

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: 2008-9459

Issue No: 2009; 4031

Case No: [REDACTED]

Load No: [REDACTED]

Hearing Date:

April 16, 2008

Genesee County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Janice Spodarek

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 April 16, 2008.

ISSUE

Did the Department of Human Services (DHS) properly deny claimant's Medical Assistance (MA-P) and State Disability Assistance (SDA) application?

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 8/21/07, claimant applied for MA-P and SDA with the Michigan DHS.
- (2) Claimant did not apply for retro MA.
- (3) On 9/26/07, the MRT denied.
- (4) On 10/1/07, the DHS issued notice.

(5) On 11/6/07, claimant filed a hearing request.

(6) Claimant has an SSI application pending with the Social Security Administration (SSA). Claimant further testified that she has been denied approximately three times. Claimant was previously denied with a final determination approximately one year previously and is alleging the same impairments.

(7) On 3/5/08 the State Hearing Review Team (SHRT) denied claimant. Pursuant to claimant's request to hold the record open for the submission of new and additional medical documentation, on 5/9/08 SHRT once again denied claimant.

(8) As of the date of application, claimant was a 37-year-old female standing 5' 6" tall and weighing 262 pounds. Claimant's BMI Index is 42.3, which places claimant in the morbidly obese category. Claimant has a GED education.

(9) Claimant does not have an alcohol/drug abuse problem or history. Claimant smokes approximately 2 ½ packs of cigarettes per day. Claimant has a nicotine addiction. Claimant has COPD and has been advised to cease smoking.

(10) Claimant has a driver's license and testified she does not drive "because of my eyes."

(11) Claimant last worked in July or August of 2006 at a [REDACTED] Claimant has worked as a waitress. Claimant's work history is unskilled.

(12) Claimant alleges disability on the basis of breathing problems and bipolar disorder.

(13) The March 6, 2008 SHRT findings and conclusions of its decision are adopted and incorporated by reference to the following extent:

Medical Summary: Physical exam: Claimant was alert, oriented, cooperative, memory intact, affect and effort appropriate, heart functioning with regular rhythm and rate. Breath sounds were mildly distant. No rales, rhonchi or wheezing. No accessory muscle

use. Breathing test showed a mild obstructive ventilatory defect with a slight degree of reverse ability. It was thought that claimant would benefit being on medication and stopping smoking.

Eye test of 7/07 reported best corrected right eye vision of 20/40 and left eye 20/25 with adequate fields. Exhibits 10, 11, 24.

Diagnosis of depression, rule out bipolar with normal mental status examinations. Exhibits 17, 32. Daily activities performed independently. Exhibit 38. Mental functioning restrictions assessed 9/07 were not clinically/objectively documented.

Analysis: Claimant has mild restrictive breathing condition that can be managed with medication and ceasing to smoke. Claimant is alert and oriented. Home care needs met.

(14) The subsequent SHRT decision is adopted and incorporated to the following extent:

Returned from SOAHR with newly submitted correspondence.

New information: Letter from Mental Health dated 2/08 states claimant appeared to be deteriorating rapidly with respect to her shortness of breath and extensive limitations and capacity for daily activities. Exhibit A.

Analysis: New information does not contain any objective medical evidence. New information does not change or alter previous decision.

(15) Claimant's physical exam states in part: Claimant has morbid obesity, and the COPD is secondary to cigarette smoking. Exhibit 7.

(16) The DDS evaluation states in part that claimant walks with a normal gait without the use of an assistive device, can pick up a coin, button closing, and open a door. Range of motion of joints is full. Exhibits 9-12.

(17) A DHS-49 completed 8/17/08 does not restrict claimant with regards to lifting, standing, sitting, or walking. In the mental limitations box, the physician writes: "No limitations." Exhibit 38.

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).

The State Disability Assistance (SDA) program which provides financial assistance for disabled persons is established by 2004 PA 344. The Department of Human Services (DHS or department) administers the SDA program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MAC R 400.3151-400.3180. Department policies are found in the Program Administrative Manual (PAM), the Program Eligibility Manual (PEM) and the Program Reference Manual (PRM).

Statutory authority for the SDA program states in part:

- (b) A person with a physical or mental impairment which meets federal SSI disability standards, except that the minimum duration of the disability shall be 90 days. Substance abuse alone is not defined as a basis for eligibility.

In order to receive MA benefits based upon disability or blindness, claimant must be disabled or blind as defined in Title XVI of the Social Security Act (20 CFR 416.901). DHS, being authorized to make such disability determinations, utilizes the SSI definition of disability when making medical decisions on MA applications. MA-P (disability), also is known as Medicaid, which is a program designated to help public assistance claimants pay their medical expenses. Michigan administers the federal Medicaid program. In assessing eligibility, Michigan utilizes the federal regulations.

Prior to any substantive review, jurisdiction is paramount. Applicable to the case herein, policy states:

Final SSI Disability Determination

SSA's determination that disability or blindness does **not** exist for SSI purposes is **final** for MA if:

- . The determination was made after 1/1/90, **and**
- . No further appeals may be made at SSA, **or**
- . The client failed to file an appeal at any step within SSA's 60-day limit, **and**
- . The client is **not** claiming:
 - .. A totally different disabling condition than the condition SSA based its determination on, **or**
 - .. An additional impairment(s) or change or deterioration in his condition that SSA has **not** made a determination on.

Eligibility for MA based on disability or blindness does **not** exist once SSA's determination is **final**. PEM, Item 260, pp. 2-3.

Relevant federal regulations are found at 42 CFR Part 435. These regulations provide:

“An SSA disability determination is binding on an agency until the determination is changed by the SSA.” 42 CFR 435.541(a)(b)(i). These regulations further provide: “If the SSA determination is changed, the new determination is also binding on the agency.” 42 CFR 435.541(a)(b)(ii).

In this case, there is apparently no dispute relative to the facts. Claimant's claim was considered by SSA and benefits denied. The determination was final. Claimant is alleging the same impairments. None of the exceptions apply.

For these reasons, under the above-cited policy and federal law, this Administrative Law Judge has no jurisdiction to proceed with a substantive review. The department's denial must be upheld.

As noted above, should the SSA change its determination, then the new determination would also be binding on the DHS.

In the alternative, should the sequential analysis be applied, relevant federal regulations state in part:

"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.

The federal regulations require that several considerations be analyzed in sequential order:

...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.

The regulations require that if disability can be ruled out at any step, analysis of the next step is not required. These steps are:

1. 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). If no, the analysis continues to Step 2.
2. Does the client have a severe impairment that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more or result in death? If no, the client is ineligible for MA. If yes, the analysis continues to Step 3. 20 CFR 416.909(c).
3. Does the impairment appear on a special Listing of Impairments or are the client's symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings at least equivalent in severity to the set of medical findings specified for the listed impairment that meets the duration requirement? If no, the analysis continues to Step 4. If yes, MA is approved. 20 CFR 416.920(d).
4. Can the client do the former work that he/she performed within the last 15 years? If yes, the client is ineligible for MA. If no, the analysis continues to Step 5. Sections 200.00-204.00(f)?

5. Does the client have the Residual Functional Capacity (RFC) to perform other work according to the guidelines set forth at 20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Sections 200.00-204.00? This step considers the residual functional capacity, age, education, and past work experience to see if the client can do other work. If yes, the analysis ends and the client is ineligible for MA. If no, MA is approved. 20 CFR 416.920(g).

At application claimant has the burden of proof pursuant to:

...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).

Federal regulations are very specific regarding the type of medical evidence required by claimant to establish statutory disability. The regulations essentially require laboratory or clinical medical reports that corroborate claimant's claims or claimant's physicians' statements regarding disability. These regulations state in part:

...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 sure, X-rays);
- (4) Diagnosis (statement of disease or injury based on its signs and symptoms)... 20 CFR 416.913(b).

...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).

...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).

It is noted that Congress removed obesity from the Listing of Impairments shortly after the removal of drug addition and alcoholism. This removal reflects the view that there is a strong behavioral component to obesity. Thus, obesity in-and-of itself is not sufficient to show statutory disability.

Applying the sequential analysis herein, claimant is not ineligible at the first step as claimant is not currently working. 20 CFR 416.920(b). The analysis continues.

The second step of the analysis looks at a two-fold assessment of duration and severity. 20 CFR 416.920(c). This second step is a *de minimus* standard. Ruling any ambiguities in claimant's favor, this Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) finds that claimant meets both. The analysis continues.

The third step of the analysis looks at whether an individual meets or equals one of the Listings of Impairments. 20 CFR 416.920(d). Claimant does not. The analysis continues.

The fourth step of the analysis looks at the ability of the applicant to return to past relevant work. This step examines the physical and mental demands of the work done by claimant in the past. 20 CFR 416.920(f).

In this case, this ALJ finds that claimant cannot return to past relevant work on the basis of the medical evidence. The analysis continues.

The fifth and final step of the analysis applies the biographical data of the applicant to the Medical Vocational Grids to determine the residual functional capacity of the applicant to do other work. 20 CFR 416.920(g). After a careful review of the credible and substantial evidence on the whole record, this Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant is denied pursuant to Medical Vocational Grid Rule 203.28. This Administrative Law Judge concurs with SHRT.

In reaching this conclusion, it is noted that claimant's COPD is secondary to smoking. Claimant's physicians have recommended ceasing smoking. Claimant is not following recommended treatment and thus, on this basis alone could be denied pursuant to the failure to follow recommended treatment under 20 CFR 416.930.

Claimant's obesity, as already noted, is not considered statutorily disabling. The obesity listing was removed at approximately the same time by Congress when it removed drug and

alcohol. This removal reflected a strong view that obesity has an extremely strong behavioral component. It is not like other “diseases.”

Claimant’s smoking and obesity are the types of behaviors which reflect “individual responsibility” as reflected in the *SIAS v Secretary of Health and Human Services*, 861 F2d 475 (6th Cir 1988) decision. This decision states in part:

The Social Security Act did not repeal the principle of individual responsibility. Each of us faces myriads of choices in life, and the choices we make, whether we like it or not, have consequences. If the claimant in this case chooses to drive himself to an early grave, that is his privilege--but if he is not truly disabled, he has no right to require those who pay Social Security taxes to help underwrite the cost of his ride. *SIAS*, supra, p. 481.

As noted by *SIAS*, claimant’s lifestyle choices do not reflect someone who is quickly deteriorating to the point of no return by quickly spiraling into a diseased state as reflected in the CMH note. It is also noted that CMH is not in a position to assess claimant’s physical problems as a physician would. CMH’s focus on claimant’s COPD is outside the type of purview generally recognized by the federal regulations with regards to expertise by different personnel and in assessing the sufficiency requirements of the medical evidence warrant statutory disability. See 20 CFR 416.913.

Nor does any of the medical evidence with regards to any alleged mental limitation rise to statutory disability as it is defined under the law. See 20 CFR 416.913(b), .913(d), and .913(e); 20 CFR 416.927; 20 CFR 416.930.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department’s actions were correct.

Accordingly, the department's determination in this matter is UPHELD.

/s/

Janice Spodarek
Administrative Law Judge
for Ismael Ahmed, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: June 17, 2009

Date Mailed: June 18, 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 mailing date of the rehearing decision.

JS/cv

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