



## United States Office of Personnel Management

**Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness**  
*Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions*  
November 2000  
Article No. 25-02

**Standard:** [Medical Instrument Technician, GS-649 \(October 1990\)](#)

**Factor:** N/A

**Issue:** Series coverage; technician versus professional work

### **Identification of the Classification Issue**

The appellant assisted a physician in conducting electrophysiology studies in the Cardiology Section of a Medical Center. The appellant had a degree in biology, had conducted animal research, had passed an exam for allied professionals in electrophysiology, kept abreast of developments in her field, and trained interns rotating through the Cardiology Section. Because the work required a high degree of skill, care, and precision and included procedures and responsibilities not permitted registered nurses in the section, the appellant believed that it belonged in a two-grade interval technologist occupation, rather than a one-grade interval technician occupation.

### **Resolution**

In determining whether the position required professional knowledge, such as that of a physician, nurse, engineer, or biologist, OPM examined the appellant's assignments along those dimensions where it most closely paralleled those of a professional. These dimensions would typically encompass defining and analyzing problems, evaluating technical practices, establishing standards, improving work methods, and developing skills. While some of the assignments were nominally similar to those of a professional, despite the appellant's credentials, none demanded professional insight.

For example, the appellant occasionally assisted in conducting trials, such as an auto pulse-width study, where she took weekly EKGs and had patients wear a Holter monitor to record heart signals. This and other such studies, however, were defined, planned, and directed by a physician or another

professional, rather than by the appellant. Instead, her daily tasks of operating and monitoring equipment and collecting and interpreting data were consistent with technician assignments.

When monitoring equipment, the appellant recognized unanticipated reactions and deviations from the norm, but was not expected to analyze the results to determine the causes or possible significance of such reactions beyond the immediate. When writing protocols, such as an administrative procedure for tracking implantable devices or the steps for preparing equipment for surgical use, the appellant based the writing on practical considerations rather than electrophysiology theory and principles. When evaluating and recommending the adoption of new equipment or researching non-invasive blood pressure monitoring equipment, she did not explore its limits or verify its performance on the basis of theoretical considerations. Typical of technician analysis, she arranged demonstrations and made recommendations based on less intensive reviews.

The appellant instructed interns and nurses on various aspects of electrophysiology. However, the purpose of the instruction was to acquaint professionals new to the field with electrophysiology techniques rather than to instruct them on theory. OPM found that the appellant's training responsibilities were consistent with the standard's expectation. Interns pursuing a specialization in electrophysiology gain their education from professionals in the field, supplemented by sessions with technicians in order to rapidly acquire the practical experience that lectures and books do not provide. As noted in the GS-649 standard, Medical Instrument Technicians may instruct physicians and nurses as well as other technicians in the use of equipment, sometimes within a classroom setting.

Keeping abreast of technical publications and advances is a common concern of both technicians and professionals. Technicians must maintain their specialized skills and keep current with new techniques. Professionals go beyond this and examine scholarly research for its potential value and fully analyze new developments, conducting tests of their own where no solutions have been established or formulas and guides developed. The appellant's position required only that she maintain technical skill as the field advanced. OPM concluded that the position was covered by the GS-649 series.

### **“Back to the Basics”**

The series determination in this case involves distinguishing between one-grade interval technical work and two-grade interval professional work. Because the primary function of the position was to perform complex technical assignments that did not require professional insight, the position was excluded from placement in a professional series.

The experience and training requirements of a position, rather than the incumbent's personal qualifications, govern its classification. The level of knowledge reflected by the appellant's degree and successful examination for non-physicians by the North American Society of Pacing and Electrophysiology was creditable only to the extent that the position demanded them.

**Link to [C-0649-08-01](#)**