

OPINION

**Of Assoc. prod Anna Petrova Georgieva, PhD,
Department of Health Care
Faculty of Public Health
Medical University -Varna
in-house member of the Scientific Jury
of a dissertation prepared by Yana Toshkova Tosheva
on "PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH
INSPECTOR - OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT"**

**for awarding of educational and science degree "PhD"
in a higher education field 7. Health and Sports, professional field 7.4.Public
Health,
scientific speciality: Health Care Management**

Information about the procedure

I present this opinion as a member of the Scientific Jury, appointed by Order No P-109-486 of 18.11.2021 of the Rector of the Medical University - Varna to provide for a procedure for the defense of a dissertation on "Professional communication of public health inspector - opportunities for improvement." of Yana Toshkova Tosheva, PhD student in the Department of Health Care. According to Protocol No 1 / 29.11.2021. from the first meeting of the Scientific Jury I have been elected to present an opinion on her dissertation.

By Order No P-109-431 of 16.07.2018 of the Rector of the Medical University - Varna Yana Toshkova Tosheva was enrolled as a PhD student in full-time mode of attendance at the Department of Health Care for obtaining educational and science degree "PhD" in the field of higher education 7. Health and Sports, professional field 7.4. Management of Health Care. A protocol for successfully passed exam covering PhD requirements in the specialty "Management of Health Care" based on Order No P-109-110 of 20.02.2020 and a protocol for successfully passed exam for covering PhD requirements in a foreign language, based on Order No P-109-286 of 26.06.2020 have been submitted. Based on the decision of the Department of Health Care for preparedness for public defense and proposal for Scientific Jury, Yana Toshkova Tosheva was approved for defense by Order No P-109-486 of 18.11.2021 of the Rector of MU-Varna.

The presented administrative documents and papers have been prepared and presented in strict compliance with the Law for the development of academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation, as well as with the Regulations for Development of the Academic Staff of the Medical University - Varna.

Biographical and career development information

Yana Toshkova Tosheva was born on August 21, 1978 in the city of Varna. In 2000 she acquired higher education - degree "Specialist" in specialty "Sanitary inspector" at Medical College- Varna.

In 2015 she was awarded Bachelor's degree in Health Care Management by the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov"- Varna, and in 2016 - Master's degree in "Health Care Management" by the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov"- Varna. Pursuant

to Order No P-106-37 / 21.02.2018, she started perusing a degree in the specialty "Medical Pedagogy" at the Medical University - Varna. Yana Toshkova Tosheva started her professional career in 2001 as Sanitary Inspector at the Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology - Varna. In 2005 she started working at the Regional Inspectorate for Protection and Control of Public Health- Varna as Junior Inspector, and in the period 2011-2016 she was Inspector at the District Directorate of Food Safety - Varna. Her teaching career began in 2015 as Lecturer in Practical Traineeship on a part-time employment contract, and since 2016 she was Assistant at the Medical College, Academic Sector "Public Health Inspector", at the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" - Varna. In the period 17.05.2019 - 19.09.2021, in parallel with her academic career she was taking the position of Internal Auditor at the Student Hostels and Canteens to the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov"- Varna. From the winter semester of the academic year 2021 to the present, Yana Toshkova Tosheva is Lecturer in Practical Traineeship on a part-time employment contract at the Medical College, Academic Sector "Public Health Inspector", Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov"- Varna. Yana Toshkova Tosheva's participation in scientific events and in many different forms of continuing education certifies her continuous pursuit of professional development and improvement. She is a member of the Bulgarian Scientific Society of Public Health. She has a good command of English and Russian.

Relevance of the dissertation

The relevance of the presented dissertation is indisputable, as in recent years citizens have growing expectations of institutions related to ensuring more public control over their activities, improving quality of services provided and ensuring a higher standard of living. Achieving these objectives requires good coordination in the communication process between governmental, non-governmental organizations, employees and consumers. Development of competencies begins in higher education, it is further developed in the process of professional development and is justified by the expectations to the future public health inspectors to best represent the civil service for which they work.

All the above defines the subject of the opportunities for improvement of the professional communication of public health inspector, reviewed in the dissertation, as particularly relevant and significant.

Knowledge of problem

Yana Toshkova Tosheva's theoretical reasoning is a consequence of a detailed analysis of 178 bibliographic sources, of which 126 in Cyrillic (28 of them in Russian, 18 are regulations), 26 in Latin and 26 Internet sources. The researched literary sources are evaluated critically and creatively, which allows a competent analysis of theoretical statements. These facts give me a reason to believe that the PhD student has shown a broad scientific awareness, competence and in-depth scientific knowledge of the problem to which she has focused her interest as a researcher.

Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation and her contributions

The dissertation has a total volume of 175 pages.

The content of the dissertation includes: introduction, five chapters, bibliography and 6 appendices. The text is illustrated with 62 figures and 11 tables. The individual chapters of the study are chronologically related and meet the structural and substantive requirements for

such type of scientific work. The work content presents the author as a scientist who can carry out research activities, make conclusions and sound proposals with scientific and applied value.

The relevance of the selected theme is substantiated in the **introduction**.

The first chapter of the dissertation includes a 50-page literature review. It is logically structured and systematized, demonstrating in-depth theoretical knowledge on the developed theme and skills for independent research of the PhD student. The body of the work is presented in a plain and concise way, in a high scientific style. Process of communication in a professional environment, status and functional characteristics of the Public Health Inspector (PHI), reforms in the working environment and their influence in the process of communication and behavior of the PHI are presented.

A comparative analysis has been made between the training related to the professional communication of the PHI in Bulgaria and 14 other countries, based on which it was concluded that regardless of the country where PHI are trained, the communication in the professional environment is part of the preparation of students, showing the importance of communication skills in the professional environment. The main challenges which public health inspectors meet in terms of the means to improve their professional communication skills are outlined and the need for exploring the opportunities for its improvement is outlined. The literature review findings justify the dissertation objectives and tasks.

The second chapter of the dissertation presents the objective, tasks and methodology of the study.

The objective of the research is to investigate the professional communication of PHIs in order to reveal the possibilities of improving their communication skills in the work process.

The objective and tasks are precisely and clearly defined, focused on solving the main research problem. Working hypotheses, subject, object and authorities of the study have been formulated. Place, time, terminology, and tools of the study have been described. The selected and applied methods of data collection, processing and statistical analysis are relevant to the set research objectives and are evidence of the author's professionalism and scientific competence

Chapter three presents the results and analysis of the survey conducted among public health inspectors and in-depth interviews with experts on the main aspects of the research problem.

The results of the research prove that the work of the PHI is stressful and stressogenic and there is a relationship between motivation, level of satisfaction and existence of conflicts. Data analysis of in-depth interviews with public health experts confirms that professional environment factors impact on professional communication and behaviour. The importance of PHI effective communication skills in preventing and managing conflicts is strongly supported. In the opinion of the inspectors, communication skills with different social groups, conflict management and teamwork are needed. Experts underline the need for mastering communication skills and techniques by building a system of specialized training at three levels: during their education at HEIs, before induction and postgraduate training during professional career. Conducting of training on three levels is based on ongoing reforms in the civil service and increasing demands of society on civil servants. Based on the results of the study, the current professional and individual profile of PHIs as health professionals with good professional training and opportunities for continuing education is outlined. In the

Republic of Bulgaria, PHIs are public servants, mainly working in the system of the Regional Health Inspectorate. They show signs of demotivation due to low pay, high stress levels and workload. Their low satisfaction results in increasing the level of conflicts at work. Drawing the personality characteristics of PHI, the PhD student concluded that contrary to the self-assessment of good communication skills, is their inability to create a positive emotional atmosphere when communicating with the persons subject to inspection, which is an essential factor in preventing potential conflict. The need to acquire good communication skills to prevent and resolve conflicts, teamwork abilities and specialized training in this area is outlined.

The PhD student's SWOT analysis of the professional behaviour of PHI, along with the strengths, weaknesses and threats, highlights a number of opportunities, such as taking measures at national level to promote the activities of PHI in society, stimulating regional institutions to conduct training related to increasing personal and professional satisfaction, managing conflict situations, learning leadership skills, introducing continuous learning throughout the professional career, as well as opportunities to participate in discussing public health issues.

The results which have been presented and their discussion fully meet the hypotheses, objectives and tasks of the PhD student. The presentation of the data obtained and their discussion are executed precisely, supported with plenty of graphical/tabular illustration and where applicable they are statistically justified. All of this is a proof of the PhD student's ability to handle with the data from the study, to report it correctly, to apply appropriate methods of analysis, and to interpret the results in-depth.

Chapter four contains approaches developed by the PhD student to improve PHI professional communication. The first of these is a Model for Optimizing Professional Communication. At the core of the model in question is a system for monitoring, controlling and analysing the behavioural characteristics of PHI, analysing and assessing PHI motivation, satisfaction and mental health. Tools for their implementation are also presented, respectively: a map for identifying risk in PHI professional communication and behaviour, a questionnaire exploring the psychological microclimate, working conditions and results (aimed at guiding the supervisor to the level of motivation and satisfaction of employees) and professional questionnaires for mental health assessment.

Particularly valuable are the preventive measures proposed by the PhD student to fight occupational stress, the tool for their implementation in the form of a map for the implementation of preventive measures and, above all, the individual approach to each employee. These measures include changing the regime of work and training in communication skills, and if necessary, supporting mental and emotional state and organizing interventions for mental health.

The author in a reasoned manner proposes the model for optimizing professional communication to be implemented in seven main stages, detailing the main steps and activities for each of these stages.

The presented Model of PHI training through the introduction of specialized programs for development of communication skills and conflict resolution at the level of basic training and continuous training at the workplace level are also contributing.

The in-depth interview with experts made in the previous chapter strongly reaffirms the need to implement in practice the approaches developed by the PhD student in improving the PHI professional communication.

The **conclusions** from the research are summarized in eight, skillfully formulated and directly related to the research objectives, tasks and working hypotheses.

The **contributions** from the dissertation are illustrated in ten points. Five of them are of theoretical significance and five of practical and applied nature.

I agree with the dissertation work main contributions of theoretical and practical nature.

The formulated recommendations are valuable and with precise addressees - higher medical schools, which provide training in the specialty Public Health Inspector and the main places for professional realization of Public Health Inspectors, namely - Regional Health Inspectorates and District Directorates of Food Safety.

The dissertation bibliography includes 178 literary sources, of which 126 are in Cyrillic, 26 in Latin and 26 online sources.

The six **appendices** include all the tools used in the course of the study, as well as the curricula proposed by the PhD student, aimed at forming knowledge, skills and habits for professional communication of the public health inspector in the basic training course

The submitted abstract meets the regulatory requirements. It accurately and clearly outlines the content of the thesis.

In relation to the dissertation theme 3 scientific publications have been made, one of which was presented in the form of a report at the IXth Scientific Session of Varna Medical College.

I have no critical remarks on the presented dissertation. It contains significant contributions to theory and practice. The overall work of Yana Tosheva is a proof of her ability to carry out independent scientific work. Taking into account Yana Tosheva's career development and promotion of the results of her research, I recommend the publication of the work as a monograph.

Personal impressions

My personal impressions of Yana Tosheva were gained from my contacts with her in connection with her presentation as a PhD student at the Department of Health Care. She has valuable personal qualities such as motivation, determination, responsibility and perseverance. In addition, Yana Tosheva's high professionalism, knowledge and skills in the field of public health qualify her as a proven professional and educated researcher with significant theoretical knowledge in this field, mastering research methods when conducting her research.

Conclusion

The dissertation undoubtedly has the features of a comprehensive, in-depth academic study of an identified problem, the development of which is innovative and topical. In conclusion, considering the merits of the presented dissertation and taking into account the unquestionable authorship and creative contribution, I confidently give my positive vote and recommend the honorable members of the Scientific Jury to vote positively for the award of the educational and science degree "Doctor" to Yana Toshkova Tosheva in the scientific specialty "Health Care Management", field of higher education 7. "Health and Sport", professional field 7.4. "Public Health".

11.12.2021
Varna

Opinion prepared by:



Assoc. Prof. Anna Georgieva, PhD