STAFFING

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: To establish a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for Medical Support Assistant, GS-679, appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3) and 38 U.S.C. § 7405(a)(1)(B).

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES: This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. This revision establishes the Medical Support Assistant occupation under VA’s Title 38 Hybrid excepted service employment system in accordance with the authority established under the “Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010” (Public Law 111-163). Authority is given to the Secretary of the VA under 38 U.S.C. §7402 to prescribe qualifications for occupations identified in or established under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3) and 38 U.S.C. § 7405(a)(1)(B). This qualification standard is effective July 1, 2012. This new qualification standard will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005 that is maintained on the Office of Human Resources Management Web site.


5. RESCISSIONS: None.

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

/s/Roger W. Baker                        /s/John U. Sepúlveda
Assistant Secretary for                 Assistant Secretary for
Information and Technology               Human Resources and Administration

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APPENDIX G45. MEDICAL SUPPORT ASSISTANT QUALIFICATION STANDARD
GS-679
Veterans Health Administration

1. COVERAGE. The following are requirements for appointment as a Medical Support Assistant (MSA) in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). These requirements apply to all VHA MSAs in the General Schedule (GS)-679 series.

2. BASIC REQUIREMENTS.

   a. Citizenship. Citizen of the United States. (Non-citizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens in accordance with VA Handbook 5005, part II, chapter 3, section A, paragraph 3g.)

   b. Experience and Education

      (1) Experience. Six months experience of clerical, office or other work that indicates the ability to acquire the particular knowledge and skills needed to perform the duties of the position; or

      (2) Education. One year above high school; or

      (3) Experience/Education Combination. Equivalent combination of experience and education are qualifying for entry level for which both education and experience are acceptable.

   c. Certification. None required.

   d. Grandfathering Provision. All MSAs 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, 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) Such employees may be reassigned, promoted or demoted within the occupation.

      (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.

      (3) If an employee who was converted to title 38 hybrid status 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. Foreign Education. To be creditable, education completed outside the U.S. must have been submitted to a private organization that specializes in the interpretation of foreign educational credentials and such education must have been deemed at least equivalent to that gained in conventional U. S. programs.

g. English Language Proficiency. MSAs must be proficient in spoken and written English in accordance with VA Handbook 5005, part II, chapter 3, section A, paragraph 3j.

3. GRADE REQUIREMENTS

a. Creditable Experience

(1) Knowledge of Current MSA Practices. To be creditable, the experience must have demonstrated the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) associated with current MSA responsibilities. Experience satisfying this requirement may be paid/non-paid employment as a MSA.

(2) Quality of Experience. Qualifying experience must be at a level comparable to MSA experience at the next lower grade level. 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.

(3) Part-Time Experience. Part-time experience as a MSA is creditable according to its relationship to the full-time workweek. For example, a MSA 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. The following criteria must be met when determining the grade of candidates.

(1) GS-3 MSA (Entry Level)

(a) Experience or Education. None beyond the basic requirements.

(b) Assignment. This is an entry level MSA position. It is expected that MSAs receive guidance from more experienced staff members and require frequent and direct supervision.

(2) GS-4 MSA (Developmental Level)

(a) Experience or Education. One year of experience in clerical or office work that indicates the ability to acquire the particular knowledge and skills needed to perform the duties of the position or two years of education above high school.

(b) Assignment. This is a developmental level MSA position. It is expected that MSAs receive guidance from more experienced staff members for more difficult tasks and require frequent and direct contact from the assigned lead and/or supervisor. Assignments at this level include but are not limited to: interacting with both internal and external customers; establishing and maintaining medical outpatient and inpatient charts as well as administrative records; verifying third party insurance and updating information in the Insurance Capture Buffer (ICB) system; obtaining medical information from
patients; coordinating information and actions related to patient care and services; and scheduling appointments in accordance with VHA national scheduling guidelines. The MSA refers all questions requiring immediate medical attention to appropriate health care team member.

(c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** Candidates must demonstrate the KSAs below:

1. Ability to meet, communicate and interact with individuals from varying backgrounds and other health care team members in a courteous and helpful manner in order to complete job assignments.

2. Ability to use various types of office automation equipment and software.

3. Ability to set up, organize, and maintain record systems.

(3) **GS-5 MSA (Full Performance Level)**

(a) **Experience or Education.** One year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level or 4 years of education above high school.

(b) **Assignment.** This is the full performance level for MSAs. At this level, the MSA performs a full range of duties. The MSA is responsible for scheduling appointments, including interpreting and verifying provider orders in accordance with VHA national scheduling guidelines. Assignments at this level include, but are not limited to: scheduling, canceling, re-scheduling patient’s appointments and/or consults; entering no-show information; monitoring the electronic wait list; preparing for clinic visits; monitoring both inpatient and outpatient appointments for areas of responsibility; ensuring encounter forms are completed in order to obtain appropriate workload credit; verifying and updating demographics and insurance information; processing all emergency and non-emergency transfers to other VA facilities or private hospitals; performing basic eligibility, co-pays and preauthorization requirements for specific coverage (i.e., TRICARE, sharing agreements, etc.).

(c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** Candidates must demonstrate the KSAs below:

1. Ability to operate computerized programs and databases in order to enter, modify and retrieve sensitive information/data into or from electronic medical records, scheduling systems and/or reports.

2. Knowledge of basic medical terminology.

3. Ability to make appointments in a clinical setting.

4. Ability to work independently in the accomplishment of a wide variety of duties, including setting priorities and coordinating work.

5. Ability to communicate effectively and professionally with employees at varying grade levels.
6. Ability to identify customer’s concerns, perform the tasks required to resolve the issue accurately and timely, and follow-up as necessary to ensure a satisfactory resolution.

(4) GS-6 Advanced MSA

(a) **Experience.** One year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level.

(b) **Assignment.** The Advanced MSA works collaboratively in an interdisciplinary coordinated care delivery model (i.e., patient aligned care team, or other specialty care setting where the patient aligned care team model is used such as oncology, HIV, SCI, Military Sexual Trauma, etc.). The Advanced MSA coordinates with the patient care team to review the clinic utilization by using various reports (e.g., Clinic Utilization Statistical Summary), ensure that the clinic setup is closely monitored to effectively support the needs of the clinic, and make any necessary adjustments. They develop/maintain effective and efficient communication with the patient, interdisciplinary team, VA medical centers, and other agencies (e.g., assist with communications during the inpatient to outpatient discharge; communicate with non-VA medical facilities; facilitate/process secure messaging with the patient and team; notify patients of normal lab results; develop and manage a tracking system for follow up care such as consults, tests, etc.). Other assignments at this level include, but are not limited to: participating in team huddles and team meetings to manage and plan patient care; setting priorities and deadlines, adjusting the flow and sequencing of the work to meet team and patient needs; may work with the team to reinforce the plan of care and self-help solutions and entering appropriate information into the electronic record; monitoring pre-appointment requirements to assure readiness for patient visit/procedure (e.g., X-ray, lab work); managing electronic wait list to verify and validate accuracy and resolve issues; participating and providing input in problem solving on operational issues or procedures in team meetings, performing administrative follow up actions; participating in and independently following up on team huddles by sharing information and collaborating with the medical team to assure continuity of care; evaluating patient information and clinic schedule lists to determine whether patient is vested; educating providers about shared patients (those who receive their care at multiple VAs or those who have care in the community) and bringing to the attention of the provider. 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.

(c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** Candidates must demonstrate the KSAs below:

1. Ability to collaborate, communicate, set priorities, and organize the work in order to meet deadlines, ensuring compliance with established processes, policies, and regulations.

2. Ability to communicate tactfully and effectively, both orally and in writing, in order to meet program objectives. This may include preparing reports in various formats and presenting data to various organizational levels.

3. Advanced knowledge of the technical health care process as it relates to access to care.
4. Advanced knowledge of managing a clinic. This includes independently utilizing reference sources, decision making, and empowering the team to collaborate and resolve problems within a complex systems environment.

5. Advanced knowledge of policies and procedures associated with operational activities that affect the patient flow, patient care, and the revenue process.

6. Advanced knowledge of medical terminology due to the technical nature of language utilized by clinicians.

(5) GS-7 Lead MSA

(a) Experience. One year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level.

(b) Assignment. The Lead MSA monitors and makes work assignments, provides input on performance, resolves daily workplace issues and maintains efficient workflow. Assignments at this level include, but are not limited to: assuring coverage of all areas of responsibility; conducting ongoing reviews to ensure quality of work; ensuring accurate and timely scheduling of appointments; providing guidance to staff members to include changes in policies and procedures; distributing and balancing workload; creating and maintaining employee work schedules; orienting and providing on-the-job training for new and current employees; ensuring all training requirements are met; organizing the work structure of his/her assigned areas; and acting as liaison between MSA and staff in order to resolve day to day conflicts. 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.

(c) Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities. Candidates must demonstrate the KSAs below:

1. Ability to organize work, set priorities, and delegate tasks/responsibilities in order to meet deadlines.

2. Skill in communicating with individuals in order to obtain the desired effect, ensuring compliance with established policies and regulations.

3. Ability to provide staff development and training.

4. Ability to manage staffing requirements, manage priorities, and coordinate work in order to complete duties in an accurate and timely manner. This includes the ability to follow-up on pending issues and demonstrating an understanding of the impact of incomplete work.

5. Ability to review and monitor data to ensure all reports are complete and accurate.
(6) **GS-7 Supervisory MSA**

(a) **Experience.** One year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level.

(b) **Assignment.** Supervisory MSAs plan and direct programs at medical centers and/or satellite outpatient clinics and have full supervisory responsibility. Assignments at this level include, but are not limited to: assigning and evaluating the work of subordinate staff; resolving complex problems to ensure patient services are met; evaluating new products, equipment, and systems in order to make recommendations for improved operations; identifying educational or training needs; making final decisions on selections; evaluating performance, and taking disciplinary action when necessary. The employee has full administrative and professional responsibility for planning and directing the MSA’s activities. Responsible for extracting and analyzing data in order to provide reports in support of performance measures to senior management. 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.

(c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** Candidates must demonstrate the KSAs below:

1. Ability to provide the full range of administrative and supervisory duties which includes assignment of work, performance evaluations, selection of staff, and recommendation of awards and/or advancements.

2. Ability to collaborate, communicate, and demonstrate customer service and interpersonal skills with all healthcare professionals to ensure quality/continuity of care and ensure compliance with established policies and regulations.

3. Ability to provide briefings, orientations, staff development and training.

4. Ability to delegate authority, evaluate and oversee people and programs, accomplish program goals, and adapt to changing priorities.

(7) **GS-8 Supervisory MSA**

(a) **Experience.** One year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level.

(b) **Assignment.** Supervisory MSAs at this level plan and direct programs at medical centers and/or satellite outpatient clinics and have full supervisory responsibility for supervising at least one subordinate team leader or supervisor. Assignments at this level include, but are not limited to: assigning and evaluating the work of subordinate staff; resolving complex problems to ensure patient services are met; evaluating new products, equipment, and systems in order to make recommendations for improved operations; identifying educational or training needs; making final decisions on selections; evaluating performance, and taking disciplinary action when necessary. The employee has full administrative and professional responsibility for planning and directing the MSA’s activities. Responsible for extracting and analyzing data in order to provide reports in support of performance
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(c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** Candidates must demonstrate the KSAs below:

1. Ability to provide the full range of administrative and supervisory duties which includes assignment of work, performance evaluations, selection of staff, and recommendation of awards and/or advancements.

2. Ability to collaborate, communicate, and demonstrate customer service and interpersonal skills with all healthcare professionals to ensure quality/continuity of care and ensure compliance with established policies and regulations.

3. Ability to provide briefings, orientations, staff development, and training.

4. Ability to manage fiscal matters, forecast resource and equipment needs, and identify budget needs.

4. **DEVIATIONS**

   a. The appointing official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for MSAs in VHA whose composite record of accomplishments, performance, and qualifications, as well as current assignments, warrant such action based on demonstrated competence to meet the requirements of the proposed grade.

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

**Authority 38 U.S.C. 7402, 7403**