

STANDPOINT

Issued by Assoc. Prof. Tanya Paskaleva Stoycheva, PhD
Healthcare Department, the Branch of Haskovo
at the Thracian University – Stara Zagora
Dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree
“DOCTOR”,
Sphere of higher education 7. Healthcare and Sports
Professional field 7.4. Public Health
Doctoral program in the Major “Healthcare Management”

Author: Dora Georgieva Vasileva

Topic: "Independent Nursing Practice - Opportunities and Challenges"

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Anna Petrova Georgieva, PhD

1. General presentation of the procedure

With an Order, issued by the Rector of MU - Varna N: R (P)-109-278, dated 08.07.2021, Dora Georgieva Vasileva was enrolled as a doctoral student in a part-time form of study for acquiring an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 7. Healthcare and Sports, Professional sphere 7.4. Public Health, doctoral program "Healthcare Management". The scientific supervisor is Assoc. Prof. Anna Petrova Georgieva, PhD. She was enrolled with the right of defense subject to an Order N: R (P)-109-319, dated 24.07.2025.

All the documents provided for in the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations thereto and the Regulations on the Development of the Scientific Staff at the Medical University - Varna have been presented.

2. Brief biography of the doctoral student

After the completion of her basic medical education, "Nursing" major at the "Dr. N. Nikolaev" Institute of Nursing and Healthcare Sciences - Varna in 1986, Dora Vasileva has been constantly improving and developing herself professionally. In 2001, she was awarded higher education, specialty "Healthcare Management" at the "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" Medical University - Varna. She further expanded her qualifications, specializing in "Human Resources Management" at the University of Economics - Varna in 2002, and was awarded a master's degree in "Healthcare Management" at the Medical University - Varna in 2010.

Dora Vasileva's work experience includes a long-term career in hospital care. From 1992 to 2018, she worked as a senior nurse in the Intensive Care Unit at the University Multiprofile Hospital for Active Treatment "St. Marina" EAD in Varna. From 2018 up to now, she has held the same position in the Department of Pediatric Surgery at the University Hospital "St. Anna - Varna" AD. Simultaneously with her work in the hospital sector, Dora Vasileva has demonstrated management skills, as since 2017 she has been the manager of the Outpatient Group Practice Clinic for Healthcare "Sestrite" OOD (Ltd) - Varna. She takes part in conferences and scientific forums. She is involved in a number of continuing academic courses and she is a member of the Bulgarian Association of Healthcare Professionals. She is fluent in Russian and English.

3. Relevance of the dissertation topic

The topic of the dissertation "Independent Nursing Practice - Opportunities and Challenges" is extremely relevant, as it concerns critical issues of contemporary healthcare. Considering the aging population, growing chronic diseases and a constant shortage of medical specialists, there is an urgent need for innovative solutions that will guarantee affordable and high quality care.

The study of independent nursing practices is of utmost importance because this type of practice can provide evidence-based care and can promote new healthcare concepts. This dissertation not only analyzes the opportunities and challenges, but also proposes innovative approaches to optimize the activities, which brings significant scientific and practical benefit.

The significance of the topic is highlighted by its potential to solve key problems in Bulgarian healthcare, such as limited access to specialized care in smaller settlements and insufficient integration of nursing services.

4. Dissertation Structure

This dissertation form meets the requirements and is presented in a total volume of 204 standard pages. It contains – an introduction, four chapters, including conclusions, recommendations and outcomes, bibliography and 4 appendices. The data from the study are illustrated by 55 figures and 6 tables.

In the introduction, the author justifies the relevance and significance of the research and the motivation for its study.

The first chapter provides a literature review on the topic. The literature review of the dissertation examines in-depth the independent nursing practice, starting with its historical development and reaching its contemporary state both in Bulgaria and globally. The study traces the historical path of this practice, considering it as a way to meet healthcare needs throughout the centuries. Subsequently, it focuses on the current situation in an international context, how independent practices are coping with global health challenges such as population aging and chronic diseases. This section also provides a comparative analysis of the regulatory framework in different countries regarding the registration, organization and professional training requirements of independent nurses.

The review analyzes in-depth the challenges that the Bulgarian healthcare system faces and the role that the independent nursing practices can play in order to solve them.

The second chapter presents the methodology of the study. The goal is formulated precisely and clearly: "To study the opportunities and challenges associated with the independent nursing practices and to outline guidelines for optimizing their activities." In order to fulfill the set goal, 9 research tasks and 3 working hypotheses have been derived.

The study covers 750 individuals from three different groups: 350 patients, 350 nurses and 50 experts (nurses with independent practice). A two-stage nested sampling has been applied in four cities (Sliven, Varna, Shumen and Veliko Tarnovo) to survey patients and nurses, while experts were interviewed comprehensively.

The design of the study is presented in five consecutive stages. It begins with a definition of the problem and ends with data analysis and formulation of the specific recommendations. To achieve the set research goals, three main scientific methods have been used: documentary, sociological and statistical. At the initial stage, the documentary method was applied in order to provide the theoretical framework of the study. It includes an analysis of the literary sources, documents and regulatory acts that describe the research issue in detail.

The next stage is the sociological study, which involves collecting empirical data using a self-developed toolkit. Two anonymous individual surveys were used among a total of 700 respondents: 350 patients and 350 nurses, as well as a semi-structured interview with 50 experts (nurses with independent practice). The questions are focused on the awareness, needs, challenges, financing and attitudes, as well as on the evaluation of innovative approaches.

For the systematization, generalization and interpretation of the collected data, the statistical method is applied at the final stage. Descriptive analysis, parametric (Student's t-test) and non-parametric methods for testing hypotheses, as well as correlation analysis (Pearson's r , Spearman's ρ) are used. For the statistical processing of the data, the software package SPSS v. 20.0 is used, and for their visual presentation, tables and graphs – Microsoft Office Excel 2016.

The third chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the obtained outcomes. It is structured to provide a comprehensive view of the independent nursing practices in Bulgaria, combining quantitative and qualitative data.

This chapter begins with a detailed analysis of the results of the sociological survey conducted among nurses, patients and experts. At the beginning, the surveyed groups of respondents are characterized, which is essential for the reliability of the conclusions. The main emphasis is placed on the patients' needs for healthcare, identifying both the challenges and the opportunities for meeting them by independent nursing practices. Then, the role, expertise and attitudes of nurses are examined, which reveals the preparation of the medical experts for professional autonomy and their readiness to take on independent practices. Attention is paid to the need for postgraduate training, emphasizing the importance of continuous training for the provision of high-quality services.

In order to enrich the analysis with empirical experience, the third chapter also includes the expertise of nurses who already have independent practices. Their observations provide valuable first-hand information about the opportunities and challenges associated with the actual functioning of this type of health service. The analysis continues with a specific example – the activities of the group practice “Sestrite” (Nurses) in Varna. This practical example illustrates a successful organization model and provides specific data and observations that support the general conclusions of the study.

Finally, the third chapter ends with a SWOT analysis of the state and development of the independent nursing practices in Bulgaria. This strategic tool summarizes the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, giving a comprehensive assessment of the environment and providing a solid basis to formulate recommendations for the future development of the sector.

The fourth chapter, entitled "Innovative practical approaches creating opportunities for overcoming the challenges of healthcare provided by nurses in independent nursing practices", presents specific, original solutions aimed at improving the organization, activities and financing of independent nursing practices. The first one is a Unified electronic system for documenting and systematizing information related to nursing activities and care.

This system aims to optimize the work process and to ensure continuity of the provided healthcare. Secondly, a unified informed consent form is proposed, which standardizes the legal basis of the relationship between the nurse and the patient. In order to ensure professional competence, a training curriculum for the specialty "Independent Healthcare Practice" has been developed, aimed at providing the necessary knowledge and skills. In addition, an algorithm for establishing an outpatient clinic for individual/group practice has been created, which serves as a practical guide for future entrepreneurs in the field of nursing care. Approaches to financing

opportunities are proposed, which is of key importance for the sustainable development of these practices.

The conclusions of the study are nine, clearly formulated and well-founded. Based on the outcomes, specific recommendations have been suggested to the Ministry of Healthcare to refine the legal framework introducing a unified electronic system, a unified informed consent form as well as new financing methods. The Bulgarian Association of Healthcare Professionals is recommended to initiate regulation of the proposed approaches and to support life-long education. The medical universities are encouraged to promote education for professional development of independent practice specialists.

I fully accept the contributions of the study that are of theoretical and practically applied nature. The theoretical contributions provide a scientific basis and argumentation for the problems related to the independent nursing practices, offering recommendations for legislative and regulatory changes. The practical benefits provide specific tools and models, such as an electronic system, forms and algorithms, which can be directly applied in real practice for their optimization and development.

5. Assessment of the dissertation work publications

Two full-text publications related to the dissertation work are presented.

6. Abstract

The abstract is formatted according to the requirements. It correctly and accurately reflects the sections of the dissertation.

Conclusion: The presented dissertation work of Dora Vasileva Georgieva on the topic "Independent Nursing Practice - Opportunities and Challenges" is extremely valuable from a scientific and applied point of view. It is distinguished with a professional competence, an innovative outlook and definitely meets all the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Academic Staff Development Regulations at MU-Varna.

Based on the outstanding qualities and contributions of this dissertation work, I confidently give my positive assessment and propose to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Dora Vasileva Georgieva, doctoral program "Healthcare Management".

25. 08. 2025

This Standpoint is worked out

(Ass. Prof. Tanya Paskaleva, PhD)

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