

STATEMENT

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SUBJECT: A competition procedure for holding the academic position of “Associate Professor” in Field of Study in Higher Education 7. Healthcare and Sports, professional field 7.1. Medicine, scientific specialty Hygiene, announced in State Gazette issue 61 promulgated on 02.08.2022 for the needs of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Neurology, Psychiatry, Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation, Preventive Medicine and Public Health.

The announcement for the competition procedure is consistent with the requirements of the Law on the Academic Staff Development in Republic of Bulgaria (LASDRB) and the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Section IV, articles 105–114 related to participation in the announced competition. There are no established procedural irregularities. Dr. Rositsa Bozhidarova Popova, MD, is the only candidate in the competition.

I declare that I have had no common publications with the candidate.

I. GENERAL PRESENTATION OF THE PROCEDURE

I have been appointed as an external member of the Scientific Jury under the procedure for holding the academic position of “Associate Professor” in Field of Study in Higher Education 7. Healthcare and Sports, professional field 7.1. Medicine (Hygiene) at Department of Neurology, Psychiatry, Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation, Preventive Medicine and Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” pursuant to Order issued by the Rector No. RD-38-579/06.10.2022 of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" and the Decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Medicine (Protocol No. 109/04.10.22).

Dr. Rositsa Bozhidarova Popova, MD, currently holds the position – Chief Assistant Professor in the same department.

The candidate has submitted all the necessary documents as required in LASDRB. This statement has been drawn up on the basis of the documents submitted.

II. Brief biographical data and career development

Dr. Rositsa Bozhidarova Popova was born in the city of Burgas, where she finished her secondary education at the English Language High School "Geo Milev" in 1996. Dr. Popova graduated from the MU – Sofia. She obtained the educational qualification degree "Master" in Medicine with honors in 2002.

Between 2003 to 2007, she worked as a General Practitioner at the "Dr. Organdzhiski" outpatient clinic, town of Shtip, Republic of Macedonia. From February 2007 to 2010, she was a consulting doctor in proper and healthy nutrition for various diseases at Diet Centers Group, Sofia. From November 2010 to 2012, she worked as a medical sales representative in infant milk formulas for AXXON Bulgaria JSC – MILUPA. In February 2013, after winning a competition, she was appointed as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Neurology, Psychiatry, Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation, Preventive Medicine and Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", University Hospital "Lozenetz", and since 2018 she has held the position – Chief Assistant Professor in the same department. She has had a recognized medical specialty in Nutrition and Dietetics since 2012. In 2014, she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation on the topic of Malnutrition – modern diagnostic and therapeutic approaches and obtained the educational and scientific PhD degree.

The series of participations of Dr. Popova in Bulgarian and international forums during the past period result from her active work as a proven young scientist and lecturer.

Dr. Popova has completed numerous internships and specialized courses in European universities and clinics focused on clinical nutrition and on the problems of modern diet therapy, biostatistics and information technologies.

All these occupationally specific trainings have improved her qualification as a specialist resulting in her merit-based membership, both in Bulgarian and in prestigious European educational organizations and programs in the field of nutrition.

Dr. Popova has a very good linguistic background with excellent command of written and spoken English, German and Russian.

According to the reference of Dr. Rositsa Popova she has fulfilled the minimum national requirements (MNR) under Art. 26, para. 5 of the LASDRB for holding the academic position "ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR", as it is evident from the table provided below.

Table 1. Reference of compliance with minimum national requirements

A group of indicators	Content	Associate Professor (target scores)	Reached scores by Dr. Rositsa Popova, PhD
A (A)	Indicator 1	50	50
B (B)	Indicators 3 or 4	100	100
C (Г)	Sum of indicators 5 to 9	200	302.5
D (Д)	Sum of indicators 10 to 12	50	125
E (E)	Sum of the indicators from 13 to the end	-	90

III. Research and project activity:

The **general scientific output** of Dr. Rositsa Popova, PhD., has included 79 scientific papers, of which 1 dissertation, 1 monograph (habilitation thesis), 14 full-text publications, contributions to 3 hygiene textbooks and to 1 practical guide, 42 contributions to national and international congresses, 39 citations in Bulgarian and foreign sources.

Dr. Rositsa Popova participates in current competition the with a total of 55 scientific works: **15 scientific full-text publications and 40 participations in national and international congresses. The full-text publications are 1 monograph (habilitation thesis), 7 publications in periodicals, 5 of which are referenced in world-renowned databases, including Scopus and Web of Science, and 7 publications in peer-reviewed scientific collections.** Dr. Popova is the first or independent author in 9 of the fifteen full-text articles (60%), proving her main involvement in the presented publications, in 3 (20%) she is the second author, and in 3 (20%) she is the third and subsequent author.

In the presented monograph on: **“Malnutrition and depression in eating disorders”**. 2022. ISBN – 978-954-075429-1 (153 pages), the candidate examines eating disorders and related malnutrition and depressive states. Malnutrition is spelled out in the habilitation work, with detailed descriptions of pathobiochemical changes in body, hormonal disorders, clinical symptoms and complications. Behavioral eating disorders are analyzed in detail on the basis of an extensive reference obtained from the world scientific literature. The monograph discusses the depression-malnutrition relationship in patients with eating disorders establishing a significant association presented by own studies. The Beck test to assess the severity of depression in this population in combination with appropriate anthropometric and biochemical methods to assess malnutrition are suggested for diagnostic application.

According to the reference of the Central Medical Library, the total number of citations of Dr. Popova is 39, with 38 citations in Bulgarian publications and 1 – abroad. In the present competition, she participates with 15 citations, having presented 1 citation in refereed and indexed journals in world-famous databases with scientific information (Scopus and Web of Science), 8 in monographs and collective volumes, and 6 in non-refereed journals with scientific review.

Dr. Popova continues her scientific work even after defending her dissertation. The main contributions beyond the dissertation work are related to the development of a wide range of topics of remarkable scientific value, as well as those of a scientific-applicable nature and an innovative approach. Her systematic review is focused on priority topics, and her scientific development works can be grouped into 7 major areas, where scientific contributions of an innovative, scientific-applicable and methodical character stand out. They can

be grouped by thematic sections as follows:

1) Chronic malnutrition – analysis of the Nutritional Status

A special place is occupied by the publications of Dr. Popova dedicated to malnutrition in eating disorders. (I.1; II.3; III.2) The outcomes of these scientific searches have been included in her monographic work and in Physical assessment of patients with anorexia nervosa and depression, published in the prestigious International Journal of medical practitioners in Bulgaria (Journal of IMAB). The candidate evaluates and make opportunities for diagnosis and treatment in patients with chronic malnutrition happen by introducing new methods for assessing nutritional status such as **calculation of the muscle area of the upper arm** (by measuring the circumference of the upper arm and triceps skinfold through caliperometry), correlated with muscle strength; **echocardiography** – determines the degree of ventricular dysfunction, which correlates with overall muscle strength; **MMSE test** to assess the cognitive functions of patients with chronic malnutrition.

2) Analysis of the consequences of unbalanced diet. Alternative diets. Lipid status in the population and in malnourished patients. (II.2; II.4; II.5; II.6; III.1; III.4)

Easy access to all kinds of information about "healthy eating" leads to wrong findings and conclusions among the general population. Articles II.4, II.6, and III.1 demonstrate in-depth reflection related to undernutrition or overnutrition, whereas articles II.2, II.5, II.7, III.4 – the positive and negative effects of alternative diets which claim to be able to prevent and treat.

3) Some aspects of preventive nutrition

Nowadays, an increased share of office workers with metabolic disorders is observed compared to workers in other industries resulting from the introduction of various techniques to reduce physical activity among the working population. Own research proves an increased incidence of metabolic syndrome among office workers increasing the risk of socially significant diseases and death. Preventive measures to improve their health status are suggested. (III.6, IV.9, IV.11).

4) Diet therapy

Dr. Popova is professionally and vigorously involved in the creation of specific and targeted therapeutic diets, applicable in modern clinical practice, both in patients with chronic malnutrition and in patients with obesity. (III.7) Furthermore, based on the assessed nutritional status of patients after hematopoietic stem cell transplantation, she provides nutritional support to diet therapy. (III.5).

5) Eating disorders

The publications on this matter are of exceptional interest, where the clinical experience with the participation of the candidate working in this field, as well as the modern concepts regarding the classification, etiology, clinical picture and therapy of these diseases, spelled out in her monographic work, are described. Resulting from her work, the awareness of this problem among medical specialists from hospital and pre-hospital care has increased, and training of students has also been enriched in this area.

6) Stress and associated factors among students. Preventive measures.

Medical education is a process associated with a considerable psycho-emotional burden and therefore the level of stress among medical students is significantly higher than that in the general population and students of other specialties. The level of stress increases gradually in the course of training and is manifested by uncertainty and insecurity, mental disorders and metabolic disturbances. Based on the identified stressors and level of stress among medical students, individual and group strategies to manage the stress in medical universities are suggested (III.3).

7) Problems resulting from unbalanced and insufficient nutrition in hospital facilities. Problems with organized nutrition services.

Dr. Popova's research interests are focused on imbalanced nutrition and especially on malnutrition, both in outpatients and in hospitalized patients. In her research work, she successfully cooperates with nutritionists, gastroenterologists, endocrinologists, anesthesiologists, resulting in her participation in (1) an international research project of the Medical University – Vienna, 2016-2017 – a scientific project "NutritionDay", DVR-Nr. 0688967 funded by the European Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (ESPN). With the results obtained from this project, Dr. Popova participated in a number of prestigious national and international forums. (II.1; IV.13; IV.17, V.1)

For the competition, Dr. Popova has attached a list of participations in prestigious forums in the country and abroad with a total of 40 scientific reports, in 31 (78%) of them the candidate is the first or independent author, and 5 of the abstracts have been published in international journals with a total IF – 8.57, h-index – 1.

Dr. Popova is a member of the Bulgarian Medical Association, a member of the Governing Board of the Bulgarian Scientific Society of Nutrition and Dietetics, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Federation of European Nutrition Societies (FENS).

IV. EDUCATIONAL AND TEACHING ACTIVITY

According to the reference submitted by Dr. Popova, she has had a total

of 15 years and 3 months of work experience, of which 9 years and 6 months of teaching experience. Dr. Popova's teaching experience is related to conducting seminars and practical exercises, colloquiums and semester exams in the mandatory discipline "Hygiene and Ecology" for students and intern-doctors from the specialty "Medicine" (training in Bulgarian and English), and also lecture course and practical exercises in "Hygiene and Ecology" for the students of the "Nursing" specialty.

The general study load of Ch. Assistant Professor Dr. Rositsa Popova, in the previous 5 years is as follows:

- Realized academic hours for the previous 5 academic years (2017/2018, 2018/2019, 2019/2020, 2020/2021, 2021/2022) – a total of 4253.6 hours, of which total teaching hours – 3451.5 hours.

The above mentioned gives me serious reason to believe that Dr. Popova is a fully formed lecturer in the "Hygiene" specialty with extensive professional experience and high general medical, specialized and linguistic qualifications.

V. CONSULTING AND SCIENTIFIC APPLIED ACTIVITY

Dr. Popova popularizes the results of her scientific studies in popular articles in periodicals related to healthy eating. She is the author of a manual on healthy eating for cardiovascular diseases. Автор е на наръчник по здравословно хранене при сърдечно-съдови заболявания. She also provides advisory and methodical assistance at various levels in the field of public health, mainly by participating in national campaigns and conducting training in educational programs regarding a healthy lifestyle, promotion of healthy nutrition in different age groups, nutrition in anorexia, in patients with multiple sclerosis, etc.

As a specialist in Nutrition and Dietetics, Dr. Popova consults kitchens specialized in preparing food for infants and children over 1 year of age, as well as kitchens specialized in preparing food according to individual menus.

CONCLUSION

The qualitative characteristics of the submitted publications and the scientific projects developed by Dr. Rositsa Bozhidarova Popova are at a very high scientific and scientific-applicable level.

The data provided by the candidate related to her participation in the competition convincingly prove that she is a fully realised scientist with various interests, both in scientific and teaching activities, and she has the necessary professional competence meeting the requirements for holding the academic position of "ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR" according to LASDRB and the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Dr. Popova has the required number of publications in our and international journals, she participates as an author in monographs, as well as in numerous scientific forums in the country and abroad.

The originality of her scientific development works is reflected in the high total impact factor – **8,57, h-index – 1.**

The foregoing allows me to recommend to the members of the Honorable Jury to award the academic position “Associate Professor” in the scientific specialty “HYGIENE” for the needs of the Department of "Neurology, Psychiatry, Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation, Preventive Medicine and Public Health", Faculty of Medicine, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" to Dr. Rositsa Bozhidarova Popova, PhD.

Sofia

30.11.2022

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'A. Penkov', written in a cursive style.

/Assoc. Prof. Alexander Penkov, PhD, MD/