

OPINION

**by Ass. Prof. Anna Petrova Georgieva, PhD
Department Healthcare
Faculty of Public Health,
Medical University –Varna
member of Scientific Board**

of Teodora Staneva Radeva's dissertation

with topic “Nursing care for dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity”

**for award of educational and scientific degree of Doctor
Area of higher education 7. 7. Health Care and Sport,
occupational strand 7.4. Public Health,
Scientific speciality: “Health Care Management”**

**Scientific Supervisors:
Prof. Hristo Kozhuharov, PhD.
Prof. Elena Zheleva, PhD.**

Information about the procedure

I present this opinion as a member of a Scientific Board, nominated by Order No. P-109-197 of 16.03.2023 of the Rector of Medical University – Varna, for the elaboration of a procedure for defence of the dissertation with topic “Nursing care for dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity” of Teodora Staneva Radeva, a doctoral student in the Department of “Health Care”, Affiliate Sliven of Medical University - Varna. According to Report No. 1/30.03.2023 from the first meeting of the Scientific Board, I have been assigned to present an opinion on the dissertation.

By order of the Rector of Medical University - Varna No. P-100-33/31.01.2020 Teodora Staneva Radeva is enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in the Department of “Health Care”, Affiliate Sliven of Medical University - Varna, in order to acquire educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” in higher education field 7. Health Care and Sports, occupational strand 7.4 Public Health, scientific specialty “Health Care Management”. In view of proposal with ref. No. 031-66/23.02.23 of Prof. Ivan Stoyanov Aleksandrov, D.Sc., Director of Affiliate Sliven of Medical University - Varna, by decision of the Academic Council under report No. 65/09.03.2023, on the grounds of Art. 24, para. 6 and Art. 30, para. 3 of the Implementing Regulations to the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, and Art. 68, para. 1 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at Medical University - Varna, Teodora Staneva Radeva was awarded the right of defence by Order of the Rector of the Medical University-Varna No. P-109-197/16.03.2023.

The submitted administrative documents and materials have been prepared and presented exactly in accordance with the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and its Implementing Regulations, as well as with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at Medical University - Varna.

Biographical data and career development of the doctoral student

Teodora Staneva Radeva was born on 18 August 1977. In 1998 she obtained specialised nursing higher education at Medical College - Shumen. In 2001 she obtained Bachelor's degree in Social Pedagogy with a specialization in Psychology at Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen, and in 2010 – Master's degree in Health Care Management at Medical University - Varna. Teodora Radeva started her professional career in 1999 as a nurse in the institution for seniors with mental disorders in the village of Cherni Vrah. In 2007 she started work at University General Hospital Sveta Marina EAD as a senior nurse in the Men's Ward at the First Psychiatric Clinic, and in 2015 she was transferred to the position of senior nurse in the Women's Ward at the Second Psychiatric Clinic. Since 2019 she has been working as a senior nurse at the Second Psychiatric Clinic. Teodora Radeva is a co-author in chapters of a textbook on Psychiatry for Nurses and Midwives, issued by MU-Varna, 2015. She participates in the training of Nursing and Healthcare Management students at MU-Varna as a mentor. Teodora Radeva is the chairperson of the PD of the Bulgarian Association of Healthcare Professionals in University General Hospital Sveta Marina EAD. She is a member of the Bulgarian Psychiatric Association and the Bulgarian Scientific Society for Public Health. The numerous participations in projects, clinical studies, scientific events and various forms of continuing education are testimony to Teodora Radeva's continuous aspiration for constant professional development and improvement.

Relevance of the topic

The relevance of the presented dissertation is determined by the continuous increase in the prevalence rates of addictions with an accompanying mental disorder and the challenges facing nursing care for dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity. In this regard, the psychiatric nurses and the multidisciplinary clinical teams working with these patients encounter a number of difficulties. The combination of more than two diseases developing simultaneously affects nursing care, creates therapeutic and diagnostic difficulties to differentiate and treat each of them. This leads to increased use of health services, more frequent hospitalizations, associated higher financial costs, complicates the communications with patients' relatives and leads to their social isolation. The medico-social significance of the analysed problem is a result of the very high morbidity and premature mortality of dependent patients with mental comorbidity. In addition, these patients are unable to realize their potential in educational and professional terms, often become the subject of pre-trial proceedings and represent a burden for their relatives.

All of the above makes the topic of nursing care for dependent patients with mental comorbidity, discussed in the dissertation, relevant and important, with a view to increasing the quality of life of patients and their families and reducing the burden of this medico-social problem.

Knowing the problem

Teodora Radeva's theoretical reasoning is the result of a detailed analysis of 187 bibliographic sources, 40 of which are in Cyrillic and 147 are in Latin alphabet. The studied literary material is evaluated critically and creatively, which allows a competent analysis of

the theoretical statements to be made. These facts allow me to believe that the doctoral student is very well informed about the issues under consideration.

Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation and contributions

The dissertation has a total volume of 107 pages. The content of the dissertation includes: introduction, four chapters, conclusions, proposals, recommendations, bibliography, 7 appendices. The text is illustrated with 15 figures and 58 tables. The separate chapters of the work are chronologically connected and meet the structural and content requirements for a similar scientific work. The content of the work presents the author as a scientist who is able to do research, to form conclusions and substantiate proposals with scientific and applied value.

The relevance of the chosen topic is supported with arguments in the **introduction**.

The first chapter of the dissertation makes a literature review, presented in 32 pages. It is logically structured and systematized and demonstrates the doctoral student's in-depth theoretical knowledge of the discussed topic and the ability to do scientific research independently. The body of the work is presented in an accessible and concise manner and in a high scientific style.

A brief overview of the history of psychiatry as a science from ancient times to the present is given. The organization of psychiatric care internationally and in Bulgaria, the existing problems, as well as the role, functions and participation of nurses in mental health care are examined. The nature and significance of addiction and mental comorbidity, the clinical and demographic factors, in dependent patients with mental comorbidity are outlined. An analysis is made of dependence and psychiatric comorbidity in schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorders, personality disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, bipolar affective disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders, anxiety and panic disorders.

The importance of the nursing procedures in psychiatric health care, as well as the essential characteristics of psychiatric health care for dependent patients with mental comorbidity, are analysed. The ethical and legal aspects of psychiatric nursing are outlined. An overview is made of the current legislation concerning dependent patients with mental comorbidity. The importance of the coordination between the structures in the existing system for treatment of dependent patients with mental comorbidity is outlined. The significance of the problem of codependence in family members affected by substance use disorders is examined. The main challenges and unsolved problems facing the nursing care of dependent patients with mental comorbidity are outlined as well as the need to explore the possibilities to resolve and improve the situation.

The purpose, tasks, material and methods of the study are presented in the **second chapter** of the dissertation.

The purpose of the scientific research is to investigate the organization of psychiatric health care for dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity in hospital and non-hospital settings and to determine the possibilities for their optimization.

The purpose and tasks are precisely and clearly defined, aimed at solving the main problems in the research. The working hypotheses, the subject, the object, the surveyed persons, the criteria for their inclusion, as well as the exclusion criteria, are formulated. A description is provided of the place and time of the study and the sources for

collection of information and the tools of the study. The selected and applied methods for data collection, processing and statistical analysis are relevant to the set objectives of the investigation.

The **third chapter** presents the results and analysis of the survey of the main aspects of the problem conducted among dependent patients with mental comorbidity, nurses, multidisciplinary clinical teams, 3rd and 4th year nursing students and 4th year midwifery students and relatives and cohabitants/persons directly related in comorbid patients. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were studied.

The dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity were asked for their opinion on the organization of the admission, the number of hospitalizations, for assessment of the quality of health care, the communication with the health care specialists, as well as about their awareness of the types of addictions, the novelties in therapies, risks and impact of psychoactive substance use on the body, the presence of addiction and accompanying mental disorders, complications during use, and rehabilitation centres working with addicted patients. The patients' health insurance status, factors related to relapse in patients, as well as their support for the idea of organizing on-line consultations with medical specialists regarding addictions with mental comorbidity were studied. The established high rates of patient relapse, low levels of awareness of rehabilitation centres and therapeutic communities and self-help groups, and the barriers to uninsured patients to follow the recommendations given at discharge are concerning.

An analysis is made of the opinion of nurses regarding the special care provided to dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity, the five most important activities for these patients, the professional experience in relation to providing nursing care to dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity. The health professionals' awareness of various aspects of the studied problem, their attitudes towards participation in information campaigns to overcome stigma, their participation in training courses and their job satisfaction were investigated.

The difficulties in communication of multidisciplinary clinical teams with nurses and with relatives of patients with addiction and psychiatric comorbidity were also studied. It is demonstrated as a result of the analysis that a large number of the nurses do not attend regularly training related to the problems of dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity, and they indicate as reason for this the "lack of information". 47.7% of nurses are satisfied with their daily work, but 79.54% feel overburdened. The multidisciplinary clinical teams do not mention difficulties communicating with nurses, but only with relatives of dependent patients with mental comorbidity.

The attitude of students to work with dependent patients with mental comorbidity during clinical practice and pre-graduate internship was investigated. According to the obtained results the main concerns during the clinical practice and pre-graduate internship for 3rd and 4th year students is the sector with enhanced supervision and the communication with patients. More than half of the students express their willingness to participate in information campaigns related to stigma.

The codependency of relatives and cohabitants/directly related to patients with comorbidities is studied. According to the obtained data almost all examined persons show co-dependency and individuals with highly expressed co-dependency were registered.

The analysis of the opinion of patients and nurses shows positive attitudes towards the creation and operation of nursing practice in psychiatric health care.

The presented results and their discussion fully correspond to the hypotheses, goal and tasks of the doctoral student. The results obtained are interesting and, where applicable, substantiated by statistical data. The tabular and graphical presentation helps to understand the presented data more easily. The presentation of the obtained data and their discussion demonstrate the doctoral student's ability to handle the research data, to reflect the data correctly, to apply the appropriate methods of analysis and to interpret the obtained results in depth.

The fourth chapter contains conclusions, recommendations and contributions of the dissertation.

The **conclusions** of the conducted research are minimised to nine (three from the theoretical and six from the empirical study). They are skilfully formulated and directly related to the research objective, tasks and working hypotheses.

The **contributions** of the dissertation are presented in seven points. Four of them are theoretical and three of them have practical-applied nature.

The formulated recommendations are valuable and precisely targeted at the Medical Universities, the Bulgarian Association of Health Care Professionals and the Bulgarian Psychiatric Association.

All instruments used in the course of the study are included in the seven **appendices**.

The submitted abstract meets the regulatory requirements. It outlines precisely and clearly the content of the dissertation.

Two **publications** were made in connection with the dissertation and presented as scientific reports at scientific forums organized by Medical University - Varna and Trakia University – Stara Zagora.

The dissertation contains significant contributions to nursing theory and practice. Teodora Radeva's overall work is proof of her ability to carry out independent scientific work. While elaborating her dissertation, the doctoral student demonstrated awareness, purposefulness and impartiality in conducting the study and observing the principles of scientific ethics.

Personal impressions

I gained my personal impressions of Teodora Radeva in the course of my communication with her in connection with the study in the master's program in Health Care Management and the organization and training of nursing students. She possesses both very good personal qualities, such as responsiveness, responsibility, persistence and initiative, and professional knowledge and skills that characterize her as a specialist in the field of health care for patients with mental disorders and their relatives. That knowledge and experience make her a researcher with theoretical skills and knowledge in the relevant field, who has mastered and applies the methods when conducting scientific studies.

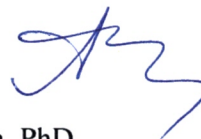
Conclusion

The dissertation possesses undoubtedly the characteristics of a comprehensive, in-depth academic study of an established problem, the analysis of which is innovative and relevant. The presented work of Teodora Radeva contains clear scientific and applied results that make an original contribution to the field of nursing science and practice.

In conclusion, bearing in mind the merits of the presented dissertation and taking into account the indisputable authorship and creative contribution, **I confidently give my positive vote** and recommend to the respected members of the Scientific Board to vote positively for **the award of educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” to Teodora Staneva Radeva in scientific specialty “Health Care Management”, higher education field 7. Health Care and Sports, occupational strand 7.4 Public Health.**

12.04.2023
city of Varna

Opinion prepared by:



Ass. Prof. Anna Georgieva, PhD