

## **STANDPONT**

by Prof. Makreta Todorova Draganova, MD

Medical University - Pleven, Faculty of Public Health, Department of Health Care Management, Medical Ethics and IT, designated as a member of the Scientific Jury by Order No. R-109-119 dated 15.02.2023 of Prof. Dr. Valentin Ignatov, MD, Rector of Medical University Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov, Varna, and with Minutes of meeting No. 1/28.02.2023 of the Scientific Jury, designated for the preparation of a Standpoint

**SUBJECT:** defence of a dissertation on the topic: "OPTIMIZING HEALTH CARE FOR ONCOLOGICAL PATIENTS THROUGH ASSESSMENT OF DISTRESS", developed by Martina Stoyanova Ivanova, full-time doctoral student at the Department: Health Care, Faculty of Public Health, Medical University, Varna, for awarding of the scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Management of health care", professional direction 7.4. Public Health.

Research supervisor: Assoc. Stanislava Pavlova Peneva, MD

Scientific consultant Assoc. Dr. Nikolay Vladimirov Tsonev, MD

### **1. General presentation of the procedure and the PhD student**

By Order No. R-109-58/01.02.2019 of Prof. Dr. Albena Kerakovska, PhD, Deputy Rector of MU - Varna, Martina Stoyanova Ivanova was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student at the Department: "Health Care", Faculty "Public Health", Medical University - Varna, for the award of a scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Health Care Management", professional direction 7.4. Public Health. Attached to the documentation are the Foreign Language Examination Protocol and the Doctoral Minimum Examination Protocol. By Order No. R-109-119/15.02.2023, considering Report with entry No. 102-378/01.02.2023 of the Head of the Health Care Department, Prof. Silvia Borisova, PhD, with a decision under Protocol No. 201/09.02.2023 of the Faculty Council and Report with No. 104-136/13.02.2023 by the Dean of the Faculty of Public Health, Martina Stoyanova Ivanova was dismissed with the right of defence and the members of the Scientific Jury were appointed.

The presented set of materials on paper and electronic carrier is in accordance with Art. 69, Regulations for the development of the academic staff of the MU Prof. Dr. P. Stoyanov, Varna from 2018 and includes all the necessary documents.

Martina Stoyanova Ivanova was born on October 1, 1989 in Varna. During the period 2009 - 2013, M. Ivanova acquired Bachelor's degree in the specialty "Nurse". Immediately after that, she continued her studies in the major "Health Care Management", educational qualification degree "Master" at MU - Varna. Martina Ivanova successfully implemented the acquired professional qualification "Head of health care and practical tutor" after 2015, when she held the position of Senior Head of Health Care at the Medical Oncology Clinic at University Multi-profile Hospital for Active Treatment St. Marina EAD - Varna, and later an active participant in the educational process of the students in the major "Nursing" and "Midwife" at the Medical University, Varna. It makes an impression that, although not so

long, her professional path follows its sequence in both clinical and academic terms, and the defence of a dissertation is a logical stage in the development of Martina Ivanova.

## **2. Evaluation of the dissertation work**

### **Relevance of the topic**

In recent decades, the facts show a trend towards progressive increase in the number of patients with oncological diseases. The study of the assessment of distress in patients with oncological diseases and the offering of specific practical approaches, which is done through the present dissertation work, is relevant and significant for modern nursing theory and practice. Studies in the dissertation work, a problem in scientific and scientific-applied terms is relevant, because on a global scale there is more and more talk about optimizing the care of the oncological patient. Clarifying the role of the oncology nurse in the assessment of distress in patients with oncological diseases, analyzing difficulties and issues for nursing practice in this direction, reveal opportunities for improving patient's condition and increasing his quality of life.

M. Ivanova has a thorough knowledge of the state of the issue and, through a retrospective analysis, carries out a creative evaluation of the available literature on the issue. A comparative analysis of the services offered in most European countries to help oncology patients was also carried out. The importance of screening for distress in increasing the effectiveness of oncology care is also discussed in detail.

### **Structure**

Presented dissertation has a volume of 186 pages and has the standard structure for the professional direction. Dissertation includes 66 figures, 8 tables and 6 appendices. Structurally, the dissertation includes: Introduction and five main sections/chapters - Literature review (44 pages); Methodology and organization of scientific research (13 pages); Results and Discussion (86 pages); Practical approaches to optimize the professional activity of the oncology nurse in patients with distress (7 pages); Conclusions, recommendations and contributions and conclusion (5 pages). The used literary sources are 226, of which 56 in Cyrillic and 170 in Latin.

### **Evaluation of the structural parts of the dissertation work**

**The introduction** presents the social, scientific and practical significance of the studied issue.

**The literature review** shows an excellent knowledge of modern care for oncological patients, as well as the possibilities for their optimization through the assessment of their distress in a global plan and in the conditions of our country. The overview is structured logically into four main parts. Emphasis is placed on the social significance of oncological diseases, the role of the nurse in the fight against oncological disease and the screening for distress in oncological patients. The main moments in screening patients are outlined. The relationship between distress assessment and the nurse's professional role, which includes objective data on patient needs, is presented. It is focused on the education of patients and their relatives as the main principles of the practice. The role of the nurse in distress assessment is given due prominence. The review is written in a good academic style with seven very well worded summaries. As a volume, the literature review is in good proportion



to the entire dissertation work. The literary sources used are fully and accurately cited. Most of them are from the last decade.

### **Purpose and methodology of the study**

The aim of the scientific study is to identify and assess the level of distress in cancer patients with a view to optimizing health care.

To achieve the goal, eight adequate tasks and three hypotheses are defined.

The study is sociological in nature using sociological methods (documentary method, survey method, interview, observation) and various statistical methods for description and analysis of the collected information.

The scope of the independent survey is optimal - 597 respondents, distributed in 3 main groups: 23 nurses, 374 hospitalized patients and 200 relatives of patients. The structure of each of the tools used to collect the primary sociological information is described in detail. Data were organized and analyzed with appropriate statistical methods from descriptive and analytical statistics using the SPSS v 23 software package.

The use of the "Distress Thermometer" as a standardized tool and a Checklist for monitoring patient's behavioural reactions can be noted as an innovative moment in the dissertation work.

The complex design of the study allows to achieve the set goal and to get an adequate answer to the tasks solved in the dissertation work.

### **Results and discussion**

The results are presented clearly, well structured and presented in a logical sequence corresponding to the set objectives of the study. It was found that almost half of the patients (49.3 %) have a high level of distress, and the main factors influencing their level of distress are gender, age, education, place of residence, etc. The fact that most of the patients' relatives (58 %), who must support the patient, have a high level of distress is worrying. Nurses' positive attitude towards the impact of distress on patient behavior is evident. The relationship between the verbal and non-verbal reactions of the patients and the different stages of their stay in the medical facility has been proven. Knowing the different behavioural reactions of the patient by nurses is definitely a prerequisite for optimizing the communication between them.

The strengths of the presented work that should be noted, are:

- the practical approaches to optimize the professional activity of the oncology nurse in patients with distress: cycle for assessment of distress in patients with oncological diseases; stages for the assessment of patients with distress, which is a type of Algorithmisation of behavior and a model of professional behavior of the nurse in a patient with an oncological disease.
- the complex analysis of various factors on the level of distress in oncology patients, which is an aspect of the holistic approach in the implementation of health care.

### **Assessment of PhD student's publications and personal contributions**

M. Ivanova has presented 3 publications in connection with the dissertation work, of which 2 real publications in journals with an impact factor and one publication in a refereed journal.

The articles meet the requirements for scientific publication activity. Topics are relevant with clearly stated objectives, appropriate study design and clear interpretation of results that are supported by evidence. The conclusions are logically valid.

**The abstract** reflects very well the content of the dissertation and presents in full the conclusions and recommendations to the relevant institutions.

I fully accept the **theoretical and practical-applied contributions** indicated by the doctoral student. The merit of the dissertation work is the comprehensive in-depth study of the relationship between the levels of distress in cancer patients and the evaluation of their daily life and communication with their loved ones, by using the Distress Thermometer. The developed model for nurses' professional behavior and the standard for its maintenance, which create real opportunities for optimizing oncology care, have an emphasized contribution..

### CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains significant scientific and applied results that have a unique contribution to science and meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of latter and the Regulations of the Medical University, Varna.

The dissertation shows that the doctoral student **Martina Stoyanova Ivanova** possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty "**Health Care Management**", **demonstrating** qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research.

Due to the above stated, I confidently give my **positive assessment** of the conducted research, presented by the above-reviewed dissertation work, abstract, achieved results and contributions, and *I propose to the honourable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"* to Martina Stoyanova Ivanova in the scientific specialty "Health Care Management".

Date: 5.04.2023

Standpoint prepared by:

  
(prof. M. Draganova, RN, MD)