

## NEW VA-QUALIFICATION PROGRAM FOR PROSTHETISTS

For many years the Veterans Administration, the American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc., the American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association, the concerned committees of the National Academy of Sciences—National Research Council, the prosthetics schools, and other groups have sought to raise the standards of prosthetics services. With this goal in mind, the Veterans Administration has developed a program which will require certain qualifications for prosthetists to furnish prostheses or services under VA's artificial limb contract. This VA-Qualification program will go into effect on March 1, 1973.

Following is a description of how the VA-Qualification program will work. In effect, only those limb facilities which have at least one VA-Qualified prosthetist in their employ throughout the contract year will be considered for the award and retention of a VA artificial limb contract.

It is to be noted that VA-Qualified status is simply evidence that a prosthetist is considered competent to provide basic prosthetics services for VA beneficiaries. A prosthetist must also have satisfied the special educational requirements to be stipulated in the contract for eligibility to furnish certain prostheses or services. We believe this new program will be another step forward in raising standards of prosthetics service for all amputees.

### *A Program of Qualifying Prosthetists For VA's Artificial Limb Contracts*

#### I. POLICY

A. Effective March 1, 1973, only those limb facilities which have at least one VA-Qualified prosthetist in their employ throughout the contract year will be considered for the award and retention of a VA artificial limb contract. This requirement will apply both to parent and to branch facilities.

B. A VA-Qualified prosthetist will be required to certify that each prosthesis provided under VA contract has been fabricated in accordance with the specifications and special conditions of the VA artificial limb contract, and has been personally fitted and aligned by him. Therefore, the number of VA-Qualified prosthetists required at a specific facility

will depend upon the size of the facility and/or the anticipated extent of services to be performed for veterans under the contract.

C. The Veterans Administration reserves the right to revoke the "VA-Qualified" status of any prosthetist because of incompetence or violations of VA policies or ethical practices.

## **II. METHODS OF ATTAINING VA-QUALIFIED STATUS**

### **A. Certification by the American Board of Certification**

1. The most usual method for a prosthetist to acquire the designation "VA-Qualified" will be through certification as a prosthetist by the American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc. (ABC). Certification as a Prosthetics Assistant or Prosthetics Technician is not acceptable. The Veterans Administration appreciates that the American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc. has made great strides toward raising standards and toward the development of professional practices and responsibilities. The VA-Qualification program is predicated on the assumption that there will continue to be fair and rigorous enforcement of the policies and procedures used by the American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc. and that standards and requirements will continue to rise progressively as the profession advances.

2. Once a prosthetist has been certified by the American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc. and has obtained "VA-Qualification" on that basis, he retains such qualification unless it is specifically revoked by the Veterans Administration. In the event the American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc. should revoke or suspend certification of a specific prosthetist for any reason, the VA will review the reasons for such action and determine whether VA-Qualification should also be revoked.

### **B. Certification by the Veterans Administration**

Recognizing that there will be a small number of prosthetists who will not be ABC-Certified but whose facilities will wish to render prosthetics services under VA's artificial limb contract program, there is established a VA-Certification program. Under this program the experience and education requirements of the American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc. in effect at the time of application by the prosthetist for VA-Certification will apply. In addition, the prosthetist will have to pass written, oral, and practical examinations which will be scheduled at least every three years. These examinations will be administered by an educational institution. Fees will not exceed those charged by the American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc.

Three letters of reference from physicians, attesting to the competency of the prosthetist, will also be required. It is the hope of the Veterans Administration that this method of obtaining VA-Qualified status will be kept at a minimum. The preferred method of obtaining VA-Qualified status is by means of ABC-Certification.

### C. *Grandfather's Clause*

It is recognized that there may be a few prosthetists who have been performing satisfactory prosthetics services for veterans for several years but who are not certified. During at least the first year of this program, VA-Qualified status may be given to those prosthetists who have performed satisfactory prosthetics services for veteran beneficiaries for at least five years as attested to by local VA officials.

### III. *VA-QUALIFICATION AS A MINIMUM REQUIREMENT*

Regardless of the method used to obtain VA-Qualified status, such status is simply evidence that a prosthetist is considered competent to provide basic prosthetics services for veteran beneficiaries. He will still have to satisfy the special educational requirements stipulated in the contract for eligibility to fabricate, supervise the fabrication of, and personally fit and align specific devices. For example, the special requirements contained in the 1971 artificial limb contract cover:

- A. Patellar-Tendon-Bearing Below-Knee legs
- B. Variants of the Patellar-Tendon-Bearing Below-Knee legs
- C. Fluid-Controlled Prostheses
- D. Total-Contact Above-Knee Sockets
- E. Immediate and/or Early Postsurgical Prostheses

As other major developments become available, additional educational requirements may be stipulated in the contract. In effect, then, the extent and nature of the services which a limb facility can provide under VA's artificial limb contract will depend upon the number and type of courses completed by its VA-Qualified prosthetists.

### IV. *IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAM*

#### A. *Certification by the American Board of Certification*

Early in 1971, the Veterans Administration will develop a listing of all practicing prosthetists who have been certified by the ABC. As additional prosthetists are certified by the American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc., their names and certificate numbers will be made known to the Veterans Administration.

#### B. *Certification by the Veterans Administration*

Provision will be made in 1972 for people who are not ABC-Certified

to apply for certification by the Veterans Administration as described in II B, above. It is planned to hold the first examinations in New York no later than July 1972 to permit determinations to be made in time for a facility to bid on VA's artificial limb contract for the contract year 1973. The next examinations probably will not be held until 1975.

*C. Grandfather's Clause*

During 1972 those people who meet the provisions of the "Grandfather's Clause," as described in II C, above, will be given an opportunity to apply for VA-Qualification. It is not anticipated that there will be any repetition of the use of this "Grandfather's Clause" as a means of achieving VA-Qualified status in future years.

*V. CERTIFICATES AS EVIDENCE OF VA-QUALIFIED STATUS*

Veterans Administration certificates, with a numbering system which will be different from that used by the American Board for Certification in Orthotics and Prosthetics, Inc., will be issued to all prosthetists achieving VA-Qualified status. These certificates remain the property of the Veterans Administration and must be returned upon request.