

OPINION

by Prof. Dr. Kiril Vassilev Draganov, DSc,

**Clinic of Hepatic, Biliary, Pancreatic and General Surgery in Acibadem City Clinic
Tokuda University Hospital EAD**

Subject: Competition to fill the academic position „Associate Professor” in the field of higher education 7. „Healthcare and sports” by professional direction 7.1.„Medicine”, specialty Neurosurgery, for the needs of the Neurosurgery Clinic, „Acibadem City Clinic UMBAL Tokuda“ EAD, announced in SG No. 47/04.06.2024.

By order № 15-05-98/05.08.2024 of the Executive Director of „Acibadem City Clinic UMBAL Tokuda“ EAD Dr. Venelina Atahasova and the procurator of the hospital Mr. Bugra Sesam and on the basis of Art. 4, Para. 2, Art. 29 a of the ZRASRB, Art. 2, Para. 2, Art. 62, Para. 1 and Para. 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the ZRASRB, Art. 61 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at „Acibadem City Clinic UMBAL Tokuda“ EAD, as well as on the basis of the Decision of the Scientific Council (protocol № 53/26.06.2024) I have been appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury for the above competition.

At the first meeting of the Scientific Jury I was appointed to prepare an opinion. The only candidate in the competition is Dr. Assen Hristov Tsekov, PhD. The documents submitted by Dr. Tsekov, as well as the terms of the competition and its procedure, are fully in accordance with the above-mentioned legal framework in force in the country.

Brief professional biographical data. Postgraduate qualifications

The candidate in the present competition Dr. Assen Hristov Tsekov, PhD graduated in Medicine at the Faculty of Medicine, Medical University, Sofia in 2011. Immediately after his graduation he became a part of the team of the Clinic of Neurosurgery, "Acibadem City Clinic of Tokuda University Hospital" EAD, and in 2018 he acquired a specialty in Neurosurgery. Dr. Tsekov, PhD has held numerous postgraduate courses and specializations at home and abroad, regarding which I would like to highlight two facts. First: all of them concern a number of fundamental, but also innovative areas and procedures in neurosurgery - laser and radiofrequency techniques, spinal surgery, microneurosurgery, neuroendoscopy, hydrocephalus surgery, etc. Second: all courses are extremely evenly distributed throughout the candidate's professional and career development and growth, and are not "campaign" courses.

Research output and citations

Dr. Assen Tsekov obtained the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Medicine in 2019 after a successful public defense of his dissertation on "Current trends and opportunities in the diagnosis and treatment of Teterd Cord Syndrome". In addition to the aforementioned dissertation, the candidate presents a list of 18 other scientific works: one monograph ("Percutaneous vertebroplasty with bone cement: risks, complications, prevention" (ed. 2024) and 17 full-text publications. Dr. Assen Tsekov, PhD is the sole author in three of the scientific papers, first author in six, and second and subsequent author in the remaining eight. Four of the articles were published in foreign journals and 13 in Bulgarian publications. In the databases

Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar 17 citations of the scientific works of Dr. Tsekov, PhD.

Main areas of research activity and contributions

The thematic areas studied and discussed in the scientific production of Dr. Assen Tsekov, PhD are diverse, the result of thorough and dedicated work. His contributions are both theoretical and of a practical and applied nature. The volume of the opinion does not allow to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the scientific directions and contributions of the scientific research activity of Dr. Tsekov, therefore in a more abbreviated form I will emphasize the main ones, which I have considered in the following 3 groups:

I. *Surgical treatment and prevention of CNS in infancy.* This includes scientific papers numbered 11, 12 from the list of scientific papers, which trace the development of surgical treatment in congenital dysraphic problems, as well as the development of knowledge about them over the years through a literature review. Cases of "Shaken Baby Syndrome" are increasing in number, which determines the clinical significance of the problem. An exemplary diagnostic and treatment algorithm is proposed.

II. *Surgical treatment and prevention of spinal disorders.* These problems have been thoroughly discussed in scientific papers No. 13, 14, 16 and 17 of the list of scientific papers. Three of them are in English and have been printed in IF journals, which is further evidence of their importance. The topics concern the surgical treatment, prevention and sequelae of spinal disorders, as well as modern minimally invasive techniques, which are also used at the candidate's institution. It is the minimally invasive, including microsurgery of the spine that allows for maximum preservation of its biomechanics, achieving good gliding and distant results while guaranteeing rapid recovery and a good quality of life. In this field falls the monograph written by Dr. Assen Tsekov, PhD. In a volume of 185 pages, the fractures of the vertebral column in osteoporosis or malignant processes are presented, which represent not only a medical but also a social problem caused by a number of circumstances - an aging population, corticosteroid treatment in a number of diseases, an increase in the incidence of malignant diseases, etc. A thorough review of the literature is carried out. The evolution of diagnostic and treatment methods, the advantages and disadvantages of various techniques, and postoperative outcomes are described with emphasis on risks, morbidities, and methods to reduce their incidence.

III. *Cranio-orbital neurosurgery.* This is the largest area of the candidate's research work and includes the scientific papers with nos. 1-10, 15. Tumors involving the cranio-orbital area are a serious challenge in terms of diagnosis and treatment and the risks associated with this delicate area. All this requires multidisciplinary involvement. An individualized approach, options for early diagnosis and an algorithm for the selection of the most appropriate neurosurgical technique - "classic" or minimally invasive - are proposed. The introduction of neuronavigation and neuromonitoring have shown that this is the shortest and safest route to the affected area.

Teaching and learning

In 2019, Dr. Assen Tsekov, PhD was awarded the title of "Senior Assistant Professor". He is a visiting assistant professor at St. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University and as such has realized

a teaching load of a total of 65 hours of classroom workload with students in the period 2020-2024. His teaching activity is complemented by 377 equivalent hours, of which 365 with postgraduate students and 12 in continuing education.

Awards. Memberships in scientific organizations and societies

Proof of the qualities of Dr. Assen Tsekov, PhD, as a physician, researcher, and teacher are the many awards he has received: "Young Doctor of the Year" (BMA, 2018); "Young Doctor of the Year" of the ASC of Tokuda University Hospital (2019); "Diploma of Appreciation" for active participation in organizing and conducting free blood donation (2019) and diploma for "Special Contribution to Blood Donation" (2021) from the National Center of Transfusion Hematology (2019); "Special Patient Trust Award" (2022) and "Best Practice Award in Spinal Surgery" (2023) from BALKAN MEDICAL AWARDS; Award for Contribution to Foster Care in Bulgaria- "Saviors of Childhood" (2023). Dr. Assen Tsekov, PhD is a member of the Bulgarian Society of Neurosurgery, the Bulgarian Medical Association and the Bulgarian Spinal Association.

Conclusion

On the basis of his diverse and focused diagnostic and therapeutic, research and teaching activities, my comprehensive assessment of Dr. Assen Hristov Tsekov, PhD is that he is a well-rounded neurosurgeon, scientist and teacher. A reference for meeting the minimum national requirements shows a total of 500.95 points against the required 400.

On review of the evidence submitted, I found no repetition or plagiarism as prescribed. I take the liberty to recommend to the Honorable Scientific Jury to award to Dr. Assen Hristov Tsekov, PhD, the academic title of Associate Professor for the respective position, for which I vote "Yes" with conviction.

Prepared the opinion:

/Prof. Dr. Kiril Vassilev Draganov, DSc/



12.09. 2024.