

STAFFING

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for Clinical Chemist, GS-1320.
2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. This revision establishes the VA-specific title 5 Clinical Chemist qualification standard for positions in Veterans Health Administration. The new standards are effective on the date of this publication. These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005 that is maintained on the [Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer website](#) and the [VA Publications Website](#).
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer, Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059).
4. **RELATED DIRECTIVES:** VA Directive 5005, Staffing.
5. **RESCISSIONS:** None.

CERTIFIED BY:

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

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UNDER 38 U.S.C. § 7406

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APPENDIX F7. CLINICAL CHEMIST QUALIFICATION STANDARD

GS-1320

Veterans Health Administration

AUTHORITY. 38 U.S.C. § 7402

1. **COVERAGE.** The following are the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) qualification requirements for appointment and placement as a Clinical Chemist in the GS-1320 series in grades GS-13 through GS-15. VHA HR Office staff and management officials must use the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) qualification standard for the Chemistry Series, 1320, for other assignments to Chemist positions below the GS-13 level or those assignments not described in this standard, such as Research Chemist, etc.
2. **DUTIES.** Clinical Chemists are senior level technical experts in areas such as electrophoresis, mass spectrometry, gas and liquid chromatography, molecular biology, clinical endocrinology, toxicology and therapeutic drug monitoring. They oversee the daily operation of complex instrumentation within the clinical chemistry laboratory. Clinical Chemists maintain laboratories' required accreditation and provides authoritative interpretation of laboratory tests, educational support and consultation for clinicians and other laboratory personnel. Clinical Chemists prepare impactful, and possibly controversial, proposals and defend their findings and recommendations in high-level (regional or national) forums. They serve as technical directors over all laboratory functions and are responsible for overseeing laboratory staff.
3. **BASIC REQUIREMENTS.** To qualify for appointment, all applicants for Clinical Chemist positions in VHA must meet the following:
 - a. **Education.**
 - (1) Candidates must hold a doctoral degree (i.e., Ph.D.) in a chemical, physical, biological or clinical laboratory science.
 - (2) **Foreign Graduates.** Foreign graduates of chemical, physical, biological or clinical laboratory science programs are considered to meet the requirements of subparagraph 3a if they have a current certification referred to in subparagraph 3c.
 - b. **Training or Experience.**
 - (1) **Fellowship Training.** Candidates must have completed a two-year training program in clinical chemistry and/or toxicology from a Commission on Accreditation in Clinical Chemistry (COMACC) accredited program.

OR,

- (2) **Relevant Experience.** Candidates may substitute five years of full-time (or equivalent part-time) diverse professional experience in a relevant discipline area (i.e., clinical chemistry and/or toxicological chemistry or molecular biology), which was gained subsequent to conferral of the doctoral degree and in laboratories or institutions maintaining standards as defined by regulatory agencies responsible for certifying laboratories in these disciplines for the Fellowship Training requirement in 3.b.(1) above.

c. **Certification.**

- (1) Candidates must possess and maintain board certification in Clinical Chemistry and/or Toxicology from the American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT), National Registry of Certified Chemists (NRCC), American Board of Clinical Chemistry (ABCC) or American Board of Bioanalysis (ABB).

- (2) **Loss of Credential.** Clinical Chemists must maintain the required certification. If they fail to maintain the required certification, management officials must take the necessary actions, in coordination with HR Office staff, to remove them from the occupation, which may also result in termination of employment.

d. **Grandfathering Provision.** Clinical Chemists employed in VHA on the effective date of this qualification standard are considered to have met all qualification requirements for the title, series and grade held, including certification 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) Clinical Chemist who are grandfathered into the GS-1320 occupational series may be reassigned, promoted up to and including the full performance level of a career ladder, or changed to a lower grade within the occupation or placed in a supervisory or managerial position.
- (2) Clinical Chemists who are appointed on a temporary basis prior to the effective date of this qualification standard may not be extended or reappointed on a temporary or permanent basis until they fully meet the basic requirements of this standard.
- (3) Clinical Chemists initially grandfathered into this occupation, who subsequently obtain certification, must meet all the basic requirements of this qualification standard and must maintain the required credential as a condition of employment in the occupation.

PART II

APPENDIX F7

(4) If Clinical Chemists who are grandfathered under this provision leave the occupation, then 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, Employee Occupational Health Service.

4. GRADE REQUIREMENTS.

a. Creditable Experience.

(1) **Knowledge of Contemporary Professional Clinical Chemist Practice.** To be creditable, candidates must possess the required knowledges, skills and abilities (KSAs) associated with the scope of Clinical Chemist practice. The candidate's experience must be evidenced by paid/non-paid employment as a professional Clinical Chemist.

(2) **Quality of Experience.** Experience is only creditable if it is post-doctoral degree experience as a Clinical Chemist and is directly related to the duties to be performed at the specific grade level. Qualifying experience is specialized experience and must be at a level comparable to or exceeding the professional Clinical Chemist experience at the next lower grade level. Examples of specialized experience include:

(a) Conducting complex evaluations processes in clinical chemistry sufficient to conduct specialized clinical laboratory testing for reliability, accuracy and cost effectiveness.

(b) Providing clinical consultation to medical colleagues in the selection and interpretation of tests for the diagnosis of diseases.

(c) Interpreting the results of new and complex analyses to determine validity and medical significance.

(d) Managing or overseeing a high-volume automated clinical laboratory.

(e) Applying regulatory standards required for maintaining certification of clinical laboratory.

(f) Coordinating specialized areas of testing in the laboratory such as toxicology, immunology, molecular and protein biochemistry.

(g) Implementing current laboratory advancements in the field of clinical chemistry/toxicology.

(h) Revising standard methods to improve or extend test systems.

- (i) Teaching clinical chemistry and toxicology to medical residents, Medical Technologists and other appropriate staff members.
 - b. **Grade Determination.** In addition to the basic requirements for appointment in paragraph 3, the following criteria applies when determining the appropriate qualifications of candidates:
 - (a) **Clinical Chemist, GS-13.** None beyond the basic requirements. GS-13 is considered the full performance level.
 - (b) **Clinical Chemist, GS-14.** One year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-13 grade level.
 - (c) **Clinical Chemist, GS-15.** One year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-14 grade level.
5. **MODIFICATIONS OR WAIVERS.** Management officials who are delegated the authority may modify or waive the specific requirements of this standard in accordance with chapter 2, section D, paragraphs 8-12 of this part.