

## OPINION

by Prof. Dr. Petko Penkov Marinov, MD  
Department of Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacotherapy  
Dean of the Faculty of Pharmacy, Medical University – Varna

**Subject:** Procedure for obtaining Educational and Scientific degree – Doctor with candidate  
Dr. Branimir Ivanov Brankov

By order № R-109-1/04.01.2021 of the Rector of the Medical University – Varna, based on a decision of the Faculty Council at the Faculty of Pharmacy under Protocol No 10/17.12.2020, I have been elected as a member of the Scientific Jury, and on the basis of Protocol No 1/11.01.2021 I have been appointed to prepare an opinion on the procedure for obtaining Educational and Scientific degree – Doctor with candidate Dr. Branimir Ivanov Brankov.

**Subject:** European practices and standards for digital forms of continuing training of medical specialists in the field of drug policy

**Field of higher education:** 7. Health and Sports

**Professional field:** 7.3. Pharmacy

**Scientific specialty:** Pharmacology

**Scientific supervisors:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Albena Zlatareva, MD and Prof. Dr. Marieta Georgieva, MD.

**Form of doctorate:** Independent form of study

**Department:** Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacotherapy, Faculty of Pharmacy, Medical University – Varna

The competition procedure is followed and is in accordance with the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its application and the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at the Medical University – Varna.

**Biographical data and professional qualification:** Dr. Branimir Brankov graduated in medicine in 1991 in Sofia. In the same year he began specialization in neurosurgery at the Military Medical Academy – Sofia, where he worked until 1993. In 1994 he began his professional career in the pharmaceutical company Merck Sharp & Dohme, NJ, USA. From 1994 to 2000 he was General Director of MSD for Bulgaria. From 2001 to 2005 he was Director of Marketing and Marketing Research. From 2004 to 2006 he was Global Director of Social Networking and Head of Global Marketing Expertise. From 2006 to 2011 he was the Head of Corporate and Strategic Analysis and Planning at MSD. From 2011 to 2017 he was the Head of Business Development in developing countries. Since 2017, he is the MSD's Regional Director General for the Balkans. Since 2000 he has a master's degree in business administration from the University of National and World Economy – Sofia. Since 2003 he has a master's degree in business administration, concentration, marketing and management from Rutgers University NJ, USA. In 2012–2013 he has completed a business program at Harvard University, Boston MA, USA. Since 2018 he is a doctoral student in an independent form of study at the Medical University – Varna.

### **Relevance:**

Continuing training, as a key element of lifelong learning, is becoming increasingly important in today's global world, where access to information is greatly facilitated and the constant evolving



of digital forms of education and their entering in higher education and the respective improvements are becoming increasingly popular.

The opportunities and goals of education of medical graduates are drastically changed and expanded after the creation of digital platforms of the latest generation, providing real-time, most up-to-date and comprehensive medical information for each field of medical science.

Drug policy is an important part of a country's overall health policy. It is essential to establish how and to what extent the medical specialists in Bulgaria and the Balkan region upgrade their training in this extremely important area for the health policy in a country. How medical education is being updated, focusing on new digital forms of education through the development, updating and adaptation of specialized training programmes for medical specialists in the field of drug policy. This topic is particularly relevant today, when the problems and constraints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have necessitated a rapid restructuring of a number of areas of political life around the world to ensure the most efficient functioning of health systems and the preservation of health. and people's lives. The widespread isolation and strict quarantine imposed in a number of European countries, including the Republic of Bulgaria, has raised the issue of distance learning. We moved to distance learning for students in a number of European countries and in our country. All this unequivocally shows the need for adaptability of educational systems and their rapid restructuring for the transition to distance learning and education.

### **Structure of the dissertation**

The dissertation contains 147 pages and an additional 24 pages for the three appendices. It is illustrated with 13 figures, 16 tables and 3 appendices. The literature review includes 194 sources. The dissertation is structured according to the classical model and includes: Introduction – 4 pages; Literature review – 90 pages; Purpose and tasks – 2 pages; Material and methods – 3 pages; Results – 20 pages; Discussion – 5 pages; Conclusions – 1 page; Contributions – 2 pages; Publications in connection with the dissertation – 1 page; Bibliography – 15 pages; Appendices – 24 pages.

### **Introduction**

Digital forms of training entering higher education are becoming increasingly popular. There is a need for continuous updating of the knowledge of medical specialists in a number of areas of medicine, including in the field of drug policy. This requires examining the existing and the need to create new specialized training programmes for medical specialists in the field of management and implementation of national and international strategies and policies in the field of drug policy, for the implementation of legislation, strategies, programmes and policies at national and international level. The emphasis in the presented study is to establish how and to what extent the medical specialists in Bulgaria and from the Balkan region upgrade their training in this extremely important area for the health policy in a country.

### **Literature review**

In this chapter Dr. Brankov thoroughly examines the basic concepts in the field of European cooperation and development in the field of education and career development, vocational training and education, and in particular the specifics in the field of medical education, as well as clarifying concepts and goals in the field of drug policy. The main documents at European Union level are aimed at improving and harmonizing the legal norms and the required quality criteria in education between the member states of the Union. A detailed analysis of the drug policy in our country has been performed, which is an important part of the national health policy. The need for the medics for additional training on the issue and the importance of this field for the improvement of the career development of the medical specialists is highlighted. The skills for working with digital media are a necessary condition for successful professional realization for

medical specialists. The literature review is written on 90 pages. It is performed and presented precisely and correctly and justifies the dissertability of the subject.



**Purpose and tasks**

The purpose of the dissertation is to establish the extent to which medical specialists have an interest and opportunity to update their basic knowledge and skills acquired in practice. Are they familiar with the issues related to the field of drug policy? Do they attend forms of continuing education and are such organized in the places where they work? To specify what web-based forms of updating training are known to the graduated medical specialists from Bulgaria, Slovenia and Croatia, which will provide them with adequate knowledge in the rapidly changing environment in the field of drug policy and regulation, and to achieve this - 3 tasks have been set to be solved by using a survey method.

The purpose and tasks are specific and properly formulated.

**Materials and methods**

The survey was conducted in three countries – Bulgaria, Slovenia and Croatia. The respondents are medical specialists with different professions and jobs. The principle of participation in the survey is voluntary, using the technique of ‘snowballing’ to distribute the questionnaire and recruit those willing to participate.

Survey and statistical methods used - descriptive, correlation and regression analyses have helped and allowed the solution of the set purpose and tasks.

**Results and discussion:**

In this chapter of the dissertation, the doctoral student shows that the areas of education and postgraduate qualification need to be updated, focusing on new digital forms of training by developing, updating and adapting specialized training programmes for employed medical specialists to know the specifics of the dynamically changing environment in the field of drug policy and regulation. Attitudes and readiness of the respondents to take part in each opportunity in a web-based form of training are established. Although the three countries in the Balkan region have created conditions for lifelong learning, it is necessary to further develop this trend in the field of drug policy and regulation, especially for those working in the field of medical services management and health policy. Access to further training should be guaranteed for everyone willing to participate.

**Conclusions:**

The creation of online specialized training programmes, the development and implementation of innovative forms of web-based postgraduate and further training in drug policy will enable more people to get involved and update their knowledge in this dynamic and rapidly changing field of science and will increase the quality of health services for the population.

The conclusions made by the author are a logical conclusion of the results of the dissertation.

**Contributions:**

Based on the dissertation, Dr. Branimir Brankov derives and formulates 2 groups of contributions, which I fully approve. The first group is of scientific and practical nature – it is demonstrated the need for the creation and development of digital forms of continuing education for medical specialists in the field of drug policy, as well as the creation of new specialized training programmes for medical specialists in the field of management for implementation of national and international strategies and policies in the field of drug policy, as the courses and programmes for postgraduate education provided by the higher schools enjoy the highest degree of trust among the respondents.

The second group of contributions is of a scientific and applicable nature - the development of communication technologies and, more recently, the epidemiological situation, require accelerated digitalization of the health sector, and sharply increase the need for rapid changes in health and drug policies, as the optimal form of continuing education is the digital one. Web-based postgraduate and further training on drug policy issues will enable everyone to get involved and adapt their knowledge in this dynamic and rapidly changing field.

These contributions enrich the knowledge about the drug policy in our country and have a certain scientific and practical nature.

**Publication activity:**

The author presents 3 full-text publications in refereed journals in English in connection with the dissertation, and in all of them he is the first author, which proves the personal contribution in developing this dissertation.

**The abstract** is prepared according to the requirements and fully meets the purposes, tasks and results of the dissertation.

**Conclusion:** The dissertation on the European practices and standards for digital forms of continuing training of medical specialists in the field of drug policy is relevant and treats an important interdisciplinary problem and is fully in line with the current problems posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The presented work fully meets the requirements of the Act on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its application and the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at the Medical University – Varna and the criteria for obtaining Educational and Scientific Degree – Doctor. That is why I give my positive assessment and recommend to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury to vote positively for the dissertation and to award Dr. Branimir Ivanov Brankov the Educational and Scientific Degree – Doctor in the field of higher education 7. Health and Sport, professional field 7.3. Pharmacy, scientific specialty Pharmacology.

01 February 2021  
Varna

Prof. Dr. Petko Marinov, MD