

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: 2008-29945
Issue No: 2009/4031
Case No: [REDACTED]
Load No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
November 24, 2008
Ottawa County DHS (70)

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 24, 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 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) Claimant has been a recipient of SDA benefits based upon active participation with Michigan Rehabilitative Services.
- (2) On May 10, 2008, claimant applied for MA-P benefits. Claimant did not request retroactive medical coverage.
- (3) On July 28, 2008, the department denied claimant's application for MA-P benefits based upon the belief that claimant did not meet the requisite disability criteria and notified claimant of its intent to terminate claimant's ongoing SDA benefits because was no longer participating in Michigan Rehabilitative Services programming and was not disabled for purposes of the SDA program.
- (4) On August 27, 2008, claimant filed a hearing request to protest the department's determination.
- (5) Thereafter, the department deleted its proposed closure of claimant's ongoing SDA benefits pending the outcome of the instant hearing.
- (6) Claimant, age 28, has a high school education. Claimant received special education services while in school for the emotionally impaired and/or learning disabled. Claimant reports that he has had one year of college, earning 25 – 30 college credits.
- (7) Claimant last relevant work experience occurred in [REDACTED] as an assembly line worker. Claimant has also worked at [REDACTED] as a cashier, fast food preparation, and clean up person. Claimant's relevant work history consists exclusively of unskilled work activities.
- (8) Claimant suffers from chronic/recurrent sinusitis, allergies, right shoulder impingement syndrome/rotator cuff tendonitis, and gastroesophageal reflux disease.

- (9) Claimant has severe limitations with regard to use of his right shoulder for heavy lifting. Claimant's limitations have last or are expected to last for 12 months or more.
- (10) Claimant's complaints and allegations concerning his impairments and limitations, when considered in light of all objective medical evidence, as well as the record as a whole, reflect an individual who has the physical and mental capacity to engage in simple, unskilled, light work activities 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 general, the claimant has the responsibility to prove that he is disabled. Claimant's impairment must result from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which can be shown by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory

diagnostic techniques. A physical or mental impairment must be established by medical evidence consisting of signs, symptoms, and laboratory findings, not only claimant's statement of symptoms. 20 CFR 416.908; 20 CFR 416.927. Proof must be in the form of medical evidence showing that the claimant has an impairment and the nature and extent of its severity. 20 CFR 416.912. Information must be sufficient to enable a determination as to the nature and limiting effects of the impairment for the period in question, the probable duration of the impairment and the residual functional capacity to do work-related physical and mental activities. 20 CFR 416.913.

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 limitations upon claimant’s ability to perform basic work activities such as lifting heavy objects with his right upper extremity. 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 capable of performing his past work in light assembly. Claimant testified that he has performed light assembly work in the past. The record does not support a finding that claimant is no longer capable of performing such work functions. Thus, claimant can not be found to be disabled. Even if claimant were found to be unable to perform past work activities, he would still be found capable of performing other 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 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.

See *Felton v DSS* 161 Mich. App 690, 696 (1987).

This Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant's residual functional capacity for work activities on a regular and continuing basis does include the ability to meet the physical and mental demands required to perform simple, unskilled light work activities. Light work is defined as follows:

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).

There's insufficient objective medical evidence, signs, and symptoms to support a determination that claimant is incapable of performing physical and mental activities necessary for simple, unskilled light work activities. On [REDACTED], claimant's family practitioner diagnosed claimant with right shoulder pain, allergies, depression, and chronic gastroesophageal reflux disease. The practitioner opined that claimant was capable of frequently lifting up to 10lbs and occasionally lifting up to 25lbs as long as he did not use his right arm. It was opined that claimant was capable of standing and walking about 6 hours in an 8 hour work day and sitting about 6 hours in an 8 hour work day. Claimant was found to be capable of operating foot or leg controls on a repetitive basis and capable of simple grasping and reaching with the bilateral upper extremities as well as pushing/pulling and fine manipulation with the left upper extremity. On [REDACTED], claimant's treating orthopedic specialist opined that claimant suffered from right shoulder impingement syndrome, rotator cuff tendonitis. On [REDACTED], [REDACTED], treating physician [REDACTED] diagnosed claimant with chronic gastroesophageal reflux disease, insomnia, depression, generalized anxiety disorder, hypertension, and allergies. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] indicated that with regard to claimant's right shoulder, claimant was limited to lifting less than 10 lbs. [REDACTED] noted that claimant was capable of operating foot or leg controls on a

repetitive basis with regarding to the lower extremities and capable of simple grasping and fine manipulation with the bilateral upper extremities. He indicated that claimant is capable of reaching and pushing/pulling with the upper left extremity. After a review of claimant's medical records, the undersigned finds that claimant has failed to establish limitations which would compromise his ability to perform a wide range of light work activities on a regular and continuing basis. The record fails to support the position that claimant is incapable of light work activities. Considering that claimant, at age 28, is a younger individual, has a high school education, has an unskilled work history, and has a work capacity for light work, the undersigned finds that claimant's impairments do not prevent him from doing other work. As a guide, see 20 CFR, Part 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Table 2, Rule 202.20. Accordingly, the undersigned must find that claimant is not disabled for purposes of the MA program. Even if claimant were found to be restricted to sedentary work, at his age, he would still be found capable of engaging in substantial gainful activity. See Med. Voc. Rule 201.27.

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 this case, there's insufficient medical evidence to support a finding that claimant is incapacitated or unable to work under SSI disability standards for at least 90 days. Accordingly, the undersigned must find that claimant is not presently disabled for purposes of the SDA program.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that Department of Human Services properly determined that claimant is not "disabled" for purposes of the Medical Assistance and State Disability Assistance programs.

Accordingly, the department determination in this matter is hereby **AFFIRMED**.

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

Date Signed: 06/09/09

Date Mailed: 06/09/09

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 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

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