OPINION

by Prof. Stela Lyudmilova Georgieva, MD, PhD
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Regarding Dissertation on the topic:

UNVEILING PLACEBO POTENTIAL: A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING AND HARNESSING LOW BACK PAIN RESPONSES IN ISRAEL

for awarding educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

in Higher Education Field 7. Health care and sport
Professional Field 7. 4. Public Health
PhD Program „Public Health Management"

with candidate: **AIHAM GOTANI**

In view of protocol No. 1/ 16.12.25 of the meeting of the Scientific Jury, determined by **order No. R-109-504/10.12.2025** of the Rector of the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" - Varna, Prof. Dr. Dimitar Raykov, MD, D.Sc, on the basis of Art. 258-269 of the ZZD, I have been appointed to present an opinion on the procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", to Aiham Gotani, PhD student in independent training at the Medical University - Varna, Faculty of Public Health, Department of Social Medicine and Organization of Healthcare, with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Silviya Pavlova Nikolova, Ph.D.

Career development of the PhD student

PhD student Aiham Gotani obtains a high education diploma in 2011 from the Mas'ade High School, Golan Heights. In the period 2013-2017, he successively obtained a bachelor's degree in Arts (B.A.) in Nursing, Safed Academic College. In 2021 he graduated as a Master of Health Administration (M.H.A) in University of Haifa. From 2023 until now she continues her education as a PhD student in PhD programme "Public health management" in Medical University - Varna. From 2017 to the present, he has been a registered nurse in the Emergency Department of Ziv Medical Center, Safed, with qualifications in providing nursing care in emergency and acute conditions, patient-centered care, and working in an interdisciplinary team. Since 2025, he is a coordinator of research work in the field of nursing care. She has extensive experience in teaching and lecturing skills. Assisted in conducting a training module "Health Economics and Financial Management" at the School of Public Health at Haifa University. He appears as a guest lecturer and participant in working groups at conferences related to climate change, the environment, emergencies in nursing, and others, and publishes his scientific research in periodicals. The wide range of the professional interests of Aiham Gotani make him a participant in a number of specialized certification

courses, such as a course in Geriatrics and Gerontology, a workshop on writing scientific articles, and others. Aiham Gotani works to acquire and maintain a high level of computer and language skills, empathetic communication, teamwork, academic writing, and presentation skills.

Assessment of the dissertation work

General characteristics

The dissertation was presented on 176EN/192BG[11] standard typewritten pages and illustrated with 17 tables and 9 figures.

The bibliography includes 200 literary sources in Latin.

The abstract was presented on 72EN/76BG[1] pages and reflects well the content of the dissertation.

Relevance of the topic

The relevance of the topic of the dissertation was seriously justified by the PhD student. Pain is one of the most important symptoms in many pathological conditions and the subject of numerous studies. In particular, low back and waist pain is globally recognized as a distinct clinical and public health problem and is one of the most prevalent and exhausting musculoskeletal conditions. In addition, causing a wide range of individual suffering, it also has a serious socio-economic burden, as it is often the cause of temporary incapacity and absences from work. In more severe cases it could be a cause of disability and the need for a prolonged period of treatment and rehabilitation.

Modern approaches to the study pain are based on the understanding that it is a multidimensional and multicausal phenomenon. This calls into question the sufficiency and effectiveness of the traditional biomedical approach to its treatment. This question is raised and competently discussed in this dissertation. As pain is increasingly perceived not simply as a physical sensation, but as a complex bio-psycho-social experience, this paper emphasizes psychosocial factors - expectations, beliefs, emotional states, and interpersonal relationships of patients, which significantly model and shape pain perception and clinical outcomes. The author attempts to apply a public health approach to the study and management of pain and the placebo effect of verbal communication - an area that is significantly less studied at present.

Quality assessment of the dissertation work

Although the structure of the dissertation differs slightly (mostly in terminology) from the generally accepted one, it contains all the necessary and expected information about the research conducted.

The first part, which we usually call ***a literature review***, was found under the names "theoretical framework" and "review of scientific literature." It makes up about 1/3 of the total volume of the dissertation.

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[1] The Bulgarian translation of the dissertation and abstract differs in the number of pages from the English original due to the language difference.

Based on a significant number of literary sources (200), in a scientific and at the same time easy-to-read style, an in-depth analysis of pain as a common pathological symptom and the various theories for studying its multifactorial origin has been made. Emphasis is placed on the biopsychosocial model of pain and the principles of patient-centred care. In addition to the analysis of various theories, strategies, and principles of pain and its management, the Aiham Gotani demonstrates good knowledge on their specific outlines in the Israeli healthcare system, i.e. the context in which the study is taking place, is impressive. The importance of the culturally and linguistically diverse environment, the daily work of health staff in situations involving multiple languages, a wide range of health literacy, beliefs about diseases and expectations of care, limited time for communication with patients, differences in resources between the centre and other parts of the country were emphasized.

The main and additional research questions and the ***tasks (objectives)*** contributing to obtaining answers to these questions were presented. Working hypotheses have been formulated to clarify the relationships and dependencies between the variables under consideration.

The methodology was described in detail. A justification for the chosen study design, the process of recruiting participants, the data collection instruments, and the statistical analysis methods were provided. The approval from an institutional ethics committee ensures that the research meets ethical standards, including confidentiality, informed consent, and protects the well-being of participants.

The empirical results of the study were organized in accordance with the objectives and hypotheses, and reflect a comprehensive analysis of the collected data, with a focus on empathy, communication strategies, trust building, shared decision-making, and cultural competence. The figures and tables are informative. They demonstrate the emerging trends of variables most often associated with characteristics such as gender, age, length of clinical experience, and profession of the participants. Statistically significant relationships were established through appropriate tests. The results, as well as the subsequent in-depth ***discussion***, might be useful to justify future therapeutic behaviour.

Notes and recommendations

The dissertation **meets the requirements in terms of volume and content. No significant weaknesses are found** in it.

I recommend:

1. The results of the study should be widely popularized through the publication of a monograph and articles in scientific journals.
2. When publishing articles, the conclusions should be more clearly delimited in a separate structural part, which will better emphasize their significance

Conclusion

Ayham Gotani's dissertation is an in-depth, comprehensive scientific study of a current public health problem on a global scale. Innovative approaches and methods have been applied in research practice. The significant amount of empirical information was presented in the "Results" chapter and competently analyzed and discussed in the "Discussion" chapter, where

conclusions were drawn that accurately reflect the results obtained. Well-founded recommendations have been made to interested and competent structures for practice and future research on the topic.

I believe that the Disertation has been completed with contributions of a theoretical, methodological and practical-applied nature and substantiated scientific evidence for the needs of public health and the healthcare system in Israel. The PhD thesis which fully meets the requirements for awarding an educational and scientific degree of "Doctor".

I strongly recommend to the Scientific Jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Aiham Gotani on the PhD Program "Public Health Management " in Professional field 7.4. Public health, Higher education field 7. Health care and sports.

21.02.2026 г.

Member of Scientific a jury

/Prof. S. Georgieva, MD, PhD/

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