

On June 21, 2004 the Office asked appellant to provide additional evidence, including a comprehensive medical report explaining how her bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome was causally related to factors of her employment. In a July 29, 2004 response, appellant noted that a medical report would soon be submitted.

By decision dated August 30, 2004, the Office denied appellant's claim on the grounds that the evidence did not establish that her bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome was causally related to her employment. It accepted the work activities claimed but noted that no medical evidence had been submitted.

Appellant requested a hearing that was held on May 23, 2005.

On May 18 and November 1, 2004 Dr. Thomas J. O'Dowd, an attending orthopedic surgeon, provided findings on physical examination, which included positive Phalen's and Tinel's signs and decreased sensation in the medial nerve distribution of both hands. He indicated that her symptoms were consistent with bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome. Dr. O'Dowd indicated that appellant had postural-related pain with activities such as holding a newspaper or driving. He did not opine as to the cause of her condition.

On March 24 and April 21, 2003, Dr. Murray Klein, an attending physiatrist, provided findings on physical examination and diagnosed bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome as demonstrated in an electromyogram and nerve conduction study. Appellant had a "pins and needles" sensation when driving or working on needlepoint crafts. Dr. Klein indicated that appellant's job included selling postage stamps to patrons. He noted that she had less discomfort, pain and numbness after wearing splints on her hands.

By decision dated August 12, 2005, the Office hearing representative affirmed the August 30, 2004 denial of appellant's claim. He noted that this medical evidence did not address the issue of causal relation.

Appellant requested reconsideration and submitted additional evidence. In an August 25, 2005 report to appellant's attorney, Dr. Klein stated that he examined appellant on only two occasions in 2003. Her carpal tunnel syndrome improved after she wore wrist splints. Dr. Klein stated:

"I have not seen [appellant] in the past two years. Therefore, I do not know what her present condition is nor do I know if it has increased or deteriorated. However, her work as a postal service worker as a clerk includes typing and lifting from the job description that you supposedly forwarded with your letter; apparently was not in the letter, therefore, I do not know exactly what her job entailed. This could actually worsen if this job requires lifting or typing."

By decision dated April 13, 2006, the Office denied modification of the August 12, 2005 decision.

LEGAL PRECEDENT

To establish a causal relationship between a claimant's medical conditions and her employment, she must submit rationalized medical opinion evidence based on a complete factual and medical background supporting such a causal relationship.¹ Rationalized medical opinion evidence is medical evidence which includes a physician's opinion on the issue of whether there is a causal relationship between the claimant's 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.² Neither the fact that a disease or condition manifests itself during a period of employment nor the belief that the disease or condition was caused or aggravated by employment factors or incidents is sufficient to establish causal relationship.³

ANALYSIS

In May and December 2004, Dr. O'Dowd indicated that appellant's symptoms were consistent with bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome. He noted that she had postural-related pain with activities such as holding a newspaper or driving. However, Dr. O'Dowd did not address the cause of appellant's condition. Therefore, his reports are not sufficient to establish that appellant's bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome was causally related to factors of her federal employment.

In two 2005 reports, Dr. Klein diagnosed bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome. He indicated that he examined appellant only twice in 2003 and had not seen her in two years. Dr. Klein noted that appellant's attorney indicated in a letter that he was enclosing a job description for review which indicated that appellant's duties included lifting and typing.⁴ However, a copy of appellant's job description did not accompany the letter Dr. Klein received. Because he did not have a copy of appellant's job description, Dr. Klein stated that he did not know exactly what her job entailed. Because Dr. Klein did not have a complete and accurate factual background upon which to base an opinion on causal relationship, his reports are insufficient to establish that appellant's bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome was causally related to factors of her employment. Further, medical reports not containing adequate rationale on causal relationship are of diminished probative value and are generally insufficient to meet an employee's burden of proof.⁵ Lacking a complete and accurate factual background and sufficient medical rationale addressing the issue of causal relationship, Dr. Klein's reports are not sufficient to establish that appellant's bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome was caused or aggravated by her employment.

¹ *Michael S. Mina*, 57 ECAB ____ (Docket No. 05-1763, issued February 7, 2006).

² *Gary J. Watling*, 52 ECAB 278 (2001); *Gloria J. McPherson*, 51 ECAB 441 (2000).

³ *Michael S. Mina*, *supra* note 1.

⁴ The Board notes that appellant did not mention any lifting duties in her claim form.

⁵ *Ceferino L. Gonzales*, 32 ECAB 1591 (1981).

CONCLUSION

The Board finds that appellant failed to establish that her bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome was causally related to factors of her federal employment.

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs dated April 13, 2006 is affirmed.

Issued: February 12, 2007
Washington, DC

David S. Gerson, Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

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

James A. Haynes, Alternate Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board