

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: 2008-20003

Issue No: 2009

Case No: [REDACTED]

Load No: [REDACTED]

Hearing Date:

January 7, 2009

Delta 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 Wednesday, January 7, 2009. The claimant personally appeared and testified on her own behalf.

ISSUE

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

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 June 5, 2008, the claimant applied for MA-P without filing an application for retroactive MA-P.

(2) On August 6, 2008, the Medical Review Team (MRT) denied the claimant's application for MA-P stating that the claimant was capable of performing other work.

(3) On August 11, 2008, the department caseworker sent the claimant a notice that her application had been denied.

(4) On August 29, 2008, the department received a hearing request from the claimant, contesting the department's negative action.

(5) On September 15, 2008, 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 49 years old with 11 years of education with a history of unskilled work. The claimant's alleges disability due to middle, left side, abdominal pain. The claimant did not meet Social Security Administration applicable listing 5.05, 1.02, and 1.04. The claimant had a non-severe impairment/condition per 20 CFR 416.920(c). No severe impairments were clinically documented.

(6) The claimant is a 49 year-old woman whose date of birth is [REDACTED]. The claimant is 5' 6" tall and weighs 172 pounds. The claimant has gained 38 pounds in the past year because she can't do anything. The claimant has completed the 11th grade of high school. She was last employed as a sales associates on May 5, 2008. The claimant has also been employed as an activity assistant, laundry aide, baker, cashier, bartender, and stocker.

(7) The claimant's alleged impairments are back pain, thoracic radiculopathy, degenerative disc disease, and post herpetic neuralgia.

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). In this case, the claimant is not engaged in substantial gainful employment and has not worked since May 5, 2008. 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 treating specialist’s opinion a [REDACTED]. The claimant was there for a follow-up on her [REDACTED] examination. The treating specialist’s clinical impression was chronic thoracic disc disease. The MRI of the cervical spine showed some disc disease with impingement of the C6 nerve root on the left. The MRI of the brain did not show any evidence of neuron disease or other significant changes. The claimant’s MRI of her brain was essentially unremarkable. The claimant’s screening laboratory studies showed elevated titers to the herpes simplex virus type 1 and type 2. ANA was also slighted elevated at 1:80 in a speckled pattern. Her Epstein Barr virus IgG titers were also positive suggesting a prior infection. The claimant’s IgM titers were negative. CMV titers were also negative. The claimant was doing somewhat better. The claimant stated that her symptoms were improved. She stated that she has a low grade fever intermittently. Although it is less problematic and less frequent. Radicular pain from the thoracic region was much improved. The

treating specialist believed that the claimant had post herpetic neuralgia. (Department Exhibit 157)

On [REDACTED], claimant was given a MRI of the brain without contrast at [REDACTED]. The radiologist's impression was no evidence of multiple sclerosis at this time with an unremarkable MRI of the brain and spinal cord. (Department Exhibit 146)

On [REDACTED], the claimant was given a MRI of the spine without contrast. The radiologist's impression was that there was evidence of uncovertebral degenerative and left foraminal and lateral disk component measuring approximately 1.0 x 0.6 cm, which appears to encroach upon the exiting last C6 nerve root. There was no evidence of central canal stenosis or abnormal T2 signal changes within the visual brain stem or spinal cord. (Department Exhibit 147-148)

On [REDACTED], the claimant was seen at [REDACTED]. The claimant had repeated thoracic epidural steroid injections on [REDACTED] for her current thoracic back pain diagnosed as radiculopathy at T5-6 and at T10-11. The claimant's pain relieve at the T5-6 level has been fairly complete through she has noticed some increase in discomfort in the lower thoracic segment which the treating pain specialist physician addressed yesterday with thoracic epidural injection at T9-10. (Department Exhibit 166)

At Step 2, the objective medical evidence on the record indicates that claimant has established that she has a severe impairment. The claimant has post herpetic neuralgia with chronic thoracic back pain and radicular symptoms. The claimant has had some improvement and success in reducing the pain with seeing the pain specialist and with medication prescribed by her treating neurologist. 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 does drive. The claimant does have a problem sitting so she prefers not to drive. The claimant cooks once or twice a month where she has a problem standing and she drops things. The claimant grocery shops with her husband twice a month. She has to sit and take a break because of the pain and she doesn't lift anything. The claimant does clean her own home where it takes longer. She washes dishes where she has to sit and take a break. The claimant doesn't do any outside work. Her hobby is reading. The claimant felt her condition has worsened in the past year because of the increase in pressure. The claimant stated that she did not have any mental impairment.

The claimant wakes up between 6:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. She makes coffee. She stated that she does have a problem sleeping at night. She watches TV. She eats a breakfast of cereal. She takes her meds and reads. She lets the dogs out. She watches TV during the day. She takes a nap between 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. or 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. She goes to bed at 8:00 p.m.

The claimant felt she could walk 100 to 150 feet. The longest she felt she could stand was 10 minutes. The longest she felt she could sit was an hour to an hour and a half. The heaviest weight she felt she could carry was 15 pounds, but she is afraid of dropping things. The claimant's pain on a scale from 1 to 10 without medication was a 6 that decreases to a 3 with medication. The claimant stopped smoking on [REDACTED] where before she would smoke a pack a week. The claimant drinks alcohol once a month to two to three times a month. The claimant is not currently or has never done illegal or illicit drugs. The claimant felt that there was no work that she felt that she could do.

This Administrative Law Judge finds that the claimant has not established that she cannot perform any of her prior work. The claimant was last employed as a sales associate and cashier, which is performed at the light to sedentary level in the national economy. The claimant does have post herpetic neuralgia where she has some encroachment on the exiting left C6 nerve root and some disk degeneration, but there was no evidence of central canal stenosis or abnormal T2 signal changes based on a MRI performed on [REDACTED]. The claimant did get relief from pain from thoracic epidural steroid injections as related by her treating pain specialist physician on [REDACTED]. The claimant would be unable to do her prior occupation as a laundry aide, baker, bartender, and stocker because those employment duties require a lot of lifting and standing. The claimant was previously employed as an activity assistant where she was engaged in activities for the senior citizens in her home, but if she is still having chronic pain and other

health issues, she may be unable to have the upbeat personality required to be an activity assistant. Therefore, the claimant is 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 her 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 insufficient evidence that she lacks the residual functional capacity to perform some other less strenuous tasks than in her prior employment or that she is physically unable to do any tasks demanded of her. The claimant's testimony as to her limitation indicates her limitations are exertional.

At Step 5, the claimant should be able to meet the physical requirements of at least light work, based upon the claimant's physical abilities. Under the Medical-Vocational guidelines, a younger individual, with a limited or less education, and a skilled and unskilled work history, who is limited to light work, is not considered disabled. 20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Rule 202.18. Using the Medical-Vocational guidelines as a framework for making this decision and after giving full consideration to the claimant's physical impairments, the Administrative Law Judge finds that the claimant can still perform a wide range of light activities and that the claimant does not meet the definition of disabled under the MA program.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department has appropriately 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 should be able to perform any level of light work. The department has established its case by a preponderance of the evidence.

Accordingly, the department decision is **AFFIRMED**.

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

Date Signed: February 20, 2009

Date Mailed: February 24, 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

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