

STATE OF MICHIGAN
STATE OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS AND RULES

ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

IN THE MATTER OF: [REDACTED]

Claimant

Reg. No: 2007-17797

Issue No: 2009

Case No: [REDACTED]

Load No: [REDACTED]

Hearing Date:

December 18, 2007

Mecosta County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Carmen G. Fahie

HEARING DECISION

This matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and MCL 400.37 upon claimant's request for a hearing. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on Tuesday, December 18, 2007. The claimant personally appeared and testified on his own behalf.

ISSUE

Did the department properly deny the claimant's application for Medical Assistance (MA-P) and retroactive Medical Assistance?

FINDINGS OF FACT

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the competent, material and substantial evidence on the whole record, finds as material fact:

(1) On May 10, 2007, the claimant applied for MA-P with retroactive MA-P to February 2007.

(2) On July 2, 2007, the Medical Review Team (MRT) denied the claimant's application for MA-P and retroactive MA-P stating that the claimant was capable of performing other work under 20 CFR 416.920(f).

(3) On July 3, 2007, the department caseworker sent the claimant a notice that his application was denied.

(4) On August 3, 2007, the department received a hearing request from the claimant, contesting the department's negative action.

(5) On November 19, 2007, the State Hearing Review Team (SHRT) considered the submitted objective medical evidence in making its determination of MA-P and retroactive MA-P eligibility for the claimant. The SHRT report reads in part:

The claimant is 53 years and alleges disability due to degenerative disc disease, inguinal hernia, and spinal stenosis at L5-S1. The claimant has a 12th grade education and a history of working as a machine operator.

The claimant has back pain with a grossly unremarkable EMG and nerve conduction study. He is able to ambulate without assistance. He has decreased reflexes in the left leg, but the remainder of his neurological exam was within normal limits. He had a reducible right inguinal hernia. The objective evidence does not support the significant limitation in standing/walking given on the 49 form. The claimant's treating physician has given less than sedentary work restrictions based on the claimant's physical impairments. However, this medical source opinion (MSO) is inconsistent with the great weight of the objective medical evidence and per 20 CFR 416.927c(2)(3)(4) and 20 CFR 416.927d(3)(4)(5), will not be given controlling weight. The collective objective medical evidence shows that the claimant is capable of performing light work.

The claimant's impairments do not meet/equal the intent or severity of a Social Security listing. The medical evidence of record indicates that the claimant retains the capacity to perform a wide range of light work. In lieu of detailed work history, the claimant will be returned to other work. Therefore, based on the claimant's vocational profile (closely approaching advanced age at

53, 12th grade education, and a history of working as a machine operator), MA-P is denied using Vocational Rule 202.13 as a guide. Retroactive MA-P was considered in this case and is also denied.

(6) During the hearing on December 18, 2007, the claimant requested permission to submit additional medical information that needed to be reviewed by SHRT. Additional medical information was received from the local office on April 4, 2008 and forwarded to SHRT for review on April 17, 2008.

(7) On May 7, 2008, the SHRT considered the newly submitted objective medical evidence in making its determination of MA-P and retroactive MA-P. The SHRT report reads in part:

The claimant has back pain with a grossly unremarkable EMG and nerve conduction study. He is able to ambulate without assistance. An MRI in [REDACTED] showed degenerative disease but no central disc herniation, but degenerative disc bulge at the lumbosacral level. The claimant had some giveaway strength in his lower extremities and muscle spasms. His neurological exam was basically within normal limits. He had a reducible right inguinal hernia. The objective evidence does not support the significant limitation in standing/walking given on the 49 form. The claimant's treating physician has given less than sedentary work restrictions based on the claimant's physical impairments. However, this medical source opinion (MSO) is inconsistent with the great weight of the objective medical evidence and per 20 CFR 416.927c(2)(3)(4) and 20 CFR 416.927d(3)(4)(5), will not be given controlling weight. The collective objective medical evidence shows that the claimant is capable of performing light work.

The claimant's impairments do not meet/equal the intent or severity of a Social Security listing. The medical evidence of record indicates that the claimant retains the capacity to perform a wide range of light work. In lieu of detailed work history, the claimant will be returned to other work. Therefore, based on the claimant's vocational profile (closely approaching advanced age at almost 54, 12th grade education, and a history of working as a machine operator), MA-P is denied using Vocational Rule 202.13

as a guide. Retroactive MA-P was considered in this case and is also denied.

(8) The claimant is a 55 year-old man whose date of birth is [REDACTED]. The claimant is 5' 9" tall and weighs 250 pounds. The claimant has gained 12 pounds in the past year because he is not able to move around. The claimant has a high school diploma. The claimant can read and write and do basic math. The claimant has been a machine operator since December 2000, which is his pertinent employment history.

(9) The claimant's alleged impairments are degenerative disc disease, inguinal hernia, and spinal stenosis.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Medical Assistance (MA) program is established by Title XIX of the Social Security Act and is implemented by Title 42 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The Department of Human Services (DHS or department) administers the MA program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MCL 400.105. Department policies are found in the Program Administrative Manual (PAM), the Program Eligibility Manual (PEM) and the Program Reference Manual (PRM).

"Disability" is:

...the inability to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.... 20 CFR 416.905.

...We follow a set order to determine whether you are disabled. We review any current work activity, the severity of your impairment(s), your residual functional capacity, your past work, and your age, education and work experience. If we can find that you are disabled or not disabled at any point in the review, we do not review your claim further.... 20 CFR 416.920.

...If you are working and the work you are doing is substantial gainful activity, we will find that you are not disabled regardless of your medical condition or your age, education, and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(b).

...[The impairment]...must have lasted or must be expected to last for a continuous period of at least 12 months. We call this the duration requirement. 20 CFR 416.909.

...If you do not have any impairment or combination of impairments which significantly limits your physical or mental ability to do basic work activities, we will find that you do not have a severe impairment and are, therefore, not disabled. We will not consider your age, education, and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(c).

[In reviewing your impairment]...We need reports about your impairments from acceptable medical sources.... 20 CFR 416.913(a).

...Statements about your pain or other symptoms will not alone establish that you are disabled; there must be medical signs and laboratory findings which show that you have a medical impairment.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

...You must provide medical evidence showing that you have an impairment(s) and how severe it is during the time you say that you are disabled. 20 CFR 416.912(c).

... [The record must show a severe impairment] which significantly limits your physical or mental ability to do basic work activities.... 20 CFR 416.920(c).

...Medical reports should include --

- (1) Medical history.
- (2) Clinical findings (such as the results of physical or mental status examinations);
- (3) Laboratory findings (such as blood pressure, X-rays);
- (4) Diagnosis (statement of disease or injury based on its signs and symptoms).... 20 CFR 416.913(b).

...The medical evidence...must be complete and detailed enough to allow us to make a determination about whether you are disabled or blind. 20 CFR 416.913(d).

Medical findings consist of symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings:

- (a) **Symptoms** are your own description of your physical or mental impairment. Your statements alone are not enough to establish that there is a physical or mental impairment.
- (b) **Signs** are anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which can be observed, apart from your statements (symptoms). Signs must be shown by medically acceptable clinical diagnostic techniques. Psychiatric signs are medically demonstrable phenomena which indicate specific psychological abnormalities e.g., abnormalities of behavior, mood, thought, memory, orientation, development, or perception. They must also be shown by observable facts that can be medically described and evaluated.
- (c) **Laboratory findings** are anatomical, physiological, or psychological phenomena which can be shown by the use of a medically acceptable laboratory diagnostic techniques. Some of these diagnostic techniques include chemical tests, electrophysiological studies (electrocardiogram, electroencephalogram, etc.), roentgenological studies (X-rays), and psychological tests. 20 CFR 416.928.

It must allow us to determine --

- (1) The nature and limiting effects of your impairment(s) for any period in question;
- (2) The probable duration of your impairment; and
- (3) Your residual functional capacity to do work-related physical and mental activities. 20 CFR 416.913(d).

Information from other sources may also help us to understand how your impairment(s) affects your ability to work. 20 CFR 416.913(e).

...You can only be found disabled if you are unable to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death, or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months. See 20 CFR 416.905. Your impairment must result from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which are

demonstrable by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory diagnostic techniques.... 20 CFR 416.927(a)(1).

...Evidence that you submit or that we obtain may contain medical opinions. Medical opinions are statements from physicians and psychologists or other acceptable medical sources that reflect judgments about the nature and severity of your impairment(s), including your symptoms, diagnosis and prognosis, what you can still do despite impairment(s), and your physical or mental restrictions. 20 CFR 416.927(a)(2).

...In deciding whether you are disabled, we will always consider the medical opinions in your case record together with the rest of the relevant evidence we receive. 20 CFR 416.927(b).

After we review all of the evidence relevant to your claim, including medical opinions, we make findings about what the evidence shows. 20 CFR 416.927(c).

...If all of the evidence we receive, including all medical opinion(s), is consistent, and there is sufficient evidence for us to decide whether you are disabled, we will make our determination or decision based on that evidence. 20 CFR 416.927(c)(1).

...If any of the evidence in your case record, including any medical opinion(s), is inconsistent with other evidence or is internally inconsistent, we will weigh all of the evidence and see whether we can decide whether you are disabled based on the evidence we have. 20 CFR 416.927(c)(2).

[As Judge]...We are responsible for making the determination or decision about whether you meet the statutory definition of disability. In so doing, we review all of the medical findings and other evidence that support a medical source's statement that you are disabled.... 20 CFR 416.927(e).

...A statement by a medical source that you are "disabled" or "unable to work" does not mean that we will determine that you are disabled. 20 CFR 416.927(e).

...If you have an impairment(s) which meets the duration requirement and is listed in Appendix 1 or is equal to a listed impairment(s), we will find you disabled without considering your age, education, and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(d).

...If we cannot make a decision on your current work activities or medical facts alone and you have a severe impairment, we will then review your residual functional capacity and the physical and mental demands of the work you have done in the past. If you can still do this kind of work, we will find that you are not disabled. 20 CFR 416.920(e).

If you cannot do any work you have done in the past because you have a severe impairment(s), we will consider your residual functional capacity and your age, education, and past work experience to see if you can do other work. If you cannot, we will find you disabled. 20 CFR 416.920(f)(1).

...Your residual functional capacity is what you can still do despite limitations. If you have more than one impairment, we will consider all of your impairment(s) of which we are aware. We will consider your ability to meet certain demands of jobs, such as physical demands, mental demands, sensory requirements, and other functions, as described in paragraphs (b), (c) and (d) of this section. Residual functional capacity is an assessment based on all of the relevant evidence.... 20 CFR 416.945(a).

...This assessment of your remaining capacity for work is not a decision on whether you are disabled, but is used as the basis for determining the particular types of work you may be able to do despite your impairment(s).... 20 CFR 416.945(a).

...In determining whether you are disabled, we will consider all of your symptoms, including pain, and the extent to which your symptoms can reasonably be accepted as consistent with objective medical evidence, and other evidence.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

...In evaluating the intensity and persistence of your symptoms, including pain, we will consider all of the available evidence, including your medical history, the medical signs and laboratory findings and statements about how your symptoms affect you... We will then determine the extent to which your alleged functional limitations or restrictions due to pain or other symptoms can reasonably be accepted as consistent with the medical signs and laboratory findings and other evidence to decide how your symptoms affect your ability to work.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

If you have more than one impairment, we will consider all of your impairments of which we are aware. We will consider your ability to meet certain demands of jobs, such as physical demands, mental demands, sensory requirements, and other functions as described in

paragraphs (b), (c) and (d) of this section. Residual functional capacity is an assessment based upon all of the relevant evidence. This assessment of your capacity for work is not a decision on whether you are disabled but is used as a basis for determining the particular types of work you may be able to do despite your impairment. 20 CFR 416.945.

...When we assess your physical abilities, we first assess the nature and extent of your physical limitations and then determine your residual functional capacity for work activity on a regular and continuing basis. A limited ability to perform certain physical demands of work activity, such as sitting, standing, walking, lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, or other physical functions (including manipulative or postural functions, such as reaching, handling, stooping or crouching), may reduce your ability to do past work and other work. 20 CFR 416.945(b).

Federal regulations require that the department use the same operative definition for “disabled” as used for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) under Title XVI of the Social Security Act. 42 CFR 435.540(a).

“Disability” is:

...the inability to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months ... 20 CFR 416.905

In determining whether an individual is disabled, 20 CFR 416.920 requires the trier of fact to follow a sequential evaluation process by which current work activity, the severity of the impairment(s), residual functional capacity, and vocational factors (i.e., age, education, and work experience) are assessed in that order. When a determination that an individual is or is not disabled can be made at any step in the sequential evaluation, evaluation under a subsequent step is not necessary.

First, the trier of fact must determine if the individual is working and if the work is substantial gainful activity. 20 CFR 416.920(b). At Step 1, the claimant is not engaged in

substantial gainful activity and has not worked since December 2000. Therefore, the claimant is not disqualified from receiving disability at Step 1.

Secondly, in order to be considered disabled for purposes of MA, a person must have a severe impairment. 20 CFR 416.920(c). A severe impairment is an impairment which significantly limits an individual's physical or mental ability to perform basic work activities. Basic work activities means, the abilities and aptitudes necessary to do most jobs. Examples of these include:

- (1) Physical functions such as walking, standing, sitting, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying or handling;
- (2) Capacities for seeing, hearing, and speaking;
- (3) Understanding, carrying out, and remembering simple instructions;
- (4) Use of judgment;
- (5) Responding appropriately to supervision, co-workers and usual work situations; and
- (6) Dealing with changes in a routine work setting. 20 CFR 416.921(b).

The purpose of the second step in the sequential evaluation process is to screen out claims lacking in medical merit. *Higgs v. Bowen* 880 F2d 860, 862 (6th Cir, 1988). As a result, the department may only screen out claims at this level which are "totally groundless" solely from a medical standpoint. The *Higgs* court used the severity requirement as a "*de minimus* hurdle" in the disability determination. The *de minimus* standard is a provision of a law that allows the court to disregard trifling matters.

The objective medical evidence on the record further substantiates the following:

On [REDACTED], the claimant was seen for a consultation. The claimant stated that he has constant pain. The claimant was given a comprehensive systemic review as well as an examination. The claimant did have some giveaway strength in his lower extremities. He had muscle spasms and decreased range of motion. The claimant had a flat affect. His reflexes were symmetrical. A review of his MRI scan showed severe L5 on S1 degenerative changes without significant disc herniation. (Department Exhibit A1)

On [REDACTED], the claimant was given a MRI of the lumbar spine. The radiologist's impression was degenerative disease of the lower spine. The degenerative change affects predominantly foramen. Central disc herniation was not seen, although, there was a very broad-base generative disc bulge at the lumbosacral level. (Department Exhibit 3-4)

On [REDACTED], the claimant's treating physician submitted a Medical Examination Report, DHS-49, for the claimant. The claimant was first examined on [REDACTED]. The claimant had a [REDACTED] back injury when running a machine at work. The claimant now has low back pain and left leg radiculopathy, and right inguinal bulge that started in [REDACTED]. The claimant's current diagnosis is degenerative disc disease at L5/S1, spinal stenosis lumbar, and right inguinal hernia. The claimant had a normal physical examination except his blood pressure was slightly elevated at 159/96. The claimant has a right inguinal hernia. The claimant favors the left leg which affects his ambulation. He had tenderness over the left paraspinals in the lumbar, and decreased strength in the lower extremities. Neurologically, the claimant had tremors. (Department Exhibit 32)

The treating physician's clinical impression was temporary disability and expected to return work 12 months from surgery. The claimant had physical limitations that were expected to last more than 90 days. The claimant could occasionally lift up to 20 pounds, but never 25

pounds. The claimant could stand and/or walk less than two hours of eight-hour workday and sit less than six hours of an eight-hour workday. There were no assistive devices medically required or needed for ambulation. The claimant could use both hands/feet, but only the right foot/leg for repetitive action. The claimant had no mental limitations. In addition, the claimant could meet his needs in the home. (Department Exhibit 33)

On [REDACTED], the claimant was seen by his treating neurologist from [REDACTED]. An MRI scan of the lumbar spine showed severe disc height at L5-S1 with Modic changes with foraminal stenosis suggesting that this was a L5-S1 disc disease which is the cause of his pain. The claimant had a normal physical examination. The claimant had decreased pinprick at the L5 and S1 dermatome in the left foot diffusely with no specific neurological deficits elicited. Straight leg raising test was 70 degrees bilateral. Flexion and extension of the lumbar spine increased the pain. (Department Exhibit 193-194)

At Step 2, the medical evidence in the record indicates that the claimant has established that he has a severe impairment. The claimant has degenerative disc disease with spinal stenosis and an inguinal hernia. Therefore, the claimant is not disqualified from receiving disability at Step 2. However, this Administrative Law Judge will proceed through the sequential evaluation process to determine disability because Step 2 is a *de minimus* standard.

In the third step of the sequential consideration of a disability claim, the trier of fact must determine if the claimant's impairment (or combination of impairments) is listed in Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR, Part 404. This Administrative Law Judge finds that the claimant's medical record will not support a finding that claimant's impairment(s) is a "listed impairment" or equal to a listed impairment. See Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR, Part 404, Part A. Accordingly, claimant cannot be found to be disabled based upon medical evidence

alone. 20 CFR 416.920(d). This Administrative Law Judge finds that the claimant's impairments do not rise to the level necessary to be listed as disabling by law. Therefore, the claimant is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 3.

In the fourth step of the sequential consideration of a disability claim, the trier of fact must determine if the claimant's impairment(s) prevents claimant from doing past relevant work. 20 CFR 416.920(e). It is the finding of this Administrative Law Judge, based upon the medical evidence and objective, physical and psychological findings, that the claimant does have a driver's license and drives with no problem. The claimant does not cook because he's not into cooking. The claimant grocery shops once a month, but his leg gives out. The claimant does not clean unless his mom insists every now and again. The claimant does mow the lawn with a push mower. The claimant felt that his condition has worsened in the past year because he is in a lot more pain where his left leg goes numb more often.

The claimant wakes up at 9:00 a.m. He watches TV. He gets on the computer. He shuffles through papers. He goes for a walk. He watches ballgames on TV. He goes to bed at 12:00 a.m.

The claimant felt that he could walk 2-3 miles. The longest he felt he could stand was 15-20 minutes. The longest he felt he could sit was 15-20 minutes. The heaviest weight he felt he could carry and walk was 25 pounds. The claimant's level of pain on a scale of 1 to 10 without medication was a 9-1/2; that decreases to a 6 with medication. The claimant stopped smoking in the 1970s where he would smoke 4-5 cigarettes a day. The claimant stopped drinking in 1989 where he would drink a fifth a day. The claimant does not or has ever used illegal or illicit drugs. The claimant stated that there was no work that he thought he could do.

This Administrative Law Judge finds that the claimant has established that he cannot perform any of his prior work. The claimant has a pertinent employment history as a machine operator, which the claimant would find difficult to perform with his back issues and his hernia. Therefore, the claimant is not disqualified from receiving disability at Step 4. However, the Administrative Law Judge will still proceed through the sequential evaluation process to determine whether or not the claimant has the residual functional capacity to perform some other less strenuous tasks than in his prior jobs.

In the fifth step of the sequential consideration of a disability claim, the trier of fact must determine if the claimant's impairment(s) prevents claimant from doing other work.

20 CFR 416.920(f). This determination is based upon the claimant's:

- (1) residual functional capacity defined simply as "what can you still do despite your limitations?" 20 CFR 416.945;
- (2) age, education, and work experience, 20 CFR 416.963-.965; and
- (3) the kinds of work which exist in significant numbers in the national economy which the claimant could perform despite his/her limitations. 20 CFR 416.966.

...To determine the physical exertion requirements of work in the national economy, we classify jobs as sedentary, light, medium, heavy, and very heavy. These terms have the same meaning as they have in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, published by the Department of Labor.... 20 CFR 416.967.

Sedentary work. Sedentary work involves lifting no more than 10 pounds at a time and occasionally lifting or carrying articles like docket files, ledgers, and small tools. Although a sedentary job is defined as one which involves sitting, a certain amount of walking and standing is often necessary in carrying out job duties. Jobs are sedentary if walking and standing are required occasionally and other sedentary criteria are met. 20 CFR 416.967(a).

Light work. Light work involves lifting no more than 20 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 10 pounds. Even though the weight lifted may be very little, a job is in this category when it requires a good deal of walking or standing, or when it involves sitting most of the time with some pushing and pulling of arm or leg controls.... 20 CFR 416.967(b).

...To be considered capable of performing a full or wide range of light work, you must have the ability to do substantially all of these activities. If someone can do light work, we determine that he or she can also do sedentary work, unless there are additional limiting factors such as loss of fine dexterity or inability to sit for long periods of time. 20 CFR 416.967(b).

The claimant has submitted sufficient evidence that he lacks the residual functional capacity to perform some other less strenuous tasks than in his previous employment or that he is physically unable to do any tasks demanded of him. The claimant's testimony as to his limitation indicates his limitations are exertional.

At Step 5, the claimant cannot meet the physical requirements of light work, based upon the claimant's physical abilities. Under the Medical-Vocational guidelines, a closely approaching advanced age individual, with a high school education, and an unskilled work history, who is limited to light work, is considered disabled. 20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Rule 202.13. Using the Medical-Vocational guidelines as a framework for making this decision and after giving full consideration to the claimant's physical and mental impairments, the Administrative Law Judge finds that the claimant cannot perform a wide range of light activities and that the claimant does meet the definition of disabled under the MA program. The claimant is eligible for Medical Assistance retroactive to February 2007 until November 2010.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department has not established that it was acting in compliance with

department policy when it denied the claimant's application for MA-P and retroactive MA-P.

The claimant cannot perform any level of light work. The department has not established its case by a preponderance of the evidence.

Accordingly, the department's decision is **REVERSED**. The claimant is eligible for retroactive MA-P to February 2007 with a medical review required November 2010.

/s/ _____
Carmen G. Fahie
Administrative Law Judge
for Ismael Ahmed, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: October 8, 2009

Date Mailed: October 8, 2009

NOTICE: Administrative Hearings may order a rehearing or reconsideration on either its own motion or at the request of a party within 30 days of the mailing date of this Decision and Order. Administrative Hearings will not order a rehearing or reconsideration on the Department's motion where the final decision cannot be implemented within 90 days of the filing of the original request.

The Claimant may appeal the Decision and Order to Circuit Court within 30 days of the mailing of the Decision and Order or, if a timely request for rehearing was made, within 30 days of the receipt date of the rehearing decision.

CGF/vmc

cc:

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