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**ЖЕНЩИНЫ РУКОВОДИТЕЛИ МЕДИЦИНСКИХ УЧРЕЖДЕНИЙ И ПРОБЛЕМЫ
УПРАВЛЕНИЕ СЕКТОРА ЗДРАВООХРАНЕНИЯ В БОЛГАРИИ**

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**FEMALE MANAGERS OF HEALTHCARE FACILITIES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY
HEALTHCARE MANAGEMENT IN BULGARIA**

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Цель данной статьи – представить участие женщин на уровне оперативного управления в системе здравоохранения, а также проблемы, стоящие перед управлением учреждениями здравоохранения. Страна отстает от европейских тенденций в области гендерного равенства в сфере компетенций сектора здравоохранения. Женщины-руководители в медицинских учреждениях составляют 37%, что ниже, чем участие женщин в управлении здравоохранением в европейских странах (41%). Перед управлением структурами здравоохранения стоит ряд системных проблем, связанных с несовершенством законодательства, финансовыми ограничениями и кадровым дефицитом. **Вывод:** В последние годы в Болгарии успешно реализуется политика по представительству женщин в управлении, но в секторе здравоохранения еще многое предстоит сделать. Нерешенные проблемы в системе усугубляют трудности для управления здравоохранением в стране.

SUMMARY

This article aims to present women's involvement at the operational management level in the healthcare system, as well as the challenges faced by the management of healthcare facilities. The country is lagging behind European trends in gender equality in the area of authority in the healthcare sector. Female managers of healthcare facilities represent 37%, which is lower than women's involvement in healthcare management in the European countries (41%). There are a number of challenges of systemic nature faced by the management of healthcare structures, generated as a result of regulatory imperfections, financial constraints and staffing deficits. Conclusion: In recent years, Bulgaria has successfully implemented the women's involvement in management policy, however, there is still much to be done in the healthcare sector. The unresolved problems in the system exacerbate the difficulties before the healthcare management in the country.

Ключевые слова: женщины менеджеры здравоохранения, женщины руководители медицинских учреждений, проблемы управления

Keywords: female healthcare managers, female managers of healthcare facilities, challenges faced by the management

Introduction: There is a persistent inequality in the representation of women and men at managerial positions in the global political and economic world. Despite the observed positive trend for increased representation of women in management, globally ladies are still not provided with the maximum opportunity for their realization at management positions. Bulgaria makes no exception with its insufficient female presence in the management of the healthcare system at different levels. The unsolved problems in the organization and operation of healthcare create a number of challenges for the managers of healthcare facilities (HCFs).

This article aims to study women's involvement in the management of HCFs for hospital patient and outpatient care (without evaluating their professional activities), as well as the challenges faced by the management.

Materials and Methods: A documented and a questionnaire-based sociological method have been applied. The share of women in first-level operational management in the healthcare sector - 381 HCFs - was examined. A survey was conducted on the obstacles faced by the managers of hospitals and Diagnostic and Consultation Centers (DCCs) for Specialized Outpatient Assistance (SOPA). The study was conducted among 89 women - healthcare managers, in the period October 2019 - January 2020.

Results and Discussions: In 2013, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) developed and adopted a Gender Equality Index which measures the existing inconsistencies in six major areas (work, money, knowledge, time, authority, health), as well as two concomitants (overlapping inequalities and violence) [5]. One of the indicators measured in the area of authority relates to "management" in various

fields of activity. There are two sub-areas within this area - political and economic. Fortunately, in 2017 Bulgaria was ranked in second place which was shared with Estonia. Among EU countries, our country has a share of women holding management positions just below half (49%). In the various socio-economic sectors, a different presence of women in the governing bodies can be seen. Women in education, social services and healthcare account for the largest share in management at the European level, with 41% each respectively. Bulgaria makes no exception with the presence of women in the management of the healthcare system at different levels: senior, top management (representatives of the executive power), coordinating management, strategic - middle level, and operational management at the first level, such as managers of healthcare facilities [1].

Directors/managers of healthcare facilities are representatives of the operational management in the structure of the national health organization and, at the

same time, they represent senior management in the structure of the particular healthcare facility. In the 381 structures studied, the distribution is as follows:

1. Female involvement in the management of hospital establishments:

- Out of 51 managers of public hospitals (including limited liability companies and joint stock companies), 17 of them are women, representing 33.3%.

- In hospitals with one hundred percent municipal ownership, female healthcare managers are 37% (out of 100 managers, 37 are women).

- Private hospital establishments are 124, with 39 of their managers being women (31.4%).

2. Female involvement in the management of HCFs of SOPMC (specialized outpatient medical care):

116 DCCs have been registered and are currently operating in the country, with 48 of them having female managers (41.3%).

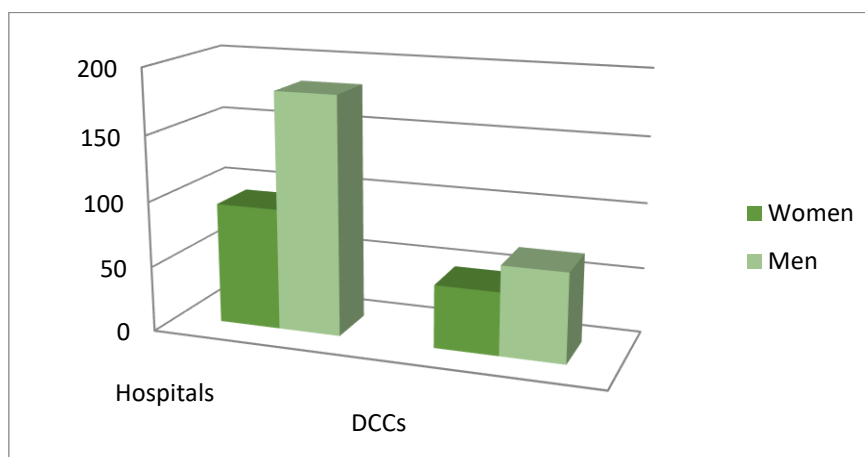


Fig. 1. Relative share of women in public, municipal and private hospitals (total), and DCCs

The results of the studied HCFs show that female managers of HCFs in our country represent 37%, which is lower than the stated women's involvement in healthcare management in the European countries (41%).

Without making a comprehensive assessment of the work of female managers of healthcare facilities, we will just state data provided by the Ministry of Health at the end of 2019: 104 hospitals (33 of them with over 50% state participation in the company's capital and 71 municipal healthcare facilities - specialized, multi-profile hospitals, mental health center, complex oncology center) are in poor financial condition with accumulated outstanding debts. In 32 of the said hospitals, representing 30.7%, management has been entrusted to female managers. In addition, 54 are the female managers of municipal and public hospital structures, with more than half of them - 32 found to be in poor financial condition with overdue liabilities.

The poor financial condition of healthcare facilities, apart from the manager's activities, is largely dependent on factors external for the structure operating in the system. In the questionnaire survey on the challenges faced by managers, 89 women

participated - 33 from SOPMC and 56 from hospital care.

The answers to the questions reveal the professional difficulties related to the imperfections in the healthcare system that managers have to overcome.

Managers in two age groups, 45-55 years (31.7%) and 56-65 years (39.4%) prevail among the respondents. The largest group in number is the group of respondents (42.6%) having work experience as managers between 10 and 15 years, followed by those belonging to the group of 15-20 years (36.4%) and those over 20 years (13.6%). Most of them (68.7%) have over 20 years of experience as medical practitioners. There are representatives of different clinical specialties among the respondents who are still to date practicing their clinical specialties. Their accumulated professional experience as managers of healthcare facilities and medical practitioners provide grounds for reliability and objectivity in the answers. 71.4% hold a Master's Degree in Health Management, which is a prerequisite for the successful management of structures. Being well aware of the problems existing in the sector, the

respondents indicated the challenges they face as managers.

Approximately half of the respondents (46.7%) indicated the regulatory framework, which in most cases is unclear, incomplete, fragmented, contradictory, frequently amended. This creates a legal vacuum, difficulties in control, the possibility of different interpretations and applications. A significant portion of the respondents (68.4%) indicated the chronic underfunding of healthcare and the inability to

financially secure the provision, in full volume and at high quality, of statutory healthcare as the main reason for the difficulties. According to 60% of managers, difficulties also arise as a result of the shortage of medical professionals. HFC managers see the manifestations of the unresolved problems at the national level in the following difficulties faced by management:

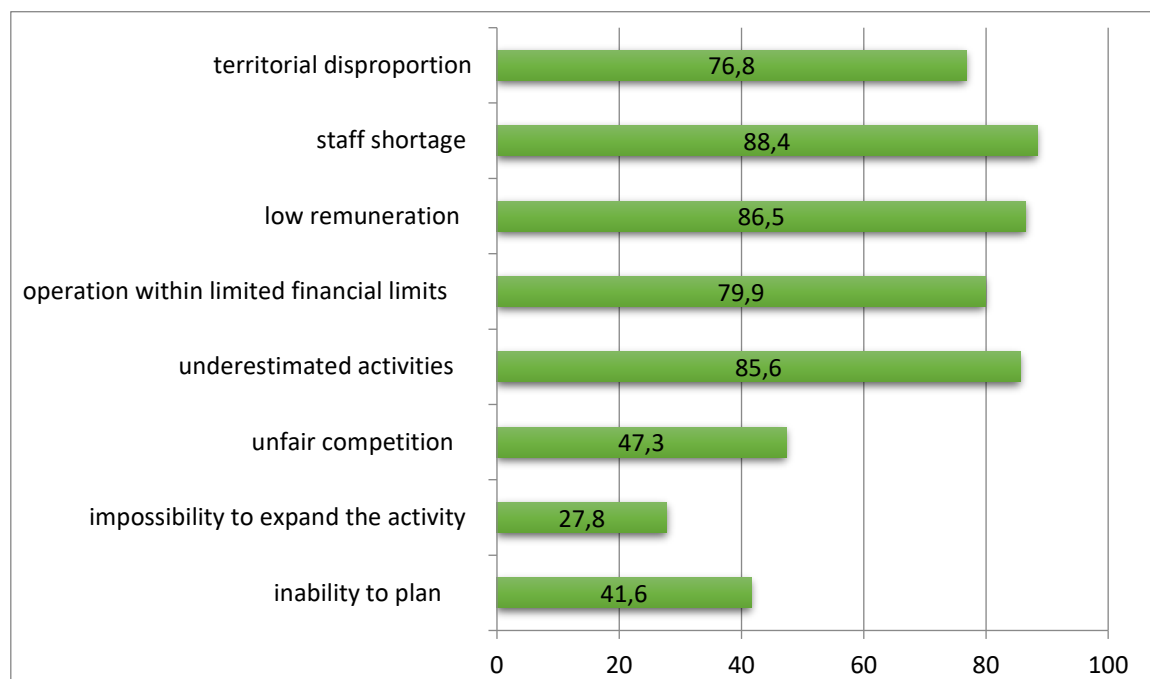


Fig. 2. What are the manifestations of the deficits shown in Fig. 2?

The largest share in the answers given by the respondents is occupied by: the shortage of medical professionals (88.4%), which in turn creates difficulties in the organization and operation of HCFs; insufficient remuneration of the majority of medical professionals (86.5%) - one of the reasons for the emigration to other countries; the existence of underestimated activities (85.6%) in hospital patient and outpatient care, which is one of the reasons for the insufficient income in the commercial companies. In the next group are the answers about the operation of HCFs in the conditions of limited regulatory standards and hospital limits (79.9%) and the existence of territorial disproportions (76.8%) at the HCF and medical professionals' level. Managers also indicated the existence of unfair competition (47.3%) and the inability to forecast, plan (41.6%) and expand the activity (27.8%) as another manifestation of regulatory imperfections and insufficient control.

Summarizing the survey results, we cannot but conclude that there are a number of challenges of systemic origin faced by healthcare managers of HCFs who have their influence on the effective organization and operation of the structures.

Conclusion: In recent years, Bulgaria has successfully implemented gender equality policies in

the area of authority, in particular women's involvement in healthcare management, but there is still much to be done. Women's involvement in the management of HCFs for hospital patient and specialist outpatient care is lagging behind the indicators for the European countries in the healthcare sector. The accumulated unresolved problems in the system generate challenges and exacerbate the difficulties faced by the healthcare management in the country.

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