

## **OPINION**

### **Regarding the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in Professional Field 7.1**

#### **Medicine (Internal Medicine)**

This opinion has been prepared in connection with the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field 7.1 Medicine (Internal Medicine), announced for the needs of the Faculty of Medicine at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." The competition was announced in the State Gazette, issue 37 of April 26, 2024, as well as on the websites of the Faculty of Medicine and Sofia University.

**The opinion was prepared by Prof. Dr. Ivo Petrov, MD, PhD, in the professional field 7.1 Medicine, in my capacity as a member of the scientific jury for the competition,** in accordance with Order No. RD-38-356 dated 05.07.2024, issued by the Rector of Sofia University, Sofia. The basis of this opinion is the documents provided on electronic media for all participants in the procedure, submitted in accordance with the requirements of the competition. Participants in the Competition

The following candidates submitted documents for participation in the announced competition:

1. Chief Assistant Dr. Valentina Simeonova Reshkova, MD, PhD - Dr. Valentina Simeonova Reshkova submitted a written statement withdrawing her participation in the competition to the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski."
2. Honorary Assistant Dr. Rada Nikolaeva Gancheva, MD
3. Dr. Nonka Nikolova Yurukova, MD

#### **I. General Description of the Submitted Materials**

##### **For the Candidate: Honorary Assistant Dr. Rada Nikolaeva Gancheva, MD**

##### **1. Application Data**

Honorary Assistant Dr. Rada Nikolaeva Gancheva, MD, has submitted all required materials and documents within the stipulated time frame, in accordance with the sample and requirements related to the application for the academic position of "Associate Professor." The documents submitted by her include 18 types of materials in hard copy, which are well-structured and clearly presented visualized, reflecting her professional path and scientific achievements. The self-assessment report of the candidate shows that she meets the minimum national requirements as regulated by the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Rules for its Application (PPZRASRB), as well as the Rules for the Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Academic Degrees and Occupying Academic Positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (PURPNSZADSU). The

submitted documents comply with all regulatory requirements and demonstrate a high level of professionalism and academic integrity.

## **2. Candidate Information**

Honorary Assistant Dr. Rada Nikolaeva Gancheva, MD, was born in 1985 in Dupnitsa. She graduated from the Medical University – Sofia in 2010 with a degree in Medicine and began her professional career in the field of rheumatology. In 2015, Dr. Gancheva successfully defended her doctoral dissertation in Rheumatology (scientific specialty 03.01.18) on the topic "Gout and Cardiovascular Risk." In 2018, she acquired a formally recognized specialty in Rheumatology within the healthcare system.

Dr. Gancheva began her clinical career as a physician at the Clinic of Rheumatology at the University Hospital "St. Ivan Rilski" – Sofia from March 1, 2017. From February 1, 2021, to October 2, 2022, she held the position of regular assistant in Rheumatology at the Department of Rheumatology at the Medical University – Sofia. Since October 4, 2022, Dr. Gancheva has been an honorary assistant in Rheumatology at the Faculty of Medicine of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." These positions reflect her consistent academic commitment and dedication to teaching and clinical work.

## **3. General Overview of the Candidate's Scientific Works and Achievements**

Dr. Gancheva's research activities are substantial, covering a wide range of studies that go beyond the scope of her dissertation and actively contribute to the advancement of medical science. In support of her candidacy for the academic position of "Associate Professor," Dr. Gancheva presented a monograph on "Renal and Cardiovascular Complications in Gout," as well as six book chapters that deepen the understanding of rheumatological diseases and their systemic effects.

The total number of her scientific publications is 54, of which 40 are in refereed and indexed journals in prestigious databases such as Web of Science and Scopus. Of these publications, 18 are in English, highlighting the international dimension of her scientific work. Two publications are indexed in Google Scholar, Crossref, and Semantic Scholar. Dr. Gancheva also has 12 publications in non-refereed journals with scientific peer review, three of which are in English. She is the author of 11 publications with an impact factor, with a total score of 24.794.

Dr. Gancheva actively participates in scientific conferences and congresses, with 22 presentations published in journals indexed in Web of Science and Scopus, 11 of which are in international forums with a total impact factor of 149.329. Additionally, she has participated in three scientific projects and presented 17 abstracts in non-refereed publications.

The self-assessment report for meeting the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB) is prepared precisely and accurately, reflecting compliance and even exceeding the requirements for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field 7.1 Medicine. All data on the impact factors of the publications are accurately aligned with

the metrics of the respective scientific journals, as listed in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) of Web of Science and Scimago Journal Rank (SJR) for the journals indexed in Scopus.

Dr. Rada Gancheva demonstrates significant scientific activity and international recognition, with a total of 70 citations of her scientific works in journals indexed in Web of Science and Scopus for the period 2012-2024, excluding self-citations and hidden self-citations. Her Hirsch index (h-index) according to Scopus is 4, highlighting her scientific impact and the quality of her publications.

Dr. Gancheva presents a wide range of scientific publications that analyze various pathological conditions, focusing on detailed analyses and summaries of literary data and her own research. The primary focus of Dr. Gancheva's research is hyperuricemia and gout as significant cardiovascular risk factors. Her studies are distinguished by a diverse methodological approach, exploring the relationship between cardiovascular risk and the clinical stages of the disease. Dr. Gancheva applies innovative approaches, such as comprehensive sonographic examination of patients with gout and the study of vascular risk associated with the development of tophi, which can have a significant impact on atherosclerotic vascular risk.

Dr. Rada Gancheva is the author of a monograph dedicated to "Renal and Cardiovascular Complications in Gout," and the lead author of the National Consensus for Diagnosis and Treatment of Gout. She is also a co-author in the international consensus of the Gout, Hyperuricemia, and Crystal-Associated Disease Network (GCAN), published in the prestigious journal *Annals of the Rheumatic Disease* in 2019, with an impact factor of 16.102, emphasizing the significance of her contribution to global standards for the treatment of gout and related diseases.

#### **4. Content Analysis of the Candidate's Scientific and Research Achievements**

Dr. Gancheva's research activity encompasses various aspects of gout and its associated metabolic and inflammatory conditions:

- **The impact of sonographically detected monosodium urate crystal deposits on target organs:** These studies examine the influence of these crystals on organs and their relationship to vascular and cardiovascular changes associated with gout.
- **Relationship between cardiovascular changes and monosodium urate deposits in patients with asymptomatic hyperuricemia and psoriatic arthritis:** These studies contribute to understanding how these metabolic changes affect long-term vascular risk.
- **Interaction between gout, obesity, diabetes, and psoriasis:** Dr. Gancheva thoroughly investigates these links, emphasizing the importance of metabolic disorders in the development of gout and cardiovascular diseases.
- **Morphological and immunofluorescent changes in renal biopsy:** Her research on the deposition of immune deposits in the kidneys of patients with hyperuricemia and gout represents an original contribution to understanding the pathogenesis of kidney damage in these conditions.

- **Studies on cardiorenal syndrome and "risky hemodynamics":** Dr. Gancheva introduces the concept of "risky hemodynamics," based on complex multimodal sonography, which expands knowledge of the hemodynamic aspects of cardiorenal syndrome in gout.
- **Relationship between asymptomatic hyperuricemia and kidney damage:** The studies address the early stages of kidney damage in patients with gout, which often manifest before the clinical onset of the disease.

Dr. Gancheva was an active reviewer for the journal *Rheumatology International* in 2017, highlighting her academic authority and competence in rheumatology. She is also a member of the Bulgarian Society of Rheumatology, the Bulgarian Society of Osteoporosis and Osteoarthritis, and the international network Gout, Hyperuricemia, and Crystal-Associated Disease Network (G-CAN), demonstrating her commitment to the development of rheumatological science at both national and international levels.

### **5. Characteristics and Evaluation of the Candidate's Teaching Activity**

Dr. Gancheva's teaching activity encompasses a significant volume of commitments within the specialties of "Medicine" and "Medicine in English" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." According to the provided report on her teaching workload, she has met all the requirements for teaching hours. For the period 2020-2022, Dr. Gancheva has a total of 520 hours of classroom teaching, of which 50 hours are dedicated to postgraduate training, and 296 hours are conducted in English. For the period 2022-2024, her classroom teaching workload amounts to 162 hours.

**The total volume of her teaching activities for the period 2020-2024 amounts to 682 hours, which attests to her active commitment to student education.** Dr. Gancheva's teaching responsibilities include delivering lectures and practical exercises in Internal Medicine, combining theoretical knowledge with practical skills essential for the training of future physicians. She works with both Bulgarian and international students, highlighting her linguistic skills and her ability to adapt to international educational standards.

### **6. Conclusion on the Candidature**

Dr. Rada Gancheva demonstrates significant scientific and teaching activity in the field of rheumatology, and her work stands out for its depth and innovation. Her main scientific contributions are focused on the study of gout and hyperuricemia as cardiovascular risk factors, applying various methodological approaches to analyze the links between metabolic disorders and the clinical stages of the disease. Dr. Gancheva is the author of numerous publications in prestigious international journals, including those with a high impact factor, and actively participates in the development of national and international consensus, further emphasizing her contribution to medical science.

Her teaching activity is also impressive, as she successfully combines theoretical knowledge with practical training for medical students, demonstrating commitment and dedication to the development of future physicians. Dr. Gancheva meets and exceeds the

minimum national requirements for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor," making her a deserving and highly qualified candidate for this position.

Given her academic achievements, scientific productivity, and contribution to the medical community, Dr. Rada Gancheva deserves positive evaluation and support for the award of the academic position of "Associate Professor."

### **For the Candidate: Dr. Nonka Nikolova Yurukova, MD**

#### **1. Application Data**

Dr. Nonka Nikolova Yurukova, MD, has submitted all required documents and materials on time according to the application form, both in hard copy and electronically, and has been admitted to participate in the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor." However, a detailed review of the submitted documents revealed some discrepancies with the required information. For example, in section 10A, an incorrect file summarizing publications and citations was provided, including the file 10B.SelectedPublicationsList.pdf. In section 11, the document AutorsSummary.pdf lacks a print date, which contradicts the requirements for specificity and validity of the documentation. Furthermore, this list is inapplicable because, as of April 30, 2024, the candidate no longer holds an academic position at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." In section 14, contributions from a previous competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in professional field 7.1 Medicine (Internal Medicine – Gastroenterology) (State Gazette No. 35 of April 18, 2023) are described, which are accepted as valid for the current competition as well.

The candidate's self-assessment report includes coverage of the minimum national requirements in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Rules for its Application (PPZRASRB), as well as the Rules for the Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Academic Degrees and Occupying Academic Positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (PURPNSZADSU). Despite some inaccuracies in the submitted documents, the candidate has been admitted to the competition, but there is a need for additional verification and clarification of the submitted materials.

#### **2. Candidate Information**

Dr. Nonka Nikolova Yurukova was born in 1971. She completed her secondary education in Pernik and continued her studies at the Medical University – Sofia, where she graduated as a physician in 1996. Her career began as a general practitioner in Pernik, followed by three years of practice as a family doctor. In 2003, she started working at the University Hospital "Lozenets" in the Clinic of Internal Medicine, where she also acquired her first clinical specialty in Internal Medicine. In 2008, Dr. Yurukova completed her second clinical specialty in Gastroenterology, further solidifying her professional expertise in this field. Currently, she works as a gastroenterologist at UMHAT "Lozenets."

The candidate has completed numerous specialized courses and training related to her clinical practice and professional qualifications. Between November 2022 and March 2023, Dr.

Yurukova completed a Masterclass in Organ Transplantation, accredited with 12 EMC credits by the Romanian College of Physicians, as per Decision No. 1812/01.03.2023, Series B, No. 3/10.03.2023. In 2022, she was recognized for her competence in Interventional and Endoscopic Abdominal Ultrasound (third level), Abdominal Doppler Ultrasound, Abdominal Ultrasound, and Ultrasound of Superficial Structures, which further expands her professional competencies in gastroenterology.

Dr. Yurukova's academic career began in 2010 at the Faculty of Medicine at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski," when she was appointed as an honorary assistant. In 2013, she was selected for the position of assistant – physician-teacher and held this role until April 29, 2024. During her academic work, Dr. Yurukova completed her doctoral studies at Sofia University and, in 2019, earned her doctoral degree in the Cardiological Doctoral Program. This demonstrates her commitment to continuous professional and academic development, as well as her aspiration to contribute to medical science and education.

As a lecturer, Dr. Yurukova combines her practical skills with her academic responsibilities, contributing to the training and development of students and young doctors. Her experience and qualifications make her a valuable asset in both clinical and academic fields, while also expanding opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation in medicine.

### **3. General Overview of the Candidate's Scientific Works and Achievements**

Dr. Nonka Yurukova, MD, is participating in the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" with scientific work that presents a variety of publications and research achievements. Despite her efforts, summarizing the quantitative scientometric indicators of the submitted works proved challenging due to discrepancies in the lists and attached files of the individual publications. Some of the presented materials were printed from online sources instead of the original journals, which does not meet the academic standards for documentary accuracy. Additionally, some data are from her previous application for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in 2023, creating additional challenges in the evaluation process.

The scanned full-text publications of Dr. Yurukova include 10 articles, one book related to her dissertation, and a monograph, the content of which largely overlaps with her dissertation for the scientific degree "Doctor." Of the presented scientific works, six are refereed in global databases, and four were presented at scientific conferences. Despite obtaining her Doctor's degree, Dr. Yurukova's academic growth is not sufficiently supported by significant publication activity that would bolster her progression to higher academic ranks and scientific development.

The citation report provided by the Central Medical Library of the Medical University – Sofia in January 2023 reports 50 citations in Scopus, 36 in Web of Science, 9 in other online databases, and 1 citation in Bulgarian sources. The absence of a detailed printed list of these citations limits the ability to fully assess the scientific impact and recognition of Dr. Yurukova's research.

The candidate's declaration indicates participation in only one research project, highlighting her limited involvement in collaborative research initiatives. The total number of

points recorded in the report for meeting the minimum national requirements is 589.8, with an incorrect entry of 1021.9 points compared to the minimum required 400 points for the academic position of "Associate Professor." The data are based on the relevant provisions of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as the criteria set by the regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski."

#### **4. Content Analysis of the Candidate's Scientific and Applied Research Achievements Presented in the Application Materials**

Dr. Nonka Yurukova, MD, is a recognized professional in gastroenterology, with a deep interest in liver transplantation. Her scientific work focuses on internal medicine and gastroenterology, with significant emphasis on metabolic syndrome, non-alcoholic steatohepatitis, and cardiovascular complications. These topics are central to her dissertation, book, and monograph, highlighting the consistency of her research interests.

Dr. Yurukova published a review titled "Impact of COVID Infection in Liver Transplant Recipients in a Clinical Center for Adult LT Recipients," where she monitored patients during the pandemic and contributed to expanding knowledge about this novel and challenging disease. In her work, she developed mathematical models to assess outcomes in liver transplantation among elderly patients and identified predictive factors for severe COVID-19 complications, representing an important contribution to medical science and clinical practice.

Furthermore, Dr. Yurukova's research interests include the study of the gut microbiome, irritable bowel syndrome, and food intolerances. Her studies track changes in cellular and humoral immunity in gastrointestinal diseases, enriching the understanding of these complex and often chronic conditions. This line of research significantly contributes to gastroenterology and enhances clinical approaches to treating affected patients.

Despite her modest participation in university projects, Dr. Yurukova has demonstrated her scientific potential and contribution to gastroenterology, as evidenced by her citations and academic recognition. She remains an active participant in the scientific community but requires broader and more consistent publication activity to solidify her academic development and contribution to medical science.

#### **5. Characterization and Evaluation of the Candidate's Teaching Activity**

Dr. Nonka Yurukova, MD, is a long-standing lecturer in the Department of Internal Medicine, Pharmacology, Pediatrics, Epidemiology, Infectious and Dermatological Diseases at the Medical University – Sofia. Her teaching career is marked by a significant commitment to the academic community but also reveals certain limitations regarding active involvement in the creation of teaching materials and the development of her pedagogical skills.

According to the academic report for the last three years, Dr. Yurukova has completed a total of 1157.5 hours of teaching activities, primarily involving classroom lectures in the past two years. This workload highlights her commitment to conducting lectures and exercises, but it is accompanied by a lack of engagement in developing teaching aids and materials, which are essential components of academic work and could greatly enrich the learning process.

The creation of educational resources is an important part of teaching that supports student learning and contributes to improving the quality of academic preparation. The lack of involvement in such activities limits the potential for a more comprehensive representation of Dr. Yurukova's teaching contribution and does not allow for a full assessment of her potential to contribute to the academic community beyond traditional classroom engagement.

## **6. Conclusion on the Candidature**

After a thorough review of the materials and scientific works presented in the competition by Dr. Nonka Yurukova, MD, and based on the analysis of their significance and the scientific and applied contributions contained therein, I conclude that the presented scientific achievements are insufficient to meet the necessary requirements according to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), its Rules and the relevant Rules of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the respective scientific field and professional direction of the competition.

Despite Dr. Yurukova's experience and professional commitment, the lack of significant publication activity, limited participation in research projects, and insufficient contribution to academic teaching in the form of developing educational materials do not allow for a positive evaluation of her candidacy. Therefore, considering all these circumstances, I give my negative assessment of Dr. Nonka Yurukova, MD, for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the current competition procedure.

## **I. Overall Conclusion**

### **Comparative Analysis of the Scientific and Academic Achievements of the Candidates**

This comparative analysis reviews the candidatures of two established specialists—Honorary Assistant Dr. Rada Nikolaeva Gancheva, MD, and Dr. Nonka Yurukova, MD, who are participating in the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field 7.1 Medicine (Internal Medicine). Both candidates possess significant professional and scientific experience but differ in their specific scientific contributions and academic activity, which define their overall contribution to medical science and education.

#### **Honorary Assistant Dr. Rada Nikolaeva Gancheva, MD**

Dr. Rada Gancheva is a recognized specialist in the field of rheumatology, with her research primarily focused on gout, hyperuricemia, and their associated cardiovascular risks. Dr. Gancheva's scientific output is significant, including 54 publications, of which 40 are in refereed journals, and 11 of these have an impact factor totaling 24.794. She is the author of a monograph and has co-authored international consensus documents, including those of the Gout, Hyperuricemia and Crystal-Associated Disease Network (GCAN), demonstrating her influence in the global scientific community.

Dr. Gancheva's teaching activity is active and involves substantial classroom engagement, including teaching medical students in English, highlighting her adaptability and



linguistic skills. She successfully combines her clinical practice with academic work, actively participating in research projects and conferences, contributing to her comprehensive academic profile. Her research in gout and its impact on the cardiovascular system is innovative and of high scientific value, expanding current knowledge and offering new approaches to the diagnosis and treatment of these conditions.

#### **Dr. Nonka Yurukova, MD**

Dr. Nonka Yurukova is a specialist with experience in gastroenterology and liver transplantation. Her scientific work includes publications related to metabolic syndrome and liver diseases, but their number and scientific impact are more limited compared to those of Dr. Gancheva. Some of the submitted materials show discrepancies with academic standards for precision, limiting the ability to fully assess her scientific contribution.

Dr. Yurukova's teaching activity is also significant but is mainly focused on classroom work without active participation in the creation of teaching materials or aids. Despite her involvement in clinical practice and teaching, her scientific activity is more modest, which affects the overall assessment of her academic productivity.

#### **Conclusion**

Based on the materials and scientific works presented for the competition, as well as the above analysis of their significance and the scientific contributions contained therein, I rank the candidates as follows:

1. **Honorary Assistant Dr. Rada Nikolaeva Gancheva, MD** – demonstrates exceptional scientific productivity and a significant contribution to rheumatology, as well as active teaching activities with international recognition.
2. **Dr. Nonka Yurukova, MD** – despite her professional experience in gastroenterology, her scientific activity and publication output are more limited, affecting the overall evaluation of her candidature.

In conclusion, I give my positive assessment for Honorary Assistant Dr. Rada Nikolaeva Gancheva, MD, and recommend that the Scientific Jury prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Medicine at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for awarding the academic position of "Associate Professor" in professional field 7.1 Medicine (Internal Medicine) to Dr. Rada Nikolaeva Gancheva.

**August 29, 2024**

**Prepared by: .....**

**Prof. Dr. Ivo Petrov, MD, PhD, DSci**