

## OPINION

Reviewer: Prof. Petar Petrov MD, PhD, DSc.

Medical University Varna – Dept. Psychiatry and Medical psychology

Regarding: Doctoral Dissertation Defense of Danko Tonev Avramov MD in Medical University “Prof. Paraskev Stoyanov” – Varna on the Topic: “Dynamics of diagnosis in patients with a first psychotic episode after use of psychoactive substances”.

Professional field 7.1 Medicine and scientific specialty Psychiatry

Scientific Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Deyan Hrusafov MD PhD

By the order of the Rector of the Medical University – Varna № P-109-517/16.12.2025, I have been appointed to prepare an opinion on the above-mentioned topic /as an internal member of the jury/ for the acquisition of an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" by Danko Tonev Avramov MD.

In recent years, our country has seen a steady increase in drug use, a change in the type and variety of drugs used, as well as an increase in the number of registered mental disorders related to their use. A significant proportion of these cases are also observed in the child and adolescent population. Diagnosing a first psychotic episode in patients using drugs raises a number of questions related to the diagnosis, course, treatment, follow-up and prognosis of these cases. The availability of new studies on the topic is always necessary given the significant dynamics of the type of drugs used in the general population over the years. Prospective studies are always much more informative and with more reliable data, which also makes their conduct more difficult. The use of tools such as

PANSS for initial assessment and follow-up is a world standard, and on the one hand it is very informative because it covers the entire spectrum of psychotic symptoms and the degree of their severity, on the other hand it is difficult and time-consuming. The information obtained in the course of the study provides another perspective on clinical work in patients with a first psychotic episode.

The literature review is in-depth and reflects various aspects of the history and contemporary views on Psychosis and First Psychotic Episode, including the contribution of the Bulgarian psychiatric community. The various psychotic symptoms, the use of drugs in a socio-cultural context and the relationship between them are examined. Attention is paid to the individual groups of different drugs and the risk they carry for the development of psychotic symptoms, both as a substance and in terms of frequency of use and dose. The main diagnostic criteria for Psychotic Episode induced by psychoactive substances use according to DSM-5, ICD-10 and ICD-11 are noted. Some predictors for the transition of the diagnosis to schizophrenic and affective disorders are assessed, which has its value, especially in the initial stages of diagnosis and choice of therapeutic strategy.

The aim, objectives and working hypotheses of the study are formulated precisely and clearly. The study contingent includes a sample of 81 participants divided into 2 groups – Experimental group of 41 individuals diagnosed with “First psychotic episode after substance use” and Control group of 40 individuals diagnosed with “First psychotic episode”, in whom no data on previous substance use were found.

The applied assessment methodology – clinical interview, laboratory minimum, urine test for psychoactive substances use and assessment scales (PANSS, GAF, DAST-10) is not new, but it is extremely informative and multidirectional, given the target population. Its implementation is laborious, which does not allow for the coverage of a larger sample, but it is extremely important given the specificity of the target population and the possibilities for dynamics of the diagnosis.

The results obtained are presented sequentially together with the subsequent discussions. The tables and graphs presented facilitate the perception of the processed data.

The analysis of the obtained results confirms that the psychoactive substances use is a significant modifying factor in the occurrence and development of psychotic disorders. The sample size does not allow for an assessment of the relationship between psychotic symptoms and individual substances use. However, the applied assessment methodology is appropriate and informative, which allows its future use for studying this target population. The included control group allows for an additional assessment of the impact of psychoactive substances use on psychotic symptoms during the follow-up process.

14 conclusions have been drawn that correspond to the set goals and objectives, are derived from the results and discussion, and are presented clearly and accurately. The limitations of the study have been correctly presented.

Four contributions have been made, which are of a scientific nature and have clinical application in the diagnostic and therapeutic process.

The presented dissertation work contains 149 pages, divided into 7 chapters and includes 43 tables, 60 figures and 5 appendices. 201 literary sources are cited, 11 of which are in Cyrillic and 190 in Latin. The dissertation work is structured according to the approved scheme: content, introduction, literature review, goals and objectives and hypotheses, materials, methods and design of the study, results and discussion, conclusions and contributions, conclusion and ends with bibliography.

**In conclusion:** The dissertation presented by Danko Tonev Avramov MD on the topic “Dynamics of diagnosis in patients with a first psychotic episode after the use of psychoactive substances” is based on a thorough literature study and an adequate research approach. The study was conducted correctly and with

appropriate tools. The conclusions drawn are correct and meet the set goal. This work complies with all the criteria for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “doctor” according to all regulatory documents in the country and the Medical University of Varna. In this regard, I confidently give my positive opinion and recommend to the members of the esteemed scientific jury to vote positively for the award of the educational and scientific degree “doctor” in medicine to Danko Tonev Avramov MD.

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Varna

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