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**U.S. Citizenship  
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**FEB 02 2004**

**FILE:** EAC 02 092 53783 **Office:** VERMONT SERVICE CENTER **Date:**

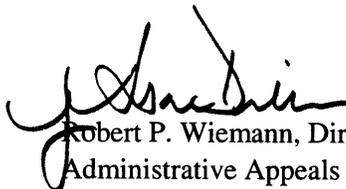
**IN RE:** Petitioner: [REDACTED]  
Beneficiary: [REDACTED]

**PETITION:** Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker Pursuant to Section 101(a)(15)(H) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)

**ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:**

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

This is the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All documents have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Any further inquiry must be made to that office.

  
Robert P. Wiemann, Director  
Administrative Appeals Office

**DISCUSSION:** The nonimmigrant visa petition was denied by the director and is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner is a hospital with 4,478 employees and a gross annual income of \$630,126,517. It seeks to employ the beneficiary as a registered nurse for a period of three years. The director determined the petitioner had not established that the proffered position is a specialty occupation.

On appeal, counsel submits a brief.

Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b), provides, in part, for nonimmigrant classification to qualified aliens who are coming temporarily to the United States to perform services in a specialty occupation. Section 214(i)(1) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(i)(1), defines a "specialty occupation" as an occupation that requires theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its equivalent) as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

Pursuant to section 214(i)(2) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(i)(2), to qualify as an alien coming to perform services in a specialty occupation the beneficiary must hold full state licensure to practice in the occupation, if such licensure is required to practice in the occupation. In addition, the beneficiary must have completed the degree required for the occupation, or have experience in the specialty equivalent to the completion of such degree and recognition of expertise in the specialty through progressively responsible positions relating to the specialty.

The director denied the petition because the petitioner had not demonstrated that a baccalaureate degree is required for the proffered position. On appeal, counsel states, in part, that the general studies of the nursing baccalaureate program prepare the individual to assume supervisory and administrative positions in the nursing hierarchy. Counsel further states that the proffered position is that of a critical care nurse, a position that is so complex that a nurse without a baccalaureate degree cannot fill it.

Counsel's statement on appeal is not persuasive. The AAO does not use a title, by itself, when determining whether a particular job qualifies as a specialty occupation. The specific duties of the offered position combined with the nature of the petitioning entity's business operations are factors that the AAO considers. In the initial I-129 petition, the petitioner described the duties of the offered position as follows:

The beneficiary is a registered nurse who will, except for attending meetings, education classes and doing preparatory work, spends [sic] virtually all of her time in the surgical intensive care unit. She will not have any supervisory duties at all, although she will, because of her education and experience, be a deep resource for other nurses in the facility. At least 90% to 95% of her time will be taken up in this manner, assisting the intensive care patients to try to stay alive and mend.

Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), to qualify as a specialty occupation, the position must meet one of the following criteria:

1. A baccalaureate or higher degree or its equivalent is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the particular position;

2. The degree requirement is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations or, in the alternative, an employer may show that its particular position is so complex or unique that it can be performed only by an individual with a degree;
3. The employer normally requires a degree or its equivalent for the position; or
4. The nature of the specific duties is so specialized and complex that knowledge required to perform the duties is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree.

The petitioner has not met any of the above requirements to classify the offered position as a specialty occupation.

First, the AAO does not agree with counsel's assertion that the proffered position would normally require a bachelor's degree in nursing or a related field. The proffered position is that of a registered nurse who will work in the critical care unit. A review of the Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (*Handbook*), 2002-2003 edition, at page 269, finds no requirement of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty for employment as a registered nurse. The three educational paths to nursing are as follows: Associate degree in nursing (A.D.N.), Bachelor of Science degree in nursing (B.S.N.), and diploma. The *Handbook* further states:

[S]ome career paths are open only to nurses with bachelor's or advanced degrees. A bachelor's degree is often necessary for administrative positions, and it is a prerequisite for admission to graduate nursing programs in research, consulting, teaching, or a clinical specialization.

As the record does not demonstrate that the beneficiary's proffered position is primarily an administrative position, or a graduate nursing program in research, consulting, teaching, or a clinical specialization, it is concluded that the petitioner has not demonstrated that the proffered position is a specialty occupation within the meaning of the regulations. Thus, the petitioner has not shown that a bachelor's degree or its equivalent is required for the position being offered to the beneficiary.

Second, although in his May 31, 2002 letter, counsel states that every registered nurse in the neurology unit, including ICU, holds a baccalaureate degree or an equivalent, the petitioner has not provided documentary evidence of such. Simply going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for the purpose of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm. 1972). Even if the petitioner were to demonstrate that all of its registered nurses in the ICU unit hold baccalaureate degrees, the petitioner's reasoning would be problematic when viewed in light of the statutory definition of specialty occupation. The petitioner's creation of a position with a perfunctory bachelor's degree requirement would not mask the fact that the position is not a specialty occupation. As with employment agencies as petitioners, the AAO must examine the ultimate employment of the alien, and determine whether the position qualifies as a specialty occupation. *Cf. Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384 (5th Cir. 2000). The critical element is not the title of the position or an employer's self-imposed standards, but whether the position actually requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and the attainment of a bachelor's degree in the specific specialty as the minimum for entry into the

occupation as required by the Act.<sup>1</sup> To interpret the regulations any other way would lead to absurd results: if the AAO was limited to reviewing a petitioner's self-imposed employment requirements, then any alien with a bachelor's degree could be brought into the United States to perform a menial, non-professional, or an otherwise non-specialty occupation, so long as the employer required all such employees to have bachelor's degrees. *See id.* at 388.

In this case, although the petitioner claimed to have hired only individuals with a bachelor's degree in nursing for its registered nurse positions assigned to the intensive care unit, the position, nevertheless, does not meet the statutory definition of specialty occupation. The position, itself, does not require the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge. Therefore, even though the petitioner may have required a bachelor's degree in the past, the position still does not require a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty.

Third, the petitioner did not present any documentary evidence that a baccalaureate degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent is common to the industry in parallel positions among organizations similar to the petitioner. The article in the record from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing concerning its collaborative agreement with the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is noted. The article states that the VA has committed to designate \$50 million over the next five years to assist its nursing workforce to attain the baccalaureate or higher degree. The VA, however, not only is the largest employer of registered nurses in the nation, but has specific hiring requirements for its registered nurse positions that are not common throughout the industry.

Furthermore, with respect to counsel's objection to denial of this petition in view of the approval of similar petitions in the past, the AAO is never bound by a decision of a service center or district director. *Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra v. INS*, 44 F.Supp. 2d 800, 803 (E.D. La. 2000), *aff'd*, 248 F. 3d 1139 (5th Cir. 2001), *cert. denied*, 122 S.Ct. 51 (2001).

Finally, on November 27, 2002, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, now Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS), issued a policy memorandum on H-1B nurse petitions (nurse memo) and acknowledged that an increasing number of nursing specialties, such as critical care and operating room care, require a higher degree of knowledge and skill than a typical RN or staff nurse position.<sup>2</sup> However, the mere fact that a nursing position has a title such as "critical care" does not necessarily mean that it qualifies as a specialty occupation.<sup>3</sup>

The AAO looks beyond the title of the position and determines, from a review of the duties of the position and any supporting evidence, whether the position actually requires the theoretical and practical application of

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<sup>1</sup> The court in *Defensor v. Meissner* observed that the four criteria at 8 C.F.R. 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) present certain ambiguities when compared to the statutory definition, and "might also be read as merely an additional requirement that a position must meet, in addition to the statutory and regulatory definition." *Supra* at 387.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum from Johnny N. Williams, Executive Associate Commissioner, INS Office of Field Operations, *Guidance on Adjudication of H-1B Petitions Filed on Behalf of Nurses*, HQISD 70/6.2.8-P (November 27, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that the nurse memo also mentions that certification examinations are available to such registered nurses who may work in such nursing specialties and possess additional clinical experience, but who are not advanced practice nurses.

a body of highly specialized knowledge, and the attainment of a baccalaureate degree in a specific specialty as the minimum for entry into the occupation as required by the Act. While the nurse memo specifically states that a petitioner may be able to demonstrate, through affidavits from independent experts or other means, that the nature of the position's duties is so specialized and complex that the knowledge required to perform the duties is usually associated with the attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree (or its equivalent), the AAO maintains discretion to use as advisory opinions statements submitted as expert testimony. *Matter of Caron International*, 19 I&N Dec. 791 (Comm. 1988). The AAO must be satisfied that the ultimate employment of the alien is in a specialty occupation, regardless of the position's title.

Although the proffered position is that of a registered nurse assigned to the intensive care unit, the duties of the position do not entail any specialized or complex responsibilities that involve the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge. As previously stated, the duties ascribed to the position, which include, in part, caring for patients recovering from complicated surgery, or who have post-surgical complications, are routine to many registered nurse positions. Just because the beneficiary would perform these duties in the intensive care unit does not elevate the duties' complexity. As the record is presently constituted, the AAO cannot find that the job fits the criterion found at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(4).

The petitioner has failed to establish that any of the four factors enumerated above are present in this proceeding. Accordingly, it is concluded that the petitioner has not demonstrated that the offered position is a specialty occupation within the meaning of the regulations.

The burden of proof in these proceedings rests solely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. The petitioner has not sustained that burden.

**ORDER:** The appeal is dismissed.