

STAFFING

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: To revise the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for the appointment of Dental Hygienist, GS-682, in VA.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES: This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. The pages in this handbook replace the existing Dental Hygienist Qualification Standard in VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix G37, in its entirety. Any dental hygienist on the rolls at the GS-4 grade level on the effective date of this revision should be promoted to GS-5 effective the pay period following approval of these qualification standards, provided they meet all administrative requirements. In addition, any dental hygienist on the rolls at the GS-8 grade level on the effective date of this revision should be promoted to GS-9 effective the pay period following approval of these qualification standards, provided they meet all administrative requirements. Supervisors should review the functional statements of all employees in comparison with the changes in the new qualification standard and make revisions as appropriate. Promotions and/or advancements of employees on the rolls on the date of this change may be recommended by the supervisor in accordance with VA Handbook 5005, Part III, Chapter 4. **NOTE:** *There will NOT be an initial one-time boarding.* 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, Staffing, that is maintained on the [Office of Human Resources Management Web site](#). Significant changes include:

- a. Adds education to the basic requirements.
- b. Removes GS-4 entry level assignment.
- c. Revises the assignments at the GS-05 through the GS-08 levels.
- d. Designates the GS-09 as the full performance level.
- e. Adds new titles and assignments for a GS-10 Advanced Clinical Dental Hygienist, Lead Dental Hygienist and Supervisory Dental Hygienist.
- f. Adds new titles and assignments for a GS-11 Senior Clinical Dental Hygienist and Supervisory Dental Hygienist.

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

5. RESCISSIONS: VA Handbook 5005/15, Part II, Appendix G37, dated March 17, 2006.

CERTIFIED BY:

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

/s/
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Executive in Charge and Chief Information Officer
Office of Information and Technology

/s/
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Assistant Secretary for
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[APPENDIX G37. DENTAL HYGIENIST QUALIFICATION STANDARD
GS-682
Veterans Health Administration

1. COVERAGE. The following are requirements for appointment as a Dental Hygienist in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Dental Hygienists perform a wide variety of interventions which contribute to the overall oral health of Veterans. The work requires a professional knowledge of the field of dental hygiene and the biomedical sciences that relate to dentistry. These requirements apply to all VHA dental hygienists in the General Schedule (GS)-682 series.

2. 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. **Education.** Associate Degree or higher in an accredited dental hygiene program. This program must be accredited by the American Dental Association's Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA).

c. **Licensure.** Applicants must be currently licensed to practice as a dental hygienist with a full, current, and unrestricted license in a State, Territory, or Commonwealth of the United States, or the District of Columbia.

d. **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. Accredited dental hygiene programs contain curriculum addressing radiologic procedures which will meet the requirement for certification as dental radiographers.

(1) **Exception.** Non-certified applicants, who otherwise meet the eligibility requirements for licensure, may be given a temporary appointment as a graduate dental hygienist under the authority of 38 U.S.C. § 7405(c)(2)(B) for a period not to exceed 2 years. Failure to obtain certification during this time period may result in termination of employment.

(2) **Loss of Credential.** A dental hygienist who fails to maintain the required licensure/certification must be removed from the occupation, which may also result in termination of employment.

e. **Grandfathering Provision.** All persons employed in VHA as a dental hygienist 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 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 provisions apply:

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(1) Employees grandfathered into the GS-682 occupational series 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) 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 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 as a dental hygienist 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 as a dental hygienist.

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

g. **English Language Proficiency.** Dental hygienists must be proficient in spoken and written English as required by 38 U.S.C. 7402(d), and 7407(d).

3. GRADE REQUIREMENTS

a. Creditable Experience

(1) **Knowledge of Current Professional Dental Hygienist Practices.** To be creditable, the experience must have required the use of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (also referred to as “clinical competencies”) associated with current professional dental hygiene practice. Evidence of such experience includes experience in private practice, U. S. military services, local/state/federal health care or educational facilities.

(2) **Quality of Experience.** Experience as a dental hygienist in private practice, U.S. military services, local/state/federal health care or educational facilities must be verified with the practitioner or the supervising officers. Experience satisfying this requirement must be active professional practice which may be paid or non-paid employment as a dental hygienist.

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

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-5 Dental Hygienist (Entry Level)

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

(b) **Assignment.** Employees at this level serve in an entry level position as dental hygienists. It is expected that they receive guidance from more experienced staff members for patient issues and require daily supervision at the site of work.

(2) **GS-6 Dental Hygienist (Developmental Level 1)**

(a) **Experience.** At least 1 year of experience at the next lower grade level.

(b) **Assignment.** Employees at this level serve as developmental level 1 dental hygienists. It is expected that they receive guidance from more experienced staff members for complex patient issues and require daily and direct contact at the site of work from the assigned supervisor.

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

1. Knowledge of oral prophylactic, therapeutic, and preventive procedures for periodontal diseases, or inflammation, or on patients with other medical and/or dental problems;
2. Ability to use communication techniques to encourage and inform individuals and groups; and
3. Knowledge of dental methods and techniques used in performing intra and extra oral procedures.

(3) **GS-7 Dental Hygienist (Developmental Level 2)**

(a) **Experience.** At least 1 year of experience at the next lower grade level that demonstrates the clinical competencies described at that level.

(b) **Assignment.** Employees at this level serve as developmental level 2 dental hygienists. It is expected that they perform more complex work while receiving less frequent supervision than at the GS-6 level.

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

1. Knowledge of oral pathology to include disease of the hard and soft tissues, disorders of tooth structure, developmental and congenital anomalies, salivary gland disorders, symptoms of infectious disorders, and appropriate protocols;
2. Practical knowledge of medical diseases, conditions, and chronic degenerative diseases as they relate to dental health and treatment; and
3. Knowledge of radiographic exposure techniques in order to produce radiographs of high diagnostic quality.

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(4) GS-8 Dental Hygienist (Developmental Level 3)

(a) **Experience.** At least 1 year of experience at the next lower grade level that demonstrates the clinical competencies described at that level.

(b) **Assignment.** Employees at this level serve as developmental level 3 dental hygienists with the ability to perform direct patient care under the general supervision of the dentist. It is expected that they receive guidance from higher-level or supervisory staff members for only the most complex patients. Assignments at this level include, but are not limited to: patient assessments (e.g. risk assessments, oral health assessments), prevention recommendations, prophylaxis, periodontal treatment for mild to moderate disease (e.g. scaling and root planing, full mouth debridement), Periodontal Screening and Recording (PSR) radiograph/image capture, fluoride treatment application, topical anesthesia administration, management of stable medically compromised patients (including risk factors).

(c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the KSAs for the GS-7 level, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

1. Knowledge of state of the art preventive dentistry measures for patient instruction and training;
2. Knowledge of anatomy and physiology in order to interpret the examination request accurately; to understand the functioning and interrelationship of the various anatomical structures appearing on the radiographic image and the various stages of the examination to judge the acceptability of the radiograph for diagnostic use; and to present for viewing;
3. Skill in providing individual and group oral health care instructions to inpatients, outpatients, Nursing Home Care Unit patients, etc.; and
4. Knowledge of VA, The Joint Commission (TJC), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and related regulations and guidelines pertaining to dental matters.

(5) GS-9 Dental Hygienist (Full Performance Level)

(a) **Experience.** At least 1 year of experience at the next lower grade level that demonstrates the clinical competencies described at that level.

(b) **Assignments.** Employees at this level serve as staff dental hygienists at the full performance level. It is expected that they provide direct patient care and receive guidance from higher-level or supervisory staff members for only the most complex patients and require only general supervision from a dentist. Assignments at this level include but are not limited to: patient medical assessment (e.g. medical/dental history, social history, vital signs, full periodontal assessment and charting), disease and treatment management recommendations, denture care, scaling and root planing, radiographs/image interpretation, patient education (e.g. post-procedure, tobacco cessation, caries and perio-disease prevention), behavior management, management of stable medically compromised patients (including risk factors), instrument sharpening, inter-service communication.

(c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the KSAs for the GS-8 level, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

1. Ability to assess the patient's medical, dental, anxiety/phobias, medications and comorbidities for safe patient care;
2. Ability to assess the impact of patient's medical and dental condition on maintaining oral health, recognize age-related changes in individual patients, adapt patient environment, and maximize patient's physical comfort;
3. Skill in detecting plaque and calculus, dental abnormalities/pathologies, assessing inflammation and providing safe instrumentation for each procedure;
4. Knowledge to select appropriate available fluoride products and indications/limitations for safe and proper application;
5. Knowledge of hygiene procedures in order to explain the process and indication, complications and expected treatment outcomes for each;
6. Knowledge of proper usage of dental radiography equipment, radiation safety, assessment of proper image capture and interpretation of films; and
7. Skill in educating patients and caregivers on periodontal disease, wellness, health maintenance, oral hygiene practices, parafunctional habits, and effects of illness, addictions, medications and tobacco on the oral cavity.

(6) **GS-10 Dental Hygienist (Advanced Clinical)**

(a) **Experience.** At least 1 year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level that is directly related to the position being filled fully meets the KSAs at that level.

(b) **Assignments.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. At this level, dental hygienists are advanced-level practitioners in assigned areas. Employee assignments may include but are not limited to advanced patient assessments/clinical evaluations (blood glucose levels, medication reconciliation, oral cancer screening, dietary analysis for caries risk, pulse oximeter, comprehensive periodontal charting), prophylaxis in complex restorative cases (e.g. multiple dental implants, orthognathic, post-surgical trauma, etc.), advanced scaling and root planing (ability to use advanced modalities) with or without soft-tissue curettage, advanced radiographic studies (cone beam computed tomography (CT), cephalometric), local anesthesia administration, advanced adjunctive treatment (xerostomia treatment recommendations, sulcular lavage, placement of intrasulcular medicaments, applying and removing periodontal surgical dressings, orthodontic care, sealant placement, occlusion adjustment, placement of desensitizing agents, professional whitening procedures), individual and group oral hygiene instructions for special-needs populations, elevated educational instruction, development of training materials/presentations), management of medically and/or behaviorally compromised patients, and collaboration with other disciplines.

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(c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the KSAs for the GS-9 level, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

1. Knowledge of medical assessment techniques including interviewing and evaluating clinical findings (e.g. normal and critical lab values) to adapt treatment based on medical and psychological issues;
2. Advanced knowledge of oral and dental anatomy including root anatomy, common pathologies and anomalies, and indications for advanced radiographic imaging and proper technique to detect potential abnormalities;
3. Skill in providing safe and thorough prophylaxis, root planing and soft-tissue curettage for complex periodontal and/or restorative cases and skill in providing safe care for patients with complex medical/psychiatric issues;
4. Knowledge of medical treatment adjuncts and indications and the ability to safely administer medicaments (e.g. intrasulcular medicaments, local anesthesia, sulcular lavage, applying and removing periodontal surgical dressing);
5. Knowledge of advanced adjunctive diagnostic and therapeutic equipment, indication for use and ability to utilize safely (e.g. sonic, magnetostrictive ultrasonic, and piezo ultrasonic scalers); and
6. Ability to apply adult education techniques/methods, organize curriculum, judge cognitive ability, and provide healthcare education regarding relationships between medical and dental pathologies to groups, interdisciplinary staff, and other outside contacts.

(7) **GS-10 Lead Dental Hygienist**

(a) **Experience.** At least 1 year of experience at the next lower grade level that demonstrates the clinical competencies described at that level.

(b) **Assignments.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Lead dental hygienists generally are 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. The lead dental hygienist monitors work flow and makes work assignments, provides input on performance, resolves daily workplace issues, and maintains efficient flow of patient care; may approve brief periods of leave, provide training to dental auxiliary staff (dental assistants and/or dental hygienists), 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 dental auxiliary staff (dental assistants and/or dental hygienists) 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 patient care plans to reduce redundancies and delay in patient treatment. Individuals may perform ancillary assignments, including program management duties, on an occasional basis.

(c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the KSAs for the GS-9 level, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

1. Advanced knowledge of dental hygiene and/or dental assisting across multiple types of dental practice, and demonstrated ability to provide guidance to dental auxiliary staff (dental assistants and/or dental hygienists);
2. Ability to monitor and report on the status and progress of work, and make adjustments to accomplish the workload in accordance with established procedures;
3. Ability to assist in dental program development, outcome management, and strategic planning;
4. Ability to act as liaison between dental staff to resolve informal employee complaints and concerns; and
5. Knowledge of procedures and policies to provide oversight and training for dental auxiliary staff (dental assistants and/or dental hygienists).

(8) **GS-10 Supervisory Dental Hygienist**

(a) **Experience.** At least 1 year of experience at the next lower grade level that demonstrates the clinical competencies described at that level.

(b) **Assignments.** For all assignments above the full-performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Supervisory dental hygienists generally are found in Complexity Level 2 (Medium Complexity) or Complexity Level 3 (Low Complexity) facilities. The supervisory dental hygienist is responsible for the supervision, administrative management, and direction of dental auxiliary staff. The incumbent may be delegated full administrative and professional responsibility for planning and directing the dental auxiliary staff activities for the service or equivalent unit at an independent outpatient clinic. Incumbent has full supervisory responsibility over a section or equivalent work unit. Typical duties include: preparing work assignments, monitoring clinical performances of dental auxiliary staff, conducting performance appraisals, and other clinical and administrative responsibilities to ensure that the mission of the service and the medical center has been satisfied. The supervisor assures compliance with accrediting agency and regulatory requirements, establishes and monitors the quality of the pre-analytical processes as part of the overall dental service quality management program, and assures corrective action is initiated as needed. The supervisor assures orientation and competency assessment of assigned staff. Develops policies and procedures, manages document control, develops performance standards, position descriptions and functional statements, and is responsible for professional and administrative management of an assigned area to include budget execution. The supervisor maintains interdepartmental relations with other services to accomplish medical center goals.

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(c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the KSAs for the GS-9 level, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs and demonstrate the potential to acquire the assignment-specific KSAs designated by an asterisk (*):

1. Advanced knowledge of dental hygiene and/or dental assisting across multiple types of dental practice to provide guidance and training to dental auxiliary staff;

2. Skill in coordinating clinical work flow and work assignments;

3. Ability to develop policy, manage equipment requests, and provide workload analysis in Dental Clinic operations;

4. Demonstrated leadership and managerial skills, including skill in interpersonal relations and conflict resolution to deal with employees, team leaders, and managers;

5. Ability to analyze clinically appropriate data and make recommendations to optimize quality, efficiency, performance, and productivity within service; and

*6. Ability to perform the full range of supervisory duties which would include responsibility for assignment of work to be performed; competency assessments; performance evaluations; selection of staff; and recommendation of awards, advancements, and when appropriate, disciplinary actions.

(9) **GS-11 Dental Hygienist (Senior Clinical)**

(a) **Experience.** At least 1 year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level that is directly related to the position being filled fully meets the KSAs at that level.

(b) **Assignments.** For all assignments above the full-performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. At this level, dental hygienists are senior-level clinical practitioners in assigned areas. Assignments may include but are not limited to: comprehensive medical assessment, adaptive treatment of the medically/mentally/physically compromised, use of more advanced adjunctive, diagnostic tools and techniques in patients with severe and recalcitrant periodontal disease, designing customized adaptive aids, participating in patient wellness programs, advanced medical and behavioral management, curriculum and examination fabrication, and giving lectures and presentations.

(c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the KSAs for the GS-10 Advanced Clinical Hygienist level, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

1. Knowledge of comprehensive medical assessment (including contraindications to dental treatment) and appropriate adaptation techniques to provide safe and effective periodontal care in severely compromised patients;

2. Ability to effectively interview, screen and adapt treatment based on findings of medically/mentally/physically compromised patients;

3. Knowledge of more advanced adjunctive, diagnostic tools and techniques (e.g. microscopy, toluidine blue dye, intraoral camera) for monitoring clinical disease processes and patient selection for their indicated use;
4. Skill in designing custom adaptive aids based on assessment of patients' abilities and disabilities and training patients and caregivers for proper usage;
5. Knowledge of tobacco cessation treatments and counseling techniques to select and manage patients in a comprehensive program and make recommendations for prescribing tobacco cessation medications;
6. Knowledge of medical and behavioral management risk factors for medically/mentally/physically compromised patients including indication of administration of adjunctive therapies (e.g. nitrous oxide, self-induced hypnosis techniques); and
7. Ability to write curriculum, examinations, training protocol, present lectures and presentations at the level of dental hygiene school faculty.

(10) **GS-11 Supervisory Dental Hygienist**

(a) **Experience.** At least 1 year of experience at the next lower grade level that demonstrates the clinical competencies described at that level.

(b) **Assignments.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher-level duties must consist of significant scope, complexity (difficulty), and range of variety, and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. Supervisory dental hygienists generally are found in Complexity Level 1 (High Complexity) facilities, or in facilities of lesser complexity levels where large dental services are found. The supervisory dental hygienist is responsible for the supervision, administrative management, and direction of dental auxiliary staff. The incumbent may be delegated full administrative and professional responsibility for planning and directing the dental auxiliary staff activities for the service or equivalent unit at an independent outpatient clinic. Incumbent has full supervisory responsibility over a section or equivalent work unit. Typical duties include: preparing work assignments, monitoring clinical performances of dental auxiliary staff, conducting performance appraisals, and other clinical and administrative responsibilities to ensure that the mission of the service and the medical center has been satisfied. The supervisor assures compliance with accrediting agency and regulatory requirements; establishes and monitors the quality of the pre-analytical processes as part of the overall dental service quality management program, and assures corrective action is initiated as needed. The supervisor assures orientation and competency assessment of assigned staff. The supervisor develops policies and procedures, manages document control, develops performance standards, position descriptions and functional statements, and is responsible for professional and administrative management of an assigned area to include budget execution. The supervisor will maintain interdepartmental relations with other services to accomplish medical center goals.

(c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the KSAs for the GS-10 level, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs and demonstrate the potential to acquire the assignment-specific KSAs designated by an asterisk (*).

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1. Ability to work independently to set priorities, delegate tasks, meet multiple deadlines, analyze organizational problems, and develop and implement effective solutions to optimize quality, efficiency, performance, and productivity within the service;
2. Ability to develop policy, manage equipment requests, and provide workload analysis in Dental Clinic operations;
3. Demonstrated leadership and managerial skills including skill in interpersonal relations and conflict resolution to deal with employees, team members, managers and other departments; and
- *4. Ability to perform the full range of supervisory duties which would include responsibility for assignment of work to be performed; competency assessments; performance evaluations; selection of staff; and recommendation of awards, advancements, and when appropriate, disciplinary actions.

4. DEVIATIONS

- a. The appointing official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for dental hygienists 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 of the proposed grade.
- b. Under no circumstances will the education requirement be waived. Under no circumstances will the licensure or 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.

Authority: 38 U.S.C. §§ 7402, 7403.]