

**OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT**  
**MERIT SYSTEMS OVERSIGHT AND EFFECTIVENESS**  
**DALLAS OVERSIGHT DIVISION**  
**CLASSIFICATION APPEAL DECISION**  
Under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code

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**Appellant:** [Appellant]

**Position:** Support Services Specialist, GS-342-5  
Position Number: 13640

**Organization:** Medical Administration Service  
[installation]  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
[installation city state]

**Decision:** Support Services Specialist, GS-342-5

**OPM decision number:** C-0342-05-01

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**Approved by:**

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon  
Bonnie J. Brandon  
Classification Appeals Officer

6/6/97

Date

## **INTRODUCTION**

The appealed position is assigned to the Medical Administration Service of the [installation] Center of the Department of Veterans Affairs in [city state]. The agency has classified the position as Support Services Specialist, GS-342-5. The appellant believes that the duties performed warrant the position being upgraded to GS-6. He filed an appeal with this office under the provisions of chapter 51 of title 5, United States Code.

This is the final administrative decision of the Government, subject to discretionary review only under the conditions and time limits specified in sections 511.605 and 511.613 of the Code of Federal Regulations and appendix 4 of the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*.

## **POSITION INFORMATION**

The Medical Administration Service (MAS) consists of three sections within the Office of the Medical Administration Officer. The appellant's position is located in the immediate Office of the MAS Chief and provides support to the Center in the areas of mail control, document reproduction, records management, and publications. In providing these support services, the appellant is responsible for directing the work of assigned Incentive Therapy patients, developing procedures for the processing of mail and establishing mail distribution points, studying and analyzing printing and photocopying requirements, maintaining a system for control and disposition of records, and determining funding requirement and making funding projections for office services to his supervisor. He is responsible for planning and coordinating these program areas. The appellant basically works independently in support of the Center by directing the activities of the Center patients assigned to work in the MAS. His assignments are either made and overseen generally by the supervisor or developed through the normal flow of a recurring workload.

## **SERIES AND TITLE DETERMINATION**

The agency has assigned the appellant's position to the Support Services Administration Series, GS-342, and the appellant does not disagree. We concur with the agency's determination. As described on page 1 of the classification standard for the GS-342 series (dated November 1978), this series includes positions the primary duties of which involve supervising, directing, or planning and coordinating a variety of services functions that are principally work-supporting, i.e., those functions without which the operations of an organization or services to the public would be impaired, curtailed, or stopped. Such service functions include communications, files and records, procurement of administrative supplies and equipment, printing, property management, reproduction, mail service, facilities and equipment maintenance, etc. The appellant's duties and responsibilities (including direction of the Intensive Therapy patient messenger service, forms control, document reproduction, and mail management) meet the definition and is properly classified in the GS-342 series.

The titling instructions in the standard for the GS-342 series establish "Support Services Specialist" as the proper title for positions that meet the requirements for staff positions concerned with planning, policy, or advisory functions pertaining to support services programs. The appellant's position is properly titled Support Services Specialist.

## **GRADE LEVEL DETERMINATION**

While the GS-342 series is the appropriate one for placement of this position, the grade evaluation criteria in the GS-342 standard cannot be used to determine the grade of this position. This is because the standard applies only to employees who supervise at least three employees who perform at least six of the functions described in Level A, Factor 1 (pages 11-12) of the standard. Although the appellant leads and directs up to eight patient Incentive Therapy workers, he does not carry out the range of supervisory duties that would meet the definition of a supervisor. For this reason the grade level criteria in the GS-342 standard cannot be applied to the appellant's position.

The essence of the appellant's position is managing and administering a variety of essential office services throughout the Center, including mail management, records management, forms management, and reproduction management. We use two standards for grade determination: Mail and File, GS-305 (dated May 1977), and the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work (dated June 1969).

### **Application of the Standard for Mail and File Series**

This standard is used to evaluate positions involving the administration, supervision, or performance of clerical work related to the processing of incoming or outgoing mail or the systematic arrangement of records for storage or reference purposes, the scheduled disposition of records, and the performance of related work when such duties require the application of established mail or file methods and procedures, knowledge of prescribed systems for governing the flow and control of communications, and/or the filing or storage and retrieval of records, and knowledges of the organization and functions of the operating unit or units serviced. In considering the standard for the GS-305 series, it is imperative to consider that the appellant's primary duties and responsibilities, and the majority of his time, include the mail management responsibilities. Therefore, we applied the criteria in the GS-305 standard to determine the grade of the appellant's program management duties.

This standard uses the Factor Evaluation System (FES), which employs nine factors. Under the FES, each factor level description in a standard describes the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. Therefore, if a position fails to meet the criteria in a factor level description in any significant aspect, it must be credited at a lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some

aspects and still not be credited at a higher level. Our evaluation of the appellant's position as compared to the nine factors in the standard follows.

### Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts which the employee must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply those knowledges. To be used as a basis for selecting a level under this factor, a knowledge must be required and applied.

At Level 1-3, work requires a thorough knowledge of the functions performed within the units serviced, as well as a thorough knowledge of the subject matter content of the materials being processed and a thorough knowledge of complex correspondence procedures and filing systems. This knowledge enables the employee to analyze and route materials to discrete organizational units with close or overlapping functions when the subject matter of the materials may not be clearly identifiable and may pertain to matters of a substantive nature. This level also includes knowledge of mail systems procedures necessary to recognize problems within the unit and recommend improved procedures and methods to increase efficiency.

The appellant's position meets Level 1-3. The appellant must be knowledgeable of agency and United States Postal Service requirements to process various classes of incoming and outgoing mail. His knowledge requirements include the ability to recognize problems within the work setting. The appellant's duties involve a full range of mail processes requiring a practical knowledge of mail systems procedures, meter mail operations, express mail couriers, etc. He analyzes materials and routes them to approximately 70 distribution points. The appellant establishes mail distribution points to ensure that routes and schedules are planned and controlled efficiently. He also directs the patient workers assigned to the mail room in the processing of various classes of incoming and outgoing mail.

Level 1-3 and 350 points are credited.

### Factor 2, Supervisory Controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibilities, and the review of completed work. Controls are exercised by the supervisor in the way assignments are made, instructions are given to the employee, priorities and deadlines are set, and objectives and boundaries are defined. Responsibility of the employee depends on the extent to which the employee is expected to develop the sequence and timing of various aspects of the work, to modify or recommend modification of instructions, and to participate in establishing priorities and defining objectives. The degree of review of

completed work depends upon the nature and extent of the review, e.g., close and detailed review of each phase of the assignment, detailed review of the finished assignment, spot-check of finished work for accuracy, or review only for adherence to policy.

At Level 2-3, the incumbent receives general guidance from the supervisor who may be concerned with other functions and services in addition to mail and file, e.g., the chief of an administrative services unit, the executive officer or administrative officer of an organization, etc. The employee independently plans and adjusts mail and file functions to meet the requirements of serviced units. The serviced units are concerned with new, emerging, or innovative programs, e.g., research and development, engineer or scientific laboratories, etc., which are subject to relatively constant change. The employee must therefore independently recognize the need for and take action to adjust or change mail-processing procedures; to establish new file procedures or systems, and to otherwise adapt or change established procedures. The supervisor is normally consulted only when problems arise for which no guidance or precedents exist. The work is reviewed in terms of the results achieved and the effect on resources and other administrative matters.

The appellant's position meets Level 2-3. The appellant works independently in developing work processes. Although many of his duties evolve from a recurring workload, the appellant studies the processes and procedures and makes decisions and recommendations to the supervisor based on his analysis of the information and the needs of the mail system users. This involves controlling the work schedules for the patient workers in order to meet the mail needs of the Center, as well as obtaining the most economical and desirable mail services. The acting Chief of the MAS provides general supervision to the appellant. Work assignments are derived through a recurring workload or specifically assigned by the supervisor in terms of defining objectives, priorities and deadlines. The supervisor is kept informed of progress, and completed work is reviewed from the standpoint of meeting overall objectives. The supervisor is available to assist the appellant with unusual problems that may arise. The appellant's supervisor does not routinely review the methods used in the work processes and utilization of the patient Incentive Therapy workers. That is, the supervisor is more concerned with the conclusions reached and recommendations made.

Level 2-3 and 275 points are credited.

### Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them.

At level 3-2, guidelines consist of numerous standing oral instructions and written procedural guides which are applicable in differing situations. Thus, employees must

use judgment and initiative in selecting and applying the proper guide, e.g., in the reading and routing of materials to a number of serviced units when the functions of the units are very similar.

At Level 3-3, guidelines consist of standing oral instructions and written guides which may not be applicable, and in some cases may not cover, an extensive range of varying operating situations. Significant judgment is required both to determine which of the guides to apply to specific cases or problems and to adapt or improvise procedures to accommodate precedent-setting or unique situations. Written guides typically include various mail management or records management handbooks and manuals which are used in setting up initial mail services to serve new organizational requirements or to extensively modify existing services because of major deficiencies or system changes.

We find that the guidelines used by the appellant meet Level 3-2. Using standard postal guidelines and agency guidance for daily operations and compliance, the appellant has amplified those guides and developed local procedures that serve as direction and training for the assigned patient workers. The appellant uses judgment in selecting and applying the proper guide. For example, he follows agency guidance when establishing additional mail delivery points, adjusting to changes in postal fares, and deciding when to use overnight couriers and freight carriers. The appellant has responsibility for mail services in a unit that has long-standing mail procedures, with little opportunity for deviation or need to set up initial mail services.

Although the appellant has adapted guides and procedures, such modifications are not comparable to those envisioned at Level 3-3 where unique or precedent-setting situations exist. Further, the appellant is not required to use guides that would be needed to set up initial mail services to serve new organizational requirements or to extensively modify existing services because of major deficiencies or system changes. There is no evidence that such conditions are present at the Center. Consequently, the appellant's position falls short of Level 3-3.

Level 3-2 and 125 points are credited.

#### Factor 4, Complexity

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work.

At level 4-2, the employee performs several related duties involving consideration of choices of appropriate procedures or actions to be taken in a variety of work situations. There is generally variety in the materials processed and in the activity required, such as recognizing a variety of types of printed forms and deciding the appropriate filing or

routing actions to be taken with each, proper processing and safeguarding of security classified materials, etc. Work of this type requires a number of steps or processes involving several different types of mail and recognizing which procedure is appropriate for each type, such as registered, insured, certified, security classified, etc.; distinguishing among a large number of distribution points when the functions of some serviced units overlap; searching for missing materials and locating requested materials when information varies or conflicts; or similar work.

The appellant's position meets Level 4-2 in that his assignments involve reviewing or studying processes to ensure adequate funding and resources for the mail operations. He makes recommendations and decisions having a direct and substantial effect on the mission of the MAS and the Center. The required coordination extends beyond the immediate unit and mail center to the other services within the Center. The appellant works with relative independence when coordinating and integrating work efforts with other services to ensure delivery of quality service by the mail unit.

The appellant's position does not meet the complexity described at Level 4-3. At this level, positions require performance of a number of duties involving the full range of mail and file procedures in a work situation where there is typically a great variety in the materials received and great complexity of subject-matter materials and processing actions. The appellant selects, adapts, and applies the most suitable procedures or methods to choosing a carrier between several available with like services. He chooses the most appropriate mail service, such as registered, overnight, priority, and class of service. His duties include rate comparison and determining the best method by which to send mail, considering cost and timeliness. Overall, the mail responsibilities in the appellant's position fall short of the great variety and complexity of materials as indicated at this level.

Level 4-2 and 75 points are credited.

#### Factor 5, Scope and Effect

Scope and effect covers the relationship between the nature of the work (i.e., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment), and the effect of the work products or services both within and outside the organization. Effect measures such things as whether the work output facilitates the work of others, provides timely service of a personal nature, or impacts on the adequacy of research conclusions. The concept of effect alone does not provide sufficient information to properly understand and evaluate the impact of the position. The scope of the work completes the picture, allowing consistent evaluations. Only the effect of properly performed work is to be considered.

At Level 5-2, positions are concerned with work involving the improvement of methods or procedures affecting the overall efficiency of the mail and file unit; or work which

involves determining and selecting appropriate materials to be made available to serviced units for their use. Performance affects the ability of personnel in the serviced units to perform their duties in an accurate manner, or provide services to others.

The appellant's position meets Level 5-2. The timeliness and reliability of mail delivery impact the efficiency and effectiveness of operations within his immediate organization, as well as other units at the Center. Within certain limits, the appellant has authority delegated to him to oversee and manage the entire planning, direction, and execution of all functions of the mail unit, including the disbursement of funds as necessary. The scope and effect of the appellant's position do not exceed the criteria for Level 5-2.

Level 5-2 and 75 points are credited.

#### Factor 6, Personal Contacts

This factor includes face-to-face contacts and telephone dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain. Levels described under this factor are based on what is required to make the initial contact, the difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place.

Contacts at Level 6-2 are with personnel in the serviced units and may also include personnel outside the organization, such as U.S. Postal Service employees and personnel in administrative units of higher or subordinate levels of the same agency.

The appellant maintains contacts with personnel outside the organization, such as staff at the U.S. Postal Service, private carriers, vendors, manufacturers, and sales representatives. Extensive contacts are maintained with employees of the Center, as well as the patients, in the daily performance of providing mail service to the organizations. These contacts fully meet Level 6-2.

Level 6-2 is assigned with 25 points credited.

#### Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts

In General Schedule occupations, purpose of personal contacts ranges from factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, or objectives. The personal contacts which serve as the basis for the level selected for this factor must be the same as the contacts which are the basis for the level selected for Factor 6.

At Level 7-2, the purpose of contacts is to work with personnel in serviced units in resolving such operating problems as delays in receipt of materials, improperly coded



or classified files or materials, and problems of similar difficulty, including inadequacy of existing file categories.

The appellant's position fully meets the intent of Level 7-2. The contacts are to gather information and recommend methods of improvements to the service provided. Contacts with service level personnel are for the purpose of resolving operating problems such as delays in receipt of mailed materials, methods of mailing materials, and levels of service requested and available. The purpose of the appellant's contacts is comparable to that described at Level 7-2.

Level 7-2 is assigned with a credit of 50 points.

### Factor 8, Physical Demands

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment. This includes physical characteristics and abilities (e.g., specific agility and dexterity requirements) and the physical exertion involved in the work (e.g., climbing, lifting, pushing, balancing, stooping, kneeling, crouching, crawling, or reaching). To some extent, the frequency or intensity of physical exertion must also be considered (e.g., a job requiring prolonged standing involves more physical exertion than a job requiring intermittent standing).

At Level 8-3, the work requires regular and recurring lifting and carrying of objects of heavy weight, over 50 pounds, and occasional lifting and carrying of heavier materials. The appellant's position meets Level 8-3 in that the work requires regular and recurring lifting and carrying of objects weighing more than 50 pounds. The work also requires long periods of standing, walking, stooping, and bending.

Level 8-3 is assigned, and 50 points are credited.

### Factor 9, Work Environment

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required. Although the use of safety precautions can practically eliminate a certain danger or discomfort, such situations typically place additional demands upon the employee in carrying out safety regulations and techniques.

At Level 9-1, the work is performed in an office setting that is adequately lighted, and heated, and ventilated.

The work at Level 9-2 is performed on loading docks or other areas exposed to the weather, or in areas subject to high noise levels and vibration, and may require the

use of protective clothing. This level also encompasses working around moving equipment.

The appellant’s position meets Level 9-1. The appellant’s work is performed inside the Center’s hospital setting with adequate lighting, heating, and ventilation.

Level 9-1, and 5 points are credited.

**Summary of Factor Levels**

| ☒                   | Factor                         | Level | Points |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-------|--------|
| 1                   | Knowledge Required of Position | 1-3   | 350    |
| 2                   | Supervisory Controls           | 2-3   | 275    |
| 3                   | Guidelines                     | 3-2   | 125    |
| 4                   | Complexity                     | 4-2   | 75     |
| 5                   | Scope and Effect               | 5-2   | 75     |
| 6                   | Personal Contacts              | 6-2   | 25     |
| 7                   | Purpose of Contacts            | 7-2   | 5      |
| 8                   | Physical Demands               | 8-3   | 50     |
| 9                   | Work Environment               | 9-1   | 5      |
| <b>TOTAL POINTS</b> |                                |       | 1030   |

Based on the grade conversion table contained in the GS-305 standard, 1030 points equate to a GS-5.

**Application of the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work**

While mail management is the primary function of the position, the remainder of the duties must be evaluated in order to determine the appropriate grade level of the position. The appellant is responsible for administrative matters involving records management, publications, forms control, messenger service, and reproduction management and provides support services to the Center and requires a knowledge of applicable regulation, policies, and procedures. He provides technical guidance and support in administrative areas, which is technical and assistant work. Therefore, we compared these duties to the criteria in the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work (June 1989).

The guide defines assistance work as technical work that supports the administration or operation of programs and requires a working knowledge of the work processes and procedures of an administrative field (e.g., office administration, communications, and security) and the mission and operational requirements of the unit. The guide describes positions in a three-part format:

- (1) The definition of the grade level as spelled out in the law (5 U.S.C. 5104).
- (2) A description of the grade level concept pertaining to clerical and assistance work written in narrative format in terms of two evaluation factors: Nature of Assignment (which includes the elements knowledge required and complexity of the work), and Level of Responsibility (which includes the elements of supervisory controls, guidelines, and contacts).
- (3) General work examples to illustrate each grade level.

### *The Law*

The requirements are to perform, under general supervision, difficult and responsible work in office, business, or fiscal administration ... requiring ...

- (i) considerable training and supervisory or other experience;
- (ii) broad working knowledge of a special subject matter or of office ... procedure
- (iii) the exercise of independent judgment in a limited field....

The appellant's duties and responsibilities meet the GS-5 level criteria required by the law.

Employees at the GS-6 level perform difficult and responsible work requiring a broad working knowledge of a special and complex subject matter, procedure, or practice. They also exercise independent judgment to a considerable extent. The appellant's position does not meet the GS-6 level criteria in that the appellant exercises independent judgment in a limited program area which does not include special and complex procedures or practices as envisioned for GS-6 positions.

### *Nature of Assignment*

At the GS-5 level, the work consists of performing a full range of standard and nonstandard clerical assignments and resolving a variety of nonrecurring problems. Work includes a variety of assignments involving different and unrelated steps, processes, or methods. The employee must identify and understand the issues involved in each assignment and determine what steps and procedures are necessary and the order of their performance. Completion of each transaction typically involves selecting a course of action from a number of possibilities. The work requires extensive knowledge of an organization's rules, procedures, operations, or business

practices to perform the more complex, interrelated, or one-of-a-kind clerical processing procedures.

As at the GS-5 level, the appellant's assignments involve continuing responsibility for providing extensive support services to the Center. The appellant ensures that administrative support matters are accomplished, regulations are followed, and requirements are met. He provides training, direction, and leadership to a group of assigned hospital patient workers. The appellant deals with a wide range of administrative issues, including the system for control and disposition of records, maintaining documentation of forms being used by the Center, and the management of copiers and reproduction requests. In these responsibilities the appellant makes decisions and takes action based on an evaluation of the situation, information available to him, and regulations and procedures that are established for handling administrative support matters.

The appellant's work does not meet the GS-6 level. At this level, work typically entails processing a wide variety of transactions for more than one type of assigned activity or functional specialization. Assignments are subject to different sets of rules, regulations, and procedures. Additionally, the work requires comprehensive knowledge of rules, regulations, and other guidelines relating to completing assignments in the program area assigned. This knowledge is usually attained through extensive, increasingly difficult, and practical experience and training in the subject matter field. The work also requires ability to interpret and apply regulatory and procedural requirements to process unusually difficult and complicated transactions. Conversely, the appellant's work involves a limited number of transactions within a wide variety of responsibilities, with relatively simple procedures requiring little training in any one subject matter field.

#### *Level of Responsibility*

At the GS-5 level, the supervisor assigns work by defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines and provides guidance on assignments which do not have clear precedents. The employee works in accordance with accepted practices and completed work is evaluated for technical soundness, appropriateness, and effectiveness in meeting goals. The number and similarity of guidelines and work situations require the employee to use judgment in locating and selecting the most appropriate guidelines for application and adapting them according to circumstances of the specific case or transaction. A number of procedural problems may arise which also require interpretation and adaptation of established guides. Often, the employee must determine which of several alternative guidelines to use. Contacts are with a variety of persons within and outside the agency for the purpose of receiving or providing information relating to the work or for the purpose of resolving operating problems in connection with recurring responsibilities.

The appellant's level of responsibility meets the overall intent of the GS-5 level. The appellant is under the general supervision of the Chief, MAS, who is available to provide assistance and direction. The appellant has frequent contact with patients, various Center personnel, and personnel from private vendors and company representatives. These contacts are for the purpose of providing guidance and advice in accordance with administrative regulations and requirements and for solving problems that arise during the normal duty hours. The appellant's work is reviewed for appropriateness and conformance with policies, regulations, established procedures, and customer satisfaction.

The appellant's work does not meet the GS-6 level. At this level, the supervisor reviews completed work for conformance with policy and requirements. The employee is recognized as an authority on completing assignments within a complicated framework of established procedures and guidelines, often when there are no clear precedents. Guidelines at this level are numerous and varied, making it difficult to choose the most appropriate and deciding how various transactions are to be completed. The responsibilities of the appellant do not meet this level of the standard criteria.

### *Summary*

The appellant's nature of assignments and level of responsibility meet and do not exceed the GS-5 grade level. Therefore, the duties and responsibilities involved with providing administrative support are evaluated at the GS-5 grade level.

### **DECISION**

The position is correctly classified as Support Services Specialist, GS-342-5.