

Video transcript

Sophia Makki

Consultant of communicable disease control

My name is Sophia Makki and I am a consultant of communicable disease control. I work for Public Health England and our offices are based at City Hospital, Nottingham, but we cover the whole of the East Midlands.

What is the purpose of your role?

So in my job we try to protect the health of whole population, whether it is children or older people and we basically try and protect people from the impacts of infectious diseases. So if somebody has an infectious disease we try to stop its spread to anybody and everyone else. We work with a big variety of people, lots of different organisations. So we work very closely with GPs who have to notify us about a range of infectious diseases. We work with microbiologists and other hospital doctors when we are dealing more urgently with an infectious diseases case in a hospital. We work for example with TB (Tuberculosis) nurses to keep TB under control. We work with environmental health officers when we're considering, sort of, food-borne outbreaks in restaurants or other places. We work with the police, with the other blue-light services when there is an emergency of a specific cause that we need to get under control as well, so ... and lots of other people that I have forgotten about or haven't mentioned ... animal health, environment agency, lots of people.

What do you do in a typical week?

So my typical week would involve at least one day on duty, so that's sort of like an in-hours on-call. We have a duty desk where we get numerous phone calls and cases are notified, and as the consultant on duty you'd be there to offer some expert advice on a particular situation, so if for example there is an outbreak in a school you'd be saying whether you think it should be closed or something like that. I do a lot of teaching and training, of doctors and other people who are specialising in public health. I also teach on the Master's of public health programme at Nottingham University and we will attend meetings on the sort of proactive side of our work, so the TB control board, looking at more long-term measures to keep things under control.

What are the rewards of your job?

So what makes the job really rewarding is that first of all the people that I work with are all passionate about health protection, they are all passionate about infectious diseases. The other thing as well is that it's not just the bugs that are interesting, it's the interaction with how human beings behave that makes it interesting. So a meningitis outbreak in one situation can be very different to another situation, so how school children behave is very different to people in the work-place. So the mechanisms of control for that outbreak can vary, so there's a lot of variety.

What attracted you to public health?

When I was a junior doctor I became very interested in infectious diseases and preventing them, and epidemiology as a whole, and I wasn't even sure what that would take me too, but I learnt that there was a special public health speciality programme, and I joined that, and that was very interesting. I worked on lots of different projects, on infectious diseases and otherwise, like accident prevention and all sorts of things across the East Midlands. And then I got my job as a consultant in the Health Protection Agency, which became part of Public Health England some years later.

What opportunities are there for career progression?

Well there are a lot of opportunities really within public health but also within health protection. So you could progress to be the director of the health protection team across a region, like the East Midlands or even broader. There are people in public health who have gone on to be chief medical officers, erm, very senior civil servants advising government on all sorts of policy, there are people who are leading, for example, now on the current Ebola crisis and coordinating the whole response in this country or sending people abroad with specialist skills. So there is a lot of variety, it depends how ambitious you are.

What makes you want to get up in the morning?

What makes me want to get up in the morning is knowing that I'm going to have a day of productive helping people and protecting people. But also there's that element of you don't know what to expect. So yesterday I had something planned to do in the afternoon, but it got taken over by chairing this incident control team meeting about scarlet fever affecting the whole of the population in the East Midlands, 3.8 million people. So you never know what to expect and it's just very interesting.