

ISSUE

The issue is whether appellant has met his burden of proof to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted April 26, 2025 employment incident.

FACTUAL HISTORY

On September 8, 2025 appellant, then a 56-year-old commissary management specialist (produce intern), filed a traumatic injury claim (Form CA-1) alleging that on April 26, 2025 he experienced numbness, limited mobility, and loss of strength in his right forearm and hand and a pull and warm sensation in his neck when he lifted a pallet of produce while in the performance of duty. He further explained that, on that morning, a truck had dropped off approximately 6,000 pounds of produce on five pallets. On the reverse side of the claim form, S.M., an employing establishment assistant commissary officer acknowledged that appellant was injured in the performance of duty.³

In support of his claim, appellant submitted a May 12, 2025 progress note from Dr. Sukhpreet Janda, an osteopath Board-certified in family practice. Dr. Janda related appellant's complaints of hand numbness and tingling of the right hand and arm, and neck pain for the past three weeks. She noted that as a management intern he lifted heavy boxes which he believed exacerbated his right-side symptoms. Dr. Janda reported her examination findings and assessed cervical radiculopathy (primary encounter diagnosis) and carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) of right wrist.

In a May 12, 2025 note, Dr. Janda advised that appellant required a restriction of lifting of no more than 10 pounds as a reasonable accommodation through June 23, 2025. In a June 11, 2025 note, she advised that appellant's 10-pound lifting restriction would continue through July 31, 2025.

An August 4, 2025 magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan of appellant's cervical spine indicated an impression of diffuse disc desiccation; mild disc space narrowing at C5-6 and C6-7 with disc extrusion; and mild facet arthropathy.

In an August 13, 2025 progress note, Dr. Gabriel Belsky, an osteopath Board-certified in preventive medicine and family medicine, noted that appellant had a history of cervical radiculopathy. He related that appellant presented for examination due to numbness and weakness in his hands, with onset in late April 2025 after lifting a box. Dr. Belsky also noted that appellant's symptoms were exacerbated by lifting boxes and working in a freezer. He discussed his findings on physical examination. Dr. Belsky diagnosed cervical radiculopathy due to multilevel cervical spondylosis.

In a development letter dated September 17, 2025, OWCP informed appellant of the deficiencies of his claim. It advised him of the type of factual and medical evidence needed and provided a questionnaire for his completion. OWCP afforded appellant 60 days to submit the necessary evidence. In a separate development letter of even date, it requested that the

³ The case record indicates that appellant resigned from the employing establishment, effective July 12, 2025.

employing establishment provide comments from a knowledgeable supervisor regarding the accuracy of appellant's allegations. OWCP afforded the employing establishment 30 days to respond.

On September 19, 2025 appellant responded to OWCP's development questionnaire, further describing his alleged injury.

On September 23, 2025 the employing establishment responded to OWCP's development letter, describing appellant's work duties, which included receiving 5 to 12 pallets of produce, putting produce away, and tagging dates, three to five hours per day, Tuesday through Saturday. It submitted an official copy of his commissary management specialist (produce intern) position description.

In an undated statement received by OWCP on September 23, 2025, appellant contended that he sustained an inflamed pinched nerve on the right side of his neck or back area for which he planned to undergo an x-ray examination. He also had issues with neck and right arm motion. Appellant noted that he could not lift boxes weighing more than 10 pounds for six weeks. In a September 24, 2025 statement, he reiterated that he had resigned due to his injuries because the employing establishment could not provide reasonable accommodation.

In a letter dated October 14, 2025, S.M. described appellant's day-to-day work duties which included lifting, pulling, pushing, bending, stooping, and stocking the sales floor. He noted that a merchandiser and others at the employing establishment assisted with any tasks that required heavy lifting. S.M. maintained that the tasks performed in produce did not require repetitive hand and wrist movement. He related that employees were able to perform their duties in a safe manner by alternating duties and taking all mandatory breaks.

OWCP, in a follow-up letter dated October 23, 2025, advised appellant that it had conducted an interim review, and the evidence remained insufficient to establish his claim. It noted that he had 60 days from the September 17, 2025 letter to submit the necessary evidence. OWCP further advised that if the evidence was not received during this time, it would issue a decision based on the evidence contained in the record. No additional evidence was received.

By decision dated January 29, 2026, OWCP accepted that the April 26, 2025 employment incident occurred, as alleged. However, it denied appellant's claim, finding that the medical evidence of record was insufficient to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted April 26, 2025 employment incident.

LEGAL PRECEDENT

An employee seeking benefits under FECA⁴ has the burden of proof to establish 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 FECA, that the claim was timely filed, that an injury was sustained in the performance of duty, as alleged, and that any disability or medical condition for

⁴ *Supra* note 2.

which compensation is claimed is causally related to the employment injury.⁵ These are the essential elements of every compensation claim regardless of whether the claim is predicated on a traumatic injury or an occupational disease.⁶

To determine whether a federal employee has sustained a traumatic injury in the performance of duty, it first must be determined whether fact of injury has been established. There are two components involved in establishing fact of injury. First, the employee must submit sufficient evidence to establish that he or she actually experienced the employment incident at the time and place, and in the manner alleged. Second, the employee must submit sufficient evidence to establish that the employment incident caused an injury.⁷

The medical evidence required to establish causal relationship between a claimed specific condition and an employment incident is rationalized medical opinion evidence.⁸ The opinion of the physician must be based on a complete factual and medical background of the employee, 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 incident identified by the claimant.⁹

In any case where a preexisting condition involving the same part of the body is present and the issue of causal relationship, therefore, involves aggravation, acceleration or precipitation, the physician must provide a rationalized medical opinion that differentiates between the effects of the work-related injury or disease and the preexisting condition.¹⁰

ANALYSIS

The Board finds that appellant has not met his burden of proof to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted April 26, 2025 employment incident.

In support of his claim, appellant submitted a May 12, 2025 progress note by Dr. Janda who provided a history of appellant's injury in April 2025. She provided assessments of cervical radiculopathy (primary encounter diagnosis) and CTS of the right wrist. However, Dr. Janda did not offer an opinion on the cause of the diagnosed conditions. The Board has held that medical

⁵ *C.G.*, Docket No. 20-0058 (issued September 30, 2021); *S.B.*, Docket No. 17-1779 (issued February 7, 2018); *J.P.*, 59 ECAB 178 (2007); *Joe D. Cameron*, 41 ECAB 153 (1989).

⁶ *J.M.*, Docket No. 17-0284 (issued February 7, 2018); *R.C.*, 59 ECAB 427 (2008); *James E. Chadden, Sr.*, 40 ECAB 312 (1988).

⁷ *T.H.*, Docket No. 19-0599 (issued January 28, 2020); *K.L.*, Docket No. 18-1029 (issued January 9, 2019); *John J. Carlone*, 41 ECAB 354 (1989).

⁸ *S.S.*, Docket No. 19-0688 (issued January 24, 2020); *A.M.*, Docket No. 18-1748 (issued April 24, 2019); *Robert G. Morris*, 48 ECAB 238 (1996).

⁹ *A.S.*, Docket No. 19-1955 (issued April 9, 2020); *Leslie C. Moore*, 52 ECAB 132 (2000).

¹⁰ Federal (FECA) Procedure Manual, Part 2 -- Claims, *Causal Relationship*, Chapter 2.805.3e (May 2023); *M.P.*, Docket No. 26-0018 (issued March 18, 2026); *M.B.*, Docket No. 20-1275 (issued January 29, 2021); *see R.D.*, Docket No. 18-1551 (issued March 1, 2019).

evidence that does not offer an opinion regarding the cause of an employee's condition or disability is of no probative value on the issue of causal relationship.¹¹ Thus, this evidence is insufficient to establish appellant's claim.

In her remaining notes dated May 12 and June 11, 2025, Dr. Janda set forth appellant's 10-pound lifting work restriction. However, she did not provide an opinion on whether the April 26, 2025 employment incident caused or contributed to a diagnosed medical condition.¹² As explained above, the Board has held that medical evidence that does not offer an opinion regarding the cause of an employee's condition is of no probative value on the issue of causal relationship.¹³ Therefore, this evidence is insufficient to establish appellant's claim.

Dr. Belsky's August 13, 2025 progress note related appellant's history of injury, as well as his prior medical history of cervical radiculopathy. He provided assessments of cervical radiculopathy due to multilevel cervical spondylosis and cervical radiculopathy with right arm symptoms linked to cervical spondylosis. However, Dr. Belsky likewise did not provide an opinion on the cause of the diagnosed conditions.¹⁴ Therefore, this evidence is insufficient to establish appellant's claim.

The remaining evidence of record consists of diagnostic studies. The Board has held, however, that diagnostic studies, standing alone, lack probative value on the issue of causal relationship as they do not address whether the accepted employment incident caused or contributed to the diagnosed conditions.¹⁵

As the medical evidence of record is insufficient to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted April 26, 2025 employment incident, the Board finds that appellant has not met his burden of proof.¹⁶

Appellant may submit new evidence or argument with a written request for reconsideration to OWCP within one year of this merit decision, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 8128(a) and 20 C.F.R. §§ 10.605 through 10.607.

¹¹ See *J.C.*, Docket No. 26-0204 (issued April 21, 2026); *R.G.*, Docket No. 25-0342 (issued May 12, 2025); *N.B.*, Docket No. 24-0726 (issued September 23, 2024); *L.B.*, Docket No. 18-0533 (issued August 27, 2018); *D.K.*, Docket No. 17-1549 (issued July 6, 2018).

¹² See *L.G.*, Docket No. 23-0405 (issued August 11, 2023); *S.D.*, Docket No. 22-0405 (issued October 5, 2022); *A.D.*, Docket No. 22-0319 (issued September 6, 2022); *V.T.*, Docket No. 19-0910 (issued September 25, 2020).

¹³ *Supra* note 11.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *A.J.*, Docket No. 25-0250 (issued May 27, 2025); *T.Y.*, Docket No. 25-0255 (issued April 2, 2025); *B.O.*, Docket No. 25-0049 (issued January 10, 2025); *A.D.*, Docket No. 24-0770 (issued October 22, 2024); *T.L.*, Docket No. 22-0881 (issued July 17, 2024); *C.S.*, Docket No. 19-1279 (issued December 30, 2019).

¹⁶ The Board notes that appellant may file an occupational disease (Form CA-2) claim if he believes that he sustained an injury due to work duties over a period of time longer than one day or work shift.

CONCLUSION

The Board finds that appellant has not met his burden of proof to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted April 26, 2025 employment incident.

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the January 29, 2026 decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is affirmed.

Issued: May 19, 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