

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

In the Matter of BESSIE O. SMITH and U.S. POSTAL SERVICE,
FULTON INDUSTRIAL BRANCH, Atlanta, GA

*Docket No. 00-2416; Submitted on the Record;
Issued May 25, 2001*

DECISION and ORDER

Before MICHAEL J. WALSH, MICHAEL E. GROOM,
PRISCILLA ANNE SCHWAB

The issue is whether appellant has met her burden of proof to establish that her carpal tunnel syndrome was aggravated by factors of her federal employment.

The Board has duly reviewed the case record in this appeal and finds that appellant has failed to meet her burden of proof to establish that her carpal tunnel syndrome was aggravated by factors of her federal employment.

On February 9, 2000 appellant, then a 47-year-old distribution clerk, filed a claim for an occupational disease assigned number 06-2001654 alleging that her carpal tunnel syndrome was aggravated by making repetitive movements while working in the post office box section and lifting mail.¹

By decision dated June 22, 2000, the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs found the evidence of record insufficient to establish that appellant's carpal tunnel syndrome was aggravated by her employment.

To establish that an injury was sustained in the performance of duty in an occupational disease claim, a claimant must submit the following: (1) medical evidence establishing the presence or existence of the disease or condition for which compensation is claimed; (2) a factual statement identifying employment factors alleged to have caused or contributed to the presence or occurrence of the disease or condition; and (3) medical evidence establishing that the employment factors identified by the claimant were the proximate cause of the condition for

¹ Prior to this claim, appellant filed a claim assigned number 06-0708840 for an injury sustained on October 22, 1994. On January 27, 2000 appellant accepted the position of modified distribution clerk part-time flexible.

which compensation is claimed or, stated differently, medical evidence establishing that the diagnosed condition is causally related to the employment factors identified by the claimant.²

The medical evidence required to establish a causal relationship, generally, is rationalized medical opinion evidence. Rationalized medical opinion evidence is medical evidence which includes a physician's rationalized opinion on the issue of whether there is a causal relationship between the claimant's diagnosed condition and the implicated employment factors. The opinion of the physician must be based on a complete factual and medical background of the claimant,³ must be one of reasonable medical certainty,⁴ and must be supported by medical rationale explaining the nature of the relationship between the diagnosed condition and the specific employment factors identified by the claimant.⁵

In this case, appellant has failed to submit rationalized medical evidence establishing that her carpal tunnel syndrome was aggravated by factors of her federal employment. The only medical evidence of record that addressed whether appellant had carpal tunnel syndrome consisted of a January 18, 2000 report providing the results of a nerve conduction study and the January 25, 2000 treatment notes of physicians whose signatures are illegible. The January 18, 2000 report indicated that appellant had bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome that was worse on the left. The January 25, 2000 treatment notes revealed a diagnosis of bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome. Neither the report nor the treatment notes discussed whether appellant's condition was aggravated by factors of her federal employment.

The only other medical evidence of record that addressed whether appellant had any work-related condition came from Drs. S.I. Naidu and Howard J. Colier, both Board-certified orthopedic surgeons. Their August 17, 1998 notes indicated that appellant sought treatment for her trigger thumb on the right side. The August 24, 1998 notes indicated that appellant's job factors and incidents of her work contributed to her condition, and aggravated the tenosynovitis of the thumb. These notes, however, failed to explain how or why appellant's tenosynovitis of the right thumb was aggravated by factors of her employment.⁶

Inasmuch as appellant has failed to submit rationalized medical evidence establishing that her carpal tunnel syndrome was aggravated by factors of her employment, the Board finds that she has failed to satisfy her burden of proof.

² See *Victor J. Woodhams*, 41 ECAB 345, 352 (1989).

³ *William Nimitz, Jr.*, 30 ECAB 567, 570 (1979).

⁴ See *Morris Scanlon*, 11 ECAB 384, 385 (1960).

⁵ See *James D. Carter*, 43 ECAB 113 (1991); *George A. Ross*, 43 ECAB 346 (1991); *William E. Enright*, 31 ECAB 426, 430 (1980).

⁶ In its June 22, 2000 decision, the Office indicated that appellant had submitted a claim for the tenosynovitis of her right thumb in a claim assigned number 06-0708840.

The June 22, 2000 decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is hereby affirmed.

Dated, Washington, DC
May 25, 2001

Michael J. Walsh
Chairman

Michael E. Groom
Alternate Member

Priscilla Anne Schwab
Alternate Member