

O P I N I O N

by Assoc. Prof. Svetlin Varbanov Varbanov, MD, PhD
Department of Nursing care, Affiliate in Sliven
Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov"-Varna

Regarding dissertation on topic: Digital follow-up of patients with substance use disorders

for award of educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Samuela Georgieva Krasteva, MD

Scientific advisor: Prof. Hristo Vasilev Kozhuharov, MD, PhD

The opinion is requested by the Rector of MU-Varna with Order N109-508/18.11.2021.

Relapse in patients with substance use disorders is a serious health, social and economic problem. According to global data, between 40-70% of patients experience a relapse within 3 months after treatment. Despite research on the topic, there is no single definition and approach to prevent the phenomenon. There is a lack of standardized strategies for continuing care for patients with SUD, both globally and regionally. All this determines the need to deepen scientific efforts in this direction. Of interest are the possibilities of digital methods for tracking and monitoring these patients, especially in the context of the widespread digitalization of all areas of healthcare and society.

The literature review is in-depth and reflects various aspects of both the relapse and the application of digital psychiatry methods in the diagnosis, monitoring and treatment of various mental illnesses. Both classical theories in the field of addiction studies and current problems regarding modern technologies and the challenges arising from them are considered.

The aim and objectives of the study are formulated accurately and clearly. The study sample includes 40 patients with a confirmed diagnosis of substance use disorders, who have

completed a full course of in-patient treatment, have no other mental illnesses, have a personal smart device and the ability to handle it.

The stratification indicators used (sex, marital status, education and employment status) as well as the clinical instruments used (PHQ-9, GAD-7 and GAF) are widely accepted and validated for research purposes.

The procedure for configuring a mobile application for clinical purposes is presented, taking into account circumstances of different nature, such as technical, ethical, related to the patient. The final product complies with the study objectives.

The data is analyzed using validated statistical methods. The results obtained are presented clearly and appropriately illustrated. They clearly outline the limited use of socio-demographic and clinical characteristics as predictors of relapse. Of particular interest are the results related to the digital behavior of patients, which suggest the real possibility of electronic means to serve as an effective method of monitoring.

The discussion is comprehensive and provides a satisfactory justification for the results obtained both within the study and in comparison with global studies on the topic.

It is pointed out correctly that the main limitation of the study is the small sample. It should also be mentioned that ignoring factors relevant to the occurrence of relapse, such as the type of substances used, the duration and severity of the disorder, the course of the illness and others.

The conclusions drawn are based on the results obtained. At the same time, the specifics of the sample do not allow generalization of most conclusions outside the study group.

Contributions of original, confirmatory and applied nature have been presented.

The presented dissertation is written on 127 standard pages, contains 34 figures and 5 tables. The literature is based on 258 sources, of which 254 in Latin and 4 in Cyrillic. The dissertation is structured accordingly.

CONCLUSION: The dissertation presented by Dr. Samuela Krasteva on the topic "Digital follow-up of patients with substance use disorders" is based on in-depth literature research and innovative research approach. The dissertation meets the requirements of the Law of

Development of the Academic Staff in Republic of Bulgaria and the regulations of its application at MU-Varna.

Due to the above, I confidently give my positive assessment and propose to the members of the esteemed jury to award the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" to Dr. Samuela Georgieva Krasteva in a doctoral program in psychiatry.

Date: 23 Dec 2021

Author: 

Assoc. Prof. Svetlin Varbanov, MD, PhD