

STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Svetlana Hristova, MD, PhD
Department of General Medicine, Medical University – Varna

on the dissertation of Dr. Daniela Krasimirova Kostadinova,
PhD student at the Department of General Medicine,
Faculty of Medicine, Medical University – Varna

Title: *“Management of Patients with Alcohol Dependence in General Practice”*
for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”

1. General presentation of the procedure

According to Order No. R-109-287/11.07.2025 of the Rector of the Medical University – Varna, I was appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury.

By decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury held on 15.07.2025, I was assigned to present my opinion regarding the dissertation of Dr. Daniela Krasimirova Kostadinova for acquiring a PhD degree in General Medicine.

The set of materials on paper/electronic medium, which I received within the deadline, fully complies with the requirements of the Procedure for obtaining a PhD degree according to the Regulations of MU – Varna.

The dissertation of Dr. Daniela Krasimirova Kostadinova was reviewed and directed for public defense by the Department Council of the Department of General Medicine at the Medical University “Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov” – Varna, in accordance with Art. 26, para. 3 and Art. 30, para. 3 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff, Art. 44, para. 2 of the Rules of MU – Varna, and a decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Medicine.

After a detailed review of all available documents, I did not find any violations in the procedure for awarding the PhD degree.

2. Biographical data

Daniela Krasimirova Kostadinova was born in 1990 in the city of Razgrad, where she graduated from a secondary school of natural sciences and mathematics. In 2015, she graduated as Master of Medicine at MU – Varna. In 2019, she acquired a specialty in General Medicine within the healthcare system.

Dr. Daniela Kostadinova has gone through all stages of the medical profession in her career path. She began as a resident physician at the Emergency Department of MHAT "St. Ivan Rilski" in Razgrad, later worked as a resident physician at the Emergency Medical Center in Razgrad. Since 2017 until now, she has been the manager and general practitioner at "Daniela Medica – APMP – IP" Ltd. in Razgrad.

3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the aims and objectives

The dissertation of Dr. Daniela Kostadinova is dedicated to a subject of importance not only for general practice but also for society as a whole. This is a problem with serious health, social, and economic dimensions. Particularly important here is the role of the general practitioner. This stems from the fact that GPs know their patients well, their health status and behavior, and thus have the opportunity both for early recognition of risky behavior and intervention, as well as for long-term monitoring when a problem exists.

The dissertation of Dr. Kostadinova addresses precisely this practically significant aspect, by offering a realistic, well-founded, and applicable model for management in primary care, aimed at developing a functional and reliable algorithm for identifying, diagnosing, and monitoring patients with risky alcohol use and abuse in general practice.

4. Knowledge of the problem

Dr. Daniela Kostadinova demonstrates very good knowledge of the subject examined in her dissertation. In the review section, she provides an in-depth analysis of scientific literature over the past 50 years concerning alcohol use, abuse, and dependence, and their impact on the individual and society.

Data from both global studies and specific facts regarding the Bulgarian population's alcohol consumption are presented. From these data, it can be concluded that in recent years alcohol dependence ranks among the leading socially significant diseases in epidemiological terms, while risky and harmful alcohol use is becoming an increasingly frequent problem among the younger age group not only in Europe but also in Bulgaria.

Dr. Kostadinova's hypothesis is that addressing the problem in general practice requires the introduction of a combined screening method for detecting risky alcohol consumption, dependence, and chronic damage in outpatient care, which would contribute to reducing long-term health consequences.

5. Methodology of the research

A significant part of Dr. Daniela Kostadinova's dissertation is dedicated to her own study of patients visiting the general practitioner's office for their annual preventive check-up. The study included a substantial sample – 610 patients aged over 18, divided

into 7 age groups, who attended a GP office over a one-year period. A comprehensive methodological approach was used, including:

- socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age);
- individual behavioral interviews regarding alcohol consumption, using specially designed questionnaires;
- biochemical analyses (GGT, AST, ALT);
- ultrasound examination of the liver.

The application of both quantitative and qualitative methods contributed to the completeness of the research framework.

Patients were selected according to strictly defined criteria, consistent with the aims and objectives of the research. Prior to participation, all subjects signed an informed consent form and a specially designed questionnaire approved by the Ethics Committee of Scientific Research at MU – Varna (Protocol No. 135, meeting held on 28.09.2023). The research was carried out in compliance with Good Clinical Practice requirements and the Declaration of Helsinki. After completing a specialized anonymous questionnaire (14 closed questions), venipuncture was performed. From each participant, 3 ml of venous blood was collected; after plasma separation, serum was tested for liver enzymes AST, ALT, and GGT. Subsequently, ultrasound liver examination was performed.

Assessment methods included clinical evaluation (anamnesis, examination, questionnaire), laboratory testing (AST, ALT, GGT), ultrasound, and statistical analysis with IBM SPSS Statistics ver.19.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation

The dissertation of Dr. Daniela Kostadinova consists of 151 pages, illustrated with 39 tables, 40 figures, and includes 3 appendices. The list of cited references comprises 131 sources, 50 in Cyrillic and 81 in Latin script.

The dissertation is structured into the following sections: introduction; literature review, aims and objectives; materials and methods; results, discussion, and conclusion; findings; contributions; and publications related to the dissertation.

The literature review comprises about one-third of the dissertation. In it, Dr. Daniela Kostadinova examines the issues of alcohol use, abuse, and dependence, as well as their impact on the individual and society. Based on the review, Dr. Kostadinova presents a summary that logically leads to the aim and objectives of the study. The main aim of the dissertation is clearly and specifically stated: "To determine the prevalence of risky alcohol consumption in the studied population, the

physical and psychological damage caused by alcohol dependence, and to develop a model for monitoring and dispensary care of identified at-risk and dependent individuals within general medical practice."

To achieve this aim, six main objectives were set:

1. To determine the frequency and quantity of alcohol consumption in the studied population;
 2. To identify whether there is a correlation between age, gender, and alcohol use;
 3. To assess the extent of psychosomatic complications and social harm resulting from alcohol abuse;
 4. To categorize patients based on the score from a screening questionnaire;
 5. To analyze the correlation between the questionnaire data and the studied biochemical and ultrasound parameters;
 6. To develop a model for the monitoring and dispensary care of newly identified patients with alcohol dependence.
- Based on her research, Dr. Daniela Kostadinova formulated six conclusions. All of them correspond to the stated aim and the six defined objectives.

7. Contributions and significance of the dissertation for science and practice

The findings from Dr. Daniela Kostadinova's research are important for medical practice. She identified 11 contributions, which fall into three categories – original, scientific-practical, and confirmatory. Among the original contributions, I would emphasize that for the first time in Bulgaria an original comprehensive methodology for screening alcohol abuse and dependence has been developed. An original questionnaire and scoring scale were designed to identify patients with risky alcohol use, dependence, and chronic alcohol-related disease.

Using statistically significant evidence from the study, a comprehensive model for the management of patients with alcohol dependence in general practice was developed.

I believe this methodology has great potential and could be introduced as a standard for early detection of patients with risky alcohol-related behavior and chronic alcohol disease.

8. Evaluation of publications related to the dissertation

Dr. Daniela Kostadinova has listed three publications related to her dissertation, which fully meet the requirements for obtaining the PhD degree.

9. Personal contribution of the PhD candidate

The conducted dissertation research, the conclusions drawn, and the formulated contributions are the result of the work of Dr. Daniela Kostadinova and are supported by her scientific supervisor.

10. Abstract

The provided abstract is sufficient in scope, content, and quality and reflects the main results of the dissertation. It fully meets the requirements specified in the Regulations of MU – Varna.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no critical remarks or recommendations regarding the research, conclusions, contributions, or the materials provided to me as part of the procedure.

12. Conclusion

I evaluate the dissertation of Dr. Daniela Krasimirova Kostadinova as relevant and valuable for general medical practice in Bulgaria. The dissertation contains important scientific and practically applicable results and meets all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, its implementing regulations, and the rules of MU – Varna. The presented materials and dissertation results fully comply with the requirements of MU – Varna. The dissertation demonstrates the in-depth theoretical and practical knowledge and skills of Dr. Daniela Krasimirova Kostadinova in the scientific specialty “General Medicine” and shows her ability to independently conduct scientific research. All this gives me the right and grounds to recommend to the members of the esteemed Scientific Jury to vote positively and to propose to the Rector of MU – Varna to award the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” to Dr. Daniela Krasimirova Kostadinova in the specialty “General Medicine.”

19.08.2025

City of Varna

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