

SUPREME COURT OF IDAHO

Gomez v. Dura Mark, Inc., 152 Idaho 597

272 P.3d 569 (2012) · No. No. 38809 · Decided March 2, 2012

SUMMARY

The Idaho Supreme Court affirmed the Industrial Commission's denial of Maria Gomez's motion to reopen the record in a workers' compensation dispute. The court held that causation is necessarily at issue when a claimant seeks medical benefits, even if the hearing notice does not specifically identify causation, and that Idaho Code § 72-432 does not presume a causal connection from prior payment of medical benefits. The court also held that the Commission did not abuse its discretion in denying additional evidence on reconsideration.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Idaho
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Burdick, Chief Justice; Eismann, Justice; J. Jones, Justice; W. Jones, Justice; Horton, Justice
JURISDICTION	Idaho
DECIDED	March 2, 2012
DOCKET	No. 38809
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Appeal from the Idaho Industrial Commission's order denying Gomez's motion for reconsideration and request to reopen the record to submit additional evidence concerning causation of medical treatment for a work-related back injury.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Idaho Supreme Court reviews appeals from the Industrial Commission on questions of law. It will not disturb factual findings supported by substantial competent evidence, and it reviews the Commission's decision whether to consider additional evidence on reconsideration for abuse of discretion. Conclusions regarding credibility and the weight of evidence are not disturbed unless clearly erroneous.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Idaho Supreme Court opinion; precedential.
PARTIES	Maria Gomez v. Dura Mark, Inc., State Insurance Fund

TOPICS

workers compensation

administrative law

appellate procedure

standard of review

statutory interpretation

PRACTICE AREAS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Idaho Code section 72-713 required the Industrial Commission to provide specific advance notice that causation would be litigated when Gomez sought medical benefits and the noticed issue concerned the reasonableness of treatment.
2. Whether deciding causation without specific notice violated Gomez's due process rights.
3. Whether Idaho Code section 72-432(1) presumed a causal connection because the employer or surety had initially paid some medical benefits.
4. Whether the Industrial Commission abused its discretion by denying Gomez's motion to reopen the record and present additional causation evidence.

HOLDINGS

1. Idaho Code section 72-713 does not require the Commission to specifically identify causation in the hearing notice when the claimant seeks medical benefits and the noticed issue is the reasonableness of treatment. Causation is necessarily at issue because entitlement to medical benefits requires proof that the treatment was related to the industrial accident or disease.
2. Gomez's due process rights were not violated because specific notice of causation was unnecessary where causation was an essential element of her claim for medical benefits.
3. Idaho Code section 72-432(1) does not presume a causal connection between an industrial accident and medical treatment merely because the employer or surety initially paid benefits. The employee must prove both that the treatment was reasonable and that it was related to the industrial accident or disease.
4. The Commission did not abuse its discretion by denying Gomez's motion to reopen the record for additional causation evidence.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Causation is put on issue by virtue of any claim regarding the reasonableness of medical benefits arising from an industrial accident or disease; even if reasonableness is found—without causation, there is no entitlement to benefits.” (573-574)

“Therefore, causation cannot be presumed in a Sprague analysis.” (575)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Maria Gomez injured her lower back on July 24, 2009, while lifting sixty-pound boxes for Dura Mark, Inc., and later received medical treatment for alleged disc and radiculopathy conditions. Her treating physicians attributed

her symptoms and treatment to the injury, while defense medical reviewers disputed the diagnosis, causation, and need for further treatment. After an emergency hearing, the referee and Commission concluded that Gomez had not proved a causal relationship between the industrial accident and the treatment for which she sought benefits.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Gomez sought workers' compensation medical benefits after injuring her lower back while lifting boxes at work. Following an emergency hearing, a referee found that she failed to prove that the treatment was causally related to the industrial injury; the Industrial Commission adopted those findings and denied reconsideration. Gomez timely appealed to the Idaho Supreme Court, which affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Sprague v. Caldwell Transportation, Inc., 116 Idaho 720, 779 P.2d 395 (1989)
- Hernandez v. Triple Ell Transport, Inc., 145 Idaho 37, 175 P.3d 199 (2007)
- Moore v. Moore, 152 Idaho 245, 269 P.3d 802 (2011)
- Hernandez v. Phillips, 141 Idaho 779, 118 P.3d 111 (2005)
- White v. Idaho Forest Industries, 98 Idaho 784, 572 P.2d 887 (1977)
- Henderson v. McCain Foods, Inc., 142 Idaho 559, 130 P.3d 1097 (2006)
- Fife v. Home Depot, Inc., 260 P.3d 1180 (2011)
- Hipwell v. Challenger Pallet & Supply, 124 Idaho 294, 859 P.2d 330 (1993)
- Troutner v. Traffic Control Co., 97 Idaho 525, 547 P.2d 1130 (1976)
- St. Alphonsus Regional Medical Center v. Edmondson, 130 Idaho 108, 937 P.2d 420 (1997)
- Harrison v. Osco Drug, Inc., 116 Idaho 470, 776 P.2d 1189 (1989)
- Reese v. V-1 Oil Co., 141 Idaho 630, 115 P.3d 721 (2005)
- Uhl v. Ballard Medical Products, Inc., 138 Idaho 653, 67 P.3d 1265 (2003)
- Slaven v. Road to Recovery, 143 Idaho 483, 148 P.3d 1229 (2006)
- Tipton v. Jansson, 91 Idaho 904, 435 P.2d 244 (1967)