

Codio v New York City Tr. Auth.

2008 NY Slip Op 33181(U)

November 24, 2008

Supreme Court, Queens County

Docket Number: 8435/07

Judge: Howard G. Lane

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Short Form Order

NEW YORK SUPREME COURT - QUEENS COUNTY

Present: HONORABLE HOWARD G. LANE
Justice

IAS PART 22

PIERRE CODIO,

Plaintiff,

-against-
THE NEW YORK CITY TRANSIT AUTHORITY
and SIMON S. GREEN,
Defendants.

Index No. 8435/07

Motion
Date October 28, 2008

Motion
Cal. No. 8

Motion
Sequence No. 2

PAPERS
NUMBERED

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Upon the foregoing papers it is ordered that the motion by defendant, New York City Transit Authority for summary judgment dismissing the complaint of plaintiff, Pierre L. Codio, pursuant to CPLR 3212, on the ground that plaintiff has not sustained a serious injury within the meaning of the Insurance Law § 5102(d) is decided as follows:

This action arises out of an automobile accident that occurred on January 11, 2006. Defendant has submitted proof in admissible form in support of the motion for summary judgment, for all categories of serious injury. The defendant submitted *inter alia*, affirmed reports from three independent examining and/or evaluating physicians (an orthopedist, a neurologist, and a radiologist), and plaintiff's own examination before trial transcript which indicates that plaintiff only missed one (1) day of work after the accident and returned to work full-time after that one day.

In opposition to the motion, plaintiff submitted: an unsworn police report and photographs, a sworn narrative report of plaintiff's orthopedic surgeon, David L. Hsu, M.D. dated September 12, 2008, an unsworn report of plaintiff's orthopedic surgeon, Harshad Bhatt, M.D., unsworn medical records and reports of plaintiff's physical medicine and rehabilitation physician,

Aleksandra Gashinskaya, M.D., unsworn medical records and reports of plaintiff's general surgeon, Prasad Chalasani, M.D., unsworn no-fault forms, unsworn MRI reports of the lumbar spine, cervical spine, and left shoulder by plaintiff's radiologist, Jeffrey Chess, M.D., and an attorney's affirmation.

APPLICABLE LAW

Under the "no-fault" law, in order to maintain an action for personal injury, a plaintiff must establish that a "serious injury" has been sustained (*Licari v. Elliot*, 57 NY2d 230 [1982]). The proponent of a motion for summary judgment must tender sufficient evidence to show the absence of any material issue of fact and the right to judgment as a matter of law (*Alvarez v. Prospect Hospital*, 68 NY2d 320 [1986]; *Winegrad v. New York Univ. Medical Center*, 64 NY2d 851, 487 NYS2d 316 [1985]). In the present action, the burden rests on defendants to establish, by the submission of evidentiary proof in admissible form, that plaintiff has not suffered a "serious injury." (*Lowe v. Bennett*, 122 AD2d 728, 511 NYS2d 603 [1st Dept 1986], *affd*, 69 NY2d 701, 512 NYS2d 364 [1986]). When a defendant's motion is sufficient to raise the issue of whether a "serious injury" has been sustained, the burden shifts and it is then incumbent upon the plaintiff to produce prima facie evidence in admissible form to support the claim of serious injury (*Licari v. Elliot*, *supra*; *Lopez v. Senatore*, 65 NY2d 1017, 494 NYS2d 101 [1985]).

In support of a claim that plaintiff has not sustained a serious injury, a defendant may rely either on the sworn statements of the defendant's examining physician or the unsworn reports of plaintiff's examining physician (*Pagano v. Kingsbury*, 182 AD2d 268, 587 NYS2d 692 [2d Dept 1992]). Once the burden shifts, it is incumbent upon plaintiff, in opposition to defendant's motion, to submit proof of serious injury in "admissible form". Unsworn reports of plaintiff's examining doctor or chiropractor will not be sufficient to defeat a motion for summary judgment (*Grasso v. Angerami*, 79 NY2d 813, 580 NYS2d 178 [1991]). Thus, a medical affirmation or affidavit which is based on a physician's personal examination and observations of plaintiff, is an acceptable method to provide a doctor's opinion regarding the existence and extent of a plaintiff's serious injury (*O'Sullivan v. Atrium Bus Co.*, 246 AD2d 418, 668 NYS2d 167 [1st Dept 1998]). Unsworn MRI reports are not competent evidence unless both sides rely on those reports (*Gonzalez v. Vasquez*, 301 AD2d 438 [1st Dept 2003]; *Ayzen v. Melendez*, 749 NYS2d 445 [2d

Dept 2002])). However, in order to be sufficient to establish a prima facie case of serious physical injury the affirmation or affidavit must contain medical findings, which are based on the physician's own examination, tests and observations and review of the record rather than manifesting only the plaintiff's subjective complaints. It must be noted that a chiropractor is not one of the persons authorized by the CPLR to provide a statement by affirmation, and thus, for a chiropractor, only an affidavit containing the requisite findings will suffice (see, CPLR 2106; *Pichardo v. Blum*, 267 AD2d 441, 700 NYS2d 863 [2d Dept 1999]; *Feintuch v. Grella*, 209 AD2d 377, 619 NYS2d 593 [2d Dept 2003])).

In any event, the findings, which must be submitted in a competent statement under oath (or affirmation, when permitted) must demonstrate that plaintiff sustained at least one of the categories of "serious injury" as enumerated in Insurance Law § 5102(d) (*Marquez v. New York City Transit Authority*, 259 AD2d 261, 686 NYS2d 18 [1st Dept 1999]; *Tompkins v. Budnick*, 236 AD2d 708, 652 NYS2d 911 [3d Dept 1997]; *Parker v. DeFontaine*, 231 AD2d 412, 647 NYS2d 189 [1st Dept 1996]; *DiLeo v. Blumberg*, 250 AD2d 364, 672 NYS2d 319 [1st Dept 1998])). For example, in *Parker, supra*, it was held that a medical affidavit, which demonstrated that the plaintiff's threshold motion limitations were objectively measured and observed by the physician, was sufficient to establish that plaintiff has suffered a "serious injury" within the meaning of that term as set forth in Article 51 of the Insurance Law. In other words, "[a] physician's observation as to actual limitations qualifies as objective evidence since it is based on the physician's own examinations." Furthermore, in the absence of objective medical evidence in admissible form of serious injury, plaintiff's self-serving affidavit is insufficient to raise a triable issue of fact (*Fisher v. Williams*, 289 AD2d 288 [2d Dept 2001])).

DISCUSSION

A. Defendant established a prima facie case that plaintiff did not suffer a "serious injury" as defined in Section 5102(d), for all categories.

The affirmed report of defendant's independent examining orthopedist, Raz Winiarsky, M.D. indicates that an examination conducted on June 6, 2007 revealed a diagnosis of: "status post-cervical spine sprain/strain, resolved"; "status post-lumbar spine sprain/strain, resolved"; status post-left knee

sprain/strain, resolved"; "status post-left shoulder sprain/strain, resolved." He opines that there is no evidence of orthopedic disability, and that there is no permanency. Dr. Winiarsky concludes that claimant is able to perform all activities of daily living without restrictions or limitations.

The affirmed report of defendant's independent examining neurologist, Marianna Golden, M.D., indicates that an examination conducted on June 6, 2007 revealed a diagnosis of resolved cervical and lumbar spine strains. She opines that there is no disability from a neurologic point of view, and that there is no permanency. Dr. Golden concludes that claimant can continue to work and perform all activities fo daily living.

The affirmed report of defendant's independent evaluating radiologists, Jane Tuvia, M.D. and Joseph Tuvia, M.D., indicates that an MRI of the left shoulder dated January 19, 2006 revealed an impression of a normal left shoulder joint with no findings suggesting acute injury or sequela of such. The affirmed report of defendant's independent evaluating radiologists, Jane Tuvia, M.D. and Joseph Tuvia, M.D., indicates that an MRI of the cervical spine dated January 26, 2006 indicates an impression of degenerative, lower cervical discs along with productive bony changes which is "consistent with chronic degenerative spinal disease which is a pre-existing condition." The doctors opine that there is a long-standing discogenic disease which, combined with the productive bony changes indicates a degenerative etiology. The affirmed report of defendant's independent evaluating radiologists, Jane Tuvia, M.D. and Joseph Tuvia, M.D., indicates that an MRI of the lumbar spine dated February 14, 2006 revealed an impression of "[d]egenerated, bulging T12-L1 and L1-L2 in association with productive bony changes" which is "consistent with chronic degenerative spinal disease which is a pre-existing condition." The doctors opine that there is a long-standing discogenic disease which, combined with the productive bony changes indicates a degenerative etiology.

Additionally, defendant established a *prima facie* case for the category of "90/180 days." The plaintiff's own examination before trial transcript which indicates that plaintiff only missed one (1) day of work after the accident and returned to work full-time after that one day. Such evidence shows that the plaintiff was not curtailed from nearly all activities for the bare minimum of 90/180, required by the statute.

The aforementioned evidence amply satisfied defendant's initial burden of demonstrating that plaintiff did not sustain a "serious injury." Thus, the burden then shifted to plaintiff to

raise a triable issue of fact that a serious injury was sustained within the meaning of the Insurance Law (see, *Gaddy v. Eyler*, 79 NY2d 955 [1992]). Failure to raise a triable issue of fact requires the granting of summary judgment and dismissal of the complaint (see, *Licari v. Elliott*, supra).

B. Plaintiff fails to raise a triable issue of fact

In opposition to the motion, plaintiff submitted: an unsworn police report and photographs, a sworn narrative report of plaintiff's orthopedic surgeon, David L. Hsu, M.D. dated September 12, 2008, an unsworn report of plaintiff's orthopedic surgeon, Harshad Bhatt, M.D., unsworn medical records and reports of plaintiff's physical medicine and rehabilitation physician, Aleksandra Gashinskaya, M.D., unsworn medical records and reports of plaintiff's general surgeon, Prasad Chalasani, M.D., unsworn no-fault forms, unsworn MRI reports of the lumbar spine, cervical spine, and left shoulder by plaintiff's radiologist, Jeffrey Chess, M.D. and an attorney's affirmation.

Medical records and reports by examining and treating doctors that are not sworn to or affirmed under penalties of perjury are not evidentiary proof in admissible form, and are therefore not competent and inadmissible (see, *Pagano v. Kingsbury*, 182 AD2d 268 [2d Dept 1992]). Therefore, unsworn reports of plaintiff's examining doctors will not be sufficient to defeat a motion for summary judgment (see, *Grasso v. Angerami*, 79 NY2d 813, 580 NYS2d 178 [1991]).

Plaintiff submitted no proof of objective findings contemporaneous with the accident. Plaintiff failed to submit any medical proof in admissible form that was contemporaneous with the accident showing any bulges, herniations, or range of motion limitations (*Pajda v. Pedone*, 303 AD2d 729 [2d Dept 2003]). The plaintiff's physician, David L. Hsu, M.D. issued a final narrative report dated September 12, 2008 more than 2½ years after the accident. Such an examination is insufficient to establish a causal connection between the accident and the injuries. The causal connection must ordinarily be established by competent medical proof (see, *Kociocek v. Chen*, 283 AD2d 554 [2d Dept 2001]; *Pommels v. Perez*, 772 NYS2d 21 [1st Dept 2004]). Additionally, other than the evaluation of plaintiff more than 2½ years after the accident, the record is devoid of any competent evidence of plaintiff's treatment.

Additionally, although defendant's independent examining radiologists opine in their affirmed report that their evaluation

of MRI's of the cervical and lumbar spines revealed pre-existing, degenerative disc disease, plaintiff's experts failed to indicate their awareness that plaintiff was suffering from such condition and failed to address the effect of these findings on plaintiff's claimed accident injuries (*Francis v. Christopher*, 302 AD2d 425 (2d Dept 2003); *Monette v. Keller*, 281 AD2d 523 (2d Dept 2001); *Ifrach v. Neiman*, 306 AD2d 380 (2d Dept 2003). Hence, plaintiff failed to rebut defendant's claim sufficiently to raise a triable issue of fact (see, *Pommels v. Perez*, 4 NY3d 566, 2005 WL 975859 (2005)).

Also, the plaintiff has failed to come forward with sufficient evidence to create an issue of fact as to whether the plaintiff sustained a medically-determined injury which prevented him from performing substantially all of the material acts which constituted his usual and customary daily activities for not less than 90 of the 180 days immediately following the underlying accident (*Savatarre v. Barnathan*, 280 AD2d 537 [2d Dept 2001]). The record must contain objective or credible evidence to support the plaintiff's claim that the injury prevented plaintiff from performing substantially all of his customary activities (*Watt v. Eastern Investigative Bureau, Inc.*, 273 AD2d 226 [2d Dept 2000]). When construing the statutory definition of a 90/180-day claim, the words "substantially all" should be construed to mean that the person has been prevented from performing his usual activities to a great extent, rather than some slight curtailment (see, *Gaddy v. Eyler*, 79 NY2d 955; *Licari v Elliott*, 57 NY2d 230 (1982); *Berk v Lopez*, 278 AD2d 156 [1st Dept 2000], lv denied 96 NY2d 708 [2001]). Plaintiff fails to include experts' reports or affirmations which render an opinion on the effect the injuries claimed may have had on the plaintiff for the 180-day period immediately following the accident. As such, plaintiff's submissions were insufficient to establish a triable issue of fact as to whether plaintiff suffered from a medically determined injury that curtailed him from performing his usual activities for the statutory period (*Licari v. Elliott*, 57 NY2d 230, 236 [1982]). Accordingly, plaintiff's claim that his injuries prevented him from performing substantially all of the material acts constituting his customary daily activities during at least 90 of the first 180 days following the accident is insufficient to raise a triable issue of fact (see, *Graham v Shuttle Bay*, 281 AD2d 372 [1st Dept 2001]; *Hernandez v. Cerda*, 271 AD2d 569 [2d Dept 2000]; *Ocasio v. Henry*, 276 AD2d 611 [2d Dept 2000]).

Furthermore, plaintiff's attorney's affirmation is not admissible probative evidence on medical issues, as plaintiff's attorney has failed to demonstrate personal knowledge of the plaintiff's injuries (*Sloan v. Schoen*, 251 AD2d 319 [2d Dept

1998]).

Therefore, plaintiff's submissions are insufficient to raise a triable issue of fact (*see, Zuckerman v. City of New York*, 49 NY2d 557 [1980]).

Accordingly, the defendant's motion for summary is granted in its entirety and the plaintiff's complaint is dismissed as to all categories.

The clerk is directed to enter judgment accordingly.

Movant shall serve a copy of this order with Notice of Entry upon the other parties of this action and on the clerk. If this order requires the clerk to perform a function, movant is directed to serve a copy upon the appropriate clerk.

The foregoing constitutes the decision and order of this Court.

Dated: November 24, 2008

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Howard G. Lane, J.S.C.