

OPINION

From Assoc. Prof. Despina Prodanova Georgieva, PhD
Ruse University "Angel Kanchev"
Faculty of Public Health and Nursing, Department of Nursing care
Professional direction: 7.5 Nursing care

Appointed by Order 3-RK-92 from 29.01.24 based on the Decision of the Academic Council 5/23.01.2024 for participation in a competition for the academic position "associate professor" 1/8 of full-time equivalent, in the professional direction 7.5 Nursing Care, announced in State Gazette No. 100 from 01.12.2023 with candidate Momchil Kostov Baev.

This opinion is prepared in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in Bulgaria, the Regulation for its implementation, and the requirements of the Regulation on the Development of the Academic Staff at NBU.

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

The competition for "associate professor" in the field of Higher Education 7. Healthcare and Sports, professional direction 7.5. Nursing Care was announced according to the established legal procedure for the needs of the Department: Healthcare and Social Work, New Bulgarian University. The only candidate in the competition is Momchil Kostov Baev.

The report presented by the candidate proves compliance with the minimum national requirements for scientific and teaching activities of candidates for the academic position "associate professor" in professional direction 7.5. Nursing Care in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulation for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. The candidate also meets the additional requirements of New Bulgarian University, according to the Regulation on the Development of the Academic Staff at NBU.

Education and career profile of the candidate

Momchil Kostov Baev was born on 12.08.1986 in Veliko Tarnovo. In 2005, he graduated from the Humanities High School "St. Cyril and St. Methodius", and in 2012 he obtained a Bachelor's degree in "Social Sciences" at the Faculty of Economics at Veliko Tarnovo University of "St. Cyril and St. Methodius". In 2015, he completed a Master's degree in "Public Health and Health Management" at the Faculty of Public Health at the Medical University of Sofia. In the same university, in 2020, he obtained a PhD in "Social Medicine and Organization of Healthcare and Pharmacy" in the field of higher education 7. Healthcare and Sports, professional direction 7.4. Public Health.

He has participated in numerous courses and training programs related to his professional activity and scientific research over the years. He holds two certificates for English language training from New York, USA.

II. Research (creative) activity and results

For participation in the competition, Momchil Baev has presented one monographic work and 9 articles, of which 5 are published in scientific journals refereed and indexed in world-renowned databases and 4 publications in non-refereed journals with scientific review. A report of 4 citations is presented.



1. Evaluation of the monographic work:

The monographic work presented for the competition "Quality of Life and Mental Health of Medical Professionals in Bulgaria" is structured in 12 chapters, with a total volume of 159 pages. 138 sources of information, mainly in English, have been studied. The author presents a current and significant problem related to the mental health of medical professionals in Bulgaria. The monograph presents an analysis in three directions: Documentary analysis of the factors leading to impaired mental health of medical professionals; Theoretical analysis of the quality of life and its measurement, and Interventions to improve the mental health of medical professionals. A thorough analysis of the peculiarities of the medical profession and the associated risk factors - chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and manifestations of "professional burnout" - is carried out. The monograph also presents the challenges faced by medical professionals. Economic and ethical aspects related to mental health in the medical field are addressed. The author presents data from his own study with the participation of a multidisciplinary team. The research shows high levels of stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction, often related to a poor working environment in hospitals, low remuneration, heavy workloads, and a lack of resources and support. The data is analyzed in depth with conclusions and recommendations made, including strategies for dealing with the stigma of seeking help and creating a supportive work environment to improve the mental health of medical professionals.

The summarized assessment of the contributions from the monograph includes:

Theoretical contributions:

- Conducting a theoretical analysis of the quality of life and mental health of medical professionals in Bulgaria.
- The specific challenges faced by Bulgarian medical professionals are studied, exploring how their professional environment affects their mental health and overall quality of life.

Contributions of a scientific-applied nature:

- Creation and presentation of the first in Bulgaria Program for the Mental Health of Medical Professionals, organized and conducted by the Astra Forum Foundation, of which the author is the founder and chairman.
- Systematization and offering of a wide range of interventions as solutions at the individual level, at the level of medical institutions, and at the national and political level.

2. Evaluation of the contributions in the other submitted publications:

The research activity of Momchil Baev is focused in 4 main directions, dedicated to current problems in the field of public health and social policy:

The first scientific direction is Sexual Health and HIV. The theoretical and practical contributions in the field are expressed in:

- Creation and application for the first time in Bulgaria of a program for home HIV testing.
- Conducting a study among the group of men who have sex with men (MSM) on attitudes towards and access to screening for the virus.
- Presentation of a reasoned opinion-recommendation to the Advisory Council on HIV to the Minister of Health for regulating HIV testing at home.
- Registration with the Bulgarian Drug Agency of the first medical device for self-testing for HIV at home in Bulgaria.
- Creation and application of the program for self-testing for HIV during the COVID-19 period. The lack of screening diagnostics due to the pandemic is compensated for by this program, which provided an opportunity for thousands of people across the country to learn their HIV status. **Two scientific publications on the topic are presented.**



The second scientific direction is related to the *Health and Healthcare of Refugees and Migrants* seeking international protection (3 publications on the topic). The low level of preparedness of public systems, including the health system, for the reception of refugees gives the candidate a basis to develop a dissertation for obtaining a PhD on the topic "Risks to the Health System of the Republic of Bulgaria in the Conditions of a Refugee Crisis in Europe", as well as to conduct research in the field, published in 3 articles. In his studies, the researcher identifies and documents a number of deficiencies in the organization of healthcare for those seeking protection

The third scientific direction is Immunizations and COVID-19. The scientific and applied contributions in the field are expressed in:

- Creation of the online-based group "Science in Crisis" with the aim of "translating" scientific information into language understandable to the general public. This makes science more accessible and increases its practical dimensions in the daily life of citizens.
- Proving the connection between anti-epidemic measures on one hand, and morbidity and mortality from COVID-19 on the other, based on a comprehensive study of all acts of legislative and executive power, and national statistics on those infected and deceased from the coronavirus.
- Conducting the first study in the country on attitudes towards vaccination, immediately upon the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines in Bulgaria before they were available to all citizens.
- Development of a National Communication Strategy for COVID-19 vaccination with the support of WHO and UNICEF in Bulgaria. Provided to the Ministry of Health and the Council of Ministers, the strategy becomes the basis for communication activities by the ministry.
- Development of the first manual in the country for medical professionals on interpersonal communication for immunization, which serves to train personnel in the system.
- Creation of a long-term initiative called "Vaccines School," consisting of monthly webinars to supplement the knowledge of medical professionals in the country. There are two scientific publications in this direction.

The fourth scientific direction is related to *Solving Problems in the Roma Community*, свързани с достъпа до здравеопазване, качеството и продължителността на живот, здравната култура и навици, и капацитета за промяна в общността са отразени в 2 публикации.

The theoretical and practical contributions of Momchil Baev in this scientific area are:

- Conducted a study on access to healthcare, including emergency care in the Roma community. The study documents the deficiencies of the health system and the inability to cover a large part of the Bulgarian society - the Roma community - through health insurance.
- Created programs with sustainable results for the preparation of students of Roma origin in medical universities and training of paramedics of Roma origin for the needs of emergency care in Sofia.

3. A report of 4 citations by other authors is presented.

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

Momchil Baev presents a report on participation in two international projects. The first, lasting from 2010-2012, is related to a social group, associated with overcoming numerous anti-Roma stereotypes leading to a number of economic, social, and health problems in contemporary society. The second covers a socially significant problem related to the perception of trans and non-binary people.



From the presented report, it is clear that in the period from 2012-2023, he was the leader of 7 scientific and educational projects. The topics of the projects are in the field of social and health policy in the country. They are related to reducing the vulnerability to HIV of young people at greatest risk. Expanding the scope of effective care for prevention and control of tuberculosis in the Roma community. Improving the work of the Emergency Medical Services - Sofia with patients from Roma communities. Expanding and establishing the Model of paramedics of Roma origin. His activity is dedicated to patient access and quality of care. He focuses on advocacy initiatives in healthcare, related to policy changes, access to healthcare, and treatment of the most vulnerable groups.

III. Teaching and educational activity.

Two public lectures were held at NBU.

- Mental health and social work with patients with HIV infection, 2021.
- Organization of healthcare for refugees from Ukraine - theoretical and practical aspects, 2022.

IV. Administrative and public service

Momchil Baev is a member of over 10 prestigious national and international organizations such as: Bulgarian Scientific Society for Epidemiology of Infectious and Non-Infectious Diseases; Academic Council on Migration by UNHCR; Advisory Council on HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections to the Minister of Health; International AIDS Society; Bulgarian Society for Public Health; Permanent Working Group on Patient Empowerment in the European Patient Forum, Brussels, Belgium; Member of COPASAH – Community of Practitioners on Accountability and Social Action in Health; European TB Coalition; Section "Healthcare for Migrants and Ethnic Minorities" of the European Public Health Association; Global Youth Coalition on AIDS.

Based on the candidate's rich professional activity over more than 10 years in the field of public health, his social engagement with current problems for the country is impressive. He participates in several expert groups at the Ministry of Health in the preparation of methodological guides and national programs for prevention and control of HIV/AIDS. He leads long-term programs - for HIV prevention and control, for community monitoring of health services, for support of medical students of Roma origin, for prevention and control of tuberculosis in the Roma community, and others.

He received an award from the Ministry of Health and the "Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS" program for contributions to the fight against HIV in Bulgaria. He is the leader of the "Sexual Health and HIV" program at the Single Step Foundation. He led a training and employment program for paramedics in the emergency system and in partnership with the Emergency Medical Services - Sofia. In 2020, he founded the Astra Forum Foundation, which he leads to this day. The foundation works for sustainable societal 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.

Throughout his professional experience, Momchil Baev focuses on advocacy initiatives in healthcare, related to policy changes, access to healthcare and treatment, coordinating several long-term programs related to access, risk management, and quality in healthcare.

V. Opinions, recommendations, and notes on the candidate's activity and achievements

I have no remarks regarding the candidate's activity and achievements. I confirm my positive opinion on the quality of the candidate's scientific and publication activity.



The candidate's professional engagement allows him to acquire and apply knowledge, competencies, and practical experience in various areas of public health, which would be relevant, current, and useful for the training of students and maintaining the high quality of education at NBU.

VI. Conclusion

All of the above gives me reason to POSITIVELY evaluate the scientific and scientific-applied activity of the candidate Momchil Kostov Baev.

The candidate fully meets the requirements for the academic position "associate professor" at NBU. I express my convinced positive assessment of the high achievements in the field of public health and practice, the scientific contributions in the presented monographic work and the other submitted publications, with which the candidate participates in the current competition.

I propose to the Scientific Jury to make a positive decision ~~and for the Academic Council of NBU to~~ elect Momchil Kostov Baev to the academic position "associate professor" at New Bulgarian University in professional direction 7.5. Nursing Care.

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