

¹ OWCP assigned the present claim OWCP File No. xxxxxx318. Appellant previously filed an August 10, 2017 traumatic injury claim (Form CA-1) alleging that he injured his neck and right hand due to overuse of a computer mouse and keyboard under OWCP File No. xxxxxx088. The claims have not been administratively combined by OWCP.

In a January 8, 2019 development letter, OWCP informed appellant that the evidence of record was insufficient to establish his claim. It advised him of the type of factual and medical evidence needed to establish his claim and provided a questionnaire for his completion. OWCP afforded appellant 30 days to submit the necessary evidence.

In a January 14, 2019 response to OWCP's questionnaire, appellant indicated that he began experiencing right thumb and wrist area pain and swelling in approximately September 2016. He noted that he first sought treatment on November 11, 2016 and requested that his supervisor, K.J., file a claim on his behalf on August 1, 2017. Appellant indicated that he worked at a computer, typed on a keyboard, and used a mouse eight hours per day, five days per week, which he believed caused pain in his thumb, wrist, and hand.

By decision dated April 2, 2019, OWCP denied appellant's claim, finding that the medical evidence of record was insufficient to establish a medical diagnosis in connection with the accepted employment factors. Consequently, it found that the requirements to establish a claim under FECA had not been established.

On April 24, 2019 appellant requested review of the written record by a representative of OWCP's Branch of Hearings and Review and submitted additional evidence.

By decision dated August 2, 2019, OWCP's hearing representative modified the April 2, 2019 decision, finding that appellant had submitted sufficient evidence to establish a diagnosis of right wrist arthritis. However, his claim remained denied because he had not submitted sufficient rationalized medical evidence to establish that the accepted employment factors caused or aggravated his diagnosed condition.

Appellant thereafter made a series of requests for reconsideration on December 5, 2019, April 15, 2020, and January 2, 2021, and submitted additional evidence with each request.

By decisions dated March 5 and July 17, 2020 and February 25, 2021, respectively, OWCP denied modification of its prior decisions.

The Board has duly considered the matter and concludes that this case is not in posture for decision.

OWCP's procedures provide that cases should be administratively combined when correct adjudication of the issues depends on frequent cross-referencing between files.² For example, if a new injury case is reported for an employee who previously filed an injury claim for a similar condition or the same part of the body, doubling is required.³ Herein, appellant's claim under OWCP File No. xxxxxx088 also involved injuries to the neck and right hand due to repetitive motion, which are at issue in the present claim under OWCP File No. xxxxxx318. For a full and fair adjudication, this case must be returned to OWCP to administratively combine the current case

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

³ *Id.*; *M.L.*, Docket No. 20-1176 (issued April 29, 2021); *L.M.*, Docket No. 19-1490 (issued January 29, 2020); *L.H.*, Docket No 18-1777 (issued July 2, 2019).

record with OWCP File No. xxxxxx088, so it can consider all relevant claim files and accompanying evidence in adjudicating appellant's current occupational disease claim.⁴ Following this and other such further development as OWCP deems necessary, it shall issue a *de novo* decision. Accordingly,

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the February 25, 2021 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: February 7, 2023
Washington, DC

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

Valerie D. Evans-Harrell, Alternate Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

James D. McGinley, Alternate Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

⁴ *Supra* note 2 at Chapter 2.400.8c(1); *W.D.*, Docket No. 19-0961 (issued March 31, 2021); *L.P.*, Docket Nos. 18-1558, 18-1568 (issued June 21, 2019).