

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Emanuela Ivanova Raycheva Mutafova, PhD.
on a dissertation "Access to dental care in Bulgaria"

of Elena Petrova Todorova

for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the
field of higher education 3.7. Administration and Management

A rationale for the review: Order No. R – 109-478/16.11.2023. of the
Rector of the Medical University - Varna and Protocol No. 1/23.11.2023.
of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury

General presentation of the procedure

The documents submitted by the candidate are in accordance with the
procedure meet the requirements of the Law on the Behavior of the
Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for the
Development of the Academic Staff of the University of Medicine - Varna.
The doctoral candidate has successfully passed the minimum examinations
required for the doctoral degree.

Brief biographical data about the PhD student

Elena Todorova was born in 1991. In 2014 she graduated from a
bachelor's program in Management, and in 2015 she obtained a master's
degree in Corporate business and Management from
Varna University of Economics. Since 2014, he has been working as a
organizer “ Medico-dental center” at the Medical University - Varna. In

2020 she was enrolled in doctoral studies at the Department of Economics and Health Care Management.

General characteristics of the dissertation

The dissertation is 154 pages long, contains 27 tables and 7 figures, five appendices and a bibliography of 211 sources, of which 25 are in Cyrillic. It is structured in three chapters, an introduction and a conclusion.

Relevance

In recent years, access to medical care has not been among the frequently studied aspects of health care, despite being one of the most important characteristics of the system. At the same time, the frequency and prevalence of diseases of the oral cavity and as the PhD student rightly points out, they are proving to be a serious but under-appreciated public health problem. These are sufficient reasons to determine the topicality of the topic and to explain the author's interest in this topic.

Evaluation of the literature review

In the literature review, the doctoral student demonstrates a good knowledge of the problem and its coverage in the available literature. In Chapter One, Elena Todorova presents the theoretical foundations for the study of access to health and dental services. It shows the development of the theoretical foundations for the study of access to health services and summarizes the foundational concepts of access to health and dental

services in the accessible literature. It is fair to conclude that there is no consensus on how to research access to dental care.

The PhD student chooses the approach proposed by McKernan et al to analyze and evaluate access to dental care, defining it as «current, comprehensive and applicable». Access to dental care is presented as a process of four components / need for dental services, barriers to access, use of dental services and health outcomes/.

Barriers to access /divided into structural, financial and personal/ are analyzed through the aspects: availability, physical and financial accessibility, convenience, acceptability and awareness.

The author discusses the process of overcoming barriers and the transition from "having access" to "getting/using access".

At the end of this chapter, Elena Todorova explains the focus of her work on the empirical study of barriers to access and usability of dental services.

Evaluation of objective, tasks and methodology

The aim of the dissertation is to "study and analyze the access to dental care for persons over 18 years of age" in our country, to determine the barriers and to assess their impact on the usability of dental services.

To achieve the goal, 6 research tasks have been set, which in their consistency and connectivity lead to the fulfillment of the set goal.

The research hypothesis identifies structural and financial barriers as limiting the realization of access to dental services, while the author expects personal barriers to have no such influence.

The limitations of the study are correctly presented.

The research was carried out using a complex of methods, adequately selected, which guarantee the value of the obtained results.

The doctoral student uses a documentary method for evaluating and interpreting the available information., a sociological method for gathering information from an anonymous survey of 953 consumers and 151 dental doctors., a series of statistical methods for processing and analyzing the obtained data.

Survey cards are presented in appendices.

I evaluate the methodology as adequate to the set goals and tasks.

Evaluation of results and contributions

In Chapter 2. "Research on access to dental care in Bulgaria" the author presents the empirical data and the analysis on them.

In item 2.1. the profile of the respondents is presented, and in item 2.2. the structural barriers of access to dental care were analyzed through the dimensions of availability, physical accessibility, convenience.

The author shows, against the background of increasing insurance with dental doctors, their uneven territorial distribution and therefore - significant inequalities in the insurance of the population.

The characteristics that have been statistically proven to influence the dimensions "physical accessibility" and "convenience" are age, education, residence, self-assessment of the individual's dental health status, availability of mandatory health insurance, income and employment status.

An in-depth analysis of the "financial accessibility" dimension is presented in item 2.3.

It is important to note that 63.4% of the compulsorily insured respondents do not use the dental activities provided in the package by the NHIF. Also important is the opinion of the dental doctors /76.3% of the respondents/ that this package is not sufficient and should be expanded by including tartar cleaning, endodontic treatment and orthodontic examination and treatment.

The obtained data for the dimensions "awareness" and "acceptability" are analyzed in item 2.4. Of interest is the analysis of the degree of influence of the various barriers on the usability of dental care. "Paying for dental services" and "lack of time" have the strongest limiting influence.

Attendance at a dental office differs significantly according to factors such as education, income and employment status.

The fact that only 6.6% of patients visit a dentist for a preventive examination is disturbing. It was established that the factors that influence the reason for visiting a dental office /for prevention or treatment/ are education, self-assessment of dental health, place of residence and income.

In this chapter, the competent use of statistical methods and the correct analysis of the obtained data, as well as the rich presentation of the obtained results in appropriate tables and figures, are impressive.

Chapter 3. is a general discussion on the guidelines for improving access to dental services in Bulgaria. A comparison was made between the graduates of dental medicine in our country and in the EU, the territorial disparity in the provision of personnel in our country, the threats to access to dental care were commented on.

The summarized conclusions of the study are presented in table 6 of paragraph 3.1.4. In item 3.2. recommendations are given for access to dental care.

Very clearly in each chapter the relationship between the points and paragraphs in them with the set research tasks is shown, which makes a very good impression.

Evaluation of conclusions and contributions

The conclusions are derived from the results of the own research and are correctly interpreted. They were the basis of the recommendations made. I accept the said contributions without remark.

Evaluation of the Abstract and publications

The abstract reflects the most essential part of the dissertation work. The 3 publications presented under the procedure are based on the main results of the dissertation development and meet the criteria for awarding scientific degrees.

Conclusion

Elena Todorova shows in-depth knowledge of the subject and skills for organizing and conducting independent scientific research.

In her dissertation work and presented publications, she demonstrated an ability to systematize and make sense of scientific facts and their correct

interpretation, as well as an appropriate presentation of the results of scientific research.

The presented dissertation work is an independent study and has a scientific and practical value.

The dissertation provides two theoretical and three theoretical-applied contributions relevant to access to dental care.

The dissertation work reviewed by me "Access to dental care in Bulgaria" fully meets the criteria for scientific educational degree "Doctor". I recommend to the members of the Scientific Jury to vote for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.7. Administration and management of Elena Petrova Todorova.

Reviewer:

Заличено на основание чл. 5, §1, б. „В“ от Регламент (ЕС) 2016/679
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/Assoc. Prof. Em. Mutafova, PhD /