Making big decisions

Public health specialist at NHS Harrow primary care trust, Denise Thiruchelvam, is sure of her career objectives. ‘I am hoping my next move is to be a consultant in public health,’ she says. ‘The public health white paper suggests that the function will be transferred from primary care trusts (PCTs) and be commissioned by local authorities and Public Health England.

‘I believe that the return of public health to local authorities is an opportunity to expand our reach into communities.’

She describes how Harrow PCT’s public health team already works closely with the local authority as part of the Harrow Strategic Partnership, a consortium of community interests in the borough.

Notwithstanding the future of the Health and Social Care Bill, Ms Thiruchelvam believes such work may be taken on by the proposed health and wellbeing boards that local authorities must establish by 2013. ‘But we need to ensure that public health is at the forefront of any agenda,’ she cautions.

For the moment though, Ms Thiruchelvam is responsible for co-ordinating NHS Harrow’s response to infectious disease outbreaks such as meningitis. She also manages contracts for immunisation programmes with primary and acute care providers.

‘The assignment that brought her the most satisfaction was taking the lead with her team on the PCT’s handling of the swine flu pandemic in 2009/10, for which she was presented with a staff excellence award.

The post of public health consultant can be reached via two routes – by completing the conventional five-year medical training programme or by portfolio.

Portfolio evidence

Ms Thiruchelvam is pursuing the latter option, for which she must produce portfolio evidence of her experience and capabilities.

She believes that public health is an integral part of nursing. ‘I qualified as a health visitor and adult nurse while studying for my degree at the University of Liverpool.’

Denise Thiruchelvam describes her passion for public health to Frances Pickersgill

NOTICE BOARD

Infusion therapy The National Infusion and Vascular Access Society will hold its annual conference on June 15/16 at London’s Hotel Russell. As infusion therapy and vascular access continue to evolve, there is a need for a co-ordinated approach to practice. This forum will provide networking opportunities and the chance to hear from respected experts. www.NIVAS.org.uk/conference-2011

Securing quality The National Quality Board (NQB) has published the first part of a review on how to improve quality during NHS changes. The document – Maintaining and improving quality during the transition: safety, effectiveness, experience – describes the responsibilities of organisations and people who will improve quality. It emphasises the importance of knowledge transfer between the new organisations created by NHS reforms, and stresses that professionals are ultimately responsible for the quality of patient care. http://tinyurl.com/maintaining-quality

Mental health Practical Mental Health Commissioning is the first in a series of papers for people involved in commissioning and providing mental health and social care services. The document compares current mental health commissioning to how it may be structured in the future. The papers were ordered by the National Mental Health Development Unit and published by the Joint Commissioning Panel for Mental Health. http://tinyurl.com/MH-commissioning
Continence

The Association for Continence Advice (ACA), the Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professions Research Unit at Glasgow Caledonian University and the RCN are asking clinicians who have qualified in the past two years how their training prepared them to treat patients with continence problems. Respondents’ names will be entered into a draw to win £30 in Waterstone’s vouchers. The deadline for completing the survey is May 31. www.surveymonkey.com/s/RCN_SurveyContinenceEducation

The Big Lunch

Supported by NHS Choices, the Big Lunch is held annually to encourage people to have lunch with their neighbours. Nurses, especially those involved with local communities, are urged to get people involved. The aims are to encourage healthy lifestyles and to promote healthy eating and the concept of community, while having fun in the process. This year’s event will take place on June 5. www.thebiglunch.com

Leadership forum

The Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Leadership Forum is looking for a new chair. The forum, which is supported by the NHS Confederation and the RCN, wants a strong candidate with senior NHS leadership expertise and first class chairing skills to drive the work of the group. The forum helps to increase opportunities for BME staff to become influential and improve the NHS response to the needs of BME communities. The closing date for applications is June 10. http://tinyurl.com/62444hy

Jennifer MacKay on presenting to a large audience

How many people can you present to without breaking into a cold sweat? For many of us, the larger the audience, the greater the trepidation, so the following tips may lessen the fear.

Preparation is paramount for successful presentations, so use a simple structure and keep the performance jargon free. It is good to include facts and personal stories to appeal to different preferences. Avoid memorising the presentation, instead, learn the main concepts and rehearse the speech several times.

Tailor your presentation to the audience. Talking directly to different elements of the audience – such as saying ‘some of you will be familiar with’ – will generate feedback and reactions.

Communication with the audience is the object of the presentation. Body language brings your performance to life and keeps people interested.

Eye contact will connect you with the audience, as will using your hands to expand your presence and illustrate points.

Establish your authority by managing the audience. Only begin speaking when the room is quiet and take questions from the floor only at the conclusion of your presentation.

Next time you are asked to speak to a large group, consider this: the larger the number, the greater the achievement.

Jennifer MacKay is managing director of Jump Training and Development

‘I found that I liked dealing with preventive care at individual and population levels. All nurses can contribute to improving health,’ she says.

Ms Thiruchelvam says the most challenging move of her career to date was the switch from the clinical environment ‘where one largely relates to individuals’, to the political and strategic environment of the PCT, via a post as a health protection nurse at the Health Protection Agency.

She believes her clinical background helps her to identify gaps in the service, manage a caseload and understand environment in hospitals, with which the PCT has its largest contract.

‘I feel I have a good experience because, here in PCTs, the impact of decisions is population-based and far-reaching,’ she explains.

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