Why Directors of Public Health need to know a Health Psychologist

- How do Health Psychologists improve the public’s health?
- Expertise in public health and behaviour change
- Where do I find one?
**What is a Health Psychologist?**

Health Psychologists are experts in applying psychological theory and evidence to achieve health behaviour change. They design, deliver and evaluate health interventions, and commission services to deliver local public health objectives. They work with national and local authority public health departments, GPs and hospital consultants, and directly with patients and carers/families.

**How can Health Psychologists help you to meet your public health targets?**

Health Psychologists:

- identify key target behaviours which if changed could impact upon public health outcomes – ensuring no spill over effects to other behaviours;
- develop and evaluate local services using evidence-based research methods;
- select context relevant, evidence-based behaviour change techniques which can be applied to developing new public health interventions or increasing the uptake of existing ones;
- identify low cost ways of tweaking existing processes or interventions to ensure they go with the grain of human behaviour;
- embed behaviour change in all programme and service commissioning;
- train health care professionals and other partners and staff to deliver behaviour change interventions.

**How can a Health Psychologist improve public health service commissioning?**

Health Psychologists are experienced in selecting and implementing appropriate behaviour change strategies to meet local public health needs. This expertise can be applied to ensure good local commissioning through writing service specifications to attract genuine expertise in behaviour change and in evaluating tenders to ensure principles of behavioural science are embedded within the services delivered.

**Where do I find a Health Psychologist?**

There are various ways in which you can utilise advice from Health Psychologists ranging from full employment to short-term consultancy or partnerships with local universities.

- **Employ a Health Psychologist** – the best way to secure health psychology input is to employ one directly. Health Psychologists can work in commissioning roles, public health strategy roles, programme delivery roles or a behaviour change specific post.
● **Link to academics** – you could contact your local university to see if they have expertise in health psychology which could be applied to public health in collaborative, mutually beneficial projects.

● **Train your own health psychologist** – you may be surprised to find that you already have some budding Health Psychologists working for you. Those with an MSc in Health Psychology may be eligible to undertake further training on the job with your support to become fully qualified. http://www.bps.org.uk/prospective-candidates

● **Placement opportunities for trainees** – Health Psychologists in Training need unpaid consultancy opportunities to develop their portfolio of research and interventions. We can assist you in advertising a placement to the right candidates.

● **Consultancy** – many Health Psychologists and academics will offer short- and long-term consultancy work.

**Case studies of health psychologist working in Local Authorities**

**Coventry University & Public Health Warwickshire**

‘Dr Emmie Fulton and Dr Katherine Brown are based jointly in the Centre for Technology Enabled Health Research (CTEHR) at Coventry University, and Public Health Warwickshire. Since 2011 they have both held part-time roles embedded in public health. Emmie and Katherine’s work includes developing and delivering interventions for early stage dementia, veterans mental health, sexual health services, falls prevention and developing methods to more effectively evaluate public health campaigns. The work is stimulating and varied, and facilitates strong links with Public Health England, community services, the council, the local Health and Wellbeing board and CCG’s. As a result of the partnership, they have facilitated further academic partnerships and collaborations between the University and the council, and have recently developed opportunities for PhD’s funded by Public Health. They are now planning upcoming events and workshops to further foster these growing links.’

**Hertfordshire County Council**

‘Michelle Constable is a Health Psychologist in Training based in the Public Health Service at Hertfordshire County Council also undertaking the Professional Doctorate in Health Psychology at the University of West England. This is the first health psychology post within the Public Health team. The aim of the role is to embed health psychology and behavioural science across public health, primary and social care; and support a strategic shift to primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. Michelle works on a wide range of projects with partner organisations developing services with an embedded behaviour change approach. Examples of current projects include: self-management of long-term conditions, motorcycle
road safety, smoking cessation, and conducting evidence reviews for commissioners. Michelle also provides behaviour change training to a wide range of stakeholders. Michelle works at the interface of commissioning and delivery.

Check out the Health Psychology in Public Health Network: www_hpphn.org.uk

**Regulation and training of Health Psychologists**

A Practitioner Health Psychologist is a protected title and as such Health Psychologists are regulated by the Health & Care Professions Council (www.hcpc-uk.org). Health Psychologists in Training must be registered with the BPS Stage 2 training route or with a BPS-accredited university doctoral health psychology programme. Registered Health Psychologists who are Chartered with the BPS have undertaken a minimum of six years of training and specialised in health psychology for a minimum of three years. All Health Psychologists hold a doctoral level qualification.

For more information on applying Health Psychology in Public Health please contact the Division of Health Psychology Policy Officer at: policyofficerdhp@bps.org.uk