



Chartered
Institute of
Environmental
Health

The case for a prominent environmental health role in the new Public Health Service for England

October 2010

The new public health service needs the contribution of an effective environmental health workforce at national and local levels

- The environmental health contribution to the objectives of the new Public Health Service will be through focussing on the health outcomes of the work Environmental Health Practitioners already do in every community and sector of our society. The aims will continue to be keeping people safe, reducing health inequalities and adapting the environment to achieve healthier outcomes, reduce harm and encourage healthy choices.
- Environmental health must be a key feature of the planning and activities of the national public health service and Environmental Health Practitioners must be identified as key members of the frontline public health workforce.
- The structures in which Environmental Health Practitioners will contribute to the delivery of public health services at local level can be achieved through shared services agreements and legislative duties on the relevant organisations to co-operate and provide support.
- During the period of recession, there should be an emphasis on the role of environmental health in supporting the economy, including by supporting England's huge SME base through the provision of advice and guidance on achieving compliance and protecting the public and good businesses from the activities of bad employers and traders.

Who are Environmental Health Practitioners?

The Environmental Health Officer has been recognised by previous Chief Medical Officers as the only health practitioner in local government. Their professional standards are underpinned by rigorous education and training, including compulsory continuing professional development as well as assured professional conduct overseen by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.

Environmental Health Practitioners work in every sector of our economy and in every community. They work to keep people healthy and safe and to reduce health inequalities and their work contributes to the local and national economy.

What do Environmental Health Practitioners contribute to public health?

Environmental Health Practitioners have the knowledge, skills, experience and the public engagement that naturally make them an integral part of the frontline workforce of a new Public Health Service for England.

Our document *Environmental Health 2012 – A key partner in delivering the public health agenda* contained our vision for the contribution of environmental health to public health in 2012. This stated:

“Environmental health practitioners, working with and alongside other public health professionals, will be key partners in local and national efforts to protect and improve the health and quality of life of individuals and communities and to reduce inequalities.”

An example of Environmental Health Practitioners delivering this vision today:

‘Warm Homes’ project managed by an Environmental Health Practitioner using partnership funding from the Strategic Health Authority, PCT and Acute Trust, together with funding from Energy Saving Trust, to ensure that insulation and other grants are targeted on the groups in greatest need. Reduction in haemo-concentration (thickening of the blood) with increased risk of heart attacks, strokes, mental illness and, surprisingly, the risks of falls.

Reference:

Burke, S., Gray, I., Paterson, K. and Meyrick, J. (2002) *Environmental Health 2012 – A Key partner in delivering the public health agenda*. London: Health Development Agency

Where do Environmental Health Practitioners work?

Environmental Health Practitioners already work in every community and sector of our economy – including the very important SMEs as well as in major business and industry where their risk management skills and holistic approach to health, combined with their problem-solving abilities are greatly valued.

Environmental Health Practitioners are in senior positions throughout the public and private sectors, in our ports and airports, our armed forces and most importantly in the NHS and the Health Protection Agency and local government – the key elements of what will form the new public health service.

Environmental Health Practitioners deliver public health improvements at a national level through workforce occupational health services to ensure safer, healthier workplaces.

Environmental Health is part of the multidisciplinary workforce

It is essential that the public health workforce is multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral and is not limited by professional boundaries. The CIEH has been working towards this by ensuring the inclusion of environmental health in the National Occupational Standards for Public Health and supporting the UK Public Health Register of Public Health Specialists. The Register includes many Environmental Health Practitioners who are working as Consultants in Public Health within the NHS and the Health Protection Agency.

Effective leadership, at all levels, will be needed in order to deliver the outcomes required by Government. The CIEH contributes to this by providing leadership development programmes for Environmental Health Practitioners and other public health professionals.

How can environmental health contribute to the Public Health Service?

The Public Health Service at national level will need the input from environmental health in order to address effectively the wider determinants of health and deliver effective outcomes in the priority areas identified by the Marmot Reports. The CIEH proposes the appointment of a Chief Environmental Health Officer, working to the Chief Medical Officer, and also the creation of a forum of those organisations representative of public health interests to assist in developing and guiding the service.

At the local level the systems of commissioning, service provision and delivery will be complex and involve:

- GP consortia commissioning health services
- Directors of Public Health now employed by the local authority
- Local authorities with responsibilities for health improvement as well as social care provision and children's services.
- Health and Wellbeing Boards

In complexity lies risk. Risk of a slip in existing high levels of health protection, risk of ineffective interventions that do not reduce health inequalities and do not achieve intended health outcomes; and risk of gaps between personal health services and public health services.

There is an additional risk that the current climate of spending cuts is leading to the loss of existing skills and expertise between now and when the new Public Health Service is established. It is particularly important to ensure that the professional capacity remains to provide resilience and deal with the emergencies of the future.

The CIEH maintains that a unifying thread running through the existing arrangements for addressing both health protection and public health issues is the Environmental Health Practitioner workforce. Therefore one way to reduce the risks that will arise in managing the transition is to make clear, now, a prominent role for the Environmental Health Practitioner in the new Public Health Service so that their significant role can be recognised and enhanced.

How will Environmental Health Practitioners fit into the new structures?

The commitment to localism will encourage different arrangements for local public services in different parts of England. The CIEH has been active in making successful arrangements for shared services, partnership working and community engagement.

The CIEH believes that whatever models of operating a local public health service are devised, the Environmental Health Practitioners can help make them successful. For example, where the public health function is placed with an upper tier local authority in parts of England where the Environmental Health Practitioner workforce is predominantly within the lower-tier, then local authorities can combine together to provide a unified local public health service. However the new Public Health Service is configured, the CIEH believes there needs to be the right statutory framework to ensure that the different authorities and agencies work together across boundaries.

Embedding Environmental Health Practitioners as a significant part of the frontline workforce will mean that the important roles of health protection, ill-health prevention and effective public health services will be fulfilled whatever the structures that are put in place.



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