ADELAIDA B. AQUINO, PETITIONER, VS. SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM AND U.S. NAVAL COMMISSARY STORE, SUBIC BAY, RESPONDENTS.

G.R. NO. 149256. July 21, 2006

Ponente: CORONA, J.

Read online (full-text search, related cases, audio case brief): https://batas.org/library/g-r-no-149256/

CORONA, J.:

At bar is an appeal by certiorari under Rule 45 of the 1997 Rules of Civil Procedure assailing the decision of the Court of Appeals (CA) in CA-G.R. SP No. 60726, entitled Adelaida B. Aquino v. Social Security System, dismissing petitioner Adelaida Aquino's claim under Presidential Decree (PD) No. 626 (the Employees Compensation Act).

Petitioner's husband, Jaime Aquino, worked as grocery man for the US Navy Commissary, Subic Bay, Olongapo City from 1970 to 1977. He performed the following tasks: (1) checked the availability of stocks before they were turned over to the supervisor of the store; (2) piled items in shelves and display cases and assisted patrons in locating them; (3) processed retail price changes by conducting inventories of items and (4) operated the forklift.

On February 2, 2000 or about 23 years after his separation from employment, he died of congestive heart failure. Petitioner filed a claim for surviving spouse's compensation benefits under PD 626 with respondent Social Security System (SSS). The latter denied the claim.

Petitioner then appealed the case to the Employees Compensation Commission (ECC) which affirmed SSS's dismissal of the claim on the ground that the cause of death of petitioner's husband was not attributable to the nature of his work as a grocery man in the Commissary. He was no longer connected with the store at that time.

Aggrieved, petitioner went to the CA seeking the reversal of the ECC's decision. There, petitioner insisted that the cause of her husband's death was traceable to the nature of his job at the commissary store. The CA dismissed her appeal.[1] Petitioner sought reconsideration of the CA decision[2] but it was denied, hence, this petition.

In this petition, petitioner essentially faults the CA for not finding that the ailment causing her husband's death was compensable under PD 626.[3]

The petition will not prosper.

Under the law, the beneficiary of an employee is entitled to death benefits if the cause of death is (1) an illness accepted as an occupational disease by the ECC or (2) any other illness caused by employment, subject to proof that the risk of contracting the same was increased by the working conditions.[4]

Stated otherwise, a claimant must prove that the illness is listed as an occupational disease by the ECC; otherwise, he must present substantial evidence showing that the nature of the work increased the risk of contracting it.

In the case of Panangui v. Employees Compensation Commission,[5] the Court explained congestive heart failure as:

> ...a clinical syndrome which develops eventually in 50-60% of all patients with organic cardiovascular disease. It is defined as the clinical state resulting from the inability of the heart to expel sufficient blood for the metabolic demands of the body. Heart failure may therefore be present when the cardiac output is high, normal or low, regardless of the absolute level, the cardiac output is reduced to metabolic demands...

Under the Rules on Employees Compensation, particularly "Annex A" thereof which contains the list of occupational diseases, congestive heart failure is not included. Hence, petitioner should have shown proof that the working conditions in the commissary store where her husband worked aggravated the risk of contracting the ailment.[6] Petitioner should have adduced evidence of a reasonable connection between the work of her deceased husband and the cause of his death, or that the progression of the disease was brought about largely by the conditions in her husband's job as grocery man at the commissary store.[7] Failing in this aspect, we are constrained to rule that her husband's illness which eventually caused his demise was not compensable.

Moreover, even if we were to construe the ailment of petitioner's husband as cardiovascular disease compensable under ECC Resolution No. 432, the petition will still not prosper. To be compensable, the cardiovascular (or heart) disease of Jaime Aquino must have occurred under any of the following conditions:

> (a) [i]f the heart disease was known to have been present during employment[,] there must be proof that an acute exacerbation clearly precipitated by the unusual strain by reason of the nature of his work;
>
> (b) [t]he strain of work that [brought] about an acute attack must be of sufficient severity and must be followed within twenty-four (24) hours by clinical signs of a cardiac insult to constitute causal relationship;
>
> (c) [i]f a person who was apparently symptomatic 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 [was] reasonable to claim a causal relationship.[8]

Clearly, the circumstances of the present case do not fall under any of the foregoing conditions.

In addition, granting petitioner's claim will set a bad precedent considering that 23 years elapsed from the time her husband stopped working at the commissary store up to the time he died. If we were to grant it, we might unduly burden the funds of the ECC and jeopardize it with a flood of unsubstantiated claims. Besides, the Court cannot remain oblivious to the possibility that, within that 23-year period, other factors intervened to cause the death of petitioner's husband. Petitioner was thus under an even greater compulsion to proffer evidence to negate this possibility and establish the causal connection between her husband's work and his death. The 23-year gap between his separation from employment in 1977 and his death in 2000 was a gaping hole in petitioner's claim.

Furthermore, well-entrenched is the rule that findings of fact of administrative officials who have acquired expertise on account of their specialized jurisdiction are accorded by the Courts not only respect but, most often, with finality.

Lastly, while it is true that PD 626 operates on the principle of social justice, sympathy for the workers should also be placed in a sensible equilibrium with the stability of the ECC trust fund.

WHEREFORE, the assailed decision of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. SP No. 60726 is hereby AFFIRMED. Accordingly, the petition is DENIED.

No costs.

Bar review courses, mock exams and a study planner that keeps you on pace - batas.org

SO ORDERED.

Puno, (Chairperson), Sandoval-Gutierrez, Azcuna, and Garcia, JJ., concur.

---

[1] Decision penned by Justice Andres B. Reyes, with the concurrence of Justices B.A. Adefuin-de la Cruz (now retired) and Rebecca de Guia-Salvador, Sixteenth Division of the Court of Appeals; rollo, pp. 58-64.

[2] CA Resolution, id., p. 74.

[3] Id., pp. 10-25.

[4] Amended Rules on Employees Compensation; see also Riño v. Employees Compensation Commission, 387 Phil. 612 (2000); Librea v. Employees Compensation Commission, G.R. No. 58879, 14 November 1991, 203 SCRA 545.

[5] 206 Phil. 61 (1983).

[6] Gau Sheng Phils., Inc. v. Joaquin, G.R. No. 144665, 8 September 2004, 437 SCRA 608.

[7] Supra at note 4.

[8] ECC Resolution No. 432, supra.

Study hands-free: podcast-style lessons with read-along highlighting - batas.org

ABOUT BATAS.ORG

Study smarter at BATAS.org

The Philippine bar review and law-school companion built around how your brain actually remembers.

The complete Philippine law library - free for everyone.

More than 100,000 Supreme Court decisions, Republic Acts, and executive issuances - full-text searchable, browsable by category and year, and always free. No paywall, no login. This PDF came from it.

Audio case-brief lectures.

Any decision becomes a podcast-style lecture - facts, issues, ruling, and doctrine - with read-along highlighting and a hands-free presentation mode. Study while commuting, working out, or resting your eyes.

Bar review built on the science of memory.

Complete, sequenced courses for all eight bar subjects, narrated like podcasts and reinforced with retrieval practice and spaced review - the study techniques with the strongest evidence behind them.

The full law-school curriculum.

One subscription unlocks the entire J.D. curriculum - every subject, every lesson, with your progress tracked down to the paragraph so you can pick up exactly where you left off, on any device.

Mock exams that tell you where you stand.

Timed multiple-choice exams graded instantly, with per-subject score breakdowns and focus suggestions that point you at your weakest topics first.

A study planner that keeps you on pace.

Set your schedule and BATAS tells you every day whether you are on track for bar day - and exactly which lesson to take next.

Start free at https://batas.org

The law library is free forever - and your first lesson is one click away.

The text of this document is an official public record and remains in the public domain. Formatting, presentation, and compilation © 2026 batas.org.

Downloaded free from the batas.org Law Library. Share it freely - the library is free for every law student, bar reviewee, and practitioner.