

## STAFFING

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for Histopathology Technician, GS-0646, 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 Histopathology Technician 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). The new standards are effective on the date of this publication, however no action may be taken to convert or promote employees until training and guidance is received. 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](#).
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5005, Staffing.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.

**CERTIFIED BY:**

/s/  
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**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY  
OF VETERANSAFFAIRS:**

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

**Histopathology Technician  
Qualification Standard  
GS-0646  
Veterans Health  
Administration**

**1. COVERAGE.** The following are requirements for appointment of a Histopathology Technician in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). These requirements apply to all VHA Histopathology Technicians in the General Schedule (GS) 0646 series. As crucial members of the Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Service, histopathology technicians possess the knowledge and skills to process anatomical tissue and cytological cell samples obtained from the Veteran by a clinician. The work performed by histopathology technicians is vital for pathologists to interpret laboratory results and provide diagnoses that allow clinicians to plan appropriate and life-saving treatments for Veterans.

**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 at the GS-6 grade level.

b. **Creditable Experience.** To be creditable, the experience must have demonstrated the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) associated with a health care field or knowledge, skills, and abilities related to the Histopathology Technician practice. Experience satisfying this requirement may be paid or non-paid employment in the health care field.

c. **Quality of Experience.** Qualifying experience must be at a level comparable to

Histopathology Technician experience at the next lower grade level of the position being filled. 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.

d. **Part-time Experience.** Part-time experience as a Histopathology Technician is credited according to its relationship to the full-time workweek. For example, one week of full-time credit is equivalent to two weeks of part-time work.

#### 4. 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 chapter 3, section A, paragraph 3g, this part.)

##### b. Experience and Education

(1) **Experience.** One year of experience in a health care field that demonstrates the applicant's ability to perform the work or provides an understanding of the work such as but not limited to a medical or clinical laboratory assistant (or technician) or health technician.

**OR,**

##### (2) Education

(a) Four academic years above high school leading to a bachelor's degree with courses related to the occupation such as biological science or chemistry; or

(b) Successful completion of two academic years of study above high school that included at least 24 semester hours in Chemistry and/or in appropriate fields of biological science and successful completion of a 12-month program of education and training in histopathology or cytotechnology.

**OR,**

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

(a) Six months of experience in the health care field and two years of education above high school that included at least six semester hours in health care related courses such as biological science, surgical technician courses or other courses related to the position; or an associate's degree in a health care related field.

(b) Six months of experience in the health care field and successful completion of a course for health care technicians, hospital corpsmen, medical service specialists, or

histopathology technicians given by the U.S. Armed Forces.

**c. Certification.** None

**d. Grandfathering Provision.** All Histopathology Technicians 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. 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 in an occupation that does not require a licensure/certification/registration, 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 retained (grandfathered) under this provision leaves that 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.** Histopathology Technicians must be proficient in spoken and written English in accordance with chapter 2, section D, paragraph 5.a., this part.

**5. GRADE REQUIREMENTS.** In addition to the basic requirements for employment, the following criteria must be met when determining the grade of candidates.

**a. Histopathology Technician, GS-5 (Entry Level)**

(1) **Experience or Education.** None beyond the basic requirements.

(2) **Assignment.** This is an entry level histopathology technician position. It is expected that histopathology technicians receive guidance from more experienced staff members and require frequent and direct supervision. Assignments associated with this position include, but are not limited to, retrieving and accessioning surgical, cytology, and autopsy specimens; enter and track workload data and disposition of pathology materials and documents electronically; perform pre and post-analytical duties; and may assist in preparation of autopsy protocols as assigned. The incumbent must maintain the integrity of patient identification throughout all processes.

**b. Histopathology Technician, GS-6 (Full Performance Level)**

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

(2) **Assignment.** At the full performance level, the histopathology technician uses independent judgment to perform the full range of duties including analyzing and evaluating laboratory results. The histopathology technician carries out the day-to-day operations in the laboratory with minimal technical supervision. This includes routine and complex histopathological and cytopathological procedures, quality control and assurance procedures, operation and routine maintenance of instrumentation, troubleshooting, and principles of performance improvement. The incumbent utilizes specialized techniques for handling cell blocks, frozen sections, bone marrows, autopsies, and fine-needle biopsies. The technician prepares technically adequate slides of surgical, cytology, and autopsy specimens by processing, embedding tissue, cutting, staining (including immunohistochemistry), and coverslipping.

(3) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs.

(a) Knowledge of professional anatomic pathology principles, practices, concepts, and theories providing for sound independent work.

(b) Knowledge of laboratory quality control and assurance procedures, principles of performance improvement, reagent management, inventory supply systems, and document control systems.

(c) Knowledge of anatomic pathology laboratory equipment and ability to operate, maintain, and troubleshoot instrumentation.

(d) Ability to plan, organize, set priorities, work as a team member, and effectively complete assignments.

(e) Ability to use independent technical judgment to analyze and evaluate laboratory results.

### c. **Histopathology Technician, GS-7 (Advanced)**

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

(2) **Assignment.** Histopathology technicians at this level generally have a higher level of responsibility for technical oversight, and are expected to carry out assigned tasks of considerable difficulty independently. The incumbent will have the responsibility of performing difficult specialized histological, histochemical, and immunohistochemical procedures, as well as developing, modifying, or adapting new staining methods or techniques, improving existing methods as necessary for routine histotechnology procedures. The technician will be responsible for troubleshooting issues with instruments and resolving problems. For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty) and range of variety and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time.

(3) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs.

(a) Skill in applying professional, complex anatomic pathology principles, practices, concepts, and theories in performing new or difficult specialized testing methods or techniques.

(b) Ability to provide technical oversight of laboratory quality control and assurance procedures and principles of performance improvement exhibiting competence in managing reagent and supply inventories and document control systems.

(c) Ability to validate methodologies, operate anatomic pathology laboratory equipment and perform complex instrument troubleshooting.

(d) Ability to use independent technical judgment to analyze and evaluate laboratory results and resolve problems.

**e. Histopathology Technician, GS-8 (Lead)**

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

(2) **Assignment.** Lead Histopathology technicians at this level perform duties which consist of a significant scope, complexity and administrative independence. The Lead provides direction to the daily operations and assumes responsibility for integrating and monitoring the standard adherence to methods and protocols to maintain continuous work flow and quality within the unit. Duties include: prepare, direct, and approve work schedules and assign tasks for timely completion of duties; ensure resources are in optimal working condition and address workflow needs; calibrate, operate, and maintain instruments and equipment used in surgical pathology, immunohistochemistry, and special stains; provides guidance and instruction to Histopathology Technicians on a broad range of specific tasks and job techniques; monitors work in progress often performing spot checks to ensure protocols are being followed; reviews completed work to ensure guidelines are met regarding work sequences, procedures, and methods; provides on-the-job training to new employees; provides cross-training to staff; provides input to supervisor on performance and training needs of employees; adjusts work assignments due to absences or changes in priorities; resolves simple informal complaints of employees and patients, referring the more difficult problems to the supervisor; recommends approval and/or disapproval of leave requests. For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty) and range of variety and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time.

(3) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs.

(a) Ability to use independent judgment and apply comprehensive technical histopathology knowledge to solve complex problems concerning a broad range of tests, procedures, and protocols.

(b) Ability to perform procedural technical review and provide written and practical application training and instructions to laboratory personnel in all areas of histology.

(c) Ability to manage staffing requirements, plan and organize workload and 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.

(d) Comprehensive knowledge of regulatory, licensing, and accrediting agency requirements that govern laboratory operations in order to insure that work practices, documentation, and reporting are consistent with all governing standards and regulations.

(e) Skill in communicating with individuals in order to obtain the desired effect, provide technical guidance and ensure compliance with established policies and regulations.

**f. Supervisory Histopathology Technician, GS-9**

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

(2) **Assignment.** Employees in this assignment perform the full range of supervisory duties for the anatomic pathology laboratory, including responsibility for assignment of work performed; performance evaluations; recommendations for appointment, awards, advancement and disciplinary actions; identification of continuing education and training needs. The individual ensures compliance with accrediting agency and regulatory requirements; establishes and monitors the quality of the pre-analytical processes as part of the overall laboratory quality management program, and initiates corrective action. This individual develops policies and procedures, manage document control, develops performance standards, position descriptions and functional statements. The incumbent is responsible for professional and administrative management of an assigned area, to include budget execution, orientation and competency assessment of assigned staff. The Supervisory Histopathology Technician maintains effective interdepartmental relations with other services in order to accomplish medical center goals. For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty) and range of variety and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time.

(3) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate all of the following KSAs.

(a) Expert knowledge of Federal and state laws, regulations, and accrediting/regulatory requirements in order to develop policies and procedures for the laboratory.

(b) Expert knowledge of laboratory quality management procedures and principles sufficient to establish and monitor a laboratory quality management program and/or education and training of laboratory staff.

(c) Demonstrated leadership and managerial skills including skill in interpersonal relations and conflict resolution in order to deal with employees, team leaders and managers.

(d) Ability to perform the full range of supervisory duties which includes responsibility

for assignment of work, performance evaluations, selection of staff, recommendation of awards, advancements and disciplinary actions.

(e) Ability to plan, organize, set short and/or long term goals and conduct studies on technical and administrative problems, including personnel shortages, organizational structure, new technology.

(f) Expert knowledge of concepts, principles and methods of laboratory technology and operations.

## **6. DEVIATIONS**

a. The approving official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for Histopathology Technicians 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 on the proposed grade.

b. The placement of individuals in grade levels or assignments not described in this 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)