

Real-life story - Annapurna Sen

Annapurna has a medical background and became interested in working to make a difference to the health of the population after a change in her family circumstances.

Annapurna Sen Head of health protection
Employer or university Bedford Borough Council
Salary range Unknown

How I got into the role

I had completed my medical training in India and had specialised as an ophthalmologist when my personal circumstances changed. Since both my husband and I had demanding careers as well as a young family, we decided that I should reconsider my work commitments and move to a career in public health to achieve a better work-life balance. This was a major decision to take, but public health is an area in which I have been able to use my experience and understanding of the clinical environment.

I have a Postgraduate Certificate in Education, which has given me the skills to plan and make decisions on education and learning – and to deliver public health training myself. I also have a Master's degree in information management, which has given me the ability to understand data maintenance, analysis and the technical aspects of public health intelligence.

What I do

I have been in this role for five years and have responsibility for health protection across Milton Keynes, the Borough of Bedford and Central Bedfordshire.

There are two parts to my role, planned work and unplanned work, each taking up about half of my time.

The planned work involves a variety of activities.

For instance, I work on our local health protection campaigns to keep our local professionals and population well informed about infectious diseases and infection prevention and control. I also oversee the local implementation of the national screening and immunisation programmes, and the implementation of community infection prevention and control programmes.

Other work involves the development of documents. For example, I help to develop our public health policies and procedures, working with colleagues from many different departments in the local authority (including the Mayor and elected members who bring a political dimension to the agenda) and with organisations such as NHS England, the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), Acute Trust and community providers. I also develop and write reports for the Health and Wellbeing Board. In addition, I am responsible for researching and writing the health protection chapter in the annual assessment of the local population's health needs, and have deadlines to meet for most of my planned work.

My previous experience and understanding of clinicians is particularly helpful when working in on the redesign of health services and the evaluation of the health services (what we call "healthcare public health"). My clinical knowledge is also important in the health improvement aspect of my role, for example in the areas of [cardiovascular](#) ^[1] disease and [stroke](#) ^[2] prevention, cancer prevention, and vaccine-preventable diseases.

The second part of my role is reactive work. I support the management of outbreaks of infectious communicable diseases, such as [respiratory](#) ^[3] disease, food poisoning, or any other infectious disease incident or outbreak. Every week there's something different and of course the unpredictability and incident management is both exciting and interesting!

I am a member of our Local Resilience Forum which brings together the emergency services, local authorities, National Health Service, Public Health England and public sector agencies in emergency planning and responding to any major incidents.

As a trained member of a Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC), I provide specialist public health advice on any major incident affecting the health of our local population.

Our effort and work doesn't give immediate results. It takes time before we can see the impact of what we've done.

The best bits and challenges

Responding to outbreaks of infectious disease or public health emergencies is exciting and unpredictable, but this work has to be balanced with the planned agenda.

In the local authority, I find that the culture is very different from that in a healthcare setting, so I'm keen to ensure that the best interests of the patient or the population aren't lost within the political health agenda.

I am happiest and at my most contented when I feel that I am serving society.

Career plans and top tips for others

I find my current role satisfying and have no plans to change in the near future. Although a clinical background is desirable rather than necessary for application to health protection jobs,

I would advise anyone considering this role to do the Health Protection and Communicable Disease modules on a postgraduate course, because an understanding of infectious disease and management is needed to deliver health protection role effectively. Even so you will find that it takes time to be able to get to grips with the management of infectious outbreaks and the language.

Don't expect to see the fruits of your work immediately, much of what we do sows the seeds for the future, and either we wait to see the rewards or someone else will see the rewards.

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/public-health/roles-public-health/public-health-practitioner/real-life-story-annapurna-sen>

Links

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

[2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Stroke>

[3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Respiratory>