

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Zhelyazkov Hristov, MD, PhD,
Vice-Rector for Postgraduate Training and University-Hospital Coordination,
Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov”

regarding the announced competition for the academic position of Associate
Professor at Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov”

1. Information about the competition

The competition was announced in the field of higher education 7. Healthcare and Sports, professional field 7.1. Medicine, scientific specialty General Medicine, in the State Gazette, issue No. 28/10.03.2026.

This opinion has been prepared in accordance with the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act, the Regulations for its implementation, and the Rules on the Terms and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov”.

The only candidate in the competition is Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Irina Ivanova Momcheva, MD, PhD.

The submitted set of application materials for participation in the competition complies with the Rules on the Terms and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov”.

2. Candidate in the competition

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Irina Ivanova Momcheva, MD, PhD, was born on 14 April 1967 in the town of Sredets. In 1993, she graduated in Medicine from the Medical University of Plovdiv (Diploma No. 000078/16.11.1993). In 2002, she acquired the specialty Internal Medicine (Certificate No. 008091/15.01.2012), and in 2011 – a second specialty, Rheumatology (Certificate No. 3080/30.06.2011), both at the Medical University of Sofia. In 2016, she completed a Master’s degree programme in Health Management at Burgas State

University “Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov”. A certificate of English language proficiency at level B2 has also been submitted.

In 2024, she acquired the educational and scientific degree Doctor under the doctoral programme General Medicine in professional field 7.1. Medicine, after defending a dissertation entitled “Study of the Involvement of Humoral Factors of Innate Immunity in the Pathogenesis of Activated Osteoarthritis” at the Medical University “Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov” -Varna.

The candidate’s professional career began in 1993 as a resident physician at the Polyclinic in the town of Sozopol. She subsequently worked as a resident physician in the Emergency Admission Department of the District Hospital in Burgas from 1997 to 1999, and as a general practitioner in a group practice from 2000 to 2008. In the period 2008–2010, she was a resident in the Rheumatology Clinic at UMHAT “St. Marina” Varna. Since 2010, she has been Head of the Rheumatology Clinic at UMHAT Burgas AD.

Since 2021, she has held the academic position of Assistant Professor, and since 2025 - Chief Assistant Professor, at the Department of Internal Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov”.

3. General Characteristics of the Candidate’s Scientific and Applied Research Activity and Assessment of Personal Contribution

The scientific interests of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Irina Ivanova Momcheva, MD, PhD, are focused on rheumatology, osteoimmunology, osteoarthritis, inflammatory rheumatic diseases, and the personalized therapeutic approach in patients with rheumatological disorders. Her publication activity highlights topics related to the pathogenesis, diagnosis and treatment of osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, polymyositis, psoriatic disease and systemic autoimmune diseases, as well as the application of modern biological therapies and interdisciplinary approaches.

According to the submitted List of Publications for Participation in the Competition, Dr. Momcheva applies with 17 scientific works, including one independent monograph, 5 scientific publications referenced and indexed in internationally recognized scientific databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, and 11 publications in non-indexed peer-reviewed journals and proceedings of scientific conferences.

A reference list of 8 citations in scientific publications has also been submitted, of which 6 are in journals referenced and indexed in internationally recognized scientific databases and 2 are in non-indexed peer-reviewed journals.

The publications submitted for the competition address important and current topics related to pathogenetic mechanisms, diagnostic features and therapeutic options in rheumatic and degenerative joint diseases. Special emphasis is placed on studies concerning osteoarthritis, osteoimmunology, the role of low-grade inflammation, biological therapy, and the importance of physical activity as part of the modern multidisciplinary approach to patients.

The submitted full-text scientific works fall within the field of the announced competition.

A significant contribution to the scientific activity of Dr. Irina Momcheva is the monographic work “Modulation of the Epigenome through Physical Activity: A Different Approach to the Management of Osteoarthritis”, dedicated to a topical and important issue in contemporary rheumatology, namely the search for new approaches to the prevention, slowing of progression and management of osteoarthritis. The monograph discusses contemporary aspects of the pathogenesis of osteoarthritis, the role of epigenetic mechanisms, low-grade inflammation, ageing, and the possibilities for influencing the disease through individually adapted physical activity. The work has a clearly expressed scientific and applied orientation, as it links fundamental mechanisms with practical recommendations for a multidisciplinary approach and personalized programmes for patients with osteoarthritis.

Dr. Momcheva fully meets the minimum national requirements and the minimum requirements set out in the Rules on the Terms and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov” for holding the academic position of Associate Professor in professional field 7.1. Medicine. She has a total of 479 points, with the minimum requirement of Burgas State University being 430 points and the minimum national requirement being 400 points.

4. Assessment of Teaching Activity

The teaching activity of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Irina Momcheva is related to the training of medical students in the discipline Internal Medicine, module Rheumatology. According to the submitted reference, during the winter semesters of the academic years 2024/2025 and 2025/2026, she delivered lectures in the Rheumatology module with an academic workload of 15 contact hours, equivalent to 30 hours of practical classes, for fourth-year students in the specialty Medicine.

Her teaching activity is directly related to her clinical and scientific expertise, which provides a solid basis for high-quality education, practical orientation of the teaching process, and the transfer of up-to-date knowledge in the fields of internal medicine and rheumatology.

Overall, the candidate's teaching activity can be assessed positively and corresponds to the requirements for holding the academic position of Associate Professor.

5. Conclusion

After reviewing the submitted materials and scientific works, I confirm that the candidate's results comply with the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act, the Regulations for its implementation, and the Rules on the Terms and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Burgas State University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" for holding the academic position of Associate Professor in professional field 7.1. Medicine.

I give a positive assessment and recommend that the Scientific Jury propose to the Faculty Council the election of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Irina Ivanova Momcheva, MD, PhD, to the academic position of Associate Professor in the field of higher education 7. Healthcare and Sports, professional field 7.1. Medicine, scientific specialty General Medicine.

15.06.2026

Signature:

Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Hristov, MD, PhD