



Addendum Compensation Service Bulletin

FEBRUARY 2014

Requiring X-Rays in Disability Examinations

There have been recent reports of the potentially harmful effects of exposing individuals to x-rays. We already know that exposure to ionizing radiation can be harmful. Veterans have been claiming non-specific joint pain in multiple joints as they are transitioning from the military to civilian life. The current practice is to provide x-rays of the claimed joints prior to the Veteran being seen by the examining physician. We are changing that practice.

Under the disability rating criteria in VA's Schedule for Rating Disabilities, a diagnosis of arthritis must be confirmed by x-ray or other radiographic testing before service connection may be established. Therefore, if arthritis is claimed, x-rays must be made a part of the examination. **Unless**, service treatment records (STRs) or other medical evidence of record shows arthritic changes in the claimed joint(s). Once arthritic changes are shown in a joint, no further x-rays will ever be required for that joint to support a diagnosis of arthritis.

Where there is a claim of non-specific joint pain in a joint or multiple joints, x-rays will no longer be provided **prior** to the Veteran being seen by the examiner. The examiner will determine if x-rays are needed in order to provide a diagnosis consistent with the history and symptomatology. If there is a diagnosis other than arthritis or a diagnosis of no disability, **do not** return the examination as insufficient merely because x-rays were not provided. However, an examination **would be insufficient if** arthritis is diagnosed and there are no x-rays to support that diagnosis.