

CLINICAL OPTOMETRIST QUALIFICATION STANDARD

Veterans Health Administration

3/27/17

1. COVERAGE

The following are overall requirements for appointment as a clinical optometrist in VHA.

2. SECTION A. BASIC REQUIREMENTS

a. **Citizenship.** Citizen of the United States. (Non-citizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens in accordance with chapter 3, section A, paragraph 3g, this part.)

b. **Education.** Degree of doctor of optometry conferred from a school or college of optometry approved by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for the year in which the course of study was completed and degree awarded. Approved schools or colleges are:

(1) United States and Canadian schools or colleges of optometry accredited by the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education for the year in which the O.D. degree was awarded.

(2) And schools and colleges (including foreign schools) accepted by an optometry licensing board or entity of a U.S. State, Territory, Commonwealth or the District of Columbia as required for licensure to practice optometry.

c. License and Registration

(1) **Clinical Optometrist (Except Residents).** Possess a current license to practice optometry in a U.S. State, Territory, Commonwealth or the District of Columbia. This license must be unrestricted and if required, maintained as a current registration with the entity issuing said license. The license to practice optometry shall be current and commensurate with their clinical privileges and issued with the highest level of therapeutic endorsements from the applicable licensing agency of the state, territory, commonwealth, or District of Columbia. The VHA facility Director may waive this licensure requirement (1) if the optometrist is to serve in a country other than the United States and (2) the optometrist has licensure in that country.

(2) **Residents and Fellows.** Licensure, with highest level of therapeutic endorsements issued by the licensing entity of a U.S. State, Territory, Commonwealth, or the District of Columbia, must be received before completion of the first year of VA residency training.

Unlicensed residents must also meet any registration or other equivalent requirements established for optometry residents of non-VHA facilities with which the VHA facility is affiliated for training purposes during the first year of VHA residency.

(3) **Impaired Licensure.** An optometrist who has, or has ever had, any license(s) revoked, suspended, denied, restricted, limited, or issued/placed on a probationary status may be appointed to VHA only in accordance with the provisions of chapter 3, section B, paragraph 14, this part.

(4) **NPDB Screening.** All applicant optometrists will be screened by National Practitioner Data Bank (NPDB) per standard VA policy.

(5) **License Enhancements.** VHA clinical optometrists are required to maintain their applicable U.S. State, Territorial, Commonwealth or District of Columbia license of record at the highest level of therapeutic privileges available from that licensing entity and to meet all requirements required by these licensing entities for future enhancements of therapeutic privileges.

(6) **Licensing Body.** The license of record filed with a VHA Facility must meet all above requirements but need not be issued by the US State, Territory, Commonwealth or District of Columbia in which the VHA facility is located.

(7) **Maintenance of Licensure (MOL).** The state license of record of a clinical VHA optometrist is required to be renewed periodically (every 1, 2 or 3 years depending on the licensing entity) in full compliance with the Maintenance of License (MOL) requirements of the license issuer.

(8) **Maintenance of Certification.** Optometrists Board Certified in general practice optometry and/or an optometry specialty shall fulfill all maintenance of board certification requirements of their particular certification board(s) if such certification is part of their Grade requirements.

NOTE: Licensure may be waived by the Under Secretary for Health or designee in Central Office, for individuals in administrative, research or academic assignments that do not involve direct patient care in accordance with current regulations.

d. **Physical Standards.** See VHA Directive and VHA Handbook 5019.

e. **English Language Proficiency.** Optometrists appointed to direct patient-care positions must be proficient in spoken and written English as required by 38 U.S.C. 7402(d), and 7407(d).

3. SECTION B: CLINICAL GRADE REQUIREMENTS

In addition to the above, the following qualifications are required for appointment to each of the following clinical optometry grades.

a. Associate Grade

Meet All Section A Basic Requirements and following requirements.

(1) A valid, current and active state License to practice optometry that is in good standing.

(2) Little, or no, prior experience practicing within a medical facility.

b. Full Grade

Two or more full years of appropriate general optometry practice in a VHA clinical setting or an equivalent practice setting and meet the following requirements.

(1) Possess the basic clinical competence, experience, training and knowledge to independently manage patients with eye and vision dysfunctions-diseases most typically presented by VHA patients; order appropriate laboratory tests and imaging; and to treat, monitor and/or refer patients as required for additional consultation or treatments as necessary.

c. Intermediate Grade

Meet the following additional requirements.

(1) A minimum of four years of prior full-time optometry practice within a VHA clinical setting, or its medical equivalent, with satisfactory, or higher, most recent performance ratings.

(The experience requirement above is waived upon successful completion of a one-year Accreditation Council on Optometric Education approve residency or residency required by a specialty board recognized by VHA.)

(2) And two or more of the following qualifications:

(i) Professional stature that warrants appointment to the clinical faculty of a school or college of optometry or school of medicine if affiliated with the VHA.

(ii) Active and regular contributory participation at VHA Grand Rounds, Journal Club, interdisciplinary in-services or their equivalents.

(iii) Board certification in the general practice of optometry issued by a certifying body recognized by VHA.

d. Senior Grade

Achievement of a high level of competence in medical optometry demonstrated by four or more of the following:

(1) Successful passage of a National, standardized written examination testing advanced competence in a specialty of optometry required by an American certification board of that specialty recognized by VHA.*

(2) Regularly serves as consultant for VHA optometrists and other health professionals at their VHA facility regarding complex patient presentations.

(3) Induction as a Fellow of the American Academy of Optometry.

(4) Responsible for organizing and moderating VHA optometry grand rounds or its equivalent.

(5) Hold appointment as an associate professor of optometry when the VHA is affiliated with a school of optometry or medicine.

(6) Inducted as a member of the Optometric Glaucoma Society, Optometric Retina Society or other optometry or ophthalmology learned society.

(7) Responsible for supervising VHA optometry trainees.

(8) A record of scholarship demonstrated by published articles and lecturing at an affiliate and/or educational meetings.

(9) Operating a specialized diagnostic or screening program serving regional VHAs. An example is a teleretinal imaging program.

* (1) Becomes mandatory for appointment to Senior Grade for those receiving O.D. degrees after 2020.

e. Chief Grade

Has achieved a high level of clinical competence as illustrated by three or more of the following:

(1) Board Certification in a specialty of optometry relevant to VHA patient care by a VHA recognized specialty board.*

(2) Appointment as Chief of an Optometry Service responsible for its patient care and teaching programs (when present).

(3) Represents the VHA Optometry Service in its relationship with affiliate(s).

(4) Inducted as Diplomate of the American Academy of Optometry in a clinical special interest group (SIG) relevant to VHA patient care.

(5) Documented history of clinical research producing publications over a significant period of time.

(6) Hold appointment as professor of clinical optometry at an affiliated school (when affiliated).

* (1) Becomes mandatory for appointment to Chief grade for those with O.D. degrees issued after 2020.

Note: VHAs frequently have multiple Chief Grade optometrists, but only one shall be responsible for overall administration of optometry staff, patient care and teaching programs.

f. Optometry House Staff and Fellows

(1) **Clinical patient care Residents (Specialty)**. Meet requirements specified in Section A.

(2) **Optometry Research Fellows (Specialty)**. Meet requirements specified in Section A plus completion of an accredited specialty residency.

g. Attendings

Meet the following three requirements.

(1) Hold qualifications required for appointment at Intermediate or higher grade.

(2) Capable of assisting in the maintenance of accepted standards of professional optometry care in VHA facilities; and of accepting full responsibility for such proper care and treatment of their assigned patients by adherence to VHA standards and requirements.

(3) Have the caliber of a faculty member at the clinical assistant professor or higher level. Where the attending does not hold a faculty appointment at an affiliated optometry or medical school, such caliber would be evidenced by recommendation of the Deans Committee or an equivalent body. The attending must also be able to train optometry students and residents and qualified to serve on appropriate review committees for the direction of VHA student and residency training programs.

h. Consultants

Meet these three requirements.

(1) Hold qualifications required for appointment at Intermediate or higher grades.

(2) Possess professional clinical ability in a specialty or subspecialty of optometry and capable of affording the facility Director and optometry service Chief the benefit of their professional experience in rendering specialty or subspecialty care as required in maintaining the highest level of medical care to VHA patients.

(3) Capable of serving as academic representative of optometry to affiliated schools or colleges and accepting responsibility for, and direction of, the educational training of optometry subspecialty residents (if present). Consultants not holding faculty appointments at an affiliated optometry or medical school should possess the equivalent professional qualifications as evidenced by recommendation for appointment from the VHA Deans Committee or equivalent body responsible for the recommendation of consultant appointments at the VHA facility.

4. SECTION C: DEVIATION

The appointing official may, under certain circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to these grade determination requirements for optometrists whose composite record of accomplishments, performance, and qualifications warrant such action based on demonstrated and/or documented competence to meet the requirements of the proposed grade.