

REVIEW

By Prof Dr Stoyanka Tsvyatkova Zheleva-Popova, MD, habilitated in Social Medicine and Organization of Health care and Pharmacy, an internal member of the Scientific Jury selected and voted by the Faculty Meeting of the Faculty of Public Health at Varna Medical University (Protocol № 179 /February 11, 2022) and appointed by order of the Rector № P-109-81 /February 22, 2022; a reviewer under Protocol №1 /March 22, 2022, from the absentee meeting of the Scientific Jury.

On the procedure for acquiring Educational and Scientific Degree of Doctor 7. Health and Sports, professional field 7.4. Public Health, science major Nursing Care Management by Assistant Professor Daniela Sabeva Taseva, PhD student in independent study in Nursing Care Management doctoral program, with the subject of the dissertation “Interaction of the Nurse with the Families of Children with Disabilities in Integrated Care. Academic advisor Prof Sonya Toncheva, PhD in Education.

Presentation of the procedure and the PhD student

The submitted set of materials on paper and electronic storage, is under the Procedure for the acquisition of Educational and Scientific Degree of Doctor at Varna Medical University, following the Regulations on Academic Staff Development of Varna Medical University. By order of the Rector of Varna Medical University № R-109-209, dated June 27, 2019, Assistant Professor Daniela Taseva, is enrolled as a PhD student in an independent form of study at the Department of Nursing Care at Varna Medical University for awarding the Educational and Scientific Degree of Doctor in Nursing Care Management. A protocol for successfully passing the doctoral exam based on the Order of the Rector of Varna Medical University № P-109-106 / February 20, 2020, has been submitted. Based on a report № 102-627 / dated March 4, 2022, by Prof Silvia Borisova, PhD in Education - Head of the Department of Health Care, following a decision of the Faculty Meeting of the Faculty of Public Health at Varna Medical University, under protocol №180 / March 7, 2022, Daniela Sabeva Taseva was expelled with the right to defence by Order of the Rector of Varna Medical University № P-109-116, dated March 14, 2022.

Candidate’s Biographical Data and Professional Development.

Assistant professor Daniela Taseva graduated from the Institute for training medical professionals with specialised secondary education in Veliko Tarnovo in 1983, majoring in child nursing. In 1997 she acquired a Master’s degree in Social Activities and Health Insurance Systems from St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo. During the 2016-2018 period she acquired yet another Master’s degree in Nursing Care Management at Prof Dr Paraskev Stoyanov Varna Medical University.

Her professional career began in 1984, as a teacher of medical practice at the Medical College - an Institute for Teachers of Practice in Sliven, and during the 1983-2008 period, she was a senior lecturer at the Medical College in Veliko Tarnovo of Pleven

Medical University. She worked as a nurse at the Children Consultation Centre in Veliko Tarnovo for a brief period. After that, during the 2009-2015 period, her professional activity was dedicated to providing social services, as a manager of the Regional Centre Foster Care under a UNICEF project, and a chief expert at the Directorate of Social Activities and Health in Veliko Tarnovo Municipality. Her academic development was realised in 2015 and is related to nursing training as an assistant professor and a deputy director of the Veliko Tarnovo Subsidiary at Varna Medical University. Assistant professor Daniela Taseva has 11 publications and 17 participations in National scientific forums. Her papers are published in the Varna Medical Forum magazine, General Medicine, Health Care and Collections of reports from scientific forums both in Bulgaria as well as Tula and Bitola. She participates in 5 UNICEF projects, associated with providing social care, mother and child health: Developing a Methodology for Providing the Service Centre for Mother and Child Health (2013); Foster Care (2009-2011); Workshop for parents 'Let's grow together' (2013-2015); 'Municipality- a Friend of the Child' (2013-2015); Assistance at Home – Providing the Service of Personal Assistant (2012-2015).

Daniela Taseva is a member of the Bulgarian Association of Health Professionals and the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria – Veliko Tarnovo Branch. She is a member of the network of social experts of the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Dissertation Characteristics

The dissertation developed by assistant professor Daniela Taseva is 240 pages long, with a standard structure for the professional field. It includes an introduction (4 pages), literature review (69 pages), aim, tasks, methodology and organisation of the research (17 pages), results from her studies and discussion (69 pages), Providing services to a child in a Center for Comprehensive Services for Children with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases (27 pages), conclusions and recommendations, contributions, references (17 pages) and 4 appendices. It features 42 figures and 35 tables. The bibliography includes 185 titles, two-thirds of which are in Cyrillic (121) and 64 in Latin; 86 sources with a posted date of publication (47%) are from the past 10 years.

Evaluation of Subject Relevance

Society's attitude to people with disabilities has experienced a long evolution from antiquity to this day. Although social stigma has been dealt with in modern society to a great extent, many issues, associated with the ability of people with disabilities to be treated as equal members of society, are not being addressed. Currently, the competence and efforts are restricted to employment, access, and professional training. However, providing them depends largely on providing adequate health services and treatment.

The issue is all the more intricate when children are the object of these measures. This necessitates timely action from early childhood to curb the development of the disease and stimulate the rest of the children's potential, professional training and early integration, which will guarantee their realisation in the future. The

burden on families involved in taking care of their children with disabilities is enormous.

The various problems and needs require coordinated, comprehensive efforts of different activities and participants, including a patient, health and social professionals, family, society, and state, whose responsibilities and participation the author has discussed in this dissertation.

Studying the needs of children with disabilities and their families for health care which have not been addressed, Daniela Taseva sees the nurse, with the knowledge, competence and skills she possesses and expanding the scope of the activities she can perform, as an equal participant, capable of complementing the interdisciplinary team that provides integrated care for children with disabilities.

Providing integrated care for children with disabilities, which is the subject of the dissertation, raises serious questions that pose a challenge to policymakers in the area of health, social care and education. This makes the subject chosen by Assistant Professor Daniela Taseva momentous, relevant, fascinating and fit for a dissertation.

Literature Review and Knowledge of the Issue

In terms of structure, **The Literature Review** includes five parts, dedicated to various aspects of the investigated issue:

The first part logically introduces definitions of the concepts that are an object of research, the core and the importance of the issue of "children with disabilities". Based on investigated literature sources and regulations of European institutions, the author has traced the development of concepts associated with disability, the evolution from the medical to the social model of disability and the resulting approaches to people with disabilities. I deem positioning the place and role of state and public organisations in the transitions between levels of incapacity, which corroborates the need for integrated medical and social care to support the families of children with disabilities to be very rewarding.

The second part presents state and public policies on early childhood development, devised to reduce inequalities of children in countries with different models of social policy - conservative and socio-democratic. Examples of early childhood interventions (ECIs) from different European countries, as well as EU directives, have been illustrated. The policy to support children with disabilities and their families has been considered in the context of the overall policy on ECI. Based on literature data, the author examines the negative aspects that impact all areas of the lifestyle of families that raise children with disabilities. Based on the "family-centred approach", Taseva defends the thesis that these families should be the object of special interventions.

In the third part, the author introduces the concept of 'integrated care', and its implementation forms and tools. Emphasis has been laid on family-centred practice, the nurse and family's role as part of the integrated care team.

The legal framework that regulates the status and care of children with disabilities and their families in Bulgaria, based on spheres (social assistance, health care, etc.) relating to the problem, has been skilfully examined; the author has stressed the need for intersectoral interaction and binding the invested funds to the services delivered. Assistant professor Taseva has examined the literature on the needs and rights of children with disabilities, and the obligations of the state and society. A special emphasis has been laid on the importance of a secure family environment and the process of deinstitutionalisation to augment the benefits for the child and the need to integrate medical, social, and educational services.

The existing organisation forms, activities and teams for providing integrated health and health services to children with disabilities and their families in Bulgaria have been traced and presented in detail. In addition to that, practices of some countries in Europe have been selected and presented. This part would be of greater value if the author could summarise and systematise the European experience and bring out trends.

The literature review and bibliography references suggest wide awareness of the subject. However, it seems to me that the nurse's role has not been covered sufficiently, which could result from a shortfall of research on the nurse's participation in integrated care for children with disabilities.

In Chapter Two, assistant professor Taseva has presented the aim, tasks and methodology of the dissertation, as well as hypotheses

The main aim has been laid out precisely and clearly: "To determine the nurse's role in the multidisciplinary team that provides integrated health and social services for children with disabilities and their families", and split into 5 correctly formulated tasks, whose implementation reflects the research done by the PhD student. There are 4 working hypotheses.

The methodology has been presented in detail. The study features 720 people, divided into four groups of respondents (directly involved in the care of children with disabilities, experts and potential participants in the future):

- Medical and non-medical specialists, working in the field of social services for children with disabilities (300 people) ;
- Parents of children with disabilities (240 families);
- Fourth-year student nurses (150 students from Varna Medical University and its three subsidiaries)
- Experts from state and municipal administration, involved in providing social services, as well as habilitated lecturers in nursing major (total 30 people).

The research was conducted in the North-Eastern and Central Northern regions. Its organisation has been presented in detail. It was conducted in four stages described in detail: preparatory, with designing the set of tools and the organisation plan; an inquiry and an interview; statistical processing and analysis of the results.

The methods selected and the set of tools correspond to the tasks assigned:

- Sociological methods: direct individual inquiry and a standardised interview;

- Documentary method - a documentary-content analysis of medical documentation and regulations;
- Statistical methods of data processing and analysis: descriptive methods for summarising category data; parametrical (t-test) and non-parametrical analysis (χ^2) for testing hypotheses; correlation (r) analysis for determining the force and direction of dependencies;
- Graphical presentation of results illustrates the investigated variables and their interrelations.

The IBM SPSS, ver. 19 was used for processing the research data.

The research tools, developed by the author are four questionnaires described in detail and presented in Appendices 1,2,3 and 4). The structure and content of the questionnaires comply with the specific character of the information collected from the respective group of respondents.

The presentation of the conceptual apparatus used, which ensures its explicit perception, makes a good impression.

The research got permission from the Ethics Committee of Scientific Research at Varna Medical University.

The results of the author's research and their discussion are presented in **Chapter Three** of the dissertation. They are generalised in eight parts, following the tasks assigned.

The presentation of *the social and demographic characteristics of the groups of respondents* allows interesting conclusions to be drawn.

The age distribution of the respondents involved in delivering social and medical services to children with disabilities reflects the ageing *medical specialists*, and the issues stemming from this, versus the younger non-medical specialists. The fact that almost 83% of this group have more than 10 years of work experience ensures a good knowledge of the system in which they work as well as providing reliable information. The latter also applies to the experts included in the study.

Important questions to which the author seeks an answer are determining the nurse's role and place in the team for integrated care and the necessary competence based on polling the opinions of specialists in the system of social services, experts and students. Asking the same or similar questions to the three groups of respondents allows answers to be compared. The results of the sociological survey have been analysed in the second and third parts of this chapter of the dissertation.

A high degree of unanimity on most issues is observed. The nurse's participation/place in the teams for integrated care in her role of providing consultations and training, fulfilling doctor's orders, home visits, and assistance to specialists is supported. Specialists and parents support the nurse's participation, which would ensure 'peace and security to the parents', 'quick and adequate response when the child's condition deteriorates, 'raising awareness', and 'drawing up a plan for child care". Experts consider the nurse's involvement mainly within the context of expanding her autonomous functions.

Regarding the identified skills and competence in working in teams for integrated care for children with disabilities, the PhD student examines the need for further training and specialisation of the nurse, based on the regulations governing training and specialisation in Nurse and Midwife majors, including curricula. It was established that the basic training guarantees preparation for work with the target contingent to a great extent, with a proposal for various forms of follow-up training. In support of the above mentioned, are the results of the polled self-evaluation and attitudes of undergraduate students majoring in Nursing to work with children with disabilities and their families. Nearly half of the respondents give a positive evaluation of the theoretical and practical training, but the motivation to work in medical and social facilities is low.

An important issue the PhD student investigates is the parents' role as part of the integrated care team. Based on information from the Social Assistance Agency, data on the incidence of children with disabilities in the studied area have been calculated and presented. The parents' opinions on the most common issues they face in everyday life, such as transport, access to medical and educational facilities, and work with institutions have been studied. Taseva has also looked into the possibility for parents to combine practising their profession while caring for their child. The share of those who are not employed or have part-time jobs is considerable, and 30% are personal assistants. Taking into consideration the physical, emotional and financial burden on the parents, information has been obtained about the specialists and institutions which can provide support to the families. The nurse's role as a member of the care-providing team, and especially as a trainer, is highly appreciated.

A separate part of this chapter is dedicated to the barriers to introducing integrated services. In reviewing international experience, the author notes the inconsistent policies in this aspect in many countries. In Bulgaria, the main barriers are legislation, unclear sources and mechanisms of funding, staffing problems, and lack of intersectoral collaboration.

Special attention has been paid to funding health and social services. Here, too, the author gives examples from the practice in Europe and analyses the sources of funding in Bulgaria. The respondents' opinions suggest the state should take a greater share in funding these services. In the face of the dominant public sector in providing social services, the PhD student expresses her vision for the development of public and private partnerships and NGOs participation. Taseva thinks that optimising costs could come from binding institutionalising nursing activities in the community to legislation.

Chapter Three ends with a generalisation marking major research results.

My remark is that there are repetitions and inserted propaedeutic texts which unnecessarily encumber the texts, and it would be better to avoid them.

The fourth chapter is entitled Providing Services in the Center for Comprehensive Services for Children with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases. Here the PhD student traces the organisation reforms in providing medical and social services for children with disabilities over the past years under The 2010 National Strategy Vision for deinstitutionalization of children in the Republic of

Bulgaria, which substantiates theoretically the proposed Algorithm for providing services to children in CCSCDCD. Drawing on the one hand, on Regulations on the structure, activity and internal order of the Centres for Comprehensive Services for Children with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases. (published in State Gazette, No. 89/11/11) and other regulations, and on the other hand, on the current views on expanding the nurse's competence and functions, as well as the results of her research, Assistant Professor Taseva is looking for the nurse's place and role in the multidisciplinary team for providing integrated care for children with disabilities and their families. The PhD student has adapted successfully the regulated functions a nurse can perform to the conditions and tasks of the CCSCDCD, defending the thesis of the nurse's equal position in the multidisciplinary team care, which has been very well illustrated in figure 38 (modern nurse's functions in the MDT of the CCSCDCD). This has led to the development of the Algorithm of the Nurse's Activities at the Center for Comprehensive Care of Children with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases and Nurse's Job Description in CCSCDCD. In addition to that, the PhD student has designed an Information Brochure on the activities of the CCSCDCD, which would raise users' and professionals' awareness.

It is logical for the PhD student to cite in this part mainly texts from the Rules of the Structure, Activity and Internal Order of the CCSCDCD but it is advisable to separate the ones included in the dissertation as quotations because of the way they have been inserted, makes it difficult to distinguish them from the author's words.

Based on the research results, literature analysis and international experience, **12 conclusions** have been formulated; they reflect the results in a synthesised form, focusing mainly on the nurse's place and role in providing integrated care.

The recommendations resulting from the dissertation, are aimed at the educational, health and social policy, of the Bulgarian Association of Health Professionals and Medical Universities.

The information on the contributions presented in the dissertation displays objectively the author's real achievements. The contributions are theoretical, practical and applied in character, and are predominantly associated with bringing out the nurse's role as a contributing factor in the integrated care teams, which I accept.

The dissertation is written in good language, the terminology is precise.

Relating to the dissertation, the PhD student has submitted **four publications** (in the magazine Macedonian Nursing, Varna Medical Forum, General Medicine, Health Care). I think that these publications present the PhD student's actual achievements in the respective periods of the development of the dissertation and are instrumental in promoting them among the academic community.

The Abstract is 83 standard pages long, and plausibly reproduces the structure and content of the dissertation, as well as the publications connected with it.

My notes on the dissertation are in their respective places in the review.

Conclusion: I appreciate the significance and relevance of the subject of the dissertation. As can be expected, assistant professor Daniela Taseva has chosen the subject of her dissertation, guided by her professional experience in social services (See biographical data), convinced that the nurse has the professional potential to help children with disabilities and their families receive comprehensive and adequate care.

While developing her dissertation, the PhD student demonstrates skills for implementing the research methodology, which is one of the aims of a PhD student's training. The research corresponds to the set of tasks assigned, including the development of the Model for Multidisciplinary Team Care with the Nurse's Participation, Algorithm for Providing Services to a Child in the CCSCDCD, Model for a Nurse's Job Description in Caring for a Child in the CCSCDCD. The entire personal work of the PhD student illustrates her attitude, including many of her observations and experience.

Based on the above mentioned, I give a positive vote for awarding Assistant Professor Daniela Taseva the scientific and educational degree of 'Doctor' in the scientific speciality of Nursing Care Management.

April 19, 2022

Review written by:



(Prof Dr Stoyanka Popova, DM)