U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

In the Matter of JOHN M. CONNER and U.S. POSTAL SERVICE,
POST OFFICE, Pittsburgh, PA

Docket No. 98-614; Submitted on the Record;
Issued December 2, 1999

DECISION and ORDER

Before GEORGE E. RIVERS, DAVID S. GERSON,
WILLIE T.C. THOMAS

The issue is whether the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs abused its discretion by refusing to reopen appellant's case for merit review under 5 U.S.C. § 8128(a) on the grounds that his application for review was not timely filed and failed to present clear evidence of error.

The Board has duly reviewed the case with respect to the issue in question and finds that the Office did not abuse its discretion by refusing to reopen appellant's case for merit review as the request was untimely made and presented no clear evidence of error.

The only decision before the Board on this appeal is the Office's August 21, 1997 decision denying appellant's request for a review on the merits of its decision dated May 21, 1996.[1] Because more than one year has elapsed between the issuance of the Office's May 21, 1996 decision and November 22, 1997, the date appellant filed his appeal with the Board, the Board lacks jurisdiction to review the prior Office decision.[2]

To require the Office to reopen a case for merit review under section 8128(a) of the Federal Employees' Compensation Act,[3] the Office's regulations provide that a claimant must: (1) show that the Office erroneously applied or interpreted a point of law; (2) advance a point of law or fact not previously considered by the Office; or (3) submit relevant and pertinent evidence

---

[1] In this decision, the Office hearing representative denied appellant's request for a schedule award for permanent impairment of either his left or right knee, and denied compensation for disability on or after May 6, 1994, causally related to his January 20, 1989 right thigh contusion injury.

[2] *See* 20 C.F.R. § 501.3(d)(2).

[3] 5 U.S.C. §§ 8101-8193. Under section 8128 of the Act, the Secretary of Labor may review an award for or against payment of compensation at any time on his own motion or on application. 5 U.S.C. § 8128(a).

not previously considered by the Office.[4] To be entitled to a merit review of an Office decision denying or terminating a benefit, a claimant also must file his or her application for review within one year of the date of that decision.[5] When a claimant fails to meet one of the above standards, it is a matter of discretion on the part of the Office whether to reopen a case for further consideration under section 8128(a) of the Act.[6] The Board has found that the imposition of the one-year time limitation does not constitute an abuse of the discretionary authority granted the Office under section 8128(a) of the Act.[7]

In its August 21, 1997 decision, the Office properly determined that appellant failed to file a timely application for review. The Office rendered its last merit decision on the issue appealed on May 21, 1996, and appellant's request for reconsideration was dated May 28, 1997 which was clearly more than one year after May 21, 1996. Therefore, appellant's request for reconsideration of his case on its merits was untimely filed.

The Office, however, may not deny an application for review solely on the grounds that the application was not timely filed. For a proper exercise of the discretionary authority granted under section 8128(a) of the Act, when an application for review is not timely filed, the Office must nevertheless undertake a limited review to determine whether the application establishes "clear evidence of error."[8] Office procedures provide that the Office will reopen a claimant's case for merit review, notwithstanding the one-year filing limitation set forth in 20 C.F.R. § 10.138(b)(2), if the claimant's application for review shows "clear evidence of error" on the part of the Office.[9]

To establish clear evidence of error, a claimant must submit evidence relevant to the issue which was decided by the Office.[10] The evidence must be positive, precise and explicit and must be manifest on its face that the Office committed an error.[11] Evidence which does not raise

---

[4] 20 C.F.R. §§ 10.138(b)(1), (2).

[5] 20 C.F.R. § 10.138(b)(2).

[6] *Joseph W. Baxter*, 36 ECAB 228 (1984).

[7] *Leon D. Faidley, Jr.*, 41 ECAB 104 (1989).

[8] *Charles J. Prudencio*, 41 ECAB 499 (1990).

[9] Federal (FECA) Procedure Manual, Part 2 -- Claims, *Reconsiderations*, Chapter 2.1602.3(b) (May 1996). The Office therein states:

> "The term 'clear evidence of error' is intended to represent a difficult standard. The claimant must present evidence which on its face shows that the Office made a mistake (for example, proof that a schedule award was miscalculated). Evidence such as a detailed, well-rationalized medical report which, if submitted before the denial was issued, would have created a conflict in medical opinion requiring further development, is not clear evidence of error and would not require a review of the case on the Director's own motion."

[10] *See Dean D. Beets*, 43 ECAB 1153 (1992).

[11] *See Leona N. Travis*, 43 ECAB 227 (1991).

a substantial question concerning the correctness of the Office's decision is insufficient to establish clear evidence of error.[12] It is not enough merely to show that the evidence could be construed so as to produce a contrary conclusion.[13] This entails a limited review by the Office of how the evidence submitted with the reconsideration request bears on the evidence previously of record and whether the new evidence demonstrates clear error on the part of the Office.[14] To show clear evidence of error, the evidence submitted must not only be of sufficient probative value to create a conflict in medical opinion or establish a clear procedural error, but must be of sufficient probative value to *prima facie* shift the weight of the evidence in favor of the claimant and raise a substantial question as to the correctness of the Office decision.[15] The Board makes an independent determination as to whether a claimant has submitted clear evidence of error on the part of the Office such that the Office abused its discretion in denying merit review in the face of such evidence.[16]

In the present case, with his request for reconsideration of the May 21, 1996 decision, appellant, through his representative, argued that the evidence or record reflected back pain as early as May 10, 1989, that Dr. Robert M. Yanchus'[17] report was somewhat flawed, that Dr. H. Andrew Wissinger's[18] report was not credible, that Dr. David P. Fowler's[19] opinions failed to contain sufficient rationale, and that since appellant's symptoms had been continuous, there was at least a conflict in medical opinion evidence. Duplicate medical evidence of that previously submitted to the record dating from 1989 to 1994, and previously considered by the Office, was also submitted. This argument and cumulative medical evidence did not demonstrate any clear evidence of error on its face on the part of the Office in its May 21, 1996 decision, as the Office properly ascertained. Therefore, the Board now finds that it is insufficient to reopen appellant's case for further consideration on its merits.

As this evidence does not raise a substantial question as to the correctness of the prior May 21, 1996 Office decision or shift the weight of the evidence in favor of the claimant, it does not, therefore, constitute grounds for reopening appellant's case for a merit review.

In accordance with its internal guidelines and with Board precedent, the Office properly performed a limited review of this evidence to ascertain whether it demonstrated clear evidence of error, correctly determined that it did not, and denied appellant's untimely request for a merit reconsideration on that basis.

---

[12] *See Jesus D. Sanchez,* 41 ECAB 964 (1990).

[13] *See Leona N. Travis, supra* note 11

[14] *See Nelson T. Thompson,* 43 ECAB 919 (1992).

[15] *Leon D. Faidley, Jr., supra* note 7.

[16] *Gregory Griffin,* 41 ECAB 186 (1989), *petition for recon. denied,* 41 ECAB 458 (1990).

[17] A Board-certified orthopedic surgeon.

[18] A Board-certified orthopedic surgeon.

[19] A Board-certified orthopedic surgeon.

The Office, therefore, did not abuse its discretion by refusing to reopen appellant's case for merit review under 5 U.S.C. § 8128(a) on the grounds that his application for review was not timely filed and failed to present clear evidence of error.[20]

Accordingly, the decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs dated August 21, 1997 is hereby affirmed.

Dated, Washington, D.C.
December 2, 1999

George E. Rivers
Member

David S. Gerson
Member

Willie T.C. Thomas
Alternate Member

[20] As the only limitation on the Office's authority is reasonableness, abuse of discretion is generally shown through proof of manifest error, clearly unreasonable exercise of judgment, or actions taken which are contrary to both logic and probable deductions from known facts. *Daniel J. Perea*, 42 ECAB 214 (1990). No such abuse of discretion was evidence here.