The setting up, functioning and closing down of medical institutions in Bulgaria is provided for in a special Medical Institutions Act. It lays down how they are created and how they work as well as what types they may be.

Out-patient offices for individual practices are facilities where one doctor (doctor of dental medicine [for the sake of brevity, hereinafter dentists/stomatologists]) performs activities. In terms of commercial status, they may be sole traders, single member limited liability companies or natural persons practicing a free profession. The administrative legal registration is performed at the Regional Health Inspection (RHI). As for medical specialties, they may be out-patient offices for general medicine or out-patient offices with a specific specialty.

A group out-patient practice unites several doctors (dentists) in a commercial company or a cooperative. The sequence is – after the commercial legal conditions are in place, the practice is registered administratively with the RHI. This type of out-patient care is also of two types depending on the medical specialty – for general of specialised medicine. A peculiarity of this type of care is that all doctors practice the same medical specialty. This is why the founders are natural persons who perform the activities.

A medical centre is a commercial company and the founders need not be doctors or dentists as the requirements for setting up a group out-patient practice are. Doctors/dentists with a minimum of 3 specialties work at medical centres. This is what makes a medical centre different from a group practice. There are three types – medical, medical-dental and dental centres.

Diagnostic and consulting centres are the most complex form of out-patient medical institution. In terms of commercial legal status, they may be commercial companies or cooperatives; the founders need not be doctors/dentists. Such centres should have hired personnel of doctors with a minimum of 10 medical specialties. They should have equipment for image diagnostics and a laboratory.

A medical diagnostic laboratory carries out laboratory research for the diagnostics of diseases while the core activities of a medical technical laboratory are the development of auxiliary technical equipment for patients. Usually, the medical technical laboratories are dental and orthotechnical. Their commercial legal status is the same as that of other out-patient institutions and the administrative registration takes place at the RHI.

Hospital medical institutions are also characterised by a combination of legal conditions for their set up. The commercial legal conditions require a commercial company or a cooperative in place. Next comes an administrative licensing regime where the Minister of Health is the competent authority.

The Medical Institutions Act requires that hospitals have a special management structure. On the one hand, this structure should correspond to the management of a commercial company
or a cooperative and, on the other hand, the special law requires an internal organisational system and lays down special requirements for education and qualification of the executive director or the managing director and others.

Hospitals may be single-profile or multi-profile. A single-profile hospital is specialised in one area of medicine. A multi-profile hospital should have in its structure at least 2 wards/clinics in two specialties.

In view of the subject matter of medical activities, there are the following types of hospitals: hospitals for active treatment; hospitals for after-care and long-term treatment; and rehabilitation hospitals.

A hospice is a medical institution where medical and other personnel perform palliative care for terminally ill patients. The medical activities in hospices registered under this Act are led by a medical specialist who need not be a doctor/stomatologist. To carry out activities as medical institutions, hospices should have an administrative registration with the RHI.

Medical and social care facilities are medical institutions whose core activities include long-term medical observation and care for people of different age groups with chronic diseases and medical and social problems. They also include care at home for people with chronically debilitating diseases. The medical institution is subject to a licensing regime where the competent authority to issues the license is the Minister of Health.

Tissue banks are medical institutions which collects, process, transport, store and process organs, tissues and cells for medical purposes. Their activities are provided for in the special Organs, Tissues and Cells Transplantation Act.

Dialysis centres are medical institutions for the treatment, rehabilitation and observation of patients with chronic renal failure. There are special requirements for the management of such centres – minimum length of service in a chemodialysis centre or a chemodialysis ward and specialty.

Transfusion haematology centres are medical institutions whose core activities are collecting blood, diagnostics, processing, storing, securing, producing, safekeeping and providing blood bioproducts. The activities are laid down in a special Blood, Blood Donation and Blood Transfusion Act.

Emergency medical care centres are medical institutions whose core activities are to provide emergency assistance to patients at home, on site in the event of accidents and during transportation to possible hospitalisation. Their activities are provided for in detail in special norms of secondary legislation issued by the Minister of Health.

Mental health centres are a relatively new type of medical institutions with the core activities of emergency psychiatric assistance; diagnostics and treatment of persons with mental disorders; observation, home care; social rehabilitation. A National Official Register provided for in an ordinance of the Minister of Health is created and maintained.

Skin and venereal disease centres are medical institutions which mainly diagnose, treat and rehabilitate persons with acute or chronic dermatological diseases; and provide periodic observations of persons with skin and venereal diseases.
Comprehensive oncology centres are medical institutions whose core activities include active search for people with oncological diseases; diagnostics and treatment of patients; observations, consultations and follow-up on patients; registration and monitoring of people with oncological and precancerous diseases; creation and maintenance of a cancer register for the respective territory where services are provided and for the needs of the National Cancer Register. A relatively new activity is the implementation of prophylaxis and screening programs for oncological diseases among the population. The structure of comprehensive oncology centres is provided for in the Medical Institutions Act as a more complex one in view of their core activities. In brief – a diagnostic and consultative unit which includes specialised diagnostic and consultative facilities, laboratories, image diagnostics, pathoanatomy and nuclear medicine; an in-patient care unit which includes wards organised according to the comprehensive treatment methods – medical oncology, radiotherapy, oncological surgery, etc.

The Medical Institutions Act expressly lists the institutions which may only be set up by the state (Article 5, para 1). The powers for their creation and transformation are granted to the Council of Ministers, upon the proposal of the Minister of Health in coordination with the respective Minister (for example, of the Interior, of Defence, etc.).

All medical institutions perform their activities in line with the so called medical standards which are approved by the Minister of Health in an ordinance.

Control over the quality and volume of medical activities as well as the compliance with the standards of medical activities is exercised by the Medical Audit Executive Agency with the Ministry of Health, the National Health Insurance Fund (RHIF) when the medical institutions are funded by, professional organisations of doctors and doctors of dental medicine.

There are also other administrative control authorities in the healthcare system but they concern individual types of medical activities with their specificities and competent authorities which require specialised knowledge, organisation and control targets, for example the Transplantation Executive Agency.