

4. Every 60th patient suffers from serious skin infections, which is probably the result of poor personal hygiene and bad sanitary conditions in the ghetto.
5. Every 50th patient suffers from tuberculosis.

Apart from treating and consulting patients, the two Roma physicians perform a variety of public activities. In June 1999 they participated in the National Roundtable Discussion on Roma Issues where they presented a report on the health status of Roma in the Nadezhda District in Sliven. In October 2000 Dr. Panayotov and Dr. Manolov attended an international seminar in Paris organized by Doctors of the World and dedicated to introducing a health promotion system in Roma communities. At the seminar the two physicians presented a report on the health status of the Roma community in Bulgaria, the obstacles to providing healthcare services to the community and the ways to overcome them. In 1999–2000 they cooperated with the Minority Health Problems Foundation – Sofia to conduct a genetic prophylaxis program on muscular dystrophy gamma-sarcoglycanopathia, a disease, which is quite common in the neighborhood. In 2000 they carried out a one-year project for improving the health and sexual education of Roma in Nadezhda District in Sliven. The project was financed by the Open Society Foundation – Sofia and was targeted to the young people and young parents in the neighborhood. The project team conducted 400 polls to evaluate the health and sexual culture of the target group and organized five training modules based on a specially designed training program. More than 1,000 information brochures were printed and distributed in the community. In the second half of 2000 the Roma Health Foundation started a microproject supported by the Open Society Club – Sliven and aimed at increasing the awareness of Roma from Nadezhda District on the philosophy, the methodology, and the legislative background of the healthcare reform in Bulgaria. This was done through a series of workshops, which were attended by 15 young Roma from the neighborhood. As a result of the project the number of people who have registered with a general practitioner has increased significantly.

In December 2000 the foundation started a project for health and sexual education of young parents and children from the neighborhood, financed by the MATRA Cap Program of the Dutch government.

Based on their experience Dr. Manolov and Dr. Panayotov identified the following problems, which have a negative impact on the access of Roma to healthcare services:

1. The difficulties associated with the choice of family physician and dentist
2. The too restrictive provisions of the Social Assistance Law and the discrepancies between healthcare and social care legislation, which could generate social tension
3. The vicious circle in which Roma inevitably fall: high unemployment, no income, no health insurance, deteriorating health status, increasing morbidity and mortality
4. The limited or difficult access to healthcare services for financial or other reasons
5. The neglectful attitude and the often low quality of healthcare services – lack of civic control and health advocacy
6. The almost nonexistent prevention activities
7. The poor health culture of Roma, the fact that they tend to seek help too late, the complicated and neglected clinical cases, which often lead to permanent disability
8. The obstacles to ensuring adequate treatment for financial reasons