

OPINION

Regarding a dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree “**DOCTOR**” on the topic: “**THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON OTORHINOLARYNGOLOGY**”

Author of the dissertation:

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Scientific Supervisor:

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Member of the Scientific Jury, author of the review:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aleksandar Valkov Valkov, MD, PhD, Department of Ophthalmology, ENT Diseases and Maxillofacial Surgery with Surgical Dentistry, Section of Otorhinolaryngology, Medical University – Pleven

The review has been prepared in accordance with the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation, and the Regulations for the conditions and procedures for acquiring academic degrees and occupying academic positions at the Medical University – Varna. The Scientific Jury for the public defense of the dissertation was appointed by Order No. R-109-126/11.03.2026 of the Rector of the Medical University – Varna. The submitted set of materials, in both printed and electronic format, complies with the procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” and the regulations of the Medical University – Varna.

Dr. Kamelia Milcheva Korucheva was enrolled in January 2023 as a PhD student in an individual form of study in the doctoral program “Otorhinolaryngology” at the Medical University – Varna. Dr. Korucheva has completed all tasks and activities set out in her individual study plan within the required timeframe and has successfully passed the doctoral minimum examinations.

Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation by Dr. Kamelia Milcheva Korucheva comprises 204 standard pages.

The ratio between the literature review, methodology, and results/discussion sections is optimal, respectively 30:10:60%. The dissertation includes a total of 84 tables, 65 figures, and 1 appendix. The bibliography contains 320 sources, all of which are directly relevant to the studied problem.

On the topic of the dissertation, the candidate has published 6 scientific contributions: three full-text publications, one participation in an international scientific forum, and two participations in national scientific forums with international participation.

Characteristics of the Work

The topic of the dissertation, “The Impact of COVID-19 on Otorhinolaryngology,” is well chosen in terms of significance and relevance.

The aim of the study is clearly and precisely formulated, namely:

To investigate and analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the activity of a specialized tertiary-level otorhinolaryngology clinic in the Republic of Bulgaria by comparing hospital activity before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (2018–2021).

Through a conducted survey, the experience, attitudes, and opinions of physicians working in the field of otorhinolaryngology regarding the changes in clinical practice as a result of the pandemic are analyzed.

An additional objective of the study is to track and evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the incidence and structure of rare but clinically significant complications associated with ENT practice, such as rhino-orbito-cerebral mucormycosis (ROCM). Through the analysis of clinical cases diagnosed and treated in a tertiary hospital for the first time during the pandemic period, the aim is to identify specific features in the course, diagnosis, and treatment of this life-threatening disease.

To achieve these objectives, the doctoral candidate has set five main tasks:

1. To analyze the dynamics and structure of hospital activity in an ENT clinic for the period 2018–2021 by examining the total number of hospitalizations.
2. To assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ENT hospital care by comparing indicators from the pre-pandemic (2018–2019) and pandemic (2020–2021) periods in order to identify significant changes in volume, seasonal dynamics, and structure of hospitalizations.
3. To identify and analyze all tracheostomies performed by the ENT team during the period 2018–2021.
4. To conduct and interpret a national survey among otorhinolaryngologists in Bulgaria.
5. To clinically analyze three cases of rhino-orbito-cerebral mucormycosis (ROCM) diagnosed and treated during the pandemic.

Results and Evaluation

The obtained results are convincing. They are presented clearly and precisely—both for the entire study cohort and for subgroups—allowing for tracking and comparison of the data. Appropriate statistical methods have been used.

Each chapter concludes with a summary of the findings, and the doctoral candidate successfully integrates them toward building an optimized systematic approach.

The conclusions correspond to the results obtained, as do the formulated inferences. The contributions of the dissertation are of a distinctly scientific-applied nature, well formulated, and derived from the study.

I highly evaluate Dr. Korucheva’s work.

The results of the dissertation confirm, refine, complement, and enrich existing knowledge regarding the impact of the pandemic on hospital and outpatient care in ENT diseases, the structure of registered conditions, the type of urgency, and its effect on medical personnel.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the dissertation presented by **Dr. Kamelia Milcheva Korucheva** contains scientific, scientific-applied, and applied results that represent an original contribution to science and meet the requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree **“Doctor.”** The dissertation demonstrates that the doctoral candidate possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty and shows the ability to independently conduct and discuss scientific research.

On these grounds, I propose that the respected members of the Scientific Jury vote positively and recommend to the Rector of the Medical University – Varna to award the educational and scientific degree **“Doctor”** in the scientific specialty **“Otorhinolaryngology”** to **Dr. Kamelia Milcheva Korucheva**, Department of Neurosurgery and ENT Diseases, Faculty of Medicine, Medical University **“Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov”** – Varna.

15.04.2026

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

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