

STATEMENT

by Assoc.Prof. Natalya Vasilevna Usheva, MD, PhD,
Head of the Department of Social medicine and health care organization
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Concerning: Procedure for awarding the degree of Doctor of Science in the scientific specialty "Social Medicine and Organization of Health Care and Pharmacy" in the field of higher education "7. Health and Sport", professional field "7.1. Medicine", on the topic "Integrative Medicine - Holistic Conceptual Model, Scientific and Educational Approaches" by Assoc. Prof. Desislava Ivanova Vankova, MD, PhD, Department of Social Medicine and Organization of Healthcare", Faculty of Public Health, Medical University - Varna.

Procedure of the public defence announcement

The dissertation has been discussed and directed for public defense by the Department of Social Medicine and Health Care Organization at the Medical University - Varna at the Department's Council of 24.06.2022. The Scientific Jury for the public defense of the dissertation was approved by Order No. P-109-284/11.07.2022 of the Rector of Medical University - Varna, and at the first meeting of the scientific jury on 14.07.2022 I was appointed as the chairman of the Scientific Jury and to make a statement.

The candidate has submitted all the necessary documents for the procedure, complying with the requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its application and the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff of Medical University - Varna.

Biographical data and career development

Desislava Vankova was born in Burgas, where she graduated from the English Language School "Geo Milev" with full honors and a gold medal. In 1993 she obtained her first master's degree in medicine at the Medical University - Varna, and in 1998 - in public health at Maastricht University in the Netherlands. Dr. Vankova obtained the specialty in Social Medicine and Organization of Health Care in 2001 .

Dr. Vankova acquired the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Social Medicine and Organization of Health Care and Pharmacy" after the successful defense of her dissertation on "Health-related Quality of Life in the Community" at the Medical University - Varna.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vankova participated in a series of courses on conducting qualitative research, systematic analysis, improving skills in writing and reviewing scientific

publications, summer schools on clinical epidemiology, building healthy cities, health technology assessment, etc.

A particular place in Assoc. Prof. Vankova's CV is found in her training in non-conventional methods of treatment, acquiring a European Diploma in Homeopathy, continuing as a certified lecturer after graduating from the German Academy of Homeopathy and Naturopathy (DAHN) and the German Homeopathic Union (DHU).

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vankova participated in 2 research projects on the topic of her thesis: one international and one university.

The candidate for this procedure is a member of international and national professional and scientific organizations; she is fluent in English and Russian.

Characteristics of the research and the applied scientific activity of the Candidate

According to the "Academic Transcript" prepared in connection with the current procedure, Assoc. Prof. Desislava Vankova exceeds the minimum number of points in all types of indicators with the total number of points obtained - 418.75.

For participation in the present procedure, all necessary documents have been attached as follows:

- Dissertation, for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor";
- Dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Science;
- Full-text scientific publications.

The 10 publications required for participation in the competition according to the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff at MU-Varna are on the topic of the dissertation, published and in full attached to the competition materials. It is important to note that more than half of the submitted publications, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vankova is a standalone or first author.

The submitted citations for Indicator A, reflecting the candidate's scientific activity, are 100 points, which fully meets the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Science.

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation of Assoc. Prof. Vankova corresponds to the set scientific specialty - "Social Medicine and Organization of Health Care and Pharmacy".

The presented dissertation meets all the requirements for a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Science, including 165 pages, 9 tables, 38 figures, 5 annexes. The 714 references cited are mostly foreign, described correctly in the bibliographic section. The dissertation is laid out in a logical sequence and structured in 4 chapters: literature review (57 pp.); aim, objectives, design, methodology and organization of the study (10 pp.); holistic conceptual

model, results of own research and discussion (64 pp.); conclusions, recommendations, contributions (15 pp.).

The literature review presents the development of the concept of integrative medicine with reference to relevant regulations, strategies and events. An important aspect is the key terms and definitions of integrative medicine from North American to European vector, the attempt to apply a taxonomic approach in their description.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vankova presents the results of research in the field of complementary and alternative medicine, health promotion, which are the basis of integrative medicine (including epigenetics, experimental biological simulators and mathematical-statistical models). The author's attempt to adapt the world theoretical and practical developments in the field of integrative medicine to the conventional methods of treatment and traditional medical education in Bulgaria is also a contribution to the Literature Review.

Chapter 2 clearly and well defines the aim, the five objectives to achieve the main aim and the research hypotheses. Assoc. Prof. Vankova presents the innovative integrative exploratory sequential mixed-methods study design as an interdisciplinary platform for scientific clinical and medico-social research. The main methodological aspects of the dissertation are as following: the creation of a holistic conceptual model, a quantitative survey among students to investigate the awareness, attitudes, behaviours and needs regarding CAM among students (specialties - medicine and pharmacy), general practitioners and pharmacists; a Delphi study on the place of CAM and health promotion in higher education in Bulgaria, the development of a conceptual educational model to achieve competencies in students. The timeframe of the study is laid out in the 4 phases over the period 2019 - 2022.

In Chapter 3, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vankova presents detailed and consistent results and their discussion from the own quantitative and qualitative studies. In the course of the discussion, the author introduces terms such as "integrative healthcare" as a substitute for "integrative medicine", "green healthcare" with the main characteristic - sustainability.

The structural model associated with teaching integrative medicine Assoc. Vankova proposes in Chapter 4 in four main thematic features: principles and characteristics; building blocks; levels of education; specialties. The educational framework for the systematic study of CAM, as an element of integrative medicine, is also described in detail to build competencies to meet current healthcare needs.

The very good visualization of the theoretical models, quantitative results through tables, figures and diagrams contributes to greater clarity and shows the author's command of the subject matter and ability to generalize.

Dissertation Evaluation - Relevance and Significance

The present work is on a topical, significant and insufficiently studied issue in Bulgaria, presented in depth, interesting and very well illustrated.

The main contributions are of theoretical relevance: conducting the innovative for Bulgaria study of the concept of "integrative medicine", as a holistic idea and medical-social construct; creating the holistic conceptual model, which allows for a more in-depth study, development and application of integrative medicine and health care; developing an original terminological guide to integrative medicine; developing universal educational models for training in integrative medicine and CAM, which is already finding practical application in the field of integrative medicine and integrative medicine.

Personal impressions of the candidate

I have personally known the candidate Desislava Vankova since the period of her PhD study at the Department of Social Medicine and Health Care Organization in Medical University of Varna and I have observed her professional and scientific growth during these ten years. The scientific capacity of Assoc. Prof. Vankova, combined with her purposefulness, consistency, responsibility and distinctive efficiency are the basis of her achievements and successes.

Conclusion

The dissertation and publications of the candidate fully meet the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Law of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its application and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the Medical University - Varna for obtaining the degree „ Doctor of Sciences”.

Based on the original topical subject, the thoroughness of the significant contributions of the dissertation, I find it reasonable to vote positively and I can confidently propose to the members of the respected Scientific Jury to vote positively for Assoc. Prof. Desislava Vankova MD, PhD to award the “Doctor of Sciences” degree in the field of higher education 7. Health and sports, professional field 7.1. Medicine, scientific specialty "Social Medicine and Organization of Healthcare and Pharmacy".

08. 08. 2022
Varna, Bulgaria

Chairmen of the Scientific Jury:
Assoc. Prof. Natalya Usheva, MD, PhD