

Geering v Benibor

2009 NY Slip Op 30757(U)

March 30, 2009

Supreme Court, New York County

Docket Number: 110268/06

Judge: Paul Wooten

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SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK — NEW YORK COUNTY

PRESENT: HON. PAUL WOOTEN
Justice

PART 22

SUSAN GEERING,
Plaintiff,
- v -

NANA BENIBOR and SOL CAB CORP.,
Defendant.

INDEX NO. 110268/06
~~105440/06~~
MOTION DATE _____
MOTION SEQ. NO. 001
MOTION CAL. NO. 3

The following papers, numbered 1 to 1, were read on this motion by defendants for summary judgment on the threshold "serious injury" issue. No opposition papers were submitted.

Notice of Motion/ Order to Show Cause — Affidavits — Exhibits ...
Answering Affidavits — Exhibits (Memo) _____
Replying Affidavits (Reply Memo) _____

FILED
COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE
NEW YORK
JAN 10 2006
PAPERS NUMBERED
1

Cross-Motion: Yes No

On January 14, 2006, plaintiff was involved in a collision with the defendants vehicle. The collision occurred on West End Avenue at or near its intersection with West 66th Street in New York County, New York. Plaintiffs commenced this action, to recover damages for alleged personal injuries suffered as a result of the of the subject motor vehicle accident. The defendant timely filed an answer and counterclaim and issue was joined. Defendant now moves for an order pursuant to CPLR § 3212, granting summary judgment on the issue of "serious injury" as defined by New York Insurance Law § 5102(d). Plaintiff filed no opposition papers.

SERIOUS INJURY THRESHOLD

Pursuant to the Comprehensive Motor Vehicle Insurance Reparation Act of 1974 (now Insurance Law § 5101, *et seq.* - the "No Fault" statute), a party seeking damages for pain and suffering arising out of a motor vehicle accident must establish that he or she has sustained at least one of the categories of "serious injury" as set forth in Insurance Law § 5102 (d) (*Marquez v New York City Tr. Auth.*, 686 NYS2d 18 [1 Dept 1999]; *DiLeo v Blumberg*, 672 NYS2d 319 [1 Dept 1998]).

Insurance Law § 5102 (d) defines "serious injury" as:

a personal injury which results in death; dismemberment; significant disfigurement; a fracture; loss of a fetus; permanent loss of use of a body organ, member, function or system; permanent consequential limitation of use of a body organ or member; significant limitation of use of a body function or system; or a medically determined injury or impairment of a on-permanent nature which prevents the injured person from performing substantially all of the material acts which constitute such person's usual and customary daily activities for not less that ninety days during the one hundred eighty days immediately following the occurrence of the injury or impairment.

Serious injury is a threshold issue, and thus, a necessary element of plaintiff's prima facie case (*Licari v Elliott*, 57 NY2d 230 [1982]; *Toure v Harrison*, 775 NYS2d 282 [1 Dept 2004]; Insurance Law § 5104 [a]). This is in accord with the purpose of the "No-Fault" law, which was to "weed out frivolous claims and limit recovery to significant injuries" (*Toure v Avis Rent A Car Systems, Inc.*, 98 NY2d 345 [2002], quoting *Dufel v Green*, 84 NY2d 795, 798 [1995]; *Licari v Elliott*, 57 NY2d 234 [1982]; *Rubenscastro v Alfaro*, 815 NYS2d 514 [1 Dept 2006]).

In order to satisfy the statutory threshold, the plaintiff must submit competent objective medical evidence of his or her injuries, based on the performance of objective tests (*Grossman v Wright*, 707 NYS2d 233 [2 Dept 2000]; *Lopez v Senatore*, 65 NY2d 1017, 1019 [1985]). Subjective complaints alone are insufficient to establish a prima facie case of a serious injury (*Gaddy v Eyler*, 79 NY2d 955, 957 [1992]; *Scheer v Koubek*, 70 NY2d 678, 679 [1987]).

It is well settled that positive MRI results may constitute a serious injury within the meaning of Insurance Law §5102(d) (*see Pommels v Perez*, 797 NYS2d 380 [2005]; *Nagbe v Mimigreen Hacking Group, Inc.*, 802 NYS2d 416 [1 Dept. 2005]). Furthermore, a CT scan or MRI may constitute objective evidence to support subjective complaints (*see Arjona v Calcano*, 776 NYS2d 49 [1 Dept 2004]; *Lesser v Smart Cab Corp.*, 724 NYS2d 49 [1 Dept 2001]). The

plaintiff's medical submissions must show when the tests were performed, the objective nature of the tests, what the normal range of motion should be and whether the plaintiff's limitations were significant (*see Milazzo v Gesner*, 822 NYS2d 49 [1 Dept 2006]; *Vasquez v Reluzco*, 814 NYS2d [1 Dept 2006]).

With respect to the categories of significant limitation of use of a body function or system and permanent consequential limitation of use, "[w]hether a limitation of use or function is "significant" or "consequential" (i.e., important . . .) relates to medical significance and involves a comparative determination of the degree or qualitative nature of an injury based on the normal function, purpose and use of the body part" (*Toure v Avis Rent A Car Sys.*, *supra* quoting *Dufel v Green*, *supra*).

SUMMARY JUDGMENT STANDARD

The issue of whether a claimed injury falls within the statutory definition of "serious injury" is a question of law for the courts which may decide the issue on a motion for summary judgment (*Perez v Rodriguez*, 809 NYS2d 15 [1 Dept 2006]). On a motion for summary judgment based upon a failure to sustain a serious injury, the defendants bear the initial burden of establishing the absence of a serious injury by tendering evidentiary proof in admissible form eliminating any material issues of fact from the case (*Toure v Avis Rent A Car Sys.*, *supra*; *see also Gaddy v Eyer*, *supra*; *Pirrelli v Long Is. R.R.*, 641 NYS2d 240 [1 Dept 1996]).

Defendant may rely either on the sworn or affirmed statements of their examining physician, plaintiff's deposition testimony and plaintiff's unsworn physician's records (*Fragale v Geiger*, 733 NYS2d 901 [2 Dept 2001]; *Pagano v Kingsbury*, 587 NYS2d 692 [2 Dept 1992]). An affirmed physician's report demonstrating that plaintiff was not suffering from any disability or consequential injury resulting from the accident is sufficient to satisfy a defendant's burden of proof (*see Gaddy v Eyer*, *supra*). In addition, the Courts have unanimously held that a party may not use an unsworn medical report prepared by the parties' own physician on a motion for

summary judgment (See *Grasso v Angerami*, 79 NY2d 813 [1991]; *Offman v Singh*, 813 NY2d 56 [1 Dept 2006]). Moreover, CPLR § 2106 requires a physician's statement be affirmed (or sworn) to be true under the penalties of perjury.

Once defendant has made such a showing, the burden shifts to the plaintiff to come forward with prima facie evidence, in admissible form, to rebut the presumption that there is no issue of fact as to the threshold question (see *Pommells v Perez*, 797 NYS2d 380 [2005]; *Gaddy v Eyer*, *supra*; *Perez v Rodriguez*, *supra*). A medical affirmation or affidavit based on a physician's own examination, tests, and review of the record, can support the existence and extent of a plaintiff's serious injury (*O'Sullivan v Atrium Bus Co.*, 668 NYS2d 167 [1 Dept 1998]). However, "where a defendant fails to meet his initial burden of establishing a *prima facie* case that the plaintiff did not sustain a serious injury, it is not necessary to consider whether the plaintiff's papers in opposition were sufficient to raise a triable issue of fact" (see *Offman v Singh*, *supra*; *Winegrad v New York Univ. Med Ctr.*, *supra*).

DISCUSSION

In support of the motion, defendant proffers, *inter alia*, the plaintiffs deposition testimonies and the affirmed medical reports of Dr. Ragna Krishna, a neurologist, Dr. Marvin Winnell, an orthopedic surgeon and Dr. Sheldon Feit, a radiologist. All three doctors concluded that plaintiff demonstrated no signs of a disability, as a result of the subject accident.

Defendants has submitted evidence in legally admissible form to meet their *prima facie* burden, entitling them to summary judgment and a finding that plaintiff has not sustained a "serious injury" within the meaning of Insurance Law § 5102 [d] (see, *Gaddy v Eyer*, *supra*; *Lowe v Bennett*, 511 NYS2d 603 [1 Dept 1986], *Aff'd*, 69 NY2d 700 [1 Dept 1986]). The plaintiff, by failing to respond, has failed to raise a triable issue of material fact.

For these reasons and upon the foregoing papers, it is,

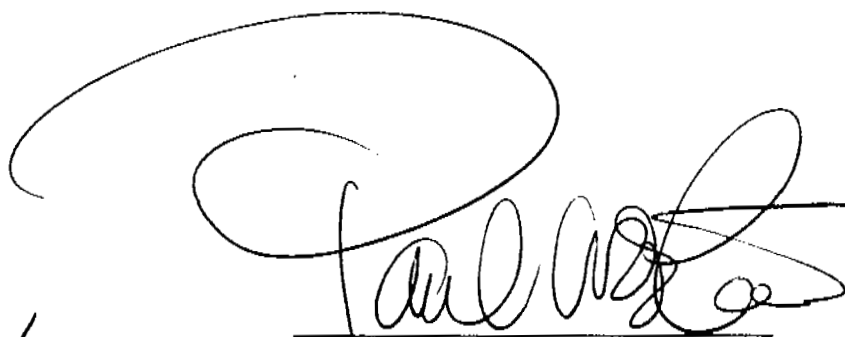
ORDERED that the defendants motion for summary judgment is granted, without

opposition; and it is further,

ORDERED that defendant shall serve a copy of this order, with notice of entry, upon all parties.

This constitutes the Decision and Order of the Court.

FILED
APR 06 2009
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NEW YORK



Paul Wooten
Paul Wooten, C.J.S.C.

Dated: March 30, 2009

Check one: FINAL DISPOSITION NON-FINAL DISPOSITION

Check if appropriate: DO NOT POST