

Opinion

Of Associate Professor Dr. Binna Nencheva, DM, internal member of the scientific jury, appointed by Ordinance of the Medical University – Varna Rector No. R-109-254/06.06.2025

regarding

competition for obtaining the academic position “Associate Professor” by Dr. Elitsa Gercheva Hristova, in scientific discipline Eye Diseases, as required by Optometry and Occupational Diseases Department, Public Health Faculty, code 03.01.36, announced in SG, issue 30/08.04.2025.

The only candidate in the competition was Chief Assistant Dr. Elitsa Gercheva Hristova, DM.

The candidate has presented all documents required for participating in the competition as established by the requirements of the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act, the Regulations for the application of that Act and the regulations for Development of the Academic Staff of the Medical University – Varna.

As per protocol No. 244 of 15.05.2023 on carrying out the first session of the scientific jury, I am appointed to elaborate an opinion on the procedure for obtaining the academic position “Associate Professor”.

Short biography

Dr. Elitsa Gercheva Hristova graduated Medicine at the Medical University – Varna in 2012. From 2013 to 2017 she was an ophthalmology resident at the Specialised Hospital for Active Treatment in Ophthalmology–Varna and Medical University – Varna, and in 2017 she obtained specialty in Eye Diseases. Within the period 2013 – 2016 she was a regular PhD student at the Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences Department at Medical University – Varna and in 2016 she obtained educational qualification degree Doctor in Medicine after presenting her thesis on Microstructural Characteristics of Macula Changes in Socially Significant Diseases of the Retina. In 2016 Dr. Hristova started work as an assistant at the Optometry and Occupational Diseases Department at Medical University – Varna, and in 2020 she became Chief Assistant. In 2024 Dr. Hristova obtained master’s degree in health management and medical and social care at Medical University – Varna.

Dr. Hristova is fluent in English. She has participated in a number of national and international scientific conferences. She has: first award of the poster competition carried out within the congress Novelties in Ophthalmology in 2014; first award – Surgery session within the competition Science and Youth in 2014; second award – poster competition within the XVIIth annual meeting of the Union of Bulgarian Medical Specialists in 2014; second award – Anniversary Scientific Student Session – 2011 and 2 grants by the European Academy of Allergology and Clinical Immunology and by the American Austrian Foundation as well a scholarship by the Bulgarian Medical Association.

Dr. Elitsa Hristova is the author of 33 scientific publications four of which have been included in the reference for complying with the minimum requirements for obtaining the academic position “Associate Professor” according to the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act.

The research works presented for this competition were published within the period from 2016 to 2024.

Dissertation on: Microstructural Characteristics of Macula Changes in Socially Significant Diseases of the Retina, 2016.

Monography: Refraction – clinical principles and algorithms, 2024, volume: 150 pages

ISBN 978-619-221-500-2.

The monography is a modern issue which provides information on all key specifics of clinical refraction and optical correction. The monography is quite exhaustive on the topic of optical correction and may serve both for training of specialists in healthcare and public health–opticians and optometrists, and for ophthalmologists. In the meantime, the work demonstrates the author’s knowledge on the physical laws for light distribution, eye anatomy and refractive media, as well as on modern high-tech research methods. The main methods for control of myopia which have particular significance now – pharmacological, orthokeratology and soft bifocal lenses, have been reviewed, as well as the additional factors influencing myopia, such as time spent outdoors, nutrition etc.

Publications

- Publications in scientific editions referred and indexed in world renown data bases with scientific information – 5 (3 of which are full-text and 2 are resumes)
- Publications and reports published in non-referred scientifically reviewed magazines or published in edited collective volumes – 12 articles
- Full-text publications in scientific magazines and compilations in relation to obtaining educational qualification degree Doctor – 4 non-referred scientifically reviewed magazines
- Publications out of the scope of the evidence material for complying with the minimal requirements for obtaining the academic position “Associate Professor” published in non-referred scientifically reviewed magazines – 1

All publications are adequately described and attached in full and in electronic copies to the materials for the competition.

The total score on indicators **G5-9** is **202.25**, which covers the mandatory minimum of 200.

Dr. Hristova has actively participated in scientific forums – 8 international and 5 abroad. Her research activity includes:

Research and scientific and applied activities of the candidate

Dr. Elitsa Hristova is the author of 33 scientific publications four of which have been included in the reference for complying with the minimum requirements for obtaining the academic position “Associate Professor” according to the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act of 2018. One full-text publication out of the scope of the evidence material has also been presented.

The research works presented for this competition were published within the period from 2014 to 2024.

All publications are adequately described and attached in full and in electronic copies to the materials for the competition.

The scientific interests of Dr. Elitsa Hristova reside in the fields of retina, children`s vision and oculoplastic and reconstructive surgery.

Dr. Hristova has actively participated in scientific forums – 29 national and 8 international scientific conferences.

According to the presented reference from the Medical University – Varna library **4 citations** of the research works of Dr. Hristova have been found on foreign scientific editions referred and indexed in world renown data bases with scientific information /WOS/Scopus/.

The main contributions of the research works of Dr. Hristova are as follows:

- Modern algorithms for exploring clinical refraction and selection of optical correction have been elaborated and presented, including for the use of multifocal lenses which have been adapted for easier application in clinical practice.
- A comprehensive comparative analysis of two automated methods for determining pupillary distance (PD) for long distance has been carried out – autorefractometry and pupilometer, establishing lack of clinically significant differences which allows more flexibility in clinical practice when selecting a method.
- Microstructural changes in corneal basal epithelium and cystic modifications in conjunctiva after UV exposure have been proven which are not clinically detectable through standard methods.
- An up-to-date epidemiological evaluation of the incidence of diabetic retinopathy in Northeastern Bulgaria has been elaborated while considering the type of diabetes, treatment and demographic factors.
- For the first time a complex comparative analysis of microstructural changes in macula in socially significant diseases (including age-related macular degeneration, central retinal vein occlusion and central serous chorioretinitis) has been elaborated, using optical coherence tomography (OCT).
- Specific features of OCT have been established which allow differentiation and early diagnostics of socially significant diseases of retina.
- An innovative diagnostic platform FORUM (Zeiss, US) has been presented with its capacity for early detection and follow-up of glaucoma and retinal diseases.

- Clinical and genetic characteristics of the Usher syndrome have been reviewed as a rare ophthalmological condition with severe multisensory manifestation.

Dr. Hristova takes part in **5 projects** funded by the Medical University – Varna and is the project manager of one of them.

Teaching and learning activities

Dr. Hristova has a 5-year' experience as a specialist. She has a teaching experience of 8 years, 7 months and 8 days, 3 years, 10 months and 3 days of which at the Optometry and Occupational Disease Department of Medical University – Varna, and 4 years, 9 months at the Eye Diseases and Visual Sciences Department. She has 5 years' experience so far. She has high teaching workload – 488 hours annually. Dr. Hristova teaches the main subjects within the curriculum for eye diseases, both in Bulgarian and English language – medicine, dental medicine, medical nurse, obstetrician and medical optician.

Her academic workload is as follows: during the academic year 2022/2023 her total workload is 169 hours; during the academic year 2021/2022 her total workload is 488 hours; during the academic year 2020/2021 her total workload is 425 hours, during the academic year 2019/2020 her total workload is 72 hours. During the academic years 2017/2018, 2018/2019., 2022/2023, and 2023/2024 Dr. Hristova was on maternity leave. It is worth noting that the teaching workload of Dr. Hristova significantly exceeds the mandatory 220 hours for the positions she has held.

The candidate has finished many specialized courses – 14, for upgrading her qualifications both in the country and abroad.

Treatment and diagnostic activities

Dr. Hristova takes active part in the treatment and diagnostic consultative work both at the University Specialised Hospital for Active Treatment in Ophthalmology – Varna and within various screening programmes. The main clinical interests of Dr. Hristova are associated to studying the retina both in standard and pathological settings with optical coherence tomography; clinical and scientific evaluation of socially significant diseases of the retina in our country; oculoplastic surgery – opportunities for surgical correction for patients with benign and malignant neoplasms of the eyelids and those who have suffered serious traumatic impairments of the eye and its annexes.

Dr. Elitsa Hristova is an ambitious young specialist who demonstrates significant abilities both in clinical and research activities.

The presented reference shows that Chief Assistant Dr. Elitsa Hristova complies with, and in some groups of indicators even significantly exceeds the scientific metric requirements for obtaining the academic position “Associate Professor” pursuant to the regulations for Development of the Academic Staff of the Medical University – Varna (Table 1)

Conclusion

According to the presented data the candidate fully complies with the requirements of the regulations for Development of the Academic Staff of the Medical University – Varna.

The complex assessment of professional development, scientific presentations and contribution provide me the grounds to give a positive mark and to suggest to the scientific jury to elect Chief Assistant Dr. Elitsa Gercheva Hristova, DM for the academic position “Associate Professor” in scientific discipline 7.1. Medicine, specialty Eye Diseases Eye Diseases, as required by the Optometry and Occupational Diseases Department to the Public Health Faculty at Medical University – Varna.

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