

STAFFING

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for Health Technician (Massage Therapy) occupation, General Schedule (GS) 0640, 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 policy establishes qualification standards for the Health Technician (Massage Therapy) occupation. The policy is established under the Title 38 Hybrid excepted service employment system, in accordance with the authority of 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(b), 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 standard is effective on the date of this publication; however, no action may be taken by the Human Resources (HR) Officer to convert or promote employees until training and guidance is received on the implementation of the qualification standard. These changes 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:** Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.
4. **RELATED DIRECTIVES:** VA Directive 5005, Staffing.
5. **RESCISSIONS:** None.

CERTIFIED BY:

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

/s/
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**[APPENDIX G56. HEALTH TECHNICIAN (MASSAGE THERAPY)
QUALIFICATION STANDARD
GS-0640**

Veterans Health Administration

- 1. COVERAGE.** The following are requirements for appointment as a Health Technician (Massage Therapy) in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). The requirements apply to all VHA Health Technicians (Massage Therapy) employed in the GS-0640 series. Massage Therapy is the practice of manual assessment and manipulation of the superficial soft tissues of skin, muscle, tendon, ligament, fascia, and the structures that lie within the superficial tissues. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) occupation provides clinical services that address a vast array of problems impacting the health and function of a diverse patient population. The work requires the application of knowledge of therapeutic massage concepts, principles and practices, and encompasses a large variety of modalities from Western and Eastern traditions. Massage Therapy promotes circulation of blood and lymph, relieves muscle tension, and can induce a general relaxation response, alleviate pain and anxiety, promote sleep, reduce stress, and enhance the general sense of wellness. Employees in this occupation may utilize appropriate tools and the external applications of water, heat, and cold to enhance therapeutic benefits. Employees in this occupation incorporate knowledge of various systems of anatomy, physiology, and pathology to apply a plan of care for those with a variety of soft tissue dysfunctions, stress related conditions, and imbalances.
- 2. DEFINITIONS.**

 - a. Journey Level.** The full performance level for this qualification standard is the GS-7 grade level.
 - b. Creditable Experience.** To be creditable, the candidate's experience must be evidenced by active professional practice, paid/non-paid employment in the practice of massage therapy, using knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics referred to as core competencies associated with the scope of massage therapy practice.
 - c. Part-Time Experience.** Part-time experience is creditable according to its relationship to the full-time work week. For example, one week of full-time credit is equivalent to two weeks of half-time work.
 - d. Graduate Health Technician (Massage Therapy).** A Health Technician (Massage Therapy) candidate who has completed the education requirements, but has not obtained the appropriate license, registration, or certification to practice as a Health Technician (Massage Therapy) in a State, Territory, or Commonwealth of the United States, or the District of Columbia.
- 3. BASIC REQUIREMENTS.** The basic requirements for employment as a Health Technician (Massage Therapy) are prescribed by Public Law 96-151 and codified in 38 U.S.C. § 7402. To qualify for appointment, all applicants for the position of Health Technician (Massage Therapy) in VHA must meet the following:

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- a. **Citizenship.** Candidates must be a citizen of the United States. (Non-citizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified candidates in accordance with chapter 3, section A, paragraph 3g, this part.)
- b. **Education.** Candidates must complete a minimum 500-hour massage therapy education program.

- c. **Licensure, Registration, or Certification**

(1) Candidates must be currently licensed, registered, or certified to practice as a massage therapist in a state, territory, or Commonwealth of the United States, or the District of Columbia. Acceptable credentials must have required successful completion of a minimum 500-hour massage therapy education program and pass the Massage and Bodywork Licensing Examination, National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork Examination, or equivalent state-issued examination.

OR,

(2) Candidates must possess and maintain a board certification from the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB).

NOTE: *As of the date of this standard, several states do not offer a credential in massage therapy. Additionally, some states offer a credential that does not meet the 500-hour education program and/or state-issued examination requirements described above in subparagraph 3.c.(1). Candidates may satisfy the basic requirement of licensure/certification/registration by possessing and maintaining a board certification from the NCBTMB.*

(3) **Exception.** Non-certified applicants, who have pending registrations or licensures in a state, or a certification by a national board recognized by the Secretary, and otherwise meet the eligibility requirements for licensure, may be given a temporary appointment as a Graduate Health Technician (Massage Therapy), under the authority of 38 U.S.C. § 7405(c)(2)(B), for a period not to exceed two years. Failure to obtain licensure/registration/certification during this period may result in termination of employment.

(4) **Loss of Credential.** An employee who fails to maintain the required licensure/certification/registration must be removed from the occupation, which may result in termination of employment.

(5) **Foreign Graduates.** Graduates of foreign massage therapy programs that require a minimum 500-hour education program are considered to meet the basic education requirements if they have a full unrestricted and current license, registration, or certification, as described in subparagraph 3.c., or by maintaining a board certification from the NCBTMB.

d. Grandfathering Provision. Health Technicians (Massage Therapy) employed in VHA on the effective date of this qualification standard are considered to have met all qualification requirements for the grade held, including positive education and licensure that are part of the basic requirements of the occupation. For employees who do not meet all the basic requirements of 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-0640 occupational series as a Health Technician (Massage Therapy) may be reassigned, promoted up to and including the full performance (journey) level, or changed to lower grade within the occupation.
- (2) Health Technicians (Massage Therapy) who are appointed on a temporary basis prior to the effective date of this qualification standard may not have their temporary appointment extended or be reappointed on a temporary or permanent basis until they fully meet the basic requirements of this standard.
- (3) Health Technicians (Massage Therapy) initially grandfathered into this occupation, who subsequently obtain additional education and/or licensure, certification, registration, and meet all the basic requirements of this qualification standard, must maintain the required credentials as a condition of employment in the occupation.
- (4) If Health Technicians (Massage Therapy), who are grandfathered under this provision, leave the GS-0640 series, they lose their grandfathered protected status. These employees must meet the full VA qualification standard requirements in effect at the time of re-entry to the Health Technician (Massage Therapy) occupation in this series.

e. Physical Requirements. See VA Directive and Handbook 5019, Employee Occupational Health Service, paragraph 2.

f. English Language Proficiency. Individuals appointed under the authority of 38 U.S.C. chapters 73 or 74, to serve in a direct patient-care capacity in VHA, must be proficient in written and spoken English. See Chapter 2, section D, paragraph 5a, this part.

4. GRADE REQUIREMENTS.

a. Creditable Experience

- (1) **Knowledge of Contemporary Professional Massage Therapy Practice.** To be creditable, a candidate must have demonstrated possession of the required knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with the scope of massage therapy practice.
- (2) **Quality of Experience.** Experience is only creditable if it was experience completed in the massage therapy practice and directly related to the duties to be performed after the post education requirements were completed. Qualifying experience must be at a level comparable to, or exceeding, the Health Technician (Massage Therapy) experience at the next lower grade level.

- b. **Grade Determination.** In addition to the basic requirements for appointment in paragraph 3, the following criteria must be used when determining the appropriate grade assignment of candidates.

(1) Health Technician (Massage Therapy), GS-5 - Entry Level

- (a) **Education, Experience, and Licensure.** None beyond the basic requirements in paragraph 3.

(NOTE: See exception to licensure/registration/certification requirement in subparagraph 3.c. above.)

- (b) **Assignment.** Health Technician (Massage Therapy) at this level perform basic massage therapy services under close supervision. The technician functions independently in applying basic massage services. Basic massage therapy includes, but is not limited to effleurage (stroking), petrissage (kneading), tapotement/percussion, friction, vibration, passive and active stretching, and draping. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) is responsible for changing linen between clients, refilling oils, cleaning massage table/chair/arm rest, and providing a clean, calm environment. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) promotes and educates patients in the health and wellness benefits of massage, and develops therapeutic relationships with patient/family/significant others by demonstrating sensitivity and respect for a patient's personal beliefs. Deviations from regular procedures, unanticipated problems, and unfamiliar situations are referred to the supervisor for a decision or assistance. Any unusual patient interactions are documented and immediately reported to the supervisor. Some assignments at this level include developmental duties involving more progressive care, designed to prepare the Health Technician (Massage Therapy) for promotion to higher grades. Such duties would be performed under close supervision.

(2) Health Technician (Massage Therapy), GS-6 - Developmental Level

- (a) **Education, Experience, and Licensure.** In addition to the basic requirements, candidates must possess one year of experience equivalent to the GS-5 grade level, and demonstrate all the KSAs below:

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**

- i. Skill to provide massage techniques including draping, using the appropriate tools, supplies, and equipment based on the needs of the patient;
- ii. Knowledge of anatomy, physiology, pathology, therapeutic effects, and evidence based practice of massage therapy;
- iii. Ability to work with an interdisciplinary team in a health care setting;
- iv. Knowledge of all patient safety procedures, rules, and regulations as they pertain to a clinical environment; and

- v. Ability to effectively communicate verbally/non-verbally and in writing (through a variety of modalities).

(c) **Assignment.** Employees at this grade level serve as developmental Health Technicians (Massage Therapy) and perform treatments which are routine and standardized in nature. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) provides treatments in various inpatient and outpatient settings, in accordance with applicable policies and procedures. Health Technicians (Massage Therapy) perform a substantially full range of duties, but receive guidance and directions regarding unfamiliar or unusual situations for more complex patient issues.

(3) Health Technician (Massage Therapy) GS-7 - Full Performance Level

(a) **Education, Experience, and Licensure.** In addition to the basic requirements, candidates must possess one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-6 grade level performing massage therapy and demonstrate all the KSAs below:

(b) Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- i. Ability to assess the physical and mental status of patients (including history and physical assessment), interpret the appropriate information to identify each patient's population-specific needs, identify indications/contraindications for massage, develop the plan of care, and monitor their response to treatment;
 - ii. Ability to use various communication techniques to encourage and educate individuals and groups to enhance massage therapy outcomes;
 - iii. Skill in developing and maintaining strong interpersonal relationships; and
 - iv. Ability to advise staff and students in massage therapy practices.
- (c) **Assignment.** At the full performance level, Health Technicians (Massage Therapy) independently assess the physical and mental status of patients. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) takes complete patient history and performs a physical assessment. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) interprets relevant clinical information to identify each patient's population-specific needs, identify indications/contraindications for massage, and develop the plan of care. Health Technicians (Massage Therapy), at this level, are responsible to perform massage therapy services with complexity higher than the developmental level. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) performs duties with limited supervision and seeks assistance from the supervisor in urgent or emergent circumstances. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) evaluates patient responses to treatment and documents responses to treatment, by maintaining accurate records in an electronic environment. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) coordinates follow up massage therapy as

necessary. Health Technicians (Massage Therapy), at this level, serve as consultants to the health care team in the evaluation and treatment of the patient. Under routine academic oversight, the Health Technician (Massage Therapy) assists with clinical supervision of massage therapy students.

(4) Health Technician (Massage Therapy) GS-8 - Advanced Clinical Level

- (a) **Experience.** In addition to meeting the basic requirements, candidates must possess one year of progressive experience equivalent to the GS-7 grade level. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate all the following KSAs:
- (b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**
- i. Skill in providing advanced massage techniques using the appropriate tools, supplies, and equipment based on the needs of the patient;
 - ii. Knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and pathology relevant to massage therapy within specialty population(s);
 - iii. Ability to modify massage therapy techniques based on an understanding of specialty populations, and various clinical/environmental settings;
 - iv. Knowledge of teaching methods and learning principles;
 - v. Ability to conduct research and quality improvement activities, related to massage therapy; and
 - vi. Knowledge of complementary integrative health, and holistic health principles.
- (c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level (GS-7), the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. At this level, the Health Technician (Massage Therapy) provides a full range of complex treatment procedures and modalities, which may include, but are not limited to reflexology, injury rehabilitation, lymphatic drainage, neuromuscular therapy, myofascial release, and/or craniosacral work. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) is responsible to provide massage therapy services for specialty areas, such as pain management, poly-trauma, surgery, traumatic brain injury, palliative care, neurology, orthopedics, geriatrics, cardiology, pulmonary, rheumatology, spinal cord injury, mental health, and oncology. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) assists other staff through education and as a member of an interdisciplinary health care team. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) is a subject matter expert responsible for mentoring other Health Technicians (Massage Therapy) who participate in educational and research activities. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) provides education in massage techniques to patients, caregivers, and employees. The Health Technician (Massage Therapy) contributes to identifying, collecting, and analyzing aggregate patient care information, to ensure safety and quality of care.

(5) Lead Health Technician (Massage Therapy), GS-8

- (a) **Experience.** In addition to meeting the basic requirements, candidates must possess one year of progressively complex experience equivalent to the GS-7 grade level. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate all the following KSAs:
- (b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**
- i. Ability to delegate tasks and responsibilities;
 - ii. Ability to manage staffing requirements, workload priorities, and coordinate the work of the unit;
 - iii. Ability to provide staff development and training; and
 - iv. Ability to review and monitor data to ensure all records and reports are complete and accurate.
- (c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. The Lead Health Technician (Massage Therapy) monitors workload, provides input on performance, resolves daily workplace issues, and maintains efficient workflow. Assignments at this level include, but are not limited to: ensuring coverage of all areas of responsibility; conducting clinical reviews to assess the quality of work; providing input to staff that includes changes in policies and procedures; creating and maintaining employee work schedules; orienting and providing on-the-job training for new and current Health Technicians (Massage Therapy); and ensuring all training requirements are met. The Lead Health Technician (Massage Therapy) reviews and analyzes aggregate patient care data, to ensure safety and quality of care.

(6) Supervisory Health Technician (Massage Therapy), GS-9

- (a) **Experience.** In addition to meeting the basic requirements, candidates must possess one year of progressively complex experience equivalent to the GS-8 grade level. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate all the following KSAs:
- (b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**
- i. Ability to provide the full range of administrative and supervisory duties which include, but are not limited to: assignment of work, performance evaluations, selection of staff, and recommendation of awards and/or advancements;
 - ii. Advanced knowledge of massage therapy across multiple areas of practice, and the demonstrated ability to provide guidance to staff massage therapists;
 - iii. Knowledge of how massage therapy integrates with other health care disciplines;

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- iv. Ability to assist in matters related to policy development, equipment requests, and workload analysis; and
 - v. Ability to delegate authority, evaluate and oversee people and programs, accomplish program goals, and adapt to changing priorities.
- (c) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. The Supervisory Health Technician (Massage Therapy) is responsible for the supervision, administrative management, and direction of Health Technicians (Massage Therapy). The Supervisory Health Technician (Massage Therapy) has full administrative and professional responsibility for planning and directing the activities for the service or equivalent unit. Typical duties include: making work assignments, monitoring the staff's clinical performance, conducting performance appraisals, and other clinical and administrative responsibilities, as assigned, to ensure that the mission of the service and the medical center has been satisfied. The Supervisory Health Technician (Massage Therapy) develops policies and procedures for the work unit, and contributes to the promotion of complementary and integrative health services. The Supervisory Health Technician (Massage Therapy) is responsible to review aggregate patient care data and take appropriate actions to ensure the safety and quality of care.

5. DEVIATIONS.

- a. The approving official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for an employee whose composite record of accomplishments, performance, and qualifications, as well as current assignment, warrants such action based on demonstrated competence to meet the requirements of the proposed grade.
- b. Under no circumstances will the education requirements be waived.
- c. The placement of individuals in grade levels or assignments not described in this standard may only be approved by the Under Secretary for Health, or designee, in VHA Central Office prior to placement in the position.

Authority: 38 U.S.C. §§ 7304, 7402.