

Position Classification Standard for Rehabilitation Therapy Assistant Series, GS-0636

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SERIES DEFINITION

This series includes positions which involve treating, instructing or working with patients in carrying out therapeutic activities prescribed for their physical or mental rehabilitation. Rehabilitation therapy assistants work in such fields of therapy as occupational, physical, kinesiotherapy, manual arts, and educational. The work requires the ability to apply a practical knowledge of therapeutic methods and techniques but does not require a full professional knowledge of the concepts, principles, and practices of the specialized field of therapy.

This standard revises and supersedes the standard for the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Therapy Assistant Series, GS-0636, issued in June 1958 and October 1958, and the flysheet issued in August 1961.

EXCLUSIONS

Positions which involve the following types of work are excluded from this series:

1. Positions that involve professional work in rehabilitation therapy are classified in the appropriate therapist series: [Occupational Therapist, GS-0631](#), [Physical Therapist, GS-0633](#), [Kinesiotherapy, GS-0635](#), [Manual Arts Therapist, GS-0637](#), and [Educational Therapist, GS-0639](#).

Positions in the therapist series are distinguished by the required application of professional competence in a specialized field of therapy. This requires knowledge of (a) fundamental scientific principles appropriate to the specialized field of therapy, e.g., physiology, anatomy, psychology, pathology of disease and injury, and educational principles and concepts; and (b) the principles and practices of the specialized field of therapy. The extent and depth of development of such knowledge is such as to require completion of a full 4-year college curriculum in an appropriate field of therapy or the equivalent. The knowledge are applied in functions such as diagnostic testing of disabilities, interpreting prescriptions in relation to disabilities, planning therapy treatment, evaluating the condition and progress of patients, conducting research and development of therapeutic techniques and devices, evaluating and advising on limitations and usefulness of therapeutic techniques and practices, and training student therapists.

In contrast, positions in the Rehabilitation Therapy Assistant Series, GS-0636 require the application of (a) practical knowledge of the techniques and procedures used in therapy, and (b) judgment and insight acquired by working with patients in rehabilitation therapy.

Therapy assistants with extensive practical experience may perform some of the functions performed by professional therapists, e.g., planning therapy treatment for patients who are not critically or acutely ill. Such functions are performed by therapy assistants in the light of their practical experience with precedent cases rather than on

their understanding of principles and concepts. Therapy assistants typically do not perform to a significant degree professional functions such as evaluating or advising on therapeutic techniques and practices or complex diagnostic testing and evaluation.

The fact that a person qualified as a professional therapist holds a position does not make the position a professional one. Positions should be placed in a professional therapist occupation only when the position requires professional competence. If a therapist performs work similar to that performed by therapy assistants and is required to apply only those knowledge which are applied by therapy assistants, the position should, of course, be classified in the Rehabilitation Therapy Assistant Series, GS-0636.

2. Positions that involve carrying out hospital recreational activities are classified in the [Recreation Aid and Assistant Series, GS-0189](#).
3. Positions that involve primarily nursing-care procedures are excluded from this series.

OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION

Therapy assistants perform a variety of duties in carrying out activities which have been prescribed for the physical or mental rehabilitation of patients. Patients are referred for treatment on the basis of a medical prescription. The prescription usually includes the treatment objective, diagnosis, length of treatment and necessary precautions to be observed during the therapy. In some situations, the patient is referred to the therapist without a specific prescription for treatment.

Therapy assistants work with patients on an individual basis, in small groups, or in large groups, depending on the patient's physical and mental status and individual needs for treatment. Patients may receive treatment in the ward, in clinics, or in any other places where the patient is to receive treatment.

Therapy assistants are responsible for the comfort and well being of patients in their charge. They must assure that patients are appropriately dressed for prescribed outdoor activities; observe safety precautions in the use of tools and equipment; prevent unauthorized absence; record attendance and participation of patients in projects or activities; and report the reactions and responses of patients.

Therapy assistants are expected to maintain equipment used in treatment in proper working condition to the extent of cleaning, testing, making adjustments, and minor repair. They report need for major repairs. Therapy assistants may also participate in demonstrating treatment activities or procedures for the benefit of other therapy assistants, student therapists and nursing and medical personnel.

SPECIALIZATIONS AND TITLES

The following specializations and titles are authorized for positions in this series:

Therapy Aid applies to positions at grades GS-1, GS-2, and GS-3.

The specialized titles listed below are to be used for positions at grades GS-4 and above that involve application of a practical knowledge of the treatment methods and techniques of the specialized field of therapy in the rehabilitation of the patient:

Occupational Therapy Assistant applies to positions that involve the use of avocational or creative activities such as art, weaving, leather work and the activities of daily living to achieve such objectives as (1) providing specific exercise to patients having physical disabilities; (2) teaching patients self-care in eating, dressing and shaving, in order to live in the community; (3) relieving tensions and aggressive feelings of hyperactive patients.

Physical Therapy Assistant applies to positions that involve the use of light, heat, cold, water, electricity, massage, and therapeutic exercise to treat physical disabilities, injury, and disease.

Kinesiotherapy Assistant applies to positions that involve the use of various forms of physical exercise and activity (1) to maintain or improve the general state of patients' health; (2) to promote relaxation in mental patients; and (3) to reeducate and strengthen muscles.

Manual Arts Therapy Assistant applies to positions that involve the use of a practical knowledge of the methods and techniques of vocational education to achieve such therapeutic objectives as (1) determining vocational potential of patients for use in physical or mental rehabilitation; (2) improving skills or learning new skills to compensate for mental or physical disability; (3) developing further the level of rehabilitation achieved in earlier stages of physical and occupational therapy. The activities include manual and machine operations in shops, printing plants, laundries, and hospital services such as furniture repair and upholstering, shoe repair, gardening, and grounds maintenance. The work includes activities which are sometimes referred to as industrial therapy. Manual arts therapy assistants may use treatment activities in which patients are paid for work they perform for outside organizations.

Educational Therapy Assistant applies to positions that involve the use of a practical knowledge of educational methods and techniques such as teaching and programmed learning to (1) diminish emotional stress; (2) channel energy into acceptable forms of behavior; (3) provide sense of achievement and progress.

Therapy Assistant applies to positions at GS-4 and above that involve the application of the treatment methods and procedures of (1) two or more fields of rehabilitation therapy, none of which is predominant; or (2) a specialized field of therapy not covered by the authorized specializations.

Positions at GS-4 and above which involve practical application of techniques common to two or more fields of therapy should preferably be assigned the specialized title which best reflects the paramount requirements of the position. In such cases, the career ladder and the professional field of therapy supported should be considered.

The word "Supervisory" should be prefixed to any of the titles established above to form the title for positions in which supervisory duties and responsibilities constitute a regular part of the position, and are of such significance as to require supervisory qualifications.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Grade levels are determined and defined under two broad factors: *Nature of Assignment* and *Level of Responsibility*. Qualifications requirements are not described separately, but have been reflected as appropriate in both the nature of assignment and level of responsibility.

Nature of assignment

This factor measures the difficulty and complexity of the work performed by the therapy assistants. It includes the skills and knowledge required to perform treatment activities, the personal contacts involved in working with patients, and the judgment needed to assess patient's reactions and progress and to motivate them constructively.

At lower grade levels, the assistant receives on-the-job training and gains experience in observation and in working with patients in simple activities. At higher grades, the assistant applies highly specialized practical skills and knowledge in the treatment of a wide variety of patients who include the acutely and chronically ill.

Level of responsibility

This factor covers the nature and availability of the guidelines which control the work; the direction, control, and guidance received from professional personnel; the kind and degree of supervision over the work during its performance; the degree of review of actions, decisions and recommendations; and the degree of authority delegated to the therapy assistant to modify treatment procedures and to advance patients to higher levels of activity.

At lower grade levels, therapy assistants receive detailed instructions; perform work under immediate and continuing supervision; and determine the use of a few simple treatment activities. At higher grade levels, therapy assistants independently apply highly specialized skills, and an extensive practical knowledge of treatment activities. At the highest levels, supervision is limited to guidance and review on matters which require professional advice or judgment.

EVALUATION NOTES

This is a one-grade interval series. The grade-level criteria in this standard cover nonsupervisory positions at grades GS-1 through GS-6. This range represents the nonsupervisory performance level typical of the occupation. Positions above grade GS-6 should be evaluated by extension of the criteria in this standard with the application of sound position-classification judgment.

Supervisory positions in this series should be evaluated by reference to the [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#).

THERAPY AID, GS-0636-01

Nature of the assignment

Therapy Aids GS-1 perform simple and repetitive tasks which require no previous experience. Tasks such as the following are designed to equip the therapy aid with the habits, attitudes, and skills necessary to perform work of the GS-2 level in this occupation:

- Distribute materials to patients for use in treatment activities.
- Clear worktables following treatment.
- Replenish storage cabinets or worktables in treatment area with supplies and materials.
- Provide support to patients transferring on or off treatment tables in physical therapy.
- Clean tanks and tubs used in hydrotherapy.
- Assist physically disabled patients in dressing and undressing for physical therapy treatment.

Level of responsibility

Therapy Aids GS-1 receive detailed instructions and training in specific duties which are clearly defined. Oral instructions are given at the beginning of each new task and work is closely checked by a therapist or therapy assistant for satisfactory fulfillment of instructions.

THERAPY AID, GS-0636-02

Nature of the assignment

Therapy Aids GS-2 perform a variety of tasks which require a limited knowledge of work procedures and understanding of the types of equipment and materials used in the therapy. By comparison, Therapy Aids GS-1 perform simple, repetitive tasks which require no previous experience. The following examples are representative of work at GS-2:

- Positions and steadies patients receiving physical or kinesiotherapy treatment.
- Fills tanks used in hydrotherapy; adds specific quantity of prophylactic solution; tests water for proper temperature.
- Attends patient during treatment, observes safety measures and reports unfavorable patient reaction to supervisor.
- Keeps clinic and all equipment clean and ready for use.
- Performs routine clerical tasks such as checking and recording attendance of patients.

Level of responsibility

At the beginning of each new task, the Therapy Aid GS-2 receives instructions concerning work methods and procedures to be followed. These procedures require strict adherence to guidelines and precise attention to detail. The Therapy Aid GS-2 receives increasingly less specific guidance as his knowledge of the work and the procedures grows. On routine assignments he performs the work under general supervision following the established guides, with occasional spot-check of work by supervisor, either during performance or upon completion of the task.

For tasks previously performed, the Therapy Aid GS-2 receives instructions which indicate only what is to be done. By comparison, the Therapy Aid GS-1 receives more detailed instructions on procedures to be followed.

THERAPY AID, GS-0636-03

Nature of the assignment

Therapy Aids GS-3 perform tasks which (a) require the application of a knowledge of a variety of hospital or clinical procedures and (b) involve participating directly in treating patients. The GS-3 aid differs from the GS-2 by actively participating in the treatment process and by instructing and guiding patients in the performance of simple prescribed tasks involved in

treatment activities. Assignments are planned so that the GS-3 aid acquires skill in observing patients' conditions and behavior and in establishing and maintaining effective relationships with patients.

Therapy Aids GS-3 perform such tasks as:

- Prepare patients for treatment of physical therapy or kinesiotherapy; set up and adjust equipment; explain treatment; operate lifting devices; provide support to patients during ambulation or gait training.
- Administer a few hydrotherapy treatments which include baths and hot and cold packs; assist patients in and out of tubs; take pulse; note physical condition and reactions.
- Assemble and lay out materials for woodworking, leather craft, or other projects in occupational or manual arts therapy; guide patients in working on simple projects; observe progress and reactions of patients and report information to supervisor.
- Direct or help patients to perform unskilled tasks in hospital services which are planned for therapeutic value in rehabilitation of patients. Activities include mowing lawns, raking leaves, shoveling snow, watering and cultivating vegetable and flower beds, unloading supplies, sorting and folding linen in laundry.

Level of responsibility

By comparison to GS-2 the Therapy Aid GS-3 is required to apply a knowledge of treatment techniques and procedures which he has previously acquired. He receives specific instructions from his supervisor concerning the treatment objectives of each patient, the specific treatment procedures to be used, the reactions or conditions to be reported, and the special precautions to be observed.

The supervisor is present to observe work in progress, to ensure use of appropriate treatment techniques and to give guidance when changes in treatment procedures are necessary. The supervisor reviews the work of the therapy aid for effectiveness in motivating patients, for correct application of treatment procedures, and for accuracy in observing progress and reactions of patients. By comparison, at grade GS-2 review is concerned with performance of tasks that are preparatory or auxiliary to treatment.

THERAPY ASSISTANT, GS-0636-04

Nature of the assignment

Therapy Assistants GS-4 differ from those at the GS-3 level by working with a regularly assigned number of patients whom they (a) supervise and instruct in a variety of the techniques involved in the activities of a particular field of therapy, or (b) treat with specified forms of physical therapy which are constant throughout the patient's treatment program. Therapy assistants treat patients, either in groups or individually.

Therapy Assistant GS-4 perform the following duties:

- Explain the treatment activity and guide patients in the techniques to be used; motivate and stimulate their interest and participation in the treatment activity.
- Assign and advance individual patients to selected phases of treatment activities according to the therapy assistant's evaluation of their need and ability.
- Observe patients for changes in attitudes, behavior and physical condition; assess and report to supervisor both favorable and unfavorable changes, special problems, absences, accidents, or safety hazards.
- Assess patient's productivity, ability, attitude, attention span, and sociability in relation to the objectives of the treatment plan.

The following assignments are illustrative:

- Provides guidance and instruction to a group of patients who have been assigned to hospital laundry for therapeutic work activity; determines individual work assignments that fit the treatment goals and that the patient can and will do; assesses patient's performance; prepares notes reporting on accomplishments of patient in treatment, extent of progress towards treatment objectives, span of attention, and interest.
- Makes trial assignments of woodworking projects to determine patient's interest and skills; instructs patient in various woodworking operations; provides encouragement when necessary to motivate patient; varies pace of treatment in accordance with patient's moods and attitudes.
- Administers a variety of selected forms of physical therapy such as ultraviolet, infrared, and massage; instructs patients in performing simple active exercises, transfer procedures (e.g., from bed to wheelchair), use of crutches in walking and in ascending and descending stairs.

- Instructs a group of geriatric patients in performing general reconditioning exercises; demonstrates routines; encourages participation and accomplishment; assesses patients' interest, level of participation, and physical and mental reactions.

Level of responsibility

Therapy Assistants GS-4 work under general supervision as indicated below whereas Therapy Aids GS-3 typically receive close and continuing supervision. Therapy Assistants GS-4 adhere to carefully prescribed procedures in working with patients and utilize standard treatment methods for activities of the specialized therapy. They plan and make assignments to patients within the range of the project and the limitations established by the supervisor. Guidance is provided by the supervisor or a therapist who assigns and schedules the patients, explains treatment objectives, activities or treatment procedures to be used, precautions to be observed and special conditions to be noted. The Therapy Assistant GS-4 carries out his assignments within these guidelines, seeking the guidance or assistance of the supervisor when the patient shows adverse physical or mental reaction during treatment.

Therapy assistants have authority to change assignments to patients or pace of activity when patient's condition so indicates.

THERAPY ASSISTANT, GS-0636-05

Nature of the assignment

Therapy Assistants GS-5 utilize a broad, practical knowledge of treatment techniques and procedures in providing treatment to an assigned number of patients. Therapy Assistants GS-5 work with patients whose physical or mental condition presents major obstacles to achievement of therapeutic goals. In comparison with the grade GS-4 level, Therapy Assistants GS-5 must have a greater sensitivity to changes in behavior or in the physical condition of patients, greater knowledge of treatment techniques, and greater skill in motivating patients.

As a regular, recurring duty, Therapy Assistants GS-5 develop progressive types of treatment plans. They employ standard treatment procedures, making minor modifications as necessary. They adapt various treatment activities to meet the specific needs of individual patients. They observe, assess, and report on the progress and reactions of patients, utilizing insight and mature judgment acquired through extensive experience in administering treatment to patients.

Therapy Assistants GS-5 perform the following duties:

- Explore with newly assigned patients their general interests, aptitudes, moods, reactions, and desire to participate in therapeutic projects. Work with patients in a variety of trial assignments to explore potential abilities, work tolerance, span of attention, and reaction to participation.

- Develop progressive types of treatment for each patient on the basis of information obtained through interview, observation and trial activity. Determine kinds of graded projects and sequence of operations which will advance patient towards treatment goals.
- Provide information and assessments of patients at medical staff meetings concerning the participation, progress, behavior, mental and/or physical reactions of patients assigned for treatment.

Illustrative assignments of Therapy Assistants GS-5 are as follows:

- Selects appropriate woodworking activities to be used for prevocational testing of patients for whom therapeutic work activity has been prescribed; assesses aptitudes of patients, mental and physical tolerance of work, and behavior in a shop environment; prepares progressive types of treatment plans for each patient based upon information provided by supervisor concerning treatment objectives.
- Plans and conducts a program of occupational therapy activities for geriatric patients having physical disabilities; teaches activities of daily living such as dressing, washing, shaving and use of eating utensils, to meet rehabilitation objective of self-care; uses a variety of arts and crafts media to provide beneficial exercise; advances patients to higher level of activity based upon observation and assessment of their participation and recommends termination of therapy.
- Administers the full range of such physical therapy agents as light, water, heat, cold, electricity, transfer procedures, and therapeutic exercises. Administers the complete treatment procedures for the assigned forms of physical therapy.

Level of responsibility

Therapy Assistants GS-5 receive general supervision from a therapist who assigns patients for treatment, indicates the treatment objectives, and provides information concerning special physical or mental conditions of acutely ill patients.

In comparison with GS-4 assistants, Therapy Assistants GS-5 have greater responsibility for judging the aptitudes and potentials of patients receiving treatment and determining when patients have advanced sufficiently to be given more difficult activities. Therapy Assistants GS-5 regularly develop progressive treatment plans based on their evaluation of patients. These plans are reviewed by a therapist prior to execution. GS-5 assistants have authority to make alterations in treatment procedures when patients fail to respond favorably. At the GS-4 level, such changes typically must have prior approval of the supervisor.

The supervisor observes work occasionally for compliance with the medical prescription and objectives of treatment; for effectiveness of assistant in planning, developing, and administering treatment; and for adequacy of patients' progress and participation. The supervisor reviews

reports for results achieved with patients, and adequacy and significance of the information. At the GS-4 level, review is concerned with use of appropriate treatment techniques, adherence to the treatment plan, and adequacy and correctness of information in reports.

THERAPY ASSISTANT, GS-0636-06

Nature of the assignment

Therapy Assistants GS-6, as a regular and recurring duty, plan and carry out highly specialized and diversified treatment for patients whose physical and mental condition requires the application of nonstandard in addition to standard treatment procedures and approaches. GS-6 assistants make frequent and extensive changes in procedures and approaches to enable the patient to overcome his disabilities and continue the treatment. They must judge whether the treatment is causing a negative or adverse effect on other conditions not under treatment. On the basis of these observations and conclusions, GS-6 assistants change or modify treatment procedures, content of the treatment plan, and approaches used in treating the patient.

GS-6 assistants draw upon a broad practical knowledge of the characteristics of physical and mental illness in judging the conditions of patients, in recognizing the relationships between patient's disabilities and the effects of treatment, and in assessing accurately both positive and negative responses to treatment. By comparison, Therapy Assistants GS-5 plan and carry out the full range of treatment for patients with conditions which respond to the application of the standard treatment procedures or require minor modification in these procedures to achieve beneficial results.

The following assignment is illustrative of the advanced level of knowledge, competence, and responsibility characterizing positions at grade GS-6:

- Plans and administers manual arts therapy as the employee in charge of specialized treatment area such as a shop or greenhouse. For example, plans the treatment of neuropsychiatric patients in one or more greenhouses; determines plants, fertilizers, equipment, and schedules for planting and cultivation consistent with horticultural requirements and treatment objectives for patients; selects and adapts treatment activities to needs and abilities of individual patients; modifies treatment procedures and treatment approaches to enable patient to overcome handicaps and progress; trains and supervises volunteers who work with patients.

Level of responsibility

Therapy Assistants GS-6 work with a high degree of independence in planning and carrying out highly specialized and complex treatment in working out treatment routines, adapting treatment procedures, and in changing or modifying the content of treatment plans.

GS-6 assistants adapt or make changes in procedures and approaches without prior approval of the supervisor. They plan treatment without review for patients who are not critically or acutely ill. Reports of patients' condition, responses, progress, and completion of treatment are reviewed by the therapist for general adequacy and for effectiveness in achieving objectives. By comparison, Therapy Assistants GS-5 plan and carry out a full range of treatment for their patients, using the standard treatment procedures to which they make minor modifications as necessary. The supervisor of the GS-5 assistant interprets the medical prescription, states treatment objectives, and reviews treatment plans prior to execution.