

PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT (V)



Interview with Octavia Sorina HONTARU – Executive Director, Coordination of Medical Assistance in Argeş County, Argeş Public Health Directorate.

County expert in community medical assistance (level 2) within the project “Provision of Integrated Services in Rural Communities – Facilitating Access of Vulnerable Persons to Efficient and High-Quality Basic Servi-

ces” (MYSMIS 339395), part of the implementation team of the Ministry of Health, Partner 2.

Coordinates and guides the activity of ECI in applying specific procedures in the field of community medical assistance (AMC) and integrated working procedures.

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“Special Nursing in Medical Specialties,”

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Reporter: *You are the executive director of the Argeş Public Health Directorate. I would like to ask you, for our readers, to tell us about the DSP’s duties, the importance of the institution and the role it must play for the benefit of each of us?*

Octavia Sorina HONTARU: Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the role and importance of the Argeş Public Health Directorate. The institution I lead has an essential mission: protecting and promoting public health in our county.

Our duties are vast and involve both preventive activities and direct interventions in the community. We monitor the health of the population and identify emerging risks. We authorize, evaluate and supervise health units, schools, kindergartens, food establishments, to ensure that hygiene and safety standards are respected.

Another important pillar of our activity is epidemiological surveillance. We manage epidemic response, control disease outbreaks and collaborate closely with hospitals, family doctors, local authorities and educational institutions to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. In addition, we carry out health information and education campaigns, encouraging healthy lifestyles, vaccination, chronic disease control and prevention of respiratory, digestive, cardiovascular and metabolic diseases.

Our constant activity. Whether we are talking about controlling the quality of drinking water, epidemiological surveys or authorizing the operation of medical units, the goal remains the same: your safety.

Our role is to prevent, protect and support. Public health is not a luxury, but a fundamental right. And DSP Argeş must be the guarantee that this right is respected.

On behalf of our team, I assure you that we remain dedicated to a healthy, safe and well-informed county. And through transparency, professionalism and cooperation, we will continue to strengthen trust in the public health system.

R: *How is DSP involved in support activities for people who request information or guidance in areas related to the specific activity of the institution? - What projects do you have on Promoting health in schools?*

OSH: The Argeş Public Health Directorate is not only a control and regulatory institution, but also a support partner for the community. An important part of our activity consists of advising, guiding and correctly informing all those who request help in areas related to public health.

We offer constant support to citizens who want information on vaccination, communicable diseases, health regulations, healthy eating or environmental quality. We promptly respond to requests received by e-mail, telephone or during hearings, and we ensure that each person receives clear answers, based on scientific evidence. We also provide educational materials, brochures and guides to good practices in the field of health.

Another important pillar of our involvement is Health Promotion in Schools. We believe that health education must start early, which is why we develop and support programs dedicated to students, parents and teachers.

We have carried out, in collaboration with the County School Inspectorate, thematic campaigns such as:

- “Screen addiction, the new challenge of the digital age; how to manage it”
- “Cervical cancer awareness month”
- “NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE VACCINATION”
- “Sexually Transmitted Infections”
- “Addictions...screens, alcohol, tobacco and drugs”
- “Benefits of a healthy diet”, “Healthy eating” and “Food waste”
- Health fairs (various themes)
- Addiction to illicit psychoactive substances”
- Smoking prevention”
- “How to manage emotions” bullying prevention
- “Oral health”

These initiatives are complemented by interactive workshops, health competitions and free consultancy offered by our specialists in educational institutions.

Through all these actions, we want to form an informed, responsible generation capable of making the right decisions for their own health.

The role of DSP is to build bridges between the healthcare system and the population. And through communication, education and active involvement, we manage to be a real support for every citizen.

R: *What are, in general, the projects that you propose in the short, medium and long term, as*

director? - What challenges does it involve/assume, from the point of view of organization, planning, coordination, management and control of the activity?

OSH: As executive director of the Argeş Public Health Directorate, my vision is based on efficiency, transparency and bringing the institution closer to the real needs of the population.

In the short term, we aim to modernize internal administrative circuits, digitize archives and streamline the process of responding to citizens' requests. It is essential to increase the accessibility of the DSP for the population, both in physical and online format.

In the medium term, our priorities aim to expand prevention and health education programs, especially in schools, disadvantaged environments and rural communities. We will develop partnerships with local institutions and NGOs to address topics such as vaccination, mental health, nutrition and personal hygiene.

In the long term, we want to transform the Directorate into a true center of excellence in county public health – with modern infrastructure, competitive laboratory equipment, a well-trained team and a solid system of intervention in epidemiological emergency situations.

These ambitious but necessary objectives, however, involve significant challenges. From an organizational point of view, we are talking about:

- Careful planning, based on local needs and risk analyses;
- Coordination between multiple structures – from internal departments to external collaborators;
- Flexible but firm leadership, in a constantly changing administrative and legislative context;
- Rigorous control of resources, to ensure efficiency and fairness in the use of public funds;
- And last but not least, staff motivation – a crucial aspect for the quality of the services provided.

Public health is not a system that works by itself. It requires vision, balance and the ability to adapt. And I, together with my team, assume this mission with full responsibility.

R: What are the main problems faced by the DSP director?

OSH: The position of director of the Public Health Directorate involves a complex responsibility, which is not limited to law enforcement or health surveillance. It is a function of balancing administrative management and the real needs of the population.

One of the biggest challenges is related to human resources. We are facing a shortage of specialized personnel, especially in the fields of epidemiology, hygiene and environmental health. Attracting and retaining well-trained medical staff in the public system is difficult, in the context of pressures and often uncompetitive salaries.

Another major problem is bureaucracy and administrative burden. Public health legislation is complex and constantly changing. This sometimes creates bottlenecks in the rapid implementation of emergency measures or prevention programs.

We are also faced with high expectations from the population, which are perfectly justified, but which must be correlated with the institution's real capacity to intervene. Citizens want quick, clear answers and effective solutions. For this, it is essential to strengthen public communication and health education.

A constant challenge is also the management of crisis situations: epidemic outbreaks, health alerts or supply problems. These require rapid reactions, resource mobilization and coordination with other institutions, under conditions of maximum pressure.

Last but not least, we are faced with outdated infrastructure and the need for digitalization. From databases to laboratory equipment, we need modernization to meet current requirements.

However, every challenge is also an opportunity. Through adaptation, teamwork and a clear vision, we can transform these difficulties into steps towards a more efficient public health system closer to the people.

R: How has the approach to a new epidemic changed/if it has changed, following COVID-19 and if so, are you prepared to face it, a new epidemiological threat?

OSH: The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly represented a turning point for the entire medical world, but especially for the field of public health. The way we manage epidemiological risks today is fundamentally different from the previous period.

At the level of the Argeş Public Health Directorate, the approach to a possible new epidemic has changed profoundly from at least three essential perspectives: anticipation, rapid reaction and communication.

First of all, our anticipation capacity has been strengthened. We now have clear protocols, well-established epidemiological routes and action plans adaptable to various risk scenarios. Monitoring epidemiological indicators and early warning have become routine components.

Secondly, the internal structure of the DSP has been redesigned to allow the rapid mobilization of human and material resources in case of emergency. We have specifically trained personnel for rapid interventions, solid collaborations with hospitals, ISU, UPU and other operational structures. The logistics for possible quarantines, testing or mass vaccinations have already been tested and perfected. The third major change is in the sphere of public communication. We have learned that transparent and rapid information is essential for gaining the trust of the population and limiting panic. We have official communication channels, health education campaigns and a well-structured media relations strategy.

We are therefore better prepared than ever. We cannot rule out the possibility of a new epidemiological threat, but today we have better tools, faster reflexes and a much better prepared team.

The challenge is real, but the DSP Argeş is ready to respond responsibly and efficiently.

R: If you consider it necessary to answer another question that was not asked, now is the time.

OSH: I would like to take this opportunity to address an aspect that I consider essential, although I was →

not directly asked: the relationship of trust between citizens and public health institutions.

The pandemic has shown us how fragile trust can be and how important it is for people to feel that institutions work for them, not above them. No matter how well-thought-out the strategies are, how quickly the medical teams react or how efficiently the protocols are implemented, without trust – the message does not reach, the recommendation is not followed, and the results are delayed.

At the Argeş Public Health Directorate, we aim to emphasize real proximity to the citizen. Not just through posters, not just through orders, but through dialogue, transparency and involvement in the concrete problems of the community.

We want the DSP to no longer be perceived only as a “control authority”, but as a support structure: for the fami-

ly doctor, for the vulnerable patient, for the parent who needs guidance, for the school looking for partners in health education.

It is time to rebuild this bond of trust, day by day, through deeds, not just through statements. Let us be present where it counts: in schools, in communities, in disadvantaged areas, but also in the digital space, where young people are looking for information today.

In the end, my message is simple: the DSP must be of the people, not just about the people. And I, as executive director, take on the mission of making this vision a reality.

Recorded by: Sorana Lixandru, MD

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