

August 27, 2012

QUALIFICATIONS FOR EXAMINERS PERFORMING COMPENSATION AND PENSION (C&P) MENTAL DISORDER EXAMINATIONS

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive establishes policy for VHA clinicians and managers regarding the professional qualifications required to perform Compensation and Pension (C&P) examinations for mental disorders.

2. BACKGROUND

a. On March 15, 2006, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) issued C&P Fast Letter 06-03, Qualifications for Examiners Performing C&P Mental Disorder Examinations. This VHA Directive is issued to provide similar directions to VHA personnel.

b. The objective of a C&P mental disorder examination is to obtain competent, critical, objective, and unbiased evaluations. To ensure that examination providers are competent to provide findings and opinions that are valid and sufficient for rating purposes, individuals who conduct C&P mental disorder examinations have specific qualifications and must have completed the required training as discussed in subparagraphs 4a and 4b. Qualified providers are permitted to conduct initial mental disorder examinations. In addition to those individuals, certain other providers are permitted to conduct review or increase mental disorder examinations as discussed in subparagraph 4c.

c. To maintain the integrity of the patient-provider relationship, it is preferable that a Veteran's treating mental health provider not perform the C&P examination on the mental health provider's own patients.

3. POLICY: It is VHA policy that each mental health professional who conducts a VHA C&P examination for mental disorder be appropriately qualified.

4. ACTION: Each facility Director, or designee, is responsible for ensuring that:

a. **Mental Health Professionals Conducting C&P Examinations for Mental Disorders are Clinically Privileged.** The mental health professional who conducts a C&P examination for a mental disorder must be clinically privileged, as governed by applicable law and the policies established at individual VHA facilities, to perform or supervise the performance of the following activities as required for all C&P examinations for mental disorders. The mental health professional must be able to:

(1) Diagnose mental disorders, including personality disorders, using the nomenclature in the most current edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

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(2) Provide an assessment of each Veteran using the multi-axial system as set forth in DSM with a narrative explanation of the Axis V determination.

(3) Determine when clinician-administered psychometric testing is necessary and integrate the results of such testing into the examination reports.

(4) Document the Veteran's past and current mental health treatment and the Veteran's subjective response to these treatments in order to assess response to treatment and potential for further improvement.

(5) Provide a prognosis with respect to each mental disorder or condition.

(6) When necessary, comment on the significance of the Veteran's prior mental health assessments (as reported) with respect to symptoms, occupational history, social history, and global assessment of functioning.

(7) Identify Veterans presenting with complex diagnostic questions or other issues that are beyond the examiner's expertise, and refer those identified Veterans to a board-certified, or board-eligible, psychiatrist or a licensed doctoral-level psychologist who has the expertise necessary to complete the C&P mental disorder examination.

(8) Ensure that Veterans and Servicemembers who present with a history of a mental health diagnosis, or with any of the suicide warning signs or risk factors, have a further suicide risk assessment which can be completed either by the examiner or by referral, secondary to the C&P examination process. The Veterans and Servicemembers, regardless of risk, must be given the Veterans Crisis Line number: 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

b. **Examiner Qualification Requirements for Initial Mental Disorder Examinations Are Met.** Mental health professionals with the following credentials are qualified to perform initial C&P examinations for mental disorders. They are:

(1) Board-certified psychiatrists.

(2) Psychiatrists who have successfully completed an accredited psychiatry residency and who are appropriately credentialed and privileged.

(3) Licensed doctoral-level psychologist.

(4) Non-licensed doctoral-level psychologists working toward licensure under close supervision by a board-certified, or board-eligible, psychiatrist or a licensed doctoral-level psychologist.

(5) Psychiatry residents under close supervision by a board-certified, or board-eligible, psychiatrist or a licensed doctoral-level psychologist.

(6) Psychology interns or residents under close supervision by a board-certified, or board-eligible, psychiatrist or a licensed doctoral-level psychologist. *NOTE: Close supervision means that the supervising psychiatrist or psychologist met with the Veteran and conferred with the examining mental health professional in providing the diagnosis and the final assessment. The supervising psychiatrist or psychologist co-signs the examination report.*

c. **Examiner Qualification Requirements for Review or Increase of C&P Mental Disorder Examinations Are Met.** Mental health professionals with the following credentials are qualified to perform review or increase C&P mental disorder examinations. They are:

(1) Mental health professionals qualified to perform initial C&P mental disorder examinations (see preceding subpar. 4b).

(2) Other mental health professionals, such as licensed clinical social workers, nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, and physician assistants who meet the requirements specified in subparagraph 4a, under close supervision by a board-certified, or board-eligible, psychiatrist or licensed doctoral-level psychologist. *NOTE: Close supervision means that the supervising psychiatrist or psychologist met with the Veteran and conferred with the examining mental health professional in providing the diagnosis and the final assessment. The supervising psychiatrist or psychologist co-signs the examination report.*

d. **Documentation of Qualified Examiners is Completed.** As required in the C&P examination worksheets or Disability Benefits Questionnaires, examining mental health professionals must sign the reports and, if applicable, obtain the signature of the supervising psychiatrist or psychologist. Signatures must include the individual's professional credentials (e.g., Doctor of Medicine (MD), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Doctor of Psychology (PsyD)). *NOTE: These signatures denote compliance with the requirements of this Directive.*

e. **Examinations are Returned as Inadequate for Rating Purposes, if Necessary.** A C&P examination for mental health disorder may be returned to VHA by VBA as inadequate for rating purposes, when the exam:

(1) Does not include the examiner's credentials and signature.

(2) Does not include the signature of a board-certified or board-eligible psychiatrist or a licensed doctoral-level psychologist.

5. REFERENCES: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-IV-TR (Text Revision), American Psychiatric Association, June 2000.

6. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: The Office of Disability and Medical Assessment (10NC8) is responsible for the contents of this VHA Directive. Questions may be addressed to the Office of Disability and Medical Assessment at (202) 461-6699.

7. RESCISSIONS: VHA Directive 2006-013, dated March 7, 2006, is rescinded. This VHA Directive expires August 31, 2017.

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