

Real-life story - Shakti Dookeran

Shakti started her career in health improvement before taking up a more strategic role. She uses her academic skills, leadership skills, and her ability to develop strong partnerships to champion prevention-focused, integrated and high-value care.

Shakti Dookeran

Population health service manager

Employer or university

Public Health England

Shakti Dookeran

I can strategically influence investment in the prevention of ill health and the promotion of population health.

How I got into the role

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After my medical technology degree and BSc in human ecology at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago, I was awarded a commonwealth scholarship to pursue an MSc in public health nutrition at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. My first job after this was at UCL working on the Whitehall II research study investigating how factors such as stress at work and the balance between work and family life have an impact on health.

I then accepted the position of public health coordinator in the Public Health Team at Tower Hamlets Council. I led a programme to develop resources aimed at the black and minority ethnic (BME) community, and led a range of community projects and

campaigns.

I moved through several roles while at Tower Hamlets including in public health strategy, in which I led and contributed to various projects such as the borough's first mental health joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) and the development of a process for domestic violence and abuse identification referral in primary care ^[1].

This work involved effective networking, negotiating and the ability to influence key stakeholders in health and social care. The experience gave me a feel for, and fostered my interest in, working at a more strategic level. The diversity of the borough's population and the high deprivation levels gave me valuable hands-on public health experience and knowledge.

What I do

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I am currently population health service manager with Public Health England (PHE ^[2]). I was attracted to the role by the opportunity it offered to strategically influence NHS England's approach to preventing ill health and promoting good health. I lead PHE's national programme to prevent atrial fibrillation (AF)-related strokes. In this role I use my leadership skills to energise and influence partner agencies to work collaboratively. We tackle system-wide challenges, such as improving access to and the use of data to help providers and commissioners identify opportunities for improving the AF care pathway and the outcomes for people who have AF.

The best bits and challenges

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What I find most rewarding is being in a position to encourage more collaborative ways of working across the system, and to increase the priority both locally and nationally to the prevention of ill health and the promotion of population health. Using these approaches, the key stakeholders on the AF programme have successfully agreed on an ambition to prevent 5,000 AF-related strokes over five years in England.

Life outside work

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I am currently completing another Master's degree in health policy at Imperial College London. I enjoy keeping fit through yoga, swimming and outdoor sports. I also love spending time with family and friends.

Career plans and top tips for others

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My career plans include applying my leadership, policy-making and public health skillset to support the delivery of a prevention-focused and more integrated health and social care system.

Success in this role requires a strong sense of shared leadership, good skills in stakeholder engagement and negotiation in order to achieve agreement on priorities and ambitions, personal resilience and the ability to adapt to changes in policy direction. While I do not work directly with the public, I do have an important part to play in ensuring that the voice of public health is heard, which requires me to present a convincing argument when relaying the evidence.

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Links

[1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Primary_care [2]
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