

REVIEW

By Professor, Doctor Albena Nikolaeva Andonova, Faculty of Medicine, Trakia University, 7.5 Nursery Care, 7. Health Care and Sports
on the scientific works for participation in a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, in the professional field 7.5 Health Care, announced in the State Gazette, No. 100 from 01.12.2023,
with candidate Doctor Momchil Kostov Baev.

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

The only candidate in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor is Momchil Kostov Baev. From the attached report in the competition documents and upon review of the documents, it is evident that the candidate meets the requirements of the regulatory documents governing the occupation of the academic position of Associate Professor, professional field 7.5. Nursery Care.

Momchil Kostov Baev acquired a Bachelor's degree in "Social Sciences" at the Faculty of Economics at Veliko Tarnovo University "St. Cyril and St. Methodius" in 2012, and a Master's degree in "Public Health and Health Management" at the Faculty of Public Health at the Medical University – Sofia in 2015. In the same university, in 2020, he acquired a PhD in "Social Medicine and Organization of Health Care and Pharmacy" in the area of higher education 7. Health Care and Sports, professional field 7.4. Public Health.

Minimum required points by groups of indicators for the academic position of Associate Professor at New Bulgarian University (NBU) require to have 570 points, formed from indicators from groups A, B, Г, and Д.

The candidate participates in the competition with a total of 819.3 points formed from the sum of points from indicators A, B, Г, Д, E, and Ж.

Indicator A - Dissertation work for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" - a dissertation on the topic "Risks to the Health System of the Republic of Bulgaria in Conditions of a Refugee Crisis" is presented.

Defense date: 27.10.2020, Diploma No/date: 807-D / 20.11.2020 at MU-Sofia, FPH. - 50 points out of the required 50 points.

Indicator B 3 - a habilitation work – monograph titled "Quality of Life and Mental Health of Medical Professionals in Bulgaria" is presented. ISBN: 978-619-92312-7-2. 100 points out of the required 100 points.

Indicator Г:

Г 7. - Publications and reports, published in scientific editions, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases with scientific information - 5 publications indexed in the global databases Web of Science and Scopus are presented. They form 125 points.

Г 8. Publications and reports, published in non-refereed journals with scientific reviewing or published in edited collective volumes - 4 articles 94.3 points.

Out of the required 200 points, M. Baev presents data for 219.3 points.

Indicator Д 10. - Citations or reviews in scientific editions, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases with scientific information or in monographs and collective volumes - 4 citations in journals indexed in Web of Science bringing 60 points out of the minimum required 50 points.

Indicator E:

E 17. - Participation in an international scientific or educational project. Under this indicator, two participations in international projects bringing a total of 40 points are presented:

- "To touch the untouchable: Combating traditional and new anti-Roma stereotypes";
- "Co-designing Citizen Social Science for Collective Action (Co-ACT): Better visibility of trans and non-binary people in research work and on the labor market".

E 18. Leadership of a national scientific or educational project. M. Baev declares participation as a leader in an impressive number of projects 7, forming a total of 280 points.

Indicator Ж:

Ж 25. Presence of a research or creative program. The candidate presents a Mental Health Program for Medical Professionals with a research element, started in November 2022 and continuing at the time of the competition, bringing him 10 points for participation in the competition.

Ж 26. Membership in national and/or international organizations and associations in the respective professional field.

M. Baev is a member of 10 Bulgarian and international organizations, which is an indication of high social and scientific engagement in various activities and initiatives for the benefit of different causes and problems. This indicator also brings 10 points.

Ж 32. Leading public lectures on behalf of NBU by invitation of HEIs or prestigious national/international organizations (or by invitation of NBU - for external candidates)

The candidate for the academic position of Associate Professor is a lecturer at two public events dedicated to socially significant issues of national and international importance (a total of 20 points):

- Mental health and social work with HIV patients, June 2021.
- Organization of healthcare for refugees from Ukraine – theoretical and practical aspects, 15.06.2022.

II. Research (creative) activity and results

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

In the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, in the professional field 7.5 Nursery Care, Dr. Baev participates with a reviewed monographic work titled "Quality of Life and Mental Health of Medical Professionals in Bulgaria".

The dissertation work is dedicated to the mental health of medical professionals in Bulgaria as a primary indicator of the quality of life of those who have chosen to work in the healthcare sector. Psycho-emotional problems arising from the nature of medical professions have a strong impact on their professional and personal lives. The monograph analyzes the most common mental problems - chronic stress and fatigue, development of Burnout syndrome, resulting from working with patients and the reflection of the work environment. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psycho-emotional state of medical professionals is also examined by the author, with several studies on the mental health of healthcare professionals before and after the pandemic being reviewed. Valuable is the author's pilot study, conducted by a multidisciplinary team with the active participation of psychologists aimed at finding working solutions to improve the mental health of medical professionals. Competently conducted analyses and own research give the author a basis to focus our attention on important problems in the current system of organization and structure of our healthcare, which have a negative reflection on the mental health of those working in the sector. The most common causes of deteriorated mental health among medical professionals are due to the critically low number of medical specialties and the significantly high number of medical professionals in retirement and pre-retirement age. It is emphasized that other factors forming the stressogenic work environment stem from internal interactions within healthcare facilities with colleagues, working with sick people and their families, and the increasing demands of society on medical professionals. The author's deep concern for improving the quality of life of medical professionals and improving their mental health, as well as working towards achieving a sustainable balance between personal and professional life, is impressive. The monograph lists examples and makes recommendations for developing and applying strategies to support the mental health of medical professionals and thereby improving their quality of life.

2. Evaluation of contributions.

The scientific-theoretical and practical-applied contributions of Momchil Baev are in several directions:

- *In the field of mental health of medical professionals.*

A monographic work on a very current, yet still sidelined by society and institutions, issue has been developed. As a result of the conducted studies, the author proposes a wide range of interventions as solutions at the individual level, at the level of the medical institution, and at the

national and political level, which form real challenges for the Bulgarian healthcare system. Changes in policies, institutional reforms, which can create a more supportive and sustainable work environment for healthcare professionals, are proposed.

- *Sexual health and HIV*

The candidate has a scientific-theoretical contribution with 2 of his publications, but also rich practical experience in the field with various marginalized groups at risk of HIV infection and training them for self-testing for the virus and increasing personal responsibility towards health.

- *Refugees and migrants*

On this topic, three publications and the dissertation, as well as practical fieldwork on one of the most pressing problems in Bulgaria as an external border of the European Union, are presented.

- *Immunizations and COVID-19*

On this issue, 2 scientific publications are presented. Momchil Baev's research interests in the field of infectious diseases and their impact on the healthcare system and public health were intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- *Roma community*

Work in this direction is presented in 2 publications. Raising awareness, motivation, and training of Roma to improve health culture is a problem affecting a significant part of the community. Encouraging Roma youth to continue their education in medical professions not only allows for personal development of the youth but also has a positive effect on the community.

3. Citations by other authors.

One of the publications presented for the competition is dedicated to a topic of international importance and has been cited in four articles published in journals indexed in the prestigious global database Web of Science.

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

The contributions of Momchil Baev have high scientific and practical value and are in the following areas:

- *In the field of mental health of medical professionals.*

In 2023, M. Baev created a therapeutic group for health professionals. With the help of a psychotherapist, prevention of professional burnout and coping with negative stress at the workplace based on psychodrama psychotherapy is conducted.

He participates in the formation of a group of goodwill ambassadors for mental health among medical professionals from various localities in the country. The goal is to reduce the effect on mental health manifestations but also to publicize the problem to fight stigma.

He organizes practical workshops for medical professionals related to art/ art therapy for coping with workplace stress.

- *Sexual health and HIV*

In the field of sexual health and HIV, the candidate has been working since 2010. He continues to work on the issue as a consultant and researcher on various problems of people at risk of HIV infection. In 2018, he created the first program in Bulgaria for home HIV testing. He conducted the most extensive study in our country among men who have sex with men (MSM) on attitudes towards and access to screening for the virus. Based on the study, he created a reasoned recommendation to the Advisory Council on HIV to the Minister of Health for regulating HIV testing at home. This led to the registration with the Executive Agency for Medicines of the first medical device in the country for self-testing for HIV at home, without the involvement of a medical professional.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as a member of the International AIDS Society, he actively participated in the vaccination of people with HIV against Sars CoV-2 and reducing the risk of contracting the coronavirus among the same population. During this period, he continued to lead the program for self-testing for HIV while all the Cabinets for Anonymous and Free Counseling and Testing for AIDS in the Regional Health Inspections in the country remained closed.

- *Refugees and Migrants*

Since 2015, the candidate has been implementing activities to protect the health and healthcare of refugees seeking international protection, starting with the first wave of tens of thousands of migrants arriving from the Middle East. His personal experience and the lack of studies on the issue led the candidate to develop a dissertation for the acquisition of a PhD degree on the topic "Risks to the Health System of the Republic of Bulgaria in Conditions of a Refugee Crisis in Europe." As a result, he describes several deficiencies in the organization of healthcare for migrants. The empirical data he collects cover several types of groups/populations - individuals seeking (or having received) international protection, specialists and humanitarian workers engaged with this population, doctors and health care professionals, and intern doctors in their final year of training. Based on this, M. Baev conducts a multidisciplinary review of the issues and objectively assesses and proposes models for optimization.

- *Immunizations and COVID-19*

His work on the issue is distinguished by the empirical proof of the relationship between anti-epidemic measures and morbidity and mortality from COVID-19. He participates in studies on attitudes towards vaccines among Bulgarians, with the first such study conducted by the candidate and his team. The study began immediately upon the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines in Bulgaria and before they were available to all citizens, only to medical professionals. A total of 2182 individuals across the country were surveyed through an online questionnaire.

At the height of the epidemic, with the support of the WHO and UNICEF offices in Bulgaria, he participates in developing a National Communication Strategy for COVID-19 vaccination with methodology. The strategy is provided to the Ministry of Health and the Council of Ministers and becomes the basis for, albeit delayed, communication activities by the ministry.

Momchil Baev and his team develop the first Guide for Medical Professionals on Interpersonal Communication for Immunization in the country, which serves for training and developing the capacity of staff in the system for more effective communication with patients and the application of methods such as "motivational interviewing."

He participates in creating a long-term initiative called "Vaccines School," consisting of monthly webinars to fill the knowledge of medical professionals in the country on topics related to vaccine prophylaxis, etc.

- *Roma Community*

From 2010 to 2020, the candidate studies the problems of access to healthcare in the Roma community, their quality and duration of life, health culture and habits, and the capacity for lifestyle change in the community. He investigates the dietary habits of the Roma in the context of maternal and child health and early childhood development. He participates in a study on access to healthcare, coverage of health insurance including emergency medical care in the Roma community, conducted on the ground "door to door."

He is a member of the team of two programs with sustainable results: for the preparation of students of Roma origin in medical universities and preparation and training of paramedics of Roma origin for the needs of emergency assistance in Sofia. As a result of the programs, hundreds of young Roma have been admitted (under equal conditions with candidates from the general population) to medical universities across the country. The second program also has achieved results and now working paramedics.

III. Teaching and Educational Activity

Momchil Baev is not a lecturer at NBU but possesses rich experience as a trainer and researcher. His work to date is directly related to training various community groups. He has rich theoretical and practical experience based on education, self-development, and work on research, creation, and implementation of projects. All this forms the basis on which the candidate's scientific and practical experience will build upon his pedagogical and research skills in the field of higher education.

IV. Administrative and Public Activity

The candidate for the academic position of "Associate Professor" has shown public activity on some of the most important topics for our society, such as the psycho-emotional overload of medical professionals, raising health literacy and awareness of society as a whole, but also of vulnerable communities and individuals, migration pressure, and the problems of

migrants and refugees. M. Baev actively and purposefully works for the optimization and synchronization of the regulatory framework in the country to achieve higher efficiency of the work of state and non-governmental organizations in the field of healthcare and social activities.

In 2020, Momchil Baev founded the Astra Forum Foundation, which he leads to this day. The foundation works for sustainable social development through the means of science by applying various programs, mainly in the field of healthcare. The main topics of work are infectious diseases, preventive and social medicine, mental health, training of medical professionals, and advocacy activities for the development of public policies.

V. Personal Impressions of the Candidate.

I do not personally know the candidate, but based on the presented documents and evidence, I am impressed by Mr. Baev's initiative and public engagement.

VI. Opinions, Recommendations, and Notes on the Candidate's Activity and Achievements

Based on the above, I confidently give a positive vote and propose to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to support the candidacy of Momchil Kostov Baev, PhD, for the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 7.5 Nursery Care and his admission to the election by the Academic Council.

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