

## OPINION

From Ass. Prof. Emilia Georgieva, PhD,  
Deputy Director of College "Career Development, Quality and Accreditation"  
Medical College Varna with  
Medical University "Prof. Doctor Paraskev Stoyanov" Varna

**Subject:** procedure for dissertation defence and award of an educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" to **Teodora Staneva Radeva**, PhD student in the full-time form of study in the doctoral programme "Health Care Management" in the field of higher education 7. Health and Sport, professional field 7.4 Public Health, in Sliven Branch of Medical University - Varna on the topic "Nursing care for dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity".

**Scientific Supervisors:** Prof. Hristo Kozhuharov, PhD  
Prof. Elena Zheleva, PhD

### 1. Descriptive characteristics of the dissertation

The dissertation of Teodora Staneva Radeva contains 126 standard pages, structured in four chapters according to the standard requirements, including: Introduction, Literature review, Goal, tasks, materials and methods of the study, Results and discussion of the organization related to the care of dependent patients with mental comorbidity; data of the awareness and level of knowledge and skills of nurses, multidisciplinary clinical teams and dependent patients with mental comorbidity were analysed; the attitude towards the creation and operation of a psychiatric nursing practice was investigated; Conclusions, Contributions, Recommendations and Publications related to the thesis. The dissertation includes 58 tables, 15 figures and 7 appendices. The bibliography contains 187 literary sources, 40 of which are in Cyrillic alphabet and 147 are in Latin alphabet.

### 2. Assessment of the relevance of the topic

According to the data from the latest clinical and epidemiological studies, the degree and frequency of the manifestation of dependency and accompanying mental disorders is categorized as high. For patients with addictions, the possibility of having a mental disorder is greater than for the rest of the population. The most common comorbid disorders are depression, schizophrenia, and anxiety and personality disorders. Nursing care of dependent patients with mental comorbidity is a challenge for psychiatric nurses and multidisciplinary clinical teams working with them. Comorbidity is the presence of more than one disease or condition at the same time. The combination of more than two conditions developing simultaneously affects nursing care and creates difficulties treating and diagnosing each of them. Partial studies related to psychiatric comorbidity among users of psychoactive substances (PAS) have been conducted in Bulgaria so far. Mental health and psychiatric care in Bulgaria are among the priorities stated in the health policy.



### **3. Literature review**

The doctoral student makes an analytical review of the literature, considering Psychiatry from a historical point of view as a science, mental health and the participation of nurses, the organization of psychiatric care in Bulgaria as well as the role and functions of nurses in mental health care, the current problems and trends. The international experience in the organization of psychiatric care is reflected. Teodora Radeva examines in a logical sequence the clinical and demographic factors in dependent patients with comorbidity for various disorders. The doctoral student's experience and knowledge contribute to an in-depth analysis of the nursing process in psychiatric health care. The problems in the coordination between the structures in the existing system for treatment of dependent patients with mental comorbidity are outlined. The lack of a national strategy for follow-up care aimed at these patients is highlighted, as well as the poor commitment of social structures to them, which proves the reason for their permanent social maladjustment. The structured literature review shows Teodora Radeva's wide competences in the area of the problem under consideration.

### **4. Methodology of the study**

The main goal and tasks are specifically formulated and reflect precisely the research work carried out by Teodora Radeva. The PhD student uses a broad range of suitable methods to achieve the goal. Three hypotheses are presented. The subject, object and scope of the study are well presented. The structure and content of the developed toolkit are subjected to the specifics of the information collected from the respective group of respondents. The methods are selected and described in detail. Documentary, statistical and sociological methods were used. A high degree of correspondence was achieved between the six tasks set, the number of surveyed respondents and the results obtained. The research toolkit was developed by the student and includes a survey of six groups of participants in the study which includes patients with addiction and mental comorbidity and their relatives, medical staff working in psychiatric clinics of University General Hospital "Sveta Marina" EAD, Varna, multidisciplinary clinical teams (healthcare specialists and members of multidisciplinary clinical teams), third and fourth-year nursing students and fourth-year midwifery students patients with a relapse within 1-3 months with addiction and mental comorbidity. The anonymous survey examines the awareness, quality and effectiveness of care and the potential for optimization of psychiatric health care. The methodology of the dissertation includes traditional and original methods specially developed for the study, meets modern requirements, prepares the doctoral student for the research work, which is a guarantee for the reliability of the obtained results.

### **5. Results and discussion**

The results of Teodora Staneva Radeva's own research are presented in the third chapter of the dissertation. They are grouped in two thematic sections following the chronology of the tasks and applied methods. The contribution of the conducted survey is determined by its scope, as it includes 294 respondents, and was conducted in Psychiatric Clinics of University General Hospital "Sveta Marina" EAD Varna, as well as at Medical University "Prof. Doctor Paraskev Stoyanov" and all its affiliates - Varna, Shumen, Veliko Tarnovo and Sliven. An analysis is made of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The data obtained from the



responses of the respondents provide original scientific information about the nursing care of dependent patients with mental comorbidity, as well as about the causes of relapse. In the patient group (n=68), a high proportion of 68.4% relapsed and did not undergo treatment or did not adhere to the treatment after discharge, which was the main cause of their relapse.

The established high rate of relapse in the group of dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity is confirmed by the low levels of awareness about the rehabilitation centres and therapeutic communities and the self-help (AA) groups dealing with the rehabilitation of addicted patients. The second and third groups included 44 respondents, of which paramedics (n=6) and nurses (n=38). The survey data confirms the European trends of demographic aging of the nursing profession. Medical professionals grade their activities in hospital settings in descending order: communication with the patient, followed by drug therapy. 81.82% of the nurses stated categorically that there is a "stigma" attached to dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity and 59.1% agree to participate in information campaigns related to the "stigma". The data from the survey of students (n=50) shows a positive trend where more than half of the students express a desire to participate in information campaigns concerning stigma. An analysis of the data in the fourth group related to co-dependencies in relatives of dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity, shows co-dependency in almost all surveyed individuals. Codependency is a family disease and, in addition to the addicted patient, it also occurs in families of addicted patients in response to stress or "shame" in the family.

The attitude towards the establishment and functioning of a psychiatric nursing practice related to the support of dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity is studied in the third chapter on the basis of the literature review and the obtained results. Drawing on the good practice in other countries, the establishment of such a psychiatric practice will improve patient care, facilitate the maintenance of post-hospital therapy with fewer resources, and restore the patients' social functions and improve their quality of life.

The study of the current organization of psychiatric care in Bulgaria is theoretical and scientific in nature as it investigates the nursing care for dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity and the problems facing its development.

The "Introduction to Psychiatric Nursing" class for nursing students training at the Second Psychiatric Clinic has a practical-applied nature.

The recommendations and contributions of the dissertation were formulated on the basis of the data obtained from the scientific study. The dissertation is written in good language, with accuracy in terms of terminology.

The content and quality of the abstract meets the requirements of the Regulations of Medical University - Varna, reflecting faithfully and adequately the main results of the study.

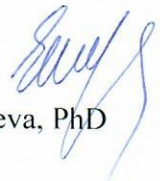
The dissertation is elaborated personally by the doctoral student, and I attribute the formulated contributions and obtained results to her personal credit.

**In conclusion**, I believe that Teodora Staneva Radeva's dissertation with topic "Nursing care for dependent patients with psychiatric comorbidity" is of high scientific and practical value, aimed at improving patient care and facilitating the maintenance of the therapy in the post-hospital period which will restore patients' social functions and will improve their quality of life. Based on the overall assessment of the documentation provided to me, I believe that Teodora Staneva Radeva fully meets the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic

Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, its Implementing Regulations and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at Medical University “Prof. Dr. P. Stoyanov” Varna.

I give my positive opinion for awarding an educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” to Teodora Staneva Radeva in higher education field 7. Health Care and Sports, in occupational strand 7.4 Public Health, and scientific specialty “Health Care Management”.

06.04.2023

Statement prepared by:   
Ass. Prof. Emilia Georgieva, PhD