

R E V I E W

By Prof. Dr. Habil Georgi Velkov Kolev, PhD

member of the Scientific Jury, elected and voted by the Department of Public Health at Varna Medical University (protocol № 179 / February 11, 2022), appointed by the Rector's Order № P-109-81 / February 22, 2022;

Under Protocol №1 /March 22, 2022, Reviewer from the absentee meeting of the Scientific Jury.

Size and structure of the dissertation

The dissertation, developed by assistant professor Daniela Taseva, is 240 pages long. The structure includes an Introduction (4 pages), Literature Review (69 pages), Aim, Tasks, Methodology and Organisation of the Research (17 pages), Results of the Author's Research and Discussion (69 pages), Providing Services to Children in the Centre for Comprehensive Services for Children with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases (27 pages), Conclusions and Recommendations, Contributions, References (17 pages) and 4 appendices. The dissertation includes 42 figures and 35 tables; parts of it present the results of the research. The bibliography includes 185 titles, of which 121 titles are in Cyrillic and 64 in Latin.

The dissertation was discussed and scheduled for defence by the Department Council of the Department of Health Care at Varna Medical University on March 2, 2022.

Evaluation of Subject Relevance

Mother and child health care is an investment in future generations. That necessitates the introduction of an integrated approach by both institutions and society and the launching of services based on cross-sectoral cooperation. These services support the families of children with disabilities and chronic diseases and can be regarded as a response to the inadequately synchronised delivery of health, social, educational and other services.

Care for a child with a disability requires parents' patience and psychological attitude for a persistent and difficult battle with the challenges they face. The relationships children develop with parents, medical and non-

medical professionals and the community are a prerequisite for their personal development.

Assistant professor Taseva analyses the available literature. The analysis shows various forms of integrated care for children with disabilities and their families. The relevance and significance of the issue and the need to bring out the nurse's role and functions in an integrated-care team is a challenge for the nursing community. The nurse's social role has not been studied adequately and in terms of implementing an integrated approach to the care of children with disabilities is critical and relevant. The nurse with her autonomous functions and responsibilities can be an important partner in child care and an active participant in the integrated-service team.

In her dissertation, the author raises and investigates issues to be resolved by various legislative initiatives, changed approaches and implementation of full care and interaction with families with children with disabilities, as well as overcoming a fragmentary approach to satisfying needs.

The subject chosen by Assistant Professor Daniela Taseva is relevant and appropriate for a dissertation. The PhD student's personal experience in the area of social services has an extra contribution and a critical view, involving recommendations and development of suited practical approaches to streamline the activity by expanding the nurse's scope conforming to academic and European experience.

The profound and comprehensive research and the methodology applied yield results that would be useful in clarifying the nurse's role in providing integrated services and that will facilitate the practice and guarantee the quality of health care for children. The defined role of the nurse in the Center for Comprehensive Service for Children with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases boosts the relevance of the issue chosen for research and analysis.

Evaluation of the Results

The **Literature Review** is 68 pages long, structured in **Chapter One**, entitled **Literature Review – Issue Relevance**. The review formulates five main headings, relating to the *Definition of the concepts, core and the importance of the issue 'children with disabilities'; State and public policies on Early Childhood Intervention. Family-centred approach; Essential characteristics and development of integrated care; legislative framework regulating the delivery of integrated care for children with disabilities and their*

families; forms for providing integrated health and social services for children with disabilities and their families in Bulgaria and some European countries.

Assistant professor Taseva analyses in logical sequence sources associated with the issue developed in the dissertation and the author's concept developed further on. The summary at the end of the chapter suggests originality since it focuses on important highlights (niches) over which the author develops her thesis. The PhD student conducted a comprehensive and detailed study of the issue of integrated care for children with disabilities and chronic diseases, and the professional skills a nurse should possess when interacting with the families of these children as a member of the integrated care team.

In developing the literature review, the author has used a sufficient number of sources that she skillfully analyses and shows extensive knowledge of the opinions of other authors on the issue chosen by her. The structure of the literature review and the stylistic layout shows assistant professor **Daniela Taseva's** skill to handle literature sources and express her opinion on the subject of the dissertation. The literature review presented in this form can be developed as a '*Nurse's Guide to Interacting with the Families of Children in Integrated Care*' and help working nurses from the practice, as well as students.

In **Chapter Two Aim, Tasks, Methodology and Organisation of Research** Taseva has defined clearly the aim of the dissertation and has set eight tasks to achieve it. Four working hypotheses have been formulated.

The methodology has been presented in detail. The opinions of 720 people have been polled, divided into four groups with clearly defined criteria for inclusion in each group: *medical and non-medical specialists working in social services for children with disabilities (n = 300); parents of children with disabilities (n = 240); fourth-year students majoring in Nursing (n = 150); experts from state and municipal administration involved in providing social services, and habilitated lecturers in "Nursing" (n = 30).*

The research was done in the Central Northern Region. The stages have been presented in detail in tabular form, indicating the time and place, respectively with the tools applied.

For the research, four questionnaires have been developed (described in detail and presented in Annexes №№ 1,2,3 and 4). The PhD student has presented the conceptual apparatus, which ensures unambiguous perception.

A set of methods needed for the tasks has been applied: *documentary method, inquiry method and standardised interview.* The primary information

has been processed and analysed using appropriate *statistical* methods. The results have been correctly presented in a graphical form.

The statistical processing of the research data was prepared by the IBM SPSS program, ver. 19.

The study has been approved by the Committee on Research Ethics at Varna Medical University.

Chapter Three of the dissertation, entitled **Results and Discussion** presents the results of the author's research, divided into eight parts.

In the first part, Assistant Professor Taseva analyses the *socio-demographic characteristics of the groups she has studied* that show the correct selection of respondents who have sufficient experience to know the research problem. According to the data, 82.9% of all specialists in the integrated services included in the poll have over 10 years of professional experience.

The results of the sociological survey have been analyzed in the second and third parts of this chapter of the dissertation. Opinions of different groups of respondents have been sought about the nurse's role and place in the integrated-care team care and the required competence that she should have. More than half of the specialists and experts think that continuous one-year training is needed, and one-third of the two groups think that training should take place every six months.

Specialists, parents and experts support the nurse's inclusion in the integrated-service team, which would guarantee 'peace of mind and security for parents', 'quick and adequate response to deteriorating child's condition', 'raising awareness', 'behaviour in an emergency', etc. Experts believe that no integrated service is possible without a nurse's participation and this will enhance the MDT's efficiency.

The author investigates the need for further training and specialization of the nurse to work in integrated-care teams for children with disabilities. A profound analysis of the official training documentation of the Nursing major with a Bachelor's degree from Varna Medical University has been studied and the opinions of graduate students have been polled. The results prove that basic training largely guarantees the nurse's ability to work in integrated care.

In the sixth part of the chapter in question, Assistant Professor Taseva examines the parents' role in the integrated care team. The author says that the relationship between professionals with expert knowledge in childcare and

parents is a potential for implementing the family-centred approach.

The opinions of the parents on the most common problems they face in everyday life, such as transport, access to education and medical facilities, the Health Insurance Fund, etc. have been polled. Taseva also investigates the possibility for parents to combine employment with caring for their children. The share of those who do not work or work part-time is significant, and 30% of them are personal assistants. Taking into consideration the physical, emotional and financial burden on the parents, information has been obtained on the specialists and institutions that most often provide support to the families. The nurse is a highly respected member of the integrated care team and especially in her role as a trainer on issues affecting children's health deficits.

The seventh part of this chapter examines the barriers to introducing integrated services. The results suggest that the main barriers are incomplete legislation, unclear sources and mechanisms of funding, staffing problems, lack of well-developed inter-institutional links and fragmentary services.

The sources of financing in Bulgaria have been studied and analysed. The respondents' opinions confirm the need for greater state participation. Many expect that the municipality should take on financing as well; others think that a mixed form of financing is also possible. In the face of the dominant public sector in providing social services, assistant professor Taseva expresses her vision of establishing NGOs to support the families of children with disabilities and give a sense of support and security.

I deem it necessary to emphasize the excellent knowledge of social and health legislation demonstrated by Assistant Professor Taseva and her critical view, analyzing the results proven by the research. She has applied this kind of approach when seeking opportunities to optimise the costs needed for the implementation of integrated services in Bulgaria.

I value Assistant Professor Taseva's work to collect and summarize data on the incidence of children with disabilities in the area she has studied.

At the end of Chapter Three, the PhD student makes a summary, stressing the main results of the research.

In **Chapter Four**, entitled "Providing Care for a Child at the Centre for Comprehensive Care of Children with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases" (CCODUHZ), the PhD student presents the provision of medical and social care for children with disabilities in Bulgaria in recent years. The Algorithm for

providing services to a child in the Centre for Child Protection is quite impressive. The theoretical justification of the Algorithm shows Assistant Professor Taseva's vision of broadening the nurse's competence and functions in the integrated-care multidisciplinary team for children with disabilities and their families, as proven by the results of the author's research. The PhD student has presented in a schematic form 'Modern Nurse's Functions in the MDT at CCODUHZ' and 'Algorithm of the Nurse's Action at the Centre for Comprehensive Care of Children with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases' that are indicative of her ability to develop models that present processes and activities where the nurse is a participant. Assistant Professor Taseva's concept is complemented by the 'Job Description for the Position of a Nurse "in CCODUHZ and" Information brochure on the activities of CCODUHZ" that would inform users and professionals. All this makes the author's vision complete and can be seen as a model to be implemented in practice.

Twelve conclusions have been drawn in **Chapter Five**, based on the research results, analysis of the literature and international experience; they reflect the research results, focusing mostly on the nurse's place and role in providing integrated health care.

Drawing on the research results, conclusions and recommendations, the PhD student has formulated *theoretical contributions*, mainly aimed to define the nurse's skills and competence to provide integrated care, possible activities, functions and social role of the nurse in caring for children with disabilities and their families. The contributions proposed by the author that have applied and practical value, which would streamline the work of the Center for Comprehensive Services for Children with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases are original:

Algorithm for providing services, Nurse's Job Description Model, Information Brochure and Multidisciplinary-Team-Care Model for Children with Disabilities with the nurse's involvement that can be applied in practice.

The author's portfolio features four scientific publications in specialised journals where Assistant Professor Taseva is the first author. The publications are related to the subject of the dissertation, which makes the PhD student recognisable by the main subject on which she does research.

The dissertation we are discussing is dedicated to a current subject of nursing practice, its size is sufficient, it is based on research and draws major conclusions. Theoretical and practical contributions have been outlined. I

highly appreciate its originality, as well as the profound analysis and think that it should be presented to the attention of institutions to which the author makes recommendations (*education, health and social policy, Bulgarian Association of Health Care Professionals and Medical Universities*), and find a place in various scientific forums and journals to present the findings and results related to the nurse's activity in her participation in activities in the area of social services for children with disabilities.

I accept the submitted 83-page author's abstract that presents structurally the essential points of the dissertation and provides a complete picture of the concept, methodology, structure and results of the dissertation research. I have no critical remarks.

Assistant Professor Daniela Taseva meets completely the requirements adopted by Varna Medical University for awarding the educational and scientific degree of Doctor.

In conclusion: The choice of the dissertation subject of Assistant Professor D. Taseva is a continuation of the experience she has gained in practice as a nurse and work in the social sphere. The submitted dissertation shows the precision of a researcher with a marked self-critical attitude to her academic development. The investigated issue presents the author as a seeker of undiscovered issues important for nursing practice, ready to offer reasonable solutions and models suited to introducing and optimising nursing care



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**Review written by
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