

STAFFING

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for the appointment of Dental Assistant, GS-681, in VA.
2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. The pages in this handbook replace the existing Dental Assistant Qualification Standard in VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix II-G36 in its entirety. The new standards are effective on the date of issuance of this handbook. 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. Significant changes include:
 - a. Clarifies Alternative Provisions for meeting the Certification of Radiologic Competence requirement.
 - b. Adds definition of Expanded Function Level.
 - c. Changes the full performance level (FPL) from GS-5 to GS-6.
 - d. Clarifies assignments and KSAO's at all grades.
 - e. Adds new GS-7 and GS-8 assignments.
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The 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:** VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix G36, dated March 17, 2006.

CERTIFIED BY:

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

/s/Roger W. Baker
Assistant Secretary for
Information and Technology

/s/John U. Sepúlveda
Assistant Secretary for
Human Resources and
Administration

ELECTRONIC DISTRIBUTION
ONLY

NOTE: This transmittal page accompanied the former VA Handbook 5005, Staffing publication. It is provided for reference to revisions made to this qualification standard.

FORMER VA HANDBOOK REFERENCE: PART II APPENDIX G36
EFFECTIVE DATE: APRIL 19, 2011

DENTAL ASSISTANT
QUALIFICATION STANDARD
GS-0681
Veterans Health Administration

1. COVERAGE. Following are requirements for appointment as a Dental Assistant in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). These requirements apply to all VHA dental assistants in the General Schedule (GS)-681 series.

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. BASIC REQUIREMENTS

a. **Citizenship.** 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. **Experience and Education**

(1) **Experience.** Six months experience that demonstrates the applicant's ability to perform the work, or provides familiarity with the work.

OR,

(2) **Education.** Successful completion of a 1-year dental assistant program accredited by the American Dental Association's Commission on [Dental] Accreditation [(CODA)].

(3) **Experience/Education Combination.** Equivalent combinations of experience and

education are qualifying.

c. **Certification.** Public Law 97-35 requires that persons who administer radiologic procedures meet the credentialing standards in 42 CFR Part 75. Essentially, they must have successfully completed an educational program that meets or exceeds the standards described in that regulation, and is accredited by an organization recognized by the Department of Education, and be certified as radiographers in their field.

(1) **Provisions for Certification of Radiologic Competence**

(a) Successful completion of the Dental Radiation Health and Safety Examination administered by the Dental Assisting National Board, Inc.;

OR,

[(b)] Successful completion of the Principles and Practice of Dental Radiology and Radiographic Safety courses and examinations developed by the Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Dentistry.

OR,

[(c)] Successful completion of a radiation health and safety program or examination approved by a state board of dentistry or the Department of Defense (DoD).]

(2) Non-certified applicants who otherwise meet the eligibility requirements for certification of radiologic competence may be given a temporary appointment as a graduate dental assistant under the authority of 38 U.S.C. § 7405 (a) (1) (D). Failure to obtain certification during that period is justification for termination of the temporary appointment. This [will result in removal from the GS-681 series and] may result in termination of employment.

(3) Certification in basic life support methods is highly desirable.

[(4)] Certification by the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB). The American Dental Association (ADA) recognizes DANB as the national certification for Dental Assistants. DANB certification is not required, but highly desirable for the appointment of Dental Assistants up to and including the full performance level, **and is required for all positions above the full performance level.**]

[(5)] **Loss of Credential.** An employee in this occupation who fails to obtain licensure/certification/registration within the required time frame, or who fails to maintain the required licensure/certification/registration must be removed from the occupation, which may also result in termination of employment.

d. **Grandfathering Provision.** All persons 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, including [] certification [(for positions above the full performance level)] 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)] Such employees [] may be reassigned, promoted up to and including the full performance (journey) level, or [changed to lower grade] within the occupation, but may not be promoted beyond the journey level or placed in supervisory or managerial positions. Such employees [MUST] meet the [certification] requirement before they can be promoted to those higher grade levels.

[(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)] Employees initially grandfathered into this occupation, who subsequently obtain additional education and/or licensure/certification/registration that meet all the basic requirements of this qualification standard must maintain the required credentials as a condition of employment in the occupation.

[(4)] If an employee who was retained [] under this provision leaves [the] 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.** Dental assistants must be proficient in spoken and written English in accordance with chapter 2, section D, paragraph 5a, this part.

4. GRADE REQUIREMENTS

a. Definitions

(1) Creditable Experience

(a) **Knowledge of Current Professional Dental Assistant Practices.** To be creditable, the experience must have required the use of knowledge, skills, abilities [(KSAs)], and other characteristics (also referred to as “core competencies”) associated with current professional dental assisting practice. Evidence of such experience includes graduation from a certified dental assisting training program, experience in private practice, VHA, Department of Defense (DoD), or other federal[, state, community or charitable] health care agency.

(b) **Quality of Experience.** Experience is only creditable after the training program certifies that the individual has completed all required courses, an internship if it is part of the program, and graduated with passing grades.

(c) **Part-Time Experience.** Part-time experience as a dental assistant is credited according to its relationship to full-time workweek. For example, a dental assistant would receive 1 week of full-time credit for each 2 weeks of half-time work.

(2) **[Expanded Function Level.** Expanded function level is defined as possessing the training and ability to provide independent and expert dental procedures as well as providing clinical assistance to the treating dentists in more complex procedural cases. The expanded function dental assistant has an increased depth and breadth of dental practice skills, and has mastered a range of dental procedures and interventions and provides direct patient care within the scope of practice. Examples of procedures may be diagnostic, restorative and/or surgical in nature. The expanded function dental assistant will make independent professional decisions and recommendations to the treating dentist and interdisciplinary care teams. The expanded functional dental assistant has the expertise to participate in the professional development of colleagues through mentorship and teaching].

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-3**

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

(b) **Assignment.** Employees at this level serve in dental assistant career development positions. It is expected that they receive guidance from more experienced staff members for more complex patient issues, and require daily close supervision.

(2) **GS-4**

(a) **Experience or Education.** In addition to the basic requirements, 1 year of experience at the next lower level, OR 2 years of education above high school that included completion of a dental assistant program accredited by the American Dental Association's Commission on [Dental] Accreditation [(CODA)]. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

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

1. [Basic knowledge of infection control and safe instrument handling].

2. Basic knowledge of dental procedures and [medical emergencies].

3. [Ability to perform basic radiographic image capture and processing/retrieval].

4. Basic knowledge of maintenance, care and storage of dental equipment.

5. Basic knowledge of patient privacy requirements.]

(c) **Assignment.** Employees at this level serve as [developmental] staff dental assistants. It is expected that they receive guidance from more experienced staff members for more complex patient issues and require daily and direct contact at the site of work from the assigned supervisor. [Assignments at this level include but are not limited to: receiving and preparing patient for treatment including seating, positioning chair, placing napkin, performing disinfection and sterilization procedures; performing basic chair side assisting with direct instruction from treating dentist; reporting medical emergencies to dentist; preparing procedural trays/armamentaria set-ups; exposing and processing basic dental radiographs with direct supervision; mounting and labeling dental radiographs and/or saving digital images to the electronic medical record with direct supervision; complying with standard recommendation for equipment maintenance; retrieving all pertinent patient records prior to seating the dental patient; directing patient to appropriate staff for the intent of scheduling visits.]

(3) **GS-5**

(a) **Experience or Education**

(1) [In addition to the requirements listed at GS-4 above, applicants must demonstrate] at least 1 year of experience [equivalent to] at the next lower grade level that demonstrates the core competencies described at that level. []

OR,

(2) Successful completion of a full 4-year course of study that included or was supplemented by completion of a dental assistant program by [CODA].

(3) In addition to meeting paragraph (1) or (2) above, the applicant must demonstrate the following KSA's:]

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

1. Knowledge of anatomy and [ability to evaluate diagnostic quality] .

2. [Broad knowledge of common medical emergencies and vital signs measurement].

3. [Basic] knowledge of instruments, materials and standardized dental procedures [].

4. [Ability to learn and utilize software programs used within VHA].

5. [Basic communication skills to provide patient instructions according to established protocol].

[]

(c) **Assignment.** Employees at this level serve as staff dental assistants [for routine dental procedures. Direct supervision is given for any complex patient procedures from

more experienced dental assistants or the treating dentist]. [Assignments at this level include but are not limited to: responds to basic medical emergencies; measures and records vital signs; provides pre- and post- operative instructions; maintains a field of operation during dental procedures through the use of retraction, suction, irrigation, drying, placing and removing cotton rolls; using the concepts of four- handed dentistry, assists with basic restorative procedures; mixes basic dental materials; assists in preparation of laboratory prescription forms; applies pressure indicator paste to removable prostheses; exposes and processes basic dental radiographs; mounts and labels dental radiographs and/or saves digital imaging to electronic medical records; evaluates radiographs for diagnostic quality; maintains routine dental equipment per manufacturer and dental service standards.]

(4) **GS-6 [Staff Dental Assistant (Full Performance Level)]**

(a) **Experience.** At least 1 year of experience [equivalent to] the next lower grade level that demonstrates the core competencies described at that level. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate the [following] technical KSAs []:

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

1. [Ability to identify normal oral anatomy.
2. Advanced knowledge of instruments, materials, and standardized dental procedures used in all phases of restorative, surgical, endodontic and periodontal care and procedures.
3. Ability to monitor and perform basic interpretation of vital signs.
4. Ability to independently provide procedure-specific patient education and appropriate referral of patient concerns to treating dentist.
5. Ability to capture standard and special dental images of good diagnostic quality in traditional or digital formats.
6. Ability to perform maintenance on dental equipment used for routine and specialty dentistry.
7. Ability to enter and retrieve data utilizing electronic dental records.
8. Ability to perform dental assistant-appropriate laboratory procedures]

(c) **Assignment.** [Employee serves at the full performance level with the ability to perform full range of duties with some independence in assigned specialties, with indirect supervision from the lead dental assistant, dental assistant supervisor or treating dentist. Assignments at this level include, but are not limited to: using the concepts of four-handed dentistry; assists with specialty procedures including oral surgery, periodontal therapy, endodontic,

prosthodontic and implant placement and restoration; anticipates surgeons/specialists needs at each stage of treatment; takes preliminary impressions; selects and manipulates a variety of gypsums and waxes; pours, trims and evaluates the quality of diagnostic casts; fabricates custom trays.

(5) **GS-7 Clinical Expanded Function Dental Assistant or Lead Dental Assistant.** At this level, dental assistants serve either as a Clinical Expanded Function Dental Assistant or Lead Dental Assistant. For all positions above the full performance level, duties must be assigned to the position at least 25% of the time.

(a) **Clinical Expanded Function Dental Assistant**

1. Experience. At least 1 year of experience at the next lower grade level or equivalent that demonstrates the core competencies described at that level. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate the following technical KSAs:

2. Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

a. Ability to perform dental assisting expanded functions.

b. Comprehensive working knowledge of advanced imaging techniques in order to provide instruction (e.g. cone beam, cephalometric, advanced panoramic imaging, TMJ, etc).

3. Assignment: In this position, the employee performs a higher level, scope, complexity and variety representing the clinical assignment, and applies advanced clinical skills. Representative duties at this level include, but are not limited to: gathering diagnostic information, pulp vitality testing, charting of existing conditions, placing of rubber dam and matrices, selecting shades, placing retraction cord, placing and removing temporary restorations, fabricating temporary crowns and removing permanent cement from supragingival surfaces. In addition, the expanded function assistant may place and remove surgical dressing, monitor nitrous oxide analgesia, and perform coronal polishing and the cleaning and polishing of removable prostheses.

(b) **GS-7 Lead Dental Assistant**

1. Experience. At least 1 year of experience at the next lower grade level that demonstrates the core competencies described at that level. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate the following technical KSAs:

2. Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

a. Advanced knowledge of dental assisting across multiple areas of practice, and demonstrated ability to provide guidance to staff dental assistants.

- b. Skill in coordinating clinical work flow and assignments.
- c. Ability to assist in dental program development, outcome management, and strategic planning.
- d. Skill in acting as liaison between staff dental assistants and the supervisor.
- e. Ability to provide professional oversight and consultation for staff dental assistants.

3. **Assignment.** The Lead Dental Assistant works with the supervisor or Chief Dental Service to monitor and make work assignments, provide input on performance, resolve daily workplace issues, and maintain efficient flow of patient care; may approve brief periods of leave, provide training to staff dental assistants, students and/or trainees; may recommend special advancements and promotions, disciplinary actions, etc. Assignments at this level include but are not limited to: provides instruction to other assistants in achieving diagnostic quality radiographs, provides instruction in maintenance of all dental service equipment, provides primary support to the chief for the daily delivery of department programs, reporting, staffing and scheduling, coordinates the patients' care plans to reduce redundancies and delay in patient treatment. Lead Dental Assistants generally would be found in Complexity Level 1 (High Complexity) or Complexity Level 2 (Medium Complexity) facilities, or in facilities of lesser complexity levels where large dental services are found. Individuals may perform ancillary assignments, including program management duties on an occasional basis.

(6) GS-8 Senior Clinical Expanded Function Dental Assistant or Supervisory Dental Assistant. At this level, dental assistants serve either as a Senior Clinical Expanded Function Dental Assistant or Supervisory Dental Assistant. For all positions above the full performance level, duties must be assigned to the position at least 25% of the time.

(a) GS-8 Senior Clinical Expanded Function Dental Assistant

1. **Experience.** At least 1 year of experience at the next lower grade level or equivalent that demonstrates the core competencies described at that level. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate the following technical KSAs.

2. **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**

- a. Competency in expanded functions to include placement and finishing of permanent restorative materials such as amalgam and/or composite; or recording of final impressions.
- b. Comprehensive and thorough knowledge of all aspects of dental imaging.

3. **Assignment.** Representative duties at this level include, but are not limited to: supragingival scaling; placing pit and fissure sealants; placing and finishing permanent restorative materials such as amalgam, glass ionomer or composite resin; making final impressions and adjusting dentures, applying pit and fissure sealants, placing liners and bases, carving amalgams, placing, curing and finishes composite resin restorations. Responsible for the imaging quality

control program, troubleshooting and appropriate referral of identified imaging issues. Participates in developing equipment requests and justifications based on workload analysis. Specialty functions may include managing post-surgical bleeding, tying-in arch wires and selecting and placing orthodontic brackets.

(b) **GS-8 Supervisory Dental Assistant**

1. Experience. At least 1 year of experience at the next lower grade level that demonstrates the core competencies described at that level. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate the following technical KSAs and demonstrate the potential to acquire the assignment specific KSAs designated by an asterisk (*)

2. Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

a. Advanced knowledge of dental assisting across multiple areas of practice, and the demonstrated ability to provide guidance to staff dental assistants.

b. Skill in coordinating clinical work flow and assignments.

c. Ability to assist the Chief in Dental Clinic operations related to policy development, equipment requests and workload analysis.

d. Ability to establish and maintain effective and cooperative work relationships.

e. Ability to analyze clinically appropriate data effectively to optimize quality, performance, and productivity within section.

f. *Ability to perform supervisory functions such as assessing competency, providing performance appraisals and managing training.

3. Assignment. The supervisory dental assistant is responsible for the supervision, administrative management, and direction of dental assistants. The incumbent may be delegated full administrative and professional responsibility for planning and directing the dental assisting activities for the service or equivalent unit at an independent outpatient clinic. They have full supervisory responsibility over a section or equivalent work unit which would require three or more dental assistants. Typical duties include: making work assignments, monitoring of staff dental assistant clinical performance, conducting performance appraisals, and other clinical and administrative responsibilities as assigned by the Service Chief to ensure that the mission of the service and the medical center has been satisfied].

5. DEVIATIONS

a. The appointing official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for dental assistants 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. Under no circumstances will the certification requirements of radiologic competence be waived.
- c. The placement of individuals in grade levels 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)