

STAFFING

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: This issuance changes VA Handbook 5005, "Staffing," Part II, Chapter 3, Appendix G13, "Licensed Practical or Vocational Nurse Qualification Standard," dated April 15, 2002. It also modifies procedures for processing advancements of licensed practical and vocational nurses found in VA Handbook 5005, Part III, Chapter 4, paragraph 5c(1)(c).

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES: This handbook contains mandatory VA procedures on staffing. The pages in this issuance replace the corresponding page numbers in VA Handbook 5005. Pages II-G13-5 through II-G13-7 and page III-46a are added. These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005 that is maintained on [the Office of Human Resources Management website](#). Significant changes include:

a. Qualification Standard

(1) **Basic Requirements-Education.** The Qualification Standard authorizes waiver of the requirement that licensed practical or licensed vocational nurses graduate from an approved school. The limitations on these waivers are outlined in paragraph 4, Section C, "Deviations."

(2) **Grade Determinations.** The Standard provides:

(a) Assignments of licensed practical and vocational nurses at all grade levels, including entry grade levels, are dependent upon the validation of competence to perform clinical procedures (e.g., IV therapy) and certification of such competencies via either educational programs or on-the-job training.

(b) New examples of performance at the GS-3 through GS-6 level.

(c) Individuals who meet minimum qualifications may be appointed at the GS-4 level if they have additional recent education and/or experience in a clinical role such as nursing assistant, health technician, or emergency medical technician.

(d) Licensed practical and vocational nurses in selected positions may now be appointed at or advanced to the GS-7 grade level.

(e) The need for licensed practical or licensed vocational nurses at the GS-6 and GS-7 levels is directly related to the skill mix and the availability of higher level supervision within the work unit.

(3) **Deviations.** Section C of the Qualification Standard adds authority to waive the education requirement in Section A and specifies the criteria for such waivers.

b. Consideration for Advancement

(1) Licensed practical or vocational nurses at the GS-6 grade level are to be considered for advancement to GS-7 on the first anniversary date of their grade. However, supervisors may submit justified recommendations any other time thereafter, if employees meet the administrative requirements

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for promotion and the supervisor believes the employee is functioning at the GS-7 level. Procedures related to identifying anniversary dates of grade for employees at the GS-6 grade level will be issued separately.) Chiefs of Human Resources, or their designees, are expected to notify managers and employees at the GS-6 grade level of their anniversary dates and of the changes in advancement procedures resulting from implementation of the revised Qualification Standard.

(2) Managers and supervisors of GS-6 licensed practical or vocational nurses are to use the time prior to the employee's anniversary date of last promotion, or, if more than a year has passed since the employee's last promotion, the time prior to the effective date of this change, to evaluate each employee against the new criteria for advancement to GS-7.

c. **Waiver and Advancement.** All GS-3 licensed practical or licensed vocational nurses whose performance is successful and who meet the minimum qualification requirements for advancement to GS-4 are to be promoted to the GS-4 grade level effective on the first day of the first pay period occurring on or after the date of this handbook.

3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: The Human Resources Management Programs and Policies Service (051), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources.

4. RELATED DIRECTIVE: VA Directive 5005, "Staffing."

5. RESCISSIONS: None.

CERTIFIED BY:

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

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**APPENDIX G13. LICENSED PRACTICAL OR
VOCATIONAL NURSE QUALIFICATION STANDARD
Veterans Health Administration**

1. COVERAGE. Following are the overall requirements for appointment as an LPN or LVN (licensed practical or vocational nurse) in VHA [. Such individuals engage] in nursing care [] which [requires] the [knowledge] and skills represented by licensure as an LPN or LVN [in a State, Territory, Commonwealth (i.e., Puerto Rico) of the United States, or District of Columbia. In their role as members of the discipline of nursing, LPNs/LVNs actively participate in and subscribe to the legal and ethical tenets of the nursing profession.]

2. SECTION A. 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.** Graduate of a school of practical or vocational nursing approved by the appropriate State [] agency and/or [accredited by] the National League for Nursing [Accrediting Commission (NLNAC)] at the time the program was completed by the applicant. Verification can be obtained from the State approving agency [or] the National League for Nursing [Accrediting Commission], 61 Broadway, 33rd Floor, New York, NY 10006. [Additional information may also be obtained from the [NLNAC Website](#). Exceptions include:]

(1) Health care education in the military service or training in the military service which is accepted by the licensing body in the jurisdiction in which the individual is licensed as qualifying for full LPN/LVN licensure will be accepted as meeting the education requirements for VHA employment.

(2) [] VHA employees who were converted to appointments under 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) in implementation of Public Law 98-160, enacted November 21, 1983, and for VHA employees converted to appointments under 38 U.S.C. 7405 in implementation of Public Law 99-576, enacted October 28, 1986; and for their future personnel actions under this authority. The waiver will not apply to persons appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) or 7405 after these conversions.

[(3) Individuals granted a license by a jurisdiction that does not require graduation from an approved school. See paragraph 4, section C.]

c. **Licensure.** Full, active, current and unrestricted licensure as a [] licensed practical or vocational nurse in a State, Territory or Commonwealth (i.e., Puerto Rico) of the United States, or District of Columbia. An LPN[LVN] 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 chapter 3, section B, paragraph 16 of this part.

d. **Physical Standards.** See VA Directive and Handbook 5019.

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e. **English Language Proficiency.** Licensed practical or vocational nurses appointed to direct patient care positions must be proficient in [both] spoken and written English as required by 38 U.S.C. 7402(d), and 7407(d).

3. SECTION B. GRADE REQUIREMENTS**a. Definitions**

(1) Qualifying experience is successful nursing practice [as an LPN/LVN,] maintaining acceptable standards within a health care setting under the direction of a registered nurse [(RN)] or physician [(MD/DO)]. This may include experience as a GPN [or GVN] (graduate practical [or vocational] nurse) provided the candidate was utilized as a practical or vocational nurse and passed the State licensure examination on the first attempt.

(2) To be creditable, practical nursing experience (as an LPN or LVN) must be documented on the application and verified in an employment reference or through other [independent] means.

(3) Part-time experience is credited according to the relationship it bears to the full-time workweek (e.g., an LPN[/LVN] who worked 20 hours per week, i.e., half-time, would receive 1 full-time workweek of credit for each 2 weeks of such service.)

[(4) The only exception to paragraphs 3a(1) through (3) would be qualifying experience for GS-4. See paragraph 3b(2)(b) below.]

(5) For the purposes of this Handbook, the term "State" includes States, Territories of the United States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.]

b. Grade Determination. In addition to the basic requirements stated in section A, the following qualification criteria must be met for each grade. The candidate's qualifications must clearly demonstrate the level of competence required for the grade.

(1) **GS-3.** None beyond the basic requirements. [LPNs at this grade level are expected to perform all duties within the scope of their license (e.g., medication administration); however, completed work may require routine or detailed higher level review depending upon the complexity of the duties involved.]

(2) **GS-4.** [Employees may be appointed at or advanced to GS-4 if they meet any of the criteria in paragraphs 3b(2)(a) through (c) below:

(a) Six months of qualifying experience as an LPN or LVN; or

(b) Graduation from an approved school (which may be waived as provided in paragraph 4 of Section C) and one year of experience that involved nursing care work in a hospital, outpatient clinic, nursing home, or other supervised medical, nursing, or patient care facility that provided a practical knowledge of human body structure and sterile techniques and procedures; or

(c) Graduation from an approved school of at least 24 months duration.

(d) LPNs at the GS-4 grade level perform all duties expected of employees at the GS-3 grade level; however, they are expected to exercise greater judgment, require less supervision, and to operate in accordance with all established policies, procedure, and techniques.]

(3) GS-5

(a) Completion of at least 1 year of qualifying experience at the GS-4 level or equivalent.

(b) Demonstrated knowledge and ability to provide a full range of practical nursing care to patients with a variety of physical and/or behavioral problems. [Works with the RN and/or MD/DO to appropriately orient/train less experienced LPNs/LVNs and/or Nursing Assistants (NAs)/Health Technicians (HTs) in relation to acceptable standards of practice in promoting optimal patient care delivery. Provides effective education to patients and/or family members in relation to common disease processes, medication, and /or prescribed treatment regimes.]

(c) Demonstrated ability to serve as a responsible member of the nursing team and interact [in an appropriate manner] with patients, family members, professional and [other] supportive personnel [involved in the delivery of] patient care, [incorporating acceptable, established customer service standards into practice.

(d) Knowledge and skill sufficient to prepare, administer, and appropriately document actions taken specific to commonly prescribed oral, topical, subcutaneous, intramuscular, and/or intravenous medications as permitted by approved local facility policies and procedures. Observation and documentation will include patient's response to medication administered and the reporting of any noted change in patient's condition to RN or MD/DO.

(e) Knowledge and ability to recognize the need for and to institute emergency measures when indicated, promptly seek the assistance of the RN or MD/DO, and assist in resuscitation procedures in cardiac and/or pulmonary arrest.

(f) Recognizes and appropriately responds to breakage/malfunction or loss of equipment, safety hazards, and supply deficiencies, promptly reporting to appropriate personnel for corrective action.

(g) Completed work is under the general supervision of an RN or MD/DO. Individuals at this grade level are expected to have a broad working knowledge of practical nursing procedures. However, completion of more complex practices or procedures may be subject to closer higher-level review.] []

(4) GS-6

[(a) Completion of] at least [one (1)] year of [additional] qualifying experience at the GS-5 level or equivalent [, fully meeting all performance requirements for the GS-5 LPN/LVN.

(b) Technically proficient in initiating, performing and completing assigned duties in providing care to variable patient populations.

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(c) Knowledge and ability to appropriately carry out assigned patient care based on the patients' conditions; to use judgment in selecting the appropriate order and sequence of procedures and treatments; and to accurately recognize, report and record relevant] patient information. Completed work [should need] only a general review by a registered nurse [(RN) or physician (MD/DO)] for [] appropriateness and conformity with [established policies/procedures.

(d)] [] Ability to observe, identify and respond to the patient's needs for [care, including] medication, [] equipment-assisted care and [patient/family education]. In [organizing and delivering] care [], the [LPN/LVN recognizes and] considers [] emotional [, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and age-related] factors.

[(e) Prepares and administers prescribed medications (oral, topical, subcutaneous, intramuscular and/or intravenous) and performs treatments according to established policies/procedures. Observes for physical and/or emotional changes in patient's condition from prescribed medications/treatments, promptly and accurately documenting noted changes, and reporting any deviations from normal to RN or MD/DO.

(f) Knowledge and ability to recognize urgent or emergent patient care situations, seek assistance of the RN and/or MD/DO, and initiate appropriate emergency interventions as directed.

(g) Knowledge and understanding of human behavior, patient motivations and reactions to situations, and ability to appropriately utilize this knowledge in working effectively with patients, family members, and other staff.

(h) Establishes constructive relationships with individual patients and their families to elicit feelings and attitudes, and to promote positive relationships, communication and socialization skills. Fosters an environment of respect for individual patient and family rights to privacy and dignity in all aspects of care delivery. Effectively incorporates knowledge and understanding of established customer service standards in all interactions with patients, family members, and/or other internal/external customers.

(i) Knowledge and skill in performing support duties for complex diagnostic tests and/or specialized practices or procedures, which include preparing the patient, assisting in the diagnostic examination, preparing and handling specialized instruments or other specialized equipment, and monitoring the patient's condition before, during, and following the procedure. Serves as a preceptor in orienting, educating, and training less experienced LPNs/LVNs or NAs/HTs related to support duties for these more complex, specialized tests/procedures.

(j) Actively seeks out educational opportunities to enhance nursing knowledge and skills, sharing new knowledge gained with other staff to improve and advance nursing practice.

(5) **GS-7.** The GS-7 grade level is for select, complex LPN/LVN positions, as established by each health care facility. To be advanced, employees must meet all of the following standards, provided the standard is part of their assignment.

NOTE: *Determinations concerning placement of positions at this grade level shall take into consideration the skill mix and the availability of supervision in the work unit. Although these positions*

are under the supervision of an RN and/or MD/DO, employees in such settings successfully and consistently demonstrate the exercise of independent technical judgment (without the need for readily available supervision), as well as a comprehensive and thorough working knowledge of the most complex or difficult practices and procedures. Such individuals may also serve as leaders or co-leaders in a nursing unit or for a specifically identified group of patients.

(a) Completion of at least one (1) year of additional qualifying experience at the GS-6 level or equivalent, fully meeting all of the performance requirements for the GS-6 LPN/LVN.

(b) Knowledge and skills necessary to carry out more specialized patient care duties, including assignments in selected, more complex inpatient and/or outpatient care settings. Knowledge base promotes the incorporation of current patient care data in actively contributing to the development of the patient's overall health plan and in carrying out assigned nursing interventions. Positions at this grade level require broader knowledge and skills because supervision is more general and employees are expected to be involved to a greater degree in the development and modification of treatment plans.

(c) Ability to assist RN and/or MD/DO to appropriately prioritize overall patient care needs and adjust plans for care delivery. Makes astute observations of subtle, less obvious changes, both physical and emotional, in patient's condition, and accurately and thoroughly documents care delivered and patient's response to care that could require immediate modification of the patient's care plan. Appropriately seeks assistance and guidance by informing RN or MD/DO of changes in patient's condition requiring higher-level intervention. At this grade level, the LPN/LVN is expected to participate to a greater degree in prioritizing, and, as appropriate, modifying patient care treatment. They must also possess the ability to observe more subtle physical and emotional changes in patients and demonstrate taking appropriate action based on those observations.

(d) Ability to proactively assist the RN or MD/DO in addressing patient's needs for medication/treatments, accurately administering prescribed medications/treatments according to established policies/procedures and appropriately recording administration and patient's response to medications/treatments received. (This may include restricted medication locally authorized for administration by employees at this grade level.) Demonstrates the knowledge and ability to readily recognize the more subtle signs and symptoms of potential or actual drug reactions, promptly inform the RN or MD/DO of observed changes in patient's condition and initiate appropriate, prescribed interventions. Employees at this grade level demonstrate broader knowledge and skill with respect to these responsibilities than employees at lower grade levels.

(e) Knowledge and skill to promptly recognize potential urgent or emergent patient care situations, seek assistance of the RN and/or MD/DO for appropriate team intervention and effectively intervene, as directed, to assure the continuation of optimal, safe and therapeutic patient care delivery. At this grade level, the LPN/LVN must have a broader knowledge of the patient treatment process and exercise judgment that demonstrates the ability to effectively intervene when appropriate.

(f) Assists individuals or groups of patients and their families to take an active role in promoting healthy lifestyles for more positive patient outcomes. Exercises skill in influencing and communicating with unusually difficult to care for or communicate with patients and/or family members who may exhibit problems with lack of self-control, resistant or abusive behaviors, or impediments in their ability

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to understand or follow instructions. This includes the ability to effectively deal with the above types of patients under very general supervision.

(g) Exhibits skill, creativity and initiative in contributing to the improvement of overall care delivery and patient and/or family satisfaction levels through active participation in committees/task forces, research projects or in developing educational materials/media. Actively promotes and effectively incorporates established customer service standards in all aspects of their practice.

(h) Possesses comprehensive practical nursing knowledge and skills in specialized procedures and practices to serve as a resource person for other staff in organizing and implementing more complex/specialized patient care. Serves as a role model and mentor to other nursing staff in the application of more complex technology, effectively guiding and directing their continuing practice in these areas.

(i) Supports the RN or MD/DO in monitoring the practice of unlicensed nursing or non-medical staff in patient care delivery. Promptly reports any deviations from normal practice patterns to the RN or MD/DO. In addition to responsibilities at the lower grade level, the LPN/LVN is responsible for monitoring the practice of non-licensed nursing and medical staff.

(j) Work of considerable difficulty and responsibility is performed under general supervision. Individuals in these positions are, to a considerable extent, expected to exercise independent technical judgments and to possess and apply a comprehensive working knowledge of the principles, art and science of practical nursing. The staff mix is such that employees at this grade level are expected to perform practical nursing duties of considerable difficulty and responsibility under very general supervision.

(k) Actively seeks out educational opportunities to enhance nursing knowledge and skills, and providing leadership in assisting other staff improve and advance their nursing practice.]

4. SECTION C. DEVIATIONS

a. In cases where the application of the grade requirements [in Section B] will result in an inappropriate grade assignment, the appointing official may authorize deviations from the established requirements. [However, the basic requirements in Section A may not be waived, nor may individuals be assigned to grade levels above the GS-7 level.]

b. The appointing official may [waive] the education requirement in Section A to permit [] appointment of [an attendee or] graduate of a school of professional (registered) nursing when the individual's qualifications warrant such consideration [, provided that the applicant meets the basic requirements for licensure as an LPN/LVN as stated in Section A, paragraph 2c. Graduate nurses with no experience may be appointed at GS-4, provided they have successfully completed the amount of education required to take the licensing examination, successfully pass the examination, and are granted a license by the State.]

c. [Appointing officials may waive the education requirement in Section A, paragraph 2b, if an LPN/LVN was licensed in a jurisdiction that does not require graduation from an approved school, provided the individual has demonstrated successful practice as an LPN/LVN. One year of successful practice is considered the equivalent of graduation from an approved school of 12 months duration.

d.] In exceptional circumstances, the appointing official may waive the experience requirement for LPNs[/LVNs] whose accomplishments, performance and qualifications warrant such consideration based on demonstrated ability to meet the requirements of the proposed grade.

Authority: 38 U.S.C. 7304; 7402.

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b. **Requirements for Podiatrists, Optometrists, Physician Assistants, Expanded Function Dental Auxiliaries, Pharmacists, Occupational and Physical Therapists, Certified Respiratory Therapists, Registered Respiratory Therapists, and Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurses.** Before they can be considered for promotion, employees in the above occupations must have a current proficiency rating of “Satisfactory” or a current performance appraisal of “Successful”. In addition, these employees must meet the time-in-grade requirements as specified in appendix L, this part. These employees must meet the same grade requirements, including the specified demonstrated accomplishments, as for appointment. Any deviation or exception to these requirements will be limited to those specified in the appropriate qualification standard. (See part II, appendix D).

c. **Processing Procedures** (See appendix III-M, this part)

(1) **Notification of Eligibility**

(a) Approximately 60 days prior to the date the employee meets the time-in-grade requirement for consideration for promotion, the health care facility will receive from the Austin Automation Center (AAC) VA form [97], Notice of Pending Personnel Action, in duplicate, identifying the employee and stating that the employee meets the time requirements for promotion as of the date specified. In addition, VA Form [97] will indicate if there is a satisfactory proficiency on record and the amount of leave without pay (LWOP) since the beginning of the waiting period to the date VA Form [97] is issued. (VA Form [97] will be received approximately 60 days prior to the anniversary date of grade for podiatrists and optometrists in Associate or Full grade, physician assistants in Associate grade and for expanded-function dental auxiliaries in Junior grade.)

(b) If the employee is not promoted, the AAC will continue to send the VA Form [97] annually until a change in grade occurs. The VA Form [97] will be forwarded to the appropriate supervisory official. An employee who is not promoted will be reconsidered on the next anniversary date of grade. A longer period for consideration, not to exceed 3 years, may be established by the approving authority when an expanded-function dental auxiliary does not meet the qualification standard grade requirements of education or required experience. In these cases, the Human Resources Management Office will tab the service control file and will destroy the VA Form [97] for the year(s) when the employee is not to receive consideration.

[(c) Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses at the GS-6 grade level are an exception to paragraphs (a) and (b) above. Such employees are to be considered for promotion on the first anniversary date of grade. However, they may be recommended for promotion at any other time thereafter, provided they meet the administrative requirements for promotion and it is determined that their scope of practice warrants their advancement to GS-7. Approximately 60 days prior to the first anniversary date of grade the facility will receive a VA Form 97 from the AAC. If the employee is not promoted, additional automated eligibility notifications will not be issued. However, supervisors may recommend employees at any time after the first anniversary date of grade.]

(2) Examinations

(a) The Professional Standards Board may recommend that an appropriate examination be conducted. An examination will not be administered until after approval is received from the person authorized to act on board recommendations. If a health care facility board cannot be properly constituted for a particular examination, the file, consisting of VA Form [97], supervisory evaluations, the employee's personnel folder, and other information will be sent to the appropriate Professional Standards Board. After conducting the examination, the designated board will forward the results of the examination and the promotion file to the employee's facility.

(b) The character and scope of the examination will be appropriate for and will be such that the professional and administrative adequacy of the individual may be determined. Examinations ordinarily will be oral but may be prescribed in written form at the discretion of the board and will consist of