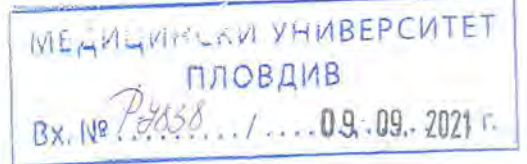


REVIEW



by Prof. Mariya Semerdzhieva, MD, PhD

Dean of the Faculty of Public Health

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Member of the Scientific Committee Pursuant to Order № P-1336/18.08.2021 of a dissertation for acquiring a scientific degree **Doctor of Science**.

Professional field: 7.1 Medicine, scientific specialty: *General Practice*

Author: Assoc. Prof. Radost Spiridonova Asenova, MD, PhD

Topic: *FROM BURNOUT TO JOB SATISFACTION IN GENERAL PRACTICE. GENERAL PRACTICE / FAMILY MEDICINE AS A CAREER CHOICE.*

GENERAL PRESENTATION OF THE PROCEDURE

The presented set of materials on an electronic medium is pursuant to the procedure for acquiring a scientific degree *Doctor of Science*, in accordance with the Law on Development of the Academic Staff of Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), Rules and Regulations of Medical University of Plovdiv.

1. Application form to the Rector of Medical University of Plovdiv
2. Protocol from an extended Department meeting for preliminary discussion of the dissertation
3. CV in a European format
4. Diploma for scientific degree *Doctor of Philosophy* (PhD)
5. Dissertation for SD *Doctor of Science* and a Summary of the dissertation on an electronic medium
6. A list of the articles and scientific papers on the topic of the dissertation
7. A list of the identified citations
8. Copies of the publications and articles on the topic of the dissertation
9. Declaration for originality and authenticity of the attached documents
10. Declaration that the evidence does not replicate the one presented in the *PhD thesis* and materials for acquisition of the academic title *Associate Professor*.
11. Other documents related to the procedure.

The presented set of documents is prepared precisely and thoroughly.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Radost Spiridonova Asenova graduated with a Master's degree from Medical University of Plovdiv in 1997. Her professional development is related to unceasing progress and improvement. She has two medical specialties – *General Practice (Diploma № 000564 from 22.01.2004)* and *Occupational Medicine (Diploma № 011940 from 01.01.2008)*. In 2009 she acquired her second Master's degree in *Public Health and Healthcare Management* at the Faculty of Public Health of Medical University of Plovdiv (Diploma № 006898 from 27.04.2009). In the same year she acquired a PhD degree (Diploma № 33278 from 08.06.2009). She has a certificate for training in Good Clinical Practice.

Assoc. Prof. Asenova began her professional path as a physician in First Outpatient's Clinic in Plovdiv. In 1999 her academic career as a full-time doctoral student started and in 2002 she became an assistant professor at the Department of General Practice, Medical University of Plovdiv. Her active scientific and teaching activity gave Assoc. Prof. Asenova the opportunity to become consecutively a senior and a chief assistant professor. Since 2012 she has been an assistant professor at the Section of General Practice in the Department of Healthcare Management, Health Economics and General Practice at FPH at MU of Plovdiv (Diploma № 011-D from 28.06.2012). As a result of restructuring, since 2016 she is an associate professor at the Department of Urology and General Practice, Medical Faculty, Medical University of Plovdiv. She was as elected Head of the Department of Urology and General Medicine in 2020.

Assoc. Prof. Asenova is involved in extremely active professional activity. Since 2009 she has been manager of the *Bulmedicus Occupational Health Service LTD* and since 2013 she has worked as a general practitioner in an accredited practice for primary health care *Stantchev Individual General Practice Ltd*. She has enriched her qualification with more than 20 additional courses in Bulgaria and abroad in the field of General Practice.

She carries out very active teaching activity for students, doctoral students, and residents at Medical University of Plovdiv in Bulgarian and English.

She is a member of prestigious international and national organisations such as World Organization of Family Doctors, European General Practice Research Network, European Academy of Teachers in General Practice, International Primary Care Respiratory Group, Association of General Practice / Family Medicine of South East Europe, Guidepoint Global Advisors, Bulgarian General Practice Society for Research and Education, Bulgarian Association for Study of Obesity and Related Diseases, The European Network for Prevention and Health Promotion in Family Medicine and General

Practice, Bulgarian Medical Association and the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria. She is president of the Bulgarian General Practice Society for Research and Education and national representative of EGPRN and WONCA for Bulgaria.

She participates actively in academic staff mobilities - 2010 Democritus University of Thrace, Alexandroupoulos, Greece; 2009 Campus bio-medico di Rome, Italy; 2008 Akdeniz University Faculty of Medicine, Antalya; 2008 Vrije Universiteit Brussels, Brussels; 2007 Kaunas University of Medicine, Lithuania.

Assoc. Prof. Asenova is project manager and a member of teams for development and successful implementation of more than 25 scientific projects including 10 international ones.

Her professional qualities are highly valued by our healthcare system as well, she was invited to be a consultant at NHIF for negotiations on NFA in 2018.

As a recognised expert Assoc. Prof. Asenova is a reviewer of many international journals: Eurasian Journal of Family Medicine, BMC Family Practice, KONURALP MEDICAL JOURNAL, scientific secretary for Bulgarian General Practice journal.

Her remarkable activity is awarded with Acad. Tasho Tashev prize for scientific achievements of a young researcher in the field of nutrition, dietetics, and metabolic diseases.

She has an excellent command of English.

RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC

The establishment of a new model of primary medical help is one of the main changes in the structure of the healthcare system after the introduction of the health reform in Bulgaria. GPs play the role of coordinators in the healthcare system, and they are expected to have a wide variety of qualities to meet its requirements and at the same time to practice in the circumstances of achieved satisfaction.

Despite the leading role of general practitioners, General Practice does not appear to be an appealing medical specialty for young people. The reasons for this are complex, the most significant of them being the present “defects” in health policy which failed in creating beneficial and stimulating conditions for specialization in Bulgaria.

The lack of sufficient interest is related to considerable professional commitment and high levels of psychological strain. In addition, the provision of complex care for patients whose expectations rise incessantly is also necessary. A distinguishing characteristic of GPs is the simultaneous knowledge of the patients’ diseases and their personality with the individual and psychological peculiarities in their social context.

The integrated and patient-centered care is considered an efficient response for the needs of people, suffering from more than one chronic disease, who are a significant part of the attended population in primary care. Family doctors are in a particularly favourable position to manage this group which is directly related to the application of contemporary concepts and approaches for improving work organisation and services in General Practice, among which the most successful ones are person-centered care and shared decision-making.

The considerable number of activities, the busy work schedule, and the necessity to provide incessant care make GPs a susceptible group for developing burnout syndrome. This requires a reasonable complex approach and attitude consistent with the available resources which would lead to overcoming and preventing burnout development among GPs.

The thorough knowledge of the factors, related to the personality, philosophy of the specialty and the working environment as well as the search for correlations among them would contribute to the analysis of all aspects of General Practice. Therefore, it is essential to initiate its realistic presentation, the opportunities for professional realisation, the specifics of the working conditions etc. for young physicians to make an informed choice.

In this respect the presented topic is extremely relevant and there is no other research in Bulgaria which confirms the significance of the dissertation.

CHARACTERISTICS AND ASSESSMENT OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation meets the requirements for acquiring the scientific degree *Doctor of Science* in content and structure. It is 220 pages long. It is illustrated in 56 tables, 9 schemes and 25 figures. Structurally, it is divided in four main parts, preceded by an introduction. The scientific paper ends with conclusions, recommendation, scientific contributions, references, and appendices.

The scientific work begins with an **introduction** in which Assoc. Prof. Asenova presents the significance of the selected topic and the necessity for its study. The logical structure of this part and the clearly defined issues are a proof for the excellent knowledge of the problem.

The first chapter is a **literature review** on the topic. Theoretical analyses are focused on the problems which Assoc. Prof. Asenova researches. The necessary specialized literature, which objectively presents the relevance of the problems, is selected with a high level of precision. Based on the existing data, a short presentation of the historical development of General Practice in Bulgaria after 2000 is made. The contemporary challenges in General Practice are considered in detail. For the first time, a

thorough classification of the positive aspects of the work of GPs and their satisfaction is made. The literature review as content, logical structure, and references strongly indicates the knowledge, ability, and skill of Assoc. Prof. Asenova to work with scientific sources, to analyse them critically, to summarize and formulate scientific aims. Chapter 1 finishes with conclusions which are a logical transition to the formulation of the aims and tasks of the dissertation.

296 sources are used, 64 of them in the Cyrillic alphabet. All of them are relevant to the studied problems. The number of the cited publications from the last 10 years is considerable, which is another confirmation for the relevance of the topic.

In the ***Aim and Tasks*** chapter, the pursued aim and the 6 tasks related to its implementation are formulated logically. The aim focuses on the development of an interventional model for career guidance based on a thorough study of the factors related to the sustainability of the profession and susceptibility of GPs to burnout syndrome.

The third chapter ***Material and Methods*** presents complex methods of personally developed and standardized tools. Different qualitative and quantitative research methods are combined, such as questionnaire, interview, focus groups, Delphi method, content analysis. The methods for achieving the pursued tasks are selected extremely precisely and combined skilfully. This is further evidence for in-depth knowledge of the problems of General Practice and rich research experience related to the practical application of various scientometric methods.

Each of the methods of study is described precisely and the respective target group in which it is applied, the selection of the participants, the inclusion criteria. This allows to follow in detail the work in each of the stages. Specialized psychological questionnaires were used - Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), Questionnaire on shared decision-making (SDM-Q-Doc-Bulgarian), and Questionnaire on locus of control. All of them were described entirely correctly, which provides clarity on their purpose and measuring qualities. The correct selection and application of such specific psychological tools is a result from thorough knowledge of the problems by Assoc. Prof. Asenova. To achieve maximum precision and accuracy of the measurement and result analysis, a validation of the used scales was performed.

Two logical units of observation were identified:

- GPs, in a contract with NHIF;
- students in their 5th year of medical studies.

All requirements in the selection of the logical units are fulfilled, a preliminary informed consent on their participation in the study being obtained. The sample size in

each of the stages guarantees a very good representativeness and significance of the results.

Adequate statistical methods were used in the processing of the primary data and they give the opportunity to disclose significant correlations among the main factorial and resultative features and statistically significant conclusions to be reached.

The design of the study is illustrated well graphically, which facilitates the tracing of the different stages of the study and their logical relation.

The analysis of the obtained data is presented professionally and thoroughly in the **Results and Discussion** chapter, the logical sequence of the tasks being followed. The chosen research methods are appropriate and give the necessary information for the realisation of the aims and tasks. The study results are interpreted correctly with respect to the main indicators.

The leading positive factors in General Practice are identified. The fact that the process is realized on an international level and these factors are valid not only for Bulgaria but also for Europe is of particular interest. The personality factors, philosophy of the specialty and the working environment, as well as training the structure and quality of which can stimulate GPs in a positive direction are fundamental for the successful practice of the specialty.

I highly value the idea to study the main advantages and positive aspects in General Practice from the point of view of future doctors (5th year students). Unfortunately, although the students clearly identify the positive sides of the work of a GP, only a few of them share the willingness to practice the specialty and this leads to the trend for the ageing of this group of medical specialists.

The doctor-patient relations are the most significant for the satisfaction of GPs, the prioritised first place being taken by *mutual trust and respect in the doctor-patient relationships* and *mission to be a GP*. These two factors influence considerably the effectiveness and quality of the medical services.

A thorough characteristic of contemporary GPs was performed based on their personality traits with factors related to the philosophy of the specialty and the working environment. The study provides the opportunity to identify correlations with high level of dependence, to check the hypotheses on the relation between the scales for assessment of locus of control, patient-centeredness in multimorbidity patients, levels of burnout and satisfaction of GPs in Bulgaria.

The monitoring of the impact of stress on GPs in dynamics shows interesting changes regarding the three measured values. In the first study in 2003, the highest levels of emotional exhaustion are reported while in 2019 the highest relative share is occupied

by the subscale depersonalisation. These results reflect objectively the initial high stress from the changes in the healthcare system following the reform and the gradual development of a chronic form of stress in which it is dehumanization that suffers the most. The found reduction of emotional exhaustion and increase in the degree of job satisfaction of GPs which directly influences their desire not to change their job, is quite positive.

The comparison of data obtained soon after the reform in the healthcare system and 15 years later reveals the real state of the primary medical help.

The **conclusions** drawn reflect a synthesis of the main aspects of the conducted research.

The detailed research of Assoc. Prof. Asenova is a solid basis for the contributions **formulated** by her. They are grouped in three main aspects: those of original nature, of an affirmative and applicable nature. Dependencies and patterns which enrich the knowledge of the problem and can successfully be used in practice, as well as for future research were found. Those include the validated questionnaire for assessment of shared decision-making SDM-Q-Doc Bulgarian; the validates internationally approved definition of multimorbidity in Bulgarian and last but not least, the developed interventional model for career guidance which could serve as a tool in successful prevention of burnout syndrome.

Based on the obtained results from the research, the necessity for establishing a professional network Bulgarian General Practice Society for Research and Education (BGPSRE) was drawn. Its existence is a fact and it not only promotes the specialty but also creates international, interdisciplinary relations and gives considerable opportunity for the development of the specialty in Bulgaria.

SUMMARY OF A DISSERTATION

The Summary of the dissertation (64 p.) corresponds to the requirements in structure and content and reflects the main results obtained during the implementation of the assigned aim and tasks.

PUBLICATIONS ON THE DISSERTATION

Assoc. Prof. Asenova presented 12 articles in full text in journals, referenced, and indexed in world renowned data bases with scientific information (Scopus and/or Web of Science) and one in the specialized journal of the World Organisation of Family Doctors (WONCA Europe).

Five of the scientific papers are published in journals with IF, some of them with a very high IF. Seven of the articles are written with an international team.

In seven of the presented works she is an only or first author which guarantees her active participation in the study and data analysis. The scientific works reflect the nature of the dissertation and completely meet the current requirements for acquiring the scientific degree *Doctor of Science*. Seventeen citations related to the dissertation were registered in scientific journals, referenced, and indexed in Scopus and/or Web of Science.

CONCLUSION

Assoc. Prof. Radost Asenova, MD, PhD presents a very seriously and responsibly developed theoretical and applicable dissertation. The research is precise from the point of view of methods, statistical data processing, procedure, and design. The summarized conclusions are accurate and fully supported by the obtained results. The language and style of the dissertation are clear, comprehensible, and scientific.

Based on all of the above-mentioned, I convincingly **give my positive vote** and believe that Assoc. Prof. Radost Spiridonova Asenova meets all requirements for the acquisition of the scientific degree *Doctor of Science*.

09.09. 2021
Plovdiv

Reviewer:
/Prof. M.Semerdzhieva, MD, PhD /

