

Escalations via ECOMP and the new MTA position, Part 2



Regional Workers' Compensation Assistant Coby Jones

Last month's column provided a broad overview of OWCP's new escalations process. Overall, we have received very positive reviews of the process from both injured letter carriers and their representatives. Many issues that would go unresolved for months are now taken care of in a matter of days or weeks. Since the May column, OWCP has released a second circular on escalations, *FECA Circular* No. 23-06, that further discusses how the process works. In this month's

column we will discuss the nuts and bolts of the process.

Within each case in ECOMP there is now an escalations tab. Currently, claimants or their representatives can use this feature if they would like to submit an inquiry regarding an issue in any of the following areas that is unresolved:

- a. Payment for wage loss
- b. Payment of a medical bill
- c. Authorization of medical treatment/procedure
- d. Authorization of a medication
- e. Health benefits or life insurance issues
- f. Overpayment issues

Last month's column provided examples of possible issues in each of the above areas. Inquiry requests will be initially sent to the appropriate staff member, depending on the nature of the issue, and will be made part of the case file. OWCP has established an initial standard response time of two business days, during which time claimants or representatives may not submit additional inquiries or escalation requests on the same issue.

For example, if a claimant or representative submits a request on Tuesday, they should expect a response by the end of the day Thursday. If they submit a request on Friday, they should expect a response by the end of the day Tuesday. In tracking the days, claimants and representatives should keep in mind that OWCP observes all federal holidays.

If after two business days the issue remains unresolved, claimants or their representative may escalate the inquiry. The inquiry will be submitted to the same individual but will also be escalated to the individual's supervisor. Claimants should then expect a response within two business days.

If two business days pass from the second request and the issue remains unresolved, claimants or their

representatives may escalate to the office director by resubmitting their request a third time.

Note that all active inquiries within escalations will appear in the legend on the bottom of the ECOMP dashboard. The "Review or Escalate Inquiries" section will display a table with inquiries that have been submitted for the case. The "Notified" column indicates the staff member(s) who have been notified about the issue, and the "Request #" column indicates the number of times an inquiry has been made about the issue.

The ECOMP escalations process will help ensure that inquiries are directed to the most appropriate Federal Employees' Compensation Act staff member and that both the inquiry and resolution will be fully documented in the claimant's case file. Accordingly, email communication to DOL and/or OWCP employees from claimants or entities registered in ECOMP regarding issues that can be escalated will be redirected to the escalations feature in ECOMP.

In similar fashion, OWCP has created a new interactive voice response (IVR) system for phone inquiries. Previously, the IVR flow chart directed billing issues to CNSI (OWCP's billing and authorization agent), and everything else to the claims examiner. The new IVR flow chart will now funnel work away from claims examiners to let them focus on their basic claim responsibilities that were outlined in last month's column.

Here is how the workflow will be directed in the new IVR system:

- Press 1 for bill payment or authorizations—directs caller to a medical treatment adjudicator.
- Press 2 for medications—directs caller to a prescription adjudicator.
- Press 3 for health/life insurance issues—directs caller to a fiscal benefit specialist.
- Press 4 for overpayment issues—directs caller to an overpayment specialist.
- Press 5 for CA-7, wage-loss-compensation and other issues—directs caller to a claims examiner.

While the new IVR system mirrors the escalations process, OWCP's goal is for claimants and their representatives to use the more efficient escalations option within ECOMP rather than direct calling.

Claimants and their representatives also should be aware that help guides are available in ECOMP to assist them in using the escalations process. The guides can be accessed by selecting the help menu in the upper right-hand corner of the ECOMP home page ecomp.dol.gov/#/, or at ecomp.dol.gov/#/help.