

OPINION

by Full. Prof. Diana Dobрева, PhD

regarding participation in a competition for the academic position of "Professor" in "Theory and Methodology of Physical Education and Sports Training (including Methodology of Therapeutic Physical Exercise)", announced by the Medical University – Medical College, Department of Rehabilitation and Preventive Health Care, in the field of higher education 7. Health Care and Sports, professional field 7.4. Public Health, on a full-time basis, published in the State Gazette, issue No. 44/14.05.2026, p. 240.

In the competition for the academic position of "Professor" in "Theory and Methodology of Physical Education and Sports Training (including Methodology of Therapeutic Physical Exercise)", for the needs of the Medical University – Medical College, Department of Rehabilitation and Preventive Health Care, there is one candidate – Assoc. Prof. Maria Stamova Vakrilova-Becheva, PhD.

The documents submitted by the candidate comply with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

At present, Maria Stamova Vakrilova-Becheva is an Associate Professor in the Department of Rehabilitation and Preventive Health Care at the Medical College of the Medical University – Plovdiv, and Head of the Department of Rehabilitation and Preventive Health Care at the Medical College of the Medical University – Plovdiv.

Maria Stamova Vakrilova graduated from the French Language High School "Zahari Stoyanov" in Sliven (1989), followed successively by the Higher Medical Institute – Plovdiv, specializing as a Rehabilitation Therapist (1992); the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski" – Sofia, Faculty of Public Health, Health Care and Tourism – Bachelor's degree in Kinesitherapy (2006); the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski" – Sofia, Faculty of Public Health, Health Care and Tourism – Master's degree in Kinesitherapy (2007); and the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski" – Sofia, Faculty of Public Health, Health Care and Tourism – PhD (2012). She also obtained a specialization in Medical Pedagogy at the Postgraduate Training Center of the Medical University – Plovdiv (2024).

Maria Vakrilova-Becheva professional career began in 1994 as a rehabilitation therapist at the Medical Center in Stamboliyski, Department of Rehabilitation, where she worked until 2000. During the period 2000–2001, she completed clinical internships in public hospitals in Paris (AP-HP), France. From 2001 to 2008, she worked as a rehabilitation therapist at St. George University Hospital in Plovdiv. Since 2008, she has been working at the Medical University – Plovdiv, Medical College.

Teaching and Educational Activities

Maria Vakrilova-Becheva teaches Kinesitherapy and Clinical and Pathokinesiological Diagnosis of the Musculoskeletal System in the two Master's programs in "Rehabilitation, Wellness, SPA and Balneotherapy" at the Faculty of Public Health of the Medical University – Plovdiv.

Maria Vakrilova-Becheva is the administrative coordinator of the four-semester Master's program "Rehabilitation, Wellness, SPA and Balneotherapy" at the Faculty of Public Health of the Medical University – Plovdiv.

Maria Stamova Vakrilova-Becheva has completed teaching mobilities under the Erasmus Programme, delivering presentations and practical training in Brussels and Namur (including two visits, the second at the invitation of the École Supérieure de Namur), as well as in Liège, Belgium. She has also completed teaching mobilities in Lisbon and Dublin, where she delivered lectures. She provides training to interns and doctoral students.

Evidence of Assoc. Prof. Vakrilova-Becheva's teaching activity is provided by her participation in continuing education and completed qualification courses, including: training in Michel Schulz lymphatic drainage massage in Bordeaux, France (2025); training in effective procedures for combating plagiarism in higher education institutions (2023); training in contemporary trends and technologies in health care (2022); simulation-based training in medicine (2021); a course in entrepreneurship and innovation in medicine (2020–2021); FMT BASIC+PERFORMANCE training (November 2019); FMT BASIC+PERFORMANCE training (February 2019); the seminar "Scopus in Support of Research Activities – Profiles, Publishing and Citation" (25.03.2019, Medical University – Plovdiv); training in **Ergon Therapy – Basic ERGON IASTM Technique Course (2018); neuromuscular taping – upper quadrant (2015); manual therapy – mobilization techniques for the cervicothoracic region and upper limb (2009); manual therapy – mobilization techniques for the lumbosacral region and lower limb (2009); manual lymphatic drainage (2009); and soft-tissue mobilization for the cervicothoracic region and upper limb (2008).

Scientific and Applied Research Activities

Maria Vakrilova-Becheva is the author of three monographs, 128 scientific articles and communications, 84 of which have been published in international scientific journals. She is a leading author of three textbooks and six manuals intended for students in the "Rehabilitation Therapist" program at the Medical College – Plovdiv and for students in the two Master's programs in "Rehabilitation, Wellness, SPA and Balneotherapy" at the Faculty of Public Health of the Medical University – Plovdiv.

The candidate's applied research activity is complemented by participation in a number of projects, including: a project funded by the European Union and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, No. BG-RRP-2.004-0007-O3, under the Strategic Research and Innovation Development Programme of the Medical University – Plovdiv (SRIDMUP); National Project No. 22251052/04.11.2022, entitled "Implementation of a Programme: Social Service Providing Mobile Social Teams in the Municipality of Plovdiv", implemented from 04.11.2022 to 30.09.2023; the scientific and educational project of the Medical University – Plovdiv "Study of Obesity in Adolescence (14–18 years) in Plovdiv – Factors and Prevention", No. R-NO-1316/17.10.2025; the European Union's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions project under the Horizon 2020 programme, FRESHER – Grant Agreement No. 954776 – FRESHER-H2020-MSCA-NIGHT-2020, as a participant and supporting the implementation of project activities; National Project BG05SFPR001-3.002-0001 "From Higher Education to Employment", implemented from 17.12.2024 to 17.12.2029; National Project BG05M2OP001-2.013-0001 of the Ministry of Education and Science "Student Internships – Phase 2", implemented from 13.01.2020 to 31.12.2023 (three-year duration), financed under the Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth 2014–2020" and co-financed by the European Social Fund; National Project BG05M2OP001-2.002-0001 of the Ministry of Education and Science "Student Internships – Phase I", implemented from 2016 to 2018 (three-year duration), financed under the Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth 2014–2020" and co-financed by the European Social Fund; and the international European Leonardo da Vinci project "Virtual Hospital" (2008).

For the present competition, the candidate has submitted for review one habilitation work in the form of a monograph, one published book based on her defended doctoral dissertation, and a total of 53 full-text publications. There are 34 publications in journals indexed and abstracted in Scopus and Web of Science, of which 23 have an Impact Factor (IF) indexed in Clarivate Analytics (Thomson Reuters), while 11 publications have a SCImago Journal Rank (SJR). The total IF is 27.83, and the total SJR is 1.664. There are 19 publications in non-refereed journals, 3 published university textbooks, 2 teaching manuals, 4 abstracts (1, 2, 3, 4) from participation in international forums, as well as participation in 10 national and 68 international webinars, with participation recorded on the electronic forum platform of the Medical University – Plovdiv.

The scientific interests and extensive scientific output of Assoc. Prof. Maria Vakrilova-Becheva are concentrated in three areas: public health and health care (11.1, 12.2, 12.8, 12.10, 12.25, 12.26, 12.28, 12.29, 13.2, 13.9, 13.14, 13.17, 13.19, 23.1, 23.2, Abstracts 1, 2 and 3); education, including education in an electronic environment (12.32, 13.5, 13.7, 13.8, 13.15, 13.16, 24.2, Abstract 4); and clinical pathology (12.3, 12.11, 12.12, 12.13, 12.14, 12.15, 12.16, 12.17, 12.18, 12.19, 12.21, 12.22, 12.23, 12.30, 13.1).

Contributions of Particular Theoretical, Scientific-Applied and Practical Value

A published book based on the defended doctoral dissertation (11.1), presenting a developed and validated original kinesitherapeutic programme, the application of a specific diagnostic algorithm, as well as the systematization of a comprehensive kinesitherapeutic model and subsequent empirical evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of the developed methodology for the treatment of chronic low back pain.

For a broad range of clinical conditions associated with musculoskeletal dysfunctions, the application of kinesitherapy during different phases of the recovery process has been systematized (12.2, 12.10, 12.25, 12.26, 12.29, 13.12, 13.9, 13.14, 13.19).

A manual entitled "Kinesitherapy after Joint Arthroplasty" (24.1) has been developed in response to the educational needs of students in the Master's program "Rehabilitation, Wellness, SPA and Balneotherapy" at the Faculty of Public Health of the Medical University – Plovdiv.

In-depth studies have been conducted, with corresponding conclusions and recommendations related to the prevention and prophylaxis of socially significant diseases (12.1, 12.4, 12.5, 12.6, 12.9, 12.27, 12.31, 13.11). The research focuses on: developing targeted preventive programmes aimed at reducing risky behaviour among adolescents; preventive measures for reducing osteoporosis; systematizing the main measures for the primary prevention of type 2 diabetes; increasing public awareness of opportunities for Alzheimer's disease prevention; systematizing contemporary approaches to the prevention of cardiovascular diseases; systematizing the comprehensive therapeutic approach to osteoporosis, including multidisciplinary interventions; and systematizing the main components of the SPA concept, including nature, medicine, culture, sport, nutrition and cosmetics, among others.

In the monograph (9.1), under the thematic area "Sport and Health," the benefits of sport for health are examined, as well as the role of physical education in the educational system in developing healthy habits among adolescents. The importance of sport for physical development has been demonstrated, including maintaining muscle mass and flexibility and slowing the processes of ageing. The contribution of physical activity to quality of life is substantiated through its comprehensive impact on physical and mental health.

An original systematization, methodology and practical guidelines, consistent with contemporary requirements of medical and cosmetic practice, are presented in the textbook "Classical, Cosmetic and Reflex Massage of the Face and Body" (23.3),

intended for the education of students and professionals in the field of medical cosmetic care.

The manual "Nursing Care for Children and Adults with Disabilities" (24.2), intended for students in the Nursing programme, implements an interdisciplinary approach consisting of a synthesis of knowledge, facts and postulates from several scientific fields – medicine, health care, special education, etho-pedagogy, physiotherapy and rehabilitation.

In the field of clinical pathology (12.3, 12.11, 12.12, 12.13, 12.14, 12.15, 12.16, 12.17, 12.18, 12.19, 12.21, 12.22, 12.23, 12.30, 13.1), new data are presented concerning the course, treatment and long-term consequences of COVID-19; relationships between oncological diseases, immune mechanisms and infections have been established; and the effectiveness of contemporary therapeutic approaches, including monoclonal antibodies and pharmacological treatment, among others, has been confirmed.

Considering the overall multifaceted research and teaching activities of Assoc. Prof. Maria Stamova Vakrilova-Becheva, PhD, I firmly believe that there are all grounds for her to be awarded the academic position of "PROFESSOR" in the field of higher education 7. Health Care and Sports, professional field 7.4. Public Health, and I will vote positively in this election.

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Sofia

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