

Video transcript

Nigel Fletcher

Health protection nurse

I'm Nigel Fletcher. I'm a health protection nurse with Public Health England and I'm based at the South Midlands and Hertfordshire Public Health England centre

What is the purpose of your role?

Our role in health protection is protecting the population's health from an incident or a disease; so, for example, GPs would phone us with communicable diseases (there's lists that they have to follow and by law they have to tell us about) and then we react on that. So that might be a food poisoning, where they've seen a patient and they want the restaurant investigated, they feel the restaurant might be a source, and then we liaise with people outside the organisation, such as environmental health officers, to go investigate that, and that can vary from a very small investigation, where it may not be the source, to something quite big, so a wedding where they may have caused food poisoning in a great number of people.

What are your main activities?

Well, the bread and butter of my job is the acute desk. And on the acute desk we field calls from anyone really, from members of the public, GPs, consultants in hospital informing us of communicable diseases; we then have care homes, environmental health officers, schools, nurseries, anyone really, phoning us either for advice or providing us with information. We never know what's going to come in from day to day, which makes my job very exciting.

What skills and qualifications are needed?

Good communication skills are vital. We don't do a lot of face-to-face contact, communicating face to face, a lot of it is over the phone. And we sometimes have to speak to members of the public who perhaps don't know their diagnosis or their GP may not have warned them we're gonna call. So it's a bit of a shock when we phone them about something that is quite urgent. So having those communication skills is vital. Also having knowledge to deal with a situation, either phoning a member of the general public or if someone's phoning us. Now, we don't always know the answer to

the question: sometimes we have to consult an expert in the centre or an expert in our organisation; sometimes it's just a case of signposting people where to go. But knowledge is definitely vital.

What attracted you to the role?

I think any nurse would say it's helping people, whether you're on a hospital ward or doing my job in my organisation. What makes me get up in the morning is knowing that I am going to make a difference.

How did you get in?

Well, obviously I'm a nurse and I did my nurse's training and spent many years on the wards of a hospital and over time I realised I wanted to go up the career ladder and I was very interested in infection prevention and control. As a result, I managed to get a job as a junior infection prevention and control nurse and I did my degree in infection prevention and control. And there was a module on that degree, which was epidemiology, that was run at the time by the health protection team at the centre, and that really whetted my appetite, you know, when I qualify that's where I'd like to end up, even if it's just for a couple of years of experience. But I've loved it so much I've never wanted to leave.