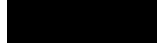


STATE OF MICHIGAN
STATE OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS AND RULES

ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

IN THE MATTER OF:



Claimant

Reg. No.: 2008-23323
Issue No.: 2009/4031
Case No.:
Load No.:
Hearing Date:
February 2, 2009
Genesee County DHS (2)

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 February 2, 2009. The claimant appeared and testified. Following the hearing, the record was kept open for 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 not "disabled" for purposes of the Medical Assistance (MA-P) and State Disability Assistance (SDA) programs?

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 April 4, 2008, claimant filed an application for MA-P and SDA benefits. Claimant did not request retroactive medical coverage.

- (2) On June 3, 2008, the department denied claimant's application for benefits based upon the belief that claimant did not meet the requisite disability criteria.
- (3) On June 9, 2008, claimant filed a hearing request to protest the department's determination.
- (4) Claimant, age 46, has a high school education.
- (5) Claimant last worked in January 2003 as an administrative assistant. Claimant has also performed relevant work as a computer operator.
- (6) Claimant suffers from Grade I Spondylolisthesis of L5 over S1 vertebrae from bilateral pars articular defect causing moderate to severe segmental spinal stenosis and bilateral neural foraminal stenosis; disc herniation at C6-C7 with cervical radiculopathy; degenerative disc disease of the cervical and lumbar spine; hypothyroidism; major depressive disorder; and pain disorder associated with both psychological factors and a general medical condition.
- (7) Claimant has severe limitations upon her ability to walk, stand, sit, lift, and carry as well as limitations upon her ability to respond appropriately to others and deal with changes in a routine work setting. Claimant's limitations have lasted for 12 months or more.
- (8) Claimant's complaints and allegations concerning her impairments and limitations, when considered in light of all objective medical evidence, as well as the record as a whole, reflect an individual who is so impaired as to be incapable of engaging in any substantial gainful activity on a regular and continuing basis.

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

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, claimant is not working. Therefore, claimant may not be disqualified for MA at this step in the sequential evaluation process.

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.

In this case, claimant has presented the required medical data and evidence necessary to support a finding that claimant has significant physical and mental limitations upon claimant's ability to perform basic work activities such as walking, standing, sitting, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying, or handling; responding appropriately to supervision, coworkers and usual work situations; and dealing with changes in a routine work setting. Medical evidence has clearly established that claimant has an impairment (or combination of impairments) that has

more than a minimal effect on claimant's work activities. See Social Security Rulings 85-28, 88-13, and 82-63.

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).

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 claimant is not capable of the walking, standing, sitting, lifting, or carrying as well as the personal interaction and ability respond to changes in a work setting as required by her past employment. Claimant has presented the required medical data and evidence necessary to support a finding that she is not, at this point, capable of performing such work.

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 you 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.

See *Felton v DSS* 161 Mich. App 690, 696 (1987). Once claimant reaches Step 5 in the sequential review process, claimant has already established a *prima facie* case of disability. *Richardson v Secretary of Health and Human Services*, 735 F2d 962 (6th Cir, 1984). At that point, the burden of proof is on the state to prove by substantial evidence that the claimant has the residual functional capacity for substantial gainful activity.

An MRI of the claimant's lumbar spine performed on [REDACTED] documented Grade I Spondylolisthesis of L5 over S1 vertebrae from bilateral pars articular defect causing moderate to severe segmental spinal stenosis and bilateral neural foraminal stenosis. An MRI of the cervical spine performed on [REDACTED] documented a moderate sized right foraminal disc herniation at C6-C7 with compression of the exiting nerve root in the neural foramen. EMG testing of the upper and lower right extremities documented mild mononeuropathy in both the upper and lower right extremity. On [REDACTED], claimant had a psychological evaluation requested by the Disability Determination Service. Claimant was diagnosed with major depressive disorder, single episode, moderate; and pain disorder associated with both psychological factors and a general medical condition. Claimant was given a current GAF score of 50. The evaluator indicated that claimant's prognosis was guarded. On [REDACTED], claimant's primary care provider [REDACTED] diagnosed claimant with cervical radiculopathy and C5-C6 disc herniation. [REDACTED] opined that claimant was incapable of lifting any amount of weight and 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. She indicated that claimant was incapable of repetitive activities with the upper and lower extremities. On [REDACTED], claimant's treating pain

specialist [REDACTED] diagnosed claimant with cervical neck pain with radicular pain; cervical disc disease; cervical degenerative disc disease; cervical spondylosis; arthritis; hypothyroidism; depression; history of lower back pain; lumbar spondylosis; lumbar degenerative disc disease; bilateral sacroiliitis radicular pain; hypothyroidism and depression. The pain specialist indicated that he would be performing cervical facet/epidural steroid injections to help with pain and assist with diagnoses. On [REDACTED], primary care provider [REDACTED] diagnosed claimant with cervical disc herniation with pain and again opined that claimant was incapable of lifting any amount of weight and 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. [REDACTED] continued to indicate that claimant was incapable of repetitive activities with the upper and lower extremities. The treating physician indicated the claimant also had problems with comprehension, memory, and sustained concentration secondary to chronic pain.

After careful review of claimant's extensive medical record and the Administrative Law Judge's personal interaction with claimant at the hearing, this Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant's exertional and non-exertional impairments render claimant unable to engage in a full range of even sedentary work activities on a regular and continuing basis. 20 CFR 404, Subpart P. Appendix 11, Section 201.00(h). See Social Security Ruling 83-10; *Wilson v Heckler*, 743 F2d 216 (1986). The department has failed to provide vocational evidence which establishes that claimant has the residual functional capacity for substantial gainful activity and that, given claimant's age, education, and work experience, there are significant numbers of jobs in the national economy which the claimant could perform despite claimant's limitations. Accordingly, this Administrative Law Judge concludes that claimant is disabled for purposes of the MA program.

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).

A person is considered disabled for purposes of SDA if the person has a physical or mental impairment which meets federal SSI disability standards for at least 90 days. Receipt of SSI or RSDI benefits based upon disability or blindness or the receipt of MA benefits based upon disability or blindness (MA-P) automatically qualifies an individual as disabled for purposes of the SDA program. Other specific financial and non-financial eligibility criteria are found in PEM Item 261. In as much as claimant has been found “disabled” for purposes of MA, she must also be found “disabled” for purposes of SDA benefits.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that claimant meets the definition of medically disabled under the Medical Assistance and State Disability Assistance programs as of April 2008.

Accordingly, the department is ordered to initiate a review of the April 4, 2008 application, if it has not already done so, to determine if all other non-medical eligibility criteria are met.

The department shall inform claimant of its determination in writing. Assuming that claimant is otherwise eligible for program benefits, the department shall review claimant's continued eligibility for program benefits in May 2010.

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

Date Signed: 07/14/09

Date Mailed: 07/15/09

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 the Circuit within 30 days of the receipt 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.

LSS/jlg

cc:

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the names and contact information of the recipients listed in the 'cc:' field.