

**CLASSIFICATION APPEAL DECISION
U.S. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
CHICAGO OVERSIGHT DIVISION**

INCUMBENT: **[Appellant's Name]**

POSITION NUMBER: 596-63240

AGENCY CLASSIFICATION: Program Support Assistant (OA), GS-303-5

POSITION LOCATION: Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Administration Medical Center
Mental Health Services
[City, State]

OFFICE OF PERSONNEL
MANAGEMENT DECISION: **Medical Clerk (OA), GS-679**

OPM decision number: C-679-05-01

This appellate decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on administrative, certifying, payroll, and accounting offices of the Government. It is the final administrative decision on the classification of the position, not subject to further appeal. It is subject to discretionary review only under the conditions and time limits specified in Part 511, Subpart F, of Title 5, U.S. Code of Federal Regulations.

/s/

FREDERICK J. BOLAND
CLASSIFICATION APPEALS OFFICER

May 29, 1998

DATE

Decision Transmitted To:

[appellant's name and address]

[name and address of appellant's
representative]

Mr. Ronald E. Cowles
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Personnel and Labor Relations
Department of Labor Relations
Washington, D.C. 20420

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

Introduction

The appellant is assigned to position number 596-63240, classified October 11, 1996, as Program Support Assistant (OA), GS-303-5. Her position is located in the Mental Health Service, Medical Center, Department of Veterans Affairs, [City, State]. She believes her position description accurately lists her major duties but requests that her position be classified as Program Support Assistant (OA), GS-303-7. She feels a higher grade is warranted due to the knowledge that is required by the position, the amount of independence she is given in performing her duties, and the atmosphere that she works in with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) patients. These issues are examined under the Analysis and Findings Section of this decision.

In addition, the appellant states:

Since transferring to the VA Medical Center in 1986 my service has been characterized by outstanding performance of duty, exemplary conduct, and high achievement in all aspects of assigned duties, technical competence, aggressive spirit, genuine concern for the welfare of the patients and a common sense approach towards leadership resulting in my selection of increased responsibility on numerous occasions. A flawless record filled with commendations and awards (including the hospital's March 1997 Customer Service Award) depicts my ability to perform at a level that far exceeds normal expectations.

My service with the PTSD Clinical Team has enabled me to develop perspective concerning leadership that is unparalleled and enabled me to adapt rapidly to new and more demanding tasks. I can organize and help members of my clinical team to accomplish the hospital mission. The VA is in need of the vast experiences and organizational skills that I have accumulated during my employment with the federal government. I am more than qualified to function as a GS-7 Program Assistant.

My position description and personnel record speaks for itself. Throughout my career, I strive to seek out and accept higher levels of responsibilities. My concern will always be for the VA mission and the veterans. I have always given 150% to the VA, Psychiatry Service and the PTSD Clinical Team and will continue to do so in the future.

OPM is required by law to classify positions on the basis of their duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements by comparison to the criteria specified in the appropriate classification standard or guide. Other methods of evaluation, such as comparison to another position, are not permitted. Similarly, factors such as an individual's qualifications, level of performance, or length of service are not considered in determining grade level. (Other areas of the personnel management system take these considerations into account. Performance and incentive awards, periodic step increases, and special pay rates, for example, consider some of these issues that are not properly addressed through classification.)

Position Information

The appellant is one of a staff of about 37 in the Mental Health Service. Other positions in the service include about 27 professional and technical positions and 10 administrative and clerical positions. These latter groups include a GS-9 Administrative Officer (the appellant's supervisor), four

Secretaries, three GS-5 Patient Care Assistants, the appellant, and a GS-2 Clerk. Four employees are assigned to the appellant's immediate unit, the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Clinical Team (PCT), which consists of a Psychiatrist, a Psychologist, a Social Worker, and the appellant.

The appellant supports three professionals in their care and treatment of patients. Her assignments include general office support, specialized support, and office automation functions presenting roughly equal time demands. Each of these areas entails various duties, as noted in the following groupings.

Office Support

- Distributes the mail
- Makes patient appointments
- Responds to inquiries
- Orders and maintains supplies and forms
- Schedules meetings/conferences
- Makes travel arrangements
- Composes and types correspondence, memorandums, reports, and staff meeting minutes
- Keep calendars
- Organizes and maintains files and records, including medical records, manuals, handbooks and other related materials
- Assists arranging and setting up picnics and other outreach programs/projects
- Receives all incoming calls/patients/visitors

Specialized Support

- Conducts face-to-face interviews with patients to obtain data that will be used to determine eligibility for benefits and/or determines the correct referral source
- Presents PCT program information to patients, visitors, and hospital staff
- Keeps patient history records
- Logs in patient information
- Gathers data for Northeast Program Evaluation Center (NEPCC) reports
- Maintains patient records
- Administer psychological tests at outreach sites when a technician is not available

Office Automation

- Uses word processing for typing correspondence, reports, and forms
- Uses computer for inputting and retrieving patient data

The appellant's performance standards address assignments sufficiently important to warrant written appraisal. The standards focus on typing accuracy, tracking correspondence and report due dates, maintaining patient appointment and meeting calendars, retrieving and filing records, and receiving

visitors and callers. The performance standards are consistent with the examples the appellant provided in response to our requests for specific examples of her work.

In contrast, her official position description overstates her actual duties and responsibilities in a number of areas. The description's casual use of language (e.g., responsible for assisting clinical team in developing and revising administrative and operational plans; conducting public relations; controls supply, budget, and engineering matters; performs procedures in a wide range of clinical and technical assignments; etc.) conveys a sense of greater authority and responsibility than warranted by the work examples the appellant provided. Such work is already credited to technical, administrative, and supervisory positions at the Center and the official description should be corrected accordingly. In addition, it should explicitly state that the position requires typing proficiency (at least 40 words per minute).

Analysis and Findings

Series and Title Determination

The appellant's duties involve a mix of work covered by series in different occupational groups, primarily Medical Clerk, GS-679, and Office Automation, GS-326. Mixed occupational series work is classified to the dominant series, based upon its paramount knowledge requirement, reason for existence, the organizational function, line of promotion, and normal recruitment source. Not considered, however, is work demanding less than a substantial (at least 25 percent) amount of time or work performed in the absence of another (e.g., appellant's administering tests when a technician is not available).

The GS-679 series includes all positions the primary duties of which are to perform clerical work in support of the care and treatment given to patients in a ward, clinic or other such unit of a medical facility. It includes functions such as serving as receptionist; performing record keeping duties; performing clerical duties relating to patient care and treatment; and providing miscellaneous support to the medical staff of the unit. It requires a practical knowledge of the medical facility's organization and services, the basic rules and regulations governing visitors and patient treatment, and a practical knowledge of the standard procedures, medical records, and medical terminology of the unit supported. The GS-326 series includes all positions the primary duties of which are to perform office automation work, which includes word processing, either solely or in combination with clerical work, when such work is performed in the context of general office clerical support.

Similar to GS-679 positions, the purpose of the appellant's position is to support the general clerical needs of a small medical unit. This is reflected in her performance standards, the specific work examples she provided, and the readily evident needs of a small team. Office automation is one of these needs, but is incidental to the Medical Clerk functions assigned the appellant. The GS-679 series best reflects the nature of work and is consistent with the career path and recruitment sources for the position.

The prescribed title for positions in the GS-679 series is Medical Clerk. The parenthetical title Office Automation (OA) is added because the position requires significant knowledge of office automation (e.g., word processing) and typing proficiency. The proper title for the position, then, is *Medical Clerk (OA)*.

Decision

The proper title and series classification of the position is Medical Clerk (OA), GS-679. The agency has first level classification authority and the responsibility for determining the appropriate grade by applying the GS-679 grading criteria.