

PUBLIC HEALTH MANAGEMENT, IN REPUBLIC OF MOLDAVIA

- News and perspectives



**INTERVIEW
GUIDE with
Prof. Dr. Univ.
Oleg LOZAN**

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Born in 1970 in Balti, Republic of Moldova.

Oleg Lozan is a Medical Doctor by background and holds the degree of the University Professor at the School of Public Health Management, the State Medical and Pharmaceutical University, Republic of Moldova.

He is a specialist in public health and health management with proven experience of successfully managing national and international health programs, teaching, and research projects in the public health sector.

Since 2003 he is founder, professor and director of the School of Public Health and Management and undertakes the overall leadership, management and supervision activities.

During 2008 – 2009 as Deputy Minister of Health he promoted a New Law of Public Health in Republic of Moldova. Also developed and implemented strategies and policies in the field of public health and health services with direct involvement in health sector reforms.

Also, between 2013-2019 he holds the position of Vice-Rector of the State Medical and Pharmaceutical University in Moldova, responsible for strategic development and high technology development in the University.

He has extensive experience working with national and international institutions as the World Health Organization, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the World Bank, the Global Fund, EU, UNICEF, GIZ and many others.

Reporter: *Mr. Professor, your concerns and experience in the field of healthcare management and public health represent elements that entitle us to consider you one of the voices that must be heard, both in a national and regional context.*

- How would you briefly characterize the image of the healthcare system in the Republic of Moldova?

Oleg LOZAN: The healthcare system in the Republic of Moldova during more than three decades of independence has seen different developments in each of these decades.

The first decade was a period of rethinking and remodelling of the Semaško type healthcare system inherited from the Soviet era, where several visions and concepts for transformations appear as well as the new Law of the Health Protection and other government legislative acts.

The following decade, the first of the 3rd millennium, can be characterized as the decade of health reforms – far-reaching reforms are carried out in primary healthcare, mandatory health insurance is successfully implemented, development and

visionary documents such as the National Policy of Health (2007), Health System Development Strategy (2008), Law on State Supervision of Public Health (2009) etc. begin to be implemented. We were an example for many countries during that time.

Unfortunately, until now and with few exceptions, the last decade is more a period of stagnation being primarily influenced by political instability - nine governments in ten years.

An ancient wisdom quote says: "what is not realized in time becomes a limitation". Today, the pressure of reforms not carried out in time are a limitation of the development of this sector, to which are added existential problems for the health field such as the massive exodus of medical workers, the insufficiency of decision-making support institutions and mechanisms, untapped potential in intra- and intersectoral collaboration, deficiencies in communication, legislative and strategic gaps, the slow and insular pace of digitalization, etc.

Overall, the current situation in the health system does not accept cosmetic repairs of an old system, but a radical resizing, rebalancing and redirection of it.

R: *For aspirants to managerial positions within health systems, the School of Management in Public Health (SMPH) in Chişinău represents an important landmark in the national and regional context. The almost 20 years of operation of the SMPH represent a milestone that can guarantee the stability of the position held by the institution you coordinate within the professional training sector in the field of health management.*

OL: This year we are on the eve of the beautiful 20th anniversary of the School of Management in Public Health, a jubilee, which in years to come means capitalizing on the enthusiasm, bravery, courage, desires for change for the better of generations of health managers.

Two decades ago, on February 27th 2003, the Ministry of Health, with the support of the Foundation Soros-Moldova, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank in the Republic of Moldova, founded SMPH, a scientific-didactic unit attached to the State University of Medicine and Pharmacy Nicolae Testemiţanu from the Republic of Moldova.

Currently, the School of Management in Public Health has the priority to increase the performance of health professionals, who participate in managerial activities in the field of public health. This mission is achieved through training (master's, doctoral studies and advanced programs of continuing medical education), through scientific research, but also through the provision of consultancy and specialized support to institutions in the field of health.

We have been promoting European values since 2007, when SMPH obtained full membership status of the The Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER), during the 29th Annual Conference, held in Valencia, Spain, and since then we continue to we implement the ASPHER and APHEA (Agency for Public Health Education Accreditation) standards in our daily activity.

The experience gained in the 20 years, the almost 400 graduates from 18 master's programs formed during all this time, →

the numerous projects and partnerships developed - are the proof of the professionalism and perseverance that we show every day within the team.

We are focused on implementing the highest standards of training, in order to provide memorable experiences to beneficiaries, which will serve them for the practical implementation of the acquired knowledge. The master's program is accredited at national level and is in the process of requesting international accreditation - APHEA.

Over time, SMPH has been a pioneer in the field of training. Dozens of projects were carried out that strengthened both the practical skills of those we train and the competences of the SMPH team.

In addition to the training mission, the School of Management in Public Health continues to strengthen its position as a consultant, especially by providing support to the authorities regarding the development and implementation of public health policies and the management of health services.

R: *Mr. Professor, postgraduate training in the field of health, and not only, acquires new values in the context of the need to reform health systems that take into account criteria such as the performance, effectiveness and efficiency of the health sector. The development and reform of the health sectors should be focused around these goals, so that the system provides high quality care and the beneficiaries are satisfied with the results obtained.*

OL: That is true, but the reforms must also be viewed systemically, especially through the lens of the latest major challenges.

All of us have had the last years of an experience that cost human lives for certain systemic conclusions - the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic, in addition to the tragic consequences, has shed light on what is happening in the health system.

These conclusions are not simple at all, because we cannot sum up the failure of some segments of the health sector with the heroism of others. But we also have no right to blindly accept the consequences of our failures during the current pandemic without trying to identify and eliminate their causes.

If we choose to close our eyes to the lessons of the pandemic, then we are assuming the present tragedy and new tragedies in the future, risking to shift the burden of the problems onto the shoulders of future generations.

Another major challenge we are going through is the war in Ukraine. The Republic of Moldavia received the highest number of refugees per capita compared to any other country, despite being one of the poorest countries in Europe. About 700,000 people from Ukraine have crossed the border since the beginning of the war, and over 100,000 refugees have chosen the Republic of Moldavia as their destination country.

SMPH launched several initiatives in the context of the war that is very close to the borders of the Republic of Moldavia, such as training and support materials for the authorities, refugees and the population in general, such as the "Guide on the organization and operation of temporary camps for victims of disasters" and "Guide on management of medical personnel in crisis situations".

One of the new initiatives of SMPH is the National Platform of Communication in Health that will ensure a transparent, professional, apolitical and equidistant dialogue with all institutions in the public health system, to provide decision-making support to managers and health authorities at all levels.

Based on the situation in the field, but also the major challenges we are going through, the health system requires major transformations – the health system must be rethought. Rethought in

many strategic aspects both as volume, spectrum of services, set of institutions, as well as their interaction and interoperability, but also the role of the entire health system at the level of society and complex intersectoral actions.

Transformations are possible when there are new, strategic, daring and assumed visions.

These transformations are only possible with the support of an army of professionals in the field, people who speak the same language – public health management.

Today, I want to reiterate, the Republic of Moldavia has a valuable human potential of well-trained specialists in the field of public health management, but this potential is nowhere near capitalized. He must be involved, respected and placed in key positions, creating a system of advancement and motivation based on merit, not on politics or narrow interests. That's the only way we'll succeed.

Beyond the vision and the human resources capable of implementing it, we need something else. The ability to also see the beautiful and positive things, such as the dedication of medical workers, the desire for change, the hope that it is possible, if one wants to and knows how.

R: *The Master's degree in Health Management developed and carried out within SMPH represents a target to be reached for many aspirants, and the institution you coordinate has extensive experience in this context.*

OL: You are perfectly right. During all these 20 years, I have not had a single admission without a competition. The competition is usually fierce with 2-4 candidates per study place. It is one of the most coveted Master's programs in the Republic of Moldavia. This pleases us, but also obliges us.

However, the greatest value of the School is not research or textbooks, articles or monographs, the greatest value is the disciples.

The School of Management in Public Health has created a considerable number of specialists, who work in the public health system, in the private and departmental sector, but also the Government, the Ministry of Health, the specialized bodies of the central and local public administration, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, etc.

Over the years, we have managed to train master's degree programs able to face the challenges of the national health system, we have opened new horizons of collaboration and won the trust and support of international and local partners of major importance in the field of public health. We have consolidated a dedicated team, open to modernization, innovation and continuous progress.

R: *Inter-institutional collaboration allows the development and adaptation of an optimal operative framework, and the result of collaborations can be incorporated into the institutional strategic objectives.*

- What is your vision regarding institutional development in a collaborative framework? What partnerships have you developed? What research projects have you carried out?

OL: It is important to strengthen public health education regionally, continentally and globally and beyond to educate young people for a better world.

Inter-institutional collaboration and sharing of expertise, teaching methods, curriculum development, skills and competence training are vital for better quality, efficient, sustainable and compassionate, people-centred health systems.

During its activity, the School of Management in Public Health carries out multiple projects in the field with the support of the World Bank, UNICEF, the American International Health Alliance, the United States Agency for International Development, the Global Fund to fight TB, HIV and Malaria, the SOROS Foundation, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the European Union and, of course, the World Health Organization, etc.

International collaboration has a special role in achieving the objectives set by the School of Management in Public Health. During the activity, numerous collaboration agreements were concluded and realized with some of the most prestigious international institutions, having a rich experience and reputation in the field, such as the Schools of Public Health from: USA, France, Lithuania, Israel, Romania, Croatia, Ukraine, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, etc.

- *What is your vision for the role of SMPH within the healthcare system?*

OL: With certainty, today's results prove that the efforts of 20 years were worth every minute, idea, emotion, sacrifice devoted to this project. A project that marked us and continues to inspire. Following the experience of 2 decades, we can say that our training organization model, with multiple innovations, but also with the rational use of human, intellectual, informational capacities, etc. can serve as an organization model for countries with similar conditions.

This is our ambition to start the journey to obtain World Health Organization Collaborative Centre status, which will allow us to connect and maintain the highest standards in the field.

There are many things with a special weight and impact on the health system. An eloquent example of this is the novel research format and the technology transfer we are making to the practical sector.

The scientific forum format, in which research is carried out, as well as public support with online transmissions for the whole country, where tens and hundreds of thousands of unique visitors gather in virtual space are clear evidence of the need for continuous promotion of this innovation.

Mediating the results of research of professional and population interest in public health and the management of health services requires strengthening, diversification and support, because these results serve as the basis for reflections on reforms, transformations and visions of development of the field of public health.

SMPH today does not only represent the walls, the building, people or achievements. The school has already become, in fact, that spirit, that desire for change, that confidence in one's own strength and that feeling of security when you have like-minded colleagues and friends behind you - all are a force, tool and potential for transformation at best, these are the true values.

- *What other conditions would need to be met for your vision to become a reality?*

- *What targets would you like to achieve? Where would you like to head/position yourself?*

OL: Our target group is primarily managers in the healthcare field, and the field in which we operate is a challenging one that forces us to reinvent ourselves and always find opportunities for development. That's why, future plans remain to be certainly ambitious, but very concrete. I will nominate only 3 key directions.

First of all, we want a clear understanding at the state level of the value of competent people in leadership positions in the health system. We have the example of the pandemic, where we all saw very clearly how vital the involvement of competent people in the management of the health system is. The price of incompetence is too high.

In this context, we need a clear concept of professionalization of public health management and health services, with meritocratic elevators, far from political, corporate, etc. influences.

Secondly, there is a need to increase the institutional capacities of the SMPH with real institutional autonomy, a full support of the central authorities of the state, of national and international development partners, governmental and non-governmental, public and private, etc.

This fact would allow sufficient resources to attract the best pedagogical and research capacities, diversifying the educational offer in the field of public health.

Thirdly, being part of an increasingly global world, it is normal to see our purpose by capitalizing on our experience by offering educational and research programs at regional and international level, including in the digital environment.

- *What aspect of your managerial work is most motivating for you?*

OL: Good question. You know, it's just like the love you feel, but you can never quite define it as a feeling. Possibly, it is the privilege of being constantly in contact with the most courageous, ambitious and strong, willing to change something in conditions that are not easy at all.

It is something very fascinating to see how those you interact with evolve, how visions crystallize, desires mature, all in just 2 years.

To witness how relationships are created, sometimes more lasting than student ones, how a unique atmosphere is born, a special climate of creativity of free, dignified and beautiful people in their desire to change the health system for the better.

"Beauty will save the world", said Dostoevsky, and education is the most powerful weapon to change it for the better, said Nelson Mandela. We have this privilege.

Thank you for your kindness in answering our questions.