

EFFECTIVENESS OF COMPANY WEBSITES AND FACEBOOK PAGES IN RETAINING PATIENTS OF DENTAL CLINICS

D. Shtereva-Tzouni¹, V. Mitreva², E. Naseva^{1,3}

¹Department of Health Management and Health Economics,
Faculty of Public Health "Prof. Tzecomir Vodenitcharov, MD, DSc", Medical University – Sofia, Bulgaria

²Clinic for Individual Practice for Primary Dental Care – REMEDIUM DENT – Sofia, Bulgaria

³Faculty of Medicine, Sofia University "Sveti Kliment Ohridski" – Sofia, Bulgaria

Abstract. Introduction and aim: Even though a dental practice is based on the clinical activity, it requires the application of smart marketing strategies and a strong online presence, which is well positioned in the marketplace. The aim of the study is to analyse the opinions of dentists regarding the effectiveness of promoting their dental practices through a website and a company Facebook page, and the positive implications of this for the prosperity of their practices, especially in times of financial crisis. **Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted between 23 February and 23 May 2023 via an online anonymous survey among 528 dentists who work in Bulgaria. **Results:** Over a third (39.2%) of dentists have a website and almost half (46.5%) have a company Facebook page, with this being more common in the capital as well as in group practices and medical/medical-dental centres. Doctors who devote resources to advertising their dental clinics are significantly more likely to have both a website and a company Facebook page. Having a company Facebook page helped to maintain and increase patient count through the inflationary year 2022, since 55.4% of participants experienced an increase in the patient count having such a page, as well as 65% maintained the patient count as a result of proactive actions on their parts ($p=0.001$). **Conclusions:** Dental clinic websites and company Facebook pages are a significant marketing tool and help maintain and increase patient count even in difficult economic times. Dentists practicing in smaller towns, as well as smaller dental clinics and individual dental care practices, will benefit most from the creation of company websites and Facebook pages.

Key words: dentists, effectiveness, dental digital marketing, website, Facebook page

Corresponding author: Doroteya Shtereva-Tzouni, Department of Health Management and Health Economics, Faculty of Public Health "Prof. Tzecomir Vodenitcharov, MD, DSc", Medical University – Sofia, Bulgaria, email: d.shtereva@fz.mu-sofia.bg

ORCID: 0000-0003-1695-5613

Received: 25 March 2025; **Accepted:** 10 May 2025

INTRODUCTION

Managing dental practice successfully is a serious challenge for dental specialists [1]. It requires the application of knowledge and skills that are not provided in conventional university education [2]. The medical profession is characterized by 'lifelong learning', but mere medical knowledge is insufficient [3]. Therefore, as far as the management of dental clinics is concerned, it is often the case that activities that are considered secondary to patient care are postponed in time or are not even implemented. These include, for instance, the maintenance of a website and company pages on social media. On the other hand, the importance of web presence has been increasing in recent years. Even though a dental medical practice is based on clinical operations, smart marketing strategies and a strong online presence are crucial to position it well in the market [4]. In an environment of competition and limited funding, it is essential to improve the ways to attract new patients and retain current ones. This is particularly relevant in times of financial crisis. Setting up and maintaining a Facebook page and a company website for the dental clinic is one possible way to achieve this goal [5-6].

The aim of this study is to analyze dental professionals' opinions on the effectiveness of presenting their dental practices through a website and Facebook page, and the positive implications this may have for the success of their practices, particularly in times of financial crisis.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We conducted an online anonymous survey among dentists between February 23 and May 23, 2023. The survey was completed by 528 dentists with a median age of 43 years (34-53 years). The majority of them are women (68.6%), while men account for 31.4%. Their detailed characteristics, sampling, and selection method are described elsewhere [7].

Statistical methods

Quantitative variables are presented as median and interquartile range, while categorical variables are presented as individual categories' absolute and/or relative frequencies. Associations between categorical variables are tested using chi-square analysis, while the differences between the means of two groups are tested using a Mann-Whitney test. Results at $p < 0.05$ are considered significant. The analysis was performed using IBM SPSS v22.

RESULTS

Of all the survey participants, 39.2% reported having a website for the dental practice where they work, and 46.5% had a company Facebook page.

We established that dentists practicing in Sofia were much more likely to report having both a clinic website (50.3% compared to 32.8% in other locations) and a company Facebook page (55.7% compared to 41.5% in other locations), compared to other regions ($p < 0.001$ and 0.002 , respectively) (Fig. 1). Consistent with this result, those living in smaller towns are less likely than practitioners in the capital to have a website (19.8% compared to 43.1%, respectively) and a clinic Facebook page (25.9% compared to 50.8%, respectively) ($p < 0.001$ for both questions). Rural practitioners are less likely to report having a website (18.5% compared to 40.4%, respectively) ($p = 0.023$), and no association is demonstrated for a Facebook page due to the small number of participants who work in villages ($p > 0.05$). For practitioners in municipal cities, there is no significant difference compared to other locations ($p > 0.05$). The results are analyzed separately for the different types of locations (with or without a website and Facebook page, respectively), as doctors practice in more than one place.

We determined that those practicing in their own office and with their own equipment, but in a rented space, are less likely to report having a website (27.5% compared to 42.8% for the other types of workplace), ($p = 0.003$), and no difference was demonstrated for having a Facebook page ($p > 0.05$) (Fig. 2). Those working in a rented dental office were significantly less likely to have both a website (12.2% compared to 42.1%) and a Facebook page for their practice (26.5% compared to 48.8%), $p < 0.001$ and 0.003 , respectively. Those working in a dental office on commission are more likely to report having both a website (61.7% compared to 36.4%) and a clinic Facebook page (70% compared to 43.7%), $p < 0.001$ for both variables. The same accounts for those working on a salary (78.9% compared to 37.8% for website and 73.7% compared to 45.7% for Facebook page), $p < 0.001$ and 0.016 . There is no difference between having a website and Facebook page for those working in their private dental office ($p > 0.05$).

We performed age-specific analysis by job type (personal dental office, on salary, etc.) with the assumption that the dentist's age was associated with both the digital skills and social media and Internet activity. It was demonstrated that among the dentists working in a dental office on a salary, the dentists with a website were significantly older (median 33 years) compared to the dentists without a website (median 27 years), $p = 0.027$ (Fig. 3).

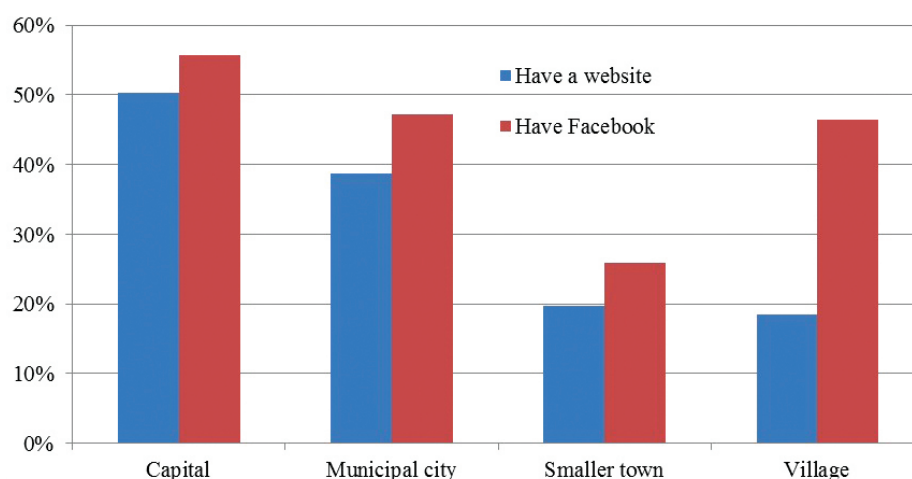


Fig. 1. Presence of a website and a Facebook page by dental practice location

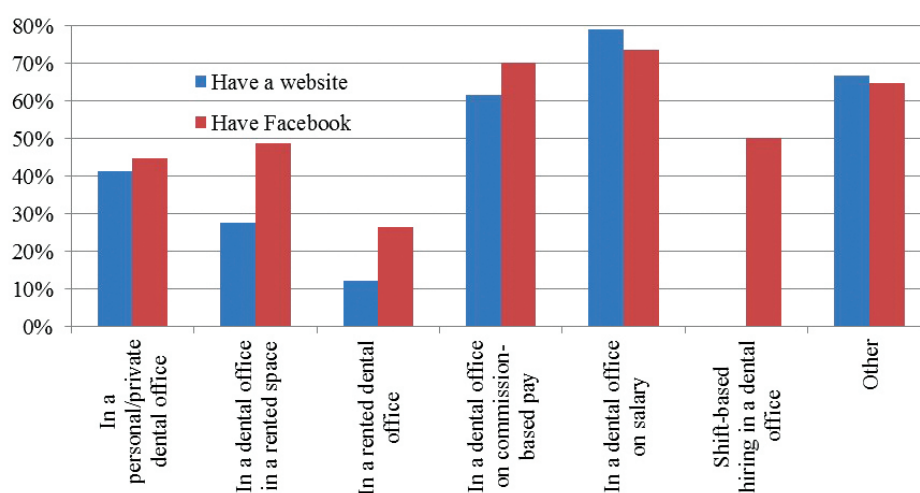


Fig. 2. Presence of website and Facebook page by workplace

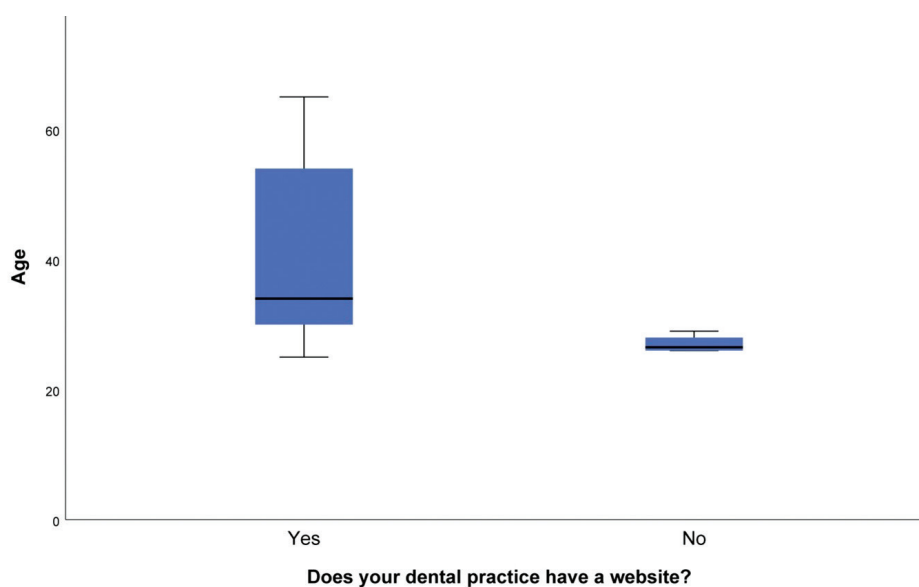


Fig. 3. Age distribution of dentists whose dental practices have a website among those who work in a dental office on a salary

As for the relationship between practice type and having a website and a Facebook page, the results signified that a website and a Facebook page were less common among the dentists working in individual practices (32.8% compared to 61.7% in other practice types for a website and 40% compared to 69.4% for a Facebook page), $p < 0.001$ for both variables. In contrast, a website and Facebook page were reported much more frequently in group practices ($p < 0.001$ and 0.004), medical-dental centers ($p = 0.001$ and 0.002 , respectively), and dental centres ($p < 0.001$ for both variables) (Fig. 4).

Dental physicians without a specialty were more likely to report having a clinic Facebook page (51.6% com-

pared to 34.4% for those with a specialty), $p < 0.001$. There was no such difference for website availability ($p > 0.05$) (Fig. 5).

One in three respondents (36.3%) allocates resources to advertising their dental practice. We established that dental physicians who do so are more likely to report having both a website (66% vs. 23.6%) and a Facebook page (72% compared to 31.9%), ($p < 0.001$ for both variables) (Fig. 6).

We asked dentists how inflation in 2022 affects the types of dental services provided by dental practices. One in ten (10.8%) reports that the effect is positive and the number of patients has increased,

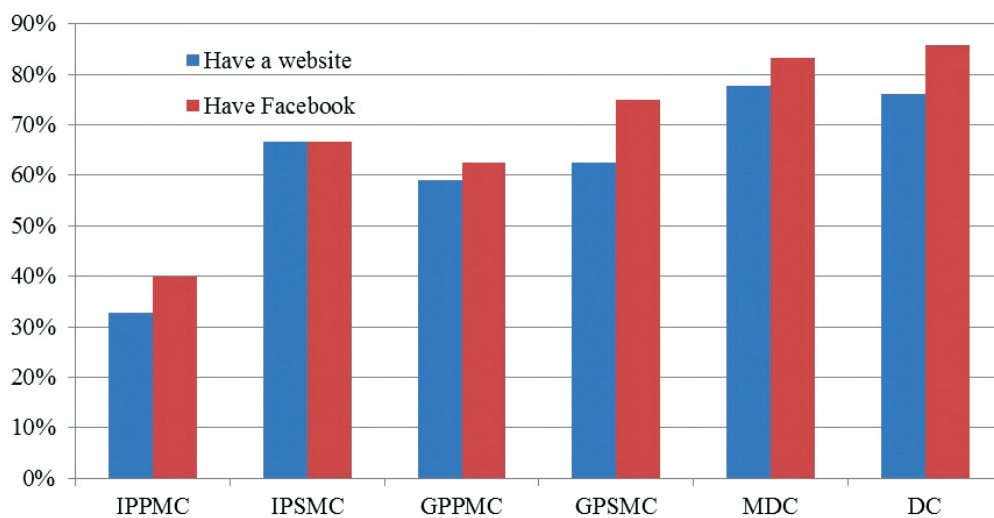


Fig. 4. Distribution of dental doctors according to the kind of dental practice they work in and whether they have a website and a Facebook page for the practice. Abbreviations: IPPMC = Individual practice for primary medical care; IPSMC = Individual practice for specialized medical care; GPPMC = Group practice for primary medical care; GPSMC = Group practice for specialized medical care; MDC = Medical-dental center; DC = Dental centre

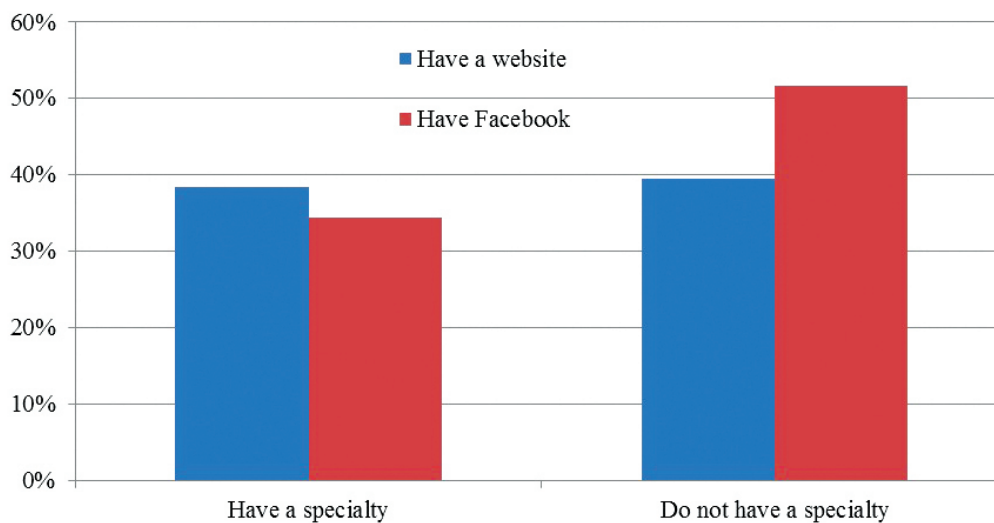


Fig. 5. Distribution of dental doctors according to whether they have a specialty and whether they have a website and Facebook page for the clinic

for 24.1% the number of patients has decreased, for about a half (49.4%) there has been no change, and for the remaining 15.6% the number of patients has remained as a result of active measures. We discovered that two groups of physicians – those for whom

the number of patients had increased, and those who had taken proactive actions and thus maintained the number of patients – are much more likely to report having a Facebook page (55.4% and 65% compared to others), ($p=0.001$), (Fig. 7).

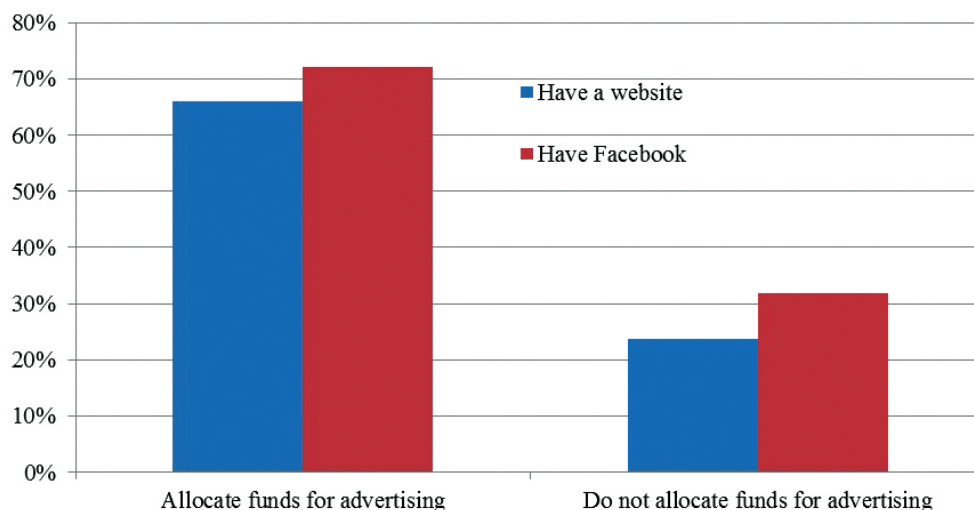


Fig. 6. Distribution of dental physicians according to whether they allocate funds to advertising the clinic and whether they have a website and Facebook page for the clinic

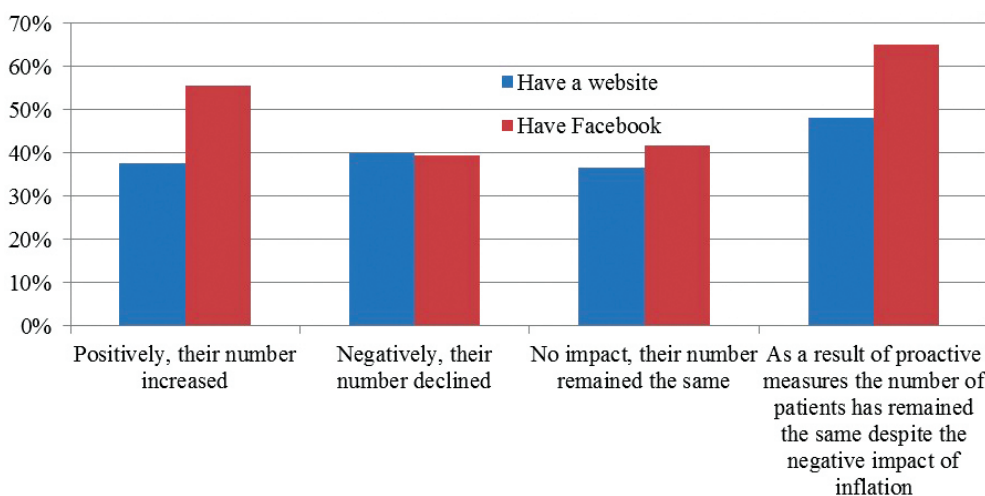


Fig. 7. Distribution of dental physicians by how the 2022 inflation has affected the number of patients visiting their dental practice and whether they have a website and a Facebook page for the clinic

DISCUSSION

Our results show that over a third of interviewed dentists have a website, and almost half of them have a company Facebook page. Physicians working in the capital are more likely to have both a website and a Facebook page. Those working in a dental office on commission-based pay or on a salary were more likely to report having both a

website and a clinic Facebook page, while those practicing in their own office, with their own equipment in a rented space, and those renting a dental office were significantly less likely to have either a website or a clinic Facebook page. The presence of a website and Facebook is less common among those working in individual practices and much more common in group practices, medical-dental centers, and dental centers. Physicians without a

specialty are more likely to have a Facebook page for their clinic. Physicians who allocate resources to advertising their clinic more often have both a website and a Facebook page. Physicians who maintained or even increased the number of their patients in 2022 were more likely to report having a Facebook page.

Along with the purely professional challenges that dentists face [8], they are also confronted with marketing challenges: retaining current patients and attracting new ones. This is particularly important in times of financial crisis. Despite the evidence of deteriorating dental health of patients [9] and the more difficult access to specialized care [10], the retention of current patients and attracting new ones is proving to be a significant challenge [4]. Social media plays a key role in solving this problem [1, 5, 6].

Having a company Facebook page is less common in Bulgaria compared to other countries. Acosta et al. report that 67.5% of the dentists they surveyed use Facebook, with 56.6% using social media for marketing and advertising [1]. The use of social media in our country is a potential marketing opportunity that has been underutilized to date. Other social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Tik-Tok, Viber, etc., also have potential that should not be ignored. The shift in dentists' training and the introduction of disciplines such as marketing and management will enable them to better manage their dental clinics using contemporary tools [2, 11, 12].

The greater prevalence of internet marketing tools in the capital that we found was to be expected. However, this provides opportunities for the development of dental clinics in smaller towns. Investing in a company website and a Facebook page will give them an advantage over other dentists and provide them with greater opportunities to attract new patients and retain current ones, due to the lower prevalence of these marketing tools in those areas. Similarly, small dental clinics and individual dental care practices would benefit more from establishing a company website and Facebook page.

It is likely that the presence of a clinic Facebook page among our survey participants contributed to the higher proportion responding that inflation has not affected patient count as a result of their proactive actions, as well as to the higher proportion of increased patient numbers. This clearly shows the effectiveness of these marketing tools even in times of economic crisis [5].

Strengths and limitations of the study

One limitation of our study is that it is based on self-reported outcomes. However, the collection of such information is not possible otherwise. In addition, the sample of our study is large enough for valid inferences. The strength of the study is that we sought information "from the source" and asked dentists themselves what marketing strategies they are using and how they are dealing with the inflationary year 2022.

CONCLUSION

Having a company website and Facebook page for dental clinics has helped physicians maintain and even increase their patient count through the inflationary year of 2022. This indicates that the dental clinic's website and having a company Facebook page are effective marketing tools for retaining current patients and attracting new ones. Dentists practicing in smaller towns, as well as smaller dental clinics and individual dental care practices, will benefit most from creating company websites and Facebook pages.

Conflict of Interest Statement: *The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this work.*

Funding: *The authors did not receive any financial support from any organization for this research work.*

Ethical statement: *This study has been performed in accordance with the ethical standards as laid down in the Declaration of Helsinki.*

REFERENCES

1. Acosta JM, Detsomboonrat P, Pisarnurakit PP, Urwanachotima N. The Use of Social Media on Enhancing Dental Care and Practice Among Dental Professionals: Cross-Sectional Survey Study. *JMIR Form Res.* 2025, 9:e66121.
2. Kirkov V, Vodenicharova A, Ivanova K, Markova K. Trends and motives in the post-graduate professional orientation of the young doctors of the 2023 class of Medical University – Sofia. *Pharmacia*, 2024, 71: 1-5.
3. Dzhafer N. The opportunity for specialization and professional development as motivation among medical staff. *Knowledge Int J*, 2024, 62, (6): 556-560.
4. Jasim ES, Alnuaimy NSM, Abid M, Dziedzic A. Orthodontic practice marketing: The orthodontist and laypeople's perspective. *J Orthod Sci.* 2024;25:13:47.
5. Ghandhi D, Bodani N, Lal A et al. Evaluation of Social Media Usage by Dental Practitioners of Pakistan for Professional Purposes – A Cross-Sectional Study. *Clin Cosmet Investig Dent.* 2022, 14:245-252.
6. Van Capelleveen MC, Slot DE. Professional use of social media platforms by independent dental hygienists in the Nether-

- lands: A quantitative study. *Int J Dent Hyg.* 2024, 22(1):120-129.
7. Shtereva-Tzouni D, Mitreva V, Naseva E. Professional and financial satisfaction among dentists. *Acta Medica Bulgarica*, 2024, 51(Suppl 2):55-61.
 8. Lyapina M, Dencheva M, Krasteva A, et al. Contact sensitization to metals in dental exposures in Bulgaria. *Biotechnology & Biotechnological Equipment*, 2018, 32(3):707–713.
 9. Nenov SM, Kirkov VK, Bonev BK. Dental Status of the Bulgarian Population: The Influence of Barriers to Accessing Dental Care. *Cureus*, 2024, 16(11):e74833.
 10. Zlatanova T, Popov N, Zlatanova-Velikova R. A Comparative analysis of access to specialized outpatient medical care in Bulgaria and the USA. *Journal of IMAB.* 2024, 30(4):5905-5909.
 11. Vodenicharova, A. Need for Qualification of Masters in Health Management at the Faculty of Public Health Sofia. *Economy & Business Journal, International Scientific Publications, Bulgaria*, 2015, 9(1), 575-581.
 12. Petrova-Gotova Ts, Markova K, Penev L, Kirkov V. Investments in scientific teaching staff – main determinant of quality medical education. *Acta Medica Bulgarica*, 2024, 51(2):29-33.