

STAFFING

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: To revise the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for nurse anesthetists appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(1) and 7405.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES: This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. The pages in this handbook replace the existing Nurse Anesthetist Qualification Standard in VA Handbook 5005, Appendix II-G7 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. Deletes the entry level grade of Nurse I and changes the entry level grade to Nurse II. This change is based on the level of education and experience required for entry into the certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA) profession.

b. Changes the full performance grade level from Nurse II to Nurse III.

c. Adds advanced practice skills requirements to the entry level based on new education and training requirements in the CRNA profession. This change is based on the current preparation time of a CRNA from the commencement of the professional education in nursing now being a minimum of 7 years of education and training.

d. Adds a section with clarifying language regarding exceptions to the qualification standard for graduate nurse anesthetists. The exceptions clause clarifies that graduate nurse anesthetists may be employed under the authority of 38 U.S.C. § 7405(a)(1)(D) for a period of no more than 1 year while obtaining certification requirements.

e. Adds language regarding graduate nurse anesthetists who fail to meet the certification requirements while employed under 38 U.S.C. § 7405(a)(1)(D).

f. Adds clarifying language regarding nurse anesthetists maintaining their certification requirements and those who lose their credentials while employed in VA.

g. Adds a grandfathering section to the standard for those nurse anesthetists who do not possess the new qualification requirements at the time of approval of the new qualification standard.

h. Emphasizes job experience as a critical factor for nurse anesthetists advancing beyond the entry level.

i. Changes the former Nurse IV grade level assignment titled Chief Nurse Anesthetist and/or a Director, School of Nurse Anesthesia to the title of Chief/Educator, with subsections of Chief or Administrative CRNA and Educator-Coordinator. The experience level for these assignments has decreased to 5 years.

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: VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix G7, "Nurse Anesthetist Qualification Standard," dated April 15, 2002.

CERTIFIED BY:

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

/s/
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[APPENDIX G7. NURSE ANESTHETIST QUALIFICATION STANDARD
Veterans Health Administration

1. COVERAGE. Following are the overall requirements for appointment as a nurse anesthetist in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

2. SECTION A: BASIC REQUIREMENTS

a. **Citizenship.** Citizen of the United States. (Non-citizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit for qualified citizens in accordance with chapter 3, section A, paragraph 3g, of this part.)

b. **Education**

(1) A degree in nursing from a school of professional nursing approved by the appropriate state-accrediting agency and accredited by one of the following accrediting bodies at the time the program was completed by the applicant:

(a) The National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC), an accrediting arm of the National League for Nursing located at 61 Broadway, 33rd Floor, New York, New York 10006. Additional information may be obtained from the [NLNAC Web site](#); or

(b) The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), an accrediting arm of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN). The CCNE accredits bachelor's and master's degree programs and is located at One Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 530, Washington, DC 20036. Additional information may be obtained from the [CCNE Web site](#).

(c) In cases of graduates of foreign schools of professional nursing, possession of a current, full, and unrestricted registration (see basic requirement in subparagraph c below) and the possession of a Certificate from the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) will meet the requirement of graduation from an approved school of professional nursing.

(2) Graduate of an accredited nurse anesthesia educational program approved by the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA) at the time the program was completed by the applicant. The AANA has compiled current listings of approved training institutions, which are published annually in the December issue of the *American Association of Nurse Anesthetists Journal*. The American Hospital Association in their "Guide to the Health Care Field" also publishes listings of approved training institutions annually in August.

c. **Registration**

(1) **Condition of Employment.** Current, full, active and unrestricted registration as a graduate professional nurse in a State, Territory or Commonwealth (i.e., Puerto Rico) of the United States or the District of Columbia. The nurse anesthetist must maintain a current, full, active and unrestricted registration to continue employment with VA. The appointing official may waive this requirement if the nurse anesthetist is to serve in a country other than the United States and has registration in that country (e.g. Philippines).

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(2) **Impaired Registration.** A nurse anesthetist who has, or has ever had, any registration(s) revoked, suspended, denied, restricted, limited, or issued/placed in a probationary status may be appointed only in accordance with the provisions of chapter 3, section B, paragraph 15 of this part.

d. Certification

(1) On and after May 4, 1993, certification by the Council on Certification of Nurse Anesthetists is a requirement for employment. This requirement does not apply to non-certified nurse anesthetists employed by VA as a nurse anesthetist prior to May 4, 1993 and continuously thereafter. Any nurse anesthetist who leaves VA employment or vacates the nurse anesthetist occupation for another VA position, must meet the current requirement of certification for re-appointment as a nurse anesthetist. The CCNA and the Council on Recertification of Nurse Anesthetists have designated the AANA's web site as a display agent for their information.

(2) Nurse Anesthetists will maintain recertification by meeting the Council on Recertification of Nurse Anesthetist's requirements as a condition of employment.

e. Loss of Credential. An employee in this occupation who fails to maintain the required licensure/certification/registration must be removed from the occupation, which may also result in termination of employment (see VA Handbook 5005, part II, chapter 3, paragraph 17). An employee who fails to maintain the CCNA certification may, at the discretion of the appointing official, be reassigned to another occupation (i.e. staff RN) for which he/she qualifies, if a placement opportunity exists.

f. Grandfathering Provision. All nurse anesthetists 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 positive education and licensure/certification/registration that are part of the basic requirements of the occupation. Nurse anesthetists who are grandfathered under the provisions of this subparagraph may be reassigned, promoted up to and including the full performance (journey) level (Nurse III), but may not be promoted beyond the journey level or placed in supervisory or managerial positions.

g. Recent Graduates

(1) A graduate nurse anesthetist who has applied to take the national Certification Examination and has been declared Certification Eligible may be given a temporary appointment for a period not to exceed one year as a graduate nurse anesthetist under the authority of 38 U.S.C. § 7405(a)(1)(D). The graduate nurse anesthetist must take the national Certification Examination at the earliest schedulable date following the date of their temporary appointment. At the time of appointment as a graduate nurse anesthetist, the Chief, Anesthesia Section or Service Chief/Product Line Manager will provide the graduate nurse anesthetist a copy of this section of the qualification standard and make clear the consequences for not becoming certified during the 1-year temporary appointment. Upon certification by the CCNA, the graduate nurse anesthetist will be converted to an appointment under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(1).

(2) Failure to become certified within the one year period will result in removal as a nurse anesthetist and may result in termination from employment.

h. **Physical Requirements.** See VA Directive and Handbook 5019.

i. **English Language Proficiency.** Nurse Anesthetists must be proficient in spoken and written English in accordance with chapter 2, section D, paragraph 5a, this part.

3. SECTION B. GRADE REQUIREMENTS

a. General

(1) **Recency and Quality of Experience.** Recency or quality of training and experience in anesthetic techniques should be carefully reviewed when determining the appropriate grade. To be creditable, experience must demonstrate possession of knowledge, skills and abilities related to the current practice of nurse anesthesia. The importance of specific types of experience or training may vary according to the intended assignment.

(2) **Grades.** The level that nurse anesthesia practice may be performed is based on a combination of education and experience. Beyond the minimum education requirements, grade determination upon appointment and advancement is dependent more on acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities than baseline education. As the nurse anesthetist acquires the knowledge and judgment that accrues with experience, the privilege of increased authority for patient care is expanded.

(3) **Research.** At any grade, nurse anesthetists may assist in or conduct approved research projects relative to anesthesia care that enhances their knowledge and skills in the profession.

b. **Part-Time Experience.** Part-time experience as a nurse anesthetist is credited according to the relationship to a full work week. For example, a nurse anesthetist employed 20 hours per week on a half-time basis would receive 1 full-time work week credit for 2 weeks of such service.

c. **Grade Determination.** In addition to the basic requirements stated above, the following qualification criteria must be met in determining the appropriate grade assignment of candidates:

(1) **Entry Level: (Nurse II)**

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

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** The following list of knowledge, skills and abilities present the minimum skill set expected of an Entry Level Nurse Anesthetist. Entry level into nurse anesthesia practice may include but are not limited to the following:

1. Ability to translate the principles of professional nursing practice in the care of assigned patients in order to provide appropriate care.

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2. Ability to do a pre-anesthetic patient history and physical, which includes collecting pre-operative consults and data.
3. Ability to formulate an anesthetic plan and describe the anesthetic risks, benefits and options to the patient.
4. Ability to administer inhalation, regional, intravenous, local, and topical anesthetics and to detect unfavorable reactions in order to continuously evaluate the patient's physical status.
5. Ability to respond to emergency situations by providing airway management, administration of emergency fluids and drugs, and using appropriate resuscitation procedures for patient care.
6. Ability to provide patient care that is abreast of changing concepts and advancements in the profession.
7. Ability to work effectively in an interdisciplinary environment for improvement of services for patient care.
8. Ability to practice nurse anesthesia with colleagues and peers utilizing a collaborative team concept of anesthesia care.

(2) Full Performance Level: (Nurse III)

(a) **Experience and Education.** In addition to meeting the requirements for Entry Level, the CRNA has had progressively responsible experience in the administration of anesthetics as indicated in the knowledge, skills and abilities listed below. These individuals must demonstrate the ability to participate in a program for nurse anesthesia care and demonstrate knowledge of anesthetizing locations, methods, equipment and procedures. At this level, the CRNA has experience in the administration of anesthetics that has demonstrated the nurse anesthetist's ability to participate in team programs that are technically challenging and/or complicated. Typically candidates can demonstrate the knowledge, skills and abilities of Full Performance Level within 2 years from entering the occupation.

(b) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** Full Performance Level practice in nurse anesthesia includes but is not limited to the following:

1. Skill in conducting and managing anesthesia for a broad range of complex surgical procedures. In addition, the CRNA must be able to adapt/modify anesthesia techniques in order to optimize patient care.
2. Ability to complete work assignments selected to add depth and breadth to their technical knowledge and skill competence. Work assignments will vary at each facility depending on the progressive acuity required for anesthesia care.
3. Ability to respond to emergency situations by providing airway management, administration of emergency fluids and drugs, and by the use of basic or advanced cardiac life support techniques in order to perform necessary resuscitation procedures.

4. Ability to effectively blend technology, skills, and competency for the advancement of anesthesia techniques, pharmacology, and equipment.
5. Ability to apply new developments and theories to develop and demonstrate the ability to recognize and solve various complex anesthesia situations.
6. Ability to practice nurse anesthesia with colleagues and peers in a team concept of anesthesia care and blend management skills with technical experience.
7. Ability to recognize clinical and technical aspects of anesthesia care and has in-depth knowledge of anesthesia methods and techniques for the practice of anesthesia.
8. Ability to perform as a mentor, preceptor, or nurse educator providing didactic and clinical instruction for graduate-level nurse anesthesia students and/or other anesthesia care providers.
9. Ability to participate in the development of anesthesia patient care audit processes involving in depth review and analysis of anesthesia records.
10. Ability to provide guidance and instruction in preparing others for positions of leadership and ethical practices which impact patient care.

(3) **Chief/Educator Level: (Nurse IV)**

(a) **Specific Assignment: Chief Nurse Anesthetist/Administrative Nurse Anesthetist**

1. Experience or Education. At this level, emphasis is placed on strategic planning and administrative/managerial responsibilities. The Chief Nurse Anesthetist /Administrative Nurse Anesthetist makes recommendations that may significantly affect the content, interpretation, or development of VA policies or programs concerning critical matters or major issues within the anesthesia arena. They are assigned positions/studies where limited guidance exists as to the method of evaluation for the potential experience identified or, where possible, new experiences need to be identified. Regularly provides anesthesia care in unusually extensive and complex surgical procedures that are of prolonged duration and involve high-risk patients, including development of individualized programs of post-op anesthesia care. A specific assigned Chief Nurse Anesthetist/Administrative Nurse Anesthetist may be a first line supervisor and/or have administrative responsibility for anesthesia staff. Individuals assigned to this level generally require approximately 5 years of progressively responsible leadership assignments in clinical, administrative, educational and/or research related to nurse anesthesia practice.

NOTE: *The Deputy Director, National Anesthesia Service, is given the opportunity to comment on appointments of nurse anesthetists to Section Chief positions (see VA Handbook 5005, part II, appendix H6.)*

2. Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities. Nurse Anesthetists at this level must have the ability to perform long and short-term planning goals for their anesthesia department. Chief Nurse Anesthetist /Administrative Nurse Anesthetist functions may include, but are not limited to, the following:

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- a. Ability to perform scheduling and supervise staff, students, or ancillary personnel to include conducting performance evaluations in order to effectively execute responsibilities.
- b. Knowledge to accept substantial and continuing responsibility and accountability for planning, organizing, directing, and controlling an integrated program.
- c. Ability to serve on committee meetings, departmental reviews, problem-focused studies, problem solving, interventions, and process oversight in order to justify program goals and motivate assigned personnel.
- d. Skill in design and management of budget and cost benefit analysis in order to ensure optimal stewardship of resources.
- e. Ability to exercise independent judgment, perform tasks of unusual difficulty along special technical, supervisory, or administrative lines. These practitioners may develop protocols of anesthesia practice.
- f. Ability to provide analytical techniques and problem solving related to drug interaction and pathological changes during the anesthesia course.
- g. Ability to provide leadership in the application of the nursing process to patient care, organization processes and/or systems, improving outcomes at the program or service level.
- h. Knowledge to participate in the audit of anesthesia care, recommending changes where indicated.

(b) Specific Assignment: Educator-Coordinator**1. General**

- a. The CRNA Educator-Coordinator coordinates an education program, Phase I (non-clinical) and/or Phase II (clinical), for nurse anesthesia students or health care trainees who rotate through the VA Healthcare System. This CRNA will have an academic appointment from an accredited school of nurse anesthesia.
- b. Assignment to the Educator-Coordinator role must represent a significant commitment to the education of students, beyond the occasional preceptorship. The Educator-Coordinator must also demonstrate a commitment to in-service training for staff, and facility continuing education in order to provide accurate information to the population serviced.
- c. The Educator-Coordinator must have administrative and technical responsibility for maintaining professional standards of practice in accordance with the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs (COA). This may include development of the orientation programs for the students, journal club, scheduling, counseling and grading students, monitoring cases, assisting with research projects, coordinating with didactic instructors and clinical anesthesia staff for student progress.

d. The Educator-Coordinator must also assist and provide development opportunities for primary clinical instructors and other department members to maintain their skills and keep current with progressive technical knowledge.

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

a. Ability to serve as interdepartmental liaison, interfacing with other departments such as nursing, surgery, PACU, outpatient surgery, admissions, administration, laboratory, pharmacy, etc., in order to incorporate the expertise of all disciplines in a comprehensive, integrated approach to care.

b. Knowledge to provide advice and assistance to other nurse anesthetists in unusually difficult or complex cases.

c. Ability to perform clinical and didactic teaching, commitment to in-service training for staff, and facility continuing education in order to provide accurate information to population serviced.

d. Ability to provide feedback to students, faculty and the Program Director in a timely fashion.

e. Skills for the development, implementation, evaluation and on-going updating of the clinical curriculum and evaluation.

f. Ability to administer, evaluate and provide sound statistical research, which may promote clinical and didactic evolution and expertise in the field of anesthesia.

g. Knowledge to implement educational strategies to meet changes, clinically, academically, and professionally, related to nurse anesthesia.

h. May chair or co-chair graduate level research in order to assist students in researching, reviewing/approving research proposal and finished product.

i. Knowledge to support and prepare for the program's accreditation process by the COA of Nurse Anesthesia.

j. Ability to facilitate communication between students, faculty, and other site coordinators to oversee/manage the clinical education of students.

(4) **Nurse V.** For highly qualified candidates with program responsibilities which significantly exceed the minimum scope and complexity of those described for Nurse IV, the Under Secretary for Health or designee may approve assignment at Nurse V on a case-by-case basis. Typically, this assignment (i.e. Deputy Director, Anesthesia Service, VACO) will be restricted to individuals who are responsible for managing a national program.

4. DEVIATIONS

a. The approving official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for nurse anesthetists in VHA whose composite record of

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accomplishments, performance, and qualifications, as well as current assignments, warrant such action based on demonstrated competence to meet the requirements of the proposed grade.

b. Under no circumstances will the educational or credential requirements be waived.

c. The placement of individuals in assignments at the highest grade level described in this standard must be approved by the Under Secretary for Health, or designee, in VHA Central Office.

Authority: 38 U.S.C. 7304; 7402]