

1.

DK164

DK164,

2.

(HMGB1 C)
(sRAGE)

, RAGE

RAGE

RAGE.

HMGB1
(fIRAGE)

. HMGB1

HMGB1

RAGE

3.

2-) (LPEI-comb-PEtOx)

(2- -

(SNAs).

” “ - , . . - “ “

6 (10.03.2024).

23 , 17 42.81. 66.21. 655, 430. 84 Scopus

2009-2023 - 69 34 35

4. „ 4.3. „ ”

, 10.03.2024 . : _____ / . , /

STATEMENT

In higher education 4. "Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Informatics", professional direction 4.3. "Biological Sciences", scientific speciality "Molecular Biology" in the direction of "Molecular Biology", for the needs of the Institute of Molecular Biology "Academician Roumen Tsanev" - BAS, announced in the Official Gazette No. 92 of November 3, 2023.

Author of the statement
Prof. Milena Georgieva Vasileva, PhD
Member of the scientific jury for the selection of "Associate Professor",
according to Order No. 862 of November 17, 2023, of
Director of IMB, BAS
from
Laboratory of Molecular Genetics, Epigenetics, and Longevity,
Roumen Tsanev Institute of Molecular Biology
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

GENERAL PART

Assistant Professor Dr. Maria Petrova is the only candidate in the competition for "Associate Professor" in the Section "Structure and Function of Chromatin" at the Institute of Molecular Biology (IMB) Roumen Tsanev at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS). All necessary documents for the competition have been prepared following the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB) and its Implementation Rules at IMB-BAS and are presented exhaustively. Lists of the candidate's scientific production, including publications and citations, and copies of the relevant publications with which assist. prof. Petrova participates in the competition, are presented. All works are in the field of the announced competition and have not been presented in previous competitions.

According to the candidate's reference, the total number of points and the sum of the points for the individual scientific indicators exceed the minimum national requirements for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor" and those established in the LDASRB Rules at IMB-BAS.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF THE CANDIDATE

Maria Petrova graduated from a master's program in "Genetics" in 2009 at the Faculty of Biology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". From 2010 to 2013, she was a regular doctoral student in the Department of Genetics under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Ginka Genova. In 2014, she successfully defended a dissertation on the topic "Study of some mechanisms by which Fragile X Mental Retardation Protein 1 controls neuronal development in *Drosophila melanogaster*" with scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Ginka Genova. Between 2013 and 2016, she worked as a biologist at the Faculty of Biology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2015, she was an assistant at the same educational institution. Maria Petrova began her scientific career at the Roumen Tsanev Institute of Molecular Biology in 2016 when she was selected and appointed as an assistant. Two years later, she was selected through a competition for "assistant professor" at IMB-BAS, section "Structure and function of chromatin".

Her scientific career combines research and educational activities, further enhancing her competencies.

SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC INDICATORS OF THE CANDIDATE

Scientific Contributions

The scientific contributions of Dr. Maria Petrova focus on three main scientific directions:

1. Research involving the analysis of innovative and alternative compounds as potential chemotherapeutics.

Throughout her research career, Dr. Petrova has presented a comprehensive list of articles describing her studies on new promising molecular structures as potential anti-cancer drugs. These compounds combine several biologically active subunits into one molecule and are presented as potential chemotherapeutics. New ferrocene conjugates with synergistic action within one molecule have been synthesized and characterized in collaboration with other scientific groups. Among the various ferrocene complexes synthesized and studied, ferrocene-containing camphor sulfonamide, known as DK164, has been presented as a compound with promising properties. Extensive biological experiments have shown that DK164 exhibits cytotoxic effects on breast and lung cancer cells while less harmful to non-cancerous cells from the same tissues. Strategies have been developed to overcome its strong cytotoxic effects and poor solubility by synthesizing analogues and incorporating them into biodegradable micelles for targeted and successful delivery to tumour cells. This scientific contribution offers perspectives for the rational design of new anti-cancer drugs based on ferrocene. These studies have been extended by searching for and studying new compounds isolated from various natural sources such as plants, fungi, and invertebrates. A set of hemocyanins isolated from molluscs has been selected and studied, with some of them demonstrating anti-tumour effects, including the potential for inducing autophagy in cell models of breast cancer, lung cancer, cervical cancer, skin cancer, head and neck cancer. Similar studies have been conducted on compounds isolated from fungi and cannabidiol. The obtained data identify extracts with the highest cytotoxic potential and effects on critical cellular processes such as apoptosis and autophagy.

2. Research dedicated to proteins with a role in oncogenesis

The results of these studies provide detailed insights into the role of HMGB1 and its receptor RAGE in the development and progression of cancer. HMGB1 participates in various cellular processes, including replication, repair, transcription, and DNA remodelling, as well as in extracellular processes by binding to its specific receptor, RAGE. Studies on HMGB1 and its truncated form (HMGB1_C) on the expression of the complete form (fRAGE) and soluble RAGE (sRAGE) in breast cancer and lung cancer models show that the membrane form of the receptor predominates in more aggressive cell lines. At the same time, in those with a better prognosis, RAGE is represented solely by the soluble form. Overall, these results contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of HMGB1 and RAGE in the development and progression of cancer and can serve as a platform for developing targeted therapies for cancer. Similar studies have been conducted with another protein, nucleolin. Studies on it reveal its role in the development and progression of cancer. Nucleolin participates in various cellular processes, including ribosome biogenesis, DNA repair, genome remodelling and stability, cell division, signalling of chemokines and growth factors, and angiogenesis. Increased nucleolin expression is associated with poor prognosis in patients with various types of cancer, including stomach cancer, hepatocellular carcinoma, acute myeloid leukaemia, non-small cell lung cancer, and ductal adenocarcinoma of the pancreas. The oncogenic effect of nucleolin appears to be multifactorial, reflecting its multiple functions. These studies provide valuable insights into its role in cancer progression and pave the way for future research aimed at better understanding the molecular mechanisms of its action and the development of targeted therapies for cancer.

3. Research on polymer systems for nucleic acid delivery into the cell

The research in this direction is focused on the analysis of polymer-based vectors. Comb-like copolymers of polyethyleneimine with poly(2-ethyl-2-oxazoline) (LPEI-comb-PEtOx) have been analyzed for their interaction with DNA and their potential for DNA delivery and release into cells. The results show that cellular internalization and transfection efficiency vary depending on the morphology and structure of the polyplexes. The highest degree of transfection is observed with copolymer complexes exhibiting elongated and ellipsoidal morphology. Block copolymers carrying tertiary amino or quaternary ammonium groups have also been analyzed for their potential to deliver DNA into cells. The results demonstrate that the quaternized copolymer exhibits significantly higher efficiency in transfecting cells with DNA compared to the non-quaternized one. The copolymers exhibit relatively low cytotoxicity towards various cell lines, enhancing cell viability. A new class of platforms for nucleic acid delivery and gene regulation, spherical nucleic acids (SNAs), has also been investigated.

In these directions, Dr. Petrova demonstrates profound knowledge and expertise. Her research contributes to expanding our understanding of molecular processes in oncogenesis and cancer biology and the development of new biomedical approaches for delivering innovative anti-cancer compounds with potential for clinical application.

SCIENTIFIC INDICATORS

The performance report on meeting the minimum national requirements of the LDASRB and the Regulation for the specific conditions and procedures for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor" at IMB-BAS shows that Dr. Petrova exceeds the points for indicators B, G, and D from the criteria for the "Associate Professor" procedure at the same scientific organization. In the presented report, Dr. Petrova also presents her points for indicator E, with which the total number of points with which the candidate participates in the competition is 655, while according to the Regulation for the Implementation of the LDASRB at IMB-BAS, the required points are 430.

Dr. Petrova is the author of 23 publications, with 17 of them being included in the competition for "Associate Professor". The total IF of the publications for the competition is 42.81. The total IF of Dr. Petrova's work after obtaining her Ph.D. is 66.21. Her scientific works at the time of submitting the documents for participation in the competition have been cited 84 times according to the data provided by Dr. Petrova for the competition, with her h-index according to the data in Scopus being 6 (as of March 10, 2024).

In summary, Dr. Petrova's publication activity is intensive and systematic, with the presented works addressing various current issues in cancer biology and the design of drugs for targeted application in oncology. Between 2009-2023, Dr. Petrova participated in nine research projects, one of which she led. She is also active in presenting her scientific results at scientific forums, participating in 69 scientific forums, including 34 international and 35 national ones. Dr. Petrova also has significant teaching activity, evidenced by the appropriate documents. This is a very good attestation of her active and successful scientific, teaching, and project activities.

CONCLUSION

Assist. Prof. Dr. Maria Petrova has presented materials that meet and exceed the requirements for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor" according to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulation for its Implementation at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS), and the specific requirements of the Roumen Tsanev Institute of Molecular Biology - BAS. The scientific output and significant contributions of the research

work to the development of the scientific field, as well as the international resonance and citation, provide prospects for future research and establish Dr. Petrova's candidacy as a highly qualified scientist leading in the field of molecular biology and genetics. Based on this, I express my positive opinion regarding her candidacy for the academic position of "Associate Professor" and recommend to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury of IMB-BAS to vote positively for her candidacy and to the Scientific Council of the Institute of Molecular Biology - BAS to appoint Dr. Maria Petrova to the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 4. "Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Informatics," professional direction 4.3. "Biological Sciences," scientific speciality "Molecular Biology" within the direction "Molecular Biology," for the needs of the Institute of Molecular Biology "Academician Roumen Tsanev" - BAS.

Sofia, March 10, 2024

Signature: _____

/prof. Milena Georgieva, Ph.D./