

## **Public health workforce planning**

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This post card will cover the basic principles of workforce planning in relation to public health, the importance of workforce planning and the intelligence and information needed to inform the plan. It will provide a framework of six steps to follow for producing a plan.

The main message is that there is more to workforce planning than just education and training. Workforce planning is also about the vision of the organisation and service delivery, which needs specific skills and competences to deliver this service. Workforce planning is **not only about NUMBERS**, it is important to get service planning right to get workforce planning right.

The 25-year Sudan National Health Strategy clearly outlined the importance of workforce investments as a high priority of the strategy.

### **What is Public Health?**

Public Health is defined as “*the science and art of preventing diseases, prolonging life and promoting health through organized efforts of society*” (Public Health in England Acheson, D, (1988), Public Health, Department of Health, London). Derek Wanless, (2004) in his report ‘*Securing Good Health for the Whole Population*’ elaborated on this definition, by adding the informed choices of the society, organizations; public and private, community and individuals.

Building on this definition Wanless emphasizes that public health is:

- Population based.
- A collective responsibility for health, its protection and disease prevention.

- Recognizes the key role of the state, linked to the underlying socio-economic and wider determinants of health as well as the disease prevention.
- Recognizes the importance of partnerships with those who contribute to the health of the population.

### **Who is the public health workforce?**

The public health workforce is made up of a broad range of people providing a diverse range of services. The workforce is drawn from a number of sectors, which will include health and non-health organizations. The Chief Medical Officer’s Project defined the public health workforce in three broad categories:

- Public health consultants, specialists, public health nurses and senior managers who work at a strategic level. They all have common core knowledge, skills and experience acquired from postgraduate training.
- Those who spend a major part of their work in promoting health and preventing disease e.g. health visitors, environmental health officers and community health workers
- Those who have a role in health improvement and in reducing inequalities e.g. teachers, social workers, housing officers and others. They may not be aware that they contribute to the wider public health workforce.

### **What is workforce planning?**

Workforce planning is a core element of organizational development.

It is an important tool to ensure health organizations and others have a workforce of the appropriate size,

skills and diversity organized in the right way so that demands of future service needs are met without compromising quality. It describes a number of related activities:

- *Designing the future workforce*, not just understanding but influencing by ensuring that workforce considerations combine with service and financial planning
- *Developing the future workforce*, includes commissioning education, staff development and retention and recruitment processes
- *Delivering the future workforce* – management actions to ensure plans are delivered, processes are effective, health professionals are engaged and best practice is shared

Workforce planning is the responsibility of everyone across the whole organisation. It helps in organizing the current service and in preparing for future change. It helps in identifying and meeting educational and training needs. Workforce planning requires a flexible approach. It is about whatever suits your job, so that workforce resources include information for anyone with an interest in improving the public health workforce.

### **Benefits of Workforce Planning**

Workforce planning supports service delivery and improves quality. It assists organisations to:

- Explore the future, assess options, and define its objectives
- Identify the best-fit future workforce to meet these objectives
- Put in place an effective programme of action to develop the future workforce.
- Matching people objectives to corporate service objectives as well as financial targets and value for money.
- Finding practical solutions to identify, attract and retain the right people to deliver the organization's vision.

- Help authorities identify future workforce challenges and priorities.
- Provide sound foundation to develop a successful local workforce strategy.

### **Six steps to develop a workforce plan:**

#### ***1. Defining the plan***

The plan can be prepared on many levels from a simple to complex. The timing depends on the type of workforce plan. It can be on a weekly basis e.g. a staffing rota in an emergency departments or it can be monthly, annually, five or ten yearly. A plan developed by an organisation will need a longer period 3 –5 years. A national plan will need to cover a much longer time frame, and some organizations advocate 10 year plan as a corporate vision.

#### ***2. Visioning the future***

The plan should have a vision on how the workforce will look to achieve the desired outcomes.

#### ***3. Assessing demand***

There needs to be an assessment in relation to the number and the skill mix of the workforce needed to achieve the planned service activities. Determining the skills and competencies required is an integral part of the wider service and financial planning.

#### ***4. Assessing supply***

It is essential to know the characteristics of the current workforce across health and other sectors. We need to understand what will control future supply so that it can meet the current and future demand. The main options will include:

- Recruitment

The main sources of recruitment, which add to the current workforce, are newly qualified staff, returnees who work in other sectors and those who will have a new role.

- Retention

Reduction of staff turnover, although inevitable. It is desirable to enable people to progress and develop.

- Effective utilization

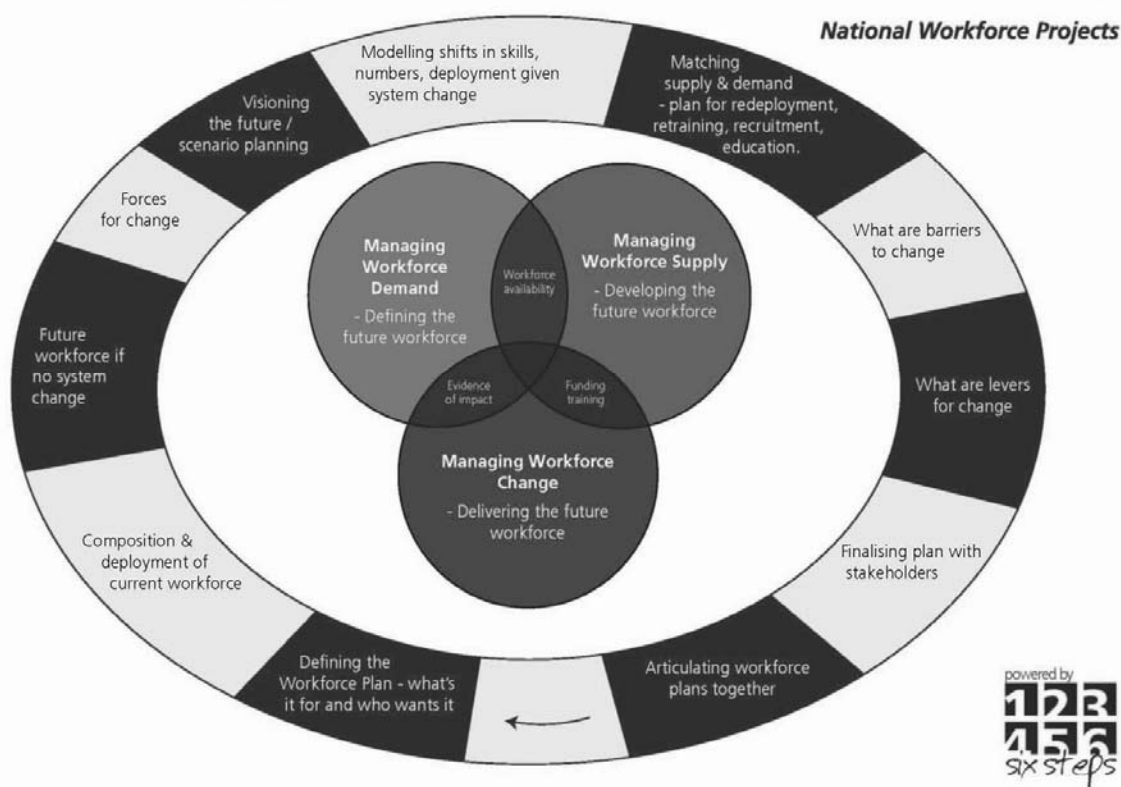
Reduction in absence, better deployment and skill mix

- Developing the existing workforce

Training and improving the skills of the existing workforce by making them more effective in the

Figure 1: Workforce planning cycle

## Workforce Planning Cycle



### Information and intelligence needed to inform the workforce planning

#### Demographic data

Understanding the demographics of the work force is an important step in planning. A key shift in the labour market is the increasing proportion of women in the workforce especially in areas, which have been traditionally male dominated. This has a major implication for the health workforce as women have a tendency to seek flexible working patterns.

job and create a potential pool of staff for promotion and enhanced roles

#### 5. Development of an action plan

An action plan needs to be developed, which identifies the workforce supply, demand and gaps.

#### 6. Implementation and review

A workforce plan needs to be implemented considering all the changes and improvement required.

It is important to understand the age profile that is which age groups account for most of the workforce. It is important for succession and retirement planning.

The local demographic picture is important, as it is the pool from where the workforce is drawn.

#### Understanding the health needs of the population

It is important to understand the needs of the population and what services need to be delivered to plan for a competent workforce, which can deliver a service.

### ***Education***

Understanding the health needs of the population and what skills and competencies are required, informing training and education programmes.

### ***Finance***

Workforce planning needs to be done with finance planners to understand the financial implications in order to develop and deliver a plan to the service.

### ***Public health workforce planning for Sudan***

- National strategies should link with workforce planning and development activities.
- Public health is a multidisciplinary field and in Sudan we should encourage public health professionals from health and non-health sectors to join public health workforce.
- Information gathering is a core element for workforce planning and in Sudan we need to strengthen local information systems e.g. census data, manpower information.
- A workforce plan should be considered to be in place, which is integrated with key partners and organizations.
- There is a need to review the recruitment process and ensure there is a job description and person specification for every post across all levels.
- There should be more opportunity for flexible working, part time jobs, job sharing, secondment opportunity and different ways of working to ensure providing the right environment.

### **Sources**

1. National Workforce Projects. Introduction to workforce planning. Manchester: NHS. 2008.
2. NHS Scotland, Scottish health Workforce Plan 2004 Baseline. Scotland. 2004.
3. National Workforce Projects. Public Health Workforce Development Resource Pack: NHS. 2007.