

³ 5 U.S.C. § 8101 *et seq.*

ISSUES

The issues are: (1) whether OWCP has met its burden of proof to terminate appellant's wage-loss compensation and medical benefits, effective March 29, 2024, as she no longer had disability or residuals causally related to her accepted employment injury; and (2) whether appellant has met her burden of proof to establish continuing disability and/or residuals on or after March 29, 2024, causally related to the accepted employment injury.

FACTUAL HISTORY

On August 13, 2019 appellant, then a 52-year-old city letter carrier, filed an occupational disease claim (Form CA-2) alleging that she developed a torn rotator cuff in her right shoulder due to factors of her federal employment, including lifting heavy flats and reaching overhead.⁴ She noted that she first became aware of her condition on February 1, 2016, and realized its relationship to factors of her federal employment on July 17, 2019. Appellant stopped work on September 5, 2019. OWCP initially accepted the claim for sprain of right rotator cuff capsule. It paid appellant wage-loss compensation on the supplemental rolls effective September 14, 2019, and on the periodic rolls effective June 19, 2022.⁵

By decision dated March 22, 2022, OWCP expanded the acceptance of the claim to include "permanent aggravation of primary osteoarthritis of the right shoulder."

On May 4, 2022 appellant underwent OWCP-authorized right shoulder total arthroplasty by Dr. Surena Namdari, a Board-certified orthopedic surgeon. In a follow-up visit dated September 1, 2022, Dr. Namdari noted that appellant related recurrent right shoulder pain and worsening left shoulder pain.⁶

On April 27, 2023, OWCP prepared an updated SOAF, which noted the accepted employment conditions as sprain of right rotator cuff capsule and "primary osteoarthritis of the right shoulder."

On May 1, 2023, OWCP referred appellant, the case record, the April 27, 2023 SOAF, and a series of questions to Dr. Alexander N. Doman, a Board-certified orthopedic surgeon, for a second opinion evaluation.

In a June 2, 2023 report, Dr. Doman reviewed the SOAF and medical record. He performed a physical examination of the right shoulder where he observed limited forward flexion

⁴ OWCP assigned the present claim OWCP File No. xxxxxx619. Appellant previously filed a traumatic injury claim (Form CA-1) for a January 31, 2011 injury, which OWCP accepted for lumbar herniated disc at L5-S1 and sprains of the low back, cervical spine, left wrist, and left shoulder under OWCP File No. xxxxxx410. She also previously filed a Form CA-1 for a July 26, 2011 injury, which OWCP accepted for lumbar sprain under OWCP File No. xxxxxx665. OWCP administratively combined OWCP File Nos. xxxxxx619, xxxxxx665, and xxxxxx410, with the latter serving as the master file. Appellant subsequently filed a Form CA-2 on April 6, 2021 alleging that she developed right shoulder primary osteoarthritis due to factors of her federal employment, including constant lifting and casing mail with her right arm. OWCP denied the claim under OWCP File No. xxxxxx396. It has not administratively combined OWCP File No. xxxxxx396 with the other claims.

⁵ Appellant was approved for disability retirement and separated from federal service, effective June 15, 2023.

⁶ The record reflects that on October 12, 2022 appellant underwent left total shoulder arthroplasty by Dr. Namdari.

and abduction. Dr. Doman diagnosed a “temporary aggravation” of primary osteoarthritis of the right shoulder and indicated that “it is particularly noted that the work injury could not have resulted in any permanent aggravation or direct causation of the osteoarthritis. Instead, there was a temporary aggravation of this condition, which was long ago ceased.” He opined that the work-related conditions had resolved, and that appellant was capable of returning to work without restrictions, was not in need of any further medical treatment for the accepted employment conditions and had reached maximum medical improvement. Dr. Doman attributed the limitations that he observed during his physical examination to the “natural history of her underlying degenerative condition of the right shoulder.”

By notice dated August 1, 2023, OWCP advised appellant that it proposed to terminate her wage-loss compensation and medical benefits based on Dr. Doman’s opinion that the accepted employment-related conditions had ceased without residuals or disability. It afforded her 30 days to submit additional evidence or argument challenging the proposed termination.

In a note dated July 10, 2023, Dr. Namdari noted that all patients who undergo total shoulder arthroplasty have a permanent 40-pound lifting restriction after the procedure.⁷

By decision dated March 29, 2024, OWCP terminated appellant’s entitlement to wage-loss compensation and medical benefits, effective that date. It found that Dr. Doman’s opinion constituted the weight of the medical evidence, establishing that she no longer had disability or residuals causally related to the accepted employment injury.

On April 26, 2024 appellant requested an oral hearing before a representative of OWCP’s Branch of Hearings and Review, which was held on August 15, 2024.

By decision dated October 29, 2024, OWCP’s hearing representative affirmed the March 29, 2024 termination decision.⁸

On October 29, 2025 appellant, through counsel, requested reconsideration.

By decision dated November 18, 2025, OWCP denied modification.

LEGAL PRECEDENT – ISSUE 1

Once OWCP accepts a claim and pays compensation, it has the burden of proof to justify modification or termination of an employee’s benefits.⁹ After it has determined that an employee has disability causally related to his or her federal employment, OWCP may not terminate compensation without establishing that the disability has ceased or that it is no longer related to

⁷ On November 17, 2023 appellant elected to receive retirement benefits from the Office of Personnel Management effective January 1, 2024, in lieu of FECA benefits.

⁸ By decision dated September 19, 2025, OWCP granted appellant a schedule award for 16 percent permanent impairment of the right upper extremity.

⁹ *C.F.*, Docket No. 21-0003 (issued January 21, 2022); *J.T.*, Docket No. 19-1723 (issued August 24, 2020); *S.P.*, Docket No. 19-0196 (issued June 24, 2020); *S.F.*, 59 ECAB 642 (2008); *Kelly Y. Simpson*, 57 ECAB 197 (2005); *Paul L. Stewart*, 54 ECAB 824 (2003).

the employment.¹⁰ OWCP's burden of proof includes the necessity of furnishing rationalized medical opinion evidence based on a proper factual and medical background.¹¹ The right to medical benefits for an accepted condition is not limited to the period of entitlement for disability.¹² To terminate authorization for medical treatment, OWCP must establish that appellant no longer has residuals of an employment-related condition, which would require further medical treatment.¹³

ANALYSIS -- ISSUE 1

The Board finds that OWCP failed to meet its burden of proof to terminate appellant's wage-loss compensation and medical benefits, effective March 29, 2024.

OWCP terminated appellant's entitlement to wage-loss compensation and medical benefits based on the opinion of Dr. Doman, who opined that she no longer had disability or residuals causally related to the accepted employment injury. The April 27, 2023 SOAF provided to Dr. Doman, however, only indicated that OWCP had accepted appellant's claim for sprain of right rotator cuff capsule and "primary osteoarthritis of the right shoulder." The Board notes that OWCP had previously accepted appellant's claim for a "permanent aggravation of primary osteoarthritis of the right shoulder."

It is OWCP's responsibility to provide a complete and proper frame of reference for a physician by preparing a SOAF.¹⁴ Its procedures provide that the claims examiner is responsible for ensuring that the SOAF is correct, complete, unequivocal, and specific. When an OWCP medical adviser, second opinion specialist, or referee physician renders a medical opinion based on a SOAF which is incomplete or inaccurate or does not use the SOAF as the framework in forming his or her opinion, the probative value of the opinion is seriously diminished or negated altogether.¹⁵ The Board thus finds that Dr. Doman's opinions are of diminished probative value because they were not based on a proper SOAF.¹⁶

¹⁰ *S.P.*, Docket No. 22-0393 (issued August 26, 2022); *A.T.*, Docket No. 20-0334 (issued October 8, 2020); *E.B.*, Docket No. 18-1060 (issued November 1, 2018).

¹¹ *S.P.*, *id.*; *C.R.*, Docket No. 19-1132 (issued October 1, 2020); *G.H.*, Docket No. 18-0414 (issued November 14, 2018).

¹² *S.P.*, *id.*; *E.J.*, Docket No. 20-0013 (issued November 19, 2020); *L.W.*, Docket No. 18-1372 (issued February 27, 2019).

¹³ *C.F.*, *supra* note 9; *M.E.*, Docket No. 20-0877 (issued August 17, 2021); *L.S.*, Docket No. 19-0959 (issued September 24, 2019); *R.P.*, Docket No. 18-0900 (issued February 5, 2019).

¹⁴ *D.M.*, Docket No. 19-0749 (issued August 19, 2019); *N.W.*, Docket No. 16-1890 (issued June 5, 2017); *K.V.*, Docket No. 15-0960 (issued March 9, 2016).

¹⁵ Federal (FECA) Procedure Manual, Part 3 -- Medical, *Requirements for Medical Reports*, Chapter 3.600.3 (October 1990); *see also R.P.*, Docket No. 18-0900 (issued February 5, 2019).

¹⁶ *Id.*; *see also D.J.*, Docket No. 26-0321 (issued June 12, 2026); *M.W.*, Docket No. 26-0111 (issued April 22, 2026); *B.C.*, Docket No. 20-1672 (issued February 8, 2023); *C.S.*, Docket No. 20-1475 (issued October 4, 2021).

In light of the foregoing, the Board finds that OWCP failed to meet its burden of proof to terminate appellant's entitlement to wage-loss compensation and medical benefits, effective March 29, 2024.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

The Board finds that OWCP has failed to meet its burden of proof to terminate appellant's entitlement to wage-loss compensation and medical benefits, effective March 29, 2024.¹⁸

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the November 18, 2025 merit decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is reversed.

Issued: August 27, 2026
Washington, DC

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

Janice B. Askin, Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

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

¹⁷ Upon return of the case record, OWCP may consider combining OWCP File No. xxxxxx396 with Master File No. xxxxxx410.

¹⁸ In light of the Board's disposition of Issue 1, Issue 2 is rendered moot.