549 Phil. 504

FIRST DIVISION

[G.R. NO. 170743, April 12, 2007]

GOVERNMENT SERVICE INSURANCE SYSTEM, PETITIONER, VS. LUCITA R. VILLAREAL, RESPONDENT.

R E S O L U T I O N

CORONA, J.:

This petition[1] seeks the reversal of the September 29, 2005 decision[2] and December 9, 2005 resolution[3] of the Court of Appeals (CA) in CA-G.R. SP No. 89975. The CA reversed and set aside the decision of the Employees' Compensation Commission (ECC) affirming the decision of petitioner Government Service Insurance System which, in turn, denied the claim for death benefits of respondent Lucita R. Villareal.

The factual antecedents follow.

Respondent is the widow of Zacarias F. Villareal, a technical education and skills development supervisor in the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority at the time of his death on October 20, 2002 due to myocardial infarction.[4]

Respondent filed with petitioner a claim for death benefits under PD 626,[5] as amended.[6] Petitioner denied the claim on the ground that the cause of death was not work-connected.[7] The ECC upheld petitioner.[8] On appeal, however, the CA reversed petitioner and the ECC and held that myocardial infarction, a cardiovascular disease, was a compensable occupational disease.[9] Thus, this petition.

Is respondent entitled to compensation for her husband's death? Yes, she is.

Under PD 626, the beneficiaries of an employee are entitled to death benefits under the system if the cause of death of the employee is a sickness listed as an occupational disease by the ECC or any other illness caused by employment, subject to proof that the risk of contracting the same is increased by the working conditions.[10]

The CA correctly ruled that myocardial infarction was considered as an occupational disease because it was included under the classification "cardiovascular disease," a compensable occupational disease under ECC Resolution No. 432 (dated July 20, 1977) subject to substantial evidence proving any of the following conditions:

> (a) If the heart disease was known to have been present during employment, there must be proof of an acute exacerbation clearly precipitated by the unusual strain by reason of the nature of this work.

(b) The strain of work that brings about an acute attack must be of sufficient severity and must be followed within twenty-four (24) hours by the clinical signs of a cardiac insult to constitute causal relationship.

(c) If a person who was apparently asymptomatic before subjecting himself to strain at work showed signs and symptoms of cardiac injury during the performance of his work and such symptoms and signs persisted, it is reasonable to claim a causal relationship.[11]

The CA found that "[t]he various stressful tasks and responsibilities the deceased had to perform exacerbated the development of his illness."[12] It held that Zacarias' case was covered by condition (a) of Resolution No. 432.

In several cases, we ruled consistently that myocardial infarction is a compensable occupational disease. In *Rañises v. ECC*,[13] we summarized some of these cases:

In *Sepulveda v. Employees Compensation Commission*, a public school teacher, assigned to a remote rural area, died of myocardial infarction. In sustaining the claim for compensation benefits, we held that due to his occupation as a school teacher assigned to one of the remotest parts of Tangub City, his illness was directly brought about by his employment or was a result of the nature of such employment.

In *Cortes v. Employees Compensation Commissio*n, we ruled that myocardial infarction is now considered an occupational disease by the ECC and is, therefore, compensable.

Then in *Eastern Shipping Lines, Inc. v. Philippine Overseas Employment Administration*, we upheld the ruling of the POEA awarding compensation benefits to the heirs of a Filipino seaman who died of myocardial infarction while his vessel was in Japan.

In *Roldan v. Republic*, we held that a poor schoolteacher who gave the best years of her life in the service and who in the process, contracted heart ailment and hypertension, is entitled to compensatory benefits corresponding to her claim.

In *Tibulan v. Inciong*, a barge captain died of myocardial infarction. We held that where an employee had entered employment in good health and suffered an illness in the course of an employment which he never had before, he has in his favor the statutory presumption that his illness or disease is compensable. We reiterated our ruling in the *Heirs of the Late R/O Reynaldo Aniban v. National Labor Relations Commission*. In this case, a ship radio operator, who was healthy when he boarded his vessel, died of myocardial infarction three months later. We ruled that his disease is compensable on the ground that any kind of work or labor produces stress and strain normally resulting in wear and tear of the human body.

In *Government Service Insurance System v. Gabriel*, we ruled that acute myocardial infarction is listed as an occupational disease, and its