

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

In the Matter of SHERRY S. SELLARS and DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE,
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, Kansas City, MO

*Docket No. 99-2459; Submitted on the Record;
Issued January 22, 2001*

DECISION and ORDER

Before MICHAEL J. WALSH, BRADLEY T. KNOTT,
PRISCILLA ANNE SCHWAB

The issue is whether appellant sustained a carpal tunnel injury while in the performance of duty.

The Board has duly reviewed the record in this case and finds that the medical evidence fails to support appellant's claim that she sustained a carpal tunnel injury while in the performance of duty.

An employee seeking benefits under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act¹ has the burden of proof to establish the essential elements of her claim. When an employee claims that she sustained an injury in the performance of duty, she must submit sufficient evidence to establish that she experienced a specific event, incident or exposure occurring at the time, place and in the manner alleged. Appellant must also establish that such event, incident or exposure caused an injury.²

In its April 20 and July 16, 1999 decisions, the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs did not dispute the nature of appellant's duties as a data transcriber/office automation clerk. She indicated that her duties required repetitive keyboarding without wrist or arm support. There is no evidence to the contrary. The issue, therefore, is whether appellant's duties caused her diagnosed carpal tunnel syndrome.

¹ 5 U.S.C. §§ 8101-8193.

² See generally *John J. Carlone*, 41 ECAB 354 (1989); *Abe E. Scott*, 45 ECAB 164 (1993); see also 5 U.S.C. § 8101(5) ("injury" defined); 20 C.F.R. §§ 10.5(a)(15)-.5(a)(16) ("traumatic injury" and "occupational disease or illness" defined).

Causal relationship is a medical issue³ and the medical evidence generally required to establish causal relationship is rationalized medical opinion evidence. Rationalized medical opinion evidence is medical evidence that includes a physician's rationalized opinion on whether there is a causal relationship between the claimant's diagnosed condition and the established incident or factor of employment. The opinion of the physician must be based on a complete factual and medical background of the claimant,⁴ must be one of reasonable medical certainty⁵ and must be supported by medical rationale explaining the nature of the relationship between the diagnosed condition and the established incident or factor of employment.⁶

The medical evidence in this case contains no opinion on whether appellant's diagnosed carpal tunnel condition is related in any way to her federal employment. A December 1998 report from Dr. Dorothy Jackson⁷ states that appellant was seen for right carpal tunnel syndrome and was in need of a wrist bar at her work station. The report falls short of relating appellant's condition to her work. A June 10, 1999 report from Dr. Dana R. Towle discusses appellant's condition and impairment, but makes no mention of the duties appellant performed or whether such duties caused or aggravated the condition noted.

Because appellant has failed to submit the medical evidence generally required to establish the critical element of causal relationship, she has not met her burden of proof to establish that she sustained a carpal tunnel injury while in the performance of her duties.

³ *Mary J. Briggs*, 37 ECAB 578 (1986).

⁴ *William Nimitz, Jr.*, 30 ECAB 567, 570 (1979).

⁵ *See Morris Scanlon*, 11 ECAB 384, 385 (1960).

⁶ *See William E. Enright*, 31 ECAB 426, 430 (1980).

⁷ The handwritten report is nearly illegible.

The July 16 and April 20, 1999 decisions of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs are affirmed.

Dated, Washington, DC
January 22, 2001

Michael J. Walsh
Chairman

Bradley T. Knott
Alternate Member

Priscilla Anne Schwab
Alternate Member