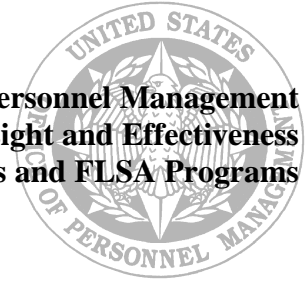


**U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs**



**Chicago Oversight Division
230 South Dearborn Street, DPN 30-6
Chicago, Illinois 60604**

**Classification Appeal Decision
Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code**

Appellant: [Name]

Agency classification: Social Worker
GS-185-11

Organization: Department of Veterans Affairs
Medical Center
[City, State]

OPM decision: Social Worker
GS-185-11

OPM decision number: C-0185-11-01

/s/

Ricardo Sims
Operations Supervisor

April 26, 2000

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

[appellant's name and address]

[name and address of appellant's servicing
personnel office]

Mr. Ronald E. Cowles
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Human Resources Management
Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington, DC 20420

Introduction

On December 15, 1999, the Chicago Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [appellant's name]. Mr. [appellant's name] position is located at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in [City, State]. His position is currently classified as a Social Worker GS-185-11. However, he believes his position should be titled Social Work Program Analyst and graded at the GS-12 / GS13 level.

General issues

The appellant indicates that the position he occupies has not received the grade level it warrants. He states that other positions that perform substantially the same work that he performs at the Medical Center are paid at higher levels, and he believes his position should be graded consistently with those positions. The appellant also makes various statements about the adequacy of the occupational standard when compared to changes in the social work discipline and the interests of his agency's management in dealing with his position.

By law, OPM must make classification determinations solely by comparing the current duties and responsibilities of the position to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, 5112). Since comparison to established standards, not other positions, is the intended and exclusive method for classifying positions, we may not consider the classification of other positions or other alternative approaches to compensation as a basis for deciding an appeal. In addition, the accuracy of grade level criteria contained in an OPM classification guide or standard is neither appealable nor reviewable [CFR 511.607 (b)(5)]. Therefore, we have considered the appellant's statements concerning his general occupation only as they are relevant to our decision.

Position information

The appellant is assigned to position description number 7497A. The appellant and his supervisor have certified the accuracy of the position description.

The appellant serves as a multi-disciplinary team member in the outpatient Mental Hygiene Clinic at the VAMC. The team consists of four Psychiatrists, two Psychologists, one Nurse Practitioner, the appellant and two Program Support Assistants.

The appellant's position description indicates that the Psychiatry/Mental Health Clinic:

Currently requires providing a range of social work services to psychiatric patients. The social worker is responsible for the quality and effectiveness of the Social Work Program in the provision of casework treatment in a variety of complex social situations with the emphasis on the development of a sensitive social diagnosis and sound treatment plan. This requires the skill for utilization of the more advanced treatment techniques such as family counseling and multi-

client treatment as indicated and implemented independently and/or in collaboration with the multi-disciplinary treatment plan.

When indicated, the social worker does singly or in collaboration with other disciplines routinely provide various group therapies, when feasible, which can singly or together be approached as educational, supportive, or therapeutic. As leader or co-leader, objectives are to assist and help patients gain self-awareness, modify attitudes, and to function more effectively in interpersonal relationships, provides a range of casework services including family and marital counseling to veterans with a variety of presenting problems such as acute psychosis, chemical abuse, long-standing personality problems, disruptive situational crisis situations, developmental life adjustment problems, etc.

The social worker also works in collaboration and cooperation with members of the Psychiatric Treatment Team in the development of a comprehensive diagnosis, treatment and disposition plan; consults to the Mental Hygiene Clinic team concerning the patient and his/her social, familial, and vocational relationships; assists in the development and /or coordination of appropriate community resources in the meeting of the needs of both the patient and his/her family.

Analysis And Findings

Series and Title Determination

The GS-185 Social Worker series includes positions which require application of a professional knowledge of the principles and practices of social work in the performance of such assignments as providing direct services to individuals and families, including work with individuals in groups. Also included are positions concerned with teaching social work, doing research on social work problems, training of social work students, and providing consultation and advice to members of related professions and community organizations on social work questions. This standard is immediately applicable to the classification of nonsupervisory social work positions where the primary emphasis is on direct professional service to individuals and families. Because the appellant's position description requires the appellant to provide social work services to psychiatric patients his position is properly classified by use of the Social Work Series GS-185 position classification standard.

Positions in this series are properly titled Social Worker.

Grade Determination

The appellant's agency has determined his position to be properly graded GS-11. The appellant believes his grade to be at the GS-12/13 level.

The appellant serves as a member of a multi-disciplinary treatment team in the outpatient mental health clinic at the VAMC seeing patients and delivering social work services to those patients as necessary. He routinely provides group or individual therapies and consults with other team members if their unique skills are necessary. These are skills comparable to the GS-11 level

where intensive social work services require the exercise of mature professional judgment and the flexible use of a wide range of social work skills.

At the GS-12 level, the position classification standard states that there are two general types of positions. The first is a supervisory position that includes full technical and administrative responsibility for the accomplishment of the work of a unit of three or more subordinate professional workers when the base level of work supervised fully meets the description of grade GS-11 in this standard. Since the appellant does not supervise a unit of three or more subordinate workers at the GS-11 grade level, he does not meet this first example of GS-12 work.

The second type of position includes those that are recognized for program responsibilities that are significant enough to justify grade GS-12 with or without the presence of professional subordinates. The position classification standard provides the following illustrations of such positions:

-- social workers in charge of the social work program at a separate installation or similar organizational component where they are responsible for development and maintenance of professional standards of service, initiating and effecting changes in methods that will promote efficient practice, and coordination of social work services with other programs of service to the same group of clients. Such positions typically are responsible for representing the social work program at conferences and in contacts with other agencies and the public. Work is subject to regulation and procedural direction from the program directors in the central office of the agency and to the local management control of the directors of the institutions such as hospitals and clinics and correctional institutions.

-- social workers responsible for serving various beneficiary groups scattered over a large geographical area when assignments include direct social work practice in cases with complex problems, organization of community services on behalf of beneficiaries, development and coordination of procedures for the use of these community services by related staffs and satellite facilities, and development and maintenance of working relationships and agreements with other organizations having responsibilities for the same groups of people.

There is no evidence that the appellant is responsible for the development and maintenance of professional standards of service at the VAMC or does he typically represent the VAMC's social work program at conferences and in contacts with other agencies and the public. These program and representational activities are the responsibility of the appellant's supervisor. In addition, the appellant does not serve various beneficiary groups scattered over a large geographic area. Therefore, his position does not meet the second type of responsibility described in the standard.

The position classification standard further states that basic responsibility for a program of social work services does not equate to classification at grade GS-12 unless there is substantial accountability for program effectiveness, modification of service patterns, and promoting acceptance of the social work function. As distinguished from positions at grade GS-11 which are responsible for providing continuing social work services at a field location, positions classified at grade GS-12 characteristically combine program development and evaluation with service functions. The appellant's duties are dedicated to delivering direct care to patients as part of a mental health team. He is not assigned substantial accountability for program management or effectiveness. Again, this responsibility lies with his supervisor.

Decision

Since his position does not meet the criteria established at the GS-12 level, the position is properly classified as a Social Worker, GS-185-11.