

STATEMENT

by **Prof. Lora Hristova Georgieva, MD, PhD**

Department of Social Medicine and Healthcare Organization,

Medical University „Prof. Paraskev Stoyanov“ - Varna,

Member of the Scientific Jury according to Order No P-109-298/27.09.2019
of the Rector of MU-Varna

Regarding: Dissertation entitled: „**Models of care for health and well-being of elderly people living alone**“

for acquiring of educational and scientific degree of *Doctor*

in the area of higher education: *7. Healthcare and Sports*

professional field: *7.4. Public Health*

specialty: *Nursing Management.*

Author: **Yanka Georgieva Markova-Dimitrova**

Scientific advisors: Prof. Silvia Borisova, DSc

Assoc. Prof. Marinela Grudeva, PhD

Procedure information: Yanka Georgieva Markova-Dimitrova was enrolled as a doctoral student on a self-study basis in the doctoral programme „Nursing Management“ at the Department of Nursing Care at MU-Varna with Order No P-109-637/14.11.2018 of the Rector of MU-Varna. She has successfully passed the doctoral minimum exam in the specialty and in a foreign language. Based on the decision of the Department Council on the readiness for public defence, with the Order No P-109-298/27.09.2019 of the Rector of MU-Varna was granted a right of defense.

The necessary set of paper and electronic documents is submitted, in accordance with the legal requirements in the Republic of Bulgaria and the procedural rules for obtaining a doctoral degree in the Regulations for the Academic Staff Development at MU-Varna.

Biographical and career information for the doctoral student: Yanka Georgieva Markova-Dimitrova was born on 11.03.1970 in the town of Svishtov. She graduated as a nurse in 1988 at the Institute for Health Professionals „Dr. Varban Genchev“ - Veliko Tarnovo. She has upgraded her education at the Medical University - Pleven as a Bachelor (2009) and Master (2011) in Nursing Management, as well as in the master's programme „Manager in Healthcare“ (2015) at the Technical University of Gabrovo. She began her professional career in 1988 as a nurse in „Dr. Dimitar Pavlovich“ hospital in Svishtov, where she worked in the surgical ward, hemodialysis, anesthesiology and intensive care ward. In the period 2012-2015 she was a nurse at the Multiprofile Hospital for Active Treatment „Dr. Stefan Cherkezov“ - Veliko Tarnovo, in the wards of anesthesiology and intensive care, and orthopedics and traumatology. Since 01.10.2015 she has been working as an assistant professor at the Department of Nursing Care in the Veliko Tarnovo Branch of the Medical University of Varna.

A solid basis for Yanka Markova-Dimitrova's research work in the field of nursing care is her rich clinical experience of more than 26 years, with patients of different ages and with different pathology, as well as the twice occupied administrative position of senior nurse. Her interest in home care is evidenced by her work as a part-time teacher for the preparation of social assistants and home assistants abroad, at the Center for Postgraduate Qualification at the Technical University of Gabrovo since 2014. She has co-authored two handbooks: for social assistants and for a home assistant. She can actively use Russian language.

Actuality of the topic of the dissertation: Population ageing is very pronounced in Bulgaria, which places care for the elderly among the serious health challenges. Elderly people need less active treatment but attention and long-term care, because their pathology is mostly chronic and their mobility is limited. Because of the concentration of hospitals and pharmacies in the large cities, coupled with a lack of public transportation, the access of the elderly people to medical care and medicines is problematic. Intensive urbanization and emigration of people of working age lead to depopulation of small settlements where the elderly remain the majority of the population and are forced to cope alone in both health and illness. The change in the family model over the last decades has destroyed the traditional cohabitation of generations in the household and doomed many elderly people not only to loneliness but also to problematic physical survival.

Given the above arguments, the topic of the thesis is up-to-date. The issue concerns not only the elderly, but also the health and social care systems, as well as the social functioning itself.

General description of the dissertation: The dissertation is written on 176 standard pages and contains 65 figures, 10 tables and 9 appendices. The bibliography includes 184 sources, of which 121 are in Cyrillic, 51 are in Latin and 12 are Internet links.

The literature review contains six sections. The biological and social aspects of ageing are discussed in detail. Much of the text is devoted to demographic trends worldwide and in Bulgaria. Particular attention is paid to international experience in the organization of care for the elderly.

While appreciating the efforts made to cover a large number of heterogeneous publications, I recommend that the doctoral student correctly indicates the sources of the information used, as well as get a closer look at a number of scientific works by Bulgarian researchers, directly related to the dissertation topic, that would contribute to the terminological and research clarity of her scientific work.

The aim of the dissertation is to study the basic biological and psycho-social needs of elderly people living alone in Veliko Turnovo district and to substantiate optimal models of care for maintaining and restoring health and well-being. Seven tasks have been set to achieve this aim. Four research hypotheses have been formulated regarding the involvement of health professionals in the care for the elderly people living

alone and on the likely improvement of health and well-being when applying a particular model of care.

The methodology includes documentary, sociological, experimental and statistical methods.

Surveys were carried out among 300 people aged 65 and over from Veliko Turnovo district who are beneficiaries of medical and social assistance, as well as among 100 people living alone, using questionnaires about their health, well-being and care needs.

The opinion of 200 medical specialists from hospital and outpatient medical care and 40 social workers was examined using anonymous questionnaires.

In the form of an experiment, a 6-month comparative observation of health of the elderly people living alone, divided into an experimental group of 31 persons and a control group of 32 persons, was made in the towns of Veliko Turnovo, Gorna Oryahovitsa, Lyaskovets, Svishtov, and neighboring villages. A specially designed Care Model was applied to the individuals in the experimental group: four visits by teams of trained volunteers – students in the specialty „Nurse“ at the Branch of the Medical University of Varna in Veliko Tarnovo, who measure basic vital signs and perform general and special care.

All respondents provided written informed consent to participate in the survey.

Statistical data processing includes descriptive statistics, non-parametric methods for hypothesis testing, variation, correlation and regression analysis.

The results are presented in six sections. Territorial and demographic characteristics of Veliko Turnovo district have been made. The data confirm both the population aging and the negative tendency towards depopulation, with increasing numbers of settlements without population and small settlements with less than 100 and even less than 50 inhabitants.

The elderly included in the study have similar social problems. Low income (low pension or social assistance benefits) leads to a low standard of living and the spending of most financial resources on food and medicines. The majority of respondents rated their physical and emotional state as satisfactory (lowest possible level). Access to health services is defined as extremely difficult by all elderly people living outside the towns. In case of need, those who live alone rely mainly on emergency medical care or local authorities.

More than 80% of the surveyed health professionals believe they are well prepared to care for the elderly at home, but 62% cannot judge whether the current regulatory framework needs change. In contrast, social workers do not feel prepared for home care, but 58% of them consider the regulatory framework to be imperfect. Collaboration between the health and social sector is considered ineffective.

The information obtained from the experimental implementation of the Care Model is of interest. The results demonstrate the positive impact of nursing care on hygiene, nutrition and movement, creating a safe environment, developing self-observation skills, maintaining a good emotional state.

The conclusions correspond to the stated aim and tasks. **Recommendations** for optimizing care for the elderly at home are addressed to the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, and the Bulgarian Association of Health Professionals in Nursing.

The contributions are genuine and confirmative. I admire the development of the author's Care Model, and I think that it should not be confined only to an „experiment“ for the purposes of this study, but continue to be applied, contributing both to the health of elderly people living alone and the education of students.

The abstract summarizes the main elements of the dissertation.

In connection with the dissertation, **four publications** have been made, the other two are under print.

Conclusion: The dissertation is devoted to an actual problem. The contributions have emphasized practical relevance and high potential for useful application. This gives me a reason to give a positive assessment and propose to the members of the honourable Scientific Jury, Yanka Georgieva Markova-Dimitrova to be conferred the educational and scientific degree of Doctor in the specialty of Nursing Management.

30.09.2019
Varna

Member of the Scientific Jury: 
/Prof. Lora Georgieva, MD, PhD/