

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

In the Matter of GARDENIA M. LAVENDER and DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES, SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION, Birmingham, Ala.

*Docket No. 97-2520; Submitted on the Record;
Issued May 3, 1999*

DECISION and ORDER

Before MICHAEL J. WALSH, GEORGE E. RIVERS,
BRADLEY T. KNOTT

The issue is whether appellant has established that she sustained carpal tunnel syndrome in the performance of duty, causally related to factors of her federal employment.

On July 18, 1996 appellant, then a 43-year-old records clerk, filed a Form CA-1 claim alleging that on July 12, 1996 she sustained neck and lower back pain and that her hands became numb from carpal tunnel syndrome, while moving file folders over a period of time.

By letter dated August 9, 1996, the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs requested further information including an explanation of how the injury occurred and a medical narrative explaining causal relation.

In response appellant submitted medical billing statements for treatment rendered for tendinitis, gout, migraine headache, allergic rhinitis, hypothyroidism and gastrointestinal reflux.

On August 22, 1996 appellant filed a Form CA-2 for the same conditions.

Also on August 22, 1996 appellant stated that on July 12, 1996 her arms and hands cramped, tingled and had sharp pains and that in compensation for hand and arm numbness she used other body parts and strained her neck, back and stomach.

By decision dated September 19, 1996, the Office rejected appellant's claim finding that the evidence of record failed to establish that an injury was sustained as alleged.

On September 26, 1996 appellant requested reconsideration and in support she submitted further medical evidence. In an accompanying statement, appellant noted her work history and indicated that she had worked as a records analysis clerk with the employing establishment for over 14 years, beginning in 1982. She stated that she had never injured her hands, wrists or arms and that on July 12, 1996 her hands tingled and throbbed after keying on the computer and that she noticed numbness when pulling folders from the file cabinets.

In a September 25, 1996 report, Dr. Anjanetta Foster, a Board-certified internist, noted that appellant “has been diagnosed with severe carpal tunnel syndrome of both hands. Heavy lifting and repetitive motions of her hands, wrists should be avoided.” Dr. Foster ordered wrist splints for appellant’s carpal tunnel syndrome. Also submitted were motor nerve and sensory nerve conduction study results demonstrating carpal tunnel syndrome. A nerve conduction velocity report dated September 10, 1996 identified prolonged terminal latency of the median nerves bilaterally and diagnosed bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome, more severe on the left than on the right.

By decision dated October 22, 1996, the Office denied modification of its prior decision finding that the evidence submitted was insufficient to warrant modification. The Office noted that, although the medical evidence submitted supported that appellant had carpal tunnel syndrome, none of the evidence stated that the carpal tunnel syndrome was related to appellant’s employment.

The Board finds that appellant has failed to establish that she developed carpal tunnel syndrome in the performance of duty, causally related to factors of her federal employment.

A person who claims benefits under the Federal Employees’ Compensation Act¹ has the burden of establishing the essential elements of his claim. Appellant has the burden of establishing by reliable, probative and substantial evidence that his medical condition was causally related to a specific employment incident or to specific conditions of employment.² As part of such burden of proof, rationalized medical opinion evidence showing causal relation must be submitted.³ The mere fact that a condition manifests itself or worsens during a period of employment does not raise an inference of causal relationship between the condition and the employment.⁴ Such a relationship must be shown by rationalized medical evidence of causal relation based upon a specific and accurate history of employment incidents or conditions which are alleged to have caused or exacerbated a disability.⁵ Such rationalized medical evidence was not submitted in this case.

In the instant case, although some of the medical evidence appellant submitted supported that she had developed carpal tunnel syndrome, none of the evidence discussed causation of the carpal tunnel syndrome, or related its development in any way to factors of her employment.

¹ 5 U.S.C. §§ 8101-8193.

² *Margaret A. Donnelly*, 15 ECAB 40, 43 (1963).

³ *Daniel R. Hickman*, 34 ECAB 1220, 1223 (1983).

⁴ *Juanita Rogers*, 34 ECAB 544, 546 (1983).

⁵ *Edgar L. Colley*, 34 ECAB 1691, 1696 (1983).

Therefore, appellant failed to meet her burden of proof to establish her *prima facie* claim.

Accordingly, the decisions of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs dated October 22 and September 19, 1996 are hereby affirmed.

Dated, Washington, D.C.
May 3, 1999

Michael J. Walsh
Chairman

George E. Rivers
Member

Bradley T. Knott
Alternate Member