

# Position Classification Standard for Pharmacy Technician Series, GS-0661

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## **SERIES DEFINITION**

This series includes positions which involve technical support work in a pharmacy under the supervision of a registered pharmacist. The work requires application of a practical knowledge of: pharmaceutical nomenclature; characteristics, strengths, and dosage forms of pharmaceuticals; pharmaceutical systems of weights and measures; operation and care of pharmacy equipment; and pharmaceutical procedures and techniques.

This standard supersedes the standard for the Pharmacy Assistant Series, GS-0661, issued in June 1961.

## **SERIES COVERAGE**

Positions in this series involve the performance of a variety of technical support functions in a pharmacy, and require application of the following practical knowledges:

1. Pharmaceutical nomenclature
  - generic, trade, and chemical names of drugs;
  - standard abbreviations used in the pharmacy, especially Latin abbreviations used in prescription writing;
  - meanings of particular terms as they are used in the pharmacy, e.g., injectables, powders, sterile solutions, external preparations, ointments, etc.
2. Characteristics, strengths, and dosage forms of a variety of pharmaceuticals
  - color, texture, and odor of pharmaceuticals;
  - unit strengths and dosage forms commonly used in the pharmacy.
3. Pharmaceutical systems of weights and measures
  - metric;
  - apothecary;
  - avoirdupois; and the methods of conversion from one system to another.
4. Operation and care of a wide variety of pharmacy equipment, e.g., tablet and capsule counting machines, automatic bottle filling machine for liquids, tube filling and crimping machine, blending and agitating machines, mixing vats, sterilizing equipment, filtering devices, etc.
5. A variety of standard procedures and techniques involved in

- repackaging drugs and supplies;
- bulk compounding;
- receipt, storage, and order of pharmaceuticals;
- preparation of certain sterile solutions;
- "setting up" prescriptions for a final check by pharmacist.

The following types of assignments characterize this occupation:

*Repackaging bulk pharmaceuticals.*-- Repackages liquids, tablets, capsules, etc., into specified quantities and various size containers. These operations consist of taking pharmaceuticals from bulk stock containers, filling smaller containers, and making up and applying appropriate labels. This work requires skill in the operation of such pharmacy equipment as tablet and capsule counting machines, automatic liquid bottling machine, and labeling machine.

*Assembling drugs and supplies.*-- Assembles and packages drugs and supplies for distribution to wards, outpatient clinics, and affiliated services. If the item is not available in the requested amount, makes necessary computations to provide order in different unit of measure. Computations are checked by a pharmacist.

*Bulk compounding.*-- Follows standardized formulas and procedures in weighing, measuring, and mixing bulk quantities of routinely used pharmaceuticals, e.g., solutions, ointments, powders. Technicians must be proficient in operating such equipment as precision balances, colloid mills, filtering machines, tube filling and crimping machines. They must also be highly skilled in the techniques of addition of ingredients. Technicians performing bulk compounding must be able to recognize commonly used ingredients by color, texture, and odor. After work is completed, technicians may perform standard assays on products before they are packaged and labeled.

*Receiving, storing, and ordering pharmaceutical supplies.*-- Receives supplies and checks receipts against requisitions. Checks for shortages, tampering, breakages, deterioration, and date of expiration. Selects proper storage area for pharmaceuticals, e.g., poisons, flammables, perishables, controlled substances, etc. Storage procedures range from placing stock on regular stock shelf to a variety of special procedures such as refrigeration, temperature and light control, etc. Rotates supplies to insure freshness, checks on acceptable levels of stock, and may order supplies.

*Preparing, storing, and issuing sterile solutions.*-- Prepares sterile solutions, e.g., irrigating and saline solutions. Applies a knowledge of rigid aseptic techniques in the preparation and handling of such solutions, and in the sterilizing and handling of all equipment used, e.g., filtering apparatus, semi-automatic transferring devices, and containers for storing the finished products. Work involves measuring, weighing, and mixing ingredients, and preparing quality control labels.

*Assisting in the preparation of intravenous additive solutions.*-- Receives physician's orders for intravenous additive solutions, computes amounts of solutions and drugs to be used. Sets up

amounts to be mixed, and performs a visual inspection of completed products. Order and final product are checked by a pharmacist.

*Setting up prescriptions for a final check by a pharmacist.*-- Reads the prescription to determine kind, strength, and dosage of drug to be dispensed. Knowledge of pharmacy dispensing requirements is important. For example, some medications may only be dispensed in a 30-day supply. After determining proper amounts of medication, etc., retrieves repackaged, labeled container of medication, or obtains bulk stock container and measures proper amounts into a smaller container. In some cases, technicians select the proper repackaged drugs for inpatient medication drawers, which typically contain unit doses of medication prescribed for a patient. In either case, a pharmacist performs a final check of the work.

## EXCLUSIONS

Excluded from this series are positions that involve primarily:

1. Professional and scientific work in the field of pharmacy. Such positions are classified in the [Pharmacy Series, GS-0660](#).
2. Application of skill and experience in trades, crafts, or manual labor occupations. Such positions are exempt from the General Schedule system. Duties reflected in this standard at the GS-1 and GS-2 levels generally require the application of manual skills. However, when such positions are established by management as part of a career ladder in training for pharmacy technician positions, they are included in this series.
3. General clerical and miscellaneous work in a pharmacy, e.g., checking and distributing supplies, maintaining records, and typing supply orders or prescription labels. Such positions are classified in the [Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-0303](#), or other clerical series as appropriate. Such positions typically do not require a technical knowledge of pharmaceuticals and the techniques used in their preparation.

## TITLES

*Pharmacy Aid* is the title authorized for nonsupervisory positions at grades GS-1 through GS-3.

*Pharmacy Technician* is the title authorized for nonsupervisory positions at grades GS-4 and above.

*Supervisory Pharmacy Technician* is the title authorized for positions requiring supervisory qualifications.

## NOTES TO USERS OF THIS STANDARD

This is a one-grade interval series.

This standard includes grade-level criteria for nonsupervisory positions in grades GS-1 through GS-5. When the duties and responsibilities exceed those described at grade GS-5 of this standard, positions should be classified by extension of the criteria of this standard and application of sound classification principles.

Positions in this series that involve responsibility for supervising the work of pharmacy technicians are evaluated by use of the [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#).

## CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA

The factors of primary significance in determining grade levels have been grouped under *Nature of assignment and Level of responsibility*.

### *Nature of assignment*

This factor measures the relative difficulty of the work in terms of:

- the nature of the duties assigned, and
- the knowledges and skills required.

Work assignments range in difficulty from simple repetitive tasks requiring no special knowledges or skills to assignments requiring the application of an intensive knowledge of: (1) pharmaceutical nomenclature; (2) formulas, strengths, and dosage forms of drugs; (3) pharmaceutical systems of weights and measures; (4) operation and care of a variety of pharmaceutical equipment; (5) receipt, storage, and order of pharmaceuticals; and (6) a wide variety of procedures and techniques required in repackaging pharmaceuticals, bulk compounding, preparation of sterile solutions, and setting up prescriptions for a final check by a pharmacist.

For example, aids at the lower levels compound simple solutions, which typically involve only 2 or 3 ingredients which mix readily and are used primarily for external application of patients, e.g., soaps, rubbing alcohol, mouth wash, lotions, or for housekeeping and sterilizing procedures, e.g., detergents, disinfecting solutions. Higher level technicians compound complex solutions which typically involve 3 or more ingredients which require considerable skill in mixing ingredients which may not be compatible, e.g., oils and water, or may react chemically. Suspensions, emulsions, pastes, and powders also require considerable skill in measuring and mixing ingredients. Many of the complex solutions and products are taken internally by patients, e.g., cough syrups, laxatives.

*Level of responsibility*

This factor measures:

- the supervisory controls exercised over the work, and
- the nature and purpose of the pharmacy technician's personal work contacts.

The degree of supervision exercised may range from specific step-by-step instructions and in-process review, to a review of completed work which has been performed with relative independence in accordance with established procedures.

Personal work contacts are not a significant element in most positions in this occupation. However, for some positions at higher levels, contacts with hospital staff involve significant responsibility.

**PHARMACY AID, GS-0661-01**

GS-1 pharmacy aid positions are trainee positions that require no previous experience. Tasks are simple and repetitive. Positions typically include learning to perform higher level duties.

*Nature of assignment*

GS-1 pharmacy aids perform a few specifically prescribed tasks of a routine nature. For example, GS-1 pharmacy aids:

- unpack, sort, and count clearly marked packages of pharmaceutical supplies, note breakages and shortages, and report these to the supervisor;
- put stock in designated storage areas;
- clean a variety of pharmacy equipment, including glassware, mixing utensils, mixing tubs, electronic capsule and tablet counter, etc.;
- keep work and storage areas clean and neat; and
- deliver drug orders to wards, outpatient departments, etc.

*Level of responsibility*

GS-1 pharmacy aids receive detailed instructions and training in specific duties which are clearly defined. Oral instructions are given at the beginning of each new task and work is closely checked for accuracy, neatness, and progression. After initial training, they are given specific directions to perform particular tasks which they carry out in a prescribed manner.

## PHARMACY AID, GS-0661-02

### *Nature of assignment*

GS-2 pharmacy aids perform a number of procedures in the pharmacy which require some knowledge of pharmaceutical terminology, pharmacy equipment, and techniques used in the preparation of various pharmaceutical products. Procedures require strict adherence to guidelines and precise attention to detail. By comparison, GS-1 aids perform a limited number of procedures which require little or no knowledge of pharmaceutical nomenclature, pharmacy equipment, and techniques of preparation.

GS-2 aids receive procedural instructions that are more detailed and numerous than those given to GS-1 aids. GS-2 pharmacy aids typically:

- Repackage bulk liquids, e.g., soaps, rubbing alcohol, disinfecting solutions, into smaller containers. Contents must be carefully measured and transferred.
- Operate the electronic tablet and capsule counter, which automatically distributes a certain number of capsules or tablets into smaller containers.
- Operate the labeling machine which produces labels for various pharmaceutical products compounded or repacked in the pharmacy.
- Operate the automatic unit dose strip packaging machine, which seals capsules, etc., in individual packages.
- Unpack and store bulk pharmaceutical supplies which require some special handling and storage, e.g., those requiring refrigeration.

### *Level of responsibility*

At the beginning of each new task, the supervisor provides detailed instructions concerning work methods and procedures, demonstrates work techniques, closely supervises work in progress, and reviews all completed work. For those tasks covered by detailed instructions, the GS-2 pharmacy aid receives increasingly less specific guidance as his knowledge of the work and procedures increase.

## PHARMACY AID, GS-0661-03

### *Nature of assignment*

GS-3 pharmacy aids perform a variety of duties requiring application of:

- a practical knowledge of pharmaceutical nomenclature; various formulas, strengths, and unit measures of drugs; pharmaceutical systems of weights and measures; work techniques and pharmacy procedures, and
- skill in the operation and care of various types of pharmacy equipment such as counting and labeling machines and in the care and distribution of pharmaceuticals.

By comparison, GS-2 positions require an elementary knowledge of pharmaceutical nomenclature, pharmacy equipment, and techniques of preparation.

The following assignments are illustrative:

1. Checks pharmacy stock to determine if it is at required level, rotated properly to insure freshness, and stored correctly, e.g., alphabetically by generic rather than trade name. Unusual conditions, such as discoloration, are referred to the supervisor. Accumulation of abnormally large amounts of supplies and need for replenishment of items are also referred to the supervisor. By comparison, GS-2 pharmacy aids primarily unpack and store pharmaceutical supplies.
2. Repackages into smaller units a wide variety of items, e.g., liquids, tablets, capsules. Determines that information such as generic name of drug, manufacturer's name, lot number, control number, shipment number, etc., is properly recorded in log books and on labels. By comparison, GS-2 aids operate labeling machines only after the identification plate has been made.
3. Bulk compounds and packages a variety of simple solutions and products most of which are for external application, or use by hospital staff, e.g., body lotions, mouthwash, rubbing alcohol, toothpowder, liniments, detergents, sterilizing solutions, and disinfecting agents.
4. Prepares specified parts of drug supply orders received from wards, clinics, emergency room, etc. Fills orders for those bulk items with which they have become familiar through placing stock on shelves, repackaging items, and bulk compounding.
5. Correctly packages, for shipment by mail, rail, or truck, drugs being sent to patients or to satellite pharmacies. A knowledge of special packing techniques for various medications, e.g., solids, liquids, flammables, poisons, narcotics, and the postal regulations governing shipment are required to perform this function. For example, narcotics are always sent by registered mail.

*Level of responsibility*

GS-3 pharmacy aids receive general instructions, typically given on a task-by-task basis, from the supervisor. When performing routine functions such as repackaging pharmaceuticals or assembling parts of drug supply orders, the supervisor spot checks completed work. When performing more difficult, less familiar tasks, such as complex bulk compounding, GS-3 aids receive close supervision in process. By comparison, GS-3 pharmacy aids receive detailed instructions, close supervision, a spot check of work in process, and review of completed work.

**PHARMACY TECHNICIAN, GS-0661-04***Nature of assignment*

GS-4 pharmacy technicians perform duties which require, to a substantial degree, specialized skills and knowledges of technical pharmaceutical work, and a thorough knowledge of the routines and procedures of the pharmacy. By comparison, GS-3 aids perform duties which require practical knowledges of pharmaceuticals, and the application of some skills and techniques in work performance.

The following assignments are illustrative:

1. Reconstitutes certain sterile medications which are to be added to intravenous solutions. These drugs are usually in a powder form to which a predetermined amount of fluid must be added by use of syringe and hypodermic needle. Obtains reconstituted drugs and solutions, e.g., glucose or dextrose, and places these with the intravenous additive order for mixing by a pharmacist.
2. Receives and fills ward and clinic drug supply orders for a wide variety of items stocked in the pharmacy. This work requires ability to compute requested amounts of drugs and supplies to the amounts obtainable in the pharmacy, e.g., the order may be for 500 mg. dosage, and the pharmacy carries 250 mg. dosage. Makes routine tours of areas serviced by the pharmacy, e.g., wards, clinics, special services, to ascertain replenishment needs from nurses. By comparison, GS-3 aids fill specified parts of drug supply orders requiring no computations, and do not typically check drug supplies in the wards, clinics, etc.
3. Bulk compounds, packages, and labels complex products, many of which are for internal consumption, e.g., cough syrups, laxatives. Skill is required in the accurate measuring, weighing, and mixing of ingredients. In addition to preparing name and quality control labels, GS-4 technicians determine which direction labels are appropriate for products compounded, e.g., "For external use only," "Shake well," "Keep refrigerated," etc. While all bulk compounding is done according to formula cards, which contain a list of ingredients and amounts to be mixed, the GS-4 technician is expected to mix ingredients in proper sequence, and carry out other necessary procedures subject only to a final check of the product by the

pharmacist. By comparison, GS-3 aids primarily compound simple solutions, and receive close supervision while doing more complex compounding.

4. Compounds and bottles sterile solutions, such as irrigating and saline solutions. This task requires rigid adherence to sterile techniques during preparation of bottles and addition of concentrate, and use of complex equipment such as the pre-mix tank, flask washer, filtering apparatus, and water distillation equipment. By comparison, GS-3 technicians typically compound nonsterile products.
5. Sets up those individual prescription orders for items that are frequently prescribed and are already repackaged and labeled, for example, tablets packaged in bottles of 100. Container and prescription are set aside for a final check and dispensing by pharmacist.

### *Level of responsibility*

GS-4 technicians are typically assigned the responsibility for a function or sequence of tasks, which they carry out according to well-established procedures. They work independently, but the supervisor checks completed work, such as bulk compounding or setting up specific prescriptions. GS-4 technicians have limited contacts with hospital staff, e.g., to obtain information. By comparison, GS-3 aids receive general instructions on a task-by-task basis, a check by the supervisor of completed work if they are performing routine functions, or close supervision if they are performing more difficult, less familiar tasks.

## **PHARMACY TECHNICIAN, GS-0661-05**

### *Nature of assignment*

GS-5 pharmacy technicians perform a variety of complex technical functions in the pharmacy which require application of an extensive knowledge of pharmaceuticals and pharmacy practices. They apply judgment based on substantial experience in the pharmacy.

GS-5 technicians typically carry out the full range of technical support functions in the pharmacy as described below. However, in an unusually large pharmacy the work may involve primarily a function such as bulk compounding. Because of the breadth, scope, and complexity of assignments, they may be assisted by pharmacy personnel of lower grade who perform the routine operations.

The following assignments are illustrative:

1. Performs substantially all sterile solution operations in a pharmacy which serves numerous units in the hospital, including research labs. Responsibilities include assuring adherence to sterile procedures, care of equipment which if allowed to malfunction may contaminate sterile products, use of correct labeling materials and techniques required during sterilization procedures, scheduling sterilization of bottles, and performance of standard assays on all completed solutions. Ascertain basic unit needs from appropriate hospital staff and refers

any problems to pharmacist. By comparison, GS-4 technicians typically carry out limited portions of a sterile solution operation.

2. Performs substantially all bulk compounding in the pharmacy. Bulk compounds, packages, and labels all products for which there are master formula cards, including the most complex products. Because of his extensive knowledge and experience, the GS-5 technician recognizes atypical occurrences when compounding, e.g., change in color or consistency, and reports problems to the pharmacist. After consulting with the pharmacist, makes adjustments in amounts of ingredients to be mixed for special orders. When compounding sterile products, the technician follows rigid sterile procedures which involve use of special equipment such as the laminar air flow hood. Performs a variety of standard assays on completed products utilizing testing equipment, e.g., specific gravity apparatus, and other analytical techniques, e.g., titration of solutions, adjusting proper concentrations in solutions, and visual inspections. Coordinates supply and demand for products with users, and meets with company representatives about basic problems with equipment, labels, etc. Refers unusual problems to pharmacist. By comparison, GS-4 technicians typically compound a limited number of complex solutions, and carry out portions of the bulk compounding operations.
3. Receives and reviews orders for intravenous additive solutions, checking with pharmacist if discrepancies, such as an incomplete order, are noted. Calculates, and converts to proper weights and measures, the amount of solution and drugs to be used, taking into account concentration, overfill for slight losses during mixture, and number of doses contained in the solution. The mixing of the solution is performed or carefully checked by the pharmacist. The GS-5 technician checks containers visually for foreign particles and affixes label to bottle. Completed work is reviewed by a pharmacist. By comparison, GS-4 technicians reconstitute drugs to be mixed in solutions, and set up necessary ingredients to be mixed.
4. Reads individual prescriptions and determines kind, strength, and dosage of drug to be dispensed. Correlation of instructions on the order and pharmacy policy limitations must be made and noted on the prescription. For example, if one tablet is prescribed for 90 days, pharmacy policy may necessitate initial dispensing of 1 container of 30 tablets, good for one month, and a notation of two refills on the prescription. Sets up prescriptions by obtaining correct stock container, counting or pouring correct amount of medication, and placing medication in smaller container. After the prescription has been filled, all contents and the label are set aside for a final check and dispensing by a pharmacist. GS-5 technicians also select the correct unit dose of medication for inpatient medication drawers. Completed work is checked by a pharmacist. By comparison, GS-4 technicians set up prescriptions for a limited number of specified common items.

### *Level of responsibility*

GS-5 technicians receive general oral instructions from the supervisor, relative to time allotted for completion of work and possible problems. Typically, they are responsible for arranging the sequence and timing of their own work to meet variable demands in a particular area. Work on prescriptions and IV solutions is carefully checked. Other work is generally reviewed for

adequacy of results. They are relied on to notice any unusual requests for drugs and supplies, reactions in bulk compounding, etc., and discuss possible solutions with the supervisor. By comparison, GS-4 technicians work with independence, but the supervisor checks completed work closely.

Based on their substantive knowledges and familiarity with a wide range of articles stocked in the pharmacy, GS-5 technicians answer routine inquiries from doctors, nurses, and other staff on the availability of specific items; e.g., drugs in stock, new drugs on order, and dosage forms available in the pharmacy. As representatives of the pharmacy, they are expected to deal with professional staff and company representatives in a tactful and helpful manner. They are expected to refer any questions concerning drug reactions, requests for order of a new drug, etc., to the pharmacist in charge. By comparison, GS-4 technicians have limited contacts with hospital staff and company representatives.