

STATEMENT

By Prof. Dr Albena Kerekovska, PhD

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Faculty of Public Health
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Regarding: Competition for the academic position "*Professor*" in the field of higher education „7. Healthcare and Sport“, in professional field 7.1 „Medicine“, in specialty „*Social Medicine and organisation of Healthcare and Pharmacy*“ for the needs of Department of Social Medicine and Healthcare Organisation, Faculty of Public Health, Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" – Varna, published in the State Gazette, issue 7, 23.01.2024.

Introduction to the competition

By order № R-109-97/22.03.2024 of the Rector of the Medical University of Varna, I am included as an internal member of the Scientific Jury for the announced competition for the academic position "Professor" in the State Gazette, issue 7, 23.01.2024.

According to Protocol № 1 / 02.04.2024, from the first meeting of the Scientific Jury, I am appointed to prepare a statement of opinion.

One candidate participates in the announced competition - **Assoc. prof. Dr Desislava Ivanova Vankova, PhD, DSc.** The candidate has precisely submitted all the necessary documents for participation in the competition.

The procedure for announcing the competition is in accordance with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its Application, and the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Medical University of Varna.

Career profile of the candidate

Desislava Vankova obtained an educational and qualification degree "Master" in the specialty "Medicine" (MD) at the Medical University of Varna in 1993. In 1999 she completed an international Master's program in public health at the Maastricht University, the Netherlands. In 2001 acquired a specialty in "Social Medicine and Healthcare Organization". In 2013 Dr. Vankova successfully defended a dissertation at the Medical University of Varna on the topic "Health-related Quality of Life at a community level" and obtained the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Philosophy" (PhD) in the scientific specialty "Social medicine and organization of healthcare and pharmacy".

She started her professional experience in 1994 as a medical doctor in the Internal Department of the Municipal Hospital in the town of Malko Tarnovo. In the period until 2001 she successively worked also as a physician in an Emergency Medical Center, and in general practice, and as an epidemiologist. From 2001 to 2015 she worked in the field of pharmaceuticals, reaching the position of Key Account Manager at GlaxoSmithKline Bulgaria.

Dr. Vankova started her academic career in 2000 as a part-time assistant at the Department of "Social Medicine and Healthcare Organization" at the Faculty of Public Health, the Medical

University of Varna (MU-Varna). In 2015 she started working as a part-time assistant, and after winning competitions, successively held the academic positions of "senior assistant" (in 2016) and "Associate professor" (in 2018) in to the same department. Since 2015 Assoc. Prof. Vankova has been the head of the Scientific Department at the Medical University of Varna. In 2022 she defended a dissertation on the topic "Integrative Medicine - Holistic Conceptual Model, Scientific and Educational Approaches" and in 2023 obtained the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" (DSc) in the specialty "Social Medicine and Organization of Healthcare and Pharmacy" in professional field 7.1 "Medicine".

The participation in many qualification courses for continuing education and short-term specializations, both in the country and abroad, further contribute to the professional development of the candidate and form her as a very well-prepared and modern-thinking professional, expert, teacher and a researcher. The directions of her postgraduate training and qualification are broad - in the field of: social medicine; modern epidemiology and clinical trials; quantitative and qualitative research methods in medicine and public health; health promotion and healthy lifestyle; preventive medicine, quality of life and subjective health; health technology assessment; integrative medicine, One Health and antimicrobial resistance. From 2021 she also specializes in Medical pedagogy.

Assoc. prof. Vankova actively participates as a supervisor, team leader, expert, and member of a working group in educational and scientific international, national and institutional projects.

She is a member of international and national scientific, non-governmental (NGO) and professional organizations, including: European Public Health Association; European Society of Integrative Medicine; Bulgarian Public Health Association (Board member, since 2023); Bulgarian Scientific Society of Public Health; Union of Scientists in Bulgaria; NGO "Public Health - 99" and Bulgarian Medical Association.

Dr Vankova has excellent multilingual competencies - she speaks and uses English and Russian fluently in his professional activities.

Science and Research activities

The publications and references submitted for participation in the competition prove high scientific productivity, quality and international recognition of the scientific production of Assoc. prof. Vankova.

A total of 72 scientific papers have been submitted for participation in the competition - actual publications that reflect the candidate's research activity in the period 2017-2023 -.

Their distribution by types and in numbers (n) is as follows:

- Habilitation work (B3.) – monograph – n=1 ;
- PhD Dissertation (A1.) – 1 ;
- DSc Dissertation (E13.) – n=1 ;
- Book based on a defended DSc work (G6.) – n=1 ;
- Monograph published but not presented as a basic habilitation work (G5.) – n=1;
- Chapter in a collective monograph (G9.) – n=1 ;
- Textbooks and handbooks (E20. и E21.) – n=5 ;
- Publications and reports published in scientific editions, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information (G7.) – n=16;
- Publications and reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes (G8.) – n=39 ;
- Published abstracts in IF journals – n=3 ;

- Participation as an expert in the preparation of European health policy strategies, which ended with the publication of a final document – n=3.

All publications are correctly described and attached in full in electronic format to the competition materials. There are 39 publications in Bulgarian (34 publications and 5 textbooks and handbooks), and 34 in a foreign language (English) (29 publications, 3 IF abstracts and 3 research strategic reports). One of the publications was published in a bilingual issue of the journal “Critique and Humanism”.

The candidate provides information on 44 participations in scientific forums after the procedure for Associate professor, 19 of which are international and 25 - national.

The high personal contribution in the scientific works of Assoc. prof. Vankova, as well as her belonging to larger author collectives of scientific researches, have been proven. She is the only or first author in 47% of the actual publications submitted for the competition.

The works have been published in renowned scientific journals, conference proceedings and books abroad and in our country, such as: *European Journal of Integrative Medicine*; *Journal of Public Health*; *BMC Public Health*; *Homeopathy*; *Insights by in vivo confocal microscopy*; *Black Sea Journal of Medicine and Public Health*; *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)*; *Contact Lens and Anterior Eye*; *Journal of IMAB*; *INTEDProceedings*; *Social Medicine*; *Scripta Scientifica Salutis Publicae*; *Izvestia Journal of the Union of Scientists - Varna*; *Asklepios*; *Varna Medical Forum*.

The research activities and scientific contributions of Associate professor Vankova are in the field of the scientific specialty of the announced competition. They can be grouped into the following thematic areas:

1. *Quality of life and health. Social inequalities:*

- In public health – for the various vulnerable groups of the population – adults, children, etc.;
- In clinical medicine – patient-reported outcomes in chronic diseases in the context of person-centered comprehensive patient care.

2. *Health promotion and preventive medicine:*

- Health promotion; active aging; values and development of public health care;
- Health promotion through Bulgarian folk dances as motor activity and academic discipline;
- One Health – expert research work at an international level and introduction of the idea in Bulgarian healthcare, including in routine activities for prevention and control of infections, as well as for dealing with antimicrobial resistance.

3. *Integrative medicine – conceptual modelling and research in the field of complementary and alternative medicine and health promotion.*

4. *Education and research. Methodologies and applications:*

- Public health education and teaching methods;
- Research methodology. Scientometrics and open access in medical science.

An initial focus in her research path are the positive indicators for the assessment of inequalities and more specifically the application of tools to assess health-related quality of life. The clearly stated desire and opportunity to deal with theoretical problems of modern social medicine confirmed Assoc. prof. Dr. Desislava Vankova as a researcher of little-known and innovative fields that need to be presented to the national academic community. Such areas are: health-related quality of life (first research in 2010), mixed-method approaches in medicine, integrative medicine, One Health, narrative medicine. Assoc. prof. Vankova's interests in education, teaching and scientific writing lead to research and publications related to teaching methods and models and to scientometrics. The classical approaches of preventive medicine and health promotion remain at the core value of the candidate's developments and pursuits, including research targeting vulnerable groups such as the elderly and children. In addition, "history of medicine" as a research field is included in all priority directions of the scientific work of Assoc. prof. Dr. Desislava Vankova.

I accept the scientific contributions indicated systematically in the applicant's reference. They are correctly defined, very well demarcated by thematic areas and substantiated in the attached scientific works.

Evidence is presented for the relevance and high quality of the publications, and their reflection in the international scientific literature. For the current competition, the candidate submitted a reference to the University Library of the Medical University of Varna for 10 citations - three of which are in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information.

Confirmation of international recognition and quality of Assoc. prof. Vankova's scientific works is the high impact factor of her scientific production - total IF = 14.715

A certificate has been submitted that Assoc. prof. Vankova has registered active scientific profiles in ORCID; Scopus; Web of Science; Google Scholar, Research Gate.

The candidate actively participates in national and international scientific forums and working groups in the field of the announced competition, including as a moderator and lecturer at scientific events.

Assoc. Prof. Vankova participated in five international and four national scientific projects with topics aimed at the main focus of her scientific interests. She is also a Team leader of 4 scientific projects at the "Nauka" Fund at the MU-Varna and of 2 international projects.

Assoc. prof. Vankova is a reviewer of numerous scientific publications in prestigious foreign and Bulgarian journals. She is a reviewer of publications in BMC Public Health; Value in Health Regional Issues; Scripta Scientifica Salutis Publicae; Zdrowie Publiczne i Zarządzanie; Social Medicine; Bulgarian Journal of Public Health; Journal of IMAB; Asklepios; Journal of the Union of Scientists-Varna; Medical Review and others.

She is a member of the editorial board of the journal "Asklepios", a publication of the Balkan Association for the History and Philosophy of Medicine.

Teaching academic activities

Assoc. prof. Desislava Vankova has over 28 years of experience in the specialty and seven years and 6 months of teaching experience in the Department of Social Medicine and Healthcare Organization, Faculty of Public Health, Medical University of Varna. Her academic workload is very high (mean of 352 classroom hours per year in the last four years) and significantly exceeds the required standard for teaching employment of qualified persons.

The candidate's academic and teaching activities are in the field of her broad interdisciplinary training and scientific interests in the field of public health.

She actively participates in the teaching of students from various specialties and educational qualification degrees (including in English language training), by leading lecture courses on social medicine, with emphasis on the relevant specialty, to students of: medicine (English language course); nursing, midwifery, speech therapy, kinesitherapy, optometry, healthcare management etc. She also conducts seminars for students of medicine (Bulgarian and English language course), dentistry (Bulgarian and English language course), pharmacy and assistant pharmacist. In 2023 participates in the innovative Master's program in English "Artificial Intelligence in Health care" through the development of the study discipline "Preventive care, Health Promotion and Artificial Intelligence".

Assoc. prof. Vankova is a member of the "Midwife" Program Board. She actively participates in the development of study programs in the disciplines: "Social Medicine and Health Promotion" - for the specialty "Midwife"; "Social Medicine" - for the specialty "Nurse"; "Prevention and Eye Health promotion" - for "Optometrist" and others. Since 2019 she has been chairing of the State Examination Commissions for "Social Medicine and Health Promotion and Social and Health Legislation" for nurses and midwives. She participates in state examination boards for the specialty "Medicine", as well as in the pre-graduate internship of last year medical students. She is the author and co-author of textbooks and handbooks that are used to teach students of various medical specialties.

Assoc. prof. Vankova is a supervisor of six PhD students in the doctoral programs "Social Medicine and Organization of Healthcare and Pharmacy" and "Public Health Management", two of whom have already successfully defended their dissertations. She is a lecturer in the theoretical courses for the specialization in "Public Health", module "Medical-Social and Legal Sciences", as well as in the specialization course in Ophthalmology in the pre-clinical module. In 2022 is responsible for the basic course for the specialization in "Social Medicine and Health Management". She is a supervisor of the "Social Medicine and Health Management" specialisations.

Assoc. Prof. Vankova works very actively with young researchers and PhD students, providing methodological support regarding the design of scientific research and the use of statistical analyzes for data processing, results interpretation, writing and editing of scientific publications.

She has completed additional training and certified courses in pedagogy and digital skills development.

Expert activities

Assoc. prof. Vankova is an expert in research ethics. She was a member of the Ethical Committee at the University Hospital "Sveta Marina" - Varna in the period of 2018 - 2022, and since 2020 she has been a member of the Research Ethics Committee at the Medical University of Varna.

The candidate participates as an expert in the preparation of European health policy strategies. She is a member of the EUPHA Working Group on Access to Medicines, an active expert at the European Commission for project assessments, as well as in national commissions for the health technologies assessment (2016-2019). Participates as a focal academic point for Burgas at the WHO Regions for Health Network.

Associate Professor Desislava Vankova, has completed numerous trainings in scientific writing, publicational ethics, scientometrics, like the training by StrikePlagiarism – “Anti-plagiarism procedures and principles in higher education” based on StrikePlagiarism.com and others.

Compliance with the scientometric requirements of the MU-Varna for occupying the academic position "Professor"

The presented materials show that Assoc. Dr. Desislava Vankova fully covers, and for the groups of indicators G, D and E exceeds the scientometric requirements for occupying the academic position "Professor" (Table 1).

Table 1. *Compliance with the scientometric requirements of the MU-Varna for occupying the academic position "Professor"*

Групи показатели	Number of points (required)	Number of points based on presented evidence
A	50	50
Б	-	-
В	100	100
Г/G	200 (≥ 100 т. from Indicator G7)	1356.57 (428.57т. from Indicator G7)
Д/D	100	1140
Е	100 (≥ 80 т. from Indicator E14)	595 (80т. from Indicator E14)

Conclusion

The candidate for participation in the current competition fully meets, and in most indicators, repeatedly exceeds the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Application and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the University of Medicine - Varna for occupying the academic position "Professor".

Assoc. prof. Desislava Vankova is an academic teacher and researcher with experience and established authority on a national and international scale. She is highly recognized as a member of scientific organizations and an active participant in our and international academic collaborations and research projects.

The candidate provides up-to-date and original scientific production of high quality, international recognition, and significant potential for practical applicability. She has interdisciplinary training and research interests, as well as significant organizational experience and expertise.

The overall assessment of the professional development, educational and teaching activity, scientific performances, contribution and international recognition, expert potential, organizational and management achievements and established authority of the candidate give me the reason to give a positive opinion and confidently suggest to the members of the Scientific Jury to choose **Assoc. prof. Dr Desislava Ivanova Vankova, PhD, DSc** for the academic position "Professor" in the field of higher education "7. Healthcare and Sport", in professional field 7.1 "Medicine", in specialty "Social Medicine and Organization of Healthcare and Pharmacy" for the needs of Department of Social Medicine and Healthcare Organization, Faculty of Public Health, Medical University of Varna.

10.05.2024
Varna

Member of the Scientific Jury:

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/Prof. Dr Albena Kerekovska, PhD/