

[STAFFING

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: To revise the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselor (LPMHC), GS-0101, appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3) and 38 U.S.C. § 7405(a)(1)(B).

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES: This handbook revision contains mandatory VA procedures on staffing, and replaces the LPMHC qualification standard in VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix G43. Revised text is contained in [brackets]. Significant changes include the addition of certain doctoral degrees as qualifying education and a Senior LPMHC assignment at the GS-12 grade. O H Y H O 8 Q G H U 9 \$ ¶ V W 38 Hybrid excepted service employment system in accordance with the authority H V W D E O L V K H G X Q G H U W K H 3 & D U H J L Y H U V D Q G 9 H W H U D Q V 2 I (Public Law 111-163), authority is given to the Secretary of the VA under 38 U.S.C. § 7402 to prescribe qualifications for occupations identified in or established under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3) and 38 U.S.C. § 7405(a)(1)(B). The new standards are effective on the date of this publication, however no action may be taken to convert or promote employees until training and guidance is received. This new qualification standard will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005 that is maintained on the [Office of Human Resources Management Web site](#).

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: None.

CERTIFIED BY:

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

/s/
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Assistant Secretary
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/s/
Peter J. Shelby
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**APPENDIX G43. LICENSED PROFESSIONAL MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR
QUALIFICATION STANDARD**

GS-0101

Veterans Health Administration

- 1. COVERAGE.** The following are requirements for appointment as a Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselor (LPMHC) in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). LPMHCs provide professional counseling and mental health services using knowledge, theory, and training foundations in professional counseling. LPMHCs may be assigned to any VHA program area, may consult with peers and supervisors, and may be involved in program evaluation and/or research activities. These requirements apply to all VHA LPMHCs in the GS-0101 series,

- (1) **Exception.** VHA may waive the licensure requirement for persons who are otherwise qualified, pending completion of state prerequisites for licensure. This exception only applies up to the full performance level. For grade levels at or above the full performance level, the candidate must be licensed.
- (2) The appointing official may waive the requirement of licensure for a period not to exceed 3 years for a LPMHC that provides care under the clinical supervision of a licensed LPMHC who is at or above the full performance level. This exception only applies at the entry level (GS-9). For grade levels at or above the full performance level, the candidate must be licensed. The Human Resources Office will provide the unlicensed LPMHC in writing the requirement to obtain licensure, the date by which the license must be acquired, and the consequences for not becoming licensed by the deadline. The written notice must be provided prior to the entrance on duty date.
- (3) **Failure to Obtain License.** In all cases, LPMHCs must actively pursue meeting state prerequisites for licensure starting from the date of their appointment. Failure to become licensed within three years from date of appointment will result in removal from the GS-0101 LPMHC series and may result in termination of employment.

- (3) 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.
 - (4) If an employee who was retained (grandfathered) under this provision leaves that 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.
 - (5) 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.
- e. **Physical Requirements.** See VA Directive and Handbook 5019.
 - f. **English Language Proficiency.** LPMHCs must be proficient in spoken and written English in accordance with VA Handbook 5005, Part II, chapter 3, section

(4) **Fellowships or Post-Graduate Training.** Fellowship and post-graduate training programs are typically in a specialized area of clinical practice, i.e., mental health counseling. Training as a fellow or post-graduate may be substituted for creditable experience on a year-for-year basis.

(5) **Practicum in a VA Setting.** VHA practicum experience may not be substituted for experience, as the practicum (field placement) is completed in a counseling or related field.

b. **Grade Determinations.** In addition to the basic requirements for employment, the following criteria must be met when determining the grade of candidates.

(1) **Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselor.** 10(a)-3(l) in teow8e 435.67 /5.63 126.02 517.51(ce)-GSTm [

of appropriate clinical interventions using professional counseling practices.

3. Basic knowledge of professional counseling practice with emphasis on human development principles through cognitive, affective, behavioral or systemic interventions, and strategies that address high risk behaviors, wellness, personal growth, and career development across the life span.
4. Ability to use a wide variety of individual, group, or family counseling interventions; demonstrates sensitivity to diversity and possesses multicultural counseling skills.
5. Ability to serve on an interdisciplinary team with focus on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and relational functioning of individuals, groups and families and on the counseling approaches, strategies, and techniques that will best help patients function effectively.
6. Basic skill in the use of computer software applications for drafting documents, data management, maintaining accurate, timely and thorough clinical documentation and delivery of services, such as Telehealth.
7. Ability to learn and utilize software programs in use by VHA.
8. Knowledge and understanding of existing relevant statutes, case laws, ethical codes, and regulations affecting professional practice of counseling.
9. Ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, with people from varied backgrounds.

(2) Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselor, GS-11 (Full Performance Level)

- (a) Experience, Education, and Licensure.** In addition to the basic requirements, candidates must have at least one year of post- P D V W H U ¶ V or post- doctoral degree mental health counseling experience (VA or non-VA experience) and must be licensed to practice at the independent practice level and demonstrate the KSAs in subparagraph (c) below. LPMHCs may provide clinical supervision over the clinical practice of an unlicensed LPMHC or LPMHC trainee. Some state licenses do not license an individual to provide clinical supervision to trainees or unlicensed

(b) Assignments. This is the full performance grade level for LPMHCs. At this level they are licensed to independently practice professional counseling and to provide mental health services within the knowledge, theory, and training foundations of professional counseling. LPMHCs may be assigned to any VHA area, consulting with peers and supervisors as appropriate. LPMHCs may be involved in program evaluation and/or research activities.

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

- 1.

4. Ability to provide subject matter consultation to colleagues and trainees on the psychosocial treatment of patients, rendering professional opinions based on experience, expertise and role modeling effective clinical skills.
5. Ability to teach, mentor staff and trainees, and provide supervision for licensure or for specialty certifications.
6. Ability to engage in written and oral communication with leadership/staff and community stakeholders regarding policies, procedures, practice guidelines, and issues pertaining to the practice of the profession.

(6) Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselor (Program Coordinator), GS-12

- (a) **Experience, Education, and Licensure.** In addition to the basic requirements, candidates must have at least one year of progressively complex experience equivalent to the GS-11 grade level. Experience must have been in a major specialty treatment program area such as, but not limited to, Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), mental health intensive case management (MHICM), or other areas of equivalent scope and complexity. Experience must demonstrate possession of advanced practice skills and judgment, demonstrating progressively more professional competency.
- (b) **Assignments.** LPMHC Program Coordinators are administratively responsible for a clinical program and provide treatment to patients in a major specialty. They manage the daily operations of the program, develop policies and procedures, and prepare reports and statistics for facility, VISN, and national use. They may supervise unlicensed graduate LPMHCs and may administratively manage any employees assigned to their program.
- (c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the KSAs for the GS-11 grade level, the candidate must demonstrate all of the KSAs below:
 1. In depth knowledge of the program coordinated, and demonstrated knowledge and ability to write policies procedures and or practice guidelines for the program.
 2. Ability to make key decisions in the hiring and identification of top candidates.

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- (b) **Assignments.** Typical assignments include serving at a facility as a care line manager or at the VISN/national level. A care line manager is assigned to manage, direct, and oversee complex treatment programs within the medical center. Supervisory responsibilities cover multiple disciplines that may be separated geographically or in multi-division facilities. They have responsibility for staffing, work assignments, budget, ensuring availability and timeliness of clinical services to be provided and admission criteria for the program, day-to-day program operation, and all reporting requirements. Leadership positions at the VISN or national level are characterized by their scope, level of complexity, significant impact on VHA mission, significant importance to the VISN. They direct mental health, behavioral science or other patient care program components at the VISN or national level or direct organizational development at the national level. Duties are exercised with wide latitude, autonomy, and independence. They have delegated authority to determine long range work plans and assure that implementation of the goals and objectives are carried out. They may serve as consultants to other management officials in the field, VISN, or national level.
- (c) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the KSAs for the GS-13 grade level, the candidate must demonstrate all of the KSAs below:
1. Advanced knowledge and skill in management/administration of

5. DEVIATIONS

- a. The approving official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for LPMHCs 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 educational requirements be waived. Under no circumstances will licensure requirements be waived for grade levels GS-11 or above.
- c. The placement of individuals in assignments and/