

## STAFFING

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for Physical Therapy Assistant, GS-0636, appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3), Appointments in Veterans Health Administration and 38 U.S.C. § 7405(a)(1)(B) and 7405(a)(1)(D), Temporary full-time appointments, part-time appointments, and without-compensation appointments.
2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. The pages in this handbook replace the existing Physical Therapy Assistant Qualification Standard in VA Handbook 5005, Appendix G23, in its entirety. The new standard is effective on the date of publication. These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, that is maintained on the [Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer website](#) and the [VA Publications website](#). Significant changes include:
  - a. Revising education and experience requirements.
  - b. Establishing license requirements.
  - c. Revising existing assignments and establishes new assignments.
  - d. Clarifying assignment titles above the full performance level.
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059), Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer.
4. **RELATED DIRECTIVES:** VA Directive 5005, Staffing.
5. **RESCISSIONS:** VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix G23, dated March 17, 2006.

**CERTIFIED BY:**

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY  
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/

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Principal Executive Director, Office of  
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/s/

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**DISTRIBUTION:** Electronic only

**NOTE:** This transmittal page accompanied the former VA Handbook 5005, Staffing publication. It is provided for reference to the revisions made to this qualification standard.

**FORMER VA HANDBOOK REFERENCE:** PART II APPENDIX G23  
**EFFECTIVE DATE:** January 28, 2021

**PHYSICAL THERAPY ASSISTANT  
QUALIFICATION STANDARD  
GS-0636  
Veterans Health Administration**

**1. COVERAGE.** [The following are requirements for appointment as a] Physical Therapy Assistant (PTA), GS-0636 in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). These requirements apply to all VHA PTAs in the General Schedule (GS)-0636 series. Under the direction of a Physical Therapist (PT), the PTA provides services that promote the prevention, remediation and rehabilitation of acute and chronic physical dysfunction. The PTA participates with the PT in planning and implementing complex treatment programs and applies physical therapy procedures to patients [ ].

**2. AUTHORITIES.**

- a. [P.L. 111-163, Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010;](#)
- b. [38 U.S.C. § 7401, Appointments in Veterans Health Administration;](#)
- c. [38 U.S.C. § 7402, Qualifications of appointees;](#)
- d. [38 U.S.C. § 7403, Period of appointments; promotions;](#)
- e. [38 U.S.C. § 7405, Temporary full-time appointments, part-time appointments and without-compensation appointments;](#)
- f. [38 U.S.C. § 7407, Administrative provisions for section 7405 and 7406 appointments.](#)

**[3.] DEFINITIONS.**

- a. **Journey Level.** The full performance level for this qualification standard is the GS-8 grade level.
- b. **Creditable Experience.** To be creditable, the experience must have required the use of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) associated with the current scope of PTA practice. Experience must have been gained as a licensed PTA.
- c. **Part-Time Experience.** Part-time experience is creditable according to its relationship to the full-time work week. For example, an individual employed 20 hours per week, or on a half time basis, would receive one full-time work week of

credit for each two weeks of service.

- d. **[Specialty Practice Areas.** Specialty areas may include but not limited to neuromuscular, musculoskeletal, cardiopulmonary, integumentary, assistive technology, brain injury and spinal cord injury (SCI).]

**[4.] BASIC REQUIREMENTS.** To qualify for appointment to this position, all applicants must possess the following:

- a. **Citizenship.** Be a citizen of the United States (U.S.). Non-citizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens in accordance with 38 U.S.C. § 7407(a).
- b. **Education.** Individuals must meet at least one of the requirements below:
  - (1) [ ] Associate degree from an accredited community college, junior college, college or university in a physical therapy assistant education program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education;  
OR
  - (2) [Graduate of foreign physical therapy assistant degree programs that meet the educational requirement and have successfully passed the National Physical Therapy Exam (NPTE) for PTAs.  
  
OR
  - (3) Graduate of military physical therapy assistant programs that meet the educational requirement and have successfully passed the NPTE for PTAs.]
- c. **Licensure.** Current, full, active and unrestricted license as a PTA in a State, Territory or Commonwealth (i.e. Puerto Rico) of the United States, or District of Columbia.

**(1) Exceptions for Non-Licensed Physical Therapy Assistant.**

- (a) Non-licensed applicants who otherwise meet the minimum qualification requirements, but who do not possess state licensure, may be appointed, pending licensure, as a graduate PTA on a full-time temporary appointment under the authority of 38 U.S.C. § 7401(a)(1)(B) and not to exceed two years in accordance with the timeframe in 38 U.S.C. § 7405(c)(2)(B).
- (b) Non-licensed individuals shall only provide care under the direct supervision of a licensed PTA or PT who meets all state regulatory requirements.
- (c) Non-licensed individuals may only be appointed at the entry level and may

not be promoted/converted until licensure is obtained.

(d) Temporary appointments of non-licensed PTAs may not be extended beyond two years or converted to a new temporary appointment.

(e) **Failure to Obtain Licensure.** In all cases, non-licensed PTAs must actively pursue meeting requirements for licensure starting from the date of their appointment. At the time of appointment, the supervisor will provide the non-licensed PTA with the written requirements for licensure, including the time by which the license must be obtained and the consequences for not becoming licensed by the deadline. Failure to obtain licensure during this time period may result in termination of employment.]

**(2) Loss of Credential.** A PTA who fails to maintain the required licensure must be removed from the occupation, which may also result in termination of employment.

d. **Grandfathering Provision.** [Please carefully review the qualification standard to determine the specific education and/or licensure/certification/ registration requirements that apply to this occupation.]

All individuals employed in VHA in this occupational series [or in another occupational series performing the duties as described in the qualification standard] on the effective date of the qualification standard are considered to have met all qualification requirements for the [ ] grade held, including positive education and licensure/trademark/registration/certification. For employees who do not meet all the basic requirements required in this standard, but who met the qualifications applicable to the position at the time they were appointed to it, the following provisions apply:

(1) [ ] Employees may be reassigned, promoted up to and including the full performance (journey) level or changed to lower grade within the occupation, but may not be promoted beyond the journey level or placed in supervisory or managerial positions.

(2) [Employees in an occupation requiring a licensure/certification/registration only at higher grade levels must meet the licensure/certification/registration requirement before they can be promoted to those higher-grade levels.]

(3) [ ] Employees who are appointed on a temporary basis prior to the effective date of the qualification standard may not have their temporary appointment extended or be reappointed, on a temporary or permanent basis, until they fully meet the basic requirements of this standard.

(4) Employees who are converted to title 38 hybrid status under this provision and subsequently leave the occupation lose protected status and must meet the full VA qualification standard requirements in effect at the time of reentry to the

occupation.

(5) [ ] Employees initially grandfathered into this occupation, who subsequently obtain additional education and/or licensure/certification/registration that meet all the basic requirements of this qualification standard must maintain the required credentials as a condition of employment in the occupation.

e. **Physical Requirements.** See VA Directive and Handbook 5019, Employee Occupational Health Service for requirements.

f. **English Language Proficiency.** [PTA candidates must be proficient in spoken and written English in accordance with 38 U.S.C. § 7403(f).]

**5. GRADE DETERMINATION.** In addition to the basic requirements outlined in paragraph 3, the following criteria must be met when determining the grade of candidates.

a. **[Physical Therapy Assistant], GS-05**

(1) **Experience.** [None beyond the basic requirements.]

[ ]

(2) **Assignment.** This is the entry level developmental position. PTAs receive ongoing guidance from more experienced staff members and require general clinical [direction] by the treating physical therapist. The [treating] physical therapist is available on a regularly scheduled basis to review the practice of the PTAs and support the PTAs in the performance of their services. PTAs perform preliminary chart review including medical history and contraindications for treatment. They treat patients through basic exercise, massage, gait and balance training and other therapeutic interventions. PTAs recommend changes in treatment based on changes in physical, mental and/or medical status of the patient. PTAs instruct, motivate and assist patients to learn and improve functional activities.

b. **[Physical Therapy Assistant], GS-6**

(1) **Experience.** One year of creditable experience equivalent to at least the next lower grade[ ].

(2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** [In addition to the basic requirements, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:]

(a) Knowledge of evidence based physical therapy practice.

(b) [Ability to perform] physical therapy data collection and use of objective measures in order to carry out patient plan of care.

(c) [Ability to modify treatment approaches, within the scope of the established treatment plans, to reflect patients' changing needs.

(d) Skill in promoting physical therapy services by providing training and interventions within the assigned areas.]

(3) **Assignment.** PTAs at this grade level serve [in developmental positions] [under general direction from PTs]. They receive ongoing guidance from more experienced staff members and require general clinical [direction] by the treating physical therapist. [PTAs develop a broad base of practical knowledge to assist the PT in reaching pre-determined patient goals.]

c. **[Physical Therapy Assistant], GS-7**

(1) **Experience.** One year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade. [ ]

(2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** [In addition to the basic requirements, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

(a) Ability to perform in depth chart review to implement treatment plans.

(b) Ability to independently use objective measures to assess progress, in accordance with the plan of care for complex patient cases.

(c) Knowledge of contemporary physical therapy practice.

(d) Ability to consult with the PT to assess progress, modify treatment and set discharge plan.]

(3) **Assignment.** [This is a developmental level for PTAs. PTAs receive ongoing guidance from more experienced staff members and receive general direction by the treating PT. PTAs draw upon a broad base of practical and experiential knowledge in order to assist the PT in reaching pre-determined patient goals. PTAs work independently but still under the general direction of PTs. They observe patients' ability to perform specified tasks in order to provide ongoing assessment of information on patients' physical and functional status. PTAs work with the physical therapy staff to assess progress, modify treatment and set discharge plan. They provide clinical direction for PTA students.]

d. **[Physical Therapy Assistant], GS-8**

(1) **Experience.** [One year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade.]

(2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** [In addition to the basic requirements, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

(a) Ability to independently implement treatment plan using knowledge of techniques related to the patient's disability and needs.

- (b) Ability to independently provide varied and multifaceted physical therapy interventions based on the established care plan (e.g., therapeutic exercise, balance, body mechanics, flexibility, strength, gait training, neuromotor development, physical agents, functional training, etc.).
  - (c) Knowledge of physical therapy data collection and assessment techniques in order to perform specific interventions and to monitor and capture progress of the patient/client.
  - (d) Ability to instruct patient on varied interventions to provide materials to enhance compliance with home programs.
  - (e) Ability to modify treatment techniques based on the learning needs and perceptions of the patient.
  - (f) Ability to identify critical changes (e.g. vital signs, pain, mobility and alertness) in patient conditions to determine their medical and functional status.
  - (g) Ability to work with PTs and other interdisciplinary healthcare team members to evaluate patient information for planning, modifying and coordinating treatment programs and discharge planning.
- (3) **Assignment.** This is considered the journey level for PTAs. PTAs at this level collaborate with the primary PT then draw upon a broad base of practical knowledge and a well-developed treatment skill set in order to reach pre-determined patient goals by independently modifying techniques within the established plan of care. They implement the plan of care for patient cases, advance the program and continually review the patient's condition to determine their medical and functional status. They provide evidenced based skilled interventions including, but not limited to, therapeutic exercise, therapeutic activities, therapeutic modalities, gait training, transfer training, manual treatment, neuromuscular re-education, self-care and management training, patient/caregiver's education and group therapy. They meet with the physical therapy staff and other healthcare team members to evaluate and discuss patient information for planning, modifying and coordinating treatment programs and discharge planning.

e. **Physical Therapy Assistant, GS-9**

- (1) **Experience.** One year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate one of the following:
- (a) A minimum of 2000 hours of clinical practice directly in the specialty area, and completion of 60 contact hours of selected continuing education coursework. This time must be within the past five years; or

(b) Advanced Practice Proficiency (APP) in the specialty area recognized by the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA); or

(c) An additional academic degree related to the health care mission.

(2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the basic requirements, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

(a) Ability to mentor other staff in advanced clinical guidelines and best practices.

(b) Ability to serve as a subject matter expert (SME) for healthcare providers in specialty practice areas regarding physical therapy care.

(c) Ability to present] advanced knowledge in the therapeutic interventions and clinical practice guidelines with the healthcare team.

(d) Ability to interpret and apply clinical practice guidelines.

(3) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty) and variety and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. PTAs at this level apply advanced practice skills to treat complex patients. PTAs possess an advanced level of clinical competence and serve as a SME in specialty practice areas. They serve as a subject matter expert in a rehabilitation program such as, but not limited to, geriatrics, amputee, brain injury, cardiac rehabilitation, orthopedics, neurological, safe patient handling, or any other functional debilitating conditions. They possess advanced practice skills and experience with a wide range of patient complexity. They apply advanced methodologies to a vast array of functional impairments and patients. They independently recommend and apply evidence-based treatment approaches within the plan of care.

f. **Lead Physical Therapy Assistant, GS-9**

(1) **Experience.** One year of experience equivalent to the next lower.

(2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** In addition to the basic requirements, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

(a) Ability to lead staff, which includes planning, organizing and assigning work and coordinating clinical workflow.

(b) Ability to mentor staff in advanced clinical guidelines and best practices.

(c) Ability to assist with PT program development, outcome management and strategic planning.



(d) Ability to serve as a liaison between PT staff and department leadership.

(3) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty) and variety and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Lead PTAs work with the supervisor to monitor and make work assignments, provide input on performance, resolve daily workplace issues and maintain efficient workflow. Leads no less than three GS-8 PTA positions. Lead PTAs coordinate staff assignments with therapy department leadership for long term strategic planning and coverage. They communicate between staff and department leadership and serve as a liaison between physical therapy and other departments. Lead PTAs apply advanced methodologies and treatment theories in the provision of care to a vast array of functional impairments and patients. They serve as consultant to other PTAs and provide clinical practice guidance to other physical therapy staff. Lead PTAs are generally found in highly complex level facilities or in a large rehabilitation program with multiple PTAs on staff.

**g. Physical Therapy Assistant (Program Coordinator), GS-10**

(1) **Experience.** One year of experience equivalent to the lower grade.

(2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the basic requirements, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs.

(a) Skill in program management/administration to include direction, development, consultation, negotiation and compliance.

(b) Ability to apply advanced knowledge of the program to interdisciplinary team functions, goals and outcomes across multiple areas of practice.

(c) Ability to serve as a consultant to internal and external stakeholders regarding the program.

(d) Ability to serve as facilitator in coordinating program initiatives among multiple teams and departments.

(e) Ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and make performance improvement adjustments as indicated.

(f) Ability to mentor and train others in the assigned program area.

(3) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty) and variety and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. PTAs at this level manage all aspects of a distinct program or service within the facility, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), national and/or regional level. They serve as a subject matter expert in a rehabilitation

program such as, but not limited to, geriatrics, amputee, brain injury, cardiac rehabilitation, orthopedics, neurological, clinical education or any other functional debilitating conditions. The program coordinator is knowledgeable about facility, regional and national policies to ensure compliance. Program coordinators oversee operations and/or management of key clinical, training, research and/or administrative programs. They develop and implement programs, policies, and procedures to meet program goals, policy and external accreditation requirements at the VISN, national and/or regional level. They monitor outcomes and implements strategies for program improvement. They are also responsible for developing and implementing short- and long-term goals and objectives consistent with the program's strategic plan.

**h. Supervisory Physical Therapy Assistant, GS-10**

- (1) **Experience.** One year of experience equivalent to the lower grade.
- (2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the basic requirements, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:
  - (a) Knowledge of contemporary physical therapy across multiple areas of practice.
  - (b) Ability to apply knowledge of contemporary physical therapy to provide clinical guidance to PTAs within the department.
  - (c) Knowledge of human resources management, including such functions as the ability to interview and select qualified applicants, monitor and evaluate performance, and maintain effective labor management relations within scope of responsibility.
  - (d) Ability to supervise a diverse PTA staff or others under their direction to include setting priorities, delegating tasks and solving problems in order to meet multiple deadlines and identifying/addressing organizational problems.
  - (e) Skill in forging positive interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution.
  - (f) Ability to analyze clinically appropriate data effectively to optimize quality, performance and productivity within the section.
  - (g) Ability to manage advocacy roles and planning activities within the rehabilitation community.
- (3) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Supervisory PTAs are responsible for the supervision, administrative

management and direction of the PTA program in a rehabilitation service or equivalent service-level department which consists of three or more PTAs and other assigned clinical, clerical and support staff. They provide supervision of key PTA clinical and training programs, including the overall technical oversight of the staff that they administratively supervise. They are responsible for the development and implementation of policies and procedures to address focused clinical needs and the overall services delivered and provided within the section. They demonstrate autonomy in performing supervisory responsibilities that include, but are not limited to, assigning work to employees, monitoring workload and clinical volume, reviewing work of employees to assure accuracy and validity of submissions, assuring adequate clinical staffing, imposing disciplinary measures, recommending awards and monitoring clinical privileges of PTAs.]

## **6. DEVIATIONS.**

- a. An approving official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for an employee whose composite record of accomplishments, performance and qualifications, as well as current assignment, warrants such action based on demonstrated competence to meet the requirements of the proposed grade and/or assignment.
- b. The placement of individuals in grade levels or assignments not described in this standard must be approved by the Under Secretary for Health in VHA Central Office prior to placement in the position.
- c. Under no circumstances will the educational or credential requirement be waived for those occupations with a positive education requirement or when specific credentials are identified as necessary to meet minimum requirements.

**RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security and Preparedness (HRA/OSP) (006), Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) (05), Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059)