

STAFFING

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for the appointment of Licensed Pharmacists, GS-660, in VA.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. The pages in this handbook replace the existing Licensed Pharmacist Qualification Standard in VA Handbook 5005, Appendix II-G15 in its entirety. The new standards are effective on the date of issuance of this handbook. These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, that is maintained on the [Office of Human Resources Management Web site](#). Significant changes include:
 - a. Adds an exception to licensure
 - b. Eliminates the GS-9 grade level
 - c. Changes full performance level from GS-11 to GS-12
 - d. Revises titles and assignments at the GS-13 level
 - e. Revises criteria for Associate Chiefs and Service Chiefs at the GS-14 and GS-15 level
 - f. Adds assignments at the GS-15 level
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVES:** VA Directive 5005
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** VA Handbook 5005/36, Part II, Appendix G15, dated August 16, 2010.

CERTIFIED BY:

/s/Roger W. Baker
Assistant Secretary for
Information and Technology

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

/s/John U. Sepúlveda
Assistant Secretary for
Human Resources and Administration

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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 G15
EFFECTIVE DATE: June 7, 2012

**LICENSED PHARMACIST
QUALIFICATION STANDARD
GS-660
Veterans Health Administration**

1. COVERAGE. Requirements for appointment as a Licensed Pharmacist in Veterans Health Administration (VHA) are as follows:

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. BASIC REQUIREMENTS

a. **Citizenship.** Citizen of the United States. (Noncitizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens in accordance with chapter 3, section A, paragraph 3g, this part.)

b. **Education**

(1) Graduate of an Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) accredited College or School of Pharmacy with a baccalaureate degree in pharmacy (BS Pharmacy) and/or a Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) degree. Verification of approved degree programs may be obtained from the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education, 20 North Clark Street, Suite 2500, Chicago, Illinois 60602-5109; phone: (312) 664-3575, or through their Web site at: <http://www.acpe-accredit.org/>. (**NOTE:** Prior to 2005 ACPE accredited both baccalaureate and Doctor of Pharmacy terminal degree program. Today the sole degree is Doctor of Pharmacy.)

(2) Graduates of foreign pharmacy degree programs meet the educational requirement if the

graduate is able to provide proof of achieving the Foreign Pharmacy Graduate Examination Commission (FPGEC) Certification, which includes passing the Foreign Pharmacy Graduate Equivalency Examination (FPGEE) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet-Based Test (TOEFL iBT).

c. **Licensure.** Full, current and unrestricted license to practice pharmacy in a State, Territory, Commonwealth of the United States (i.e., Puerto Rico), or the District of Columbia. The pharmacist must maintain current registration if this is a requirement for maintaining full, current, and unrestricted licensure. A pharmacist who has, or has ever had, any license(s) revoked, suspended, denied, restricted, limited, or issued/placed in a probationary status may be appointed only in accordance with the provisions in VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Chapter 3, section B, paragraph 16.

NOTE: *Individuals who have or have had multiple licenses and had any such license revoked for professional misconduct, professional incompetence or substandard care, or who surrendered such license after receiving written notice of potential termination of such license by the State for professional misconduct, professional incompetence, or substandard care, are not eligible for appointment to the position unless such revoked or surrendered license is fully restored (38 U.S.C. § 7402(f)). Effective November 30, 1999, this is a requirement for employment. This requirement does not apply to licensed pharmacists on VA rolls as of that date, provided they maintain continuous appointment and are not disqualified for employment by any subsequent revocations or voluntary surrenders of State license, registration or certification.*

(1) **Exception.** Non-licensed pharmacists who otherwise meet the eligibility requirements may be given a temporary appointment at the entry level as a Graduate Pharmacist under the authority of

38 U.S.C. § 7405(c)(2)(B). The appointing official may waive the requirement of licensure for a period not to exceed 2 years for a pharmacist that provides care under the supervision of a licensed pharmacist. For grade levels above the GS-11, the candidate must be licensed.

(2) **Failure to Obtain License.** In all cases, pharmacists must actively pursue meeting state prerequisites for licensure starting from the date of their appointment. At the time of appointment, the supervisor will provide the unlicensed pharmacist with the written requirement to obtain licensure, the date by which the license must be acquired, and the consequences for not becoming licensed by the deadline. Failure to become licensed within 2 years from date of appointment will result in removal from the GS-0660 Pharmacist series and may result in termination of employment.

d. **Grandfathering Provision.** All licensed pharmacists employed in VHA in this occupation on the effective date of this qualification standard are considered to have met all qualification requirements for the title, series and grade held, including positive education and licensure/certification/registration that are part of the basic requirements of the occupation. 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 grandfathered into the GS-660 occupational series 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 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 the standard. 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.

(3) If a licensed pharmacist who was retained under this provision leaves the occupation, the employee loses protected status and must meet the full VA qualification standard requirements in effect at the time of reentry to the occupation.

e. **Physical Requirements.** See VA Directive and Handbook 5019.

f. **English Language Proficiency.** Pharmacists must be proficient in spoken and written English as required by 38 U.S.C. 7402(d), and 7407(d).

4. GRADE REQUIREMENTS

a. Creditable Experience

(1) **Knowledge of Professional Pharmacy Practices.** To be creditable, the experience must have demonstrated the use of knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with professional pharmacy practice. Professional practice means paid/non-paid employment as a professional or unlicensed graduate pharmacist as defined by the appropriate licensing board.

(2) **Residency and Fellowship Training.** Residency and fellowship training programs in a specialized area of clinical pharmacy practice may be substituted for creditable experience on a year-for-year basis. The pharmacy residency program must be accredited by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP). A fellowship program that is not accredited by the American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP) will need to have comparable standards for experience to be creditable (Professional Standards Board refers to the Deputy Chief Consultant for Professional Practice for the determination).

(3) **Quality of Experience.** Qualifying experience must be at a level comparable to pharmacy experience at the next lower level. Experience as a Graduate Pharmacist is creditable provided the candidate was used as a professional pharmacist (under supervision) and subsequently passed the appropriate licensure examination.

(4) **Part-time Experience.** Part-time experience as a professional pharmacist is credited according to its relationship to the full-time workweek. For example, a pharmacist employed 20

hours a week, or on a 1/2-time basis, would receive 1 full-time workweek of credit for each 2 weeks of service.

b. **Grade Determinations.** In addition to the basic requirements for employment in paragraph 2, the following criteria must be met when determining the grade of candidates.

(1) **GS-11 Pharmacist**

(a) **Experience, Education, and Licensure.** None beyond the basic requirements. (NOTE: See exception to licensure requirement in subparagraph 2c(1) above.)

(b) **Assignment.** Pharmacists at this grade level serve in a developmental capacity.

(2) **GS-12 Clinical Pharmacist (Full Performance Level)**

(a) **Experience or Education.** In addition to the basic requirements, candidates must meet one of the following:

1. 1 year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level, or
2. Completion of an ACPE-accredited Pharm.D. program.

(b) **Assignment.** A pharmacist in this assignment handles routine medication-related activities in accordance with local, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), and national policies and regulations. These include, but are not limited to: reviewing, interpreting, and verifying medication orders for appropriateness; processing and filling medication orders; interacting with and making recommendations to other clinical staff regarding medication therapy ordered to ensure safe and effective care; reviewing the patient's medications, allergies, labs, and other pertinent information from the medical record to identify and solve medication-related problems; contacting providers as appropriate; documenting recommendations and interventions; providing refill extensions and partial medication supplies; taking health and medication histories; performing medication reconciliation; providing drug information; assisting in formulary management including therapeutic substitutions, nonformulary reviews and medication usage evaluations; documenting and assessing adverse drug events (ADEs); assisting in medical emergencies; providing oversight of technical staff in all aspects of medication distribution. Pharmacists assigned to this position must demonstrate the following knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs):

1. Knowledge of professional pharmacy practice.
2. Ability to communicate orally and in writing to both patients and health care staff.
3. Knowledge of laws, regulations, and accreditation standards related to the distribution and control of scheduled and non-scheduled drugs and pharmacy security.

4. Skill in monitoring and assessing the outcome of drug therapies, including physical assessment and interpretation of laboratory and other diagnostic parameters.

(3) **GS-13**

(a) **Experience.** In addition to the GS-12 requirements, must have 1 year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level.

(b) **Assignments.** Candidates at this grade level are to be in one of the assignments listed below. For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher level duties must consist of significant scope, administrative independence, complexity (difficulty) and range of variety as described in this standard at the specified grade level and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time.

1. **Clinical Pharmacy Specialist.** The clinical pharmacy specialist (CPS) functions at the highest level of clinical practice, works independently under their scope of practice as defined by the individual medical center to directly care for patients. A CPS plays a defined role in budgetary execution and serves as a mid-level provider who functions to initiate, modify or discontinue medication therapy and as a consultant for intensive medication therapy management services. This includes, but is not limited to, the following: designing, implementing, assessing, monitoring and documenting therapeutic plans utilizing the most effective, least toxic and most economical medication treatments; helping achieve positive patient centric outcomes through direct and indirect interactions with patients, providers, and interdisciplinary teams in assigned areas; performing physical assessments; and ordering laboratory and other tests to help determine efficacy and toxicity of medication therapy. Pharmacists assigned to this position must demonstrate the following KSAs:

a. Ability to communicate orally and in writing to persuade and influence clinical and management decisions.

b. Expert understanding of regulatory and quality standards for their program area.

c. Ability to solve problems, coordinate and organize responsibilities to maximize outcomes in their program area or area of clinical expertise.

d. Expert knowledge of a specialized area of clinical pharmacy practice or specialty area of pharmacy.

e. Advanced skill in monitoring and assessing the outcome of drug therapies, including physical assessment and interpretation of laboratory and other diagnostic parameters.

2. **Facility Program Manager.** Manages all aspects of a distinct program to include policy development, quality resources and specialty functions unique to the program to optimize cost effectiveness (budget) and patient outcomes. Coordinates a single program area of a complex pharmacy operation, or multiple program areas within a facility to develop, organize, manage, and control complex pharmacy programs. Develops, organizes, coordinates and manages

single or multiple program areas within the medical facility; this may include a single program area at multiple facilities. The Program Manager title is reserved for those individuals who have one or more of the following: supervisory responsibilities for various sections within Pharmacy Service; a complex program requiring coordination of multiple locations such as medical center care facilities, Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), rural health, telemedicine, etc; specialized areas of a complex nature such as nuclear pharmacy, quality assurance, pharmacy informatics, clinical applications coordinator, Home Based Primary Care, pharmacoeconomist or liaison pharmacist duties requiring the coordination of processes with other medical facilities or VISNs. Pharmacists assigned to this position must demonstrate the KSAs identified in subparagraph 3b(3)(b)1 above.

3. Pharmacy Supervisor. Responsible for the professional and administrative management of an assigned area in pharmacy service, to include budgetary execution. Such individuals have responsibilities for supervising multiple pharmacists and technicians. Manages people, maintains effective interdepartmental relations, and cooperates with other services to accomplish the medical facility's mission and goals. Develops performance standards, assures that the program area is compliant with all regulatory and accrediting body requirements, designs and implements orientation and training programs for staff, and develops and maintains systems to monitor the performance of staff activities. Develops policies and procedures relative to their assigned area. Pharmacists assigned to this position must demonstrate the following KSAs:

a. Ability to effectively supervise subordinate staff.

b. Ability to communicate orally and in writing to persuade and influence clinical and management decisions.

c. Expert understanding of regulatory and quality standards pertaining to pharmacy.

d. Skill in managing people or programs.

4. Associate Service Chief/Associate Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy (CMOP) Director. Responsible for coordinating multiple programs in pharmacy service in a medical facility. Serves as the Acting Service Chief in the absence of the Service Chief. Develops and maintains a system of internal reviews that ensure service programs operate at a satisfactory level of performance and in compliance with regulatory and accrediting bodies. Has extensive responsibility for pharmacy utilization of resources and budget. Makes selections, assigns personnel, and serves as a mentor to help employees develop their full potential. (**NOTE:** *Associate Service Chief/Associate CMOP Director positions should be graded one grade below the grade of the Chief of Pharmacy Service or CMOP Director.*) Pharmacists assigned to this position must demonstrate the following KSAs:

a. Ability to negotiate to influence clinical and management decisions.

b. Ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing regarding complex clinical and

technical issues.

c. Skill in utilizing regulatory and quality standards to develop and implement operational programs.

d. Skill in managing multiple and diverse people or programs.

e. Skill in utilizing available resources to support the mission and goals of the organization.

f. Ability to plan, organize, and direct the functions of the pharmacy staff.

(4) **GS-14**

(a) **Experience.** In addition to the GS-13 requirements, must have 1 year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level.

(b) **Assignments.** Candidates at this grade level are to be in one of the assignments listed below. . For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher level duties must consist of significant scope, administrative independence, complexity (difficulty) and range of variety as described in this standard at the specified grade level and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time.

1. **National or VISN Program Manager.** Responsible for the management of national or VISN level programs. These programs include collaboration with other Federal agencies (e.g., National Institutes of Health, Public Health Service, Department of Defense, Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Centers for Disease Control, etc.) or organizations outside the Federal health care system. Programs of this magnitude are directed by VA Central Office or a VISN. (**NOTE:** *VISN Pharmacist Executives are not included in this category.*)

2. **Associate Service Chief/ Associate CMOP Director.** Responsible for coordinating multiple programs in pharmacy service in a medical facility. Serves as the Acting Service Chief in the absence of the Service Chief. Develops and maintains a system of internal reviews that ensure service programs operate at a satisfactory level of performance and in compliance with regulatory and accrediting bodies. Responsible for pharmacy utilization of resources and budget. Makes selections, assigns personnel, and serves as a mentor to help employees develop their full potential. (**NOTE:** *Associate Service Chief/ Associate CMOP Director positions should be graded one grade below the grade of the Chief of Pharmacy Service or CMOP Director.*)

3. **Service Chief.** Individual is assigned as Chief at Facility Complexity Level 2 or 3 medical facility but assignment does not have the high level of complexity to support a GS-15 grade as defined in paragraph (5)(b) below. Responsible for all aspects of pharmacy services at a medical facility by maintaining effective interdepartmental relationships, demonstrating active problem resolution skills and close cooperation with other programs and services in accomplishing the medical facility mission and goals. Responsible for budget management,

determining resource needs, allocating resources, ensuring proper utilization in productivity, efficiency, and cost effectiveness of the operation. Formulates objectives and priorities and implements plans consistent with the long term interest of the organization, capitalizing on opportunities and managing risks. Responsible for compliance with all safety, regulatory, and accrediting body requirements. Delegates authority to several supervisory and program levels to meet the goals of the service and staff. Ensures orientation and training programs are established to ensure staff development, oversees academic affiliations, and participates in medical facility, VISN, National, other external governmental agencies, and professional associations.

(c) **Demonstrated KSAs.** The KSAs shown below apply to all assignments at this grade level, and the specific KSA designated by an asterisk (*) applies to assignment 2 and 3.

1. Skill in persuading others and gaining cooperation to accomplish goals.

2. Ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing regarding complex clinical and technical issues.

3. Skill in utilizing regulatory and quality standards to develop and implement operational programs.

4. Skill in managing multiple and diverse people or programs.

5. Skill in utilizing available resources to support the mission and goals of the organization.

*6. Ability to plan, organize and direct the functions of the pharmacy staff.

(5) **GS-15**

(a) **Experience.** In addition to the GS-14 requirements, must have 1 year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level.

(b) **Grade Level Criteria.** At the GS-15 level, Chiefs of Pharmacy must meet the following:

1. Individuals are assigned as Chiefs of Pharmacy at Complexity Level 1a, 1b or 1c VHA facilities; or

2. Individuals are assigned as Chief of Pharmacy at Complexity Levels 2 or 3 and must meet the criteria noted in 2a and b below.

a. Must meet **all** of the following requirements:

(1) Manages a complex medical center based pharmacy program that is defined as having multiple practice settings (e.g. hospital ambulatory care, long-term care, behavior

health care) that require Joint Commission review as separate standards.

(2) In addition to the medical center pharmacy, has responsibility for pharmacy services at one or more of the following: CBOCs, Rural Health Program, domiciliary, or provides dispensing and/or clinical services to State Veterans Home.

(3) Presence of advanced clinical pharmacy programs that include pharmacist(s) that have approved scopes of practice with prescriptive privileges.

(4) Pharmacy provides clinical pharmacist services to three (3) or more specialty areas such as, but not limited to, hemodialysis, oncology, operating room or an emergency department.

b. In addition to the requirements listed in 2a above, must meet at least **two** of the following:

(1) An ASHP Accredited Pharmacy Residency Program.

(2) A Research Program that is accredited by the Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs (AAHRPP).

(3) Actively involved in committees or advisory/work groups at the VISN and/or National level.

(4) An ongoing pharmacy student rotation in both the intermediate and advanced practice experience settings.

(c) **Assignments.** Candidates at this grade level are to be in one of the assignments listed below. For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher level duties must consist of significant scope, administrative independence, complexity (difficulty) and range of variety as described in this standard at the specified grade level and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time.

1. **Service Chief.** Responsible for all aspects of pharmacy services at a medical facility by maintaining effective interdepartmental relationships demonstrating active problem resolution skills and close cooperation with other programs and services in accomplishing the medical facility mission and goals. Responsible for budget management, determining resource needs, allocating resources, ensuring proper utilization in productivity, efficiency, and cost effectiveness of the operation. Formulates objectives and priorities and implements plans consistent with the long term interest of the organization, capitalizing on opportunities and managing risks. Responsible for compliance with all safety, regulatory, and accrediting body requirements. Delegates authority to several supervisory and program levels to meet the goals of the service and staff. Ensures orientation and training programs are established to ensure staff development, oversees academic affiliations, and participates in medical facility, VISN, National, other external governmental agencies, and professional associations.

2. **CMOP Director.** Responsible for all programs and services provided by the CMOP.

Provides prescription mail-out services to multiple VA facilities across geographic regions. Services include filling, labeling, shipping, and tracking shipment of prescription medications and medical supplies. Ensures all prescriptions transmitted from the medical centers are processed in a timely and cost-effective manner. Responsible for all resources that affect the outcome of the CMOP's daily workload.

3. Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Pharmacist Executive (VPE). VPEs are program managers responsible for the administration and management of Pharmacy Benefits Management (PBM) Services for an entire network. Serves on the National Formulary Committee and makes decisions on the structure and content of the National Formulary. Serves as an advisor to VACO for development of PBM policy. Assignment may be collateral duty or a separate position within the VISN. Serves as the network pharmacy lead on all aspects of facility pharmacy operations within a network, including new pharmacy construction, pharmacy physical requirements, inpatient, outpatient and controlled substance distribution models used, as well as all pharmacy processes including drug research, clinical pharmacy practice, pharmacy automation, adverse drug event reporting, drug recalls, and related pharmacy issues. Serves as the point of contact for VISN pharmacy contracts, including diabetes test strip selection, first/urgent fill pharmacy contract and Veteran State Home Contracts/Agreements. Responsible for oversight of the total network drug and CMOP budget. Reports to the Network Director or designee but works closely with the VISN Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and/or other VISN level clinical positions in areas involving pharmacy services.

4. National Pharmacist Executive. National Pharmacist Executives serve as national program managers for PBM. Responsible for multiple programs at the national level and interact with other government agencies and standards organizations.

(d) **Demonstrated KSAs.** The KSAs shown below apply to all assignments at this grade level, and the specific KSAs designated by an asterisk (*) apply to assignment 1 and 2.

1. Skill in persuading others and gaining cooperation to accomplish goals.

2. Ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing regarding complex clinical and technical issues.

3. Skill in utilizing regulatory and quality standards to develop and implement operational programs.

4. Skill in managing multiple and diverse people or programs.

*5. Skill in utilizing available resources to support the missions and goals of the organization.

*6. Ability to plan, organize and direct the functions of the pharmacy staff.

5. DEVIATIONS

a. The appointing 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.

b. Under no circumstances will the educational requirement be waived. Under no circumstances will the licensure requirement be waived above the GS-11 level.

c. The placement of individuals in grade levels not described in the qualification standard must be approved by the Under Secretary for Health or designee in VHA Central Office.

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)