

Statement of opinion

from Assoc. Prof. Galina Rumenova Petrova, Ph.D., Medical University - Varna, Faculty of Pharmacy, Department of Organization and Economics of Pharmacy, 84 "Tzar Osvoboditel" Blvd, 9002 Varna, Bulgaria, **GSM:** +359896868583

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Chairman of the Scientific Jury according to the Order No. P-109-478/16.11.2023 of the Rector of Medical University - Varna and Decision of the Scientific Jury with Protocol No. 1/23.11.2023.

Regarding: Procedure for obtaining a scientific and educational degree "Philosophy Doctor" in the doctoral program "Organization and management outside the field of material production (in healthcare)", professional field 3.7. Administration and Management, field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences.

Author: Elena Petrova Todorova

Title of the dissertation: "Access to dental care in Bulgaria"

Scientific supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Elka Atanasova, Ph.D.

Brief biographical data about the PhD student

Elena Petrova Todorova was born on 19.04.1991 in Varna. In 2010 She received her secondary education at the National High School for Humanities and Arts "Konstantin Preslavski" - Varna. She graduated from the Varna University of Economics with a Bachelor's degree in Management in 2014. From the same University she obtained a Master's degree in Corporate Business and Management in 2015.

In the period from 2020 to 2023, Elena Todorova is a PhD student in the doctoral program "Organization and management outside the field of material production (in healthcare)", professional field 3.7 "Administration and Management" at the Department of Economics and Management of Healthcare, Faculty of Public Health, Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" - Varna, on full-time basis (Enrolled by Order of the Rector of Medical University - Varna № R-109-390/09.10.2020), under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Elka Atanasova, Ph.D. The PhD student was expelled with the right to defense after a discussion in the Department (Protocol № 13/03.11.2023) by the Order of the Rector of MU - Varna № P-109-478/16.11.2023 based on the Decision of the Faculty Council of the Public Health Faculty (Protocol № 213/08.11.2023).

Elena Todorova works as an Organizer at the Medical and Dental Center at the Faculty of Dental Medicine of the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" - Varna.

I. General characteristics of the dissertation

The dissertation of Elena Todorova has a total volume of 154 standard pages. It includes a main text (introduction, three chapters, conclusions and recommendations) of 117 pages, 3 appendices at the end of the text, which detail the methodology and tools used in the author's research, and a reference list.

The theoretical foundation of the dissertation consists of a total of 211 cited sources, 25 in Cyrillic and 186 in Latin, which correspond to the thematic research field and which the PhD student has used in good faith. The primary part of the literature are publications from the last 5-10 years, which has allowed the author to reflect up to date views in the researched field.

Seven figures and 27 tables are presented in the text of the thesis, all of them with indicated national and international source used. Of them, entirely author's products are those that summarize the results of the statistical processing of the primary data from the surveys conducted by the doctoral student.

The dissertation is dedicated to an important and current scientific and practical problem of increasing importance - ensuring access to dental services for the population in Bulgaria.

Elena Todorova's development combines empirical and scientific evidence on the importance of oral health and the quality of life of the population. The increasing incidence of oral cavity diseases and their worldwide prevalence are a problem of particular importance, as they impose a serious health and economic burden on patients and society as a whole. Access to dental care is associated with good oral health and improved health outcomes.

The dissertation work is developed in accordance with the stated aim, research objectives and research hypothesis. For greater specificity and significance of the research, permissible limitations related to the scope of research and analysis are defined. Several scientific methods have been used in the dissertation - documentary, sociological and statistical methods.

The **introduction** of the dissertation presents the relevance and importance of the chosen topic showing the obvious professional commitment of the PhD student.

The first chapter focuses on the conceptual apparatus of access to health and dental services. Widely presented is the information from the Bulgarian and foreign specialized literature on the studied problems. The needs for dental services, barriers to accessing the dental care, the utilization of dental services and the relationship between oral health and general health have been analysed.

The second chapter is the logical continuation of the dissertation research begun in First Chapter. This chapter presents an in-depth study of the dimensions of access to dental care in Bulgaria among 953 respondents and 151 dentists. Based on a complex approach, the main dimensions associated to different barriers that may limit the usability of dental care are outlined: Structural barriers (availability - provision of dentists, nurses/dental assistants, physical accessibility, convenience); financial barriers (financial accessibility - coverage of dental services by the NHIS, ways of covering the cost of dental services, patients' attitudes towards payment for dental services); and personal barriers (awareness, acceptability).

The third chapter provides a number of practical solutions for improving access to dental care in Bulgaria, related to: increasing health literacy of the population regarding the importance of preventive activities and treatment of oral cavity diseases; improving the level of awareness about the types of dental activities that are fully or partially paid for by the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF); developing new strategies for promotion and prevention of oral health to be integrated into national or local health programs and expansion of the scope of dental services covered by the NHIF.

The results of the studies provide a valuable basis for taking appropriate policy measures by public health stakeholders to improve access to dental care in Bulgaria.

The content of the dissertation fully corresponds to its topic. The set aim and research tasks are fully achieved. The presented dissertation is developed logically and sequentially. Elena Todorova demonstrates a very good command of the terminology of the subject matter. She has used a rich toolset of research and analysis methods and a considerable database.

II. Contributions

The presented dissertation on "Access to Dental Care in Bulgaria" has clear scientific contributions. I accept the theoretical-methodological and theoretical-applied contributions formulated by the author, namely:

1. The development of the theoretical foundations for the study of access to dental care is studied and chronologically traced. Based on the literature review, a comprehensive and specifically applicable to dental care approach to access research is derived.
2. A methodological toolkit was developed and used for conducting research on access to dental care.
3. The structural, financial and personal barriers to access to dental care were explored and, through a statistical analysis, their degree of influence on different groups of users was assessed by factors in individual dimensions, as well as on the usability of dental services.
4. The study applies for the first time in our country the chosen approach for research on access to dental care, which makes it possible to make comparative research at national and international level available.
5. On the basis of the conducted research and the obtained results, recommendations have been formulated that can be taken into consideration and used to integrate measures to improve access to dental care in Bulgaria.

III. Recommendations and questions

I have no specific notes and questions to the PhD student. I recommend Elena Todorova to continue in the future her work on the chosen topic and the dissemination of the obtained results.

IV. Dissertation summary and publications on the dissertation

Elena Todorova has submitted 3 real publications in scientific journals related to the topic of her dissertation. Two of the publications are co-authored and one is single author publication.

The dissertation summary correctly presents the structure and content of the work and highlights the most important points and conclusions of the research.

V. Conclusion

There is a systematic study of a current and important problem - access to dental care in Bulgaria. The dissertation research offers insight into the determinants identified and influential in the different dimensions, key to reducing inequalities in access to dental care.

The study is focused on the subject and is logically sound. In the dissertation, the PhD student shows good knowledge, consistent search and derivation of practical solutions based on generalized empirical analysis.

In this regard, I give my positive assessment and confidently recommend the members of the esteemed Scientific Jury to award the educational and scientific degree “Philosophy Doctor” to Elena Petrova Todorova in the doctoral program "Organization and management outside the field of material production (in healthcare)" in professional field 3.7. Administration and Management.

22.01.2024

Varna

Chairman of the Scientific Jury:

/Assoc. Prof. G. Petrova, PhD/

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