

PART V. TITLE 38 SPECIAL ADVANCEMENTS AND CASH AWARDS

1. SCOPE. This part contains policies, procedures and guidelines governing the advancement of [] podiatrists, optometrists, chiropractors, registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, physician assistants and expanded-function dental auxiliaries appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7401(1) or 7405(a); and, Title 38 hybrid employees appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) or 7405(a)(1)(B). Excluded are facility directors, chiefs of staff, medical and dental residents appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7406, and health care executives appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7306.

2. REFERENCES

- a. VA Directive 5017
- b. 38 U.S.C., chapters 73 and 74

3. PERSONS AUTHORIZED TO APPROVE ADVANCEMENTS. The Under Secretary for Health, or a designee, shall approve all advancements of employees covered by this part. (See appendix A of this part.)

4. CRITERIA FOR SPECIAL ADVANCEMENT FOR ACHIEVEMENT (SAA)

a. [**Podiatrists and Optometrists and Chiropractors.** Full-time, part-time, and intermittent podiatrist, optometrists and chiropractors may be advanced within the grade from one to five steps on the basis of professional achievement above that expected for the grade level or assignment providing they have demonstrated a high level of performance and potential for assumption of greater responsibility. Examples of professional achievement are:

(1) Outstanding and exceptional achievement as evidenced by receipt of official recognition from a recognized professional or academic organization.

(2) Significant professional attainment in research or contributions to podiatric or optometric science and patient care worthy of publication in a national or international journal of high regard within the respective professions.]

b. [**Registered Nurses and Nurse Anesthetists**

(1) **Criteria.** Full-time, part-time and intermittent registered nurses and nurse anesthetists may be advanced within the grade from one to five steps on the basis of professional achievement provided they have demonstrated excellence in performance above that expected for the grade level or assignment and potential for assumption of greater responsibility. Such achievement may be demonstrated by:

(a) Recognition of professional groups such as certification by the appropriate national certifying body (except where such certification is required as a condition of employment) or election to an office in a national professional society; or

(b) Professional attainments in research or contributions to the advancement of health sciences and patient care worthy of national or international recognition; or

(c) Receipt of professional awards at the State or national level in recognition of significant and distinguished contributions to nursing, nurse anesthesia, or health care delivery.

(2) **Number of Steps.** The relationship between the number of steps to be granted and the size of the pay range should be considered when granting special advancements under this paragraph. For example, if an employee is in a grade with a 133 percent pay range, a five-step advancement should only be granted in extremely unusual situations where there is a clearly documented history of truly exceptional achievement.

(3) **Nurse Anesthetists.** Nurse anesthetists appointed on and after May 4, 1993, may not be given an SAA based on certification by the Council on Certification of Nurse Anesthetists. Certification is a condition of employment and may not be used as a basis for an SAA].

c. **[Physician Assistants.** Full-time, part-time and intermittent physician assistants may be advanced within the grade from one to five steps on the basis of professional achievement above that expected for the grade level or assignment provided they have demonstrated excellence in performance and potential for assumption of greater responsibility. Examples of such achievements include, but are not limited to:

(1) A graduate level degree in a field related to the Department's health care mission;

(2) Appointment to a university faculty position;

(3) Significant contributions to the Department's health care mission. Such accomplishments may result from leadership or exceptional efforts on facility, regional or national task forces or committees, or by serving as a consultant on matters relating to education research, health care management, or quality of care issues;

(4) Recognition of outstanding and exceptional achievement by a professional or academic organization;

(5) Election to office in a professional organization at the State or national level;

(6) Independently producing or serving as a principal assistant or major contributing member on research producing publishable results that advance patient care or medical science; or

(7) Attainment of specialty certification within the occupation. This does not include certification as a physician assistant by the National Commission on Certification of Physician's Assistants, which is a condition of employment as a physician assistant in VHA].

d. **[Expanded-Function Dental Auxiliaries.** Full-time, part-time, and intermittent expanded-function dental auxiliaries may be advanced within their grade from one to five steps on the basis of

professional achievement above that expected for the grade level or assignment provided they have demonstrated excellence in performance and potential for assumption of greater responsibility. Such achievement may be evidenced by:

- (1) Completion of significant research in either the biomedical or health care delivery area and publication of these results in a recognized journal.
- (2) Recognition of outstanding and exceptional achievement by receipt of an official award and publication of these results in a recognized journal.
- (3) Academic achievement by completion of a postgraduate degree in a related health care field].

e. Pharmacists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Certified Respiratory Therapists, Registered Respiratory Therapists, Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurses, Audiologists, Speech Pathologists, Audiologist-Speech Pathologists, Dieticians, Kinesiotherapists, Medical Record Administrators/Specialists, Medical Technologists, Psychologists, Social Workers, Biomedical Engineers, Pharmacy Technicians, Medical Instrument Technicians, Medical Record Technicians, Dental Hygienists, Dental Assistants, Nuclear Medicine Technologists, Occupational Therapy Assistants, Therapeutic Radiologic Technologists, Physical Therapy Assistants, Diagnostic Radiologic Technicians, Prosthetic Representatives, and Orthotist-Prosthetists. These occupations may be advanced within the grade from one to five steps on the basis of professional achievement above that expected for the grade level or assignment providing they have demonstrated a high level of performance and potential for assumption of greater responsibility. Please note that the granting of four or five steps should be reserved for only the highest personal achievements, and should be rare. To the extent possible, all employees should be encouraged to seek developmental opportunities that could enhance their personal qualifications and be afforded fair and equitable opportunity to accomplish such achievements. Examples of professional achievement include:

- (1) Professional attainments in health care management, education, research, and patient care that are recognized at the national or international level, or are published in a recognized journal within the employee's occupation, or
- (2) Attainment of certification by an appropriate national certifying body, unless such certification is a condition of employment within VA or meets the criteria in the qualification standard for promotion to a higher grade, or
- (3) Academic achievement by the completion of a higher-level degree in a field related to the Department's health care mission, unless the degree is a condition for promotion under the applicable qualification standard, or
- (4) Election to office in a professional organization at the state or national level in recognition of significant and distinguished contributions to the employee's occupation, or
- (5) Recognition of outstanding and exceptional achievement by a professional or academic organization, or

(6) Independently producing or serving as a principle assistant or major contributing member on research producing publishable results that advance patient care or medical science, or

(7) Appointment to a university faculty position, or

(8) Appointment to a State licensing board or national certifying or accrediting body related to the practice of the employee's occupation.

NOTE: *Individuals at the top step of their grade cannot receive an increase to base pay; however, they can be recognized with a Special Contribution Award per Part III of this handbook providing they have demonstrated a high level of performance and potential for assumption of greater responsibility, and by meeting one of the examples of professional achievement stated above.*

NOTE: *Local facilities are encouraged to develop criteria to ensure consistent application of Special Advancements for Achievement.*

5. PROCESSING AND DOCUMENTING SPECIAL ADVANCEMENTS FOR ACHIEVEMENT (INCLUDING USE OF STANDARDS BOARDS). See appendices B and C of this part.

6. CRITERIA FOR SPECIAL ADVANCEMENT FOR PERFORMANCE (SAP)

a. **Consideration.** Full-time, part-time and intermittent podiatrists, optometrists, chiropractors, registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, physician assistants, and expanded-function dental auxiliaries who have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance and professional competence over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession, or who have made noted contributions in some phase of their profession, may be considered for SAPs. Hybrid Title 38 positions may be considered in accordance with paragraph f. Union officials serving on 100 percent official time who do not perform sufficient management-assigned duties to receive an evaluation of their performance are not eligible for SAPs. **NOTE:** *Physicians and dentists may receive a performance pay lump sum payment per Part IX of VA Handbook 5007.*

[**NOTE:** *SAP's for supervisors and managers should be considered only at the end of the rating cycle.*]

b. **Podiatrists, Optometrists, and Chiropractors.** An advancement of three steps, not to exceed the maximum of the grade, may be granted in lieu of and on the same due date established for a periodic step increase. Two steps may be granted when employee is at the eighth step of the grade. The employee must have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance as evidenced by the following examples:

(1) Demonstration of exceptional skills and aptitudes in the care and treatment of patients.

(2) Actual assumption of greater professional and/or administrative responsibility. Faculty appointment (post residency) at the rank of instructor or above may be considered as a greater responsibility.

(3) Significant research.

(4) Significant clinical contribution (including publication).

c. **Registered Nurses and Nurse Anesthetists.** An advancement of one step within the grade may be granted to covered employees when there has been a demonstrated sustained high level of performance and ability over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession. In addition, one or more of the criteria listed in chapter 4, paragraph 6 of part III of VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, must be met.

d. **Physician Assistants.** The employee must have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance and ability over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession or there must have been noted contributions in some aspect of health care. Criteria for one-step advancement will be demonstrated by superior performance as evidenced by:

(1) Assumption of a major responsibility in administering a major patient care program.

(2) Significant accomplishments associated with an academic program conducted in affiliation with the facility where the physician assistant is employed.

e. **Expanded-Function Dental Auxiliaries.** The employee must have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance and ability over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession or there must have been noted contributions in some phase of health care. Criteria for 1-step advancement will be demonstrated by superior performance as evidenced by:

(1) Demonstration of exception skills and aptitudes in the care and treatment of patients.

(2) Significant accomplishments associated with an academic program conducted in affiliation with the VA facility where the person is employed.

f. **Pharmacists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Certified Respiratory Therapists, Registered Respiratory Therapists, Licensed Practical or Vocational Nurses, Audiologists, Speech Pathologists, Audiologist-Speech Pathologists, Dieticians, Kinesiotherapists, Medical Record Administrators/ Specialists, Medical Technologists, Psychologists, Social Workers, Biomedical Engineers, Pharmacy Technicians, Medical Instrument Technicians, Medical Record Technicians, Dental Hygienists, Dental Assistants, Nuclear Medicine Technologists, Occupational Therapy Assistants, Therapeutic Radiologic Technologists, Physical Therapy Assistants, Diagnostic Radiologic Technicians, Prosthetic Representatives, and Orthotist-Prosthetists.** The Quality Step Increase provisions in part III, paragraph 3 of this handbook will be used to grant one-step special advancements for performance for employees in these occupations. Special advancement for performance recommendations for Title 38 hybrid employees will not require review by a Professional Standards Board. Instead, recommendations will be forwarded directly to the appropriate approving authority listed in appendix A of this part.

NOTE: *Individuals at the top step of their grade cannot receive an increase to base pay; however, they can be recognized with a Special Contribution Award per Part III of this handbook.*