

Real-life story - Jasmine Murphy

Jasmine originally trained as a dentist but was inspired to pursue a career in public health following a humanitarian trip to help street orphans in Bolivia.

Jasmine Murphy Consultant in public health

Employer or university Leicester city council

Salary range Over £65K

How I got into the role

I originally trained as a dentist and worked in a high street dental practice on an NHS contract. After practising for a few years, I joined a humanitarian trip to provide dental treatment to street orphans in Bolivia. I was so moved by the plight of the children there that I found the trip to be life-changing. I had studied public health during my training but what I witnessed on my trip made what I had learned come to life and made me realise how unjust and unfair life could be for some children.

Shortly after my visit to Bolivia, I went on another trip, this time to a remote community in Romania. The area was high up in the mountains with no street lighting or cars and there were many families living in poverty. Again, I was able to see firsthand the impact of deprivation and inequalities on the lives of children.

When I returned to work I became aware of inequalities experienced by my own patients. I suppose they had always been there but I now recognised them in a totally different way. Slowly I started to become dissatisfied with what I could do in my role with individual patients and realised that a lot more could be done on a population level.

My interest in public health grew stronger and I began thinking about specialising in dental public health. I had just become pregnant with my first child at the time, so with careful preparation, discussion and planning, I resigned as partner at the dental practice, went on maternity leave and took up post as a senior house officer in dental public health when my son was six months old.

After gaining my membership qualifications with the Faculty of Dental Surgery, I then formally entered the dental public health training programme where I gained a Master's in research in public health, competencies in public health practice and a fellowship in dental public health with the Royal College of Surgeons in 2011. I took up my first consultant post in public health in 2012.

What I do

I manage a portfolio of public health responsibilities with a particular focus on the needs of children and young people (including dental public health). I am accountable for commissioning the healthy child programme so that services work to improve child and family health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities.

Another role I have is that of chairing the statutory child death overview panel which reviews the deaths of all children normally resident in the area (excluding those who are stillborn). On the panel there are representatives from social care and the police, clinicians, and various other professionals. We consider issues and circumstances in the child's life such as domestic abuse, and assess the level of influence they had in the death. We also determine whether the death was preventable and identify if there were any contributory factors that could be addressed. We then make recommendations so that action can be taken to help prevent such deaths in the future.

Children in Leicester have some of the highest levels of dental decay in the country. In my role as lead on dental public health, I have set up a partnership board between the local authority and the NHS to tackle this situation. We are putting into practice an oral health promotion strategy for preschool children and have recently won a national award from the Royal Society of Public Health for our partnership and strategic approach.

Health inequalities are not inevitable: they are unfair and unjust and should not be left to luck or chance.

The best bits and challenges

One of the best bits has to be working with such nice [1] supportive colleagues as well as seeing the opportunities to influence health and wellbeing in my day-to-day work. Challenges include being very busy and struggling to manage my diary. I'm often double-booked for meetings and have to continually prioritise my workload. Funding cuts and budget constraints are a constant challenge too.

Life outside work

I have two sons and quite a busy family life. We enjoy cycling and dog walking and until recently trained in Kung Fu together. I work hard to maintain a good work-life balance but it's not always easy!

Career plans and top tips for others

At the moment I'm very happy where I am. It can take a long time in public health to realise the rewards from all your efforts so I'm just going to work as hard as I can to make a difference.

You can't learn public health just from a text book! In my experience you have to see things for yourself to truly understand so getting experience in community development or volunteering can be very valuable.

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/public-health/roles-public-health/public-health-consultants-and-specialists/real-life-story-jasmine-murphy>

Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#NICE>