

## REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stela Ivanova Baltova, International Business School, Botevgrad, professional field 3.8. Economics (Business Services)

**Regarding:** Procedure for defending doctoral thesis for the award of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.8 Economics (Finance, money circulation, credit and insurance (insurance and social work) at the Academy of Economics "D. A. Tsenov" - Svishtov

**Author of the dissertation:** Lyuba Martinova Miteva

**Dissertation topic:** "Organisational and Management Challenges for Medical Institutions in Conditions of a COVID-19 pandemic (following the example of the "Heart and Brain" Medical Center EAD - Pleven)"

**Scientific supervisors:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nikolay Ninov (Academy of Economics "D. A. Tsenov")

Prof. Ryszard Pukala, PhD (The Bronislaw Markiewicz State  
Higher School of Technology and Economics, Jaroslaw, Poland)

**Grounds for preparing the review:** Order No. 475 of June 1, 2023 of the Rector of the Academy of Economics "D. A. Tsenov" for participation in a scientific jury for a dissertation defense.

### 1. General characteristics of the presented dissertation thesis

The dissertation presented for review is developed in a volume of 238 pages, of which 216 pages are the main text. It is structured as follows: introduction, main text systematized in three chapters, conclusion and references. In terms of structure, the doctoral thesis is logically supported and a good balance between the individual parts has been achieved.

78 literary sources were used, of which 51 titles are in Bulgarian and the rest in Latin, including publications in scientific and periodicals, monographs, books, legal documents, statistical sources, analyzes and reports of national and international organizations, etc. The predominant part of the diverse in nature and resource literary sources used in the work, is published in 2020 and after, incl. 2023 is important from the point of view of the interpretation

of the research problem, which de facto is not very well known in the scientific and specialized literature, and proves the relevance of the research.

The dissertation includes 69 figures and 24 tables, well laid out and clearly referenced. The use of figures and tables evenly in the dissertation work, in the theoretical part as well, allows the theoretical propositions to be clearly and argumentatively clarified and the results of the empirical studies to be well presented. Lists of tables and figures in a separate list at the beginning of the work would make the text more clear and easier to work with. Together with the dissertation, 1 appendix is presented on its content in a volume of 17 pages.

The doctoral thesis is designed according to the technical requirements, and together with the abstract and the presented scientific publications on the topic (3 in total), represent a complete product of independent scientific research. The introduction contains the necessary components such as definition of the topic, degree of development of the problem and review of scientific literature on the topic, object and subject of the research, aim and objectives of the dissertation work, research methodology, research thesis, research questions, scope of the research, incl. its limitations.

### **Relevance of the topic**

Without knowing the doctoral student and her professional path, it seems to me that the choice of the topic of the dissertation research is her personal one, and it shows the researcher's desire to make a contribution to solving a problem that has arisen through the methods of science, which requires knowledge, professional experience, dedication. The dissertation is undoubtedly dedicated to a current and important economic, social and management issue - the organizational and management challenges facing medical institutions in the conditions of a pandemic caused by Covid-19, and this does not raise any doubt. The Covid 19 pandemic, which has spread steadily throughout the world, has given birth to a new field of scientific research, modestly known until now due to the nature of the causative agent.

Researching countermeasures and minimizing damage from pandemic risks by highlighting the specifics in healthcare organizations would not only lead to adequate and sustainable risk management in healthcare facilities, but would enable the development of such policies to regulate these processes, including in the context of digitization of health systems. The Covid-19 pandemic, which faced unforeseen circumstances for health systems not only in Bulgaria, but also in the EU and throughout the world, unequivocally brought out the need to apply a very specific technology for risk management in health care and health organizations.

Any research that would lead to the disclosure of the direct and indirect links between the development and implementation of a risk management program in a healthcare facility and the results of the activity of the same during the pandemic, including the mechanisms for dealing with new risks, continuity of the work process, staff and patient safety, will contribute to the topic of risk management in the health system in the context of a pandemic and in risk management in general. The PhD student correctly finds research deficits in these areas and directs her research in these directions.

**The object** of the dissertation work is a health facility, specifically named - the private multispecialty hospital for active treatment "Heart and Brain" EAD - Pleven, as part of the active national system of medical facilities for hospital medical care in the Republic of Bulgaria.

**The subject** of the research is the organizational and management challenges facing the medical facilities in the country, in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to implement a risk management program (following the example of the "Heart and Brain" Medical Center EAD - Pleven).

**The primary objective** of the dissertation research is to "demonstrate the need for a strong risk management program" (p. 10 in the dissertation) in the healthcare organization. To achieve the goal, the doctoral student defines the framework of the research and sets out nine research tasks in their sequence, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Bringing out the key characteristics, specificity, place and importance of the hospital in modern health systems;
2. Presentation of the concept of risk management of a medical facility in the context of new public health projections;
3. Justification of the application of risk management as a mandatory and developing management function in health facilities in the conditions of a pandemic;
4. Bringing out the challenges facing hospital medical care in Bulgaria during the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of the state of hospital medical care in Bulgaria;
5. Implementation of the Program for controlling the risks and opportunities of the "Heart and Brain" Medical Center EAD - Pleven during the COVID-19 pandemic
6. Conducting a survey regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the activities of the "Heart and Brain" Medical Center EAD - Pleven.

The tasks thus set determined the structure of the dissertation work.



The defended **thesis** is that the COVID-19 pandemic has provoked the management of the medical institutions for hospital medical care in Bulgaria in the direction of rethinking the strategies of the medical institutions and more specifically the risk management programs underlying their risk management.

In the introduction, the author also presents the applied methodological toolkit, which sufficiently allows to reach results that support the achievement of the goal of the dissertation work. It is correctly approached as far as setting limits to the scope of the research is concerned, which allows to achieve focus and, based on the conclusions, "to initiate decisions that, in addition to enriching the field of science, are of maximum benefit to practice and - especially for the management of hospital facilities" (p. 12).

## **2. Evaluation of the obtained scientific and scientific-applied results**

The presentation of the dissertation work is organized in three chapters, relatively balanced in terms of their volume. To present the technology of her research and the analysis of the results, the author has adopted a classic approach of structuring a dissertation with clearly distinguishable and logically connected theoretical-methodological and analytical parts, which in their totality represent an independently completed study. Each chapter ends with conclusions.

**The first chapter** has a theoretical-cognitive nature and examines in a logical sequence the characteristics and the place of the hospital in modern healthcare systems, with a logical focus on the functional areas of management of the medical facility. Conceptual views on risk management in medical facilities, methods and techniques for risk analysis, and risk management as a management concept are presented. Among the significant conclusions is the consideration of risk management in health care and resp. in medical facilities as a relatively new field both for scientific research and from a purely practical point of view. At the same time, it is argued that facing the unknown (still in all its aspects) risk of Covid-19 has shifted the focus of hospital risk management to another, more complex plane. Practical solutions for risk management in healthcare facilities during the Covid-19 pandemic are presented. The importance of research, disclosure and analysis of the essential characteristics of this risk, and the specifics of its management in medical institutions, is brought out.

**The second chapter** is devoted to an analysis of the current state of hospital medical care in Bulgaria and the organizational and management challenges it faces in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the basis of statistical information about payments at medical

facilities for hospital medical care, conclusions are reached about the financial condition of hospitals, the interrelationship between increasing the delegated budgets and the possibility of offering high-tech activities, the reasons for the differences in the budgets between the state, municipal and private hospitals, as well as the migration of patients to the native health market is justified, primarily related to "individual needs and desire to use, respectively receive high-tech health services and products that are not offered by municipal hospitals, but are exclusively and mostly available in state and private hospitals in Bulgaria" (p. 115 in the dissertation).

A special place in this chapter are the results of the critical analysis of the activity of the "Heart and Brain" Medical Center EAD - Pleven in the conditions of the pandemic. In summary, conclusions are drawn that are fully relevant to the objectives of the dissertation research. They boil down to the fact that hospital management is a field of continuous changes over the last more than 20 years, not only in the way of financing, but also in terms of new requirements for hospital management, under the influence of the introduction of modern technologies, the reporting and implementation of the medical and administrative activities, the active work on projects and an undoubtedly significant problem and challenge before the implementation of the policies - finding and retaining suitable personnel.

The contribution of the research is most clearly expressed in **the Third Chapter** of the dissertation, which analyzes the results of the conducted study regarding the application of the updated program for mastering the risks and opportunities in the research object. The important components for the effective and efficient implementation of the Program are motivated, such as the choice of a method for qualitative risk analysis, its assessment and control, a method for monitoring good information, knowledge of the action algorithm and the existence of feedback from the research staff object on the occasion of the adopted and implemented updated program for mastering risks and opportunities. The author considers the outlined guidelines for the future development of the "Program for mastering risks and opportunities" as a potential opportunity for the rapid development of working and effective action plans and crisis management systems with a view to ensuring the continuity of the activity of a hospital and preventing insolvency and bankruptcy of the organization, resp. meeting the expectations of all stakeholders.

The analysis of the results of the conducted empirical research among the staff of the research site leads to several conclusions. First of all, the degree of familiarity and applicability of the "Program for mastering risks and opportunities" in the organization and the real positive effects of its implementation, both in terms of medical and financial results of the hospital, as well as for the creation of a favorable and safe environment for staff and patients. In the second



place is the proven strong correlation between personal participation in the diagnostic and treatment process and the degree of awareness of the objectives of the risk management program in the healthcare facility and other resulting dependencies. The discussion of the research results logically gives the doctoral student reason to conclude that "the key to guaranteeing the continuity and high quality of health services is the proactive way to define and manage risks in hospital medical facilities" (p. 157) as a condition for successful risk management, it is not done fictitiously and the entire staff of the medical facility actively participates in the process.

**The conclusion** correctly summarizes the achieved scientific and practical-applied results in the dissertation, systematizes and summarizes the recommendations for meeting organizational-management challenges facing medical institutions in pandemic conditions. There are opportunities to continue and deepen the research.

### **3. Evaluation of scientific and scientific-applied contributions**

The dissertation work and the publications, in which the scientific views and results of the research work of the doctoral student Lyuba Miteva are presented, show a conscientious attitude to the researched field and the aspiration of a young researcher to create new knowledge.

I support the author's main scientific and scientific-applied contributions identified in the dissertation, which, in my opinion, can be supplemented and reduced to the following:

1. On the basis of a thorough study and critical analysis of literary sources, the theoretical statements in the field of risk management in the health system and more specifically in medical facilities in the conditions of a pandemic caused by Covid-19 have been enriched.
2. The results of the assessment of the development and state of the research object - a hospital - in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic as a direct result of the adopted organizational behavior and hospital risk management policy, reveal dependencies between the management functions in the research object. These dependencies should be monitored not only in pandemic conditions, but in normal operation of the healthcare facility to ensure a stress-free transition to another risk management mode in the event of a new pandemic threat.
3. A staff-oriented survey tool was developed and tested to establish the effective implementation of the "Risk and Opportunity Management Program" in a medical hospital facility.

4. Specific guidelines for the future updating of the "Program for mastering risks and opportunities" have been drawn up in order to ensure the continuity of the activity, prevent the insolvency and bankruptcy of the organization, ensure the expectations of the shareholders-owners of the company, and of all other interested parties in society.

#### **4. Evaluation of dissertation publications**

The doctoral student has published the main results of the research on the subject of her dissertation in three independent publications in Bulgarian in the period 2019-2022, of which one article in a scientific journal and 2 reports from participation in international scientific conferences, with which she meets the minimum national requirements for the acquisition of ONS "Doctor" according to the prescriptions of the Rules for implementation of the law on the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

#### **5. Evaluation of the dissertation summary**

The dissertation summary is presented in a form that meets the requirements, reflecting correctly in a volume of 42 pages the content of the dissertation and the main scientific and applied results achieved, and also contains guidelines for future research on the topic of the dissertation. The statement of contributions correctly reflects the results achieved by the author.

The list of the author's publications on the topic of the dissertation is added.

#### **6. Critical remarks, recommendations and questions**

I don't have any particular critical remarks and recommendations to the dissertation work submitted for review, except that the list of used literary sources is not fully prepared in accordance with accepted standards: literary sources in Cyrillic and Latin are described mixed. The text states that there are confirmed hypotheses, but de facto there are no formulated ones, which would be welcomed to be clarified by the author.

I would like to recommend Lyuba Miteva to continue her research on risk management in healthcare facilities in the future towards creating a model for ensuring adequate management of human resources by expanding the number of researched sites, as well as publishing the results of her research research in publications abroad.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, I can state that the dissertation work and the publication activity of Lyuba Martinova Miteva meet the criteria laid down in the Act on the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. The set goals and tasks of the research have been successfully fulfilled, and as a result, results of a scientific and scientific-applied nature have been achieved. With conviction, I give a positive assessment of the dissertation work on the topic "Organizational and management challenges for medical institutions in conditions of a pandemic of COVID-19 (following the example of the Medical Center "Heart and Brain" EAD - Pleven)" and I propose to the esteemed jury to award **Lyuba Martinova Miteva** the educational and scientific degree "**doctor**" in professional field 3.8. Economics (Finance, money circulation, credit and insurance (insurance and social work)).

June 29, 2023  
Sofia

**Reviewer:** .....  
(Assoc. Prof. Stela Baltova, PhD)

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of Article 4, Paragraph 1 of Regulation  
679/2016.