

To: The Chair of
the academic jury appointed to conduct the competition
for the academic position of "associate professor" by Order No.
11-07-75/May 28, 2026, in the field of higher education 7.
Health Care and Sports, professional area 7.1 Medicine

OPINION

By Prof. Dr. Stoyan Stefanov Handzhiev

Re: Competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in Field 7. Health Care and Sports, professional field "Medicine," scientific specialty "Surgery," with candidate Dr. Ivo Petrov Zhivkov, M.D.

1. Biographical Information and Career Development

Dr. Ivo Petrov Zhivkov, M.D., was born on July 10, 1985. His professional career includes working as a surgical resident, a surgeon, and a deputy head in clinical units specializing in highly specialized surgical procedures. From April 2011 to December 2016, he was a surgical resident at the Clinic of Endoscopic and General Surgery at the St. Ivan Rilski University Hospital - Sofia, and from December 2016 to December 2018, he worked as a surgeon at the same clinic. From October 2021 to April 2025, he served as deputy head of the Clinic of Endoscopic and General Surgery at St. Ivan Rilski University Hospital EAD in Sofia.

Dr. Zhivkov provides surgical consultation services in the field of laparoscopic and minimally invasive surgery. The materials indicate consulting engagements with "Southwest Hospital" JSC, "Medica" University Hospital in Ruse, and "MedLine" Hospital in Plovdiv.

2. Professional Qualifications and Clinical Competence

Dr. Zhivkov holds a specialty in Surgery, a doctoral degree, and has submitted documentation for additional qualification courses.

In terms of clinical practice and recognized (licensed) competencies, Dr. Zhivkov is an expert in the field of laparoscopic exploration of the biliary tract, laparoscopic cholecystectomy, surgical treatment of choledocholithiasis, minimally invasive approaches to diseases of the colon and rectum, surgical treatment of morbid obesity, and the implementation of programs for accelerated postoperative recovery.

3. Research Activity and Scientometric Indicators

Dr. Ivo Zhivkov's scientific output includes a doctoral dissertation, a habilitation thesis (monograph), publications in peer-reviewed and indexed journals, scientific reports, and publications of a scientific-applied nature. The academic report was prepared for to fill the academic position of

“associate professor” in Field 7: Health Care and Sports, and it confirms compliance with the minimum national requirements under the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The candidate’s dissertation is titled “The Place and Role of Laparoscopic Biliary Tract Exploration in the Diagnosis and Treatment of Benign Extrahepatic Cholestasis.” It analyzes the diagnosis and treatment of benign extrahepatic cholestasis, introduces the concept of preoperatively undiagnosed extrahepatic cholestasis, and emphasizes the diagnostic and therapeutic value of laparoscopic exploration of the biliary tract.

Dr. Zhivkov’s habilitation thesis is the monograph “Technical Aspects of Laparoscopic Exploration of the Biliary Tract.” The certificate presented indicates that the work has been accepted for publication by RIK “Design-DL” EOOD, is currently in the “in press” stage, has ISBN 978-954-90617-9-6, is 158 pages long, and is expected to be published in May 2026. This work logically builds upon the dissertation and systematizes one of the candidate’s leading areas of scientific and practical interest.

Among the publications presented are articles in journals such as *Surgical Endoscopy*, *Clinical Nutrition ESPEN*, and *Obesity Surgery*, as well as articles in Bulgarian scientific journals and anthologies. Notable examples include “TEM in T1 Rectal Cancer—Influence of Cancer Grading,” “Rectal Prolapse—Laparoscopic vs. Conventional Treatment,” “Laparoscopic Treatment of Cases of Unrecognized Ductal Lithiasis—Our Experience,” “Laparoscopic Common Bile Duct Exploration vs. ERCPG in Patients with Choledocholithiasis and Acute Cholecystitis,” and “Dissection and Presentation of the Bile Duct and the Common Bile Duct—Is It Important to the Success of LCBDE.” These publications present the candidate as a member of research teams working on contemporary and clinically significant issues.

The citation report from the Central Medical Library at the Medical University of Sofia confirms the presence of citations in Web of Science, in Bulgarian sources from the CML’s library collection, and in other foreign open-access online sources. Although the citation profile is not the primary factor in evaluating surgical research and applied work, the visible presence of the candidate’s publications in international and national sources is a positive aspect of the candidate’s academic profile.

4. Evaluation of the Habilitation Thesis

The habilitation thesis “Technical Aspects of Laparoscopic Biliary Tract Revision” is not limited to a theoretical description of the methodology, but rather builds upon the clinical and scientific experience reflected in the candidate’s dissertation and publications. This forms a coherent sequence, from defining the problem, through analyzing the results, to deriving practically applicable technical recommendations.

5. Creative Achievements and Scientific and Applied Contributions

Dr. Ivo Zhivkov’s creative achievements and scientific and applied contributions can be examined in several main areas, which complement one another and outline a comprehensive profile of a surgeon with a clearly defined focus on minimally invasive surgery.

5.1. Laparoscopic Revision of the Biliary Tract and Treatment of Choledocholithiasis

The most significant area of the candidate's work relates to laparoscopic exploration of the biliary tract. The contribution here consists of establishing the diagnostic and therapeutic value of the method, analyzing its place relative to endoscopic techniques, and emphasizing its role in cases of preoperatively undiagnosed extrahepatic cholestasis. The publications devoted to LCBDE, choledocholithiasis, and acute cholecystitis demonstrate an effort to compare the approaches rather than to create a formal dichotomy between endoscopy and laparoscopic surgery.

5.2. Minimally Invasive Colorectal Surgery

The second area of focus concerns minimally invasive surgery for the sigmoid colon and rectal prolapse. The publication on TEM for T1 rectal carcinoma highlights local transanal techniques, which—with proper patient selection—allow for oncologically sound resection while preserving the rectum. The analysis of the impact of tumor grading on treatment decisions is important because local excision for early-stage rectal carcinoma requires a precise risk assessment.

The publication comparing laparoscopic versus conventional treatment of rectal prolapse also has practical value. Laparoscopic rectopexy is considered a modern approach associated with less postoperative pain and faster recovery, with a similar recurrence rate. The introduction and critical evaluation of such methods are important for the advancement of surgical practice.

5.3. Bariatric Surgery and Care for Patients with Morbid Obesity

A third area of focus is bariatric surgery and the care of patients with morbid obesity. Publications on the laparoscopic adjustable gastric band, specific nursing care, and the application of ERAS in patients with morbid obesity demonstrate a broadening of the surgical perspective beyond the operation itself. Patients with morbid obesity require a specialized environment, adapted equipment, a multidisciplinary team, and clear perioperative guidelines.

5.4. Programs for Accelerated Recovery After Surgery

The fourth area of focus relates to Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS). Dr. Zhivkov's contributions to publications on the applicability of ERAS in Eastern Europe, on accelerated recovery following laparoscopic biliary tract revision, and on the patient's role in this process demonstrate an understanding of modern surgery as a combination of preoperative preparation, surgical technique, anesthesiological approach, postoperative care, and active patient motivation.

6. Teaching and Educational Activities

Dr. Ivo Zhivkov's teaching and academic activities are documented in a certificate issued by the "Yordanka Filaretova" Medical College at the Medical University of Sofia. The certificate states that the candidate has delivered lectures, led seminars, and participated in examination activities over the past two academic years as an adjunct instructor.

Based on the information provided, it can be concluded that the candidate possesses the necessary teaching qualifications for the academic position of "associate professor." He is capable of imparting not only information but also clinical reasoning, which is particularly important for the training of future medical professionals and for introducing them to the practical realities of hospital practice.

7. Public, Organizational, and Expert Activities

Dr. Zhivkov is a full member of the European Association of Endoscopic Surgery, the European Society of Oncological Surgery, and the Bulgarian Surgical Society. He is a co-founder of the NGO "IT for Health."

8. Overall Assessment

Based on the documents submitted, I conclude that Dr. Ivo Petrov Zhivkov is an accomplished specialist with a clearly defined professional identity. His main strength lies in combining clinical surgical practice, scientific research on real-world surgical problems, and teaching. His candidacy is not based on a single achievement but on consistent development over the years.

His scientific contributions are primarily applied research, which is entirely natural and valuable for the field of surgery. They relate to diagnostic and therapeutic algorithms, single-stage laparoscopic approaches, safety in biliary tract revision, minimally invasive treatment of colorectal diseases, bariatric surgery, and accelerated postoperative recovery. These are areas of direct benefit to clinical practice.

The monograph, currently in press, is of central importance for the habilitation process. It demonstrates the ability to systematize one's own and the team's experience, to present technical approaches, and to formulate practical guidelines. In a field such as surgery, such a work is valuable when it can serve not only as an academic text but also as a methodological guide for practicing surgeons.

Publications in international journals and participation in research teams demonstrate the candidate's visibility beyond the confines of a single clinic. The topics are current, and some of them have been published in reputable journals in the fields of endoscopic surgery, clinical nutrition, and bariatric surgery. The citations further confirm that the candidate's work is recognized within the scientific community.

Teaching activities, although primarily in the form of part-time instruction, are substantial and practice-oriented. They are consistent with the nature of the candidacy and enable Dr. Zhivkov to participate fully in the training of students, residents, and medical professionals.

9. Conclusion

After reviewing the submitted materials, I consider that Dr. Ivo Petrov Zhivkov, M.D., meets the requirements for the academic position of "associate professor" in Field 7. Health Care and Sports, professional area "Medicine," scientific specialty "Surgery." The candidate possesses the necessary clinical experience, scientific output, habilitation thesis, teaching activity, and organizational maturity.

I give my positive assessment of the professional, research, and teaching activities of Dr. Ivo Petrov Zhivkov and recommend that the esteemed Scientific Jury propose his appointment to the academic position of "associate professor" in the scientific specialty of "Surgery."

Date:

Signature:

