

# ***Bulgarian National Report***

## ***Association: Bulgarian Dental Association (BgDA)***

***Year: 2009***

### **I. The association and its organisation**

Bulgarian Dental Association (BgDA) was among the first dental professional organisations in Europe: it was founded on December 20<sup>th</sup> 1905, and for more than 40 years has been a powerful and authoritative representative of the interests of the profession.

However, the communist regime banned the medical and dental associations in 1947, and replaced them with what are now described as “obedient and toothless trade-unions”, uniting artificially the alleged interests of the so-called “health workers” – doctors and auxiliary staff together. The new centralised healthcare system transformed the doctors from independent specialists to salaried state employees, with no real responsibility and stimulus. Private practice was prohibited from 1971.

All this lasted until 1989, when the government regime crashed. The Bulgarian Dental Association was “resurrected” on March 11<sup>th</sup> 1990 in the city of Plovdiv, by a widely drawn national conference of Bulgarian dentists, which actually turned out to be the constituent assembly of the renewed organisation. The Association quickly gained popularity and new members, although membership was voluntary. Highly intensive activities were immediately undertaken in several directions: *reestablishment of private practice, cost evaluation of dental procedures, professional ethical standards, defence of the profession, information and qualification of the members.*

This initial period is characterised by the co-existence of the old, discredited public system and the renewed private dental care, which was quickly gaining power and overtaking the modern standards. This co-existence raised some specific problems: *disloyal competition, price dumping, dual standards* etc.

In 1999 the *Law of the Professional Organisations of Physicians and Stomatologists* (Later: *Physicians in Dental Medicine*) established the new professional organisation: The Association of Stomatologists in Bulgaria (ASB). After the accession of Bulgaria in the EU, the Association regained the title *Bulgarian Dental Association (BgDA)*.

The law entrusts to the Association functions, typical of the similar professional organisations in the democratic world:

- To negotiate and contract with the National Health Insurance Fund.
- To keep and update the register of the profession. Registering with the Association is a compulsory prerequisite for practising dental medicine in Bulgaria.
- To enforce the ethic principles of the profession and penalize their infringement.
- To inform and qualify its members.
- To defend its members, etc.

### **II. Trends and developments**

#### ***1. Professional policy***

The Constituent Congress adopted the Constitution of BgDA, which develops further the stipulations of the law in the spirit of the professional self-government.

The Constitution introduced the “functional field” principle in the central management of the Association, via the establishment of 7 Standing Working Committees (SWC), intended to perform its basic functions. Each Chairman of a SWC is being elected by the Congress, and is holding also the office of a Vice-President of the Association, which determines their high statute and responsibility.

The Constitution stipulates a territorial representation in the Managing Board by including in the Board representatives of all the 28 Regional Colleges of BgDA.

The Law of the Professional Organisations and the Constitution of BgDA constitute also the control bodies of the Association as independent commissions:

- The *Commission of Professional Ethics* is supervising the moral, ethical and deontological issues in practicing the dental profession.
- The *Control Commission* controls of the decisions of the Managing Board, as well as their implementation, in terms of their adherence to the law and the Constitution of BgDA.

## **Ethics**

### *Ethical Code*

Bulgarian dental practitioners are subject to the “*Code of professional ethics of the physicians in dental medicine in the Republic of Bulgaria*”, adopted by the Congress of BgDA, signed by the Minister of Health and published in the State Gazette.

The Code contains the duties of the physicians in dental medicine ensuing from the practicing of the dental profession. It reflects the moral principles and criteria of professional conduct of the members of the dental profession.

The Code contains regulations on:

- The duties of the members of the dental profession during practice;
- Promotion of the dental services;
- Relationships with the patients
- Patients’ referral
- Medical documentation and professional secrecy
- Payment of the dental services
- Qualification
- Infringements and penalties

### *Registration*

The prerequisite for registration in Bulgaria is a primary degree in dental medicine. The registration of *dental practitioners* is administered by the Bulgarian Dental Association by means of its Regional Colleges.

The registration of the *dental practices* as medical institutions is administered by the Ministry of Health by means of its regional bodies – the Regional Centres of Healthcare.

### *Data Protection*

In 2002, two laws came into force: the *Law on Protection of Personal Data*, and the *Law on Protection of Classified Information*.

In 2006, the *Law on Consumer’s Protection* was been adopted. These laws stipulate the use of personal and classified data.

### *Advertising*

According to Bulgarian law, no commercial advertising is permitted in healthcare activities. Dental practitioners are permitted to promote their services in accordance to the law and the Ethical Code.

### *Insurance and professional indemnity*

Professional indemnity insurance is mandatory according to the *Law of Health*, and the Regional Colleges of BgDA cover the insurance of their members.

### *Relief of the BgDA members*

In October 2008, The Congress of BgDA voted positively and added to the BgDA Constitution an article for establishing a Fund for relief of colleagues, regular members of BgDA, who have serious health problems.

### *Number of dentists in Bulgaria*

Most dentists practice in general practice – although some also work in hospitals and dental faculties.

Number of BgDA members (2005): 7859.

Number of members BgDA (2008, preliminary data): approx. 8000.

In active practice – 7859.

Dentist to population ratio – 932.

Female dentist – 66%.

## **2. Health and social policy**

The Bulgarian Dental Association has drafted a National programme for prevention of oral diseases in children 0-18. The draft has been discussed in the Ministry of Health and the Parliament, and informally endorsed. The Minister of Health has established a working group with representatives of both the Ministry and the Bulgarian Dental Association in order to finalise the Programme. The Working group finalised the Programme at the end of November 2008. The Programme is funded by the Bulgarian Government. The final draft will be presented and approved by the Council of Ministers in April 2009.

BgDA organized twice Months for Oral Health Prevention in Bulgaria with more than 2000 physicians in dental medicine volunteers. During the Months the physicians in dental medicine made checks of the oral status and gave advices free of charge for any one patient of their clinics who wishes.

## **3. Educational policy**

To enter a faculty of dental medicine of the university, a student has to have completed secondary school (usually at the age of 18). There is an entrance examination, which is similar to that of medical students. The undergraduate course lasts for 5.5 years

The following shows the official number of students ordered by the Ministry of Education and Science:

Number of schools – 3

Student intake – 170  
Number of graduates per year – 150  
Percentage female students – 50%

#### *Primary dental qualification*

The primary degree in Bulgaria is Physician of Dental Medicine with a Master Degree.

#### *Vocational Training*

Dental graduates in Bulgaria are entitled to registration immediately upon graduation. There is no postgraduate vocational training. There is a 6 months mandatory pre-graduate practical training in the faculties of dental medicine.

Diplomas from other EU countries are recognised without the need for vocational training.

Quality assurance for the dental schools is provided by the Ministry of Education.

#### *Language requirements*

According to the *Law of Health*, the Ministry of Health shall assist EU citizens in acquiring the necessary knowledge of Bulgarian language and professional terminology.

Non-EU foreign citizens are required to have a command of Bulgarian language and professional terminology.

#### *Continuing education*

Continuing education (CE) is mandatory. A credit system has been introduced and administered by BgDA. A minimum of 30 points is to be covered in 3 years. The CE is delivered by BgDA, or by other institutions, accredited by BgDA. Every year BgDA organize over 70 lectures, couple of Symposia and one National Scientific Congress of the BgDA – part of the CE Programme of FDI. The average number of participants of the National Scientific Congresses is more than 1500. During the Congresses there are regular Dental Exhibitions.

In May 6 -9, 2009 in Varna will be the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress of Balkan Stomatological Society (BaSS) joined with the 9<sup>th</sup> Scientific Congress of BgDA (FDI Continuous Educational Programme) with a big Dental Exhibition.

#### *Specialist Training*

Specialists train in the faculties of dental medicine, and in accredited medical institutions. Specialisation is administered by the Ministry of Health, with the support of BgDA.

Training lasts for 3 years and concludes with a State examination.

The types of specialist are:

- General dental medicine
- Orthodontics
- Oral Surgery
- Paediatric dental medicine
- Operative dental medicine and endodontics
- Periodontology and oral mucosa diseases

- Prosthetic dental medicine
- Dental image diagnostics
- Social medicine and dental health organization
- Dental clinical allergology

### **III.The insurance system**

Healthcare in Bulgaria is based on mandatory health insurance, governed by the Health Insurance Act (1998, State Gazette # 70), also encompassing the voluntary health insurance which is at its initial stage. It creates legislative framework for the organization of the mandatory health insurance.

The mandatory health insurance system is designed as a state monopoly. It has the exclusive right to grant mandatory health insurance and to guarantee the observance of the insurance rights in respect of all nationals, following a public contract model. A National Framework Contract is to be signed every year between the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) on one side, and the Bulgarian Medical and Dental Associations – on the other. The Contract comes into force upon sanction of the Minister of Health. The contracted annual package of activities in dental medicine varies according to the age.

The NHIF is monitoring the quality of dental care in the system of mandatory insurance, according to criteria negotiated with the BgDA and included in the National Framework Contract.

About 98% of dentists in Bulgaria work in general (liberal) practices. Thus, the dental services are delivered on this base, either through the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) or privately. Among all Bulgarian dentists, over 5500 have contracts with the NHIF.

### **IV.Changes in fees**

*In 2007 BgDA approved its Method of Price-formation of Dental Fees.*

*The dental fees are in accordance with the inflation.*

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