

Video transcript

Dr Shona Arora

Centre director

My name is Dr Shona Arora and I'm centre director for Public Health England, and I cover Avon, Wiltshire, Swindon and Gloucestershire.

What attracted you to public health?

I first became interested in public health when I was a junior doctor working in a really busy hospital in the East End of London. At that point in my career, I wanted to become a diabetologist, focusing on looking after people who suffered from diabetes. We used to have these enormous clinics full of people with eye problems, kidney problems, perhaps lost a limb because of having to have it amputated, all because of diabetes. And I just thought: there must be a better way than this, there must be a way of getting to people earlier, so that they don't have to suffer like this. And public health is all about preventing ill-health, so that was really one of my main reasons for going into public health.

At the same time, I worked for a diabetes consultant, who was very keen to work with local GPs to set up what was then called 'Shared Care' between GPs and hospitals. But he didn't know how to go about doing that. And again that got me thinking: how do we create change in our system? Well, here I am 20 years later, and I can safely say that we have really good primary care delivery of diabetes, so most people now get their diabetes care in general practice and don't have to traipse up to hospital and sit in Outpatients for three hours. And generally speaking, some of those less-good outcomes from diabetes, like blindness and limb-loss, are much less common than they used to be. And that's because people like myself have worked with clinicians to try and make things better for a whole group of people in our population.

That's what originally motivated me, and I guess really what I've also learnt is that the battle is never quite won, because, whilst the care of people of diabetes has improved, we know now that the impact of obesity means that more and more people are getting diabetes. And now my focus in public health and in preventing ill-health is to see what we can do to tackle obesity. And I thought tackling diabetes was complicated, but the challenge we face with reducing our levels of obesity is

perhaps even more challenging. So what I find really interesting about public health is it's quite big-picture stuff; it's about the art and science of improving health and protecting people from ill-health through the organised efforts of society. So that's about engaging everyone to play their part, and using data and epidemiology and the evidence of what we know works to try and change things for the better. And sometimes it's really hard work. And sometimes it takes an awfully long time. But in its own way it can be just as rewarding as the contact I used to have when I was seeing patients every day as a doctor.