

OPINION

From **Prof. Antonia Yordanova Atanasova, MD, PhD, DSc**

Internal member for MU–Varna, habilitated in Professional Field 7.1 Medicine,
Medical University – Varna

regarding the dissertation entitled

“The Role of Endoscopy in Assessing Response After Neoadjuvant
Chemoradiotherapy in Rectal Cancer”

submitted for the procedure for obtaining the educational and scientific degree
“Doctor”

in full-time doctoral training in the doctoral program “Gastroenterology”,
Professional Field 7.1 Medicine

Author: **Dr. Aleksandar Dimitrov Trifonov**

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I. PROCEDURE OF DEFENSE

By Order No. R-109-42 / 16.01.2026 of the Rector of the Medical University “Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov” – Varna, issued on the basis of a decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Medicine (Protocol No. 1 / 29.01.2026), and pursuant to Artical 24, paragraph 6 and Artical 30, paragraph 3 of the the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB) and the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff at the Medical University of Varna. No procedural violations have been found. I was appointed to prepare a statement on the dissertation of Dr. Aleksandar Dimitrov Trifonov entitled “The Role of Endoscopy in Assessing Response After Neoadjuvant Chemoradiotherapy in Rectal Cancer”, submitted for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the doctoral program “Gastroenterology”, in the field of higher education 7. Healthcare and Sports, Professional Field 7.1 Medicine.

This opinion has been prepared in accordance with the established requirements for evaluation reports for the degree “Doctor”. I declare that I have no conflict of interest within the meaning of Article 4, paragraph 5 of the LDASRB.

I. BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Aleksandar Trifonov graduated with distinction from the Medical University – Varna in 2019. From 02.12.2019 to 02.05.2020 he worked as a physician in the multidisciplinary emergency department of University Hospital “St. Marina” – Varna. In 2020 he successfully competed for a position and joined the Second Department of Internal Medicine, Gastroenterology Teaching Sector, as a lecturer. Between 2020 and 2024 he completed his specialization in gastroenterology at the Clinic of Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition at University Hospital “St. Marina” – Varna, obtaining his specialty in 2024.

Since 28.02.2025 he has been working in the Department of Gastroenterology for Endoscopic Diagnostics at University Hospital “St. Marina” JSC – Varna, while also serving as an assistant at the Second Department of Internal Medicine. He has completed advanced training in endoscopic diagnostics and therapy both in Bulgaria and abroad. His participation in national and international scientific forums with oral presentations and posters reflects the breadth of his academic interests. The candidate is fluent in Bulgarian, English

III. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation consists of 139 pages and is illustrated with 22 figures and 32 tables. The clinical study was conducted with approval from the Research Ethics Committee at MU–Varna – Protocol/Decision No. 23, meeting held on 25.11.2025. Due to the retrospective nature of the study, the lack of direct contact with patients, and the use of existing medical documentation, individual informed consent form was not required.

IV. RELEVANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISSERTATION

The topic is highly relevant, as recent years have shown an increasing incidence of malignant diseases of the rectum. Colorectal cancer ranks third among the most commonly diagnosed cancers and second among the leading causes of cancer-related mortality worldwide. Numerous analyses, randomized clinical trials, and national population-based studies have demonstrated that neoadjuvant chemoradiotherapy followed by surgery reduces local recurrence and improves survival in patients with resectable locally advanced rectal cancer. However, certain controversies remain regarding survival outcomes and quality of life in these patients. Therefore, in recent years, assessment of therapeutic response has become crucial for risk stratification

and for decision-making regarding radical surgery versus organ-preserving approaches.

V. ESSENCE OF THE DISSERTATION

The aim is clearly defined, and the tasks are well systematized. The conclusions are aligned with the tasks and demonstrate that the aim has been achieved. In summary, the findings of Dr. Aleksandar Trifonov's dissertation show that the endoscopically established clinical response is the only independent predictor of pathological complete response, with approximately a 15-fold increase in the likelihood of achieving pathological complete response compared to patients without endoscopic clinical complete response. The dissertation supports the concept that endoscopic examination should be a leading component in the multimodal algorithm for assessing response to neoadjuvant therapy.

VI. PUBLICATIONS AND SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITY

The dissertation of Dr. Aleksandar Trifonov includes one scientific publication related to the dissertation topic, published in a national journal as first and sole author. The dissertation fully meets the structural and content requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

VII. CONCLUSION

All this gives me reason **to vote positively** and to propose to the members of the Scientific Jury at the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov"-Varna **to award Dr. Alexander Trifonov the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the doctoral program "Gastroenterology"**.

26.02.2026, Varna

Prof. Antonia Yordanova Atanasova, MD, PhD, DSc

Заличено на основание чл. 5,
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