

REVIEW

of the doctoral dissertation titled:

"Independent Nursing Practice – Opportunities and Challenges"

submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree **"Doctor"**

in the field of higher education **7. Healthcare and Sports**, professional field **7.4. Public Health**,
scientific specialty: **Health Care Management**.

developed by PhD candidate **Dora Georgieva Vasileva**

under the scientific supervision of **Associate Professor Dr. Anna Georgieva, PhD**.

Reviewer: **Associate Professor Silvia Ivanova Filkova, PhD**. Educational Sector "Rehabilitator"
at the Medical College of the Medical University – Varna,

Chairperson of the Scientific Jury according to order № P-109-319/24.07.2025 by the Rector of
Medical University "Prof. Dr. P. Stoyanov" – Varna.

Procedure Data

Dora Georgieva Vasileva was enrolled as a part-time PhD student for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education: 7. Healthcare and Sports, professional field 7.4. Public Health, in the scientific specialty: Health Care Management, at the Department of "Health Care" at the Sliven Branch of the Medical University – Varna, in accordance with Order of the Rector № P-109-278/08.07.2021. Based on the Rules for Implementing Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff at the Medical University "Prof. Dr. P. Stoyanov" – Varna, and the decision of the Academic Council according to Protocol № 26/21.07.2025, having successfully passed the doctoral minimum exams and considering her readiness for public defense, Dora Georgieva Vasileva was removed from the PhD student register with the right to defend her dissertation, according to Order № P-109-430/30.06.2025 by the Rector of Medical University – Varna.

Biographical Data and Career Development of the PhD Candidate

Dora Georgieva Vasileva was born on December 28, 1967, in Varna, Bulgaria. She completed her secondary education at the III English Language High School "Dimitar Blagoev" in Varna in 1984. She then continued her studies at the College of Health Care Specialists "Dr. N. Nikolaev" – Varna, where in 1986 she obtained a qualification as a "Pediatric Nurse."

Over the years, Dora Vasileva progressively advanced her education in the field of health care and management. In 2001, she graduated in "Health Management" from the Faculty of Public Health at Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" – Varna. A year later, in 2002, she earned an additional qualification in "Human Resource Management" from the University of Economics – Varna. Her pursuit of continued education led her to obtain a second Master's degree in "Health Care Management" at Medical University – Varna in 2010.

Her professional career is distinguished by many years of dedicated work in the healthcare sector. In 1992, she began working at the University Multi-profile Hospital for Active Treatment “St. Marina” – Varna, where she served for 26 years as a Senior Nurse in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit. During this period, she gained extensive practical experience and developed strong organizational skills.

In 2017, Dora Vasileva took on the management of the first of its kind in Bulgaria, the Group Practice Outpatient Clinic for Primary Health Care in Nursing (GPPC) “The Nurses” Ltd. – Varna, where she worked as manager and actively contributed to the development and establishment of the group practice model for health care.

Since May 2018 to the present, she has held the position of Senior Nurse in the Pediatric Surgery Department at “St. Anna” Multi-profile Hospital – Varna JSC, where she continues to combine high professional standards with responsibility and care for patients and colleagues alike.

Dora Vasileva has numerous specializations, participation in international and national conferences, and an active role as a mentor to nursing students within projects funded by the Ministry of Education and Science. She is proficient in Russian at a very good level and has good working knowledge of English. Her skills encompass a wide range, from clinical practice to managerial, educational, and research competencies.

She is a member of the Bulgarian Association of Health Care Professionals (BAHCP) and remains active in the scientific and professional community, fully dedicating herself to the cause of improving the quality of health care in Bulgaria.

General Characteristics of the Dissertation

The dissertation presented by Dora Vasileva was developed at the Department of “Health Care” at the Sliven Branch of the Medical University – Varna. The dissertation is structured into four chapters and contains 204 pages. It includes 55 figures, 6 tables, and 4 appendices. The bibliography comprises 201 literary sources, of which 109 are in Cyrillic and 92 in Latin script. A good balance has been achieved between the different parts of the dissertation.

Assessment of the Relevance of the Topic

The topic of independent nursing practice is extremely relevant both internationally and nationally. Its importance and timeliness can be argued in both a global and local context. Worldwide health systems face a shortage of medical professionals—a problem exacerbated by an aging population, increasing prevalence of chronic diseases, and global crises such as COVID-19. In response, many countries are expanding the role of nurses by providing opportunities for independent practice, especially in hard-to-reach areas.

In Bulgaria, despite the high qualification of nurses, their potential remains underutilized due to regulatory restrictions. The acute shortage of medical staff necessitates changes, but existing barriers in legislation and system organization hinder the development of independent nursing practice. In-depth research and targeted measures are needed to overcome these obstacles.

Although there are Bulgarian studies on the subject, a comprehensive and systematic study covering the historical context, international experience, current state, and possible perspectives is still lacking. The present research has significant scientific and practical value as it fills this gap and can serve as a basis for future legislative, educational, and organizational changes.

The dissertation highlights the innovative potential of the issue, combining normative, historical, and organizational analysis. The study offers innovative solutions to improve access to health care, enhance service quality, and optimize costs. The topic is current, socially significant, and scientifically grounded, addressing key aspects of the role of nursing related to the future development of health care. The methodological approach—including a literature review, historical overview, and analysis of the current state—creates a solid foundation for formulating practical guidelines and recommendations.

Literature Review

The literature review is presented in a volume of 70 pages and is structured in the first chapter entitled "Literature Review." It covers two main thematic areas subjected to in-depth analysis: "Historical Overview of the Emergence and Development of Independent Nursing Practice as a Means to Meet Health Care Needs" "The Current State of the Issue 'Independent Nursing Practice' in the Context of Present Health Challenges." As a result of analyzing the available literature related to the historical overview of the emergence and development of independent nursing practice up to the present day, the author draws fundamental conclusions. She summarizes that nursing care has historically evolved in response to societal needs, with a current emphasis on home and community care. It has been established that international experience highlights the necessity of balancing strict regulation with institutional support for nurses. The doctoral candidate points out that in Bulgaria there is regulatory framework, but lacking clear mechanisms for financing and documentation, which necessitates further research and legislative changes for more effective sector organization.

In developing the literature review, the author relies on a broad range of reliable sources, which she analyzes skillfully, demonstrating deep familiarity with various scientific positions on the issue. The structure and stylistic presentation of the review attest to Dora Vasileva's confident handling of scientific literature. The conclusions in this part of the dissertation are presented convincingly and professionally, emphasizing the need for broader discussion of the issue in the Bulgarian context, as well as the importance of recognizing and establishing independent nursing practice. Through this, Dora Vasileva demonstrates erudition, professional competence, and abilities for deep analysis and synthesis.

Formulation of the Scientific Research

The second chapter presents the research methodology, developed in detail and correctly. Based on a thorough literature review, the aim and main research thesis are successfully formulated: "To investigate the opportunities and challenges related to independent nursing practices and to outline directions for optimizing their activities." Nine research tasks and three working hypotheses are precisely defined, logically linked to the formulated aim.

The representativeness of the study is ensured through a representative sample that accurately reflects the characteristics of the studied population (patients and nurses). A cluster two-stage sampling method was applied, with clusters selected based on territorial criteria: the cities of Sliven, Varna, Shumen, and Veliko Tarnovo. Participants in the survey (patients, nurses, and experts) were selected randomly.

The subjects of the study are patients, nurses, and experts. The object of study concerns the challenges facing independent nursing practices and the opportunities for optimizing nursing activities and patient care.

The study covers 750 individuals distributed as follows:

- 350 patients who received nursing care in hospital and outpatient settings;
- 350 nurses working in hospital and outpatient care;
- 50 experts – nurses practicing through independent nursing practice.

Each participant completed an anonymous questionnaire, having previously given informed consent to participate in the study.

Results and Discussion Chapter

Three presents the findings from the sociological study conducted, which encompasses the opinions and attitudes of nurses, patients, and experts regarding the opportunities and challenges facing independent nursing practice in Bulgaria. The characteristics of the surveyed respondents are analyzed, outlining the primary healthcare needs of patients receiving nursing care in the outpatient setting. The chapter also examines the readiness, attitudes, and professional motivation of nursing staff to work in independent practices, as well as the necessity for post-graduate qualification.

Additionally, expert experience from practicing nurses is presented, providing concrete insight into the real conditions in which such forms of practice operate. An analysis is included of an existing health care outpatient clinic, used as an illustrative example from practice. The conclusive SWOT analysis identifies the main strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats related to the development of independent nursing practices in Bulgaria.

The results clearly emphasize the need for changes in the regulatory framework, financing, and professional training to increase the effectiveness of this model. The study was conducted and presented professionally, demonstrating the author's expertise and competence.

In Chapter Four, based on the literature review and study results, innovative practical approaches are proposed to address the challenges facing independent nursing practice. The proposals cover key aspects of health care organization and management, aiming to enhance their efficiency, quality, and sustainability.

Special emphasis is placed on the need for digitalization through the introduction of a unified electronic system for documenting nursing activities, as well as legal protection through the development of a standardized informed consent form. Responding to the need for professional

training, a specialized educational program for nurses working in independent practice has been developed.

Organizational models are considered, including an algorithm for establishing and managing outpatient nursing clinics, along with possible mechanisms for financial support and sustainability of these practices. The educational program aims to improve the competence and readiness of nursing staff to meet the modern sector requirements. Chapter Four concludes with an expert evaluation of the proposed solutions, confirming their feasibility and significant contribution to improving access, quality, and efficiency of health services.

Overall, the proposed measures shape a sustainable model for the development of independent nursing practice and reinforce the professional role of nurses within the healthcare system.

Assessment of Contributions

The dissertation represents the first comprehensive, purposeful, and in-depth complex study on optimizing the involvement of nurses in the patient informed consent process. Based on the obtained results, the author substantiates the need for regulatory codification of the nurse's role in informing and obtaining patient consent, including written consent for invasive nursing procedures.

The research findings, formulated conclusions, and recommendations outline contributions of both theoretical-cognitive and practical-applied nature. The summary of contributions included in the dissertation objectively reflects the author's actual achievements. Among the presented contributions, the following stand out:

This study provides a significant contribution both theoretically and practically by presenting, for the first time, a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the opportunities and challenges related to independent nursing practice in Bulgaria. The survey data from patients, nurses, and experts confirms the key role of these practices in improving healthcare quality, while identifying the main barriers and prospects for their development.

Based on a comparative legal analysis, specific recommendations are formulated for improving Bulgarian legislation, focusing on documentation, information systems, and financing. The study also proposes practical solutions directed at increasing the efficiency, continuity, and accessibility of nursing care.

The proposed measures are addressed to the responsible institutions aimed at improving organization, awareness, and financial sustainability of independent nursing practices. Among these are:

- Development of an electronic system for documenting nursing care;
- An original model of an informed consent form compliant with Bulgarian legislation;
- An innovative specialization training program titled "Independent Practice in Health Care";
- An algorithm for establishing outpatient clinics for individual or group practice;

Proposals for sustainable financing models. These tools target improvement of effectiveness, transparency, and quality of nursing care provided, as well as strengthening the professional role of nurses in the healthcare system.

In accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations of Medical University – Varna, I confidently propose to the esteemed Scientific Jury to confer the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" on PhD candidate Dora Vasileva in the scientific specialty "Health Care Management."

18.08.2025

Заличено на основание чл. 5,
§1, б. „В“ от Регламент (ЕС)
2016/679

Assoc. Prof. Silviya Filkova, PhD