

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Todor Staykov Stoev - Medical University, Plovdiv, field of higher education 7. Health and Sports, professional field 7.4 Public Health (Social Medicine, Organization of Health Care and Pharmacy)

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

Field of higher education: 2. Humanities

Professional field: 2.4. Religion and Theology

Doctoral Program: "Medicine, Psychology and Faith"

Author: Veselina Petrova Boteva

Topic: "Management of Health Organizations - Goals, Functions, Methods and Spiritual Support. Holistic Approach to Patients"

Scientific Supervisors:

1. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Adriana Hristoslavova Lyubenova - Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski"
2. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rusalena Veselinova Pendzhekova-Hristeva - Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski"

1. General Description of the Submitted Materials

By Order No. RD-22-1593/28.07.2026 of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for the procedure for public defense of a dissertation on the topic "Management of Health Organizations - Goals, Functions, Methods and Spiritual Support. Holistic Approach to Patients" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology, doctoral program "Medicine, Psychology and Faith".

The author of the dissertation is Veselina Petrova Boteva - a doctoral student in independent preparation at the Department of Theology of the Faculty of Philosophy and History of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski", with scientific supervisors Assoc. Prof. Dr. Adriana Hristoslavova Lyubenova and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rusalena Veselinova Pendzhekova-Hristeva.

The dissertation was discussed and directed for public defense at an extended meeting of the Department of Theology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski", held on 30.06.2026.

The set of materials presented by Vesselina Petrova Boteva is in accordance with Art. 36. (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of Plovdiv University, includes the following documents:

- dissertation;
- abstract of the dissertation;
- autobiography in European format;
- opinion of the scientific supervisors;

- certificate of fulfillment of the minimum national requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor";
- list of scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation;
- declaration of originality and reliability;
- declaration on the results and contributions of the conducted dissertation research;
- the remaining required documents related to the procedure.

The dissertation has a total volume of 207 pages and includes an introduction, three main chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and appendices. The empirical part contains 11 in-depth interviews and two questionnaires among 336 specialists and 129 users of health and medical-social services.

The doctoral student has presented four independent scientific publications directly related to the topic and the main results of the dissertation. The presented materials are compiled and formatted in a way that allows for a comprehensive assessment of the scientific research, the achieved results and the formulated contributions.

I do not identify any inconsistencies or other circumstances that would hinder the conduct of the procedure.

2. Brief biographical data about the doctoral student

Veselina Petrova Boteva has extensive professional experience in the field of social policy, social assistance, management of social services and the interaction between state and municipal institutions.

Of great importance for the development of the dissertation work is the practical and managerial experience accumulated by Vesselina Boteva. She participates in working groups at the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy for the development of secondary legislation, as well as in inter-institutional and expert formats related to the development of social policy, employment, long-term care and deinstitutionalization of elderly people and people with disabilities. Her professional experience as a trainer and supervisor testifies to high competence and direct knowledge of the problems studied in the dissertation.

The presented biographical data show that the doctoral student has the necessary educational background, professional experience and managerial expertise for the independent development of the selected scientific issues.

3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and objectives

The topic of the dissertation is undoubtedly relevant both in scientific-theoretical and scientific-applied terms. The development of health and medical-social services increasingly raises the issue of overcoming the limitations of the traditional biomedical model and moving to comprehensive, human-centered care that takes into account the physical, mental, social, moral and spiritual dimensions of the human personality.

The relevance of the study is determined by the insufficient institutionalization of spiritual support in Bulgarian health and medical-social organizations. In practice, there is still a lack of sustainable organizational mechanisms, professionally trained personnel, regulated procedures and sufficiently developed forms of interaction between medical institutions, social services, clergy and religious communities.

Particularly significant is the fact that the dissertation does not consider spiritual support as an isolated religious activity, but as part of quality management and a holistic model of care. In the study, the patient and the user of social services are considered not only as carriers of an illness, disability or social problem, but as individuals with their own experiences, values, fears, hopes, beliefs and needs for meaning and human closeness.

The main goal of the dissertation is to analyze the need for a more integrated model of interaction between medical sciences, social work and spiritual support in order to build a comprehensive, humanely oriented and ethically sustainable approach to human care. The goal also includes substantiating the need for institutional integration of spiritual care as an essential element of the holistic model in health and medical and social services.

The research tasks are logically related to the main goal. The goals and objectives are clearly formulated, interconnected and successfully implemented in the structure and content of the dissertation. The relevance of the study is also confirmed by the empirical results, according to which there is a clear discrepancy between the spiritual and existential needs of patients and users and the degree to which institutions provide systematic and recognizable spiritual support.

I believe that the chosen topic is timely, socially significant and corresponds to the scientific profile of the doctoral program "Medicine, Psychology and Faith".

4. Knowledge of the problem

The dissertation demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the state of the research problem in both a national and international context. The doctoral student has analyzed scientific literature in the fields of theology, health management, medicine, social work, bioethics, psychology, palliative care and management of health and social organizations.

The dissertation analyzes contemporary international standards, instruments and educational models for the assessment and provision of spiritual care. The possibilities for the participation of clergy in multidisciplinary teams, for the training of medical and social specialists and for the development of institutional procedures that guarantee voluntariness, equality and protection of religious freedom are examined.

I believe that the doctoral student knows the state of the researched problem in the necessary depth and demonstrates the ability for critical, systematic and creative use of bibliographical and documentary sources.

5. Research methodology

The chosen methodology is appropriate for the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the research problem. A mixed research approach was applied, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The theoretical part used analysis and synthesis of scientific literature, heuristic, historical and comparative-historical approach, systematic and comparative analysis, as well as a structural-functional approach to examining institutions and management models.

The chosen methodology is adequate, consistently applied and allows achieving the set goal and obtaining substantiated answers to the tasks of the dissertation research.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation work

The dissertation work has a total volume of 207 pages and includes an introduction, three main chapters, conclusion, bibliography and appendices. The text includes 3 tables, 17 figures and 8 appendices. The structure is logical and consistent. The presentation goes from the theoretical

and conceptual clarification of the problem through the analysis of international and national practices to the presentation of the own empirical research and the development of an organizational and management model.

The introduction convincingly presents the relevance and significance of the topic, the object and subject of the study, the main goal, the research tasks, the thesis, the methodology, the limitations and the theoretical and practical significance of the work. The thesis of the study is clearly formulated. According to it, spiritual support is not an external addition, but an organic element of holistic care, without which full-fledged care for a person in conditions of illness, old age, disability and existential crisis cannot be achieved.

The first chapter examines the strategic goals and management functions of health organizations, the structural models of management, the state of health institutions in the Republic of Bulgaria and the existing deficits in the provision of spiritual care.

The second chapter is devoted to the theoretical foundations of the holistic approach, spirituality in medicine and international experience in integrating spiritual support into health systems. The comparative analysis shows that the deficits in Bulgarian practice are not an insurmountable given, but can be overcome through consistent policy, professional training and coordinated institutional interaction.

The third chapter contains the methodology, presentation and analysis of the results of the empirical study. The volume of empirical work, the diversity of the groups involved and the combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis provide a solid basis for the conclusions drawn. In the final part of the third chapter, an organizational and management model for the institutionalization of spiritual support is developed.

The conclusion summarizes the main results and shows that the set goal has been achieved, the tasks have been completed and the thesis of the dissertation has been defended.

Overall, the dissertation is well structured, reasoned and written in an appropriate scientific language. The conclusions logically follow from the theoretical and empirical analysis, and the reliability of the material used is supported by a sufficiently broad research basis.

I give a highly positive assessment of the structure, content, methodological consistency and reliability of the presented dissertation work.

7. Contributions and significance of the work for science and practice

I accept the scientific and applied scientific contributions formulated in the dissertation work. They are real, clearly distinguishable and arise directly from the research conducted.

The main contribution consists in the argumentative affirmation of spiritual support as an organic component of holistic care and in the development of a conceptual and practical framework for its institutional integration in Bulgarian health and medical-social organizations.

The dissertation work has built a comprehensive theoretical model that connects medicine, social work, health management, bioethics and Orthodox theology into a single concept of human care. Spiritual support is presented as an integral part of quality care, and not as an external, occasional or additional activity.

The proposed model has immediate practical applicability. It does not necessarily require the establishment of new administrative structures, but offers optimal use of existing resources, the definition of coordination functions, the development of procedures and training

of personnel. The model creates an opportunity for spiritual support to be transformed from an episodic initiative into a sustainable element of organizational policy for quality and holistic care.

The contributions are important both for the development of the scientific discussion on holistic care and for the practical improvement of health and social services in Bulgaria. They create a basis for future regulatory changes, pilot programs, training of specialists, institutional partnerships and the development of practical standards for spiritual support.

I believe that the contributions are original, well-founded and significant for science and practice and meet the requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

8. Evaluation of publications on the dissertation work

Four independent scientific publications are presented on the topic of the dissertation work:

1. Boteva, V. "Hospital chapels as a focus for performing the work of mercy in healthcare institutions". – In: Proceedings of the scientific conference "Knowledge, science, technologies, innovations", Publ. "Institute for Knowledge, Science and Innovations", V. Tarnovo, 2024.
2. Boteva, V. "The holistic approach to the treatment of patients". – In: Journal "Thought, Word, Text", volume 20 (26), Plovdiv University Publishing House, Plovdiv, 2024.
3. Boteva, V. "Analysis of data from empirical studies on the influence of spirituality on the emotional state of patients in palliative care". – In: Proceedings of the scientific conference "Knowledge, Science, Technology, Innovations", Publ. "Institute for Knowledge, Science and Innovations", V. Tarnovo, 2025.
4. Boteva, V. "Integration of spirituality in health practice - philosophical and ethical dimensions". – In: Journal "Thought, Word, Text", volume 30 (35), Plovdiv University Publishing House, Plovdiv, 2025.

The presented reference for the minimum national requirements shows that the doctoral candidate meets the necessary indicators for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

I give a positive assessment of the presented publications and their compliance with the dissertation work.

9. Personal participation of the doctoral candidate

The personal participation of Veselina Boteva in the conducted dissertation research is indisputable and clearly recognizable. The doctoral student has independently conducted the research and analysis of the scientific literature, formulated the research thesis, the goal and objectives, developed the tools for empirical research, organized the collection of information and analyzed the obtained quantitative and qualitative data.

The connection between the doctoral student's professional experience and the scientific research has been used constructively. Practical knowledge of the social and institutional system does not replace scientific analysis, but contributes to the correct formulation of the problems and the applicability of the proposals.

A declaration of originality and credibility has been submitted, in which the doctoral student states that the results and contributions to the scientific production are original and have not been borrowed from research and publications in which she has no participation. No data

have been established for unlawful borrowing, unreliable presentation of results or foreign authorship. I accept that the formulated results and contributions are the personal merit of the doctoral student and prove her ability to independently plan, conduct and present scientific research.

10. Abstract

The abstract has been prepared in accordance with the established academic requirements and faithfully reflects the structure, content and main results of the dissertation work. It contains sufficient information to form a clear idea of the scientific problem, the methodology used, the achieved results and the formulated contributions.

The presentation is consistent, clear and corresponds to the text of the dissertation. The contributions are presented specifically and are supported by the theoretical and empirical research conducted. The abstract is 32 pages long and presents the content of the dissertation work in a concentrated form, it also includes the main characteristics of the empirical work - 11 in-depth interviews and two questionnaire surveys with 129 users of health and medical-social services and 336 specialists in the health and social sphere.

I give a positive assessment of the content, structure and quality of the abstract and believe that it meets the applicable regulatory and academic requirements.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

Separate recommendations can be made to the dissertation work that do not reduce its scientific value and do not question the achieved results.

The proposed organizational and management model should be pilot tested in a specific medical institution or medical and social service. This would allow for the assessment of its practical applicability, the necessary resources, the attitude of staff and users and the possibilities for sustainable implementation.

In future studies, the impact of various forms of spiritual support on emotional well-being, the feeling of loneliness, satisfaction with care and trust in institutions could also be tracked.

The above remarks are of a recommendatory nature and represent guidelines for future development of the topic, and not criticism that would reduce the positive assessment of the dissertation work.

12. Personal impressions

The work of the doctoral student reveals in-depth knowledge of the problems of social policy, health and medical-social services, analytical thinking, professional ethics and a clearly expressed commitment to improving the quality of care for the sick, the elderly, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

I believe that the professional experience of Veselina Boteva is an important prerequisite for the practical value of the dissertation research, without limiting its scientific independence and objectivity.

13. Recommendations for future use of the dissertation contributions and results

The results and contributions of the dissertation work have the potential for broad scientific and practical application.

The proposed organizational and management model can be used as a basis for developing and testing pilot programs for spiritual support in medical institutions, hospices, residential social services, homes for the elderly and services for people with disabilities.

I recommend that the results be popularized among health and social institutions, professional organizations and higher education institutions.

It would be appropriate to develop a practical guide for institutional implementation of spiritual support, which would contain sample procedures, tools for identifying needs, rules of interaction and quality indicators.

The dissertation creates a good basis for future comparative and applied research, including for tracking the effect of spiritual support on emotional well-being, satisfaction with care, feelings of loneliness, hope and trust in institutions.

I recommend that the scientific and scientific-applied results be further developed and presented in future publications, monographic studies, training programs and practical projects.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific, applied and applied results, which represent an original contribution to science and meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of ZRASRB and the relevant Regulations of the University "Paisiy Hilendarski".

The dissertation shows that Veselina Petrova Boteva possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional competencies in the field of the doctoral program "Medicine, Psychology and Faith" and demonstrates qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research.

Based on the above, I give my **convinced positive assessment** of the conducted dissertation research, the presented dissertation work, the abstract, the scientific publications, the achieved results and the formulated contributions.

I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award Veselina Petrova Boteva the educational and scientific degree of "doctor" in: Field of higher education: 2. Humanities; Professional field: 2.4. Religion and theology; Doctoral program: "Medicine, psychology and faith".

23.09.2026

Reviewer:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Todor Staykov Stoev