

STATEMENT

by Prof. Plamen Milchev Chernopolsky, MD, PhD, DSc.,

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REGARDING: A DISSERTATION ENTITLED: "Modern Surgical Approaches in Malignant Diseases of the Gastrointestinal Tract- Clinical and Epidemiological Aspects in Northeastern Bulgaria"

FOR THE AWARD OF THE SCIENTIFIC DEGREE "DOCTOR OF SCIENCES"

FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION: 7. Healthcare and Sports; PROFESSIONAL FIELD: 7.1 Medicine

PREPARED BY: PROF. KOSTADIN GEORGIEV ANGELOV, MD, PhD

1. GENERAL PRESENTATION OF THE PROCEDURE

The procedure for the defense of the dissertation entitled "Modern Surgical Approaches in Malignant Diseases of the Gastrointestinal Tract- Clinical and Epidemiological Aspects in Northeastern Bulgaria", submitted for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences", in the professional field 7.1 Medicine, within the field of higher education 7. Healthcare and Sports, at the Department of General and Operative Surgery, Faculty of Medicine, Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov"- Varna, by Prof. Dr. Kostadin Georgiev Angelov, MD, is conducted in accordance with the Order of the Rector of the Medical University- Varna, No. R-109-148/24.03.26, based on the decisions of the Department Council recorded in date 16.03.26, and of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Medicine at the Medical University – Varna recorded in Protocol No.56/23.03.2026.

The analysis of the submitted documentation and the review of the procedure up to the stage of the defense demonstrate that full legal compliance has been achieved with the applicable regulatory requirements, including: the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the Medical University- Varna.

2. BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF THE DOCTORAL CANDIDATE

Kostadin Georgiev Angelov graduated from the Medical University of Sofia with Master's degrees in Medicine and Public Health. In 2015, he completed a Master's degree in Finance at the University of National and World Economy (UNWE). In 2014, he defended a dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree Doctor (PhD) in the scientific specialty Surgery, entitled

“Optimization of the Surgical Approach and Lymph Node Dissection in Patients with Gastric Cancer.”

In 2015, following a competitive procedure, he was elected Associate Professor, and in 2020 he was elected Professor.

The professional career of Kostadin Angelov began in the Emergency Department- Shock Room at the Emergency Medical Service in Sofia, where he worked as a resident physician. In 2006, he joined University Hospital “Alexandrovska”- Sofia as a surgeon. From 2013 to 2020, he served as Executive Director of the hospital. In 2020, he was elected Minister of Health of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Subsequently, he was elected as a Member of Parliament in the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, serving in the 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 50th, and 51st National Assemblies, and is currently Deputy Speaker of the 51st National Assembly.

As a lecturer, he has delivered numerous lectures in surgery to students of medicine and dental medicine, as well as training for intern physicians, residents, and doctoral students in surgery. He has published a series of articles in Bulgarian and international scientific journals, indexed and referenced in globally recognized scientific databases, with over 9,000 citations.

In 2012, he was awarded the prize “Best Lecturer” by the medical students of the Class of 2012, and in 2015 he received the “Prof. Dr. Parashkev Stoyanov” Award for outstanding achievements in medical science and teaching.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE DISSERTATION

The structure and design of the dissertation are consistent with the established traditions in medical science for a dissertation submitted for the scientific degree “Doctor of Sciences.”

The topic “Modern Surgical Approaches in Malignant Diseases of the Gastrointestinal Tract- Clinical and Epidemiological Aspects in Northeastern Bulgaria” is interesting, original, and socially significant, given the prevalence and incidence of oncological diseases in Bulgaria.

The literature review comprises 117 pages, reflecting 1,000 references (out of a total of 1,068 references for the entire dissertation), and is developed in a detailed and analytical manner. The review is divided into two parts in accordance with the formulated topic, as follows: Part I- Analysis of the Health Problem, and Part II- Systematic Review of Scientific Publications on the Topic of the Dissertation. Through the analysis of the literature on the dissertation topic, as well as the conclusions and generalizations drawn, it is evident that the author possesses excellent theoretical and medico-clinical preparation in the field of surgery and gastrointestinal oncology, both in operative treatment and in subsequent invasive and pharmacological therapy. In addition to acknowledging the scope and quality of the review, I would particularly emphasize that for the first time in the theory of surgical diseases in Bulgaria, a surgeon presents, analyzes, and systematizes clinical-pharmacological approaches for preoperative and postoperative pharmacological treatment with biological medicinal products. In the section “Analysis of the Health Problem,” Prof. Dr. Kostadin Georgiev Angelov presents a disease-by-disease systematization of pharmacological treatment, resembling a

comprehensive reference framework, including both conventional chemotherapy and biological therapy, such as the use of monoclonal antibody-based medicinal products and one of the major therapeutic breakthroughs- tyrosine kinase inhibitors. Special attention in the review is devoted to the importance of classification systems and tumor staging, emphasizing their fundamental role in achieving clinical effectiveness of the chosen surgical treatment approach. The multimodal approach is highlighted as a leading principle in the management of these diseases.

The aims and objectives of the dissertation are formulated clearly and precisely. Two major objectives are defined, and tasks are outlined in seven directions, containing a series of working hypotheses that demonstrate the breadth of the doctoral candidate's knowledge as well as the scientific contributions of the dissertation. The working hypotheses are summarized into two independent groups, both interesting and thought-provoking, particularly with regard to data derived from real-world practice (real-world evidence).

The author develops his research potential in two main directions:

First direction- documentary analysis and content analysis of publicly available documents containing information on the epidemiology of gastrointestinal oncological diseases in Bulgaria; a review of scientific publications by Bulgarian authors aimed at systematizing the modern surgical approaches to malignant diseases of the gastrointestinal tract used in real clinical practice in Bulgaria; and a review of scientific publications by international authors to systematize the modern surgical approaches to malignant diseases of the gastrointestinal tract applied in real clinical **practice worldwide.**

Second direction- review of retrospective databases; epidemiology of gastrointestinal oncological diseases in Bulgaria; modern surgical approaches to the treatment of malignant diseases of the gastrointestinal tract; innovative surgical techniques and their added benefits, among others.

A broad spectrum of **Materials and Methods** has been selected in order to adequately address the stated objectives. Methods from several scientific fields have been employed. I assign the greatest scientific value to the epidemiological study of malignant diseases of the gastrointestinal tract in Northeastern Bulgaria, conducted on the basis of the University Multiprofile Hospital for Active Treatment "St. Marina" EAD- Varna, the largest diagnostic, therapeutic, and consultative university hospital complex in Northeastern Bulgaria. A retrospective observational single-center study of electronic medical records was conducted according to an original author-designed protocol, covering a ten-year period and including a total of 2,103 records. Although local-regional in scope, the study demonstrates characteristics of national representativeness, including a sufficiently large number of patients with diverse socio-demographic characteristics, and presents highly impressive results.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The **results** are presented comprehensively. Their scale and precision are particularly noteworthy, and they are illustrated in both tabular and graphical formats. I would especially like to highlight the

statistical processing of the data from the retrospective study, which has been carried out professionally, with excellent quality and competence, accompanied by outstanding visualization.

5. CONTRIBUTIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The author formulates and presents a **broad range of conclusions**, all of which are fully substantiated. The **contributions** are structured in several directions- scientific-theoretical, methodological, and scientific-applied. I fully agree with the way they are formulated and stratified.

The most important contributions, which I fully accept and would like to quote verbatim in my opinion, are as follows:

1. For the first time in Bulgaria, surgical oncological pathology has been analyzed through the framework of Health Technology Assessment (HTA) by means of a retrospective observational study of electronic medical records derived from real clinical practice.
2. For the first time in the scientific literature, a systematic review of scientific publications according to the PRISMA standard has been conducted for the evaluation of surgical oncological practice in diseases of the gastrointestinal tract.
3. For the first time in international surgical research practice concerning oncological gastrointestinal diseases, a study assessing clinical effectiveness based on the PICOS framework has been conducted.
4. For the first time in Bulgaria, a narrative observational study of modern surgical approaches to the treatment of malignant diseases of the gastrointestinal tract has been conducted at both the international and national levels, based on an analysis of scientific publications by Bulgarian authors.
5. For the first time in Bulgaria, an epidemiological study of malignant diseases of the digestive tract has been carried out based on a systematic analysis of data from the European Cancer Information System (ECIS) and the International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization (IARC/GLOBOCAN).
6. For the first time in Bulgaria, a local-regional longitudinal retrospective study of malignant diseases of the gastrointestinal tract has been conducted, covering one of the six administrative regions of Bulgaria.
7. An original author-designed protocol for a retrospective study has been developed, and a unique research toolkit has been introduced for conducting systematic reviews of scientific publications evaluating surgical interventions.
8. An original author-modified version of the PICOS framework intended for the evaluation of oncological gastrointestinal diseases has been developed. In addition to the standard five elements- P (Population), I (Intervention), C (Comparator), O (Outcome), S (Study Design)- the

modified instrument includes Tumor type, TNM classification, ECOG performance status, and Type of surgery (radical/palliative). This modified version of the PICOS framework (which may be referred to as a'Modo Angelov) represents an original contribution of international significance. Without the addition of these elements to the PICOS framework, the evaluation of the clinical effectiveness of surgical interventions would not be possible.

6. ASSESSMENT OF THE PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

The presented **scientific output** fully reflects the dissertation in terms of objectives, tasks, methodology, results, and conclusions, and at the same time meets the scientometric requirements of the Medical University of Varna.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation submitted for evaluation fully complies with Art. 86 (2) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the Medical University-Varna, namely: the dissertation addresses an original theory, contains theoretical and empirical generalizations, and proposes solutions to major scientific and applied problems at the level of contemporary science.

I **POSITIVELY** evaluate the dissertation entitled:

“MODERN SURGICAL APPROACHES IN MALIGNANT DISEASES OF THE GASTROINTESTINAL TRACT- CLINICAL AND EPIDEMIOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN NORTHEASTERN BULGARIA.”

I will confidently vote **“IN FAVOR”** of awarding the scientific degree **“DOCTOR OF SCIENCES”** to **PROF. KOSTADIN GEORGIEV ANGELOV, MD, PhD.**

2 April 2026
Varna

Prepared by:

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