

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.: 2009-33126
Issue No.: 2009, 4031
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Load No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
October 22, 2009
Macomb County DHS (36)

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 October 22, 2009. Claimant appeared and testified. Claimant was represented by [REDACTED]. 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, 2009, an application was filed on claimant's behalf for MA-P and SDA benefits. The application did not request retroactive medical coverage.
- 2) On July 1, 2009, the department denied claimant's application for benefits based upon the belief that claimant did not meet the requisite disability criteria.
- 3) On July 16, 2009, a hearing request was filed by claimant to protest the department's determination.
- 4) On September 8, 2009, claimant's authorized representative filed a hearing request on claimant's behalf to protest the department's denial of claimant's March 11, 2009, application.
- 5) Claimant, age 44, is a high-school graduate.
- 6) Claimant last worked in 2008 as a dispatcher. Claimant has performed relevant work as a clerical employee.
- 7) Claimant has a history of a fracture of her back with placement of spinal rods, seizure disorder, and alcohol and benzodiazepine abuse.
- 8) Claimant was hospitalized [REDACTED] with complaints of a generalized seizure. A CT of the brain documented bilateral middle cerebral artery aneurisms.
- 9) Claimant was transferred to a larger hospital on [REDACTED]. On [REDACTED], her right middle cerebral artery aneurism was clipped. Claimant was discharged on [REDACTED], with a notation that her left middle cerebral artery aneurism would be clipped at a later point.
- 10) Claimant current suffers from hyperlipidemia; degenerative joint disease; degenerative disc disease of the lumbar spine with history of fracture and

placement of spinal rods; seizure disorder; chronic tension headaches; bilateral middle cerebral artery aneurisms (right aneurism clipped on [REDACTED], and the left aneurism awaiting clipping); generalized anxiety disorder; alcohol abuse, reportedly in remission; and benzodiazepine dependence, reportedly in remission.

- 11) Claimant has severe limitations upon her ability to walk or stand for prolonged periods of time and/or ability to lift. Claimant's limitations have lasted or are expected to last twelve months or more.
- 12) 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 she has significant physical and mental limitations upon her ability to perform basic work activities such as walking, standing, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying, or handling. 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, or lifting 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 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). 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.

In this matter, claimant has a history of a back fracture as a teenager which required placement of spinal rods. She also has a history of a seizure disorder and alcohol/benzodiazepine dependence. Claimant was hospitalized [REDACTED], as a result of a generalized seizure. A CT of the head documented bilateral middle cerebral artery aneurisms. Claimant was transferred to a larger hospital on [REDACTED]. On [REDACTED], the right middle cerebral artery aneurism

was clipped. Claimant was discharged on [REDACTED], with the notation that the left aneurism would be treated at a later point. On [REDACTED], claimant was evaluated by a consulting psychiatrist for the department. The consultant diagnosed alcohol abuse, rule out dependence; benzodiazepine and opioid dependence; and anxiety, NOS. Claimant was given a GAF score of 48. Claimant was seen by a consulting internist for the [REDACTED] on [REDACTED]. The internist diagnosed traumatic brain injury after a car accident in [REDACTED] with coma of two to three weeks; chronic lumbar disc disease, status post lower back surgery; chronic tension headaches; seizure disorder, chronic; chronic osteoarthritis in multiple joints; and depression and anxiety by history. On [REDACTED], claimant's treating neurosurgeon diagnosed claimant with cerebral aneurisms (one clipped and another needing to be clipped). The neurosurgeon noted that claimant "has a large middle cerebral aneurism that needs to be clipped in the operating room, prior to its rupturing." At that point, the neurosurgeon indicated that claimant "needs another surgery very soon." On [REDACTED], claimant's treating primary care physician diagnosed claimant with degenerative disc disease, generalized anxiety disorder, hyperlipidemia, and backache. The physician opined that claimant was limited to lifting less than ten pounds.

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. Inasmuch as claimant has been found "disabled" for purposes of MA, she must also be found "disabled" for purposes of SDA benefits.

The Medical Social Work Consultant (MSWC), in conjunction with the Medical Review Team (MRT), is to consider the appropriateness of directing claimant to participate in appropriate substance abuse and/or mental health treatment as a condition of receiving benefits. Unless the MSWC determines that claimant has good cause for failure to participate in mandatory treatment, claimant will lose eligibility for MA-P and SDA benefits. See PEM Item 260, p. 5, and PEM Item 261, pp. 3 and 4.

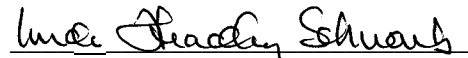
Further, a referral is to be made to Adult Protective Services for an evaluation of possible financial management problems. Specifically, before SDA benefits may be paid to claimant, Adult Protective Services is to assess the appropriateness of a payee or conservatorship for claimant because of substance abuse or other problems which may prevent adequate management or discharge of financial or other personal affairs. See Adult Services Manual, Item 215.

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 March of 2009.

Accordingly, the department is ordered to initiate a review of the March 11, 2009, application, if it has not already done so, to determine if all other non medical eligibility criteria are met. The department shall inform claimant and her authorized representative 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 April of 2011.

The Medical Social Work Consultant, in conjunction with the Medical Review Team, is to consider the appropriateness of ordering claimant to participate in mandatory substance abuse and/or mental health treatment as a condition of receipt of benefits. Further, a referral is to be made to Adult Protective Services, consistent with this order.


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

Date Signed: March 30, 2010

Date Mailed: March 31, 2010

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 mailing 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/pf

cc:

