

## **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 is the purpose of your role?**

I'm one of 15 centre directors for Public Health England and we form the local presence for Public Health England. The directors of public health in local government lead the local authorities' responsibilities to improve the health of their local residents, and we're there to support them in that.

### **What do you do and who do you work with?**

I think one of the interesting things that happens as you perhaps move up the scale in any professionally grounded career and move to director level is you do less of the professional expert role and more of the managing and oversight and influencing role. It's often the bit that we call the strategic influencing element. So a lot of my day is spent talking to external stakeholders, local authority colleagues, NHS colleagues, other colleagues to try and identify areas where we could work together to improve the health of the population. It's making sure that we've got good governance, good robust systems in place to respond to any emerging health protection incidents like outbreaks or something like Ebola coming into the UK, making sure that we're ready for pandemic flu should we need to be, keeping an eye on our immunisation rates across Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, and making sure that my team are on top of that, and making sure that we're sharing that information nationally, and also, if nationally information's being collected that's useful for us to know locally, making sure that we share that back locally, and that we're looking at ways to improve areas where we're not performing so well.

### **How do you make a difference?**

So, in Public Health England, there are 15 centre directors that cover the country nationally, and we talk on a weekly basis about what's going on in our patches. We get information from the centre about what is going on in our patches as well, because they can provide us with data and intelligence

about what's happening across the whole country. And then within our centres we talk within our centre teams about how we might want to tackle areas which aren't producing such good results. And we then decide who's going to do what in terms of who we need to talk to in a particular local area, whether we might need to work with them on perhaps finding a little bit of investment, whether we can join them up with another area that's performing really well so that maybe they can learn what someone else is doing and adopt that good practice. So those are some of the things we do. We talk to people who work in NICE, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and Health, to try and make sure that we're rolling out best practice on what works and how we can improve people's health. We have a lot of contact within Public Health England with our knowledge and intelligence teams, with our national field epidemiology service and with some national experts on areas such as dementia, tobacco, alcohol and drugs. And all of that is about how we get national expertise down into local delivery systems that are going to improve population outcomes at local level.

### **How did you get in?**

When I finished my training as a junior doctor, I decided to carry on training in the specialty of public health. At that time, that was the main route to develop a career in public health in this country, and it was a five-year training scheme like a lot of other medical training schemes. Once I finished the training scheme I then moved on to work as a consultant in public health, and eventually became a director of public health in Gloucestershire where I live.

### **What are the rewards of your job?**

I think what makes my job really rewarding and exciting is the sense that I have that I can influence people to work in a way affects a large section of our population, and I can, sometimes with a little bit of money, work with a whole range of other organisations to create a real synergy around a particular campaign or a particular issue. And I do love that, when I see other people picking up an issue and running with it.

### **Where might you go next?**

In all my time in public health, I've never really had a long-term career plan, or every step I've taken I've always really enjoyed. And I think that's the real beauty of public health: it's such a broad church and there are so many ways in which you can find professional or personal satisfaction. I think the other thing I'd say about it is it gives you a really good set of transferable skills, so you're not

confined to working just in the NHS or local government or even, in my case, for Public Health England and the Department of Health. With the set of skills it gives you, you can work in the third sector, you can work for yourself, you can work abroad, you can stay here. And I don't know what I'm going to do next, but that's what I love about my job!