

JUAN LOPEZ MANANSALA; PETITIONER, VS. REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES (DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES, BUREAU OF SOILS), AND WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION COMMISSION, RESP...

G.R. NO. L-38184. May 30, 1974

Ponente: CASTRO, J.

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CASTRO, J.:

Special civil action for certiorari from the decision of the Workmen's Compensation Commission (hereinafter referred to as the Commission) in RO4-WC Case 124120 which denied the claim of Juan Lopez Manansala (hereinafter referred to as the petitioner) for reimbursement of medical expenses under section 13 of the Workmen's Compensation Act, as amended.

On June 9, 1971 the petitioner, a mechanic-driver in the Bureau of Soils, filed with the Regional Office No. 4 of the Department of Labor a claim for disability compensation on account of tuberculosis and peptic ulcer contracted in the course of his employment. The Bureau of Soils and the Office of the Solicitor General not only did not controvert the claim but actually admitted its validity. It was nonetheless denied by the Regional Office on the ground that the petitioner had not been absent from work for more than 3 days during the period of his disability from 1965 to 1971. Upon review, the Commission, in its decision dated October 26, 1973, reversed the Regional Office's finding because the evidence showed that the petitioner was confined at the Quezon Institute for treatment from May 18 to May 27, 1966. Consequently, the Commission awarded the petitioner temporary total disability benefits in the sum of P342.59 and non-scheduled disability compensation in the sum of P804.46, or a total of P1,147.05, under the authority of the provisions of sections 14 and 18 of the Workmen's Compensation Act. The Commission, however, denied the petitioner's claim for reimbursement of medical expenses, declaring that

"Under Section 13 of the Act, claimant is entitled to reimbursement of medical expenses but since the claim for medical expenses is not supported by receipts nor substantiated by the testimony of the attending physician, no reimbursement is allowed."

The basic issue tendered for resolution is whether the Commission acted with grave abuse of discretion in denying the claim of the petitioner for reimbursement of medical expenses in the sum of P6,285.50.

We hold that the Commission erred in denying outright the questioned claim. Four circumstances, in combination, point to the gravity of the Commission's error. First. The Commission itself found and so held that the petitioner is entitled not only to disability benefits but as well as to reimbursement of medical expenses. Such being the case, the least it should have done, in the exercise of its broad statutory powers, was to accord the petitioner full opportunity to adduce proof of his medical expenses. Second. The case at bar involves a non-controverted, admittedly valid disability claim. Third. The medical certificates issued to the petitioner by the two doctors who attended to him each contains a specification of medical expenses. Fourth. The Bureau of Soils and the Office of

the Solicitor General expressed complete agreement with the reasonableness of the petitioner's medical expenses, as evidenced by the following indorsement dated June 7, 1971 of Assistant Solicitor General Dominador L. Quiroz:

"Respectfully forwarded to the Chief, Workmen's Compensation Section, Regional Office No. 4, Department of Labor, Manila, the within papers relative to the claim for compensation filed by Mr. Juan Lopez Manansala, Driver, Bureau of Soils, with the information that this Office is not controverting the said claim for compensation, it appearing from the Employer's Report that the claimant was injured in regular occupation (Item 17) and that the employer is not controverting the said claim for compensation (Item 8). The claim for reimbursement of medical expenses in the amount of P6,285.50 is also not being contested by this Office in view of the preceding indorsement of the Acting Director of Soils that the same is fair and reasonable."

It bears emphasis that the Workmen's Compensation Act was "designed to give relief to the workman ... and secure him and his dependents against becoming the object of charity by giving him a reasonable compensation,"[1] and that pursuant to these objectives the Act must be liberally construed in favor of the workman and his dependents.[2]

ACCORDINGLY, the denial by the respondent Commission of the petitioner's claim for reimbursement of medical expenses is reversed, and this case is hereby ordered remanded to the said Commission for reception of the petitioner's proof of the medical expenses incurred by him, and for further proceedings in accordance with law and this decision. No costs.

Makalintal, C.J., Teehankee, Makasiar, Esguerra, and Munoz Palma, JJ., concur.

[1] ITEM COP vs. Florzo, 17 SCRA 1104; Batangas Transp. Co. vs. Perez and WCC, 11 SCRA 793.

[2] Ibid.; Ramos vs. Poblete, 73 Phil. 241; Catapang vs. WCC, 13 SCRA 684; Iloilo Dock & Engineering Co. vs. WCC, 5 SCRA 765.

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