

STAFFING

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for Acupuncturist, GS-601, 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 Acupuncturist 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(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 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:

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**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
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*Use in conjunction with the OPM Standard.

[APPENDIX GXX. ACUPUNCTURIST QUALIFICATION STANDARD
GS-601
Veterans Health Administration

1. COVERAGE. The following are requirements for appointment as an Acupuncturist in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). These requirements apply to all VHA Acupuncturists in the general schedule (GS) 601 series. Acupuncture is a modality used to treat a wide range of conditions, used alone or as an adjunct to other treatment modalities. Acupuncture is the stimulation of specific points along the skin of the body using thin needles. It can be associated with the application of heat, pressure, or laser light to these points.

2. DEFINITIONS

a. **Appointing Official.** The Human Resources Management Officer is delegated appointing authority, to process and authenticate notifications of personnel actions, and authority to effect management-approved employment actions on behalf of officials, employees and facilities for which service is provided.

b. **Approving Official.** The Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Director, Facility Director, or designee is the approving official and will determine whether to approve or disapprove the appointment of employees in the hybrid occupations.

c. **Journey Level.** The full performance level for this qualification standard is GS-11.

d. **Creditable Experience.** To be creditable, the experience must have required the use of knowledge, skills, and abilities, (KSAs) associated with acupuncture. The experience must be post-master's degree or higher.

e. **Part-Time Experience.** Part-time experience as a professional acupuncturist is creditable according to its relationship to the full-time work week. For example, an acupuncturist employed 20 hours per week, or on a half time basis, would receive 1 full-time workweek of credit for each 2 weeks of service.

f. **Master's level program.** Degree-granting authority is authorized by relevant state regulatory authorities. The Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (ACAOM), the accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for accreditation is aware that some states may not presently authorize the awarding of a professional master's degree in acupuncture or Oriental medicine. In addition, certain states have different levels of degree-granting authority and institutional operation. Because state degree-granting authority is not under the Commission's control, the Commission deliberately does not base its scope upon the awarding of such a degree but rather upon the education and training at that "level" of instruction. An institution that offers a coherent professional program at the master's degree level is eligible to seek accreditation whether or not it is located in a state that permits the institution to grant a professional master's degree.

3. BASIC REQUIREMENTS

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a. **Citizenship.** Citizen of the United States. After a determination is made that it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens, necessary personnel may be appointed on a temporary basis under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7405 without regard to the citizenship requirements of 38 U.S.C. 7402 or any other law prohibiting the employment of or payment of compensation to a person who is not a citizen of the United States. Candidates must meet all other requirements for the grade and position concerned.

b. **Education.** Individual must meet one of the requirements below:

(1) Master's degree in acupuncture or oriental medicine from a program accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (ACAOM).

OR

(2) Master's level degree in acupuncture or oriental medicine from a program accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (ACAOM).

c. **Foreign Graduates.** Graduates of foreign acupuncture programs meet the requirements in subparagraph 3b if they have a full unrestricted and current license to practice acupuncture in a State, Territory or Commonwealth of the United States, or in the District of Columbia.

d. **Certification.** Acupuncturists hired in the VHA must be board certified through the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM). The board certification must be current and the acupuncturist must abide by the certifying body's requirements for continuing education.

e. **Loss of Certification.** An acupuncturist who fails to maintain the required certificate must be removed from the occupation, which may result in termination of employment. At the discretion of the appointing official, an employee may be reassigned to another occupation if qualified and if a placement opportunity exists.

f. **Licensure.** Current, full, active, and unrestricted license to practice acupuncture in a State, Territory or Commonwealth (i.e. Puerto Rico) of the United States, or District of Columbia.

g. **Loss of licensure.** An acupuncturist who fails to maintain the required license must be removed from the occupation, which may result in termination of employment. At the discretion of the appointing official, an employee may be reassigned to another occupation if qualified and if a placement opportunity exists.

h. **Grandfathering Provision.** All persons employed in VHA in this occupational series or in another occupational series that are performing the duties as described in this qualification standard on the effective date of this qualification standard are considered to have met all qualification requirements for the title, series and grade held, including positive education and certification that are part of the basic requirements of the occupation. For employees who do not meet all the basic requirements in this standard, but who met the qualifications applicable to the position at the time they were appointed to it, the following apply:

(1) Such employees may be reassigned, promoted up to and including the full performance (journeyman) level, or changed to lower grade within the occupation, but may not be promoted beyond the journeyman level or placed in supervisory or managerial positions.

(2) Acupuncturists 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) Acupuncturists who are converted to title 38 hybrid status under this provision and subsequently leave the occupation lose protected status and must meet the full VA qualification standard requirements in effect at the time of reentry as an acupuncturist.

i. **PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS.** See VA Directive and Handbook 5019.

j. **ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY.** Candidates will not be appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. chapters 73 or 74, to serve in a direct patient-care capacity in VHA who are not proficient in written and spoken English. See Chapter 2, section D, paragraph 5a, this part.

4. GRADE REQUIREMENTS

a. Creditable **Experience**

(1) **Knowledge of Acupuncture Practices.** To be creditable, the experience must demonstrate possession of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) associated with current professional acupuncture practice. The experience must be post-master's degree or above.

(2) **Quality of Experience.** Experience is only creditable if it is obtained following graduation with a certificate, masters or doctoral degree in Acupuncture or Oriental Medicine from an accredited training program. Creditable experience must include work as a professional licensed acupuncturist. Qualifying experience must also be at a level comparable to acupuncture experience at the next lower grade level. For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher level duties must consist of significantly larger scope, administrative independence, difficulty and range of variety and described in this standard at the specified grade level and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time.

b. Grade **Determinations.** In addition to the basic requirements for employment, the following criteria must be met when determining the grade of candidates:

(1) **GS- 9 Acupuncturist (Entry Level)**

(a) **Experience.** None beyond the basic requirements.

(b) **Assignments.** Individuals at this grade level are considered to be entry level and are closely supervised. The employee works under the direction of a journey level or higher acupuncturist or other health care providers licensed to perform acupuncture. The acupuncturist provides professional services

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in accordance with the established treatment plan. Deviations from regular procedures, unanticipated problems, and unfamiliar situations are referred to more experienced staff for a decision or assistance.

(2) GS-11 Acupuncturist (Full Performance Level)

(a) Experience or Education: Individual must meet at least one of the requirements below:

(1) Experience. In addition to the basic requirements, must have 1 year of creditable experience equivalent to the GS-9 grade level, which is directly related to the position to be filled.

(2) Education. Doctoral degree or equivalent degree from an accredited college or university in an acupuncture or oriental medicine.

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

1. Ability to screen referrals and direct veterans to other services as appropriate.
2. Ability to formulate an appropriate differential diagnosis.
3. Ability to formulate an acupuncture treatment plan independently or with other health care professionals.
4. Ability to educate patients on health lifestyle changes including nutrition, exercise, sleeping habits, stress management, mind body techniques and other matters related to acupuncture care. This includes the ability to communicate with individuals of varying backgrounds.
5. Skill in the selection and use of the appropriate acupuncture tools and supplies based on needs of the patient.

(c) Assignment. Acupuncturists at this level review and triage acupuncture referrals. The incumbent serves as a member of an interdisciplinary team providing acupuncture treatment as well as further coordination of care for patients referred for acupuncture services. The acupuncturist analyzes medical histories and physical findings to formulate a differential diagnosis based on oriental and western medicine paradigms. Duties include the design and oversight of acupuncture treatment plans as well as a full range of acupuncture services, monitoring the accuracy of needle placement during a treatment. The incumbent communicates with patients about any abnormal or unexpected results or responses to treatment and advises patients regarding lifestyle changes including nutrition, exercise, sleeping habits, stress management, mind body techniques and other matters related to acupuncture care. The acupuncturist may submit referrals and requests for devices, materials and appliances available and commonly used by the acupuncture profession. Duties include documentation of information related to patient care including assessment, diagnosis, treatment, response to treatment, plan of care, and patient education as well as identification and documentation of appropriate coding for each patient encounter. The acupuncturist provides information regarding the patient consultation to other health care providers.

The incumbent manages clinical workload demands. The incumbent serves as a mentor to new staff or less experienced staff and students.

(3) GS-12 Acupuncturist (Advanced Level)

(a) **Experience.** In addition to the basic requirements, completion of a minimum of 1 year of progressively complex experience equivalent to the GS-11 grade level.

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

1. Skill and ability to perform safe and effective advanced acupuncture techniques.
2. Knowledge of complex issues surrounding the delivery of care as it relates to acupuncture services, such as evidence based and cost effectiveness.
3. Ability to apply and adapt acupuncture to new and changing programs.
4. Knowledge of research strategies, methodologies and principles.
5. Ability to problem solve issues surrounding delivery of acupuncture.

(c) **Assignments.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity, difficulty, range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Employees at this level carry out assigned tasks independently in all areas of acupuncture which substantially exceed the full performance level and require advanced knowledge in all areas of acupuncture. Regardless of the nature of the specific assignment, the work must be of sufficient scope and complexity to meet the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform at this grade level. The advanced level acupuncturist serves as the leader of an interdisciplinary team to provide evaluation, monitoring, planning, and coordination of care of patients for acupuncture services. At this level of employment, the acupuncturist provides advanced acupuncture techniques that may include but are not limited to injections at acupuncture points. Duties include participation in case reviews and treatment plan discussions, demonstrating advanced knowledge of techniques and discussion of theory, as well as promoting and maintaining communication with staff and others. The acupuncturist participates in the creation of new programs or interventions that may include group acupuncture, combining acupuncture with other interventions, and expansion of acupuncture care into new populations or new settings. The incumbent works with others on improvement projects to discover, examine and test knowledge, theories, and innovative Oriental Medicine approaches. The advanced level acupuncturist may participate in clinical research projects that strengthen the scientific basis of acupuncture and related complementary and alternative medical treatments. Duties include the participation in teaching principles of acupuncture to staff, students and residents including journal clubs, grand rounds and in-service trainings. The incumbent provides assistance as needed for issues or problems that arise in relation to the acupuncture practice or service and serves as a preceptor to new

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staff or less experienced staff and students. The advanced level acupuncturist serves as an advisor to leadership on issues pertaining to acupuncture.

(4) **GS-12 Supervisory Acupuncturist**

(a) **Experience.** In addition to the basic requirements, completion of a minimum of 1 year of experience equivalent to the GS-11 grade level.

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

1. Ability to perform the full range of supervisory duties including: responsibility for work assignments; competency assessments; performance evaluations; selection of staff; and recommendation of awards, advancements, and when appropriate, disciplinary actions.

2. Ability to analyze organizational and operational problems to develop and implement solutions that result in efficient operations and use data effectively to manage workload, quality, performance, productivity within the service.

3. Knowledge of how acupuncture integrates with other healthcare disciplines.

4. Ability to analyze clinical data and make recommendations for corrective actions to optimize quality, efficiency, performance, and productivity within service keeping in line with accrediting bodies and policy.

5. Knowledge related to administrative functions such as, material, supply, and equipment management.

(c) **Assignments.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity, difficulty, range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Supervisory acupuncturists demonstrate professional and scientific expertise in order to provide therapeutic clinical acupuncture procedures. The supervisor may have overall responsibility for planning, assessing and evaluating programs to ensure proper coordination between care delivered by the program and overall delivery of healthcare within the facility, or coordination of non-VA care as appropriate. The supervisory level acupuncturist oversees an Acupuncture Program including an outpatient clinic where patients are seen for initial visits and follow-up care. The incumbent facilitates collaboration with other specialties and disciplines maintaining interdepartmental relations in the planning and provision of acupuncture services to accomplish Medical Center goals. Duties include preparing work assignments, monitoring clinical performances, conducting performance appraisals, developing performance standards, as well as other clinical and administrative responsibilities. Duties include tracking of outcome data and patient satisfaction data to ensure that trends are analyzed and monitored, preparing appropriate administrative reports and quality assurance reviews. The supervisory level acupuncturist assists in developing, analyzing, integrating, monitoring, and managing acupuncture service care delivery and associated data to promote quality and cost-effective outcomes across the continuum. The acupuncturist demonstrates consideration of costs and

benefits in the selection of resources, services, and products for patients, analyzing resource utilization and workload data for strategic decision making. The acupuncturist demonstrates leadership in quality improvement activities for the clinic operations and is responsible for applying problem solving skills. The incumbent supervises clinical research projects that strengthen the scientific basis of acupuncture and related complementary and alternative treatments. The acupuncturist obtains assistance from leadership as needed for problems or issues that arise as well as routinely apprising leadership of situations that may require higher level interventions and/or actions. The supervisor assures compliance with accrediting agencies, regulatory requirements, and the quality management program, assuring corrective action as needed.

(5) **GS-13 Acupuncturist Program Coordinator**

(a) **Experience.** In addition to the basic requirements, completion of a minimum of 1 year of progressively complex experience equivalent to the GS-12 grade level.

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

1. Ability to analyze organizational and operational problems to develop and implement solutions that result in efficient operations and use data effectively to manage workload, quality, performance, and productivity within the service.

2. Broad knowledge of how healthcare disciplines and other modalities integrate.

3. Ability to plan, organize, and integrate clinical work flow, set short and/or long term goals for the program, and conduct studies on technical and administrative problems, including personnel shortages, organizational structure, and new technology.

4. Knowledge of quality improvement process.

5. Ability to conceptualize, define, plan and implement new programs.

6. Ability to apply current research findings and standards of care in the health care setting.

(c) **Assignments.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity, difficulty, range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. The incumbent is responsible for developing, analyzing, integrating, monitoring, and managing healthcare delivery systems through communication and use of resources to promote high-quality, cost-effective outcomes across the continuum. The incumbent provides executive/upper level leadership and exceptional experience in dealing with complex and challenging professional, scientific, and technical acupuncture issues that arise. The program manager is responsible for assessing, evaluating, and developing programs to ensure proper coordination of care delivered by the program with the overall delivery of healthcare within an individual facility or with non-VA providers as appropriate. The incumbent serves as a subject matter expert to resolve problems at a lower

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level as necessary. The program coordinator provides oversight for clinical workflow, including, but not limited to, tracking outcome data, patient satisfaction data, monitoring work productivity, and ensuring trends are routinely analyzed. The incumbent performs a cost-benefit analysis during the selection of resources, services, and products, requesting the aforementioned as necessary; reviews and prioritizes resource utilization to develop and maintain a budget. The program coordinator presents administrative reports, quality assurance reviews and quarterly reports to reflect strategic goals. The program manager demonstrates leadership in quality improvement activities for program operations and develops new programs as needs arise. The incumbent supports clinical research projects by providing resources as needed. The program coordinator incorporates research findings into clinical practice and program development. The incumbent develops, reviews, updates, and implements educational materials to meet the needs of the veterans, the general public, and other professionals. The incumbent assures program compliance with accrediting agencies, regulatory requirements, and quality management programs, taking corrective action where necessary.

4. DEVIATIONS

- a. An 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, certification or license requirements be waived for any grade level.
- c. 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 the VHA Central Office prior to placement in the position.

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