

REVIEW

from

assoc. prof. Margarita Dimitrova Stankova, MD, PhD

New Bulgarian University, 7.4 Public Health

on the scientific work for participation in a competition for the academic position of associate professor, in professional field 7.4 Public Health, announced by the New Bulgarian University in SN no. 100/01.12.2023, with a candidate

Momchil Kostov Baev, Ph.D

I. Evaluation of compliance with the minimum national requirements and the requirements of the New Bulgarian University

Dr. Momchil Baev was born in 1986. He took a Bachelor degree in Social Work at Veliko Tarnovo University "St. St. Kiril and Metodiy", Master's degree in Public Health and Health Management from the Medical University - Sofia and PhD degree of Public Health with a specialty in "Social Medicine and Organization of Health Care and Pharmacy" from the Medical University - Sofia, Department of Social Medicine. Dr. Baev has completed many courses in the field of health care - "Training of trainers to provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents and young people at risk"; "HIV/AIDS Education and Prevention"; "Health Technology Assessment (HTA)"; as well as in the field of management of non-government organizations - "Financial management of NGOs" and the methodology of scientific research work.

His professional career includes consulting work in health programs and projects in the field of healthcare, an Emergency Paramedic training and employment program, consulting services for the preparation of guidelines and preparation of papers for national disease prevention and control programs, work for patient organization, HIV and infectious disease prevention programs in sexual health. Dr. Baev is the founder and chairman of the Astra Forum Foundation, which has extensive experience in initiatives to communicate science to the public in the fields of healthcare, environment, and cultural and historical heritage. The foundation conducts trainings and seminars for doctors of various specialties on the problems of immunizations and communication with patients and implements a long-term program for the mental health of medical professionals by conducting group psychotherapy. The activities of the Astra Forum Foundation include advocacy at the executive and legislative authorities to improve public health policies and retain the medical professionals in the healthcare system.

Within the submitted materials for the competition for the academic position of associate professor in professional field 7.5 Health Care, I can emphasize that Dr. Baev has

a long experience in applied and research projects in the field of healthcare and special interests in communication in healthcare - communication between medical professionals and patients, disease prevention and patient behavior, healthcare professional health and well-being.

Regarding the minimum national requirements and the requirements of the New Bulgarian University for the position of associate professor in professional direction 7.5 Health Care, Dr. Momchil Baev fully fulfills the criteria - monograph, publications in the field, incl. guidelines, participation in national and international projects.

During the academic year 2023/2024, Dr. Baev is also successfully involved in the training of students in Healthcare Management, Psychology and Social Work.

The candidacy is fully in line with the priorities of the Department of Healthcare and Social Work and the future development of programs in the field of health.

II. Research activities and results

1. Evaluation of the monographic work, or other publications corresponding in volume and content to a monographic work, including an evaluation of the scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the author.

Dr. Baev is the author of a monographic work entitled "Quality of life and mental health of medical professionals in Bulgaria". The monograph includes an analysis of the medical professionals' work environment, a description of the unique challenges and stressors of the medical profession, an analysis of medical job demands, long work hours and stressful situations, medical profession-specific stress and burnout, a description of research methods for evaluation of stress experienced by medical workers, factors for burnout in the health sector, the impact of chronic work stress on mental health and well-being, quality of life and mental health of medical professionals in Bulgaria, fatigue risk factors for compassion fatigue, strategies for building of emotional resilience and prevention of compassion fatigue, measures for positive change, self-care and its role in maintaining mental health, support systems and resources. A model to support health professionals to tackle stress and psychological problems in the workplace and results from own research on quality of life and mental health and research on individual performance in the workplace are presented. Special attention is paid to interventions to improve the mental health of medical specialists and research on their quality of life and work in Bulgaria. The monograph also includes suggestions for implementing policies and practices to reduce burnout and promote mental well-being, and innovative strategies to improve mental health in the medical field.

In addition to the presentation of data from own research and the proposed model for supporting medical professionals and improving their mental well-being, the following positive contributions can be highlighted for the monograph:

- Looking at a different perspective and putting the focus on the medical professional and not on the patient, which should actually be the priority of any health care system, since a good quality of life of the medical professional would ensure good diagnosis and treatment

of the patient, as well as a good characterization of the health worker's presence and proper communication and focus on the patient and their problem.

- Looking at empathy and compassion and considering them as possible sources of stress and anxiety in healthcare professionals.

- The extremely human attitude of the author to the subject and the true recognition of himself not only as an observer of the process, but also as a specialist who shows real concern for the bearers of the problem he is investigating.

2. Evaluation of the contributions in the other publications It also includes an assessment of the peer review requirement of the publications.

Dr. Momchil Baev participated in the current competition with a research activity based on his professional and expert experience with 28 scientific publications in the following areas:

- **Sexual Health and HIV** - The following publications are presented:

Dr. Baev started his expert and research activity in this field in 2010 and it has been continuous until now. Along with practical work in counseling and other community-based services, Dr. Baev researches biological and behavioral patterns and trends among groups at risk of HIV infection. In 2018, he created and piloted Bulgaria's first home HIV testing program, which until now was unknown in the country. This applied and research activity leads to the preparation of an opinion-recommendation to the HIV Advisory Council to the Minister of Health on the regulation of home HIV testing. This also led to the registration in the Executive Medicines Agency of the first medical device in Bulgaria for self-testing for HIV at home, without the participation of a medical specialist.

This activity continues in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and as a member of the International AIDS Society, Dr. Baeav conducted a scientific review on the vaccination of persons with HIV against Sars CoV-2 and the risk of disease with the coronavirus among this population. Throughout the pandemic, Dr. Baev led and implemented the HIV self-testing program. In the conditions of a pandemic and in the absence of screening diagnostics, this program succeeded, at least partially, in providing the opportunity to thousands of people in all 28 regions of the country to know their HIV status.

- **Refugees and Migrants** - The following publications are presented:

Velkova, AS; Baev, MK. Self-reported health and utilisation of health services by asylum seekers in Bulgaria, EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, Volume28,Page 406-406, Published NOV 2018, Web of Science, ISSN 1101-1262, eISSN 1464-360X, Web of Science

Баев М., Предоставяне на здравни услуги и здравен статус на лица, търсещи международна закрила в България. Годишник на НВУ „Васил Левски“, 2019, част II, с. 213-219, ISSN: 1312-6148

Баев М., Общ преглед и здравни аспекти на мигрантската криза в Европа след Арабската пролет, Здравна политика и мениджмънт, 2020, том 20 (№1). ISSN: 1313-4981.

Dr. Baev has been working in the field of health and healthcare for migrant populations such as refugees seeking international protection since 2011. His dissertation deals with the preparation of public systems, incl. the health center, for accepting refugees. It is entitled "Risks to the health system of the Republic of Bulgaria in the context of the refugee crisis in Europe". In his research, Dr. Baev discovered and documented a number of shortcomings in the organization of healthcare for asylum seekers. The empirical data covers several types of groups/populations – (1) persons seeking (or granted) international protection, (2) specialists and humanitarian workers engaged with this population, (3) doctors and health care professionals, and (4) trainee doctors in their final year of study. A multidisciplinary view of the issues makes it possible to objectively assess the problems and propose models for improvement.

In this way, the following goals are fulfilled through the dissertation work for the acquisition of the PhD of Dr. Baev:

- Conducting a complex field socio-medical study of the health status of persons seeking international protection in the Republic of Bulgaria and of the organization of health care for them in conditions of a refugee crisis, based on a mix-methodology combining quantitative and qualitative methods.

- Study of the Bulgarian and European legislative frameworks for the provision of health care to persons seeking international protection, as shortcomings of the national regulatory framework have been identified and a recommendation has been made to address them.

- To ascertain the attitudes of doctors, health care professionals and medical students towards working with migrants, as well as assessments of the risks to the health care system in the context of a refugee crisis.

- Proposal of a "Conceptual model for preparation and response of the health care system in the conditions of a refugee crisis.

- Proposal for a change in the recruitment model for the health care of accommodation centers.

- Immunizations and COVID-19 - The following publications are presented:

Момчил Баев, Георги Стоилчев, Димитър Фердинандов, Емилия Насева, Симеон Петров, Марио Петров, Георги Баев. Влияние на противоепидемичните мерки в България върху заболяемостта и смъртността от COVID-19. Българско списание за обществено здраве, том 13, кн. 4, 2021 г. ISSN: 1313-860X

Baev M, Naseva, Em., Stoilchev G. ATTITUDES TOWARDS VACCINES AGAINST COVID-19 IN BULGARIA, General Medicine, Volume 23, Issue 4, Pages 10 - 18, 2021, ISSN:1311-1817

Баев, М., Ваксинация срещу Sars-Cov-2 и риск от COVID-19 при хора, живеещи с ХИВ, сп. Детски и инфекциозни болести, том 1, година XIII, 2021, ISSN: 1313-762X.

Momchil Baev's research interests in the field of infectious diseases and their impact on the healthcare system, public health and individuals lead to the creation of an online group "Science in Crisis" with the aim of "translating" scientific information into a language understandable to the general public. This makes science more accessible and increases its practical dimensions in the everyday lives of citizens.

Among the scientific contributions of the candidate's research work, the empirical proof of the relationship between anti-epidemic measures on the one hand and morbidity and mortality from COVID-19 on the other, based on a large-scale study of all acts of the legislative and executive authorities, and the national statistics of sick people, and people who died from coronavirus.

Dr. Baev's team conducted the first study of attitudes towards vaccines among Bulgarians, which started immediately upon the appearance of vaccines against COVID-19 in Bulgaria. In the period January 8-26, 2021, Dr. Baev's team surveyed 2,182 people through an online questionnaire. Respondents were recruited through an open invitation in posts on the social networks Facebook and Instagram, as well as through targeted advertising on them. Advertising messages on the network were aimed at persons between the ages of 16 and 70 from the entire territory of Bulgaria, regardless of their gender or other specific affiliation. Respondents were recruited from all 28 regions of the country, including regional cities, municipal centers and villages.

During the epidemic, Dr. Baev's team, with the support of WHO and UNICEF, developed a National Communication Strategy for vaccination against COVID-19 with a methodology. The strategy was submitted to the Ministry of Health and the Council of Ministers, and became the basis for communication activities by the Ministry.

Dr. Momchil Baev and his team developed the first in Bulgaria Handbook for medical specialists on interpersonal communication for immunization, which serves to train and develop the capacity of personnel in the system for more effective communication with patients and the application of methods such as "motivational interviewing". The book is suitable for all health professionals involved in routine and other immunizations and contains a rich set of practical exercises and examples. Dr. Baev and his team are creating a long-term initiative called "Vaccine School", which consists of monthly webinars to supplement the knowledge of medical specialists in the country on topics related to vaccine prevention, current recommendations of specialists, regulations, indications and contraindications, novelties in scientific research work.

- **Roma community** - The following publications are presented:

Velcheva, H; Baev, M .Research on the eating habits of pregnant Romani women and mothers of newborns in Bulgaria in 2015, EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, Volume 26, Page 338-338, ISSN 1101-1262, eISSN 1464-360X

Baev, M , Manov, R. Access to healthcare of Roma women in Bulgaria and Roma paramedics in the Emergency care units. EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, Volume 28,Page 475-475, NOV 2018, ISSN 1101-1262, eISSN 1464-360X

Dr. Momchil Baev started working on the problems of the Roma community in 2010 until 2020. He is interested in the problems of access to health care of Roma community, the quality and length of life, health culture and habits, and the capacity for community change. In his field research over the years, he visited all the largest Roma neighborhoods in the country - Sofia, Sliven, Stara Zagora, etc.

Among other scientific contributions in the field, the research on access to health care stands out, incl. emergency aid in a Roma community, which was carried out on a door-to-door basis. The study documents the shortcomings of the health system and the impossibility of covering a large part of Bulgarian society - the Roma community - through health insurance.

Among the applied contributions, two large programs with sustainable results stand out - (1) training of Roma students in medical universities and (2) training of Roma paramedics for the needs of emergency care in Sofia.

4. Evaluation of the results of participation in research and creative projects and application of the obtained results in practice.

Dr. Momchil Baev participates in the competition with a list of international projects:

- Touching the Untouchable: Combating Traditional and New Anti-Roma Stereotypes, 2010-2012
- 2. Co-Designing Citizen Social Science for Collective Action (Co-ACT):
- Greater visibility of trans and non-binary people in research and the labor market

The candidate has managed 7 national projects with the following titles:

1. Community Monitoring of Health Services: Documentation and Standardization, 2012-2015, Open Society Foundation.
2. Reducing the vulnerability to HIV of young people at greatest risk (15-24 years) by increasing the scope of youth-oriented services and programs, National Program for the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS and STIs, Ministry of healthcare.
3. Expanding the scope of effective care for the prevention and control of tuberculosis in the Roma community, 2011-2012, National Program for the Prevention and Control of Tuberculosis, Ministry of Health.
4. Improving the work of the Emergency Healthcare Centers - Sofia with patients from Roma communities, 2015-2016, Open Society Foundation

5. The model of paramedics of Roma origin - expansion and validation, 2017-2019, Open Society Foundation
6. Paramedics - a new horizon for the healthcare workforce in Bulgaria, 2019-2020, Open Society Foundation.
7. Resilience and recovery in times of crises – support for health personnel and vaccination coverage in Bulgaria, UNICEF, 2022-2023.

III. Teaching activity

During the academic year 2023/2024, Dr. Momchil Baev was actively involved in the development of courses for students in the MA program "Health Care Management", MA program "Clinical Social Work" and students in BA program "Psychology".

IV. Administrative and public activity

In addition to being the founder and head of a non-governmental organization in the field of healthcare and manager of 9 applied and scientific projects in the same field, Dr. Momchil Baev also presents an impressive list of memberships in professional organizations and expert groups:

- 09/2022 – Member of the Bulgarian Scientific Society for Epidemiology of Infectious and Non-Infectious Diseases.
- 11/2021 – Member of the Academic Council on Migration, UNHCR.
- 01/2021 – Member of the Advisory Council on HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections to the Minister of Health
- 10/2022 – 05/2023 - Member of a working group for the preparation of a national recommendation for the introduction of pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV, for updating Ordinance 34 of the Ministry of Health and amending the Methodological Guide for the treatment of adults with HIV infection.
- 10/2020 – 02/2021 – Member of a working group for the preparation of a national Program for the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and STIs in the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2025.
- 11/2018 - until now - Member of the International AIDS Society
- 05/ 2017 – until now – Member of the Bulgarian Public Health Society.
- 01/2017– 05/ 2017 – Member of the Task Force Group – working group on patient safety at the European Patient Forum, Brussels, Belgium.
- 07/ 2015 – 03/ 2017 – Member of the Interdepartmental Working Group on the preparation of the National Program for the Prevention and Control of HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections of the Republic of Bulgaria 2016 – 2020;
- 10/ 2015 – 04/2017 – Member of the Standing Working Group on Patient Empowerment at the European Patient Forum, Brussels, Belgium.
- 06/ 2012 – until now - Member of COPASAH – Community of Practitioners on Accountability and Social Action in Health.
- 07/ 2012 – until now - Member of the European TB Coalition.

11/ 2011 - until now - Member of the "Health of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities" Section of the European Public Health Association.

06/ 2010 - until now - member of the Global Youth Coalition on AIDS.

V. Personal impressions of the candidate (if any)

My personal impressions of Dr. Momchil Baev are entirely positive. He is extremely conscientious, consistent, and hardworking. Dr. Baev is a valuable partner who cares about the team he works with and listens to the position of all parties in his work. He learns extremely quickly, reacts adequately in stressful situations, and takes benefits of the experience of others. Dr. Baev is sensitive, empathetic, oriented towards the well-being of the people he works with. Dr. Momchil Baev has exceptional potential for very high achievements in science and practice in health care. I believe that he would be an indispensable member of the team of the Department of Healthcare and Social Work at the NBU and would contribute a lot to the scientific, educational and administrative development of the department.

VI. Opinions, recommendations and notes on the activity and achievements of the candidate

As a recommendation to the candidate, I would note the opportunity to develop more publication activity and to focus his efforts on collecting research data while working in applied projects.

Conclusion

My evaluation of the academic activity of Momchil Baev, PhD is positive. I thoroughly recommend that the Academic Council of the NBU accepts **Dr. Momchil Baev** for the position associate professor in professional field 7.5. Health Care

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Date 27.03.2024

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