

OPINION

By Prof. Iskren Kotzev, MD, D.Sc

in connection with the announced competition for associate professor in the field of higher education 7. Healthcare and Sports, professional field 7.1. Medicine, scientific specialty "Gastroenterology" 03.01.14, for the needs of the Gastroenterology Clinic of the scientific organization at "Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda University Hospital" EAD, announced in State Gazette No. 85/14.10.2025.

The Scientific Council of Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda University Hospital EAD announced a competition for an associate professor in gastroenterology (03.01.14) for the needs of the Gastroenterology Clinic at Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda University Hospital EAD in State Gazette No. 85/14.10.2025. The only candidate for the competition is Dr. Rosalina Ivanova Balabanska, a physician at the Gastroenterology Clinic at ASK Tokuda University Hospital, Sofia.

By order 15-05-258/15.12.2025 of the executive director of Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda University Hospital EAD, I was included as a member of the scientific jury. At the absentia meeting of the scientific jury on 15.12.2025, I was appointed to prepare an opinion on the competition. The original documents and copies provided to me for review contain everything necessary to conduct an in-depth review and assessment of the candidate's qualities and contributions.

I know Dr. Rosalina Ivanova Balabanska well and follow her development. I am well aware of her work as a doctor, researcher, and scientist. I was her reviewer for her doctoral dissertation in 2021 and her habilitation monography "Liver Steatosis," published in 2025.

Dr. Rosalina Balabanska was born in Plovdiv and graduated from High School No. 35 in Sofia with a gold medal. She graduated as a doctor from the Medical University of Sofia in 1987 with excellent grades. She worked as a district doctor (1987-1991), as a resident at the Military Medical Academy, Sofia (1991-1994), as a resident doctor at the Fifth City Hospital, Sofia (1994-2007), and since 2007 at the Gastroenterology Clinic at Acibadem City Clinic Tokuda University Hospital as a resident, assistant, and senior assistant (since 2022).

In 1996, she obtained a specialty in internal medicine, and in 1999, in gastroenterology. In 2021, she successfully defended her dissertation for the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" on the topic: "Liver steatosis and non-alcoholic steatohepatitis - clinical evaluation and application of transient elastography."

Dr. Rosalina Balabanska has submitted 66 published scientific papers for review - 1 dissertation, 1 habilitation monography, publications related to the dissertation - 6 (not subject to review), publications in journals with impact factor - 25, in journals without impact factor - 3, in Bulgarian scientific journals - 28, and 2 popular science articles. All publications are listed in document No. 8 of the mandatory documents for participation in the competition. Thirty-eight scientific papers have been published in extenso, while the others are summaries of participation in scientific forums.

A report on citations No. 895/27.11.2025 from the Central Medical Library of the Medical University, Sofia, which shows that a total of 1,271 citations are documented in the databases - in foreign sources Scopus - 635 and Web of Science - 625. Citations in Bulgarian sources from the library fund of the Central Medical Library have also been identified - 11. The index: Scop is 4 and in Web of Science it is 6.

28 scientific papers have been published in journals that are referenced and indexed in world-renowned scientific information databases - Scopus/Web of Science (25 with IF), 30

scientific publications and reports are in non-referenced peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes. Of all these 58 publications, 28 are in English and 30 are in Bulgarian. The publications are in prestigious journals - Clinical and Molecular Hepatology, The Lancet Infectious Diseases, New England Journal of Medicine, Hepatology, Journal of Hepatology, Gut, Cytokine, HIV Medicine, Journal of Crohns & Colitis, Digestion, Ultrasound in Medicine and Biology, Nephrology, Dialysis and Transplantation. Scientific papers referenced in the National Reference List of NACID have been published in Bulgarian medical journals - Bulgarian Hepatogastroenterology, Contemporary Medicine, Diagnostic and Therapeutic Ultrasound, MEDINFO, GP News, Medical Magazine, etc. Dr. Balabanska is the sole and first author in 17 scientific publications, second author in 17, third and subsequent author in 22, and last author in 2. The total impact factor is 679.596 and the individual impact factor is 34.643.

Dr. Balabanska has remarkable scientific activity with her participation in 21 Bulgarian and 27 international scientific congresses and conferences.

The topics of Dr. Balabanska's scientific output are wide-ranging and include: diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis B, D and C, abdominal ultrasonography, diagnosis and treatment of MASLD, GIT, IBD, and clinical cases.

Her main contributions are in the field of hepatology:

- Clinical algorithm for managing patients with liver problems (elevated liver enzymes or abnormal ultrasound findings)
- Own threshold values for staging liver steatosis with CAP on FibroScan and for staging liver fibrosis with transient elastography (FibroScan)
- Diagnosis and treatment of chronic hepatitis B, D, and C
- Application of non-invasive methods and transient elastography in hepatology
- Diagnostic algorithm for liver examination in patients with metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes mellitus, or obesity
- Ultrasound examination to determine the degree of steatosis by determining the US-FLI (Ultrasound fatty liver index) and MFS (Modified fatty score)
- Introduction of the FAST score for rapid differentiation of cases with advanced fibrosis and MASH activity
- Much of her experience and contributions in the field of MASLD are shared in her monograph "Liver Steatosis" – a contemporary approach to pathogenesis, non-invasive diagnosis, and therapeutic approach.

It should be noted that her monograph "Liver Steatosis" is the first comprehensive and up-to-date publication in Bulgarian medical literature devoted to the topic of liver steatosis.

Dr. Rosalina Balabanska has been involved in teaching propaedeutics of internal medicine and internal medicine - gastroenterology to third- and fourth-year medical students at the Faculty of Medicine of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" since 2020. At ASC UMHAT Tokuda, she participates in the training of gastroenterology residents, conducting courses in abdominal ultrasonography, Fibroscan application, and contrast-enhanced ultrasound.

Dr. Rosalina Balabanska's teaching load with residents for the period from the beginning of 2021 to the end of 2025 is 1,152 teaching hours. For the same period, Dr. Rosalina Balabanska is the head of the specialization of three gastroenterology residents: Dr. Dimitar Koemdzhiev, Dr. Marina Lilova, and Dr. Daniel Kavrakov, and in the previous period from the opening of Tokuda Hospital until the end of 2020, she supervised the residents Dr. Zümrud Sadkova, Dr. Kristina Stoyanova, and Dr. Rosalina Mihaylova.

The academic workload report from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" to the Department of Internal Medicine, Pharmacology and Clinical Pharmacology, Pediatrics, Epidemiology, Infectious and Skin Diseases" shows a teaching load for the 2022/2023

academic year of 180 hours, for 2023/2024 of 195 hours, and for 2024/2025 of 105 teaching hours. Dr. Rosalina Balabanska's total teaching load is estimated at 1,632 equivalent hours for the period from 2021 to the end of 2025.

Dr. Rosalina Balabanska has over 37 years of extensive clinical experience in the field of clinical medicine. She has worked and continues to work with leading Bulgarian doctors in the field of internal medicine, gastroenterology, and hepatology—her first teacher, Acad. Grigor Mechkov, Prof. Simeon Stoynov, Assoc. Prof. Radin Tsonov, and Prof. Petko Karagyozov. She is one of the doyens of the Gastroenterology Clinic at Tokuda Hospital, where she has worked for almost 20 years. Dr. Balabanska has made a significant contribution to daily clinical work, biopsy activities, and the introduction of elastography in the Clinic and in Bulgaria. She is an active researcher in international clinical programs with new drugs for the treatment of chronic viral hepatitis B, D, and C, metabolic-associated steatohepatitis with advanced fibrosis, primary biliary cholangitis, alcoholic liver disease, and liver cirrhosis.

Dr. Rosalina Balabanska is a renowned expert in the diagnosis and treatment of chronic liver diseases, abdominal ultrasound, contrast-enhanced ultrasound, and non-invasive diagnosis with transient elastography. She is a member of the expert committee for the diagnosis and treatment of patients with chronic viral hepatitis.

Dr. Balabanska meets the national criteria for the academic position of "Associate Professor" according to the indicators in groups A and B and repeatedly exceeds the requirements for the indicators in groups G and D with a total score of 10,453.09 points, with a minimum required score of 400 points.

Dr. Rosalina Balabanska is a prominent representative of the Bulgarian school of hepatology, and her presence would be a source of pride for any clinic in the world. Dr. Balabanska occupies an important place in contemporary scientific and practical gastroenterological and hepatological thought in Bulgaria. She participates in international and national clinical studies, as well as in scientific and expert national and international exchanges. She is an accomplished clinician in gastroenterology and hepatology, with significant experience and personal contributions in the field of steatotic liver disease, abdominal echography, and chronic viral hepatitis, with major original scientific contributions. She is modest, fair, responsive, and innovative in her work. Dr. Balabanska is a highly responsible and excellent teacher. In recent years, her name has been associated with the contemporary development and successes of hepatology in Bulgaria and worldwide.

Dr. Rosalina Balabanska is a respected medical specialist, researcher, lecturer, and scientist. Dr. Balabanska is an active participant in all major Bulgarian and international scientific forums on gastroenterology and hepatology. She is a member of the National Societies of Gastroenterology, Hepatology, and Ultrasonography, as well as the European and American Associations for the Study of the Liver. She has extensive experience in research as a principal investigator in clinical trials in all phases. She is well respected and recognized by her patients, students, colleagues, and the community. She was named Researcher of the Year in 2016 and 2018 by Tokuda Hospital, and according to a survey by the newspaper 24 Hours, she has consistently been among the "Doctors We Trust" since 2012. Dr. Rosalina Balabanska is a prominent physician, well known in the scientific societies of gastroenterology and hepatology, and in the Bulgarian Association of Ultrasound in Medicine, where she actively participates in scientific life.

It must be said that Dr. Balabanska has long deserved her habilitation. This is evidenced by the fact that the jury includes a host of leading doctors and scientists, namely Prof. Krum Katsarov, Prof. Petko Karagyozov, Prof. Milena Staneva, Prof. Krasimir Antonov, Prof. Deyan Zhelev, and Assoc. Prof. Radin Tsonev. Such consensus is rare in the scientific life of Bulgarian gastroenterologists and hepatologists.

Dr. Rosalina Balabanska meets all the requirements and criteria for the academic title of "Associate Professor" in the field of gastroenterology, and based on the above, I give my positive vote and recommend that the esteemed members of the academic jury award her this title.

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Iskren Kotzev".