

## OPINION

on the procedure for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" of  
PhD student student **Veselina Petrova Boteva**

in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.4 Religion and Theology

Doctoral program: Medicine, Psychology, and Faith,

Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

The opinion was prepared by **Assoc. Prof. Galya Yordanova, PhD**, University of Shumen "Ep. Konstantin Preslavski", as a member of the scientific jury for the procedure.

### 1. Information about the doctoral candidate

Veselina Petrova Boteva is a doctoral candidate pursuing independent study—having completed her coursework and been cleared for the defense—at the Department of Theology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski." Her dissertation is titled ***"Management of Healthcare Organizations: Goals, Functions, Methods, and Spiritual Support – A Holistic Approach to Patients."***

The submitted curriculum vitae shows that the doctoral candidate first obtained a Bachelor's degree in Social Activities and Management, followed by a Master's degree in Accounting for Financial and Non-Financial Institutions, with the professional qualification of Master Economist. In 2014, she graduated with a Master's degree in Health Management, holding the professional qualification of Master of Health Management. Since 2024, she has been enrolled as a doctoral student at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski." All of this demonstrates a marked interest in research and academic advancement.

In 2021, she completed a qualification course in "Supervision" at the Department for Qualification and Professional Development of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski." She has participated in numerous programs, training courses, and projects.

She has authored **four** scientific publications related to the topic of her dissertation.

The documents submitted for the procedure meet the requirements of the Regulations for the Application of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (PPZRASRB) and are well-organized and complete. They attest to the necessary academic and practical qualities and achievements of doctoral candidate **Veselina Boteva** in the field of theology.

### 2. General overview of the doctoral candidate's research work and achievements

The scholarly work of PhD candidate Veselina Boteva addresses health management within the context of Orthodox theology.

The presented work comprises an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and appendices. It is substantial in length, spanning 207 pages. The reference list includes a total of 124 titles—36 in Cyrillic and 88 in Latin script—with 40 of these publications dating from 2018 or later. Additionally, 17 regulatory documents were consulted, including laws, codes, ordinances, strategies, action plans, methodologies, European regulations, and international regulatory instruments.

The study examines how spiritual support can be incorporated as an institutional component of health and medical-social services. It focuses on the role and involvement of spiritual care providers, as well as on organized forms of spiritual care that can assist in the care process for patients and recipients of various health services.

In my view, the stated objectives align precisely with the specific tasks. These tasks outline a coherent research process: first, a theoretical framework is established by defining key concepts and models. Next, an international review of spiritual care practices is conducted to serve as a basis for comparison. The empirical component involves a survey regarding the attitudes of professionals, existing institutional practices, and the spiritual needs of patients. Based on this, gaps within Bulgarian institutions are identified, and the role of staff—along with the potential for collaboration with spiritual care providers—is analyzed. The final stage involves formulating practical recommendations for the institutional integration of spiritual support. These tasks encompass the theoretical framework, comparative analysis, and practical applicability—the three key elements of a doctoral dissertation.

The thesis of the dissertation presents an interesting argument: namely, that spiritual support is not an externally added service but an essential component of holistic care. In summary, the thesis posits that without a spiritual dimension, care for the individual remains incomplete—particularly in situations of illness, old age, disability, or existential crisis, when the need for meaning, comfort, and inner resilience becomes inseparable from medical and social assistance.

The Introduction establishes the relevance and significance of the study by outlining a genuine scientific and societal gap that necessitates an in-depth examination of the issue at hand. The object and subject of the study are defined, thereby specifying the analytical framework and focusing attention on the key aspects of the phenomenon.

The primary objective and the specific tasks structuring the logic of the research process and ensuring methodological consistency are formulated. The research thesis, expressing the central scientific premise subject to argumentation and verification, is presented.

The review of the scholarly tradition outlines existing approaches, concepts, and findings in the field, situating the current study within the body of accumulated knowledge. The section on methodology and limitations specifies the methods, sources, and analytical techniques employed, as well as the factors defining the scope of the study.

The theoretical and practical significance is discussed, highlighting contributions to both the academic discipline and applied practices. The structure of the study is presented, demonstrating the logical arrangement of its various parts.

The section on the validation of results substantiates their scientific validity through conference participation, publications, or other forms of professional presentation. Finally, the rationale for the choice of topic is outlined, revealing the author's personal and scientific motivation for addressing the specific issue.

The first chapter examines strategic goals and management functions within healthcare organizations, outlining the fundamental principles of planning, leadership, and control in the modern healthcare system. It presents the organizational models of healthcare facilities and their structural characteristics, which determine the effectiveness of management processes.

The state of healthcare institutions in the Republic of Bulgaria is analyzed, with a focus on management challenges and distinct deficiencies in the provision of spiritual care. Empirical data from

surveys and interviews reveal the actual attitudes of staff and patients regarding support for finding meaning, religious practices, and spiritual presence within the healthcare environment. Based on this, management conclusions are formulated, and key deficiencies are summarized. The subsequent section addresses the role of medical staff in providing spiritual support, defining its scope, the necessary professional competencies, and the limitations faced by specialists. Models for the training, assessment, and implementation of spiritual practices are presented, alongside comparative organizational solutions drawn from international practice. The impact of integrating spiritual care on the quality of health outcomes is analyzed. Attention is also given to social-health services for people with disabilities, highlighting the importance of integrated spiritual care as part of comprehensive support. The goals, functions, and methods of spiritual care within these services are examined, as are effective models at both national and international levels. Management dimensions encompass issues related to staffing, training, protocols, teamwork, ethics, the legal framework, and financing.

The second chapter is titled "A Holistic Approach to Users of Health and Medico-Social Services." It examines the theoretical foundations of the holistic model and the role of spirituality in medicine, outlining a conceptual framework in which spiritual support is understood as an integral part of comprehensive patient care. International experience—including established practices and models for integrating spiritual care into healthcare systems—is presented to serve as a benchmark for assessing the situation in Bulgaria.

The chapter analyzes the state of spiritual care in the Republic of Bulgaria, highlighting staffing shortages, institutional constraints, and the lack of sustainable mechanisms for providing spiritual support. Special attention is paid to integrating spiritual care into health and social services; this includes an examination of ethical, legal, and cultural prerequisites, as well as specific models, programs, and implementation strategies. Approaches to evaluating spiritual support are presented, alongside barriers, facilitating factors, and recommendations for national policy. Finally, the chapter discusses the opportunities and challenges associated with institutionalizing spiritual support within the Bulgarian health and social care system, emphasizing the need for a systemic approach, professional training, and regulatory clarity to ensure sustainable implementation.

Chapter Three presents the methodology of the empirical study, including the methods and tools employed, the logic of the empirical design, and the limitations defining the scope and interpretation of the results. This is followed by a detailed presentation and analysis of the empirical data, utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The qualitative analysis examines the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, their assessment of institutional care and emotional well-being, their religious attitudes and spiritual needs, as well as the role of the Orthodox chapel and clergy within the healing environment. The quantitative analysis involves profiling participants from the first survey and evaluating existing institutional practices regarding spiritual support.

The second survey focuses on the spiritual self-development of health and social service users, examining their demographic profiles, service experiences, emotional states, and spiritual needs and practices. The conclusion drawn from the empirical research synthesizes the key trends, gaps, and needs that define the actual landscape of spiritual care. Chapter Three concludes by proposing an organizational-management model for institutionalizing spiritual support within health and medicosocial organizations; this model is grounded in the empirical findings and aims to facilitate practical implementation and sustainable development.

The conclusion reiterates the findings from Chapters 1, 2, and 3. The study's contributions are described.

The publications are relevant to the dissertation topic and effectively illustrate its content.

The submitted abstract meets the requirements.

Regarding the scientific publications submitted for the procedure, I summarize the following:  
*they meet the minimum national requirements* for the award of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the scientific field 2. Humanities and professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology;

*I am not aware of any instances* of plagiarism proven in accordance with statutory procedures.

### **3. Substantive analysis of the scientific and applied scientific achievements of the doctoral candidate, as contained in the materials submitted for the procedure.**

This work proposes an interdisciplinary framework that integrates theology, medicine, social work, and management into a unified model of holistic care. It approaches spiritual support as an anthropological and ethical necessity rather than a confessional practice. The study restores the human dimension of care, emphasizing that the patient is, above all, a person rather than a clinical or administrative case. Thus, a new philosophy of care is formulated—a shift from formal service provision to a holistic human presence. The central conclusion is that quality care is inconceivable without a spiritual dimension, for true care begins where the individual is seen as a person.

### **4. Critical remarks and recommendations**

I noticed that in paragraph 10 of the **Introduction**—"Rationale for Choosing the Topic"—the text is written in the third person singular. While this is not incorrect, it creates a greater stylistic sense of detachment. It sounds more bureaucratic and less natural for an academic text in which the author presents their own reasons: personal interest in the topic, individual scholarly motivation, and personal research trajectory. Since these are personal grounds, writing the text in the first person would be entirely appropriate.

I offer an editorial recommendation regarding the title of the study, should the work be prepared for publication as a book. A suitable theoretical-conceptual option is: *"Strategic Management of Healthcare Organizations: Goals, Functions, Methods, and the Integration of Spiritual Support within the Holistic Care Model."*

The observations I have shared are offered in a constructive spirit and do not alter my overall positive impression.

### **5. Personal impressions of the doctoral candidate**

I know doctoral candidate **Veselina Boteva** only through the dissertation and publications she has presented; therefore, I am commenting solely on her research skills.

### **6. Conclusion on the Doctoral Thesis**

Having reviewed the materials submitted during the procedure—including the dissertation and publications—and having analyzed their significance and scientific-applied contributions, I declare that the scientific achievements meet the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB); doctoral candidate **Veselina Petrova Boteva** possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the field of interdisciplinary theology and is capable of conducting independent scientific research.

### **Conclusion**

The dissertation contains scientific, applied-scientific, and applied results that contribute to the field and meet all the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB); therefore, I confidently provide a positive assessment of the submitted dissertation, the abstract, and the achieved results and contributions, and I recommend that the esteemed

scientific jury award the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" to **Veselina Petrova Boteva** in in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology.

02.10.2026 г.

Prepared the opinion:

(Assoc. Prof. Galya Yordanova, PhD)