



RISK MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE MATERNITY STRUCTURES

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ABSTRACT

The health organization identifies various risks associated with management, activities and structure, resources and consumers. The obstetric structures, although they were not placed on the first line, attended to pregnant, maternity and gynecologically ill women with symptoms of Covid.

The purpose of the present paper is to determine the risks associated with patient care in the Covid pandemic. By means of a questionnaire, a study was conducted of 232 medical specialists from the hospital - obstetric assistants in Varna from 3 medical institutions.

RESULTS: The respondents determine that the workload at the workplace is very high (85.34%), most of them (80.63%) took care of Covid patients. The ranked ones are the main problems in the workplace related to the Covid situation: the lack of clear rules and guidelines for dealing with the Covid crisis, the wage system, conflicts and a tense situation. Protocols and rules have been implemented that facilitate decision-making in specific conditions, ensuring the proper launch of processes.

CONCLUSION: the provision of obstetric care in the conditions of the Covid pandemic requires a continuous audit of activities, compliance with the planned rules for all possible and rare situations, in accordance with the established guidelines and rules of conduct of leading organizations in the field, in accordance with the regulatory provision defining medical practice.

Key words: *risk, obstetrics, responsibilities, audit, covid.*

INTRODUCTION

Risk management is a set of activities that lead to the fact that environmental factors produce uncertainty under control - purposeful actions to resolve and avoid the danger that carries it. They direct its development in a favorable direction, so that it does not get out of control and does not develop into a conflict. Conflict prevention is also a part of the risk management process. A risk manifests itself in the system and in such a way that it cannot be repeated. On the other hand, a risk leads to crises that cause various violations, as they affect the resources of the health organization, structure and development. Each risk and crisis, regardless of its nature, is characterized by time, with the possibility of deployment and management.

The main tasks include: the study of risk factors in the workplace (15), the relationship between working conditions and their impact on activities (11); the organization and preparation of the health care structure for the implementation of the processes taking place in it in a crisis; the definition of mechanisms by which the management can create an optimal working environment that provides stability and safe conditions for employees to achieve organizational goals; suggest ways to assist personnel in combating the adverse impact of working conditions in the organization (5,13).

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The environment is a place where labor relations, communication and people take place, perform various roles and functions, interact all the time

(1). Some authors consider it a complex system of various tasks and actions, the implementation of which is sometimes affected by contradictory orders from the governing body (2, 9).

According To The Data. Shane (16) everything depends not on the risk factors themselves, but on the reaction to them, which, in turn, depends not only on the character, but also on the personality, upbringing and attitude to restrictions, on the new organization and rules that are established to regulate the processes of uncertainty.

Risk management in hospital obstetric structures requires not only guidance (1, 2, 4), but also training to improve the provision of obstetric services in various areas (3, 14). Stress, workload and high responsibilities are a factor that prevents the full performance of work duties (17,12) and requires mechanisms to overcome and reduce that influence. The activities in obstetric structures are regulated by the Ministry of Health and the national framework contract for activities, with a certain responsibility for implementation (7, 8, 9).

The working conditions combined with communication interactions in the health sector are considered the cause for a number of stressful situations (6). Reducing stress and risky situations is the main task of management in terms of

creating a safe and healthy working environment, because in a crisis, the mental load is extremely high, and employees feel unsafe, scared (1, 15).

Exposition: over the past year and a half, the Covid-19 pandemic caused a number of unpleasant incidents that have attracted the attention of specialists and the scientific community to the need of specific care for pregnant women, and newborn. Pregnancy particularly is a physiological condition in a woman. Sometimes it occurs with complications that threaten the normal development of the fetus and the health of the mother. A number of diseases affect the course of pregnancy and childbirth and are associated with risks for both the mother and the fetus, especially in a Covid epidemic situation.

The number of restrictions planned due to the announcement of the pandemic and the emergency epidemiological situation led to the termination of women's consultations and omissions in providing assistance to the pregnant women. Moreover, during the period of a full lock down, the care of a pregnant woman in the physiological and psychological aspect is transferred to the maternity departments of the medical institutions. An observation and a survey were conducted among 232 medical specialists from the obstetric and gynecological hospital in the city of Varna, consisting of 3 medical institutions.

The distribution of the respondents is shown in **Figure 1**.

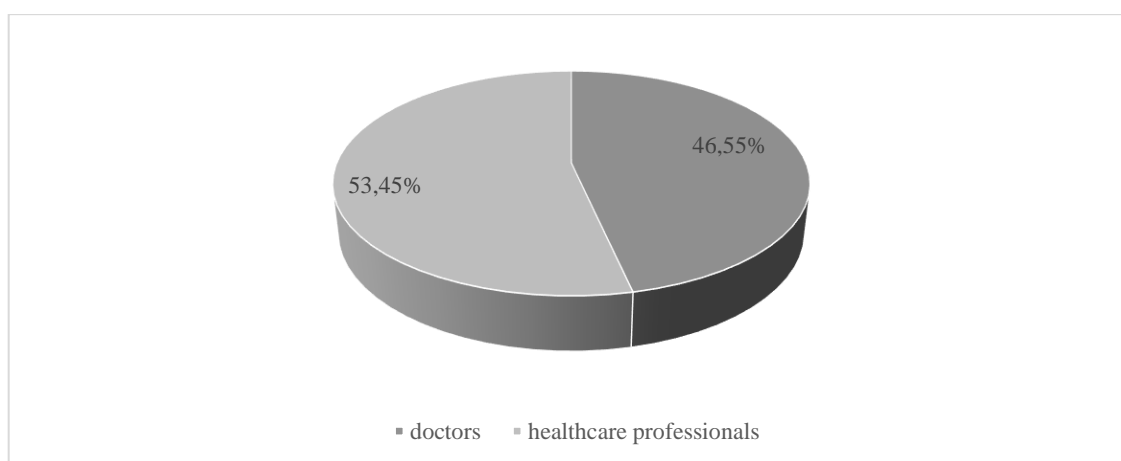


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents in the professional direction

More than half of the respondents found a high load in the working environment (**Figure 2**). In the free answers, most of them share the fact that the main difficulties are related with the specifics of the work and activities by sector, the development of new skills, the numerous

obligations and the large amount of information. The most intensive and busiest sectors are in the surgical block, maternity halls, intensive neonatology departments, intensive care units, and Covid structures.

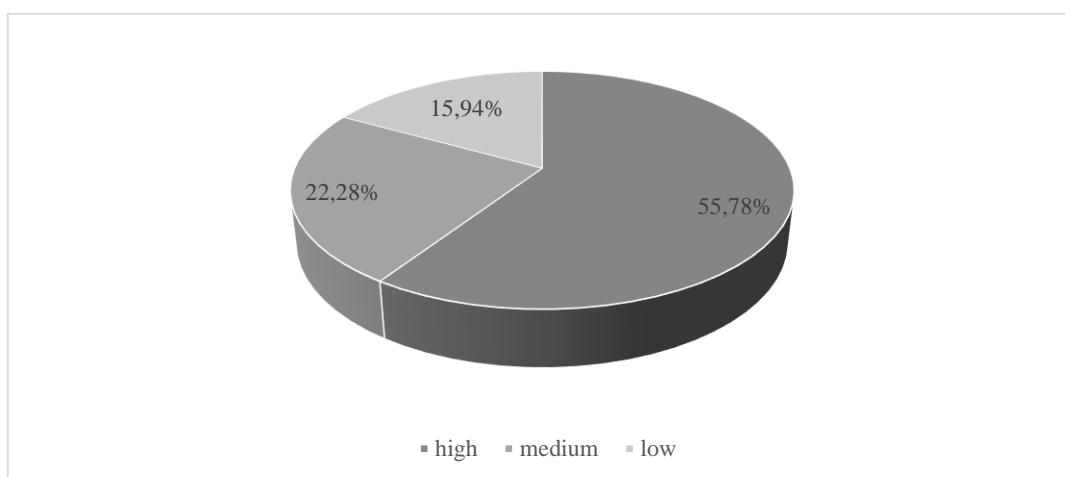


Figure 2. The degree of workload at the workplace.

The load is caused by the nature of the work, the urgency of completing tasks, sudden complications associated with pregnancy, childbirth or extragenital conditions (diseases of various organs and systems, Covid infection, etc.). The organization of Covid units in obstetric structures was done on the grounds of order of the Ministry of Health, through the Regional Health Inspections without the medical institutions themselves, which are on the first line at the direction of the Ministry of Health. This led to various risk situations related to: tension among the staff (92.67%); organization of processes (91.37%); lack of medical workers, due to illness, turnover or an unfavorable outcome (86.64%); lack of consumables and personal protective equipment (89.93%); lack of adequate remuneration (99.10%); lack of clear legal provisions (84.75%).

The dynamic changes in the regulatory framework are turning medical care into administration of activities, and less and less time is left for communicating with the patients and early detection and diagnosis of the risk factors related to the working environment and medical care. For a long time, the lack of standards for certain medical specialties increased the uncertainty in the implementation of relevant activities, referring exclusively to the provisions of the framework agreement and clinical protocols. In their work, doctors and healthcare professionals work with incomplete information from the patient, which contributes to the rapid application of therapeutic and diagnostic measures.

Prompted by the need for self-improvement, 159 (68.53%) respondents shared that they need training in their work (**Figure 3**).

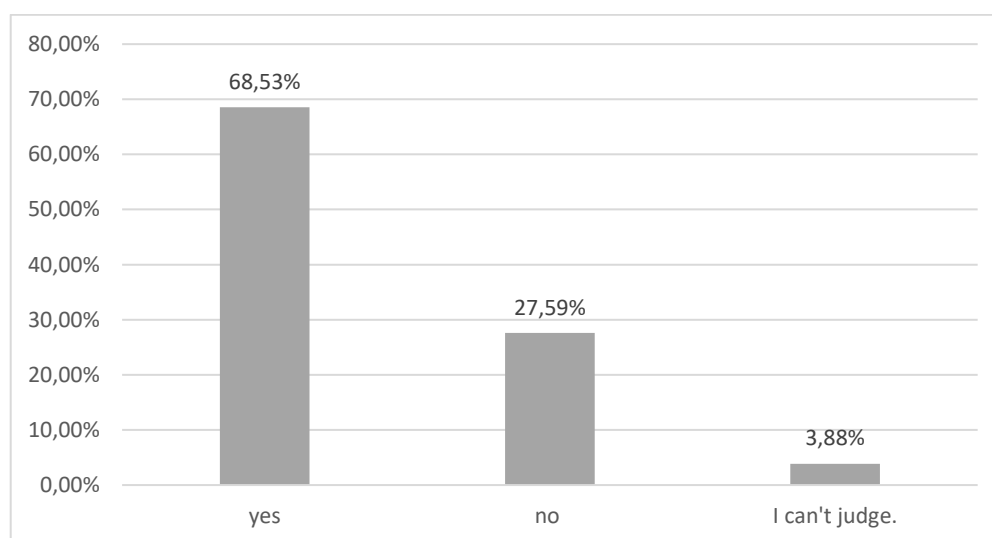


Figure 3. The need for additional training.

Training as a means of professional development may be a regulatory requirement or an emerging need. It is directed according to the needs of the structure and ensures the activity. This is due to the quality of knowledge and skills: qualifications, a certain need for training, the introduction of introductory training at the workplace (the specifics of medical work), ongoing training.

The main focus in the field of management in relation to employee training is aimed at:

- training in guidelines and behavior to overcome and eliminate uncertainty in the conditions of Covid-38.15% (clear regulatory action regarding the safety of the working environment and personnel when working with such patients);
- for special practical colleges and trainings to prevent the spread of Covid at 32.94%;
- training for working with the hospital information system at 18.5%;
- on-the-job trainings related to medical care by 10.41%.

On-the-job training is a continuous management function that protects human resources, ensures safe working conditions and contributes to a favorable working environment. Training is necessary both for updating the qualification level and for inclusion in the professional class.

Risk management is associated with the study of employee satisfaction and the identification of motivating and demotivating factors. Frequent demotivating factors are role ambiguity in relation to working with patients with Covid and role conflicts in everyday professional activities in 186 (80, 17%) doctors and midwives working in obstetric structures. The interviewed medical specialists express the opinion that the constantly changing and unclear regulatory decrees make it difficult to carry out the daily activities for treatment and diagnostic process. The lack of adequate measures to combat the Covid crisis, the lack of protection for hospital obstetric care contractors, the ambiguity regarding the treatment and diagnostic algorithm for the Covid infection are risk factors, both from the point of view of the workflow, and are a factor in the occurrence of undesirable incidents and escalation of crisis situations.

On a national level, the obstetric care contractors, despite the fact that they carry out activities on the first line, remained out of the scope for additional financing of the European projects in relation to work in an emergency epidemiological situation. The specialized hospital structures carry out activities under a national framework contract, without being able to receive additional payment for working with Covid patients, i.e. as a medical institution, it cannot conclude a contract on the clinical path (CP) №38, CP №49 and CP №104, because the subject of activity is the provision of specialized obstetric and gynecological care to pregnant women, maternity patients and women with reproductive and gynecological problems. The last year and a half have shown that ambiguity and lack of clear behavior regarding pregnancy, childbirth, gynecological problems with concomitant Covid disease, with or without symptoms, have serious consequences for hospital specialized obstetric and gynecological structures.

The evaluation criteria are determined by the current National framework contract (NFC), which determines the criteria and internal regulatory regulation, according to which the treatment and diagnostic process is carried out as well as the subsequent control by the National Health Insurance (NHI), respectively, the district medical insurance (DMI), the regional health Inspectorate (RHI), the Ministry of Health (MH), etc.

In order to reduce uncertainty regarding the administration and documentation of the medical activities, especially in an epidemiological situation, the majority of medical specialists (213-91, 81%) declare the need for an official to carry out timely follow-up control over medical documentation and clearly understand the need for training, and daily training in this.

Role ambiguity is the cause of various undesirable phenomena-the threat of Covid, the lack of an algorithm for behavior and treatment due to the ambiguity of the course of the disease, stress, conflicts, demotivation, etc. The most common conflicts arise due to insufficient discussion of assigned tasks according to 219 (94.39%) respondents, and placement of urgent and unscheduled tasks at 198 (85.34%), competing with other routine tasks or being implemented in conditions of epidemiological danger and time shortage.

The study of the satisfaction of the hospital employees with respect to various factors serves as a guide for hospital structures as a starting point for identifying all elements relevant to reducing uncertainty, risk and taking timely corrective measures with respect to resources, structure and communication channels.

The epidemiological situation and the risks associated with it in relation to obstetric and

gynecological care of the hospital require flexible solutions of structures related to the organization of the working process, providing material resources to support the activities of the departments. As strong motivating factors, the respondents primarily point to a good manager, followed by personal job satisfaction and the possibility of career development and on-the-job training (**Figure 4**).

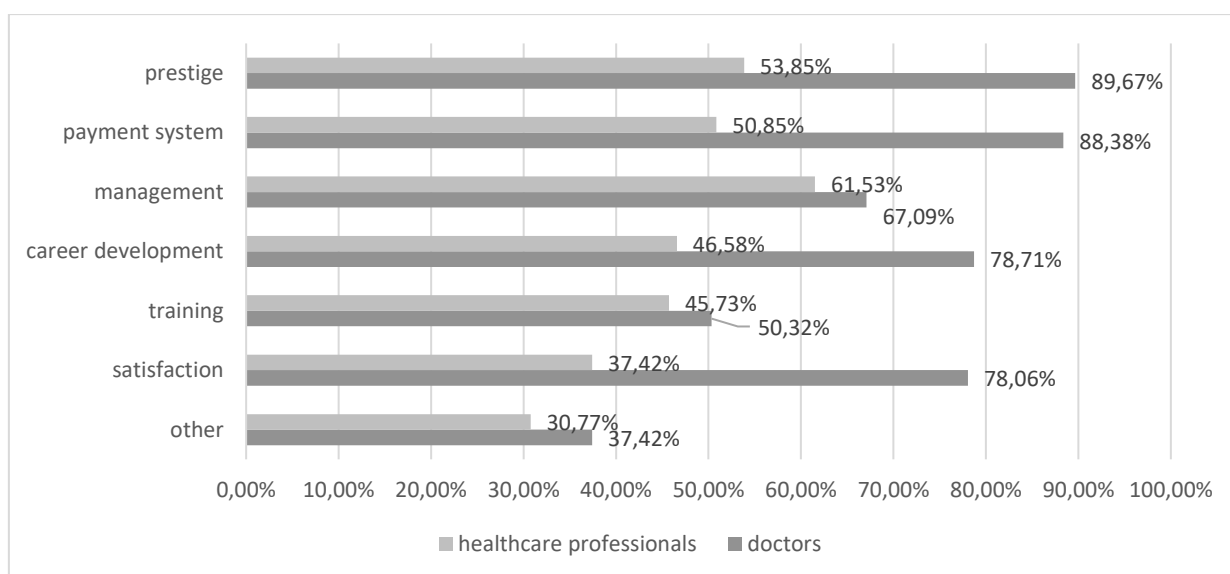


Figure 4. Ranking of motivating factors for work in accordance with hospital specialists (The sum of the percentages is more than 100%, because the respondents gave more than one answer.)

The guarantee of the quality of training of young specialists is the application of the acquired knowledge (theoretical and practical skills) in the course of work under the guidance of a mentor, together with a team from the department. The hospital staff should not only successfully perform their work, but also be ready to acquire new knowledge and skills that will allow healing structures to develop: to search for and create new solutions, to be flexible, to be able to benefit from difficult situations.

A strategic element of the risk management is to conduct a continuous internal and subsequent external audit of the entire obstetric and gynecological organization.

The purpose of the audit is to optimize processes, increase efficiency and develop the quality of the products or services offered, as well as to minimize risks by predicting them and timely recalling them. The audit focuses on 5 key areas (structure, people, processes, documentation, internal and external

communications and communications) in all departments of the structure and determines the key performance factors:

- View the current structure;
 - Overview of management and administrative practices – levels of subordination and reporting, internal communication, internal control tools;
 - View the activity structure (the relationship between the processes in the hospital departments and among them);
 - Audit of the existing methods of human resources management;
 - Assessment of managers and key employees-assessment of managerial skills, personal characteristics, potential development;
 - Audit of internal communication and communication among the departments and people and employee performance assessment.
- The audit process provides the management with a detailed report reflecting the current situation in the company, strengths and weaknesses, recommendations and an action plan. on-the-job training (**Figure 5**).

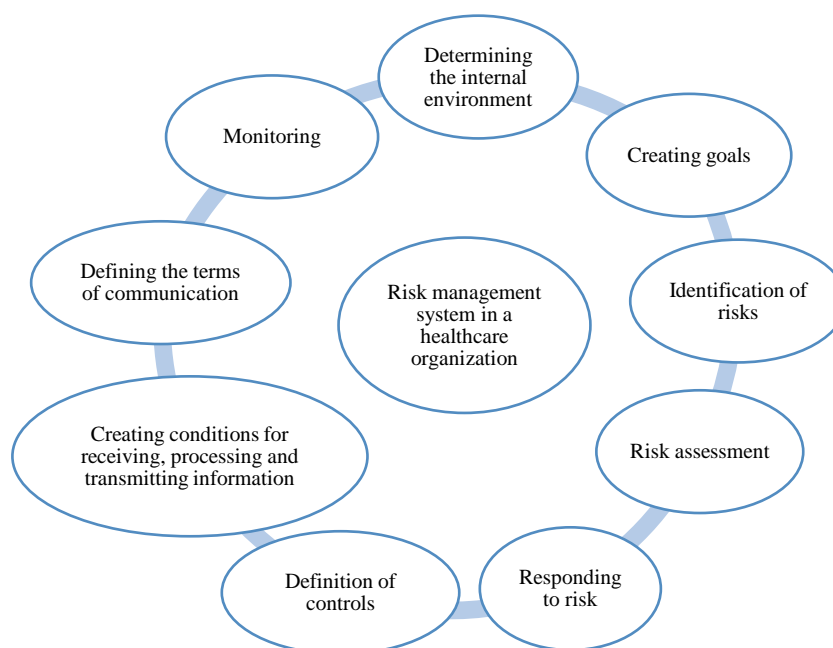


Figure 5. The organization's risk management process

Table 1. Risk categories in the obstetric practice

| Risk categories | Risk elements |
|--|--|
| Structurerelated risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - functional conditionality - planned activity rules - clear hierarchical levels - built communication channels - certain positions - internal-regulatory action (rules, protocols of behavior, orders, algorithms) |
| Resource-related risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - availability of material resources - provision of financial resources - provision of qualified personnel |
| Risk related controls | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - established mission, vision, development strategy - developed investment policy - participation in programs and partnerships - development of the product leaves |
| The risk associated with medical care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - dissatisfaction of patients; - low quality of care; - insufficient / no care; |
| Patient-related risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - patient safety system -the rules of informed consent for therapeutic and diagnostic behavior have been developed |
| The risk associated with information asymmetry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - on the patient's side - on the side of the medical professionals |
| Quality-related risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - determination of quality in the obstetric structure; - care aimed at the needs of patients; |
| PR risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - image management policy; - market expansion policy; |

There were no developed guidelines and methodology to assist the development of a risk management system in both the health organization and in the obstetric practice to help the management in determining the management policy of the structures. On a daily basis, they are confronted with internal and external factors and influences that create uncertainty-whether it is when and to what extent they will be able to achieve their goals, namely, high-quality, timely and affordable medical and obstetric care. The effect that this uncertainty has on the goals is a risk.

Each obstetric structure should determine its own risk categories (**Table 1**).

CONCLUSION

the management of obstetric structures and the risks associated with them is carried out by managing environmental factors that lead to uncertainty and managing human resources through their competencies, knowledge and skills, and the environment and processes require constant development, regardless of the workload and nature of work. In this process, the key factor is continuous on-the-job training (about new technologies, new methods of treatment and diagnosis, changes in regulations, divination and standards of behavior and good medical practice) for the quality performance of medical services.

The environmental factors and the organization itself help to develop and adapt an employee to work and work. It is necessary to manage the adaptation of the human factor when working in stationary conditions through the use of motivating behavior mechanisms and modern management methods. Employees perform certain actions in accordance with their leading motives of internal and/or external forces in relation to them.

This review brought the policy of prevention of labor organization, healthy and safe working conditions and staff care to the leading positions. In Bulgaria, health care workers are under the influence of stressful working conditions, and their motivation is constantly decreasing or relatively low due to diverse factors that negatively affect the psyche and physical fitness. There is an urgent need of a stable regulatory act,

of the introduction of flexible effective measures to solve problems related to the personal protection at the workplace of personnel. The creation of an effective environment in the conditions of Covid risk and epidemiological situation, along with improving the working conditions, requires due attention from the management, adequate support from the administration, professional relations and organizational climate, good communication.

The human resources management policy should be aimed at caring for

The employees, creating a stable working environment, flexible processes and activities, secure hierarchical relationships, secure communication channels and interaction with employees.

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