

STATEMENT

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Member of the Scientific Jury according to Order No P-109-482 of 18 November 2021
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Regarding: Dissertation on:

REHABILITATION CARE FOR OVERCOMING LONELINESS IN ADULTS AND THE ELDERLY

Author: **Donka Panayotova Nikolova**, assistant at Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov Medical University - Varna. Rehabilitation Therapist Training Sector at Medical College.

Supervisors:

Assoc. Prof. Stanislava Pavlova, MD

Prof. Dr. Paraskeva Mancheva, Doctor of Medical Sciences

Data on the procedure: By order of the Rector of MU-Varna No P-100-94 of 8 February 2019 **Donka Panayotova Nikolova** is enrolled as a doctoral student in the doctoral programme Health Care Management with an independent form of study, area of higher education: 7. Health and Sports, Professional field: 7.4. Public Health, topic of the dissertation on: **Rehabilitation care for overcoming loneliness in adults and the elderly** Based on a decision of the department council of Department of Health Care on the readiness for public defence and proposal for a Scientific Jury, Donka Nikolova was given the right to defence, according to Order of the Rector of MU-Varna No P-109-482 of 18 November 2021.

Work Biography and Career Development

In 1989, Donka Panayotova graduated the Institute of Health Staff Training Dr. P. Beshev - town of Pleven, speciality Rehabilitation Therapist. In 2006, she was awarded educational and qualification degree Bachelor in Psychology, and in 2007 - educational and qualification degree Master in Applied Psychology at Varna Free University Chernorizets Hrabar - city of Varna. In 2017, Donka Panayotova was awarded educational and qualification degree Bachelor and in 2018 - Master in Health Care Management at Medical University Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov. Donka Panayotova Nikolova is registered for specialisation with Order No P-106-86 / 24.02.2021 in non-clinical speciality Public Health of professional field Health Care for a period of 1 year, beginning from 15 March 2021.

She started her career development in 1989, in the 5th polyclinic in the city of Varna, where she occupied the position of Rehabilitation Therapist in a therapeutic gymnastics hall at Physiotherapy Department. When performing its activities, Donka Nikolova implements rehabilitation treatment and prevention programmes for patients with various pathologies and level of disability. On 20 July 1990 she began to work at Sana sanatorium of Construction Troops General Directorate in Druzhba resort - city of Varna, as a rehabilitation therapist. In March 2001, Donka

Nikolova started working at Medical and Psychological Centre of Varna Free University Chernorizets Hrabar as a rehabilitation therapist. On 1 July 2011, she started working as a psychologist in Radost Centre for Social Rehabilitation and Integration of Children with Special Educational Needs at Joy for our Children Foundation - city of Varna. Since 1 November 2013, Donka Nikolova has been occupying the position of Director of Radost Centre for Social Rehabilitation and Integration. Since 25 March 2015, she has been an assistant at Rehabilitation Therapist Training Sector of Medical College at Medical University - Varna. She teaches Kinesitherapy in Internal Diseases, Kinesitherapy in Surgery, Kinesitherapy in Geriatrics, Kinesitherapy in Rheumatology, Therapeutic Massage, Zonotherapy and Remedial Gymnastics.

Donka Nikolova is interested in the problems of elderly, their physical and psychological health in the aging process, in the possibilities for comprehensive rehabilitation in terms of healthy longevity, and in overcoming chronic conditions and psychological and emotional problems through old age.

A list of 5 publications related to the dissertation is presented.

Relevance of the Topic

The relevance of the topic of this dissertation is determined by the demographic characteristics and continuous trend toward population aging worldwide. In Bulgaria, the number of elderly people over 65 has more than doubled in the last twenty years against the background of demographic decline. The aging processes are associated with increased needs for medical and social comprehensive long-term care. Elderly people and adults are characterised by polymorbidity, impaired vital functions and less opportunities for self-care, mobility and communication. The socio-economic processes in the country and enhanced migration processes in recent years have had a negative impact on health and social problems and on the growing number of elderly people living alone. All this leads to mental disorders resulting in anxiety and depression. Loneliness has an adverse effect on the cognitive functioning of elderly people and adults, with the most vulnerable being people with disabilities and permanent invalidity. This necessitates a comprehensive rehabilitation at this age, focused on the biological, mental and social aspect of the problem, which provides real opportunities to improve their life satisfaction. Impaired health, mental and social well-being of elderly people living alone increases the need for qualified, long-term and comprehensive rehabilitation. The dissertation is focused on the development and application of comprehensive methodology for overcoming loneliness in elderly people and adults, who use services provided by nursing-care facility.

Structure and Characteristics of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured in 3 chapters and contains 158 pages, 8 tables, 94 figures and 7 appendixes. The author referred to 168 sources, with 53 of them being in Cyrillic and 115 in Latin.

The first chapter consists of 39 pages. The literature overview highlights the relevance and importance of the issue considered by the postgraduate student. Sufficient number of sources have been analysed in terms of their volume and content to present the demographic characteristics and characteristics of health, mental and social condition of people over 65. The organisational structures and models for provision of social services in the community and in specialised institutions are presented. The feelings of loneliness and dissatisfaction have been highlighted as

important indicators of social maladaptation and social isolation and as a reason for reduced satisfaction with life of elderly people and adults, which deteriorates their quality of life and social functioning. The foreign experience in the application of practical approaches for overcoming loneliness through various ergotherapeutic techniques and art therapy is presented.

The information presented by the postgraduate student in the first chapter highlights the relevance of the problem and the importance of ergotherapy and art therapy, being components of the rehabilitation for overcoming loneliness and social isolation in elderly.

The second chapter, which consists of 11 pages, presents the research methodology, which includes an objective, tasks, hypotheses, experiment design, stages of research and research methods. The objective of dissertation research is clearly indicated. To achieve it, 5 tasks, which accurately reflect the research work of the postgraduate student, are presented. The design of experimental work is properly described and includes the object, time range, nature and scope of the comprehensive methodology *From the Past to the Present* prepared by the postgraduate student. The stages of research work reflect the specific activities and the time frame of their implementation. To prove the working hypotheses, sufficient number of tools with appropriate content has been developed. Adequate research methods, which allow the required measurements, results and conclusions to be made, have been used.

In the third chapter, which consists of 73 pages, the postgraduate student presents results of a survey and results of discussion of the questionnaire *Scale of Loneliness* and *Scale of Life Satisfaction* before and after the methodology *From the Past to the Present* has been applied.

The survey covers a total of 86 elderly people and adults. The questions in the questionnaire are structured in four thematic groups. By studying the socio-demographic and health profile of the individuals being examined, the postgraduate student determines the characteristics of the study group. The specific features of communication in the elderly people and adults in the nursing-care facility are differentiated and the results of different aspects of communication are presented. The information on the shared memories from childhood, family, relationships with friends, professional development and other significant experiences provides an opportunity to reveal the emotional status of the studied group of elderly people and adults. By using the questionnaire *Scale of Loneliness*, the initial level of loneliness of the entire respondent group was proved (51.2%). After using the comprehensive methodology *From the Past to the Present* in overcoming / reducing the feeling of loneliness, significant differences were found between the experimental group (EG) and control group (CG) - i.e. a trend towards reducing the feeling of loneliness among the users of the social service nursing-care facility was observed in EG. After applying the methodology *From the Past to the Present* and analysis of the results in Experimental Group (EG) - before and after application of the methodology - statistically significant differences are found:

The obtained positive results prove the effectiveness of the experimental work and the achievement of the dissertation objectives after the application of the author's methodology From the Past to the Present.

The results of the research are appropriately illustrated and are comprehensively and correctly interpreted. MS Excel 2019 and IBM Statistics19 software package is used to illustrate the processed graphical data from the survey and scales.

Recommendations and Questions to the Postgraduate Student:

I have no recommendations or questions to the postgraduate student.

Scientific and Applied Contributions:

This dissertation research is characterised by originality and contribution nature. I accept the report of the contributions reflecting real achievements, as systematised by the author, which can be synthesised in two main directions.

Contributions of Theoretical Nature

1. Targeted and in-depth study of loneliness and satisfaction in elderly people and adults of the nursing-care facility was conducted.
2. Practical guidelines for reducing loneliness in elderly people and adults of the nursing-care facility have been proposed.
3. Comprehensive methodology From the Past to the Present has been developed.

Contributions of Practical and Applied Nature:

1. The developed comprehensive methodology From the Past to the Present has been tested and positive results have been obtained.
2. The established patterns are the basis for future studies tracking the studied processes.
3. The author's methodology From the Past to the Present can be used successfully to reduce loneliness and social isolation, to improve adaptation and to increase life satisfaction in elderly people and adults.
4. The memory therapy can be used by the staff working in nursing homes due to its wide therapeutic potential.

The obtained positive results and the contributions of theoretical and practical and applied nature contribute to the scientific development of geriatric comprehensive rehabilitation care in Bulgaria.

The recommendations and proposals in the dissertation are based on the obtained results and are aimed at institutions at the national and municipal level,

The author's summary is structured according to the chapters of the dissertation. The synthesised and well-selected text corresponds to the dissertation content. A list of 5 scientific publications related to the dissertation topic published in journals and proceedings of scientific conferences, is presented.


Conclusion

The dissertation of assistant Donka Nikolova addresses a topical issue related to the provision of comprehensive rehabilitation care for elderly people and adults in nursing-care facility in order to reduce loneliness and to increase their life satisfaction. The objective of dissertation research has been achieved. The formulated hypotheses are proved by the obtained statistically significant results. The conclusions are clearly, accurately and comprehensively presented. The achieved contributions have both scientific and practical value. The presented publications meet the requirements.

I am convinced of my positive assessment and I believe that the dissertation of **Donka Panayotova Nikolova** meets all requirements for award of scientific and educational degree Doctor.

20 January 2022

The statement is prepared by:



Assoc. Prof. Despina Georgieva, PhD