



## МЕДИЦИНСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ СОФИЯ

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## REVIEW

by Prof. Georgi Neichev Onchev, MD,  
from the Department of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology  
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member of a scientific jury according to Order No. R-109-267/ 25.05.2023 of the Rector of the  
MU-Varna

for holding a contest for the position of “Associate Professor”—one post in the area of higher education 7. “Healthcare and Sports”, the professional field 7.1 “Medicine”, and scientific specialty “Psychiatry” for the needs of the Department of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology at the Faculty of Medicine of MU-Varna, based at UMHAT “Sveta Marina”, announced in the “State Gazette”, issue 28/28.03.2023.

### 1. General overview of the procedure

The only candidate who submitted documents to participate in the contest is Dr. Zhivko Pavlinov Apostolov, MD, PhD. The documents and materials delivered by him have been submitted within the legally established deadline and comply with the procedure for occupying the academic position of “Associate Professor” according to the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA), the Statutes for its implementation, and the Statutes for Development of the Academic Staff at the MU “Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov” Varna (last rev. 21.11.2022) and its appendices.

### 2. Brief biographical sketch and career development

Dr. Zhivko Pavlinov Apostolov, MD, completed his medical degree at the Medical University of Varna (2010). He has two years of medical experience in emergency and primary medical care, and since 2012, he has been working at the Second Psychiatric Clinic of the University Hospital “Sveta Marina” in Varna and became Board certified specialist in psychiatry in 2017. Since 2011, he has been a regular PhD student at the Department of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology at the Medical University of Varna, successfully defending his dissertation on the topic “On some dimensions of brain asymmetry in schizophrenia” in 2014. From 2016 to 2018, he was an honorary Lecturer, in 2018 he became Lecturer, and since 2019, he has been

Senior Lecturer at the Department of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology at the Medical University of Varna, conducting practicals in both psychiatry and medical psychology.

### **3. Research papers**

The presented scientific publications, excluding those for the PhD degree, consist of 1 monograph, 12 full-text articles, and 3 abstracts. Eleven of the articles are published in Bulgarian journals, while 1 is published in an international journal. Two of the articles are published in journals referenced in global databases (Web of Science—Core Collection and Scopus), while 10 are published in non-referenced journals. In the presented official academic report issued by the Library of the Medical University of Varna, publications numbered 11 and 12 in indicator D8 are incorrectly included because they are abstracts rather than full-text “publications and reports”. Their quantitative contribution to this indicator is modest (a total of 12 points), and even if they are removed, the total score for indicators D5-9 (258 points) exceeds the mandatory minimum of 200 points.

The publication listed as a “full-text one ... beyond the minimum scientometric requirements for the position of Associate Professor” (page 5 of the academic report) is not a full-text article but an abstract (similar to the other two abstracts in *Scripta Scientifica Vox Studentium*) and should not be considered as such.

The total number of citations of the candidate’s publications is 11, excluding self-citations. Since the citations are in non-referenced journals (indicator E12 of Appendix 1 to the Statutes for the Development of Academic Staff at the Medical University of Varna’s), the total score for this indicator is 55.

In the 12 proper full-text articles, the candidate is the sole author in 5 of them, the first author in 6, and the second author in one. Thematically, the publications are related to schizophrenia, evolutionary psychiatry, brain asymmetry, depression and anxiety disorders, as well as some philosophical and methodological aspects of neurocognition. The language used is precise and academically appropriate.

The weaknesses of the presented habilitation papers are as follows: a) their scarcity; b) their placement in predominantly non-referenced publications, some of which (such as *GP News*, *MEDINFO*, *PRO MEDIC*) are low-ranking periodicals with a descriptive and educational nature and unclear peer review standards; c) the lack of original research publications, with the exception of one that involves retrospective data collection from hospital records—the rest are reviews, and one includes a description of a clinical case; d) the absence of publications in journals with an impact factor (IF) or higher impact rank. Consequently, the citations solely come from non-referenced Bulgarian sources. It should be noted that these weaknesses are not incompatible with the requirements of the Statutes for the Development of Academic Staff at the Medical University of Varna for the respective academic position.

Particular attention should be given to the habilitation monograph titled “Evolutionary psychiatry: A different perspective on schizophrenia and psychopathology” (2018), which represents an integrative application of neo-Darwinism principles to psychopathology. The monograph is rich in information and text, and at the same time, the author effortlessly transitions

between different disciplines such as psychiatry, evolutionary biology, neurophysiology, anthropology, genetics, and ethology, illustrating the different paces of cultural and biological evolution in humans—and the emergence of diseases as a result of this divergence. The book presents a range of theoretical and empirical foundations for considering schizophrenia as a byproduct of evolution. Competently and restrainedly, it describes hemisphere specialization and the development of language, the so-called social brain, cognitive functioning in the world of symbols and “double” reality, and the failure of this functioning in severe mental illness. The monograph traces the phenomenon of cultural evolution surpassing biological evolution in other mental disorders as well, where ancient adaptive behaviors can be viewed as prototypes of modern symptoms in response to environmental changes. One of the key messages of the monograph is that the genes for mental disorders have been likely helpful for us in the past and are part of our human essence.

#### **4. Scientific contributions**

The contributions of the review publications are mainly practical and affirmative, while the original ones come from the areas of evolutionary psychiatry and brain asymmetry. They can be systematically categorized into separate thematic areas.

##### **4.1 Evolutionary Psychiatry**

The evolutionary role of social cognition and the social brain in the emergence of psychopathology stands out. Evolutionary theories regarding the development of schizophrenia and some other mental disorders are discussed, with bold connections made between different disciplines.

##### **4.2 Schizophrenia**

A comparison of trends in antipsychotic prescribing for first-episode schizophrenia over a 10-year period is conducted through a retrospective review of hospital records. Reviews on pharmacotherapeutic and psychotherapeutic possibilities in the treatment of schizophrenia are presented.

##### **4.3 Depression and Anxiety Disorders**

Reviews on personalized approaches in the treatment of depression are presented, as well as the connection between mitral valve prolapse and panic disorder, diabetes and depression, and other mental disorders. Additionally, a review on the treatment of anxiety disorders during pregnancy and breastfeeding is done.

##### **4.4 Philosophical and methodological aspects in contemporary cognitive neuroscience**

An overview is provided on embodied cognition, presenting ideas about the role of the body and its interactions with the environment in cognition, challenging the traditional view of the brain as the sole center of knowledge. The theoretically possible implications of this paradigmatic focus are discussed, particularly in relation to a better understanding and treatment of schizophrenia.

#### 4.5 Brain Asymmetry

The original scientific contributions in this field are discussed in the candidate's dissertation and are not a proper focus in the assessment of the criteria for the academic position in the current competition.

#### 5. Teaching activity

Dr. Apostolov served as an honorary Lecturer from 2016 to 2018 with a yearly teaching workload of 60 teaching hours. Since 2018, as a regular Faculty member (Lecturer and Senior Lecturer), he has had a teaching workload ranging from 221 to 229 teaching hours per year, both in Bulgarian and English languages.

#### 6. Clinical activity

Dr. Apostolov is a theoretically and practically well-prepared clinician with a phenomenological approach and therapeutic attitude. His previous experience in emergency and general medicine serves as a valuable prelude to his specialization, providing breadth and clinical realism to his practice. He works with pathology in both general psychiatry and the field of addictions. The candidate has established professional integrity. Although clinical activity is not a specific criterion for habilitation, these qualities are an integral part of a comprehensive evaluation.

#### 7. Participation in scientific events and organizations

Dr. Apostolov has participated in five European congresses and two national conferences. He has active profiles on platforms such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ORCID, ResearcherID, and eLibrary.

#### 8. Summarization and conclusion

The table below presents summarized quantitative data from various areas of the candidate's scientific research activities, compared to the requirements of the respective indicator groups according to the Statutes for Development of the Academic Staff at the MU Varna (Appendix 1) for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the area 7. Healthcare and Sport, professional field 7.1. Medicine—clinical subfield. It is evident that the candidate's actual parameters satisfy those of the national law and the University's Statutes.

**Table. Compliance of the candidate's actual indicators for scientific activities with the minimum requirements of the Statutes for Development of the Academic Staff at the MU Varna (Appendix 1) for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the area of 7. Healthcare and Sport, professional field 7.1. Medicine—clinical subfield**

<b>Groups of indicators</b>	<b>Quantitative requirements of the SDAS MU Varna</b>	<b>Real candidate's indicators</b>
A1	50	50
C3	100	100
D5-D9	200	258
E10-E12	50	55
F	0	0
<b>Total sum of points</b>	<b>430</b>	<b>463</b>

It is acknowledged that Dr. Apostolov has the potential to expand his scientific pursuits and engage in more ambitious research and publication activities. His youthfulness and depth of knowledge suggest a broader scope for scientific exploration and writing, providing grounds for expectations in that regard.

The overall assessment of the candidate's scientific and teaching activities demonstrates that he meets the requirements of the DASRBA and the Statutes for Development of the Academic Staff at the MU "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" Varna for the position of Associate Professor in the field of 7. Health Care and Sports, professional field 7.1 Medicine—Clinical subfield. This provides a basis for a positive opinion on the appointment of Dr. Zhivko Pavlinov Apostolov to the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the area of higher education 7. "Healthcare and Sport", professional field 7.1. "Medicine", specialty "Psychiatry".

Prof. Dr. Georgi Onchev

