

**ПИСМО ДО РЕДАКТОРА
LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

**FIRST BULGARIAN EULAR-ENDORSED COURSE ON CAPILLAROSCOPY
AND MICROCIRCULATION IN RHEUMATIC DISEASES**

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Nailfold capillaroscopy is a unique method with the advantages of safe noninvasiveness, easy and rapid performance. Moreover, it is the only technique for morphological evaluation of the nailfold capillaries. Its major role in rheumatology is to facilitate the differential diagnosis of Raynaud's phenomenon. In systemic sclerosis, capillaroscopic findings are included in the current classification criteria [1, 2]. Microvasculopathy is also observed in a number of other rheumatic diseases with peripheral vascular syndrome [3, 4].

Recently, the EULAR (European Alliance of Associations for Rheumatology) Study Group on Microcirculation in Rheumatic Diseases has approved a fast-track algorithm for differentiation of a scleroderma from a non-scleroderma pattern [5] and is part of the 2013 ACR/EULAR classification criteria for systemic sclerosis. As there is a wide variety of nonscleroderma patterns, the categorisation of capillaroscopic images as nonscleroderma patterns may be a challenge to the capillaroscopist. Objectives: This study was designed to propose a simple fast track algorithm to differentiate scleroderma patterns from non-scleroderma patterns and to assess its interobserver reliability. Methods: During the 8th EULAR course on capillaroscopy

held in Genoa, September 2018, a lecture on teaching the fast track algorithm to categorise an image as non-scleroderma (category 1), a consensus on minimum reporting standards in capillaroscopy [6] and the standardisation of capillaroscopic image acquisition and analysis [7]. The evolving knowledge about microcirculation in rheumatic diseases requires continuing education of the specialists involved in capillaroscopy diagnostics.

In Europe, the great interest shown by rheumatologists during the capillaroscopy seminars organized since 2003 at the annual EULAR congresses, stimulated the idea of organizing a course in capillaroscopy. The first EULAR course "Capillaroscopy in Rheumatic Diseases" was held in 2004 in Genoa, Italy. Since then, the course has been held every two years in Genoa until 2018. The course organizer at the beginning was Prof. Dr. Maurizio Cutolo – Professor of Rheumatology and Head of the Department of Clinical Rheumatology at the University of Genoa, Italy. Shortly thereafter, Prof. Dr. Vanessa Smith, Professor of Rheumatology, and Head of Clinics at the University Hospital of Ghent, Belgium joined the steering team of the course [8, 9]. Since 2020, the EULAR course in capillaroscopy takes place during the annual EULAR Rheumatology congress.

In four consecutive years (from 2020 to 2023), the Bulgarian Rheumatology Society also started organizing workshops in capillaroscopy held by the Bulgarian rheumatologists Prof Dr. Sevdalina Lambova and Dr. Vladimira Boyadzhieva. In 2021, a national consensus on capillaroscopy was published by the Bulgarian Rheumatology Society [10]. As a continuation of these initiatives, the first Bulgarian EULAR-endorsed Course on Capillaroscopy and Microcirculation in Rheumatic Diseases was planned and took place from 27 to 29 September 2024 in Saints Constantine and Helena, Varna, Bulgaria. A total number of 36 rheumatologists and trainees attended the course from different Bulgarian centers in the country, i.e. Sofia, Plovdiv, Pleven, Ruse, Varna, Stara Zagora, etc., including a physician from Romania (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Lecturers and attendees in the first Bulgarian EULAR-endorsed Course on Capillaroscopy and Microcirculation in Rheumatic Diseases (2024)

Members of the scientific committee and lecturers were three international guests – Prof. Dr. Maurizio Cutolo (founder of modern capillaroscopy training in Europe; President of EULAR for the period 2011- 2015), Prof. Dr. Vanessa Smith (Chair of the EULAR study group for the study of microcirculation in rheumatic diseases) and Prof. Dr Ulf Müller-Lad-

ner (Head of the Department in Rheumatology and Internal Medicine at the University of Giessen, Bad Nauheim, Germany; President of EUSTAR/EULAR Scleroderma Trials and Research from 2010 to 2013, of the Scientific Society of Rheumatology in Germany for the period 2015-2016 and of the German Society of Internal Medicine 2022-2023). Bulgarian organizers and lecturers were Prof. Dr. Rumen Stoilov (President of the Bulgarian Rheumatology Society), Prof. Dr. Sevdalina Lambova, Dr. Vladimira Boyadzhieva, Prof. Dr. Hristo Dobrev and Dr. Nikolay Stoilov. Prof Dr. Sevdalina Lambova is Professor of Rheumatology in the Department of Propaedeutics of Internal Diseases “Prof. Dr. Anton Mitov”, Medical University of Plovdiv. She is leading expert in capillaroscopy and the author of the first two monographs in Bulgaria about the application of capillaroscopy in rheumatology (“Capillaroscopy in rheumatology – norm and pathology”, 2021 [11], and “Capillaroscopy in rheumatology – what else do we need to know?”, 2024) [12]. Prof. Dr. Hristo Dobrev (Head of the Section of Dermatology and Venereology at the Medical University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria) is leading expert in the field of capillaroscopy education for the country and organizer of the first basic course in capillaroscopy at the Medical University of Plovdiv in 2012. Dr. Vladimira Boyadzhieva and Dr. Nikolay Stoilov are specialists in rheumatology from the Medical University of Sofia.

The aim of the course was to present the proper technique of capillaroscopy, analysis of capillaroscopic images, interpretation of the results, differentiation between normal and pathological findings in rheumatic diseases. The full immersion 3-day-course provided a summary of the most recent advances in the field of microvascular pathology in rheumatic diseases from leading experts in the field. The course covered both basic theoretical and practical principles in performing and interpretation of capillaroscopic examination, as well as innovative aspects regarding microvasculopathy in rheumatic diseases based on the contemporary knowledge and the considerable practical experience of the experts [12]. Capillaroscopic findings in Raynaud’s phenomenon as well as in other less frequent peripheral vasculopathies, for which only scant data are existing, were presented. With the improvement of modern knowledge in the field of capillaroscopy, expanding indications for performing capillaroscopy should be taken into account that was also extensively discussed during the course.

Altogether, the course included 4 sessions in 3 days with 19 lectures and 3 practical sessions with patients. The training provided the participants with the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills, as well as to share valuable experiences during the practical sessions with examination of patients with different rheumatic diseases and with discussion of the findings in complex clinical cases (Fig. 2). In-depth and inspiring discussions were held within the course, which encouraged the exchange of expertise and posed questions for future research.

Tests were conducted at the beginning and at the end of the training to evaluate the acquired knowledge. Analysis of the results showed an increase in success rates, which illustrates the value of the training process and the overall goal of the course.



Fig. 2. Image from the practical session

The first Bulgarian EULAR-endorsed Course on Capillaroscopy and Microcirculation in rheumatic diseases (2024) was a logic consequence of the

increasing need of international education in capillaroscopy in Bulgaria and reflects also the intensive collaboration between European experts in the field of capillaroscopy.

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