

# Summary of Discussions with Focus Groups from the Health and Safety Occupational Group

*Note: The Summary is incomplete. A focus group is still planned for Kansas Commission of Veterans Affairs' health care staff in Winfield. There may be additional information that needs to be added from these employees.*

## Overview of Findings

In the health and safety occupation group, although being broad and having multiple disciplines, are all concerned with health and safety prevention and/or health care of individuals. The group has three major areas: **Diagnosing, treating, and care** – which has professional, technician and support disciplines in the patient care services such as dietetics/nutrition, nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, pharmacy, dentistry, medical technology, and others; **inspection and investigation** – which has professional and technician disciplines in the safety and occupational health services where the primary objective of the work is the elimination or minimization of human injury and property and productivity losses in the workplace and health care setting through investigation, inspection, or enforcement such as occupational health and safety, accident prevention, fire prevention, industrial safety, environmental protection, and others; and **health care delivery** – which has professional disciplines in the public health services where the primary objective of the work is prevention of individuals from becoming sick or injured through education, policy develop, administering preventive care programs, and conducting research services such as nursing, nutrition, occupational health, and food safety education programs and public health enforcement

In most cases in these disciplines an individual is required to be licensed or certified for their discipline or received class room training from universities or vocational schools. Individuals are therefore committed to continued study to maintain their license or certification. Due to the licensing and the continuous training, career ladders or structures are rarely utilized beyond the normal development of an individual to full job performance expectations. Other than moving into supervisory or managerial role, career advancement is generally measured through longevity or obtaining a specialized license or certification in their discipline.

Employees indicated due to lack of career advancement there is an increasing tendency for those employees to leave the agency to find other jobs where their skills and capabilities are valued as much or more then the licenses or degrees they hold. This results in the feelings that the agency or the State is a great training ground to get job experience, but it is not a place to stay for your whole career. Some employees indicated they stay because they were hired when longevity and step movement was given and they are now invested in the state's retirement system and don't want to lose out on a retirement package. Other employees stay because they like the work that they are doing and higher level classifications or increased compensation levels are not a priority over the enjoyment and satisfaction from the work one does.

The Technicians in the State Hospitals under Department of Social Rehabilitation Services and the Juvenile Correctional Facilities indicated that due to downsizing, restructuring of work and/or not filling professional positions, particularly therapists, they are doing higher level of work. This higher level work was traditionally done by therapists. Therefore, there is a need to

make sure that the level or levels of work are accurately reflected in these classification specifications to ensure employees are compensated appropriately.

## **Disciplines Groups**

**Health diagnosing, treating, and care:** The professional, technical and assistant medical or dental care services given to patients in hospital, clinics, homes, school, community and correctional or nursing care facilities, or treatment of human disorders or illnesses. Most positions require a current state license or certification in their discipline.

**Inspection and Investigation:** Inspections that are performed are primarily concerned with legal and regulatory compliance determinations which differs from those aimed at material or process adequacy. Compliance inspections assess whether or not there is adherence to the environmental, health, safety or other provisions of a mandated program. Compliance may be obtained by methods such as persuasion, negotiation, and technical assistance. Compliance may also require actions such as citation of violations, drafting of complaints, and referral of case from administrative or legal proceedings, or closing of businesses or operations.

Although subject matter knowledge differs among disciplines or enforcement programs, there are common characteristics that run through them all. Inspections and investigation positions include both line and staff work involving tasks such as onsite inspections or surveys to assess compliance, investigations to substantiate alleged or suspected instances or patterns of noncompliance, negotiations with persons or organizations whose activities have been found to be at odds with mandatory guidelines, and analysis of reports required of individuals or organizations engaged in regulated activities to assess their compliance with mandatory guidelines. Many such positions also involve work in explaining and promoting the regulatory or compliance program to those whose activities are subject to it and to the general public as well. Compliance positions require knowledge of program related legislation and regulations, a knowledge of the type of activities where compliance is sought, and knowledge of inspections or investigative techniques including the writing of reports that substantiate findings and serve as a basis for administrative or legal action. The inspections, investigations, negotiations, or analytical work involved requires evaluative judgment based on application of statutory or regulatory provisions and administrative procedures to varied situations that arise in the course of an assignment. Most positions require a current state or federal license or certification in their discipline.

**Health Care Delivery:** Public health services that monitor the health of the population, promote health and safety, watch for emerging diseases, establish medical policies and practices, and make sure all citizens, rich and poor, have access to medical care. Public health professionals try to prevent problems from happening or re-occurring through implementing educational programs, developing policies, administering services, and conducting research, in contrast to clinical professional who focus primarily on treating individuals after they become sick or injured. Most positions require a current state license or certification in their discipline.

## **Minimum Qualifications**

The **professional** disciplines require at least a bachelor's degree in a specialized field or higher education in a specific health field; **technician** disciplines, where workers operate technical equipment and assist health diagnosing and treating practitioners, require graduation of 1-year or 2-year training programs; and **service** disciplines require little or specialized education or training.

The majority of the participants agreed that the current minimum qualifications were sufficient. Some of the reoccurring comments from the participants are as follows:

#### **Professionals –**

- Most disciplines require a minimum of two additional years of experience working in the discipline after licensing/certification.
- Would like the agency to pay for continual education to retain license/certification.
- Entry level classes are not really utilized.

#### **Technicians –**

- Most disciplines require a minimum of one additional year of experience working in the discipline after licensing/certification.
- Would like the agency to pay for continual education to retain license/certification.

#### **Service –**

- Most of the work is learned on the job.
- Requirements of certification can be gained through experience or formal education.
- Would like the agency to pay for continual education to retain license/certification.

## **Full Performance**

### **Amount of Time to Reach Full Performance**

In Professional positions, in general participants indicated that it takes anywhere from one year to two years to be capable of full performance. The participants also indicated that this time reflects the experience acquired through on the job training and actual performance of the duties, and does not include the continual learning that is needed for licensing.

For Service and Technician positions, participants indicated that it takes anywhere from six months to a year to reach full performance. In almost all cases, the time increments mentioned above reflect the experience acquired through on the job training.

Some participants also indicated that this length of time can be dependent on cyclical or seasonal issues, depending on the particular discipline. Finally, some positions are required to complete specific certification or training requirements before being able to complete full-performance work. However, in general, the amount of time that is required to reach full performance is generally dependent on the employee's ability.

**Advanced Full Performance Level:** Both for Professionals and Technicians, there seems there is a clearly defined level of work that is higher in complexity and responsibilities than an

employee who is seen as performing independently at full performance. The next higher role is generally seen as a specialist or leader worker where the work in the discipline has exacting technical requirements; requires learning more advanced, difficult, and responsible procedures; maintaining quality assurance of the discipline they regulate; or supervises assignments.

At the Service positions, the next higher role beyond the full performance worker is the supervisor role. The supervisory work is generally done by the manager of the program or by a professional staff member.

### **Type of Supervision Received**

**Professionals** generally receive limited supervision and the work requires employees to use independent judgment or act on their own discretion, requiring the use of initiative and creativity to resolve problems or interpret policy to develop solutions. As employees progress to higher levels of positions, direction becomes more general and employees have greater and greater independence and accountability. Major work assignments are examined for soundness or technical judgment and for general effectiveness and adequacy. At the advanced level, employees have a broad and comprehensive knowledge of theories, concepts and practices with the ability to apply those skills to complex, difficult and/or unprecedented situations. In most cases, supervision exists to provide administrative direction in the planning, organizing and implementation of the work activities, as well as to oversee the budget responsibilities, respond to legislative and media inquiries and complaints, and to see to human resource issues. In the Clinical nursing disciplines, the supervisory role is to coordinate the job assignments and establish priorities and deadlines for patient care; and assist the nurse with unusual problems.

**Technicians** generally receive general supervision. While supervision is limited, employees generally do not have authority to make independent decisions outside of standard operating procedures or guidelines. As one becomes advanced or seen as an expert in their processes, employees are given more independent judgment to act on their own discretion requiring the use of technical knowledge to resolve complex problems. Supervision exists to provide general direction, review judgments made by employees, and clarify standards, policies and procedures that are normally seen as the day-to-day work activities of a supervisor. Additional, specific instructions are given for new, difficult, or unusual assignments.

**Services** generally receive direct supervision. The supervisor provides continuing or individual assignments by indicating generally what is to be done, limitations, quality and quantity expected, deadlines and priority of tasks.

**What Criteria Should Compensation be Based?** There seemed to be a consensus that performance and other personal characteristics that the employee brings to the job (such as initiative, ability to work well with others, etc.) should be one of, but not the primary criteria for the basis of compensation for both health and safety positions. But the primary criterion is that the state gets the individuals' base pay to market and then keep up with inflation.

The participants indicated that this would be especially important criteria during the period of time when a new employee is working toward the full performance level. There was also consensus that, due to the importance of experience and on-the job training, longevity was the

most important criteria on which employees' pay should be based, especially after the point when an employee becomes capable of full performance of his or her job duties. Longevity coincides with an employee's continued career growth and additional responsibilities. Pay for renewal of the employees' certification, licensure or completion of specific training thought would also be a benefit; in addition, to provide necessary equipment to perform the job. Some participants they are using their own personal internet, email, and long distances services and office equipment, and are not compensated by their agencies for chargers or the costs that they are incurring.

While performance and other personal characteristics were thought to be important criteria on which pay should be based, the participants expressed concern with the ability to fairly administer a system that bases pay on those qualities. The primary concern was favoritism. However, the participants thought that a system based exclusively on longevity with all employees receiving the same amount of increase, regardless of effort or job performance, would not work well, and could serve as a disincentive to exceptional work.

In addition, the participants indicated that they were all in favor of a system that would allow an employee to progress in pay as they progressed in their career.

**Occupational Survey Summary**  
**Participation Rate: 16%**

Due to the small statistical sample size the confidence of probability can not be measured.