

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To issue Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) procedures regarding employee recognition and awards.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains VA policy on recognizing and rewarding VA employees. The pages in this transmittal replace the corresponding page numbers in Part V and in the appendices to Part V of VA Handbook 5017, dated April 15, 2002. They incorporate a change that revises coverage based on the addition of Chiropractors as a new Title 38 occupation. This change will be incorporated into the electronic version of the VA Directive 5017 that is maintained on the [Office of Human Resources Management Web site](#).
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Employee Relations and Performance Management (051), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5017, Employee Recognition and Awards.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** Refer to the Transmittal Sheet for VA Handbook 5001, "General Introduction and Administration."

CERTIFIED BY:

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

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Assistant Secretary for
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PART V. TITLE 38 SPECIAL ADVANCEMENTS AND CASH AWARDS

1. SCOPE. This part contains policies, procedures and guidelines governing the advancement of physicians, dentists, podiatrists, optometrists, [chiropractors,] registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, physician assistants and expanded-function dental auxiliaries appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7401(1) or 7405(a)[(1)(A)]; [and,] pharmacists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, certified respiratory therapists, registered respiratory therapists, and licensed practical or vocational nurses appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) or 7405(a)[(1)(B)]. Excluded are facility directors, chiefs of staff, medical and dental residents appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7406, and health care executives appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7306.

2. REFERENCES

- a. [VA Directive 5017]
- b. [38 U.S.C., chapters 73 and 74]

3. PERSONS AUTHORIZED TO APPROVE ADVANCEMENTS. The Under Secretary for Health, or a designee, shall approve all advancements of employees covered by this part. (See appendix A of this part.)

4. CRITERIA FOR SPECIAL ADVANCEMENT FOR ACHIEVEMENT (SAA)

a. **Physicians and Dentists.** Full-time, part-time, and intermittent physicians and dentists may be advanced within the grade from one to five steps [on the basis of professional achievement above that expected for the grade level or assignment providing they have demonstrated a high level of performance and potential for assumption of greater responsibility. Such achievement may be demonstrated by professional attainments in health care management, education, research, or patient care worthy of national or international recognition.](#)

b. **Podiatrists, Optometrists [and Chiropractors].** Full-time, part-time, and intermittent podiatrists, optometrists [and chiropractors] may be advanced within the grade from one to five steps [on the basis of professional achievement above that expected for the grade level or assignment providing they have demonstrated a high level of performance and potential for assumption of greater responsibility. Examples of professional achievement are:](#)

(1) Outstanding and exceptional achievement as evidenced by receipt of official recognition from a recognized professional or academic organization.

(2) Significant professional attainment in research or contributions to podiatric or optometric science and patient care worthy of publication in a national or international journal of high regard within the respective professions.

a. **Consideration.** Full-time, part-time and intermittent physicians (other than chiefs of staff), dentists, podiatrists, optometrists [and chiropractors] in Executive grade and below and registered nurses (other than nurse executives), nurse anesthetists, physician assistants, and expanded-function dental auxiliaries who have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance and professional competence over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession, or who have made noted contributions in some phase of their profession, may be considered for Special Advancements for Performance (SAP). Pharmacists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, certified respiratory therapists, registered respiratory therapists, and licensed practical or vocational nurses may be considered in accordance with paragraph f below.

b. **Physicians, Dentists, Podiatrists, Optometrists [and Chiropractors].** An advancement of three steps, not to exceed the maximum of the grade, may be granted in lieu of and on the same due date established for a periodic step increase. Two steps may be granted when employee is at the eighth step of the grade. The employee must have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance as evidenced by the following examples:

(1) Demonstration of exceptional skills and aptitudes in the care and treatment of patients.

(2) Actual assumption of greater professional and/or administrative responsibility. Faculty appointment (post residency) at the rank of instructor or above may be considered as a greater responsibility.

(3) Significant research.

(4) Significant clinical contribution (including publication).

c. **Registered Nurses and Nurse Anesthetists.** An advancement of one step within the grade may be granted to covered employees when there has been a demonstrated sustained high level of performance and ability over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession. In addition, one or more of the criteria listed in chapter 4, paragraph 6 of part III of VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, must be met.

d. **Physician Assistants.** The employee must have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance and ability over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession or there must have been noted contributions in some aspect of health care. Criteria for one-step advancement will be demonstrated superior performance as evidenced by:

(1) Assumption of a major responsibility in administering a major patient care program.

(2) Significant accomplishments associated with an academic program conducted in affiliation with the facility where the physician assistant is employed.

e. **Expanded-Function Dental Auxiliaries.** The employee must have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance and ability over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession or there must have been noted contributions in some phase of health care. Criteria for 1-step advancement will be demonstrated by superior performance as evidenced by:

(1) Demonstration of exceptional skills and aptitudes in the care and treatment of patients.

(2) Significant accomplishments associated with an academic program conducted in affiliation with the VA facility where the person is employed.

f. **Pharmacists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Certified Respiratory Therapists, Registered Respiratory Therapists, and Licensed Practical or Vocational Nurses.** Generally, the Quality Step Increase provisions in part III, paragraph [3] of this handbook will be used to grant one-step special advancements for performance for employees in these occupations. However, the recommendations of supervisory officials will be referred to the appropriate Standards Board for review. Approval of such advancements shall be based on the findings and recommendations of the Board.

7. PROCESSING AND DOCUMENTING SPECIAL ADVANCEMENTS FOR PERFORMANCE.

See appendices C and D of this part.

a. **Physicians, Dentists, Podiatrists, Optometrists [and Chiropractors]**

(1) Approximately 90 days prior to the employee's completing the waiting period for a periodic step increase or rate adjustment, the facility will receive from the Austin Automation Center (AAC), VA Form 97, Notice of Pending Personnel Action, in duplicate, identifying the employee and stating that the employee is eligible for consideration for Special Advancement for Performance. An advancement of three steps, not to exceed the maximum of the grade, may be granted in lieu of and on the same due date established for a periodic step increase. Two steps may be granted when employee is at eighth step of the grade. Human Resource Management Officers shall assure that appropriate officials will be notified in anticipation of eligibility. **NOTE:** *For physicians and dentists only: Local officials may approve a Special Advancement for Performance retroactive to the date of the periodic step increase when, through administrative error, the advancement was not granted on the due date.*

(2) The advancement shall be regarded as an equivalent increase.

(3) No two such advancements may be granted in succession within the grade.

APPENDIX A. PERSONNEL AUTHORIZED TO APPROVE ADVANCEMENTS

1. Under Secretary for Health or designee

a. Advancements of those covered by the scope of this handbook when the Under Secretary for Health or designee is the appointing official.

2. Network Directors

a. Advancements of those covered by the scope of this handbook and VA Directive 5017 when Network Director is the appointing official.

3. Facility Directors

a. Advancements of physicians.

b. Advancements of optometrists.

c. Advancements of podiatrists.

d. Advancements of dentists (staff dentists, service chiefs and positions comparable to service chief) and expanded-function dental auxiliaries.

e. [Advancements of chiropractors]

f. Advancements of registered nurses and nurse anesthetists.

g. Advancements of physician assistants.

h. Advancements of pharmacists. Facility directors may also delegate to the Chief of Pharmacy Service the advancement of pharmacists in noncentralized assignments below GS-13 and assistant chiefs of Pharmacy Service at GS-13.

i. Advancements of occupational therapists. Facility directors may also delegate to chief of staffs the advancements of occupational therapists in noncentralized assignments below GS-13.

j. Advancements of registered respiratory therapists. Facility directors may also delegate to chiefs of staff the advancements of registered respiratory therapists.

k. Advancements of certified respiratory therapists. Facility directors may also delegate to chiefs of staff the advancements of certified respiratory therapists.

APPENDIX B. PROCESSING SPECIAL ADVANCEMENTS FOR ACHIEVEMENT

HOW TO PROCESS A SPECIAL ADVANCEMENT FOR ACHIEVEMENT		
A		B
S T E P S	If an employee meets criteria specified in part V, paragraph 4 and is	then take the following steps
1	a physician, dentist, podiatrist, optometrist, [chiropractor,] registered nurse, nurse anesthetist, physician assistant, expanded-function dental auxiliary, physical therapist, registered respiratory therapist, certified respiratory therapist,	At the time of achievement, the employee may be recommended for advancement. Recommendations will be made to the Standards Board by the chief of service or Chief of Staff as appropriate.
2	licensed practical or vocational nurse, occupational therapist, or pharmacist	The Standards Board will make specific recommendation as to the appropriate number of steps to be granted. The board action with supporting justification will be forwarded to the HRM office.
3		The HRM office will forward the file through channels to the appropriate approving official.
4		Special advancements for achievement will be made effective on the first day of the pay period following administrative approval of the advancement.

**APPENDIX C. DOCUMENTATION OF ADVANCEMENTS ON SF 50-B,
NOTIFICATION OF PERSONNEL ACTION**

Category of Employee	Appointment Authority	Nature of Action	Legal Authority	VA Required Remarks
physicians, dentists, podiatrists, optometrists, [chiropractors,] registered nurses, physician assistants, expanded- function dental auxiliaries and nurse anesthetists	38 U.S.C. 7401(1)	“Administrative Pay Increase” “Administrative Pay Increase”	38 U.S.C. 7403	“Special Advancement for Performance” “Special Advancement for Achievement”
[the same Title 38 occupations listed above]	38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1) [(A)]	“Administrative Pay Increase” “Administrative Pay Increase”	38 U. S. C. 7405(b)	“Special Advancement for Performance” “Special Advancement for Achievement”
pharmacists, occupational and physical therapists, registered respiratory therapists, certified respiratory therapists, and licensed practical vocational nurses	38 U.S.C. 7401(3)	“Administrative Pay Increase” “Administrative Pay Increase”	38 U.S.C. 7403	“Special Advancement for Performance” “Special Advancement for Achievement”

Category of Employee	Appointment Authority	Nature of Action	Legal Authority	VA Required Remarks
[the same Title 38 hybrid occupations listed above]	38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1) [(B)]	<p>“Administrative Pay Increase”</p> <p>“Administrative Pay Increase”</p>	38 U. S. C. 7405(b)(2)	<p>“Special Advancement for Performance”</p> <p>“Special Advancement for Achievement”</p>

APPENDIX D. PROCESSING SPECIAL ADVANCEMENTS FOR PERFORMANCE

HOW TO PROCESS A SPECIAL ADVANCEMENT FOR PERFORMANCE		
A		B
S T E P S	If employee meets the criteria specified in part V, paragraph 6 and is a	then take the following steps
1	a physician, dentist, podiatrist, optometrist [or chiropractor]	Upon receipt of VA Form 5-97, Notice of Pending Personnel Action, the HRM office will forward the original VA Form 5-97 to the employee's service chief through the Chief of Staff, or to the Chief of Staff, as appropriate. The duplicate copy of the notice will be placed in the pending file in the HRM office.
2		Upon receipt of the advance SF-50B, for the periodic step increase or rate adjustment, the HRM Office will remove the duplicate VA Form 5-97 from the pending file. This will be sent with SF-50B to the service chief through the Chief of Staff, or to the Chief of Staff as appropriate.
3		If the employee is recommended for advancement, recommendation will be submitted to the Standards Board.
4		The Standards Board will submit its recommendation on VA Form 10-2543, Board Action, to the HRM Office through the Chief of Staff.
5		The HRM office will forward the board action through channels to the appropriate approving authority listed in appendix A of this part.