



UK public health specialist training programme

Background

The Faculty of Public Health (FPH) is responsible for overseeing the quality of training and professional development of public health consultants in the UK. We set and maintain the professional standards in the discipline, primarily through the formulation of the training curriculum and the examinations that trainees need to pass to become fully-fledged senior public health specialists. There are several ways in which public health training leads the way among medical specialties.

Impact

Public health specialists work across a vast array of organisations, including local and national government, the NHS, academia, the voluntary sector and international public health organisations. The five-year structured training programme prepares trainees for all aspects of public health work. The scope of the work they undertake during training is breath-taking – including areas such as food poverty and hunger, climate change, mental health, alcohol, smoking, drugs, tuberculosis and antimicrobial resistance. The results of this work have a lasting impact on improving health and tackling the causes of ill-health.

The past 18 months and the COVID-19 pandemic have had a profound effect on societies around the world, and on medicine and public health. Alongside preparing future public health leaders for a huge range of population health challenges, the specialty training scheme has adapted and moulded to fight the pandemic, accelerating the safe pathway through training to boost the supply of specialists, and applying flexibilities to improve trainees' capacity to tackle the worst global pandemic in a century.

Internationalism

Public health is a global specialty; practitioners and specialists from the UK work around the world and the UK welcomes expertise and innovation from across the globe. Core training skills, such as data analysis and policy formulation, are grounded in the use of international comparisons. Many of the current and emerging planks of public health training and practice, such as climate change and sustainability, demand an international approach that transcends borders. The training programme has long had a rich internationalism and the Faculty's Diplomate Exam in particular has, having moved to an online format as a result of the pandemic, become increasingly attractive to international candidates.

FPH has worked with ASPHER and other partners to support the development of a competency-based training framework for Europe and is working with African Schools of Public Health to adapt this for African needs; this is part of FPH's strategic commitment to strengthen public health globally. Strengthening the link between Schools of Public Health, National Institutes of Public Health and Professional associations and networks of public health supports the development of a truly global public health community of practice.

Innovation

Public health is unique amongst medical specialities to permit multi-disciplinary entry into the speciality in the UK, as has been the case for the past 20 years. There is now an even balance between medics and trainees with other backgrounds on the public health training programme and this has vastly enriched the profession, bringing in a greater diversity of people and a truer representation of the communities that public health professionals serve.

The curriculum and the training programme are uniquely designed to produce globally literate public health leaders through the acquisition of knowledge, application of that knowledge, performance as a specialist and finally performance as a public health leader. The Faculty's two examinations, the Diplomate Exam and the Final Membership Exam are also open to people outside of the formal training scheme to act as 'credential' for those working in population and public health roles.