

**STATEMENT****REGARDING THE COMPETITION FOR THE ACADEMIC POSITION "ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR"  
AT MU-PLOVDIV****I. Analysis of the candidate's career profile**

Dr. Velichka Zaharieva Popova was born in the town of Stamboliyski in 1971. In 1996, she graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at the Medical University-Plovdiv. In 2009, she started working as a part-time assistant at the Department of Propaedeutics of Internal Medicine and became a full-time assistant in 2011. In 2018, she defended a dissertation on the topic "Tissue expression of TNF- $\alpha$  and RANKL in patients with inflammatory joint diseases and acute coronary syndrome," for which she acquired the scientific degree of "Doctor" (PhD) in rheumatology. She has held the position of "Chief Assistant" since October 2019. Her clinical work as a rheumatologist includes University Hospital "Plovdiv" during the period 2003-2008, University Hospital "St. George" from 2008 to 2012, and University Hospital "Kaspela" EOOD from 2013 to the present.

Dr. Velichka Popova is a member of the Union of Scientists of Plovdiv, the Bulgarian Association for Musculoskeletal Ultrasound (BAMSU), and the Bulgarian Medical Society for Osteoporosis, Osteoarthritis, and Other Rheumatological Diseases. She is also a reviewer at Rheumatology International, which is indexed in Scopus/WoS with an impact factor. Dr. Popova has participated in numerous national and international congresses.

**II. General description of the submitted materials for the competition**

Dr. Velichka Zaharieva Popova, MD, enters the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the scientific specialty of "Rheumatology" as the sole candidate. The position was announced in the State Gazette, issue 82 / 27.09.2024, for the needs of MU-Plovdiv for teaching in Bulgarian at the Department of "Propaedeutics of Internal Medicine Prof. Dr. Anton Mitov".

In compliance with Art. 108 of Section IV of the Regulations for Academic Development of MU-Plovdiv, Dr. Popova has provided all the necessary materials and documents, both in paper and electronic format, including a curriculum vitae (CV); a notarized copy of a diploma for completed higher education with an appendix; a notarized copy of a diploma for the acquired ONS "Doctor" in the scientific specialty of the announced academic position (notarized); a certificate of internship in the relevant specialty; and a reference for the academic positions held to date; an academic reference for the candidate's academic workload for the last three academic years; a copy of the latest attestation sheet; an abstract of a dissertation for the ONS "Doctor"; a published independent monograph; a list of publications in scientific journals, referenced and indexed only in Scopus and/or Web of Science; a list of publications in non-refereed journals with scientific review; a list of citations and/or reviews in scientific publications, referenced and indexed only in Scopus and/or Web of Science; a copy of a diploma for recognized specialties in internal medicine and rheumatology (notarized); a document certifying participation in national or intra-university scientific projects; a published textbook at the university level; documents that certify training of interns, postgraduates and doctoral students, issued by the relevant department/department of the higher education institution/scientific organization; a reference for original scientific contributions; a reference self-assessment according to the template for fulfilling the specific scientometric requirements in the main units of MU-Plovdiv; a declaration of originality and authenticity

of the attached documents in accordance with the template; copies of publications; summaries of the submitted publications in Bulgarian and English; and other documents, such as qualification courses, certificates, memberships, etc.; a completed NACID card.

### **III. Evaluation of the candidate's scientific works for overall academic development**

The candidate's scientific activity is of high scientific contribution both to Rheumatology and to other fields of medicine related to cardiovascular pathology, cardiovascular risk and risk factors, neurology, nephrology, etc. For this candidacy, Dr. Velichka Popova, MD, has provided the following scientific publications:

1) Research articles

- 14 refereed articles in Scopus/Web of Science, 9 of which have an impact factor, in 5 of which she is the first author.
- 32 publications in non-refereed journals with scientific review, in 9 of which she is the first author.

2. A monographic work on the topic "Practical guidelines for vascular ultrasonography in rheumatology", published in 2024 by the University Publishing House of the Medical University of Plovdiv, ISBN 978-619-237-126-5.

3. Her dissertation research titled "Tissue Expression of TNF- $\alpha$  and RANKL in Patients with Inflammatory Joint Diseases and Acute Coronary Syndrome". This is the first and only work at this stage on the tissue expression of some of the most important cytokine receptors (TNF- $\alpha$  and RANKL) and their relation to atherosclerotic plaques in patients with inflammatory joint diseases (IJD) and acute coronary syndrome (ACS). For the first time, it identifies those cytokines that distinguish patients with ACS and IJD, finding a relationship between expression and serum level by determining sTNF- $\alpha$  and sIL-6 as serum biomarkers for patients with ACS and IJD. Additionally, important dependencies are examined such as the prognostic significance of hsCRP, hscTnI, TNF- $\alpha$ , and IL-6 levels at 48 hours, as well as the relationship between cytokine expressions with hsCRP, hscTnI, and the GRACE score scale.

Through her work, Dr. Velichka Popova, MD has promoted the use of vascular sonography in clinical practice for the evaluation of vascular risk and conditions associated with vascular involvement. In 2024, she published a monograph titled "Practical Guidelines for Vascular Ultrasonography in Rheumatology" by University Publishing House MU Plovdiv, ISBN 978-619-237-126-5, which is entirely distinct from her primary dissertation work on the subject. This publication is the outcome of extensive personal effort and years of dedication. In it, she conducts a comprehensive examination of the evaluation of vessels in daily practice, presenting clinically focused and synthesized material in a systematic, straightforward, and organized manner. The monograph is a reflection of her own experience and knowledge and aims to popularize the methodology in scientific forums and her daily practice. She examines the fundamental ultrasonographic techniques for evaluating vascular changes and their application in rheumatology, conducts a comprehensive examination of the existing scientific literature, presents her own research findings, and outlines future projects, including the application of elastography in rheumatological patients' vascular pathology.

The work comprehensively investigates the intricate relationship between vascular alterations and autoimmune inflammatory joint and systemic connective tissue diseases, thereby establishing future prospects.

Dr. Velichka Popova's publication activity encompasses a variety of interdisciplinary areas, including the examination of patient populations and clinical cases in a multifaceted manner.

#### **IV. Evaluation of monographic work or equivalent publications submitted for participation in the competition for "ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR" by the candidate:**

The monograph "Practical guidelines of vascular ultrasonography in rheumatology" was published in 2024 by the University Publishing House MU Plovdiv, ISBN 978-619-237-126-5. It provides a comprehensive and accessible overview of the methods of vascular examination from the perspective of the rheumatologist. The fundamentals of ultrasound diagnostics and the significance of vascular examination in contemporary rheumatology are extensively discussed. The section on vasculitis is presented for the first time in the Republic of Bulgaria from the perspective of the rheumatologist. It summarizes the primary nosological units, changes, and the author's personal contribution.

#### **V. Citations of the candidate's publications in the national and international literature (publication image)**

For his candidacy, the candidate has submitted 20 citations in journals indexed in Scopus and/or Web of Science, has an H-index of 4.

#### **VI. Comprehensive, qualitative assessment of the educational, methodological and teaching activities, including scientific supervision of students, doctoral students, and postgraduates**

Dr. Velichka Popova, MD, began working as an assistant professor at the Department of Propaedeutics of Internal Medicine in March 2011, and has been a senior assistant professor since October 2019. She has a teaching workload of over 1110 hours per year, instructing medical students in Bulgarian and rheumatology residents. Additionally, she serves on examination committees, leads basic courses for residents in Rheumatology, and is a lecturer for postgraduate courses in capillaroscopy.

Dr. Velichka Popova, MD, has been involved in five intra-university projects with researchers from various departments and universities, resulting in publications in international journals.

In addition to her dissertation work, Dr. Velichka Popova, MD, is dedicated to promoting the benefits of vascular sonography in rheumatology. She aims to expand its use in vasculitis, assess the need for vascular risk stratification in patients with rheumatological diseases, and monitor high-risk groups. Her efforts contribute to the broader application of vascular ultrasonography in inflammatory joint diseases and vasculitis by rheumatologists. She is also the first in Bulgaria to use pSWE elastography for vascular assessment, highlighting the potential for future applications of modern ultrasonographic methodologies in rheumatology.

## VII. Critical remarks and recommendations

I do not have critical remarks or additional recommendations

## VIII. Overall assessment of the candidate's compliance with the minimum national requirements

I believe that the candidate fully satisfies the requirements, mandatory conditions, and scientometric indicators described in the Regulations for Academic Development at the Medical University—Plovdiv: Art. 2b, paras. 2 and 3, respectively, the requirements under Art. 2b, para. 5 of the Law on Academic Development of the Medical University of Plovdiv, and the specific requirements for the Medical University of Plovdiv by field of study and for units with clinical activity.

Group indicators	Content	AD " Associate professor" (number of points)	Dr. V. Popova, (number of points)
A	Indicator 1	50p	50p
B	Indicator 2	-	-
C	Indicator 3 and 4	100p	-
D	Sum of indicators 5 to 9	200p	663.38p
E	Sum of indicators 10 to 12	100p	300p
F	Sum of indicators 13 to 22	60p	193,41p
G	Teaching activities and academic position	300p	1668,4p
Total		810p	2875,19p

## IX. Conclusion

I firmly believe that Dr. Velichka Zaharieva Popova, MD, fully satisfies the mandatory and specific conditions and scientometric criteria for obtaining the academic position of "Associate Professor." I recommend that the esteemed Scientific Jury vote in favor of granting Dr. Velichka Zaharieva Popova, MD the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the Department of Propaedeutics of Internal Medicine "Prof. Dr. Anton Mitov."

Statement by:

Заличено на основание  
Чл.5 §1, 6. "В" Регламент (ЕС)2016/679

Date: 25.02.2025г.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tsvetanka Petranova, MD, PhD