

Position Classification Standard for Autopsy Assistant Series, GS-0625

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SERIES DEFINITION¹

This series includes all classes of positions the paramount duties and responsibilities of which are to provide technical assistance and related services to pathologists or physicians during autopsies and/or inquests. Characteristic of positions in this series is some knowledge of human anatomy and of embalming processes, and skill in dissecting procedures.

These standards supersede the standards for the Morgue Attendant Series, GS-0625 issued in December 1945 under the code SP-646-0.

COVERAGE AND EXCLUSIONS

Autopsy assistant positions in the Federal service are typically located in hospitals, and are, in these standards, described in that context. Because of the number and incidence of autopsies, the need for 7-days a week coverage and/or on-call duty, etc., autopsy assistant duties may occur in from one to three positions in a typical hospital, and characteristically occupy less than the full time of the incumbents. The remaining time in the position may be devoted to duties such as those of medical technician, animal caretaker, laboratory helper, chauffeur, etc., which by themselves, would be classifiable to some other series or covered under wage administration plans.

When the position requires either the ability to learn, or to perform the technical procedures described in this standard the position is to be classified in this series. If duties and knowledges other than those described in this series are required, then the position is to be classified to the applicable series, or under the wage administration plan, whichever is appropriate for those duties and knowledges. In classifying a mixed position, the position will be classified to this series if knowledges, skills, and abilities to perform autopsy assistant technical procedures are paramount. The assistance of the operating officials in identifying whether autopsy assistant duties, knowledges and skills are required is essential in making the decision as to the appropriate series.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Autopsies are performed, when legal consent has been received, on the bodies of patients who die in hospitals or on the bodies of others which come into the custody of hospitals for the purpose of conducting autopsies. In all hospitals, autopsies provide a vital source of information for clinical investigative studies. In those hospitals having a residency program, autopsies also provide a vital source of information for teaching programs. The prosector (pathologist or physician who conducts the autopsy) is medically and legally responsible for the autopsy, for the techniques and methods used, for the extent of the examination, and for the contents of the

¹ These standards are based upon a draft developed by the Veterans Administration.

written report of findings. The autopsy assistant assists the prosecutor in the examination by performing technical procedures as directed, by providing tools, equipment, solutions, etc., when needed, by preparing the body both before and after the autopsy, by disposing of organs, tissues, etc., as directed.

Autopsy examinations may include observation and findings on all conditions and characteristics of the body, organs, tissues, etc. Typically, in a complete examination, autopsy findings are presented in two major parts: (1) gross autopsy description covering the visual examination, and (2) microscopic examination description covering laboratory or other studies made from tissues, blood, bone marrow, etc. In connection with the gross autopsy description, the autopsy assistant is responsible for bringing to the attention of the prosecutor any obvious deviations he observes in the whole body and in the organs which he may excise. For example, the autopsy assistant is expected to recognize and report an organ weighing 50% more than normal or that the color of an organ is grossly different. In connection with the microscopic examination description, the autopsy assistant fixes the organs, tissues, etc., in proper solutions so that the microscopic examination can be made.

In addition to the performance of technical procedures, which constitute the series and grade-controlling elements of autopsy assistant positions, autopsy assistants typically perform related clerical work, and a variety of other duties necessary to the maintenance of the autopsy area and equipment.

GRADE LEVEL CRITERIA

These standards are based on a description, as a benchmark, of the duties and responsibilities typical of the Autopsy Assistant, GS-4. In addition, the following summary of the duties and responsibilities typical of positions at all levels, and brief characterizations of grades other than GS-4 are provided for guidance in distinguishing between the Autopsy Assistant, GS-4, and autopsy assistants at other grade levels.

- GS-2: This is the entrance level for persons without previous experience or training in autopsy work. Autopsy Assistants, GS-2, receive close supervision in all phases of their work, and, with respect to technical autopsy procedures, are normally limited to assisting others, in a trainee capacity.
- GS-3: Autopsy assistants at this level perform a limited variety of the less difficult technical procedures under general supervision, and/or perform substantially the full range of technical procedures which characterize GS-4, but only under close supervision. They also perform, under only general supervision, substantially the full range of preparatory duties and miscellaneous duties which are described as nongrade controlling duties in the GS-4 position.
- GS-4: Autopsy assistants at this level perform, under general supervision, all but the most exacting technical procedures and, in addition, perform a variety of preparatory duties

and miscellaneous duties which are not grade controlling. Duties and responsibilities of typical GS-4 autopsy assistants are described in detail below.

GS-5: In addition to performing the duties typical of GS-4, autopsy assistants at this level perform under general supervision, on a regular recurring basis, such duties as assisting in the training of interns and new residents by demonstrating the use of surgical instruments in autopsies; providing coordinated assistance to more than one prosector when two or more autopsies are conducted simultaneously; and carrying out highly specialized technical procedures requiring exacting skills and abilities to prevent disfigurement of the facial or neck features of the deceased remains, and/or to prevent damage to a specimen which will be further examined and dissected. Technical procedures requiring these exacting skill and abilities typically include those needed for removal of the tongue, (excising by pulling the tongue down and back to avoid any incision in the neck area that would disfigure); the whole eye (proceeding from the back, cutting portions of frontal bones, and severing the eye from attachments to muscles, nerves, and membranes of the eye); the spinal column (often proceeding from the front to avoid leakage, excising and removing the column intact, and placing it in a fixative solution, and other procedures of comparable difficulty.

Supervisory responsibility is not characteristic of autopsy assistant positions although, typically, GS-4 positions include a type of "factor through" responsibility for certain designated autopsy and/or inquest procedures involved from the receipt to the release of the body. These or other duties may also include responsibility for training and instruction of one or more other employees assigned full or part-time. However, when the extent of supervisory responsibilities of the autopsy assistant position meets the minimum supervisory criteria contained in the [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#) for one-grade interval positions, the position will be classified by reference to that Guide and titled Supervisory Autopsy Assistant.

AUTOPSY ASSISTANT, GS-0625-04

Autopsy assistants at this level perform the full variety of technical autopsy procedures involved in typical autopsy examinations. In addition, they typically perform preparatory and miscellaneous duties necessary to the autopsy procedure and maintenance of the autopsy area, though such duties are not grade controlling.

Nature and variety of the work and scope of responsibility

1. *Technical procedures* -- The autopsy assistant at this level typically carries out the following procedures in connection with the actual autopsy:
 - a. Makes the primary incision to open body cavities; removes breastbone; together with the prosector or another autopsy assistant, removes thoracic and abdominal contents in locks; removes, cleans and opens intestines.

- b. Removes the skull-cap, the brain, and the pituitary gland; takes bone marrow from vertebra and ribs and other bones as directed; excises gonads.
- c. May remove other organs under close supervision of the prosector.
- d. Closes the body, replacing organs and performing procedures necessary for the subsequent embalming process.

While carrying out the procedures cited in a. and b. above, the Autopsy Assistant, GS-4, is relied upon to call attention of the prosector to any deviations from normal in shape, size, color, weight, texture, consistency, etc., for the prosector examination and his direction for any needed action for excision, dissection, or taking of specimens. As he/she removes specimens, the autopsy assistant weighs them and places them in solutions or containers, as appropriate, for laboratory examination and/or other purposes as directed by the prosector. He/she must properly identify (label) the specimens in accordance with laboratory procedure.

The following duties do not, of themselves, warrant a GS-4 classification. However, they are typically a part of GS-4 positions, in conjunction with performance of the technical procedures described above.

2. *Preparatory duties* -- The autopsy assistant typically is required to carry out the following functions in preparing for the autopsy:

- a. Assures that all necessary documentation is available and prepares any additional documentation, i.e., verifies that proper authorization for autopsy is at hand, and records all information necessary for autopsy records.
- b. Verifies that the body of the deceased is, in fact, the body to be autopsied, and makes all arrangements to schedule the autopsy.
- c. After reading the autopsy authorization to ascertain the extent of the autopsy, selects the appropriate instruments, devices, containers, solutions, and other equipment for use during the autopsy.

3. *Miscellaneous duties*

- a. Is responsible for maintenance of an aseptic autopsy area, including instruments, equipment, and clothing, and for proper asepsis in the handling of specimens.
- b. Is responsible for proper assembly, routing or holding of specimens for laboratory study, further demonstration, or processing. (For instance, fixative solutions for a brain specimen must be changed at stated times before further laboratory or other study and examination of the brain specimen.) He/she files specimens retained for study.
- c. Transmits instructions from the prosector to the photographer on placement and locations to obtain useful photographs of designated specimens.

- d. Is responsible for maintaining equipment in readiness for use (sharpening knives, for instance), for preparing and maintaining the stock of fixative solutions, for maintaining adequate supplies, and for replenishing supplies.
- e. Is responsible for shipment of autopsy and/or surgical specimens to other laboratories, as directed by the prosector, using the appropriate techniques for packing and preserving to insure safe arrival of specimens.
- f. May be responsible for taking care of clothing and valuables, recording receipt, and properly disposing of them.
- g. May drive an ambulance to pick up bodies when death does not occur in the hospital.

Knowledges and abilities required

The Autopsy Assistant, GS-4, must be skillful in the use of surgical instruments (knives, scalpels, scissors, hand and powered saws, chisels, forceps, rongeurs, etc.) in all incisions, excisions, and other maneuvers that involve the use of such instruments. He/she must recognize and be able to use the anatomical names of body organs, structures, sites, etc.

He/she must have a knowledge of anatomy as applied to the conduct of the autopsy. The Autopsy Assistant, GS-4, must have a knowledge of hospital procedures and practices concerning patient deaths, funeral arrangements, "coroner" cases, and mortuary contracts as related to the autopsy, receipt, and release of the dead human body. He/she must have a knowledge of the embalming processes insofar as the autopsy procedures vary when a body is to be embalmed.

The autopsy assistant must have a good knowledge of methods for preparing solutions for preserving specimens, both for retention in the hospital and for shipment elsewhere. He/she must be proficient in the use of aseptic techniques.

The Autopsy Assistant, GS-4, must possess emotional stability and must demonstrate a mature and respectful approach which recognizes the dignity of the dead human body.

Nature of supervisory control exercised over the work

The Autopsy Assistant, GS-4, receives general technical supervision from the supervising pathologist, who provides initial guidance on policies and practices in the autopsy and/or morgue functions; who reviews his work by personal observation; and who reviews the comments of prosectors and others who are assisted by the autopsy assistant. The autopsy assistant receives technical direction from the individual prosectors on the autopsies for which they are responsible; is guided by hospital policies and procedures pertinent to receipt and release of the dead human body; and, is guided by information contained in professional publications concerning new or changed technical procedures, new instruments, and new devices.