

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: 2009-10050
Issue No: 2009; 4031
Case No: [REDACTED]
Load No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
March 11, 2009
Wayne 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 March 11, 2009. Claimant appeared and testified. Claimant was represented by [REDACTED]

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 November 27, 2007, an application was filed on claimant's behalf for MA-P and SDA benefits. The application requested MA-P retroactive to August of 2007.

(2) On September 10, 2008, the department denied claimant's application for benefits based upon the belief that claimant did not meet the requisite disability criteria.

(3) On December 4, 2008, a hearing request was filed to protest the department's determination.

(4) Claimant, age 54, has a college degree in mass communications.

(5) Claimant last worked in April of 2005 as the director of sales and marketing for a music company.

(6) At the hearing, claimant reported that she is currently actively seeking work in writing, substitute teaching, public relations, and/or human resources.

(7) Claimant's relevant work experience includes highly skilled work in which the skills are transferable.

(8) Claimant was hospitalized [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for sigmoid diverticulitis. Claimant was treated with medication.

(9) Claimant was hospitalized [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] as a result of pain from the left buttocks down to the left thigh. She underwent a lumbar laminectomy and fusion from L4 to S1.

(10) Claimant currently suffers from diskogenic low back pain status post lumbar laminectomy and fusion as well as mild degenerative changes to the bilateral hips.

(11) Claimant has severe limitations upon her ability to lift heavy objects. Claimant's limitations have lasted or are expected to last 12 months or more.

(12) Claimant is capable of meeting the physical and mental demands associated with her past work.

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). In this case, claimant is not working. Therefore, claimant may not be eliminated from MA at this step in the sequential evaluation process.

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, claimant has the responsibility to prove that she 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 eliminated from 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 she has significant physical and mental limitations upon her ability to do basic work activities such as lifting heavy objects. 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 her from doing her past relevant work. 20 CFR 416.920(e). In this case, claimant was hospitalized [REDACTED] for sigmoid diverticulitis. She was treated with medication. She was re-hospitalized [REDACTED]

in which she underwent a lumbar laminectomy and fusion from L4 to S1. On [REDACTED] claimant's treating neurosurgeon [REDACTED] diagnosed claimant with diskogenic back pain now post lumbar fusion. The neurosurgeon indicated that claimant had no physical or mental limitations. An [REDACTED] of the bilateral hips performed on [REDACTED], documented mild degenerative changes of the right and left hips. At the hearing, claimant testified that she is actively seeking employment for work in writing, substitute teaching, public relations and/or human resources. It is the finding of this Administrative Law Judge, based upon the medical evidence and objective, physical findings, that claimant is capable of her past work. Claimant has performed work as the director of sales and marketing for a music company. She reported that she stopped working in April of 2005 when her company was sold. The record does not support a finding that claimant has physical or mental limitations which would preclude claimant from engaging in past work activities. Accordingly, the undersigned must find that claimant is capable of past work and thus not "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 this case, there is insufficient medical evidence to support a finding that

claimant is incapacitated or unable to work under SSI disability standards for at least 90 days.

Therefore, the undersigned finds 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 the 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 is hereby AFFIRMED.

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

Date Signed: 4/01/09

Date Mailed: 04/01/09

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/at

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cc:

