

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Vassil Borislavov Traykov, MD, PhD
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In relation to the competition for the academic position of "**PROFESSOR**" in the higher education field 7. Healthcare and Sports, professional field 7.1. Medicine, scientific specialty **Cardiology**, for the needs of the Cardiology Clinic at **Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda University Hospital**, announced in State Gazette issue 31 from 11.04.2025.

I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury by Order No. 15-05-141/11.06.2025, issued by the CEO of Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda University Hospital. I have been assigned to prepare an opinion as an internal member of the scientific jury.

The only applicant for this competition is **Assoc. Prof. Valeri Lyubenov Gelev, MD, PhD**.

All necessary documents required by Article 4, para. 2 and Article 29a of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB) and Article 2, paras. 2 and 3, and Article 62, paras. 1 and 2 of the implementing regulations, as well as according to the internal rules of Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda, have been provided in electronic format. They fully comply with the requirements of the LDASRB and its implementing regulations.

For the purpose of this procedure, Assoc. Prof. Valeri Gelev has submitted all mandatory documents, including lists of publications, participation in scientific forums, a summary of teaching activities, scientific contributions, diplomas, certificates, and others.

In my role as a member of the scientific jury, I declare that I have no conflicts of interest with the candidate and that no plagiarism is detected.

1. Biographical Data

1.1. Education and Qualifications

Assoc. Prof. Valeri Gelev graduated from the First English Language High School in Sofia and received his medical degree from the Medical University of Sofia in 1990. He acquired a specialty in Internal Medicine in 1995 and in Cardiology in 2000. He obtained a certificate for Invasive Cardiology in 2003. In 2016, he obtained a Master's degree in Healthcare Management. He has completed numerous specialized trainings in interventional cardiology, including at ICPS – Massy, Paris (2004), Columbia University, New York (2006 and 2008), and the Research Institute for Cardiovascular Medicine, Novosibirsk, Russia (2008 and 2009).

1.2. Professional Career

Assoc. Prof. Gelev began his career in 1990 as a general practitioner in Kostenets, then worked as a cardiologist at UMHATEM N.I. Pirogov and the

Department of Invasive Cardiology at the National Heart Hospital, Sofia. From 2009 to 2013, he served as Head of Invasive Cardiology at UMHATEM N.I. Pirogov. Since 2013, he has been Deputy Head, and since March 1, 2023, Head of the Cardiology Clinic at Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda Hospital, Sofia. He has been a lecturer at the Faculty of Medicine, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" since 2019. In 2021, he defended his doctoral thesis entitled "Retrograde Approach in the Recanalization of Chronic Coronary Occlusions" and received the degree of PhD. Since 2021, he has been an Associate Professor of Cardiology at Tokuda Hospital.

1.3. Professional Memberships and Roles

Assoc. Prof. Gelev is a member of the Bulgarian Society of Cardiology (BSC), the European Society of Cardiology (ESC), and the Bulgarian Society of Interventional Cardiology (BSIC). He has been a member of the BSC Board (2020–2022 and 2022–2024), President of BSIC for two terms (2015–2019), and currently serves as Vice President of BSIC since 2023. He is also a member of the EuroCTO Club and serves on the Expert Council on Cardiology at the Ministry of Health.

2. Scientific Activity

Assoc. Prof. Gelev is the author and co-author of 131 scientific works, of which 130 are after acquiring the title of Associate Professor (Table 1). This includes 1 doctoral thesis; 1 chapter in a peer-reviewed scientific textbook; 50 research articles, 29 indexed in Scopus/Web of Science (21 with Impact Factor, total IF = 616.438) and 21 in peer-reviewed non-indexed journals. Out of them, the candidate is the first or the senior author in 28. Assoc. Prof. Gelev presents a total of 79 participations in scientific meetings as an organiser, chairperson and/or speaker. Twenty-eight of them were international and 51 national meetings. The candidate presents a total of 10288 citations. The cumulative impact factor of Assoc. Prof. V. Gelev is 616,438.

According to the attached report on scientometric criteria, Assoc. Prof. Valeri Gelev covers the minimum requirements for scientific and teaching activities for holding academic positions, as adopted by the Scientific Council of Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda University Hospital.

Total number	131
PhD Thesis	1
Pulbications in national and international journals	50
• Publications in Bulgarian journals	21
• Publications, indexed in Scopus/ Web of science (total):	29
• With impact factor	21
• Cumulative impact factor	616,438
Chapter in a peer reviewed book:	1
• First author	• 5 of 51 (10%)

• Senior author	• 23 of 51 (45%)
• Second author	• 1 of 51 (2%)
• Third or subsequent author	• 22 of 51 (43%)
Total number of citations	10 288

3. Key scientific contributions

The candidate has significant scientific contributions to the field of cardiovascular medicine. The scientific work of Assoc. Prof. V. Gelev demonstrates a systematic approach and professionalism, naturally leading to valuable developments published in renowned scientific journals and presented at national and international forums.

There are several important main directions that can be traced in the presented works:

3.1. Recanalization of Chronic Coronary Occlusions

The scientific publications in the field of chronic coronary occlusions represent one of the main focuses throughout the candidate's professional career and are related to the epidemiology of this type of coronary lesions, anatomical features, as well as the indications and techniques for interventional revascularization. In several published reviews on the topic, the trends and progress in this field of interventional cardiology are presented. The importance of the retrograde approach for recanalization is also examined in detail. An important contribution of Assoc. Prof. Gelev is his participation in the analysis of data from the European Registry of Chronic Total Occlusion—the largest registry in the world for chronic coronary occlusions. This registry was created by the members of the EuroCTO Club, which initiated, conducted, and published the first randomized trial in the world comparing the effectiveness of interventional treatment versus medical therapy in patients with chronic coronary occlusions.

3.2. Percutaneous Interventions for Left Main Stenosis

With the advancement of technology, the introduction of increasingly effective, safe, and accessible drug-eluting stents, intravascular imaging modalities, as well as the development of techniques in interventional cardiology, percutaneous revascularization of the left main coronary artery has undergone serious development and now represents an alternative to the previous "gold standard"—coronary artery bypass surgery. This makes the topic extremely relevant. The candidate presents publications that examine various aspects of the indications for interventional treatment of the left main coronary artery, as well as the techniques to achieve optimal results. The results of the first original prospective study in Bulgaria, which followed a large number of patients long-term after left main coronary artery revascularization, are presented.

3.3. Complex Coronary Interventions

Complex coronary lesions, especially in patients with multiple comorbidities and high risk, represent a therapeutic challenge. For the majority of these patients, surgical revascularization is unacceptable either due to very high surgical risk or because the patients are unwilling to undergo surgery. The candidate presents thorough work in the field of complex coronary interventions, examining the significance and management in the presence of massive coronary calcification, as well as the global trends in the treatment of this type of lesions. For the first time in the country, intravascular lithotripsy was introduced for the treatment of coronary lesions with significant calcification, especially in patients with complex lesions. The new technique, its specific features, and the results achieved have been evaluated, as well as the optimal ways for its combined use with other methods for treating heavily calcified coronary lesions. The clinic's team shares its knowledge and gains experience through participation in EURO 4C (Cardiac Care of Calcified and Complex Patients) and EAPCI (European Association of Percutaneous Cardiovascular Interventions).

3.4. Non-Obstructive Coronary Disease

Ischemia with non-obstructive coronary arteries (INOCA – Ischemia with Non-Obstructive Coronary Arteries) represents a form of chronic coronary syndrome of increasing significance due to its clinical importance and its association with a higher incidence of major cardiovascular events. This long-underestimated condition is extensively covered in the guidelines for the management of chronic coronary syndrome published in 2024. Considering the large number of patients with this significant condition, in early 2024, the clinic became the first in the country to implement the only available system for invasive assessment of coronary microcirculation for diagnosing the different phenotypes of angina in patients with non-obstructive coronary arteries (ANOCA). In a series of publications and presentations, the author discusses the accumulated experience regarding the invasive assessment of coronary microcirculation and its clinical significance. This issue was the focus of the international BBC course—Bulgarian Bifurcation and Complex Coronary Interventions Course, held in January 2025, with the participation of the candidate as one of the course directors.

3.5. Lp(a) and Its Role as a Cardiovascular Risk Factor

The independent and genetically determined role of Lipoprotein(a) as a risk factor and key predictor for cardiovascular disease is discussed in several reviews presented by the candidate. The atherosclerotic involvement in general and the atherosclerotic burden of the coronary tree in patients with elevated levels are evaluated. From a practical perspective, the presence of elevated levels requires a very detailed assessment of other risk factors, as well as optimization of medical therapy in these patients in order to reduce adverse events. In this regard, Assoc. Prof. Gelev initiated a large prospective study, including routine monitoring of Lp(a) levels in patients with cardiovascular disease. This is a contribution of high scientific-theoretical and scientific-practical value, which allows obtaining important information about the proportion of patients with markedly elevated levels of this marker, indicating a high risk for the development of cardiovascular disease.

3.6. Other

A number of works are also presented in various areas, examining:

- Heart rate variability and its changes in patients with chronic coronary syndrome before and after revascularization, as well as in patients with degenerative aortic stenosis;
- Endovascular treatment of visceral organs in life-threatening conditions in urology;
- Diagnosis and treatment of heart failure with preserved left ventricular ejection fraction;
- Contemporary management of acute coronary syndrome, heart failure, arterial hypertension, and dyslipidemia;
- Contrast-induced neurotoxicity after interventional treatment of cerebral aneurysm;
- The role of hyperuricemia as a factor for the manifestation of contrast-induced nephropathy;
- The occurrence of arrhythmias in COVID-19;
- Results from the ESC-EHRA EORP-AF Long-Term General Registry—a European registry including a large number of patients with atrial fibrillation;
- Current pharmacological therapy for various cardiovascular diseases—acute coronary syndrome, dyslipidemia, chronic coronary syndrome, anticoagulant therapy for atrial fibrillation, dual antiplatelet therapy after PCI;
- The significance of catheter ablation with no or minimal use of fluoroscopy for the ablation of supraventricular arrhythmias, the use of intracardiac echocardiography for the implantation of left bundle branch pacing systems, and others.

4. Scientometric Indicators

The scientometric indicators of Assoc. Prof. Valeri Gelev, MD, PhD, comply with the requirements set by the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda University Hospital (Table 2). Under indicator A, the candidate presents a defended doctoral dissertation, thereby meeting the requirements for this indicator. For indicators from B to E, the candidate significantly exceeds the minimum required points according to the criteria of Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda University Hospital. Assoc. Prof. Valeri Gelev is involved in teaching activities within the institution, working with medical residents, continuing medical education, and highly specialized activities in the field of Cardiology, as well as serving as an adjunct lecturer for medical students in Bulgarian and English in the subject Internal Medicine – Cardiology for 4th and 6th-year students at the Faculty of Medicine, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

Table 2

Group of indicators	Contents	Minimal requirements of NACID and Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda for "professor"	Number of points reported by Assoc. Prof. V. Gelev
A	Criterion 1	50	50
B	Criterion 2	-	-
C	Criteria 3 or 4	100	132.53
D	Sum of criteria from 5 to 9	200	238
E	Sum of criteria from 10 to 12	100	168 920
F	Sum of criteria 13 until the end	100	260
Total number of points		550	169 600.53

5. Conclusion

After a thorough review of the submitted documents and materials related to the competition, I consider that they fully comply with all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), its Implementing Regulations, and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda University Hospital – Sofia. Assoc. Prof. Valeri Gelev presents a large number of publications and presentations at international forums, significantly exceeding the minimum required number of points according to the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda University Hospital and the requirements of NACID. Assoc. Prof. Gelev is a well-established specialist with extensive clinical experience, significant scientific and applied research contributions, as well as substantial teaching experience. He is a physician with high national and international recognition.

Based on the above, I give a positive opinion of the application of Assoc. Prof. Valeri Gelev, MD, PhD, and I confidently recommend to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury to vote in favor of his election to the academic position of "Professor" in the field of Higher Education Area 7. Healthcare and Sports, Professional Field 7.1. Medicine, and the scientific specialty "Cardiology", for the

needs of the Cardiology Clinic at Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda University Hospital –
Sofia, in the competition announced in State Gazette No. 31 dated 11.04.2025.

Sofia,

Assoc. Prof. Vassil Traykov, MD, PhD

29.06.2025

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping loops and strokes, likely representing the name Vassil Traykov.