

OPINION

by Prof. Dilyana Vicheva, MD, PhD

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on a dissertation submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**"

Field of Higher Education: 2. Humanities

Professional Field: 2.4. Religion and Theology

Doctoral Programme: "Medicine, Psychology and Faith"

Author: Veselina Petrova Boteva

Title: "Management of Healthcare Organizations – Goals, Functions, Methods and Spiritual Support. A Holistic Approach to Patients"

Academic Supervisors:

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1. General Overview of the Procedure and the Doctoral Candidate

The dissertation submitted by Veselina Petrova Boteva was developed within the doctoral programme "Medicine, Psychology and Faith" at the Department of Theology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski". The set of submitted materials complies with Art. 36(1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of Plovdiv University.

Veselina Boteva has an educational background and substantial professional experience directly related to the subject matter of the research. Her professional career has been consistently associated with social policy and the management of medical and social care activities, providing a solid practical foundation for the development of the chosen interdisciplinary topic.

2. Relevance of the Topic

The topic of the dissertation is timely and socially significant. Contemporary healthcare and medical-social systems increasingly focus not only on illness, but on the human person as a whole, with physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs. In Bulgarian practice, the spiritual dimension of care is still insufficiently institutionalized. The absence of sustainable organizational mechanisms for identifying and addressing the spiritual needs of patients and service users determines both the relevance and the practical significance of the research.

Particularly valuable is the doctoral candidate's effort to examine spiritual support not as an isolated or supplementary activity, but as a possible component of the holistic model of care and of the management of healthcare and medical-social organizations.

3. Knowledge of the Research Problem

The dissertation demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the research problem and the ability to interpret it from an interdisciplinary perspective. It analyses the managerial and organizational aspects of healthcare organizations, the nature of the holistic approach, the place of spirituality in medicine and social care, as well as international models and good practices. The author successfully relates the theoretical concepts to the actual problems of the Bulgarian healthcare and social system. A substantial body of scholarly literature has been used – 124 bibliographic sources, regulatory documents, electronic resources, and academic publications – enabling the problem to be examined within a broad scholarly and practical context.

4. Research Methodology

The selected methodology corresponds to the aims and objectives of the dissertation and combines theoretical and empirical methods. In-depth interviews and two questionnaire surveys were conducted, involving 336 professionals and 129 patients/users of healthcare and medical-social services. The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches allows the problem to be examined from different perspectives – both from the standpoint of professionals and through the experiences and needs of people using healthcare and social services. This provides the necessary empirical basis for the conclusions and proposals formulated in the dissertation.

5. Characteristics and Evaluation of the Dissertation and Its Contributions

The dissertation comprises 207 pages and includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and appendices. Its significant scientific and applied contributions include the interdisciplinary conceptualization of holistic care; substantiation of the managerial importance of spiritual support; analysis of international models and practices; identification of specific deficiencies in the Bulgarian healthcare and medical-social system; and the author's own empirical study of spiritual needs.

A particularly significant contribution is the proposed organizational and managerial model for institutionalizing spiritual support in healthcare and medical-social organizations. The model includes interinstitutional partnership, internal organizational rules, and a coordination mechanism.

6. Assessment of the Publications and the Doctoral Candidate's Personal Contribution

Four scholarly publications related to the dissertation topic have been submitted. They address hospital chapels and spiritual care, the holistic approach to the patient, an empirical study of the influence of clergy on the emotional state of patients receiving palliative care, and the philosophical and ethical dimensions of integrating spirituality into healthcare practice. The publication activity demonstrates the consistent development and validation of the dissertation's main ideas. The submitted materials provide grounds for assessing the results, conclusions, and contributions as the doctoral candidate's personal contribution.

7. Dissertation Abstract

The dissertation abstract is 32 pages long and accurately reflects the structure, content, and main results of the dissertation. It presents the relevance of the problem, the object and subject of the research, its aim and objectives, thesis and methodology, as well as the principal results and scientific and applied contributions. Its content provides a sufficiently clear and systematic overview of the research carried out and the results achieved.

8. Recommendations for Future Use of the Dissertation Contributions and Results

The results of the dissertation research have potential for practical application and further scholarly development. It is recommended that the proposed organizational and managerial model be piloted in specific healthcare and medical-social organizations, with its impact on the quality of care and the satisfaction of patients and service users being monitored. Promising directions for future research include comparative analyses across different regions of the country, examination of the attitudes of medical and social-care professionals toward spiritual care, and the development and evaluation of programmes for enhancing professionals' spiritual competence.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation submitted by Veselina Petrova Boteva constitutes an independent, timely, and practically oriented scholarly study. The work demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the subject matter, an appropriate methodology, substantial empirical research, and clearly formulated scientific and applied contributions.

Of particular value is the effort to establish a practically applicable connection between the management of healthcare and medical-social organizations, the holistic approach to the patient, and the institutionalization of spiritual support while respecting the individual needs of the human person.

I consider that the dissertation meets the requirements for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". I therefore give it a positive assessment and confidently recommend that the esteemed Scientific Jury award Veselina Petrova Boteva the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in Field of Higher Education 2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.4. Religion and Theology, Doctoral Programme "Medicine, Psychology and Faith".

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Opinion prepared by:

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