

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

Atlanta Oversight Division
75 Spring Street, SW., Suite 1018
Atlanta, GA 30303-3109

Classification Appeal Decision
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [Appellant]

Agency classification: Medical Clerk
GS-679-3

Organization: Medical Center
Department of Veterans Affairs

OPM decision: Medical Support Assistant
GS-679-3

OPM decision number: C-0679-03-01

Virginia L. Magnuson
Classification Appeals Officer

December 4, 2001

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 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).

Since this decision changes the title of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the fourth pay period after the date of this decision, as permitted by 5 CFR 511.702. The servicing personnel office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected position description and a Standard Form 50 showing the personnel action taken. The report must be submitted within 30 days from the effective date of the personnel action.

Decision sent to:

[appellant]

[Human Resources Officer]

Ms. Ventris C. Gibson
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human
Resources Management (05)
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW., Room 206
Washington, DC 20420

Introduction

On September 13, 2001, the Atlanta Oversight Division, Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted an appeal for the position of Medical Clerk, GS-679-3, [organization], Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), [geographical location]. The appellant requests that her position be reclassified to GS-4. We received a complete administrative report from the agency on October 5, 2001.

The appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.). This is the final administrative decision on the classification of the position subject to discretionary review only under the limited conditions and time outlined in part 511, subpart f, of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

General issues

In March 2001, the [geographical location] Medical Center's Human Resources Support Team reviewed the appellant's position, previously classified as Medical Clerk, GS-679-4. As a result, the supervisor prepared a new position description that was forwarded to the VA Shared Service Center (SSC) for classification. A member of the SSC classified the appellant's position as Medical Clerk, GS-679-3. The appellant's position was downgraded to GS-3 on September 9, 2001.

The appellant makes various statements about her working conditions, her agency, and its evaluation of her position. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of her position. By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing her current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Therefore, we have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

Additionally, the appellant also compares the classification action taken on her position to the classification actions for other medical clerk positions at the Medical Center. Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position to others as a basis for deciding her appeal.

The appellant disagrees with the accuracy of her position description. After carefully reviewing all the available information, including the official position description, we have concluded that the duties being performed by the appellant are adequately described for classification purposes in the assigned position description.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellant, her supervisor and her agency, including the official position description. An Atlanta Oversight Division representative conducted telephone interviews with the appellant and the appellant's immediate supervisor. This appeal was decided by considering the audit findings and all information of record.

Position information

The appellant is assigned to position description number [#]. She serves as receptionist and performs clerical work in support of the treatment provided by the [organizational location]. She receives patients, sorts and organizes incoming imaging requests by image type and date, and uses the hospital's Veterans Information Systems Technical Administration (VISTA) system to register radiological exams, generate requests, check appointments and enter magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) appointments. The appellant receives and relays incoming telephone messages or answers general questions regarding cancellations, department hours, or department services. She performs most tasks independently according to established procedures and/or previous experience. She refers questions or new situations to the supervisor and receives oral and/or written instruction on non-recurring assignments and changes in department procedures.

Series and title determination

The agency determined that the appellant's position is properly placed in the Medical Support Assistance Series, GS-679, and is titled Medical Clerk. The appellant does not contest the title or series determination of her position. We concur that the position is properly placed in the GS-679 series, however, we disagree with the title.

The Job Family Standard (JFS) for Assistance and Technical Work in the Medical, Hospital, Dental, and Public Health Group, GS-600, is used to classify positions in the Medical Support Assistance Series, GS-679. The standard specifies the title to be used for positions in the GS-679 series. The proper title for the appellant's position is Medical Support Assistant.

Standard determination

JFS for Assistance and Technical Work in the Medical, Hospital, Dental, and Public Health Group, GS-0600, Medical Support Assistance Series, GS-679, dated May 2001.

Grade determination

The GS-600 JFS for Assistance and Technical Work is a Factor Evaluation System (FES) position classification standard covering two distinct occupations. Under the FES, positions are evaluated on the basis of their duties, responsibilities, and the qualifications required in terms of nine factors common to nonsupervisory General Schedule (GS) positions. Nine different classification factors are identified for evaluation. Each factor has several levels that equate to higher degrees of difficulty or complexity, and each has a corresponding point value assigned. The total of points for all nine factors is compared to a grade conversion chart in the standard to arrive at a final grade. Some of the factor level definitions in the GS-600 JFS have separate criteria for each covered series. We used the Medical Support Assistance criteria.

Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that a worker must understand to do acceptable work, such as the steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts; and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply this knowledge.

To be used as a basis for selecting a level under this factor, a knowledge must be required *and* applied. The agency evaluated this factor at Level 1-2. We agree.

At Level 1-2, medical support assistants apply established rules, regulations and operating procedures of the medical facility, its personnel, and its functions. They refer calls, answer questions, schedule patients, determine eligibility for service, assemble patient charts in their required order and sequence, and record a variety of physician's orders for patient activities, diets, tests and treatment. They also answer questions regarding routine procedures, relay physician instructions to patients, file test results, relay information regarding the patient's condition, and compile or submit data on patients treated. At Level 1-2, medical support assistants also operate personal computers, data processing equipment, and/or office support software and use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation and required formats.

The appellant's position requires a comparable knowledge of established rules, regulations and operating procedures impacting the [organizational location]'s operation. The work requires a basic knowledge of imaging exams and ability to recognize and differentiate the request types for imaging. It also requires knowledge of the VISTA radiology scheduling package and other VISTA clerical functions such as exam registration and printing of requests and schedules. The appellant uses this knowledge to serve as receptionist and support patient care. She greets patients and registers them for exams. She types identifying information, such as name, date, social security number, and requesting physician, into the system in order to generate paperwork for exams or to make or cancel MRI appointments. Scheduling MRI appointments entails using the system to identify the next available dates for the exam and entering identification data. She initiates action to obtain missing paperwork necessary for exam requests usually by notifying a designated point of contact. The appellant also maintains a system of sorting and organizing exam requests by imaging type, date, inpatient or outpatient. She performs the initial screening of MRI patient information forms for positive foreign metallic matter indications in order to notify radiology technicians. She schedules any radiological exams requested by the technicians for the patient. Additionally, the appellant refers calls, answers general questions on routine office procedures such as office hours, name of the head radiologist, fax number and appointment times, and serves as receptionist for the [organizational location]. Receptionist duties include answering routine inquiries about office procedures or requests for directions to other facility areas, and monitoring the waiting area to ensure patients are seen in a timely manner.

In addition to the knowledge described at Level 1-2, medical support assistants at Level 1-3 use more extensive knowledge of a body of rules, procedures and operations of the medical center, the facility's records system, regulations, administrative policies and professional service procedures applicable to a variety of issues. They give instructions to patients and arrange appointments, assemble patients' charts, record physicians' orders and retrieve x-rays, laboratory reports, and other relevant patient data. They organize patient records to research records, extract medical information and review records for completeness, accuracy, and consistency with medical facility requirements, and record data involving outpatient appointments, inpatient admissions, and discharge and transfer information using the medical facility's record system.

The appellant's position does not require the more extensive Level 1-3 knowledge. Her work assignments relate to the imaging service and do not require knowledge of all standardized

available medical facility services, medical terminology, and procedures of each serviced unit. The appellant provides routine procedural directions to patients but does not give the more issue-related instructions intended at Level 1-3. The appellant is not required to assemble patients' charts, record physicians' orders, research records, extract medical information, or perform other procedures similar to those identified at Level 1-3.

Level 1-2 is credited for 200 points.

Factor 2, Supervisory Controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the extent of review of completed work. The agency evaluated this factor at Level 2-2. We agree.

At Level 2-2, the supervisor makes assignments by providing general instructions. The employee uses initiative and works independently within the framework established by the supervisor. The employee is expected to refer problems not covered by the supervisor's instructions or procedures to the supervisor or designated employee. The supervisor reviews new or difficult assignments and those with potential adverse impact and may spot check routine work products for accuracy.

Level 2-2 is met. The appellant performs most tasks independently according to established procedures and/or previous experience. She refers questions or new situations to her supervisor. The supervisor provides instruction on non-recurring assignments and procedural changes. The supervisor spot checks work for compliance with procedures and established requirements for the handling of patient information.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor makes assignments by defining the overall objectives, priorities and deadlines, and assists with unusual situations. Employees independently plan the work, resolve problems, carry out successive steps of assignments, and make adjustments using accepted standard operating procedures or practices. They handle problems and deviations that arise in accordance with established policies, regulatory and administrative guidelines, directives, instructions, and accepted practices.

Level 2-3 is not met. The appellant does not approach the degree of independence of action envisioned at this level. She has no control over the setting of priorities or deadlines related to the radiological exams. Written guidance and direction regarding what needs to be done are readily available, and questions and new situations are referred to the supervisor. The appellant performs recurring procedural tasks with little opportunity to adjust or alter the timing or sequence.

Level 2-2 is credited for 125 points.

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them. The agency evaluated this factor at Level 3-1. We agree.

At Level 3-1, specific guidelines covering all important aspects of assignments are provided to the employee. The employee works in strict adherence to the guidelines. Little or no judgment is required in selecting guidelines for application to individual cases.

Level 3-1 is met. The appellant uses guidelines that include step-by-step descriptions of department procedures, working examples of commonly used forms, and policies applicable to administrative functions. The supervisor also provides oral directions. Technologists and others are resources for use of VISTA. Guidelines cover most situations and little judgment is used in selecting the guidelines for application. Much of the work is accomplished using the VISTA system. The appellant determines which of several VISTA functions to use such as radiology scheduling, exam registration, request printing, and schedule printing, but the functional processes are well-defined. Receptionist functions involve routine and repetitive questions for which information is readily available.

At Level 3-2, employees use procedural and regulatory guidelines that specifically cover the assigned work. They must choose the most appropriate guidelines, references and procedures to use from a number of similar guidelines and work situations. They make minor deviations or adapt guidelines to specific cases.

Level 3-2 is not met. The appellant has specific guidelines covering most aspects of the work. There is only limited opportunity to exercise judgment in determining the appropriate guidelines to use. She uses several VISTA functions or clerical guidelines rather than a number of similar guidelines, in accomplishing tasks. She does not make minor deviations or adapt guidelines to specific cases.

Level 3-1 is credited for 25 points.

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work. The agency evaluated this factor at Level 4-2, the only complexity level identified in the standard for medical support assistance. We agree.

At Level 4-2, the employee's work consists of several related processes such as compiling, recording, reviewing, selecting, and interpreting medical data and information incidental to a variety of patient care and treatment activities. The employee decides what needs to be done by choosing from various options that require recognition of and differences among a few easily recognizable alternatives. The employee responds to changing priorities that frequently depend upon the differences in medical information about each patient and the urgency of the situation.

Level 4-2 is met. The appellant performs several duties covered by established procedures. She reviews, sorts and files exam requests, screens MRI forms for completeness and positive metal

indications, makes MRI appointments, and receives and registers patients for exams. She also performs several related duties such as printing schedules, requesting work orders, providing appointment information, scheduling appointments, and monitoring the waiting room. These duties involve several recurring processes. They require recognition of imaging types and necessary procedural actions. The appellant performs tasks based on the imaging exam needs for each patient. This complexity is comparable to the one complexity level identified for medical support assistance. There is no evidence in the record that this level is exceeded.

Level 4-2 is credited for 75 points.

Factor 5, Scope and Effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work, i.e., purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization. The agency evaluated this factor at Level 5-1. We agree.

At Level 5-1, employees perform a variety of uncomplicated and recurring receptionist, record keeping and miscellaneous functions. The work affects the patients' attitudes and the unit's efficiency.

Level 5-1 is met. The appellant serves as receptionist for the imaging support team and performs routine tasks such as sorting exam requests, registering patients and entering MRI appointments. She monitors the office workflow to ensure patients are seen in a timely manner and calms patients by explaining the office procedure for patient visits. The work affects efficiency, effectiveness and timeliness of radiological exams and office workflow.

At Level 5-2, medical support assistance has greater scope and impact. Employees perform receptionist and general record keeping duties; give patients instructions on test preparation, diets and procedural requirements; and record physician's orders. The work affects accuracy and acceptability of further processes, including patient care.

Level 5-2 is not fully met. The appellant's work involves receptionist and record keeping duties but does not include giving the patients instructions about the exams or recording physician's orders. The appellant's work impacts efficiency by ensuring patients have their paperwork or have fully completed forms prior to exams, and that the exams are done in a timely manner. The work does not generally affect accuracy and acceptability of further processes or services.

Level 5-1 for 25 points is credited.

Factor 6, Personal Contacts and Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts

These factors assess face-to-face as well as telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain. The levels of these factors are based on what is required to make the initial contact, the difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place, e.g., the degree to which the employee and those contacted recognize their relative roles and authorities. In GS occupations, the purpose of personal contacts ranges from

factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, and objectives.

Factors 6 and 7 are interdependent. The personal contacts that serve as the basis for the level selected for Factor 7 must be the same contacts as those that are the basis for the level selected for Factor 6. The agency credited Level 6-1 for Personal Contacts and Level 7A for Purpose of Contacts. We agree.

Personal Contacts

At Level 6-1, contacts are with other employees within the immediate work unit or related work units. Some contacts may be with members of the general public in very highly structured situation. Contacts at this level are of a routine and recurring nature.

Level 6-1 is met. Contacts primarily are with the full range of treated patients and their visitors, employees of community services or businesses, and hospital staff and members of the [organizational location]. Occasionally, the appellant has contact with employees or physicians relating to the entry of work orders to the system. The appellant's personal contacts are highly structured and involve specific information such as the test to be done, patient identification information, office procedures and general hospital directions.

At Level 6-2, contacts are with employees within the medical facility, but outside the immediate work unit. Some contacts may be with the general public in moderately structured settings. Such contacts may include representatives from insurance companies, private physicians, other care providers, and individuals from other agencies or organizations seeking information.

Level 6-2 is not met. While the appellant's contacts include patients, physicians, representatives from outside activities and business, and the general public, they are of a routine and recurring nature. The purpose for the contacts is clear and typically involves registering patients or scheduling exams, providing general information, or directing and transferring calls to others. The appellant does not normally have less structured contacts from outside activities and private physicians or others seeking information. The appellant refers these to other members of the team.

Purpose of Contacts

At Level A, the purpose of contacts is to acquire, clarify, or give facts or exchange general and medical information directly related to the work. The information may range from general admission information to highly specialized medical information.

Level A is met. The appellant's regular and recurring contacts are typically with patients and their family members, members of the [organizational location] and other hospital units, and others outside the medical center for the purpose of exchanging and obtaining factual information.

At Level B, the purpose of contacts is to initiate and follow through on work efforts or to resolve operating or technical problems related to the treatment of patients and/or the maintenance of patient records. Employees at this level influence or persuade individuals or groups working toward mutual goals and have basically cooperative attitudes.

Level B is not met. The purpose of the appellant's contacts is to exchange information rather than to initiate or follow through on work efforts or to resolve operating or technical problems. Additionally, there is no indication in the appeal record that the appellant's contacts involve the use of persuasion or need to influence others. The appellant refers difficult patient contacts to the supervisor.

Level 6-1 and Level 7-A are credited for a total of 30 points.

Factor 8, Physical Demands

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed upon the employee by the work assignment. This includes physical characteristics and abilities and the physical exertion involved in the work. The agency credited this factor at Level 8-1. We agree.

At Level 8-1, the work does not require any special physical effort or ability. It may require walking, bending, standing, and/or carrying of light items such as files and manuals, but it is mainly sedentary.

Level 8-1 is met. The appellant carries such things as patient records, supplies and letter mail. The work is primarily sedentary, but requires some bending, walking and standing.

At Level 8-2, the work requires some physical exertion such as prolonged periods of standing, bending, reaching, crouching, stooping, stretching, and lifting moderately heavy items such as manuals and record boxes.

Level 8-2 is not met. The appellant's work is primarily sedentary and requires some physical effort. There is no indication in the appeal record that the work requires prolonged periods of physical exertion or lifting of moderately heavy items.

Level 8-1 for 5 points is credited.

Factor 9, Work Environment

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings, and the safety precautions required. The agency credited this factor at Level 9-1. We agree.

At Level 9-1, the employee typically works indoors in an environment involving everyday risks or discomforts. He or she is required to observe normal safety practices. The area is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated.

Level 9-1 is met. The appellant's primary work environment is a medical office setting with a glass window facing the waiting area and a split door entry. The office is in a medical facility. The normal risks and discomforts of an office environment are present.

At Level 9-2, the work environment involves moderate risks or discomforts that require special precautions, e.g., exposure to infectious diseases. Employees may be required to use protective clothing or gear. Employees may work in close proximity to mentally disturbed patients and, consequently, be at risk of physical abuse.

Level 9-2 is not met. The appellant's work does not require special precautions. Although the appellant has contact with psychiatric patients, ward personnel normally escort these patients. This does not meet the intent of Level 9-2.

Level 9-1 is credited for 5 points.

Summary

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-2	200
2. Supervisory controls	2-2	125
3. Guidelines	3-1	25
4. Complexity	4-2	75
5. Scope and effect	5-1	25
6. Personal contacts and	6-1	
7. Purpose of contacts	7-A	30
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	5
<i>Total</i>		<i>490</i>

A total of 490 points falls within the GS-3 range, 455-650, according to the Conversion Table in the GS-600 JFS.

Decision

The appellant's position is correctly classified as Medical Support Assistant, GS-679-3.