

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: 2007-27415

Issue No: 2009

Case No: [REDACTED]

Load No: [REDACTED]

Hearing Date:

November 20, 2008

Macomb County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Linda Steadley Schwarb

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 hearing was held on November 20, 2008. Claimant appeared and testified. Following the hearing, the record was kept open for the receipt of additional medical evidence. Additional documents were received and reviewed.

ISSUE

Did the Department of Human Services (DHS or department) properly determine that claimant is no longer "disabled" for purposes of the Medical Assistance (MA-P) program?

FINDINGS OF FACT

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

- (1) Claimant has been on ongoing recipient of MA-P benefits since July of 2003.

(2) On July 12, 2007, the department notified claimant that it intended to terminate her MA-P effective July 24, 2007 based upon the belief that claimant no longer met the requisite disability criteria.

(3) On July 16, 2007, claimant filed a timely hearing request to protest the department's determination.

(4) Thereafter, the department deleted its proposed negative action pending the outcome of the instant hearing.

(5) Claimant, age 48, has a 9th grade education.

(6) Claimant's last relevant work was reported to have occurred in 1997 when claimant wrapped meat and waited on customers behind a meat counter. Claimant is reported to also have performed relevant work as a machine operator, grill cook, and bakery worker. All of claimant's relevant work experiences consisted exclusively of unskilled work activities.

(7) Claimant has a history of mental health problems with psychiatric hospitalizations as well as substance abuse.

(8) Claimant suffers from Bipolar I disorder, mixed; polysubstance dependence; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; hypertension; fibromyalgia; and obstructive sleep apnea.

(9) When comparing current medical documentation with documentation from the most recent Medical Review Team approval, it is found that medical improvement of claimant's condition has not occurred as there has been no decrease in the severity of claimant's impairments as shown by changes in symptoms, signs, and/or laboratory findings.

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).

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

Once an individual has been determined to be “disabled” for purposes of disability benefits, continued entitlement to benefits must be periodically reviewed. In evaluating whether an individual’s disability continues, 20 CFR 416.994 requires the trier of fact to follow a sequential evaluation process by which current work activities, severity of impairment(s), and the possibility of medical improvement and its relationship to the individual’s ability to work are assessed. Review may cease and benefits may be continued at any point if there is substantial evidence to find that the individual is unable to engage in substantial gainful activity. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5).

First, the trier of fact must determine if the individual is working and if work is substantial gainful activity. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(i). In this case, claimant is not currently working. Accordingly, claimant may not be disqualified for MA at this step in the sequential evaluation process.

Secondly, if the individual has an impairment or combination of impairments which meet or equal the severity of an impairment listed in Appendix 1 to Subpart P of Part 404 of

Chapter 20, disability is found to continue. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(ii). This Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant's impairments are not "listed impairments" nor equal to listed impairments. Accordingly, the sequential evaluation process must continue.

In the third step of the sequential evaluation, the trier of fact must determine whether there has been medical improvement as defined in 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(i). 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(iii). Medical improvement is defined as any decrease in the medical severity of the impairment(s) which was present at the time of the most recent favorable medical decision that the claimant was disabled or continues to be disabled. A determination that there has been a decrease in medical severity must be based on changes (improvement) in the symptoms, signs, and/or laboratory findings associated with claimant's impairment(s). If there has been medical improvement as shown by a decrease in medical severity, the trier of fact must proceed to Step 4 (which examines whether the medical improvement is related to the claimant's ability to do work). If there has been no decrease in medical severity and thus no medical improvement, the trier of fact moves to Step 5 in the sequential evaluation process.

In this case, claimant was most recently approved by the Medical Review Team on September 20, 2005. At that time, claimant was diagnosed with Bipolar I disorder, mixed. She was also found to suffer from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and alcoholic hepatitis. More recently, on December 22, 2008, claimant's primary care physician [REDACTED] diagnosed claimant with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, hypertension, alcoholic hepatitis, bipolar disorder, fibromyalgia, and obstructive sleep apnea. The physician found that claimant was limited to occasionally lifting up to 10 pounds as well as limited to standing and walking less than 2 hours in an 8-hour work day and sitting less than 6 hours in an 8-hour work day. The physician found claimant to be incapable of repetitive activities with the bilateral lower extremities as well as incapable of reaching and pushing/pulling with the bilateral upper

extremities. The treating physician found claimant had mental limitations, particularly with comprehension, sustained concentration, and social interaction. On December 22, 2008, claimant's treating psychiatrist continued claimant's diagnosis of Bipolar I disorder, mixed. The treating psychiatrist gave claimant a current GAF score of 40 and found claimant to be markedly limited in all areas of understanding and memory, sustained concentration and persistence, social interaction, and adaption. Thus, after comparing past medical documentation with current medical documentation, the undersigned Administrative Law Judge finds that there has been no medical improvement.

In the fifth step of the sequential evaluation, the trier of fact must consider whether any of the exceptions in 20 CFR 416.994(b)(3) and (b)(4) apply. If none of them apply, claimant's disability must be found to continue. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(v).

The first group of exceptions to medical improvement (i.e., when disability can be found to have ended even though medical improvement has not occurred), found in 20 CFR 416.994(b)(3), are as follows:

- (1) Substantial evidence shows that the claimant is the beneficiary of advances in medical or vocational therapy or technology (related to claimant's ability to work).
- (2) Substantial evidence shows that the claimant has undergone vocational therapy (related to claimant's ability to work).
- (3) Substantial evidence shows that based on new or improved diagnostic or evaluative techniques, claimant's impairment(s) is not as disabling as it was considered to be at the time of the most recent favorable medical decision.
- (4) Substantial evidence demonstrates that any prior disability decision was in error.

In examining the record, this Administrative Law Judge finds that there is nothing to suggest that any of the exceptions listed above apply to claimant's case.

The second group of exceptions is medical improvement, found at 20 CFR 416.994(b)(4), are as follows:

- (1) A prior determination was fraudulently obtained.
- (2) Claimant did not cooperate.
- (3) Claimant cannot be located.
- (4) Claimant failed to follow prescribed treatment which would be expected to restore claimant's ability to engage in substantial gainful activity.

After careful review of the record, this Administrative Law Judge finds that none of the above-mentioned exceptions apply to claimant's case. Accordingly, per 20 CFR 416.994, the undersigned concludes that claimant's disability for purposes of MA must continue.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that claimant continues to be "disabled" for purposes of the Medical Assistance program. Accordingly, the department's determination in this matter is hereby REVERSED.

The department is ORDERED to maintain claimant's eligibility for Medical Assistance if she is otherwise eligible for program benefits. The department should review claimant's continued eligibility for Medical Assistance in March of 2010.

/s/
Linda Steadley Schwarb
Administrative Law Judge
for Ismael Ahmed, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: 6/16/09

Date Mailed: 6/22/09

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 mailing date of the rehearing decision.

LSS/cv

cc:

