

PEER REVIEW

by Prof. Nikolay Conev, MD, PhD

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Regarding: Competition for the academic position of "Professor" in the field of higher education
7. Healthcare and Sports, professional direction 7.1. Medicine and scientific specialty
"Oncology" for the needs of the Department of Oncology, Faculty of Medicine at the Medical
University – Varna. The competition was announced in the State Gazette, No. 102 of
28.11.2025.

I. Brief biographical and professional data

Associate Professor Eleonora Georgieva Dimitrova – Gospodinova, MD, PhD, was born on March 9, 1972, in Varna. She possesses a solid medical education, having graduated with a Master's degree in Medicine from the Medical University of Varna in 1996 with honors. Her professional development is a testament to consistency and high-level expertise in the fields of internal medicine and oncology.

Her clinical career began in 1997 at the St. Marina University Hospital – Varna, where she gained invaluable experience as a physician. Over the years, she acquired three major medical specialties: Internal Medicine (2002), Pneumology and Phthisiatry (2004), and Medical Oncology (2008). This broad specialized training allows her to apply a comprehensive approach to the treatment of oncological patients.

Her academic growth is closely linked to MU-Varna. In 2017, she defended her doctoral thesis titled "Expression of Beclin-1 as a marker of autophagy and its prognostic and predictive value in patients with metastatic colorectal cancer" and was awarded the educational and scientific degree of "PhD". Since 2018, she has held the academic position of "Associate Professor," and currently serves as the Head of the Department of Oncology.

II. Description of the presented scientific materials

For the current competition, Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova presents an impressive set of scientific works reflecting her intensive research activity since taking the position of Associate Professor. A total of 23 scientific materials are presented:

- **Habilitation Work (Monograph):** "Personalized Approach in Patients with Colorectal Carcinoma" (2025), which is a profound study on the most contemporary diagnostic and therapeutic strategies.
- **Scientific Publications:** 21 articles published in reputable scientific journals. It should be noted that 14 of these publications are in international journals indexed in the global databases Scopus and Web of Science, which is evidence of the international recognition of her research.
- **Additional Works:** A previous monograph, "Colorectal Carcinoma" (2018), is also included, further complementing her expertise in this socially significant field.

III. Analysis of the Dissertation and Monographs

Analysis of the Doctoral Thesis (PhD):

Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova's dissertation, "Expression of Beclin-1 as a marker of autophagy and its prognostic and predictive value in patients with metastatic colorectal cancer" (2017), is a comprehensive scientific study at the molecular level. In it, the candidate focuses on one of the most complex processes in cell biology – autophagy – and its role in tumorigenesis. Her analysis of the Beclin-1 protein was innovative for Bulgarian oncological practice. She successfully proved that the expression levels of this marker have a direct correlation with the aggressiveness of the tumor process and the response to therapy in patients with advanced colorectal cancer. The scientific value of the work lies in the derivation of predictive criteria that allow the oncologist to forecast the likelihood of therapeutic success before treatment begins.

Analysis of the 2018 Monograph:

The monograph "Colorectal Carcinoma" (2018) is a large-scale work summarizing modern knowledge on one of the most common and socially significant oncological diseases. In this

study, Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova conducts an exhaustive review of the epidemiology, etiology, and pathogenesis of the disease, integrating her own clinical experience with the latest international guidelines. The work is characterized by exceptional systematicity – from detailed descriptions of diagnostic methods (endoscopy, imaging, and histopathology) to algorithms for complex treatment. Her contribution to the analysis of the multidisciplinary approach is particularly valuable.

Analysis of the 2025 Habilitation Monograph:

The primary habilitation work for the current competition, "Personalized Approach in Patients with Colorectal Carcinoma" (2025), is a logical and scientific advancement of Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova's previous work. In it, she shifts from "standard" to "personalized" treatment, viewing the tumor not just as a location, but as a unique genetic profile. The monograph analyzes modern achievements in targeted therapy and immunotherapy in detail. The candidate devotes significant attention to the challenges of CAR-T cell therapy in solid tumors – a topic at the forefront of global oncology. She critically analyzes factors hindering the effectiveness of these cells, such as the dense tumor stroma and the immunosuppressive tumor microenvironment (TME). This work proves that Assoc. Prof. Dimitrova not only monitors global trends but also actively works on implementing the concept of precision medicine in the Bulgarian health system.

IV. Educational and teaching activity

Assoc. Prof. Eleonora Dimitrova is a prominent lecturer with over 10 years of experience at MU-Varna. She conducts training for medical students, interns, and residents in the disciplines of "Propaedeutics of Internal Diseases" and "Oncology." Her teaching workload consistently exceeds the required standards, and she actively participates in the development of curricula and methodological materials.

Particularly impressive is her achievement in training young scientific personnel. Under her scientific supervision, five doctoral students have successfully defended their theses in the "Oncology" program:

Zhelyazko Iliev Arabadzhiev, Margarita Maneva, Maria Penkova, Asen Yanchev, Mary Hachmeryan

This success is a clear indicator of her leadership qualities and her ability to build scientific schools.

V. Conclusion

Based on the materials presented for the competition, I can categorically state that Assoc. Prof. Eleonora Dimitrova-Gospodinova is an established scientist, a leading specialist in medical oncology, and a respected educator. Her scientific output meets and exceeds the minimum national requirements and those of the Medical University of Varna for the position of "Professor." Her contribution to the development of personalized oncology in Bulgaria is indisputable.

All of the above gives me a full reason to provide my highly positive assessment and to propose to the Honorable Scientific Jury to award Assoc. Prof. Eleonora Georgieva Dimitrova – Gospodinova, MD, PhD the academic position of "Professor" in the specialty of "Oncology."

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