



accepted claim file<sup>3</sup> and that she required a surgical procedure. However, she had been advised that her current symptoms were different and, thus, required a new case/claim. OWCP assigned the current claim File No. xxxxxx960.

After further development of the current claim, by decision dated May 3, 2018, OWCP found that appellant had not met her burden of proof to establish that her right thumb condition was causally related to the accepted factors of her federal employment.

On August 31, 2018 appellant, through her representative, requested reconsideration. She contended that OWCP should have accepted her current occupational disease claim for right trigger thumb as it had previously accepted right trigger thumb under File No. xxxxxx501 based on the same medical evidence.

By decision dated January 11, 2019, OWCP denied modification of its prior decision. It noted that appellant already had an open claim for right trigger thumb for which she remained entitled to medical benefits. OWCP further explained that, if surgery was required, she should pursue the issue under her accepted claim rather than file a new claim.

The Board has duly considered the matter and finds that the case is not in posture for decision. OWCP's procedures provide that cases should be combined where correct adjudication depends on cross-referencing between files and where two or more injuries occur to the same part of the body.<sup>4</sup> Under OWCP File No. xxxxxx501, appellant has an accepted claim for a right wrist/hand/thumb condition. However, the case record associated with that prior claim is not currently before the Board.

Under its procedures, OWCP has determined that cases should be combined where a new injury case is reported for an employee who previously filed an injury claim for the same part of the body and where correct adjudication depends on cross-referencing between files.<sup>5</sup> The Board finds that for a full and fair adjudication, the claims in File Nos. xxxxxx501 and xxxxxx960 must

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<sup>3</sup> Appellant has a prior claim for a January 1, 2017 traumatic injury to her right wrist, hand, and thumb, assigned File No. xxxxxx501. OWCP has accepted that claim for right trigger thumb and radial styloid tenosynovitis (de Quervain's).

<sup>4</sup> Federal (FECA) Procedure Manual, Part 2 -- Claims, *File Maintenance and Management*, Chapter 2.400.8(c) (February 2000).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at Chapter 2.400.8(c)(1); *L.P.*, Docket Nos. 18-1558, 18-1568 (issued June 21, 2019); *L.S.*, Docket Nos. 17-1863, 17-1867, 17-1868 (issued April 18, 2018); *W.S.*, Docket No. 15-0969 (issued October 5, 2015); *C.C.*, Docket No. 14-1576 (issued March 9, 2015).

be administratively combined. This will allow OWCP to consider all relevant claim files and accompanying evidence in developing the current occupational disease claim.<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, the Board will remand the case to OWCP to administratively combine File Nos. xxxxxx501 and xxxxxx960. Following this and other such further development as deemed necessary, OWCP shall issue a *de novo* decision.

**IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT** the January 11, 2019 decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is set aside and the case is remanded for further proceedings consistent with this order of the Board.

Issued: January 29, 2020  
Washington, DC

Christopher J. Godfrey, Chief Judge  
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

Patricia H. Fitzgerald, Deputy Chief Judge  
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

Janice B. Askin, Judge  
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

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<sup>6</sup> *Id.*