



July 5, 2005.<sup>1</sup> She also attributed her condition to heavy lifting and repetitive motion during her 10 years at the employing establishment. Appellant noted sorting 2,440 letters and flats, lifting and loading mail, processing heavy parcels and driving 5 to 6 hours during each 8-hour shift. She stopped work on April 14, 2005.<sup>2</sup>

In a September 13, 2005 letter, the Office advised appellant of the additional factual and medical evidence needed to establish her claim. The Office explained that a report from her physician explaining how and why work factors caused bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome was crucial to her claim.

In an April 29, 2005 report, Dr. Judson J. Somerville, an attending Board-certified anesthesiologist, attributed appellant's bilateral forearm pain and paresthesias to cervical and lumbar radiculopathy.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Efren A. Moreno, an attending plastic surgeon, submitted a June 15, 2005 report noting bilateral paresthesias and numbness in the median nerve distribution, along with peripheral edema, gestational diabetes and possible preeclampsia. After appellant delivered by cesarean section on July 5, 2005, she underwent July 28, 2005 electromyography and nerve conduction velocity studies that demonstrated bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome, very severe on the right and moderate on the left.

In an August 24, 2005 report, Dr. C. Ricardo Estrada, an attending osteopathic physician specializing in neurosurgery, noted appellant's work as a letter carrier and related her complaints of bilateral hand pain beginning in April 2005.<sup>4</sup> Following an August 25, 2005 MRI scan showing bilateral median nerve compression at both wrists, Dr. Estrada diagnosed bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome on September 20, 2005 and recommended surgery.

By decision dated November 9, 2005, the Office denied appellant's claim on the grounds that causal relationship was not established. The Office found that appellant established both that her duties as a letter carrier entailed repetitive motion and lifting as described and that she had bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome. However, she did not submit rationalized medical evidence explaining how and why the accepted work factors caused the claimed condition.

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<sup>1</sup> The record contains literature from various internet sites on pregnancy and its connection to carpal tunnel syndrome. These excerpts do not specifically address appellant's claim. The Board has held that excerpts from publications and medical literature are not of probative value in establishing causal relationship as they do not specifically address the individual claimant's medical situation and work factors. *Gloria J. McPherson*, 51 ECAB 441 (2000).

<sup>2</sup> On August 29, 2005 appellant accepted a light-duty job offer, but there is no indication that she returned to work.

<sup>3</sup> An April 20, 2005 magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan of appellant's spine showed mild dextroscoliosis in the thoracic spine, mild stenosis at L2-3 and a small disc extrusion at L5-S1. Appellant was 22 weeks pregnant at the time of the scan.

<sup>4</sup> In an August 24, 2005 slip, Dr. Antonio Salinas, an attending Board-certified obstetrician and gynecologist, held appellant off work from April 14 to September 15, 2005. Dr. Salinas did not address carpal tunnel syndrome in this report.

## LEGAL PRECEDENT

An employee seeking benefits under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act<sup>5</sup> has the burden of establishing the essential elements of his or her claim, including the fact that the individual is an "employee of the United States" within the meaning of the Act; that the claim was filed within the applicable time limitation; that an injury was sustained while in the performance of duty as alleged; and that any disability and/or specific condition for which compensation is claimed are causally related to the employment injury.<sup>6</sup> These are the essential elements of each and every compensation claim regardless of whether the claim is predicated on a traumatic injury or an occupational disease.<sup>7</sup>

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) 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 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. The medical evidence required to establish causal relationship is generally 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, must be one of reasonable medical certainty 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.<sup>8</sup>

## ANALYSIS

Appellant submitted sufficient evidence to demonstrate that her rural letter carrier position entailed lifting and repetitive hand and wrist motion. She also submitted July 5 and August 25, 2005 diagnostic studies confirming the presence of bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome. To meet her burden of proof, appellant must establish a causal relationship between the accepted work factors and the claimed carpal tunnel syndrome.

Appellant submitted reports from several physicians in support of her claim. Dr. Somerville, an attending Board-certified anesthesiologist, opined in an April 29, 2005 report that appellant's bilateral forearm symptoms were caused by cervical radiculopathy. He did not

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<sup>5</sup> 5 U.S.C. §§ 8101-8193.

<sup>6</sup> *Joe D. Cameron*, 41 ECAB 153 (1989).

<sup>7</sup> *See Irene St. John*, 50 ECAB 521 (1999); *Michael E. Smith*, 50 ECAB 313 (1999).

<sup>8</sup> *Solomon Polen*, 51 ECAB 341 (2000).

mention appellant's job duties. Dr. Moreno, an attending plastic surgeon, submitted a June 15, 2005 report noting appellant's symptoms as well as peripheral edema and other complications of pregnancy. He did not discuss any relationship between work factors and appellant's upper extremity condition. Dr. Estrada, an attending osteopathic physician specializing in neurosurgery, submitted August 24 and September 20, 2005 reports noting appellant's position as a letter carrier and diagnosing bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome requiring surgery. However, Dr. Estrada did not address how appellant's duties as a letter carrier caused or contributed to the claimed bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome.

As none of appellant's physicians offered medical rationale explaining how and why the accepted work factors caused or contributed to the claimed condition, their opinions are insufficient to establish causal relationship in this case.<sup>9</sup> Appellant has failed to meet her burden of proof.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Board finds that appellant has not established that she sustained bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome in the performance of duty as she submitted insufficient medical evidence to establish causal relationship.

### **ORDER**

**IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT** the decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs dated November 9, 2005 is affirmed.

Issued: May 19, 2006  
Washington, DC

Alec J. Koromilas, Chief Judge  
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

David S. Gerson, Judge  
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

Michael E. Groom, Alternate Judge  
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

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<sup>9</sup> *Steven S. Saleh*, 55 ECAB \_\_\_\_ (Docket No. 03-2232, issued December 12, 2003).