

AWARDS FOR NURSE SPECIALTY CERTIFICATION

SOP CNO-002

VISN 20
Northwest Network

Service Line(s):
Chief Nursing Officer

Signatory Authority:
VISN 20 CNO

Effective Date:
April 28, 2023

Responsible Owner:
Chief Nursing Officer

Recertification Date:
January 13, 2028

1. PURPOSE AND AUTHORITY

- a. This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) aims to establish procedures for granting awards for staff within the services of the VISN 20 Network Office. This SOP encompasses Licensed Practical or Vocational Nurses (LPNs, LVNs), Registered Nurses (RNs), Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs), and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) after they achieve an eligible and appropriate specialty certification. The registered nurse, nurse anesthetist, or LPN/LVN will submit evidence of professional accomplishment within 14 calendar days after obtaining achievement but 30 calendar days at maximum.
- b. Approving officials may approve or disapprove awards, at their discretion, for nondiscriminatory reasons, e.g., budget limitations, disagreement with the value of the contribution made by the employee to the Agency or its mission.
- c. This SOP sets forth mandatory procedures and processes to ensure compliance with VA Handbook 5017/18, dated August 20, 2020, and VA Handbook 5017/15, dated June 3, 2019.

2. PROCEDURES

- a. VISN20 will give a one-step special advancement for achievement (SAA) and a \$250 cash award to RNs, CRNAs, and APRNs as recognition for specialty certification. LPNs/LVNs are eligible for a one-step SAA only as recognition for achieving a specialty certification.
- b. All eligible specialty certifications must be nationally certified and on the Master certification list of approved specialty certifications by the Office of Nursing Service (ONS).
- c. The Specialty certification will be approved by the appropriate Supervisor/Service Director and Chief Nursing Officer before the LPN/LVN, RN, CRNA, or APRN begins the certification process.
- d. To be eligible for this award recognition, certifications must be in a specialty related to the accomplishment of the healthcare mission of the VISN20 Northwest Network. They must be specific to the nurse's current duty assignment.

- e. Specialty certification includes second and subsequent certifications but does not include recertification or renewal of previously held certifications. Employees are only eligible for one specialty certification award per 12-month cycle or year. This applies to up to two certifications per year.
- f. Certifications achieved before becoming employed, or a certification that has already received an award or is required for a degree or license as a nurse within VISN20, are not eligible for an award.
- g. Qualifying certifications will only be eligible for an award one time. If a certification is not renewed, it will not qualify for an award if obtained a second time.
- h. The Central Office Nurse Professional Standards Board (CONPSB) will consider recommendations for Special Advancements for Achievement for registered nurses in the VISN 20 Network Office. Recommendations of the board will be forwarded to the Network Director or designee at the VISN Office. Employees at the top step of their grade cannot receive a step increase. Therefore, for those employees who are at the top step of their grade and who also meet all of the criteria for an SAA, the CONPSB will make a recommendation to the approving official as to the amount of a cash award that may be appropriate based on the value of the employee's contribution to the Agency and its mission. This amount will have the initial \$250 added to the total.
- i. Only employees at the top step of their grade may receive a cash award in lieu of an SAA. However, Registered nurses and certified registered nurse anesthetists who obtain a specialty certification and are at the top step of the grade will only be granted a cash award; they are not eligible for a cash award in lieu of an SAA for obtaining a specialty certification. All cash awards will be documented on VA Form 4659.

3. ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

- a. RNs, APRNs, or LPN/LVNs are responsible for the following:
 - (1) Obtaining preapproval for certification and providing supporting documents to the Service Supervisor.
 - (2) Obtaining all the necessary documentation about their achievement of a specialty certification.
 - (3) Employees will typically submit evidence of professional accomplishment within 14 calendar days after the achievement is obtained, but documentation may be accepted up to 30 calendar days after the achievement when extenuating circumstances exist, (e.g., lengthy illness or inability to get documentation from certifying body.) NOTE: Agency budget limitations are not an extenuating circumstance.
 - (4) Become certified before becoming a registered nurse, or nurse anesthetist with the Department are not eligible for a cash award for specialty certification.
 - (5) Staff who receive a certification as a result of VA funding, or the certificate is a condition of employment with VA for the current position held, or the certification is a qualification requirement for promotion to a higher grade or is used to justify a higher

level are not eligible for a cash award. [Refer to the qualification standards in VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part II for additional information about specific qualification standards. For example, nurse anesthetists appointed or reappointed on or after May 4, 1993, must be certified by the Council on Certification of Nurse Anesthetists as a condition of employment. They are not eligible for cash awards for specialty certification.]

b. Service Supervisor is responsible for:

(1) Reviewing certification requests.

- (i) Determine whether or not to support the employee's submission with a formal recommendation for an SAA.
- (ii) Consult with Fiscal or Human Resources to determine if the award budget allows for award recognition and compliance with local award policies; and
- (iii) If the criterias for the award are met, and funding is available, make a recommendation including the appropriate justification.

(2) Submit Supervisor's Endorsement: it must indicate in the written submission supporting the SAA.

- (i) At the time of the achievement and at the time of the SAA recommendation, the employee is performing at an Excellent/Highly Satisfactory or Outstanding level. The most recent rating of record is not sufficient to support this requirement unless it was issued within the past 30 calendar days; and
- (ii) How the knowledge gained by obtaining the certification will benefit VA and the duties assumed for which the certificate was obtained. Examples of these accomplishments must be provided; and
- (iii) How the employee will apply the knowledge in performing their current job duties.

(3) Follows the process outlined by Chief Nursing Office for submitting awards for specialty certification requests. Documentation to E-Mail Group, "VISN20 CNO Routing".

c. Chief Nursing Officer reviews and concurs all Awards for Nurse Specialty Certification.

(1) The award nomination and all required justification and documentation attached will be forwarded to CNO, who will submit it to Human Resources so that it will be received no later than 30 calendar days after the achievement or 60 calendar days after the achievement when extenuating circumstances exist, e.g., the supervisor was on extended leave or additional information from the employee was needed.

(2) CNO Designee submits award to HR's "Your HR" site for final submission after technical and CONPSB review.

d. Human Resources Officer is responsible for:

- (1) Human Resources will conduct an initial technical review of the award before submission to the appropriate CONPSB to ensure that the employee and supervisor have provided all information and that the policy requirements have been met.
 - (i) For Title 38 employees, the VA 10-2543 Board Action Form must be reviewed by the applicable Staffing Specialist and the VA 4659 Incentive Awards Recommendation and Approval form reviewed by the Performance Management Team prior to the SAA package going to the applicable Nursing Professional Standards Board.
 - (ii) Hybrid-Title 38 employees, the VA 4659 Incentive Awards Recommendation and Approval form must be reviewed by the Performance Management Team prior to the Approving Official's review.
- (2) Additional information obtained by Human Resources during the technical review process will be attached to the award nomination.
- (3) If the award submission fails to meet technical requirements due to a lack of justification provided by the immediate supervisor, it will be returned to the supervisor within seven calendar days with an explanation of what information is needed or why technical requirements have yet to be met. Otherwise, if the award meets technical requirements, Human Resources will return the nomination to the CNO within seven calendar days following receipt of the award. Human Resources will document, as part of the submission to the CONPSB, that an HR technical review was completed. If HR fails to meet their timelines, the staff member will not be prevented from submitting award to CONPSB, HR will make the appropriate annotation relating to the delays of any technical reviews.
- (4) The overall operation of the Incentive Awards Program, including processing approved awards for specialty certifications.

4. REFERENCES

- a. Department of Veterans Affairs Nurse Pay Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-366, dated August 15, 1990).
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/1199>
- b. VA Handbook 5017/15, dated June 3, 2019.
- c. Master Certification List, Office of Nursing Office, April 24, 2020,
https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VACOVHAONS/Workforce/certification/Lists/Nursing_Certifications1/AllItems.aspx

5. REVIEW

This SOP must be reviewed at minimum at recertification and including when there are changes to VA Handbook 5017/18 dated August 20, 2020.

RECERTIFICATION

This SOP is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of January 13, 2028. In the event of contradiction with national policy, the national policy supersedes and controls.

SIGNATORY AUTHORITY

TERESA
BOYD

Digitally signed by
TERESA BOYD
Date: 2023.12.21
14:52:09 -08'00'

Teresa D. Boyd, DO
VISN 20 Network Director
Date Approved: (approval is date signed by signatory authority)

NOTE: *The signature remains valid until rescinded by appropriate administrative action.*

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