

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: 2009-14279
Issue No: 2009
Case No: [REDACTED]
Load No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
March 30, 2009
Oakland 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 30, 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 August 26, 2008, claimant filed an application for MA-P. Claimant did not request retroactive MA-P.

- (2) On October 24, 2008, the department denied claimant's application for benefits based upon the belief that claimant did not meet the requisite disability criteria.
- (3) On January 20, 2009, claimant filed a hearing request to protest the department's determination.
- (4) Claimant, age 52, has a high school education with some college education. Claimant was formerly a licensed insurance agent.
- (5) Claimant last worked in approximately 2007 as a licensed insurance agent or salesman. Claimant is no longer licensed, but continues to receive approximately [REDACTED] per month from insurance policy renewals. Claimant has had no other relevant work experience.
- (6) Claimant has a history of Rieger's syndrome, Hepatitis C, Iritis, and Substance Abuse including Heroin, Cocaine, and Alcohol.
- (7) Claimant currently suffers from alcoholism and Iritis, as well as a history of Rieger's Syndrome and history of Hepatitis C.
- (8) Claimant's complaints and allegations concerning 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 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 in 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 mean 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 for extended periods of time and lifting extremely heaving 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 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 may well be capable of his past work as an insurance agent or salesperson. Unfortunately, claimant is not currently licensed at this time. The record does suggest that if claimant were to renew his license, he

would be capable of his past work. But, even if claimant were found to be incapable of his 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 the claimant 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 light work. 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 is insufficient objective medical evidence, signs, and symptoms to support a determination that claimant is incapable of performing the physical and mental activities necessary for a wide range of light work. Claimant was hospitalized on August 10, 2008. His admitting diagnosis was Polyarthrititis and alcohol withdrawal. His discharge diagnosis on August 17, 2008 was Polyarthrititis, alcohol and heroin withdrawal, Iritis, history of Rieger's

syndrome, and history of Hepatitis C. An x-ray of the lumbar spine taken on August 12, 2008 was negative and indicated only minor degenerative changes at L4-S1. On February 23, 2009, Claimant's family physician, [REDACTED] diagnosed claimant with Rieger's syndrome, Hepatitis C, alcoholism, and history of IV drug abuse. The treating physician opined that claimant was incapable of lifting any amount of weight as well as incapable of repetitive activities with the upper and lower extremities and limited to standing and walking less than 2 hours in an 8 hour work day. The physician also indicated that claimant with limited with regard to comprehension, memory, sustained concentration, following simple directions, and social interaction [REDACTED] opinion is not supported by acceptable medical evidence consisting of clinical signs, laboratory or test findings, or evaluative techniques and is not consistent with other substantial evidence in the report. Claimant's physician did not present sufficient medical evidence to support his opinion. At the hearing, claimant testified that he drives and is capable of taking care of his own self-care, cooking, and the like. Claimant acknowledged that he is still drinking alcohol, approximately one half pint of vodka, several days a week. The evidence presented fails to support the position that claimant is incapable of a wide range of light work activities.

Considering that claimant, at age 52, is closely approaching advanced age, has a high school education, has a skilled work history in which the skills are not currently transferable (due to a lapse in his license to sell insurance), and has a work capacity for light work, the undersigned finds that claimant's impairment does not prevent his from doing other work. As a guide, see 20 CFR part 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Table 2, Rule 202.13. Accordingly, the undersigned must find that claimant is not presently disabled for purposes of the MA program.

