

## IMPLEMENTATION THE PROJECT OF DISTANCE LEARNING IN FACULTY OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nikolay A. POPOV  
Medical University Sofia  
Faculty of Public Health  
Sofia- BULGARIA

Assist. Prof. Dr. Natalia SHTEREVA-NIKOLOVA  
Medical University Sofia  
Faculty of Public Health  
Sofia- BULGARIA

Prof. Dr. Karolina LYUBOMIROVA  
Medical University Sofia  
Faculty of Public Health  
Sofia- BULGARIA

### ABSTRACT

This article pertains to a project realized in Faculty of Public Health (FPH) in the Medical University – Sofia. The project is financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) - European Commission. In this project was realized a distance educational course in Public Health with the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The project includes over 1,000 students, 25 lecturers and five assistants in 22 different disciplines. Within the project was created a multimedia lab. The result shows that this new form of education is very well received by the students and the quantity of knowledge receives surpassed that of traditional methods. The project is for a period of two years. After the final of the project the FPH will accredit Master programs.

**Key Words:** Distance education, e-learning, ICT, public health.

### INTRODUCTION

In 2012 the Faculty of public health to the Medical University – Sofia started introducing distance learning under a project funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) - European Commission. Its implementation will create the necessary prerequisites for more active and effective utilization of the opportunities provided by the state-of-art information and communication technologies for the achievement of quality training and provision of equal opportunities for acquiring the knowledge and skills one needs for full value life in the information society (Oldfield S., 2005). The dynamics of the modern economy necessitates the maintenance of high level of professional qualification and significant role in this area is attributable to the cutting edge technologies and innovative learning methods. The classical educational patterns suggest high costs as well as difficult access to education of the handicapped people and the ones that live outside the academic cities and towns (Oldfield S., 2004). The project created good base for the maintenance of distance learning and consequently it will underwent additional development and will serve as good practice for the entire university (Petkov V., St. Velikov, R.-Velikova Zlatanova, T. Zlatanova, 2013). It is in full conformity with the requirements provided for in the regulations for acquiring higher education of “bachelor” and “master” educational-qualification degree (Popov N., V. Petkov, T. Zlatanova, 2008).

## PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The improvement of quality and access to education and qualification thanks to the establishment of platform for innovative patterns of interactive e-learning, development of virtual library and training with the students of the Faculty of public health to the Medical University – Sofia.

## PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION STAGES

We developed a laboratory for the creation of multimedia contents (Figure 1.). The laboratory will consist of 5 workplaces and each will be equipped with computer that contains high-speed processor for rapid rendering of video and audio contents, monitor and high quality microphone and earphones, device for creating e-drawings. In it the lecturers will be provided with access to an environment for preparing e-contents.



Figure 1: The new laboratory for the creation of multimedia contents.

Training for the lecturers. It is a part of the current project and aims at improving the qualification of the lecturing personnel in the area of the cutting edge methods and models in the area of distance learning. The lecturers should be provided with up-to-date information in the area of the current theory and practice. The training also covers training for preparing tests, including the theory, the manners of measuring the test quality, making up questions. The remaining training is focused on using particular technologies and software, being elements of the present project. During the training the lecturers were informed about the environment under development, operating Moodle and creating e-contents. The training was held in 2 phases – theoretical and practical parts that were finalized with tests.

22 distance learning modules were elaborated for the majors taught by the lecturers, who were trained under the previous activity (Figure 2.). They were assisted by five “Programmes” Assistants that are aware of all technical details concerning the e-contents elaboration for training purposes and render methodical, technical and all other kinds of assistance to the lecturers that prepare the distance learning courses. On the basis of the developed modules the lecturers created contents for the virtual library. The majors in view of which the modules were elaborated, are distributed into the winter and summer tuition semesters. The modules contain various lecturing approaches and methods depending on the opportunities of the e-platform and they are finalized by tests and grades assigned to the students.

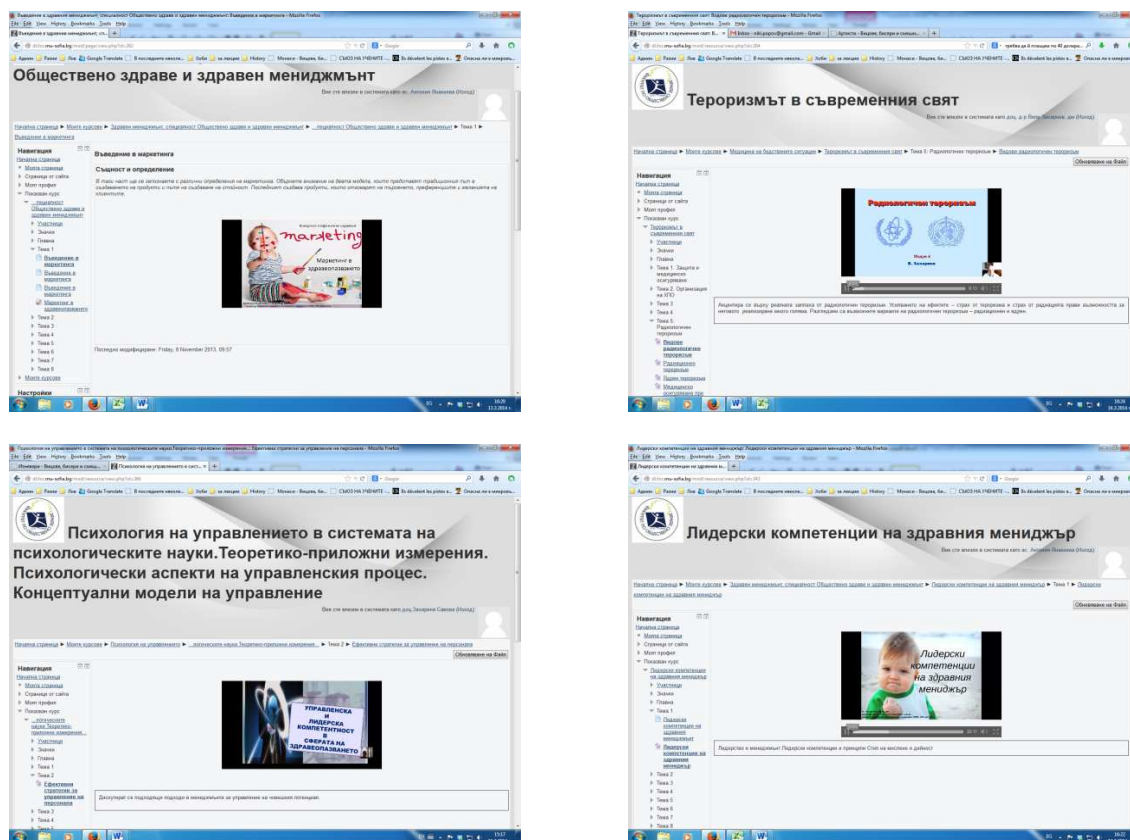


Figure 2: Parts of the developed distance learning modules in Faculty of Public Health

The next project stage was about the actual holding of distance learning for the students of the Faculty of public health with the use of the e-platform, the virtual library and the e-contents. The introduction of the distance learning pattern and teaching the students on the basis of the developed modules is part of their self-preparation for the particular major, as each module is finalized by the test and results of the distance learning. During the tuition the students were provided with the opportunity to use the created virtual library, which proved very useful according to their feedback.

### FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

Over 1000 questionnaires are about to be processed as a result of the enquiry survey that was held among the trained students in order to summarize the training results, report the positive sides of the distance learning courses, the recommendations provided by the students, the difficulties encountered by them, the objectivity of the defined results. Comprehensive analysis of their opinions and impressions will be elaborated by the project team.

E-learning manual will be issued and it will be useful for the lecturers as well as for the students. It will provided answers to general questions (of the type: What is distance learning?), specific issues (possible difficulties and coping with them, recommendations) and practical pieces of advice for holding the learning process step-by-step. The manual will contain materials from the training with which the lecturers are provided, analysis of the held students' tuition and conclusions.

After the project finalization in November 2014, the distance learning system of Faculty of public health will be maintained and operated in conformity with the introduced programme and on the basis of the experience accumulated during the project implementation. The university has undertaken to provide funding for the work related to the distance learning patterns, after including these activities in its annual budget. Opportunities will be sought for raising external funding in order to build over and improve the distance learning with the application under various schemes and programmes including the ones co-funded by the EU, as well as various

sponsorship patterns. As a result, the verified distance learning programme will be presented to the attention of the Accreditation Council. A Standing Committee of already trained lecturers will keep working with the e-platform and they will hold distance learning courses and will enrich the virtual library with materials and information. Students' grades acquired in the distance learning courses will be regularly assessed in order to perform continuous monitoring on behalf of the lecturers' team. On the basis of this monitoring we will undertake actions for improving the processes of the distance learning for students. The technical maintenance will be performed by full-time technical employees that will also support the team of lecturers when it comes to implementing courses.

The result of the comprehensive project implementation will have favourable effect on the training process thus diversifying the academic contents and the training itself. The students will have the opportunity to take advantage of the convenience and benefits offered by the distance learning thus making their education much more attractive (Velikov St., 2011). They will participate much more actively in the tutoring process. The lecturers would be able to acquire different experience and facilitate the material being assimilated by the students thanks to the cutting edge learning and tutoring methods. The distance learning will bring about innovative approach towards presenting the educational material and more opportunities for individual work.

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#### BIODATA AND CONTACT ADDRESSES OF AUTHORS



**Nikolay A. POPOV** is an associate professor at the Medical University - Sofia in 2010. He has over 10 years experience in voluntary health insurance as a financial director of one of the largest health insurance funds in Bulgaria.

He has participated in a lot of projects, including: project "E-learning students in Health Management, based on information and communication technologies", project "Analysis and Evaluation of Private Health Insurance Fund (HIF)" received honorary award "Signum Laudis Pro Scientiae Meritis" of the Medical University - Sofia for the most successful scientific development. He is currently a technical coordinator of the project "Implementation of Distance Learning in Public Health", financed by the European Social

Fund (ESF) - European Commission. Author of two monographs and more than 50 publications in Bulgarian and international scientific journals.

Assoc. Prof. Nikolay A. POPOV  
Medical University Sofia  
Faculty of Public Health  
Sofia- BULGARIA  
E. Mail: [niki.popov@gmail.com](mailto:niki.popov@gmail.com)



**Dr. Natalia SHTEREVA-NIKOLOVA** is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Public Health at the Medical University - Sofia.

In 2006 he graduated with a master's degree in "Public Health and Health Management" at the Faculty of Public Health at the Medical University - Sofia. In 2009 has acquired specialty "Social Medicine and Public dental health."

She teaches students from bachelor programs in the Faculty of Public Health in the field of "Social Medicine" and "Medical Ethics".

She is a member of the faculty council of the Faculty of Public Health.

Dr. Shtereva-Nikolova has authored book chapters, publications in national and international journals and participation in national and international congresses, conferences and seminars.

Dr. Natalia SHTEREVA-NIKOLOVA  
Medical University Sofia  
Faculty of Public Health  
Sofia- BULGARIA  
E. Mail: [nshtereva@gmail.com](mailto:nshtereva@gmail.com)



**Karolina LYUBOMIROVA** is a professor in the department "Occupational health" in the Faculty of Public health, Medical University Sofia. She is a toxicologist and occupational health expert, National consultant in Occupational health, Secretary of the Bulgarian society in Toxicology, National Secretary of ICOH, Vice rector on education of Medical University Sofia. She has experience in research projects about risk assessment of working and susceptible population exposed to risk factors. Her interests are bachelor and master programs in Occupational and public health and health management including distant education.

Prof. Dr.Karolina LYUBOMIROVA  
Medical University Sofia  
Faculty of Public Health  
Sofia- BULGARIA  
e-mail: [carol\\_lub@abv.bg](mailto:carol_lub@abv.bg)

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