

How can Environmental Health Practitioners deliver better public health?

In order to deliver better public health we must look at the health inequalities which exist and we must remember Environmental Health Practitioners (EHP) are part of a pro active profession protecting the public's health. There is still a need to have both the enforcing officer as well as the practitioner providing guidance and support. Links between organisations from both the private and public sector should be increased to ensure that the messages reaching businesses and the public are complementary. Environmental Health issues must be addressed at early stages of processes, such as during planning, as part of a preventative strategy.

We must be prepared to concern ourselves with the health and well being of the public at all levels, including locally, nationally and internationally. It is vital that we take into account not only the current issues but address those likely to occur in the future. This gives a large scale challenge to the profession. We are no longer looking at officers who travel around businesses ticking boxes. We are looking at a much bigger picture if the profession is to deliver better public health. For this to be achieved it is vital that standards are set above that of legal compliance, to ensure that the aims made will guarantee improvement and not just compliance. EHPs must look at achieving public health as a standard of wellbeing not just as a standard free from illness.

Environmental Health Practitioners will need to be dealing with health inequalities such as the lack of housing which is a problem at a national level. We need to consider the types of housing available and its suitability for those who are caught up in the shortage of permanent residency.

The environmental issues that dominate the news should be of increasing concern for the EHP as there is a vital role for the EHP in addressing such issues and being concerned with the future of the environment and the effect that might have on the health of the community. The effect of today's pollution is the cause of global warming and also affects the health of many. We can only guess at the effect global warming may have on the health of the public in the future.

Food safety although still important must also be coupled with the promotion of good nutrition and will need as much educational aspects as it will guidance and promotion of legal compliance. Healthy eating campaigns that involve EHPs are required; this is to address the future public health concerns as much as food hygiene does today. It is true that outbreak investigation and minimising the effect will still be part of an EHP's work but there will be less need for this once a set level is achieved and the EHP can look more at the affect of lifestyle on food and visa versa.

Health and Safety, like food safety, will be able to shift resources. There will always be the need for accident investigation but the number would decrease if steps were made to shift resources towards education. Public health is increasingly being affected by work related stress, health and safety will need to address this as part of the effect of work activities and the work environment on health. Psychological aspects will be as much of a concern as physical risks to those working within workplace health and safety. Much of health and safety aspects of public health is addressing the attitudes of the public towards their own health and safety on a long term basis as much as in the short term.

Although education is required for many, knowledge alone is not sufficient therefore resources must be provided to give a means of using the knowledge gained to full capacity. Changes in lifestyle are the reasons for changes in public health issues. In order to improve public health we must look today's lifestyle. Campaigns often educate people in what they must do to improve their health but do not give them the means to do so. We are often asking for a change in lifestyle or to make something part of the public's daily lives but it must be feasible to them. EHPs must be able to deliver social marketing in order to provide the public with a means of improving health. Such changes and agendas are the only way in which EHPs can potentially deliver significant improvements in public health.

In order for EHPs to deliver better public health there must be a step forward as we cannot better the delivery of public health by standing still.