

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.: 2009-2592
Issue No.: 2009/4031
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Load No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
December 10, 2008
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 December 10, 2008. The 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) On March 11, 2008, claimant filed an application for MA-P and SDA benefits. Claimant did not request retroactive medical coverage.

- (2) On September 16, 2008, the department denied claimant's application for benefits based upon the belief that claimant did not meet the requisite disability criteria.
- (3) On September 22, 2008, claimant filed a hearing request to protest the department's determination.
- (4) Claimant, age 48, has a high school education.
- (5) Claimant last worked in 2005 as a housekeeper. Claimant has had no other relevant work experience. Claimant's relevant work experience consists exclusively of unskilled work activities.
- (6) Claimant had an emergency room visit on [REDACTED] as a result of syncope.
- (7) Claimant was hospitalized [REDACTED] through [REDACTED] for syncope.
- (8) Claimant had an emergency room visit on [REDACTED] as a result of left foot pain and swelling secondary to a fall.
- (9) Claimant suffers from hypertension; nonobstructive coronary circulation with coronary vasospastic disease and normal left ventricular function resulting in a New York Heart Classification functional capacity of Class I; gastroesophageal disease; mild exogenous obesity; and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.
- (10) Claimant has severe limitations upon her ability to walk and stand for prolonged periods of time and to lift extremely heavy objects. Claimant's limitations have lasted or are expected to last 12 months or more.
- (11) 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 has the physical and mental capacity to engage in 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 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 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. A basic work activity 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 walking and standing for prolonged periods of time and lifting extremely 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 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 prolonged walking and standing and/or heavy lifting required by her past employment as a housekeeper. 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 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 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 claimant is incapable of performing the physical and mental activities necessary for a wide range of light work activities. In this matter, claimant has been diagnosed with

nonobstructive coronary circulation with coronary vasospastic disease and normal left ventricular function. She also suffers from hypertension, gastroesophageal reflux disease, mild obesity, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. On [REDACTED], claimant's family doctor [REDACTED] diagnosed her with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, hypertension, gastroesophageal reflux disease, and heart disease. The physician gave claimant no limitations. [REDACTED] reported on [REDACTED], that claimant suffers from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. She opined that claimant is capable of occasionally lifting up to 10 lbs as well as capable of simple grasping and fine manipulation with the bilateral upper extremities. On [REDACTED], claimant was seen by a consulting internist. Following examination and a pulmonary function test, the consultant provided the following impression:

1. Mild to moderate COPD secondary to cigarette smoking. In spite of the patients PFT showing a normal PFT, clinically the patient does have emphysema mild to moderate.
2. Degenerative joint disease involving the left knee.
3. History of essential type hypertension.
4. Cyst on her spleen....
5. History of chest pain. The patient is on multiple medications for this including Cardizem and Imdur. Cardiac cath was done by Dr. Ahmed and the cardiac cath was apparently within normal limits.

On [REDACTED], claimant's treating cardiologist [REDACTED] diagnosed claimant with chest pain with shortness of breath; non-obstructive coronary circulation; history of GERD; COPD; and ex-smoker. The physician opined that claimant is a Class I on the New York Heart Classification. [Patients with cardiac disease but without resulting limitation of physical activity. Ordinary physical activity does not cause undue fatigue, palpitation, dyspnea or anginal pain.] After a review of claimant's hospital records, records from claimant's treating physicians, and

test results, claimant has failed to establish limitations which would compromise her ability to perform a wide range of light work activities on a regular and continuing basis. The record fails to support the physician that claimant is incapable of light work activities. Considering that claimant, at age 48, is a younger individual, has a high school education, has an unskilled work history, and has a sustained work capacity for light work, the undersign finds that claimants impairments do not prevent her from doing other work. See 20 CFR, Part 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Table 2, Rule 202.20. Accordingly, the undersigned must find that claimant is not presently 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’s determination in this matter is HEREBY AFFIRMED.

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

Date Signed: 07/14/09

Date Mailed: 07/14/09

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:

