

Hae Chung v GMG Enter., LLC
2015 NY Slip Op 31774(U)
September 8, 2015
Supreme Court, Queens County
Docket Number: 700734/12
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 6

ELIZABETH HAE CHUNG,

Plaintiff,

-against-

GMG ENTERPRISES, LLC and REVOLLO
GUIDO HERMN ANGULO,

Defendants.

Index No. 700734/12

Motion
Date July 6, 2015

Motion
Cal. No. 26

Motion
Sequence No. 4

	<u>Papers Numbered</u>
Notice of Motion.....	EF 35
Memo of Law.....	EF 36
Aff. In Support.....	EF 37
Affidavit of Service.....	EF 38
Aff. In Opposition.....	EF 40
Exhibits.....	EF 41
Aff. In Reply.....	EF 42
Affidavit of Service.....	EF 43

Upon the foregoing papers it is ordered that this motion by defendants for summary judgment dismissing the complaint of plaintiff, Elizabeth Hae Chung, 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 March 15, 2012. Defendants have submitted proof in admissible form in support of the motion for summary judgment, for all categories of serious injury. Defendants submitted inter alia, an affirmed report from an independent examining physician (an orthopedist) and plaintiff's own examination before trial transcript testimony.

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[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 [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 [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[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 [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 [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[2d Dept 1999];

Feintuch v. Grella, 209 AD2d 377[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 [1st Dept 1999]; Tompkins v. Budnick, 236 AD2d 708[3d Dept 1997]; Parker v. DeFontaine, 231 AD2d 412 [1st Dept 1996]; DiLeo v. Blumberg, 250 AD2d 364 [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. Defendants 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 defendants' independent examining orthopedist, Igor Rubinshteyn, M.D., indicates that an examination conducted on February 12, 2015 revealed a diagnosis of: resolved cervical spine, lumbar spine, and left shoulder sprain. He opines that: there were no objective residuals related to the subject accident.

Additionally, defendants established a prima facie case for the category of "90/180 days." The plaintiff's examination before trial transcript testimony indicates that: he only misses five (5) days of work as a result of the accident and he was not confined to home or bed for any period following the accident. 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 defendants'

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 raises a triable issue of fact

In opposition to the motion, plaintiff submitted: an attorney's affirmation, an affirmation of plaintiff's physician, Neofitos Stefanides, M.D., plaintiff's own affidavit, and an affirmation and sworn MRI reports of plaintiff's radiologist, Ayooob Khodadadi, M.D.

A medical affirmation or affidavit which is based upon a physician's personal examinations and observation 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, 688 NYS2d 167 [1st Dept 1980]). The causal connection must ordinarily be established by competent medical proof (see, Kociocek v. Chen, 283 AD2d 554 [2d Dept 2001]; Pommels v. Perez, 4 NY3d 566 [2005]). Plaintiff submitted medical proof that was contemporaneous with the accident showing range of motion limitations of the cervical spine (Pajda v. Pedone, 303 AD2d 729 [2d Dept 2003]). Plaintiff has established a causal connection between the accident and the cervical spine injuries. The affirmation submitted by plaintiff's physician, Neofitos Stefanides, M.D., sets forth the objective examination, tests, and review of medical records which were performed contemporaneously with the accident to support his conclusion that the plaintiff suffered from significant injuries, to wit: range of motion limitations of the cervical spine. Dr. Stefanides' affirmation details plaintiff's symptoms, including severe neck pain. He further opines that the cervical spine injuries sustained by the plaintiff in the accident were causally related to the motor vehicle accident of March 12, 2015. Additionally, plaintiff's radiologist, Ayooob Khodadadi, M.D., interpreted MRI films of plaintiff's cervical spine taken on April 18, 2012 and found an impression of: reversal of the cervical lordosis possibly due to muscular spasm, and central herniated disc at the C5-6 level. Furthermore, plaintiff has provided a recent medical examination detailing the status of her cervical spine injuries at the current point in time (Kauderer v. Penta, 261 AD2d 365 [2d Dept 1999]). The affirmation of Dr. Stefanides provides that a recent examination by Dr. Stefanides on May 13, 2015 sets forth the objective examination, tests, and

review of medical records which were performed to support his conclusion that the plaintiff suffers from significant injuries, to wit: range of motion limitations of the cervical spine. He further opines that the cervical spine injuries are permanent in nature, significant, and causally related to the subject motor vehicle accident. Clearly, the plaintiff's experts' conclusions are not based solely on the plaintiff's subjective complaints of pain, and therefore are sufficient to defeat the motion (DiLeo v. Blumber, supra, 250 AD2d 364, 672 NYS2d 319 [1st Dept 1998]).

Since there are triable issues of fact regarding whether the plaintiff sustained a serious injury to her cervical spine, plaintiff is entitled to seek recovery for all injuries allegedly incurred as a result of the accident (Marte v. New York City Transit Authority, 59 AD3d 398 [2d Dept 2009]).

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

Accordingly, the defendants' motion for summary judgment on the cause of action for personal injury is denied.

The clerk is directed to enter judgment accordingly.

That branch of the motion seeking to dismiss the property damage cause of action is hereby denied as the Property Damage Appraisers' Report submitted by defendants in the instant motion indicates property damages in the amount of \$2,414.14. Accordingly, as there is evidence of property damage, the cause of action for property damage shall remain.

This constitutes the decision and order of the Court.

Dated: September 8, 2015

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Howard G. Lane, J.S.C.