

## 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 1971 in the town of Stamboliyski. In 1996, she graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at the Medical University-Plovdiv. In 2009, she started working first as a part-time assistant at the Department of Propaedeutics of Internal Medicine, and subsequently in 2011 became a full-time assistant. 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. Since October 2019, she has held the position of "Chief Assistant." Her clinical experience as a rheumatologist includes work at University Hospital "Plovdiv" from 2003 to 2008, then at University Hospital "St. George" from 2008 to 2012, and at University Hospital "Kaspela" from 2013 to the present.

Dr. 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 Journal, indexed in Scopus/WoS with impact factor. Dr. Popova has participated in numerous events as a lecturer at national and international congresses.

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

Dr. Velichka Zaharieva Popova, MD, is the only candidate in the competition for the academic position of "ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR" in the scientific specialty of "Rheumatology", which 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 line 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. These include 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- "Rheumatology" (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, and others; a completed NACID card.

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

The candidate has made significant scientific contributions to Rheumatology and interdisciplinary studies.

1) In this competition, Dr. Velichka Popova, MD, has provided the following articles:

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

2) For her candidacy, Dr. Velichka Popova, MD, has presented a monographic work titled: "Practical Guidelines for Vascular Ultrasonography in Rheumatology" published by University Publishing House MU Plovdiv, ISBN 978-619-237-126-5 in 2024.

3) The candidate's dissertation, "Tissue expression of TNF- $\alpha$  and RANKL in patients with inflammatory joint diseases and acute coronary syndrome," is unique in its design. The study of the tissue expression of some of the most important cytokine receptors (TNF- $\alpha$  and RANKL) on atherosclerotic plaques in patients with inflammatory joint diseases (IJD) and acute coronary syndrome (ACS) is innovative and of practical importance. It determines the cytokines that distinguish patients with ACS and IJD for the first time, and establishes a relationship between cytokine serum level and expression by identifying sTNF- $\alpha$  and sIL-6 as serum biomarkers for patients with ACS and IJD. Furthermore, it identifies important dependencies such as the prognostic significance of the levels of hsCRP, hscTnI, TNF- $\alpha$ , and IL-6 at 48 hours, as well as the relationship between the expressions of cytokines with hsCRP, hscTnI, and the GRACE Score scale. Through her work, Dr. Velichka Popova, MD, contributes to the popularization of sonographic examination of vessels in clinical practice, the need for assessment of vascular risk, as well as conditions related to vascular involvement, such as vasculitis.

She expands upon this in a monograph that is entirely distinct from her primary dissertation on the subject: "Practical guidelines for vascular ultrasonography in rheumatology," which was published by the University Publishing House MU Plovdiv in 2024 and has an ISBN of 978-619-237-126-5. This monograph is the outcome of extensive research and personal effort, and it is written in a manner that is both comprehensive and comprehensible, with the primary objective of integrating the methodology into ordinary life. The monograph's central section is dedicated to vasculitis, which is presented for the first time in Bulgaria from the perspective of a

rheumatologist. It summarizes the changes in the vascular wall in the most common nosological units and serves as a reference for the application of this methodology. Future prospects are established through the examination of the intricate relationship between vascular changes and autoimmune inflammatory joint and systemic diseases of the connective tissue.

The publication activity of Dr. Velichka Popova fully defines the profile of her scientific interests. She is interdisciplinary oriented, focusing on interesting clinical cases, as well as systematically following and studying patient populations in her articles.

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

The monograph "Practical Guidelines for Vascular Ultrasonography in Rheumatology," published by the University Publishing House MU Plovdiv in 2024 with ISBN 978-619-237-126-5, presents methods for studying vessels from the perspective of a rheumatologist in an accessible and comprehensive manner. The goal of this publication is to establish this methodology as a standard practice for Bulgarian rheumatologists, which is achievable through the clear and comprehensive presentation of the methodology and practical guidance for its implementation. The physical principles are described in an engaging manner, along with detailed explanations of study methods and parameters for normal and pathological conditions. The author's personal contribution is evident in the accumulation of knowledge and continuous updates provided in the monograph.

#### **V. Reflection (citation) of the candidate's publications in the national and foreign literature (publication image)**

For her candidacy, the candidate has submitted 20 citations in journals indexed in Scopus and/ or Web of Science.

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

Dr. Velichka Popova, MD, began working as an assistant at the Department of Propaedeutics of Internal Medicine in March 2011 and became a senior assistant in October 2019. She has a teaching workload that exceeds 1100 hours per year, instructing medical students in Bulgarian and postgraduates in rheumatology. Additionally, she serves on examination committees, lectures in basic courses in Rheumatology, and in capillaroscopy for postgraduate students. Dr. Popova has collaborated on five intra-university projects with researchers from various departments and universities, resulting in publications in international journals. In addition to her dissertation work, Dr. Popova is dedicated to promoting the advantages of vascular sonographic evaluation in rheumatology and expanding its use in vasculitis. Her efforts aim to increase the application of vascular ultrasonography in rheumatology and advocate for its routine use in practice for both inflammatory joint diseases and vasculitis. She is the first in Bulgaria to utilize

pSWE elastography for vascular assessment, thus paving the way for the future of modern rheumatology.

#### VII. Critical notes and recommendations

I have no critical notes or my recommendations are: supporting young doctoral students and residents at the department in shaping their scientific theses.

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

I believe that the candidate fully meets the requirements, mandatory conditions, and scientometric indicators described in the Regulations for Academic Development at the Medical University - Plovdiv: Art. 2b, paragraphs 2 and 3, as well as the requirements under Art. 2b, paragraph 5 of the Law on Academic Development of the Republic of Bulgaria. Additionally, the candidate meets the specific requirements for the Medical University - 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 am confident that Dr. Velichka Zaharieva Popova, MD, meets all the required and specific criteria, as well as scientometric standards, for attaining the academic title of "Associate Professor." Therefore, I suggest that the esteemed Scientific Jury vote in favor of granting Dr. Velichka Zaharieva Popova, MD, the position of "Associate Professor" at the Department of Propaedeutics of Internal Medicine "Prof. Dr. Anton Mitov".

Date: 27.02.2025г.

Statement provided by:

Prof. Dr. Anastas Batalov, MD, PhD

Заличено на основание  
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