

# Northwest PUBLIC HEALTH

## Finding a Passion for Public Health

**Personal Essay: A new MPH candidate shares her journey into a career in public health.**

*By Kim Moore*

I did not start my academic career with a passion for public health. At one time I thought I wanted to be a doctor because I liked helping people, science fascinated me, and I enjoyed discussing and debating health care delivery and quality of care issues. My parents were instrumental in my taking school seriously and valuing education from a young age. From the beginning of my school career, my parents always told me I was expected to go to college.

My first exposure to public health was during my six years at the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) in Olympia. I started working at DOH part-time during the school year and full-time during the summers while I was in high school, as a way to gain exposure to the health field and to earn some money. At DOH I saw how health policy was developed, formed a picture of the health care delivery system, and began to recognize the importance of being able to communicate the health message to members of the public as well as the media.

A key reason I ended up in public health was my exposure to various public health issues and, more importantly, the encouragement I received during my years at DOH. I met some fantastic people who took the time to teach me things and encouraged me to concentrate on school. Of the many people who mentored me at DOH, one of the most inspirational people was Dr. Maxine Hayes, Washington State Health Officer.

At the University of Washington, to fulfill a general education requirement, I took a class titled "Diversity in Health Care." As part of an assignment for the class, I visited some community health clinics. This experience sparked my interest in social justice issues, the needs of diverse communities, and the challenges of delivering culturally appropriate care to diverse populations. After the class was over, I volunteered at one of the clinics. I was still aiming to become a doctor and continued to take science classes as well as public health classes, but one day I realized that I was more talented in the verbal and analytical areas than in the hard sciences. Even more importantly, I had developed a passion for public health issues.

During my junior year at the University of Washington, I joined the Health Justice Network (HJN), where I received firsthand experience dealing with social justice issues. As a member of HJN, I wrote grants and addressed issues that contribute to health disparities, such as environmental justice, access to care, cultural competency, health policy, and health workforce development. While active in HJN, I met many more inspirational people in the public health field who took me under their wing and encouraged me to pursue my public health and social justice passions.


I also worked part-time at the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice, where I added to my public health experiences and became acquainted with the Center's director, Jack Thompson. He was very supportive and helped me identify the criteria I should use to choose the graduate school program that best fit my learning style and career aspirations.

During that time, I worked on a couple of Washington State Board of Health (WSBOH) projects, where I met two wonderful Board of Health staff who introduced me to others in the public health field and encouraged me to apply to graduate school. Their encouragement helped me overcome my fear of the grad school admission process. This fall I began the MPH-COPHP (Community-Oriented Public Health Practice program) at the University of Washington.

Currently, I'm combining my passions for public health and social justice as a health and environmental investigator in the Environmental Health Section of Public Health - Seattle & King County. I am also a member of the WSBOH Health Workforce Diversity Network, where I have seen what wonderful things can be accomplished when public health agencies work together toward a common goal. The premise of the Network is that in order to improve the quality of care for minorities and under-served populations, it is necessary to recruit and retain more minority public health workforce professionals. I am committed to working with diverse and under-served populations in public health by using creative solutions that take into consideration the situational and social circumstances of the populations I am trying to serve.

In looking back on how I became a public health professional, the key factors include having many diverse experiences in public health, parental support, my commitment to getting a college education, and the mentoring (both the networking and the social support) I received along the way.

*Kim Moore*

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