

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

In the Matter of SUSAN STEWART and U.S. POSTAL SERVICE,
POST OFFICE, Lawrenceville, Ga.

*Docket No. 96-1461; Submitted on the Record;
Issued April 7, 1998*

DECISION and ORDER

Before MICHAEL J. WALSH, BRADLEY T. KNOTT,
A. PETER KANJORSKI

The issue is whether appellant has met her burden of proof in establishing that she sustained an injury in the performance of duty.

On July 31, 1995 appellant, then a 37-year-old rural carrier, had pain in her arm and hand while delivering mail which she described as feeling like a tearing of the muscle extending from the lower arm to the armpit. In an August 14, 1995 form report, Dr. D.V. Dronavalli, a Board-certified internist, indicated that appellant had tenderness over the left shoulder. He diagnosed weakness of the left shoulder. In the question on the form asking whether the condition was related to the employment injury, the doctor marked the "yes" box but put a question mark beside it. Appellant stopped work on August 2, 1995 and returned to work on August 30, 1995. She received continuation of pay for the period she did not work.

In a November 9, 1995 decision, the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs denied appellant's claim on the grounds that fact of injury was not established.

The Board finds that appellant has not met her burden of proof in establishing that her left shoulder condition is causally related to her employment.

A person who claims benefits under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act¹ has the burden of establishing the essential elements of her claim. Appellant has the burden of establishing by reliable, probative and substantial evidence that her medical condition was causally related to a specific employment incident or to specific conditions of employment.² As part of such burden of proof, rationalized medical opinion evidence showing causal relation must

¹ 5 U.S.C. §§ 8101-8193.

² *Margaret A. Donnelly*, 15 ECAB 40, 43 (1963).

be submitted.³ The mere fact that a condition manifests itself or worsens during a period of employment does not raise an inference of causal relationship between the condition and the employment.⁴ Such a relationship must be shown by rationalized medical evidence of causal relation based upon a specific and accurate history of employment incidents or conditions which are alleged to have caused or exacerbated a disability.⁵

The only medical evidence of record are form reports from Dr. Dronavalli who gave an amorphous diagnosis of left shoulder weakness and only supported causal relationship by checking a box that appellant's condition was work related. However, the Board has held that such a report has little probative value where there is no explanation or rationale supporting the opinion on causal relationship between the diagnosed condition and the employment-related injury.⁶ This opinion is weakened further by the fact that Dr. Dronavalli put a question mark next to the box which indicated he had some doubts on whether appellant's condition was related to her employment. Appellant has not submitted any medical evidence, consisting of a narrative of the employment injury, a description of her treatment, specific diagnosis and a rationalized opinion on causal relationship, which would establish that her shoulder condition was causally related to her employment.

The decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs, dated November 9, 1995, is hereby affirmed.

Dated, Washington, D.C.
April 7, 1998

Michael J. Walsh
Chairman

Bradley T. Knott
Alternate Member

A. Peter Kanjorski
Alternate Member

³ *Daniel R. Hickman*, 34 ECAB 1220, 1223 (1983).

⁴ *Juanita C. Rogers*, 34 ECAB 544, 546 (1983).

⁵ *Edgar L. Colley*, 34 ECAB 1691, 1696 (1983).

⁶ *See Lillian M. Jones*, 34 ECAB 379, 381 (1982).