The School of Public Health Management, Chisinau
- Progress Factor in Development of the Health System in Moldova

Interview with Oleg LOZAN,
Director of The School of Public Health Management, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova

Personal information:
Date of birth: 10th of Aprilie, 1970;
Place of birth: Bălți, Republic of Moldova

Professional experience:
• 2003-present – The School of Public Health Management, USMF "Nicolae Testemițănu", Director;
• 2008-2009 – The Government of The Republic of Moldova, Vice-minister of Health, Medical Director;
• 2002-present – USMF “Nicolae Testemițănu”, Lecturer;
• 2001-2007: The Departament of Public Health and Management, USMF “Nicolae Testemițănu”, Senior Lecturer;
• 1997-2001 - The Departament of Public Health and Management, USMF “Nicolae Testemițănu”, Assistant Lecturer.

Education and training:
• 2007-2012: postdoctoral studies; Habilitated Doctor in Medicine; The University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Nicolae Testemițănu", The Republic of Moldova;
• 1994-1998: PhD., Doctor in Medicine, The University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Nicolae Testemițănu", The Republic of Moldova;
• 2005-2007: Master in Management and Public Health; The University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Nicolae Testemițănu", The Republic of Moldova;
• 1988-1994: University Education, Medical Doctor; The University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Nicolae Testemițănu", The Republic of Moldova;

Scientific activities:
Scientific papers: Over 60 publications: 4 monographs, 42 articles, 3 methodic assignments, 2 books, 11 scientific communication manuals.

Awards, distinctions/classes, degrees:
March 2001 – The Award of the Academy of Science Presidium of The Republic of Moldova, for the series of papers: “Medico-social and demographical aspects of human health in the Republic of Moldova”.

Member of scientific associations:
• 2000-present – Executive Director of The Republican Association “Public Health and Management in Republic of Moldova”;
• 2005-present – President of The National Association “Telemedicine in The Republic of Moldova”;
• 2007-present – ASPHER Member - The Association of Schools Of Public Health in the European Region;
• 2008-present – ISFTEH Member - The International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth.

Activities within the editorial board of scientific journals:
• Scientific editor of 12 books published by the School of Public Health Management, The University "Nicolae Testemițănu”;
• Member of the editorial board of the journal "Public Health, Management and Health Economies”.

OL: The health system in Moldova consists of elements and different levels of assigning coordinate health services at the policy level developing by the Ministry of Health.

Thus, the emergency medical service consists of The National Center for Emergency Healthcare, 5 Emergency Healthcare Stations Areas with 43 substations of Emergency Healthcare in districts and municipalities and 87 Emergency Healthcare points in rural areas, which ensure universal access of population to urgent medical care in pre-hospital stage. Within the Emergency Healthcare Service, 250 emergency medical teams operates in non-stop system.

A particular importance in providing public health services is assigned to the primary health care, determined by the role that this service has in the interface between health services to communities and families, and also inter sectorial and inter-professional cooperation and health promotion. Currently, in Moldova operates 262 general practitioners centers, 500 general practitioners offices and about 300 health centers.

Public hospital system in Republic of Moldova comprises 84 medical institutions, of which 73 public institutions: district hospitals, municipal hospitals, public health institutions of republican level hospital. The hospital care is also provided in 11 private hospitals. The assurance level of the population consists of 56.1 hospital beds per 10000 inhabitants. In Republic of Moldova, from the quantitative point of view, the number of medical staff is under the EU average, a situation complemented by the irregular territorial distribution and a disbalance between sectors, manifested through an unequal relationship between primary and secondary care, migration of the health professionals, low motivation, etc. The health system financing is mainly made by mandatory health insurance sources. The compulsory health insurance, applied in Republic of Moldova acts under mixed financing sources, which consist of: insurance premiums paid by the employers and employees, sources from the state budget for the categories of persons insured by the Government, insurance premiums paid to the unemployed persons and other sources consisting of income from fines, interest on bank deposit etc.

Reporter: Mr. Director, you are in this institution, which you moreover conduct, for 10 years. You have had contact with many specialists and experts in the field of public health and related fields and you have also owned and had managerial and scientific positions in key organizations in the health system in Republic of Moldova so, we can consider you one of the most capable person in presenting us some of the achievements and challenges of the health system in Moldova.

- For the beginning, please tell us which are the defining elements of the health system in Moldova?

- Which were the steps taken so far, and what are the perspectives for the reform of the health system in Republic of Moldova?
OL: Speaking about the stages of the reform in the health sector, we can mention three distinct periods.

The first stage begins to realize at the middle of ‘90s and generally speaking, it is characterized by developing the primary care with the family/general medicine implementation, the optimization of the hospital sector to streamline the number of beds and rationalize the number of health workers.

An important element of this period was the development of a minimum package of health services guaranteed by the state. In 1999, it has been reviewed some planning and funding mechanisms as in 2001 to introduce new financing mechanisms. All these components of the reform have served as a basis for the further planning of a more realistic process and more familiar to the population’s needs. Later, it has been enhanced the cooperation mechanism between the primary and secondary levels of care, it have been developed elements of motivation for preventive and health promotion activities and the managerial staff have been trained in the system.

The next important stage in the process of the health reform was launched at the same time with the implementation of the mandatory health insurance in 2004. Along with the compulsory insurance, it have been applied the foundation of a market economy in the field of health by changing the financing mechanism and contracting of service providers.

A particular element of that stage is the education reform by developing a comprehensive training of health managers. In 2003, it was created the School of Public Health Management within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Nicolae Testemițanu".

At that time, under the Ministry of Health and with the support of international organizations, it have been developed The National Health Policy (2007) for the next 15 years, and Strategy for Health System Development (2008) for the next 10 years.

The third stage is the one which we actually go through and it consists in a difficult pass from a quantitative reform promoted over the last 15-18 years to a qualitative reform. The current stage is a specific one also through the mark of a considerable economic crisis. In such conditions, the World Bank and the World Health Organization recommend the guidance of the resources to the most cost-effective services and reducing the excessive infrastructure.

Thus, the portfolio of the planned reforms for the next phase is aimed to attract additional investment and effective targeting of the financial resources available by supporting the vulnerable groups and the primary national programs, reducing the costs for expensive equipment, infrastructure and administrative costs.

R: The health problems, at European and global level, do not recognize borders between countries, and probably from this point of view, the public health problems in your country do not differ greatly from the global or the European ones. Maybe, what differentiates is the level of the problem and the health system capacity to solve these problems.

- Please refer further to the challenges to which the Republic of Moldova health system is facing.

OL: If we totalize, we can relate the main elements that define the situation in the field of public health in demographic, morbidity and the main risk factors.

Thus, the Republic of Moldova records increased values of the general mortality, ranking among the countries with the highest mortality in the European Region.

There are geographical differences, environment and gender in death rates. The most common deaths are caused by the diseases of the circulatory system. On the second level are placed the tumors, and in the third – digestive diseases.

During the last eight years, the rate of the infant mortality has a decreased direction, reaching the rate of 10.9 per 1000 live births. This rate is lower compared to CSI countries, but higher than the 27 member states of the EU.

The maternal mortality rate also tends to decrease, the difference between the maternal mortality rates in rural and urban areas is almost 2 times; it can be partly explained by providing medical services, their quality and the unequal distribution of resources.

The proportion of the infectious and parasitic diseases in the general population morbidity structure is about 15%.

Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS is among the priority public health issues in Moldova.

For Republic of Moldova, in men, the main risk factors are: alcohol abuse, smoking and hypertension. In women, three primary risk factors are hypertension, high cholesterol and excessive alcohol consumption. As we can see, a serious public health problem is the alcohol abuse in adults.

And according to the WHO data for the last years, Moldova ranks first in Europe in this chapter, which requires immediate and complex actions of public health.

It is important to relate another major public health problem - smoking in adults. The study results show significant differences in smoking prevalence between men and women: 51% of men and 7% of women have reported smoking. Smoking is more frequently among men in rural areas than in the urban areas. As regard the women, the situation is reversed.

Overweight and obesity, as well as associated diseases represent a major public health problem. In Republic of Moldova, about 50% of adults are overweight or obese. The proportion of obese people is higher in urban areas compared to rural areas and it is higher among women than men.

Certainly, this spectrum of problems presents only a brief summary and if we add here problems of the health sector related to the fragmentation of the health system, the problem of duplication of services, gaps in continuity of service providing, failure in integration and coordination of the health services at a local level, and so on, we will make a huge range of problems, but also it is providing a land for reform activities.

- Which are the priorities (the public health strategy) and how is the system prepared to face the challenges?

OL: Right now, it is the last minute for drafting the new national public health strategy for 2013-2020 which comes to support the achieving of the Governmental Program of Republic of Moldova "European Integration: Freedom, Democracy, Welfare. 2011-2014", 

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The present Strategy describes the current situation in the field, defines goals and targets, actions and necessary measures, establishing clear responsibilities and deadlines for all partners involved in activities related to public health.

On the level of the health system, the reform health departments are prepared in accordance to an implementation plan which describes the long-term perspective for the local decision-makers, but also for the international donors.

The core of the priorities is the field consists of catalyzing the health reforms to ensure a high level of population health until 2017, as well as a high degree of satisfaction of the population to medical services; every citizen of the Republic of Moldova will have to be protected from financial risks in the context of access to health services; inequity in health care use and distribution will be eliminated; in the meantime, the sustainability of all results will be ensured for a long time.

A significant role in the development of the health care is assigned to the primary health care. Mentionable that the increasing autonomy of rural primary health care institutions is on the agenda of the Ministry of Health priority activities. The emphasis on decentralization and rationalization of primary health care structure - relocation to smaller offices, relocation closer to the population from the oversize and overcrowded offices, healthcare reform and the establishment of consultative mechanisms for providing health services in full.

The modernization of the health sector is also part of the main priorities and accelerating the reforms in this sector are considered of vital importance. Hospital care planning is addressed through modern regionalization strategies and effective management of future investment in the hospital sector. The approval and reasoned implementation of regionalization hospital service will lead to optimization of hospital care by allocating resources to each hospital argued for their modernization and ensuring public access to specialized, safety, cost-effective and of high quality health care.

The rationalization of public spending on hospitals will be achieved by regionalizing the hospital care and creating regional hospitals, reshaping already existing beds to ensure continuity of care, providing patient treatment both acute and long-term treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care. In this context, there will be established health zones, with the development of mechanisms of reference of patients in health care in the area of health care (primary care, emergency care, hospital care, public health service, etc.), the spectrum of the provided services and the institutions endowment with the necessary equipment, as well as patient reference mechanism to the next level of care.

Another area of the reform provides that efficient use of financial resources, including the development of contractual aspects and the guidance of incentives for efficiency and performance of the medical services. By developing the integrated networks of local health services, it will strengthen the capacity of local health authorities to effectively coordinate the local health services and to monitor and assess the performance of healthcare in the region.

The reform will be supported by a comprehensive strategy for developing human resources in health (including components of training, education, planning) and by a communication program. The communication program will clarify need and opportunity of the reforms and the way that the reshuffle will result in strengthening and improving the health systems, complemented with a series of public debates involving all stakeholders in health within these debates.

R: Health management acts an important role in achieving health system performance. For this reason, many schools of public health in Europe insist on management development as a modern science, of a great interest and need.

- Which is the policy of the Republic of Moldova in the field of training specialists in “health management” and what is the role of the institution you are leading in implementing this policy?

OL: The human factor is the biggest asset of any healthcare system, and the development of human resource performance is a goal pursued by all the countries with increasing economy or transition economies.

Currently, there are still many public health warning signals, coming from the population health status, quality and accessibility of health services, shortage of medical staff in the country, poor infrastructure and equipment, insufficient training of staff involved in health system management etc.

We are pass through a period of challenges and to achieve all the goals, it is necessary to mobilize all the human potential, including improving capabilities and skills in the field of public health management. However, the performance of a public institution and even a health system in its entirety is determined by the way in which human, material, and financial resources are appropriately used to achieve expected objectives of service recipients. For that, managers need specific skills and knowledge which can be provided only through additional training. Only having certain qualities and an adequate training, a specialist will be able to make an accurate and effective management, being sensitive and responsive to all the aspects of this complex field.

In Republic of Moldova, medium and long term policies in the field of human resources in the health system, including training specialists in the field of public health management or public health are reflected in the Program of Medical and Pharmaceutical education development in Republic of Moldova for 2011 - 2020, Government Action Plan for 2011-2014, the Implementation Plan "Accelerating reforms: addressing health needs through investment policy" strategic Development Programme of the Ministry of Health for the period 2012-2014, the Framework Program on Resource Development in human health system, 2012, The Program on training of managers in the health system etc. In the background of adoption by the Ministry of Health the Concept training of managers in the health system, in 2005, it was launched the Program of Management Masters of Public Health within the School of Public Health Management.

The Public Health Management School is an institution that operates beside the Medical University "Nicolae Testemițanu", being founded by the Ministry of Health in 2003, with the support of relevant international organizations in the field: WHO, UNICEF, World Bank, Soros Foundation Moldova etc.
The activity of The School of Public Health Management focuses on the triad - education, research and training, consultancy services, being an important academic and scientific institution in the field of public health in Moldova. The School of Public Health Management main directions of activity are:

- Training through postgraduate (Master's degree) and advanced medical education programs to increase the capacity and performance of health professionals involved in management and public health;
- Developing research to increase the level and quality of public health knowledge, based on scientific evidence, to propose cost-effective interventions;
- Providing advisory services and technical assistance in the field of public health, at the request of various national and international institutions and structures, in order to develop policies, strategies and existing programs and public service delivery in public health.

The institution promotes European and national public health and management values, implement standards, modern educational methods and technologies, thus ensuring the quality of training, managerial skills, training professionals, able to cope with the new demands of the health care system and manage institutions, and to manage public and private health care.

The School of Public Health Management participates in developing public health and health policy in Republic of Moldova, promotes research focused on the study of health, risk factors and cost-effective interventions.

- What type of courses does the School of Public Health Management from Chisinau offer and what kind of other activities is it developing, besides training?

OL: The master studies aim at deepening and broadening professional skills in various fields of public health, developing managerial skills necessary to effectively manage healthcare institutions. Master studies are organized in the form of training to distance learning day for a period of two years, including practical work and research. The training program includes an amount of about 30 subjects, divided into 4 sections (Research Methodology/Economics&Law/Management/Public Health).

The daily training involves conducting regular updated training modules (core and special subjects) in an intensively rate which ensures fulfilling curriculum and offers the possibility of combining education with work effort.

The distance learning provides a contemporary approach to education by providing advisory and teaching support, coordinating activities training, using for this purpose the opportunities offered by the available communication information technologies.

In the training process it is involved the teaching staff from the School of Public Health Management, Medical University "Nicholae Testemițanu" professors, public health specialists in the central specialized agencies (Ministry of Health, specialized scientific-practical centers), experts from abroad, representatives of international organizations (WHO, UNICEF and so on).

During the postgraduate studies, the masters do practical stages in international organizations, Ministry of Health, health care institutions within the country and abroad, etc., in order to develop practical skills and familiarity with specific activities in the field.

Since 2010, the postgraduates of the School of Public Health Management undergo through practical training in the field of hospital management in health care units in France.

Along with the Master Program, the School of Public Health Management organizes advanced training programs that are developed in accordance with the Republic of Moldova Health Policy, Health System Development Strategy and/or recommendations from international organizations in order to increase the resource of human skills system, ongoing training and development of new skills that meet health policies.

The implementation of continuous advanced training programs seeks to modernize, optimize and diversify the methods of learning and self-training in public health, by using modern educational technology adapted to the needs of beneficiaries and health system priorities.

Advanced training programs are aimed at aligning national training system and public health management to European and world standards. Also, a special attention within the School of Public Health Management is given to research, which take place within postgraduate, doctoral and postdoctoral studies. Since 2010, within the School of Public Health Management it was launched an advanced program for all doctoral research methodology medico-biological profile in the country. This program aims at training advanced doctoral students in the field and includes the following sections: "Epidemiology and Research methods", "Biostatistics", "The Ethics of Biomedical research," "Legal aspects of national and international research" and "Project Management in Research".

So far, within the research process, it have been developed and made about 200 studies devoted to various problems in the field of public health and management.

- Please list us some of the projects undertaken and coordinated by your institution, who have had a positive impact on the healthcare system in Moldova.

OL: During its work, the School of Public Health Management have conducted multiple projects in the field, most of them of teaching or research nature.

Among the most significant and positive impact on the health system, we will mention in chronological order: The Project "Health Services Management " - between 2003-2005, with the World Bank support, it have been conducted training for management personnel in the healthcare system in the management of health services. This project was the first major educational initiative of the School of Public Health Management. About 300 managers from different levels have been trained in the field.

The Project "Distance learning for general practitioners” – carried out in 2005 with the support of the European Union under the project "Health promotion and disease prevention". The School of Public Health Management in Republic of Moldova initially launched the first distance learning system based on WEB. This system, improved and adapted, is widely used to date and it is an organic part of the Masters in Public Health Management. This method based on distance WEB learning used for the first time in professional medical education system in Moldova has proved to be effective, convenient and with a considerable economic effect. It is important to mention that the distance learning method has been accepted without reservation by the participants.
The Project "Distance learning through videoconferencing", 2005. The course was dedicated to the medical management field. It was developed a comprehensive program consisting of current management issues for all the leading health professionals in Bălți.

The Project "Retraining in tuberculosis control", developed in 2006, within more than 500 health workers from the primary health care network in Moldova have participated in training seminars by videoconference method. The project was realized with the support of the American International Health Alliance (AIHA) within the "Project Strengthening Tuberculosis Control in Moldova", funded by the U.S. Government through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). This project aimed to implement modern educational technology in the health system, promoting distance learning method in the continuous professional medical training, diversification and improvement of existing methods of training.

The Project "Distance education on HIV/AIDS" began in 2010 and it is still running. It is a project funded by the Global Fund to Fight Tuberculosis, HIV and Malaria. The project is focused on promoting national and international standards and provides the use of contemporary teaching methods Web-based distance education on HIV/AIDS. A large number of general practitioners and specialists in public health have completed this educational material.

The Project "The Medical management of public health emergencies", in 2010, under the aegis of WHO, was conducted for the first time in Republic of Moldova, the training course "The Medical management of public health emergencies".

The project "Promoting Human Rights in the health system" carried out in 2010 – 2011 and funded by the Open Society Institute, Soros Foundation Moldova. Within the training program, it was implemented during training the course "Human Rights in Health System" and it was published the manual with the same title.

The Project "Support to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Moldova in building capacity for prevention and control of non communicable diseases" developed in 2012. It has been conducted the training course "The Medical management of public health emergencies".

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Summarizing, we can report that the potential achievements of projects is an increasing one and the positive impact is crucial in the successful launch of public health sector reforms in Moldova.

R: Not being yet an EU member, your country makes sustained efforts to align with standards and regulations. In terms of public health preparedness, we can say that, through the membership ASPHER, the institution that you coordinate hold and enjoy the same rights that a member country has.

- Which are the main benefits you get from such an association?

OL: In achieving its objectives, the School of Public Health Management collaborates with various national and international institutions in the field, in the process of organization and conducting research studies and master training programs in public health.

One of the most significant events of this kind was developed on 27 October 2007 in Valencia, Spain, when the School of Public Health Management of Moldova became a full member of the Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER), a very important matter for the institution that I represent.

ASPHER membership status gives to the Public Health School of Management the possibility to access to European values in the field. We have also the ambition to start the international accreditation procedure through ASPHER in the future. This means that the diplomas awarded by the School of Public Health Management will have external validity, therefore, it will increase the exchange of ideas, trainees and teachers, which will further strengthen the collaborative relationships and will raise the professional specialists by offering the possibility to be connected to current affairs and European performance in the field.

- What other partnerships and collaborations do you have, or do you expect to finish in the future?

OL: In addition to its core activities, The School of Public Health Management states also internationally.

During its short history, it were signed cooperation agreements with some of the most prestigious educational institutions in the European Region, with a lot of experience and high reputation in this area, such as the Schools of Public Health from: Romania, France, Israel, Lithuania, Switzerland, Germany, etc. These agreements aim to promote joint research, training, exchange of information and people (trainees, teachers, etc.), the joint cooperation projects in the field, participation in international events and involvement in joint programs of scientific research and surveys, offering new perspectives for future managers in the health system of the Republic of Moldova and the School of Public Health Management.

From the national point of view, the School of Public Health Management has signed partnerships with The Center for Health Policies and Studies, National Center of Public Health, The National Center for Health Management, The National Health Insurance Company, etc.

The signed agreements aimed at promoting mutual research, training, exchange of information necessary to achieve cooperation projects and the organization of congresses, conferences, seminars, summer schools and achieving the joint research or teaching.

Regarding the future plans, we foresee the cooperation in developing new relations with local and international partners and deepen and diversify the relations already established.

In this chapter, I will specifically note the huge potential agreement between The National School of Public Health and Health Services Management, Bucharest, Romania and The Management School of Public Health, Chisinau, Moldova. Our partnership needs to be fully exploited for the benefit of professionals, institutions, health systems, and after all, the final goal - public health, which is what we want so much. This potential is very important because it is present in the same culturally, linguistically, historically space and therefore, I am certain about the beautiful future of these relations.

Thank you for the dialogue, with respect, Oleg Lozan.

Interview conducted by: Marius Ciutan

Interview translated by Cristina Mototolea, MD, Public Health Specialist