

## OPINION

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**Regarding:** competition for the occupation of an academic position "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 7 "Healthcare and sports" in the professional field 7.1 "Medicine" and scientific specialty "gastroenterology" for the needs of the Gastroenterology Clinic, Acibadem City Clinic UMBAL Tokuda EAD, announced in the State Gazette No. 85 of October 14, 2025.

The only applicant in the competition is Dr. **Rozalina Ivanova Balabanska, MD, PhD**, Chief Assistant Professor at the Gastroenterology Clinic, Acibadem City Clinic UMBAL Tokuda EAD. A full set of papers has been submitted in compliance with the requirements of the Law for development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as the Regulations of development of the academic staff in the Acibadem City Clinic UMBAL Tokuda EAD.

### I. Professional development

Dr. Rozalina Balabanska graduated in medicine with honors in 1987 at the Medical University of Sofia. In 1987-1991, she worked as a GP in town of Pernik. Since March 1991, she has been appointed as a resident doctor in leading gastroenterology clinics and departments at elite health institutions and hospitals in Sofia - Military Medical Academy (1991-1994); Fifth City Hospital (1994-2007) and Tokuda Hospital (since 2007). Since September 2020, she is also a part-time lecturer in Internal Medicine and Gastroenterology for medical students at the Faculty of Medicine of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Since February 2022 she is a Chief Assistant Professor at the Gastroenterology Clinic, Acibadem City Clinic UMBAL Tokuda - Sofia. She acquired two clinical specialties - a major in **Internal Medicine in 1996** and in **Gastroenterology in 1999**. In 2021 Dr. Balabanska defended her PhD thesis entitled "Liver steatosis and non-alcoholic steatohepatitis - clinical evaluation and application of transient elastography (Fibroscan)" and acquired academic degree "**Doctor**" in Internal Medicine.

Dr. Balabanska has been consistently upgrading her knowledge and clinical skills. She has completed numerous postgraduate courses in prestigious clinical centers and institutions in The Netherlands, Italy, Spain and France. She is an established specialist and expert in the diagnosis and treatment of gastroenterological diseases, especially in the field of chronic liver damage. Her research interest is focused mainly in hepatology. She is experienced and skilled in performing abdominal ultrasound, as well as liver biopsy and other ultrasound guided invasive procedures. Dr. Balabanska is among pioneers who introduced transient elastography with Fibroscan in Bulgaria and contributed to the validation of this method in our country.

Dr. Rozalina Balabanska is a respected doctor. She has won twice the prestigious award "Researcher of the Year" at Tokuda Hospital. Several times she has been among the awarded "Doctors in whom we trust" from the newspaper "24-hours" and among the "Best doctors in Sofia" award of "Darik Radio". She is a member of the Bulgarian Society of Gastroenterology, Gastrointestinal Endoscopy and Abdominal Ultrasound; Bulgarian Association of Surgeons and Gastroenterologists; Bulgarian Association of Ultrasound in Medicine, European and World Federations of Ultrasound in Medicine; European Association for the Study of the Liver; American Association for the Study of Liver Disease. Dr. Balabanska speaks English and Russian

### II. Research activity

Dr. Rozalina Balabanska participated in the competition with a total of **66 scientific articles**, 59 of them are not used in procedure for acquiring academic degree "Doctor". These 59 articles include: 1 monograph; 28 publications in international journals, referenced in Scopus and/or

Web of Science databases (25 of them are with impact factor); 28 articles in Bulgarian published in journals listed in the National Reference Journal List of NACID; 2 other non-referenced publications with scientific review. The candidate is the sole, first or second author in 34 of the 59 articles (58%), which clearly demonstrate her leading role in the development of presented papers.

Dr. Balabanska has published in several prestigious international and Bulgarian journals, including: *Clinl. Mol. Hepatol*; *Lancet Infect. Dis*; *N Engl J. Med*; *Hepatology*; *J Hepatol*; *Gut*; *Cytokine*; *HIV Med*; *J Crohn's Colitis*; *Digestion, Ultrasound Med. Biol.*; *Bulgarian hepatogastroenterology, Modern medicine, Diagnostic and therapeutic ultrasound, etc.* She has a **total cumulative impact factor of 679.596** and an **individual impact factor of 34.643**, as well as an h-index of 6 (Web of Science) and 4 (Scopus). A total number of **635 citations** of Dr. Balabanska's scientific papers were found in the Scopus and 625 citations - in Web of Science. It should be point out that citations partially overlapped in the two databases. Additionally, her scientific record includes 11 citations in Cyrillic found in Bulgarian academic publications

Dr. Rozalina Balabanska's scientific output is extensive and multifaceted, focusing on the critical challenges of modern gastroenterology and hepatology.

Her monograph is the most comprehensive and up-to-date publication on liver steatosis in Bulgarian medical literature. It provides an in-depth exploration of the etiology, prevalence, pathogenesis, genetic factors, histological changes, diagnosis, and treatment of this disease. Modern non-invasive methods for assessing the severity of liver damage, replacing biopsy, are reviewed in detail. New terms and nomenclature for steatotic liver disease are presented. Mechanisms of alcoholic liver damage are described. Current therapeutic approaches are summarized, including changes in diet and lifestyle, reduction of body mass, control of diabetes and dyslipidemia, medications for treatment, and indications and results after bariatric surgery.

Dr. Balabanska's PhD thesis offers significant clinical value. Her research focuses on the non-invasive assessment of liver steatosis and metabolically associated steatohepatitis using transient elastography (TE) with Fibroscan. Together with Assoc. Prof. Radin Tsonev, she is a pioneer in the introduction of transient elastography in our country and has a significant contribution in validation of the method in Bulgaria. Particularly valuable for clinical practice is the proposed original algorithm for management of patients with a metabolic syndrome, diabetes or obesity.

Of significant interest are the data concerning novel pharmacological agents for the treatment of chronic Hepatitis B. These include: TLR7 agonist Ruzotolimod (RO7020531); PD-L1 inhibitor (RO7191863); the capsid assembly modulators Linvencovir (RO7049389) and Vebicovir (ABI-H0731); siRNA - Imdusiran (AB-729). These findings reflect the cutting edge of contemporary research aimed to achieve a complete functional cure for patients living with chronic HBV infection.

Publications exploring new therapeutic strategies for reducing liver fibrosis also warrant special attention. These studies includes testing of: a new drug for the reduction of liver fibrosis (ND-L02-s0201); Pan-PPAR agonist Lanifibranor in patients with MASH and advanced fibrosis; treatment with GLP-1 RA Semaglutide in MASH. These groundbreaking results—in both MASH and chronic hepatitis B—are entirely novel, not just for Bulgaria but globally. They stem directly from Dr. Balabanska's active role as a principal investigator in numerous international clinical trials.

Dr. Balabanska's research offers significant practical insights into the antiviral management of chronic viral hepatitis B and C. Her work encompasses: detailed evaluations of interferon and ribavirin combination therapies, including the impact of peg-interferon and monotherapy with

amantadine in chronic hepatitis C; study of the IL28B polymorphism in chronic hepatitis C patients and its critical role in predicting therapeutic response; analyses of nucleoside and nucleotide analogues for treatment of chronic hepatitis B, focusing on predictors of HBeAg loss during tenofovir treatment and the management of treatment-related side effects.

The author has described interesting and rare clinical cases of familial adenomatous polyposis, Gardner's syndrome, giant esophageal polyp, transthyretin amyloidosis, anabolic steroid use resulting in liver damage, infectious mononucleosis, alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency.

Dr. Balabanska's scientific output is extensive. It significantly enriched and expanded our contemporary understanding on important and actual problems in hepatology. Her work represents a substantial contribution to both medical science and clinical practice.

### **III. Academic teaching activity**

Dr. Rozalina Balabanska is an established university teacher. She actively participates in the teaching of medical students at the Faculty of Medicine at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She is involved in the postgraduate training in Gastroenterology of resident doctors, as well as in conducting courses in abdominal ultrasound and transient elastography in the continuing medical education program and in the individual training programs. According to the provided report in the period 01.01.2021 - 30.11.2025, Dr. Balabanska supervised specialization in gastroenterology of three interns and in the same period her total academic occupation is 1152.5 hours. She daily imparts her knowledge and practical skills to interns and young doctors from the Gastroenterology Clinic at "Acibadem City Clinic UMBAL Tokuda".

### **IV. Compliance with the requirements for occupying the academic position "associate professor"**

The self-assessment report for the implementation of the minimum National Indicators attached by Dr. Rozalina Balabanska shows that she has a total of **10453.09 points**, which many times exceeds the required 400 points.

### **V. Conclusion**

I believe that with her high professional qualification, clinical experience, significant scientific production, contributions and teaching skills, Dr. Rozalina Balabanska, MD fully meets all the requirements for occupying the academic position of "associate professor", set in the Law for development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as in the Regulations of development of the academic staff in the Acibadem City Clinic UMBAL Tokuda EAD.

I confidently give my positive assessment and recommend the respected members of the Scientific Jury to award Dr. Rozalina Ivanova Balabanska, MD, PhD the academic position of "associate professor" in Gastroenterology.

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