

S T A T E M E N T

by Prof. Dr. Veselinka Dimitrova Nestorova, MD

Medical University Varna

appointed by Order of the Rector of MU-Varna No. P –109 -254/06.06.2025

Regarding: Announced competition for the academic position "Associate Proffesor" in the field of higher education 7. "Health and sports", professional direction 7.1. "Medicine", in the scientific specialty "Ocular diseases" for the needs of the Department of "Optometry and Occupational Diseases" ", Faculty of Public Heath, according to the announcement in

SG No. 30/08.04.2025

Dr. Elitsa Gercheva Hristova, PhD, is the sole candidate in the announced competition. The submitted documentation complies with the requirements stipulated in the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Academic Degrees and for Holding Academic Positions at the Medical University – Varna.

Brief biographical data:

Dr. Elitsa Gercheva Hristova graduated in Medicine from the Medical University – Varna in 2012. From 2013 to 2017, she was a resident in ophthalmology at the Specialized Eye Hospital for Active Treatment – Varna (SBOBAL–Varna) and the Medical University – Varna, obtaining her specialty in "Ophthalmology" in 2017. Between 2013 and 2016, she was a full-time doctoral student at the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Science, Medical University – Varna, earning the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor of Medicine" in 2016 after defending a dissertation entitled "Microstructural Characteristics of Macular Changes in Socially Significant Retinal Diseases." In 2016, Dr. Hristova began working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Optometry and Occupational Diseases at the Medical University – Varna and was promoted to Senior Assistant Professor in 2020. In 2024, she earned a Master's degree in "Health Management and Medico-Social Care" from the same university.

Dr. Hristova speaks English. She has participated in numerous national and international scientific conferences. She is the recipient of several awards and grants, including: First Prize

– Poster Competition held during the “Innovations in Ophthalmology” Congress, 2014; First Prize – “Surgical” Session of the “Science and Youth” Competition, 2014; Second Prize – Poster Competition at the 17th Annual Meeting of the Union of Bulgarian Ophthalmologists, 2014; Second Prize – “Jubilee Scientific Student Session,” 2011. She has also received two grants from the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology and the American-Austrian Foundation, as well as a scholarship from the Bulgarian Medical Association.

Evaluation of scientometric indicators in connection with participation in a competition for the academic position of "associate professor"

I. Research activity:

The total publication activity of Dr. Elitsa Hristova contains 33 scientific papers. To participate in the competition, she submitted:

- Dissertation work for the acquisition of the PhD on the topic " Microstructural Macular Changes in Patients with Socially Significant Retinal Diseases ", 2016.
- Monograph – Refraction – Clinical Principles and Algorithms, 2024.
- Full-text publications in scientific journals and anthologies other than those for the acquisition of PhD - 17 (of which 5 in foreign scientific publications referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information/WOS/Scopus/, 12 in non-refereed journals with scientific review.
- Full-text publications in scientific journals and collections in connection with the acquisition of the PhD – 4 in non-refereed journals with scientific review.
- Full-text publications in scientific journals and anthologies beyond the minimum scientometric requirements for tenure of Academic Position "Associate Professor" - 1

The total number of points from indicators G5-9 is 202.25, which cover the mandatory minimum of 200 points.

Dr. Hristova has participated with a report in a total of 29 national and 8 international scientific conferences.

In 2024, a monographic work by Dr. Hristova was published: " Refraction – Clinical Principles and Algorithms ", reviewed by Prof. Dr. Zornitsa Zlatarova, PhD, DSc and Art.

cor. Prof. Dr. Christina Grupcheva, Ph.D, DSc. The monograph comprises 160 pages and is structured into nine consecutively arranged chapters that trace the logical progression from the fundamental physical principles of light to the most up-to-date algorithms in clinical refraction practice.

The monograph “Refraction – Clinical Principles and Algorithms” is a structured scientific and applied work dedicated to one of the fundamental topics in ophthalmology—clinical refraction. Its purpose is to provide both an in-depth theoretical overview of the foundations of light and ocular optics and practical algorithms applicable in contemporary ophthalmological and optometric practice. The monograph is intended for a wide range of professionals: ophthalmologists, residents, optometrists, students, and academic instructors. It combines classical concepts of physiological optics with innovations in instrumental diagnostics and subjective visual assessment.

According to the submitted reference from the library of the University of Varna, 4 citations of Dr. Hristova's scientific work were searched for in foreign scientific publications referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information /WOS/Scopus/.

The indicated citations for indicators D10-12 carry a total of 60 points, with a minimum requirement of 60 points.

Dr. Hristova's scientific research activities and contributions of scientific works are in the following main directions:

1. Refraction – Clinical Principles and Algorithms – Monograph
2. Microstructural Alterations and Prevention of Anterior Ocular Surface Damage (G7.1, G8.1)
3. Diabetic Retinopathy and Other Socially Significant Retinal Diseases – Epidemiology, Microstructural Characteristics, and Diagnostic Methods (G7.3, G7.5, G8.4, Dissertation)
4. Modern Diagnostic Technologies and Digitalization in Ophthalmology (G8.2)
5. Rare Ocular Diseases and the Interdisciplinary Approach (G8.3)

The main contributions of Dr. Hristova's scientific work are as follows:

- Development and presentation of modern algorithms for the examination of clinical refraction and the selection of optical correction, including the use of multifocal lenses, tailored for easy application in clinical practice.
- A detailed comparative analysis of two automated methods for determining distance pupillary distance (PD)—autorefractometry and pupillometry—has been conducted, revealing no clinically significant differences, thus allowing for greater flexibility in clinical decision-making.
- Microstructural changes in the corneal basal epithelium and cystic alterations in the conjunctiva after UV exposure have been demonstrated, which are not detectable by standard clinical methods.
- An up-to-date epidemiological assessment of the prevalence of diabetic retinopathy in Northeastern Bulgaria has been performed, taking into account diabetes type, treatment, and demographic factors.
- For the first time, a comprehensive comparative analysis of microstructural changes in the macula in socially significant diseases (including age-related macular degeneration, central retinal vein occlusion, and central serous chorioretinopathy) has been conducted using optical coherence tomography (OCT).
- Specific OCT features have been identified, enabling differentiation and early diagnosis of socially significant retinal diseases.
- The innovative diagnostic platform FORUM (Zeiss, US) and its capabilities for early detection and monitoring of glaucoma and retinal diseases have been presented.
- The clinical and genetic characteristics of Usher syndrome have been reviewed as a rare ocular disorder with severe multisensory manifestations.

Dr. Hristova has participated in five projects funded by the Medical University of Varna, serving as the principal investigator on one of them.

II. Educational activity:

According to the provided report, as of April 15, 2025, Dr. Hristova has accumulated a total teaching experience of 8 years, 7 months, and 8 days. She is a faculty member at the Department of Optometry and Occupational Diseases at the Medical University of Varna. In addition to teaching students in the Optometry program, she also participates in the education of Bulgarian and English-speaking students in Medicine and Dental Medicine, as well as medical residents and thematic course participants. Her academic workload has been as follows:

- Academic year 2022/2023: 169 hours;
- Academic year 2021/2022: 488 hours;
- Academic year 2020/2021: 425 hours;
- Academic year 2019/2020: 72 hours.

During the academic years 2017/2018, 2018/2019, 2022/2023, and 2023/2024, Dr. Hristova was on maternity leave. It is noteworthy that her teaching load significantly exceeded the required 220 hours for the positions she has held.

III. Therapeutic and diagnostic activity

Dr. Hristova is actively involved in the therapeutic, diagnostic, and consultative activities at the University Specialized Eye Hospital for Active Treatment – Varna, as well as in various screening programs. Her main clinical interests focus on the study of the retina in both normal and pathological conditions using optical coherence tomography; the clinical and scientific evaluation of socially significant retinal diseases in Bulgaria; and oculoplastic surgery—particularly opportunities for aesthetic surgical correction in patients with benign and malignant eyelid tumors, as well as those who have suffered severe traumatic injuries to the eye and its adnexa.

Dr. Elitsa Hristova is a determined and ambitious young ophthalmologist who demonstrates a high level of clinical competence and strong commitment to her professional development. During her professional growth at the University Specialized Eye Hospital – Varna, she has consistently exhibited responsibility, analytical thinking, and teamwork skills. She has shown particular interest in surgical practice and purposefully continues to enhance her surgical expertise. She is actively engaged in scientific research and possesses considerable potential for sustained academic advancement.

Conclusion

The scientometric indicators presented by Dr. Elitsa Hristova, PhD, as well as the report on her teaching load, meet the criteria set forth in the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff and the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for Acquisition of Academic Degrees and Academic Positions at the Medical University – Varna, as required for holding the academic position of "Associate Professor." This provides me with sufficient grounds to cast a positive vote and to recommend to the esteemed Scientific Jury that Dr. Elitsa Gercheva Hristova, PhD, be awarded the academic position of Associate Professor.

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Varna

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