

STAFFING

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for Recreation Specialist (Yoga Therapy), GS-0188, appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3), Appointments in Veterans Health Administration and 38 U.S.C. § 7405 (a)(1)(B), Temporary full-time appointments, part-time appointments, and without-compensation appointments.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This qualification standard establishes the Recreation Specialist (Yoga Therapy), occupation under VA's title 38 hybrid excepted service employment system according to the authority established under P.L. 111-163, Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010. VA Secretary has authority under 38 U.S.C. § 7402 to prescribe qualifications for occupations identified in or established under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3), Appointments in Veterans Health Administration and 38 U.S.C. § 7405(a)(1)(B), Temporary full-time appointments, part-time appointments, and without-compensation appointments. The new standard is effective on the date of this publication. This qualification standard is maintained on the [Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer website](#) and [Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer \(OCHCO\) \(va.gov\)](#).
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Office of 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).
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE/HANDBOOK:** [VA Directive 5005, Staffing, April 15, 2002.](#)
- 5. RELATED HANDBOOK:** VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part II, Appendix G17.
- 6. RESCISSION:** None

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

/s/
Cassandra M. Law
Assistant Secretary for
Human Resources and Administration/
Operations, Security, and Preparedness

DISTRIBUTION: Electronic Only

FORMER VA HANDBOOK REFERENCE: Not Applicable.

EFFECTIVE DATE: May 22, 2024

**RECREATION SPECIALIST (YOGA THERAPY)
QUALIFICATION STANDARD
GS-0188**

Veterans Health Administration

- 1. COVERAGE.** The following are requirements for appointment or placement as a Recreation Specialist (Yoga Therapy) in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). These requirements apply to all VHA Recreation Specialist (Yoga Therapy) in the General Schedule (GS) 0188 occupational series. Yoga Therapists have advanced training in the skillful application of yogic principles and practices, which are safely adapted to the particular condition, functional status, lifestyle, and goals of the Veteran. Yoga Therapists use practices such as meditation, mantra, affirmations, mindfulness, movement, postures, and breathing techniques that promote self-regulation, psychological resilience, and improved functioning and quality of life. Yoga Therapists work with Veterans to create and implement a self-empowering therapeutic plan tailored to the Veteran's goals. They also apply a biopsychosocial-spiritual framework (the yoga framework of koshas) to determine appropriate yoga interventions that support and empower the Veteran to move toward improved health, well-being, and equanimity. Yoga therapy supports salutogenesis and the alleviation of suffering (as defined by the Veteran) by integrating the following eight elements: ethical commitments, lifestyle observances, physical postures, conscious breathing, sensory withdrawal, concentration, meditation, and cultivation of peace. Yoga therapy incorporates yogic principles and practices that Veterans can use during the sessions and as a part of their everyday life to explore their own well-being and innate capacity to heal. Yoga therapy can occur in individualized sessions or in small groups with other Veterans who have similar health concerns and well-being objectives or goals.
- 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 §§ 7505 and 7406 appointments.](#)
- 3. DEFINITIONS.**

 - a. **Appointing Official.** The Human Resources (HR) 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 Under Secretary for Health or designee (for VHA Central Office appointments) is the approving official and will determine whether to approve or disapprove the appointment of employees in hybrid occupations.
- c. **Experience.**
 - (1) **Creditable Experience.** To be creditable, the experience must have required the use of knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with current professional yoga therapy practice. Experience satisfying this requirement may be paid or non-paid employment.
 - (2) **Part-Time Experience.** Part-time experience as a certified Yoga Therapist is credited according to its relationship to the full-time workweek. For example, a certified Yoga Therapist employed 20 hours per week or on a half-time basis, would receive one full-time work week of credit for each two weeks of service.
 - (3) **Quality of Experience.** Experience is only creditable if it is directly related to the position to be filled. Qualifying experience must be at a level comparable to Yoga Therapist experience at the next lower level. For all assignments above the full performance level (FPL), the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, administrative independence, complexity, and variety as described in this standard at the specified grade level and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time.
- d. **Occupational Definitions.**
 - (1) **International Association of Yoga Therapists.** The International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT) is an accrediting body of training schools and certification for Yoga Therapists. Certification granted by IAYT is referred to as C-IAYT. C-IAYT is required for Yoga Therapists in VHA.
 - (2) **Yoga.** Yoga is a mind and body practice with origins in ancient Indian philosophy. The various styles of yoga typically combine physical postures, breathing techniques, meditation or relaxation, and discussion on applications to daily living and lifestyle mindfulness education. Yoga Instructors are responsible for conducting yoga and well-being classes, either group or individual, in-person or virtually for the purpose of promoting, preserving, or restoring health and well-being.
 - (3) **Yoga Therapy.** While all yoga is potentially therapeutic, yoga therapy applies yogic tools such as posture, breathwork, meditation, lifestyle, and mindfulness education to address an individual's unique physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs as clinical care. Yoga therapy can include

both individual and group sessions. In addition, yoga therapy includes assessment of the individual's well-being, health conditions, injuries, or illnesses through specific evaluations of physical, psychoemotional, social, and spiritual status. This assessment can include evaluation of posture, movement balance, mood and emotions, resilience to stress, sleep quality, participation in social and daily activities, and connection to meaning, purpose, and values. The Yoga Therapist will help to create a plan of care to work toward goals that are co-created by the participant and therapist.

e. **Journey Level.** The FPL for this qualification standard is the GS-09 grade level.

4. BASIC REQUIREMENTS. To qualify for appointment to this position, all applicants must possess the following:

a. **Citizenship.** Be a citizen of the United States (U.S.). Non-citizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens according to 38 U.S.C. § 7407(a).

b. **Certification.** All applicants must hold an [International Association of Yoga Therapists](#) (IAYT) certification (C-IAYT).

(1) **Loss of Credential.** Management officials, in collaboration with Human Resource (HR) Office staff, must immediately relieve employees who fail to maintain the required certification from duties and responsibilities associated with the occupation and/or assignment, which may also result in separation from employment.

c. **Physical Requirements.** See [VA Directive and Handbook 5019, Employee Occupational Health Service](#) for requirements.

d. **English Language Proficiency.** Yoga Therapist candidates must be proficient in spoken and written English according to 38 U.S.C. § 7403(f).

5. OFFICIAL POSITION TITLES. All official documents relating to a position (e.g., functional statements and personnel actions) must use the approved official title and grade level as described below. For recruitment purposes, HR Offices will use the titles shown in paragraph 6 in the job opportunity announcement. See VA Handbook 5003, Part I for information on the use of official titles and organizational titles.

a. Recreation Specialist (Yoga Therapy), GS-07.

b. Recreation Specialist (Yoga Therapy), GS-09.

c. Recreation Specialist (Yoga Therapy), GS-11.

d. Lead Recreation Specialist (Yoga Therapy), GS-11.

e. Supervisory Recreation Specialist (Yoga Therapy), GS-12.

6. GRADE DETERMINATIONS. All individuals assigned to this occupation must meet all the basic qualification requirements in paragraph 4 above and all the qualification requirements defined in the specific assignment.

a. Yoga Therapist, GS-07.

- (1) **Experience or Education.** None beyond the basic requirements.
- (2) **Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs).** In addition to the basic qualification requirements, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:
 - (a) Knowledge of yoga therapy assessment processes.
 - (b) Knowledge of clinical health conditions (i.e., disease states, diagnoses, and symptoms).
 - (c) Ability to deliver evidence-informed yoga practices adapted for the specific needs and conditions of the participant.
 - (d) Ability to guide participants in yoga therapy.
 - (e) Ability to adapt the physical environment to support the biopsychosocial health and well-being of various populations.
 - (f) Ability to communicate with patients and other health care professionals to render effective therapeutic and working relationships.
 - (g) Ability to conduct yoga therapy assessments to develop care plans with appropriate yoga therapy interventions.
 - (h) Ability to use a computerized system for care planning and documentation.
- (3) **Assignment.** At the entry level, Yoga Therapists (YTs) are developmental and work under close clinical guidance or direct supervision of a YT who is at or above the FPL. Clinical guidance may be provided by a YT from another facility. YTs have knowledge of the yoga therapy discipline and work with guidance from higher level or supervisory staff performing increasingly complex tasks designed to prepare them for promotion. Entry level YTs refer deviations from regular procedures, unanticipated problems, and unfamiliar situations to more experienced staff. They conduct assessments to elicit information relevant to the Veteran's health care within the defined yoga therapy scope of practice. Using an understanding of typical disease states, diagnoses, and symptoms, the YT evaluates the Veteran, identifies risk factors, special considerations, and contraindications to ensure the safety and aptness of yoga therapy

interventions. They appropriately and safely demonstrate or guide participants in yoga practices such as postures (asana), breathwork (pranayama), meditation (Dhyana and dharana), gestures (mudras), sounds (mantra), and applications to daily life through yoga philosophy and other practices in the yoga tradition. YTs use an understanding of modifications to appropriately guide safe evidence-informed therapeutic yoga practices based on the individual's diagnosis, health, and well-being. They foster a safe environment and therapeutic relationship to facilitate mind-body connection. YTs develop care plans and provide education within the yoga therapy framework according to the Veteran's health condition, needs, goals, life circumstances, and access to resources such as time and equipment. They determine and refer Veterans to an appropriate health care provider for any new clinical findings or concerns outside of the Yoga Therapist's scope of practice. YTs report any medical or behavioral incidents to their supervisor. They use the electronic health record (EHR) to review Veteran records and document each Veteran encounter, which may include indication, evaluation, assessment, goals, plan, and intervention. YTs participate in educational programs and outreach events for Veterans, staff, caregivers, and/or community organizations designed to increase awareness regarding the benefits of yoga, yoga therapy, and self-care strategies. They follow guidelines and policies such as patient identification, obtaining consent, incident reporting, and infection prevention and control. As necessary, YTs set up, break down, sanitize, and inspect equipment and report needed repairs or replacement to the supervisor.

b. Yoga Therapist, GS-09.

- (1) **Experience.** At least one year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level.
- (2) **Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs).** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:
 - (a) Knowledge of physical and mental health conditions including symptoms, diagnoses, functional limitations, medications and side effects, medical terminology, and treatments related to acute, chronic, and traumatic illnesses/injuries.
 - (b) Skill in adapting the physical environment to support the biopsychosocial health and well-being of various populations.
 - (c) Skill in communicating with patients and other health care professionals to render effective therapeutic and working relationships.

- (d) Skill to conduct yoga therapy assessments to develop care plans with appropriate yoga therapy interventions.
 - (e) Skill in delivering evidence-informed yoga therapy adapted for the specific needs and conditions of the participant.
 - (f) Ability to establish criteria for incoming referrals.
 - (g) Ability to develop educational materials.
- (3) **Assignment.** Employees at this grade level serve as FPL YTs. In addition to the duties and KSAs described at the entry level, YTs at the FPL determine whether incoming referrals for yoga therapy are appropriate for the program and individual Veterans. To promote and support Veteran biopsychosocial-spiritual health and well-being, YTs independently create and implement evidence-informed, patient-centered therapeutic care plans and modify care plans based on outcomes. They provide ongoing assessment of Veterans' progress toward goals and response to therapy through interview, evaluation, and review of care plans. YTs communicate with Veterans and collaborate with other health care professionals regarding care plans. They create and facilitate evidence-informed and condition-specific yoga therapy groups or workshops. YTs serve as consultants or mentors for yoga personnel. They develop and maintain a portfolio of educational materials and resources for clinicians and Veterans using print and non-print media. YTs plan, develop, and/or participate in educational programs and outreach events designed to increase awareness regarding the benefits of yoga, yoga therapy, and self-care strategies for Veterans, staff, caregivers, and/or community organizations. They may participate in projects such as research or quality improvement initiatives.

c. Advanced Yoga Therapist, GS-11.

- (1) **Experience.** At least one year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level.
- (2) **Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs).** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:
 - (a) Skill in using specialized yoga therapy techniques.
 - (b) Skill in providing yoga therapy for individuals with multiple comorbidities and conditions including those impacted by social determinants of health.
 - (c) Skill in providing mentorship, coaching, or training.

- (3) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the FPL, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity, difficulty, variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. In addition to the duties and KSAs described at the FPL, the Advanced YT conducts assessments and develops and implements therapeutic plans for Veterans with multiple comorbidities and conditions impacted by social determinates of health using specialized yoga therapy skills and techniques. The Advanced YT is recognized as a subject matter expert and leads or participates in case conferences and patient rounding. They serve as a preceptor or mentor to students, trainees, or staff in YT and other health care professions. Advanced YTs may develop curriculum and/or training programs related to yoga and yoga therapy as a component of complementary and integrative health (CIH) care. They may collaborate with research investigators and other staff to develop and implement projects such as research or quality improvement in areas of CIH and yoga therapy. Advanced YTs contribute to the development of yoga therapy standard operating procedures and policies.

d. Lead Yoga Therapist, GS-11.

- (1) **Experience.** At least one year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level.
- (2) **Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs).** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:
 - (a) Knowledge of administrative functions such as management of equipment, supplies and operations.
 - (b) Skill in providing yoga therapy for individuals with multiple comorbidities and conditions including those impacted by social determinates of health.
 - (c) Skill in providing mentorship, coaching, or training.
 - (d) Ability to develop program policies and procedures.
 - (e) Skill in leading a team to assign work, coordinate, and oversee daily responsibilities and make adjustments to accomplish the workload according to established procedures.
 - (f) Ability to evaluate a yoga therapy program to identify trends and make program adjustments.
- (3) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the FPL, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity and variety and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. As part of their regular and recurring duties, the Lead YT will lead a team of other employees in yoga

therapy work at least 25% of their duty time. In addition to the duties described at the FPL, the Lead YT works with team members to achieve specific tasks, meet productivity goals, and provide services and programs. The Lead YT ensures daily work is completed by distributing and balancing workload among employees according to established workflow and skill level; assures timely accomplishment of the assigned workload; assesses the status, quality, and progress of the work; and makes recommendations to the supervisor on staff performance. They conduct assessments and develop and implement therapeutic plans for Veterans with multiple comorbidities and conditions impacted by social determinates of health using specialized yoga therapy skills and techniques. The Lead YT is recognized as a subject matter expert and leads or participates in case conferences and patient rounding. They may serve as a preceptor or mentor to students, trainees, or staff in YT and other health care professions. Lead YTs may develop curriculum and/or training programs related to yoga and yoga therapy as a component of CIH care. They evaluate the program in order to provide progress reports and/or develop program policies and procedures. Lead YTs ensure the organization's strategic plan, mission, vision, and values are communicated to clinical staff and integrated into work plans, programs, and services. They may collaborate with research investigators or other staff to develop and implement projects such as research or quality improvement in areas of CIH and yoga therapy. Lead YTs ensure that all supplies and equipment requirements are identified, justified, and requested through proper channels. They use and maintain equipment and space to optimize operational needs and ensure delivery of yoga therapy and CIH services.

e. Supervisory Yoga Therapist, GS-12.

- (1) **Experience.** One year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level.
- (2) **Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:
 - (a) Skill in providing yoga therapy for individuals with multiple comorbidities and conditions including those impacted by social determinants of health.
 - (b) Skill in providing subject matter expertise in consultation with interdisciplinary teams and committees.
 - (c) Ability to use a computerized system for care planning, documentation and reviewing the work of subordinate staff.
 - (d) Ability to address and resolve complaints and concerns from patients and staff.

- (e) Ability to manage clinical and program resources and requirements.
 - (f) Ability to analyze data to make recommendations to optimize quality, efficiency, performance, and productivity.
 - (g) Ability to perform the full range of supervisory duties, which include assignment of work, competency assessments, performance evaluations, employee development, staff selection and recommendation of awards, advancements and disciplinary action.
- (3) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the FPL, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity, difficulty, variety and be performed by the incumbent as a major duty at least 25% of the time. Supervisory YTs conduct assessments and develop and implement therapeutic plans using a full range of therapeutic skills and techniques for individuals with complex conditions. The supervisor uses the EHR for planned care, documentation, and periodic review of subordinate staff EHR encounters to ensure quality of work. Supervisory YTs exercise a full range of supervisory responsibilities in planning, directing, and assessing work of subordinate staff. They establish performance standards, evaluate overall performance of employees, ensure competency requirements are met, identify, and provide staff development and training, ensure staff maintain and enhance expertise and comply with quality and safety standards. Supervisory YTs evaluate and make decisions for purchase of equipment, supplies, and materials according to operating procedures and maintenance standards. They coordinate and disseminate program marketing information through appropriate channels such as social media and public affairs. Supervisory YTs have leadership responsibilities for program, policy, and procedure development; establishing and ensuring program goals are met; and may have an active role in fiscal management for the program. They direct or participate in the design and conduct of quality improvement and/or evidence-based practice initiatives including data collection and analysis and may collaborate with research investigators to develop and implement CIH research studies. Supervisory YTs use qualitative and/or quantitative data for program development and improvement. They represent the profession at interdisciplinary meetings and on committees. Supervisory YTs address or resolve Veteran and staff concerns and recommend processes or standard operating procedures to optimize patient-centered care.

7. DEVIATIONS.

- a. The establishment of a position and subsequent placement of an individual in a grade or assignment not described in the hybrid title 38 qualification standard must be approved by the Under Secretary for Health or designee prior to placement.

- b. Under no circumstance will educational requirements necessary to meet basic qualifications or assignment specific educational requirements be waived.
- c. Under no circumstance will the credential (i.e., license, certification, and/or registration) requirements to meet basic qualifications or assignment specific credentials be waived unless an exception provision is provided in the qualification standard.
- d. In rare and unusual circumstance(s), the Under Secretary for Health or designee may approve requests for reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for an individual whose composite record of experience, accomplishments, performance, and qualifications warrant such action based on demonstrated competence to meet the requirements of the grade and/or assignment.

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).