

STATE OF MICHIGAN
STATE OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS AND RULES
ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No.: 2009-33472
Issue No.: 2009/4031
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Load No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: October 19, 2009
Oakland County DHS (02)

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Colleen M. Mamelka

HEARING DECISION

This matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and MCL 400.37 upon the Claimant's request for a hearing. After due notice, a telephone hearing was conducted from Detroit, Michigan on Monday, October 19, 2009. The Claimant appeared, along with [REDACTED], and testified. [REDACTED] appeared on behalf of the Department.

During the hearing, the Claimant waived the time frame for the issuance of this decision in order to allow for the submission of additional medical evidence. The additional records were received, reviewed, and entered as Exhibit 3. This matter is now before the undersigned for a final decision.

ISSUE

Whether the Department properly determined that the Claimant was not disabled for purposes of the Medical Assistance ("MA-P") and State Disability Assistance ("SDA") benefit 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. The Claimant submitted an application for public assistance seeking MA-P and SDA benefits on August 26, 2008.
2. On April 8, 2009, the Medical Review Team ("MRT") determined that the Claimant was not disabled. (Exhibit 1, pp. 1, 2)

3. On April 17, 2009, the Department notified the Claimant of the MRT determination. (Exhibit 1, p. 24)
4. On June 29, 2009, the Department received the Claimant's timely written request for hearing.
5. On September 2, 2009, the SHRT found the Claimant not disabled. (Exhibit 2)
6. The Claimant's alleged physical disabling impairments are due to low back pain, neck pain, leg pain/numbness, right arm numbness, arthritis, emphysema, and Hepatitis C.
7. The Claimant has not alleged any mental disabling impairment(s).
8. At the time of hearing, the Claimant was 52 years old with a [REDACTED] birth date; was 6' in height; and weighed 215 pounds.
9. The Claimant is a high school graduate with some college and an employment history in heavy equipment repair.
10. The Claimant's impairments have lasted or are expected to last continuously for a period of 12 months or longer.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Medical Assistance ("MA") program is established by Subchapter XIX of Chapter 7 of The Public Health & Welfare Act, 42 USC 1397, and is administered by the Department of Human Services ("DHS"), formerly known as the Family Independence Agency, pursuant to MCL 400.10 *et seq* and MCL 400.105. Department policies are found in the Bridges Administrative Manual ("BAM"), the Bridges Eligibility Manual ("BEM"), and the Bridges Reference Manual ("BRM").

Disability is defined as 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(a) The person claiming a physical or mental disability has the burden to establish it through the use of competent medical evidence from qualified medical sources such as his or her medical history, clinical/laboratory findings, diagnosis/prescribed treatment, prognosis for recovery and/or medical assessment of ability to do work-related activities or ability to reason and make appropriate mental adjustments, if a mental disability is alleged. 20 CFR 413.913 An individual's subjective pain complaints are not, in and of themselves, sufficient to

establish disability. 20 CFR 416.908; 20 CFR 416.929(a) Similarly, conclusory statements by a physician or mental health professional that an individual is disabled or blind, absent supporting medical evidence, is insufficient to establish disability. 20 CFR 416.927

When determining disability, the federal regulations require several factors to be considered including: (1) the location/duration/frequency/intensity of an applicant's pain; (2) the type/dosage/effectiveness/side effects of any medication the applicants takes to relieve pain; (3) any treatment other than pain medication that the applicant has received to relieve pain; and (4) the effect of the applicant's pain on his or her ability to do basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.929(c)(3) The applicant's pain must be assessed to determine the extent of his or her functional limitation(s) in light of the objective medical evidence presented. 20 CFR 416.929(c)(2)

In order to determine whether or not an individual is disabled, federal regulations require a five-step sequential evaluation process be utilized. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(1) The five-step analysis requires the trier of fact to consider an individual's current work activity; the severity of the impairment(s) both in duration and whether it meets or equals a listed impairment in Appendix 1; residual functional capacity to determine whether an individual can perform past relevant work; and residual functional capacity along with vocational factors (i.e. age, education, and work experience) to determine if an individual can adjust to other work. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4); 20 CFR 416.945

If an individual is found disabled, or not disabled, at any step, a determination or decision is made with no need evaluate subsequent steps. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4) If a determination cannot be made that an individual is disabled, or not disabled, at a particular step, the next step is required. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4) If an impairment does not meet or equal a listed impairment, an individual's residual functional capacity is assessed before moving from step three to step four. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4); 20 CFR 416.945 Residual functional capacity is the most an individual can do despite the limitations based on all relevant evidence. 20 CFR 945(a)(1) An individual's residual functional capacity assessment is evaluated at both steps four and five. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4) In determining disability, an individual's functional capacity to perform basic work activities is evaluated and if found that the individual has the ability to perform basic work activities without significant limitation, disability will not be found. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iv)

In general, the individual has the responsibility to prove disability. 20 CFR 416.912(a) An impairment or combination of impairments is not severe if it does not significantly limit an individual's physical or mental ability to do basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.921(a) An individual is not disabled regardless of the medical condition, age, education, and work experience, if the individual is working and the work is a substantial, gainful activity. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4)(i) Substantial gainful activity means work that involves doing significant and productive physical or mental duties and is done

(or intended) for pay or profit. 20 CFR 416.910(a)(b) Substantial gainful activity is work activity that is both substantial and gainful. 20 CFR 416.972 Work may be substantial even if it is done on a part-time basis or if an individual does less, with less responsibility, and gets paid less than prior employment. 20 CFR 416.972(a) Gainful work activity is work activity that is done for pay or profit. 20 CFR 416.972(b)

As outlined above, the first step looks at the individual's current work activity. In the record presented, the Claimant is not involved in substantial gainful activity therefore is not ineligible for disability benefits under Step 1.

The severity of the Claimant's alleged impairment(s) is considered under Step 2. The Claimant bears the burden to present sufficient objective medical evidence to substantiate the alleged disabling impairments. In order to be considered disabled for MA purposes, the impairment must be severe. 20 CFR 916.920(a)(4)(ii); 20 CFR 916.920(b) An impairment, or combination of impairments, is severe if it significantly limits an individual's physical or mental ability to do basic work activities regardless of age, education and work experience. 20 CFR 916.920(a)(4)(ii); 20 CFR 916.920(c) Basic work activities means the abilities and aptitudes necessary to do most jobs. 20 CFR 916.921(b) Examples 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.

Id. The second step allows for dismissal of a disability claim obviously lacking in medical merit. *Higgs v Bowen*, 880 F2d 860, 862 (CA 6, 1988). The severity requirement may still be employed as an administrative convenience to screen out claims that are totally groundless solely from a medical standpoint. *Id.* at 863 *citing Farris v Sec of Health and Human Services*, 773 F2d 85, 90 n.1 (CA 6, 1985) An impairment qualifies as severe only if, regardless of a claimant's age, education, or work experience, the impairment would not affect the claimant's ability to work. *Salmi v Sec of Health and Human Services*, 774 F2d 685, 692 (CA 6, 1985)

In the present case, the Claimant alleges disability based on low back pain, neck pain, leg pain/numbness, right arm numbness, arthritis, emphysema, and Hepatitis C.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant attended a consultative evaluation. The Claimant had difficulty getting on and off the examination table, mild difficulty heel and toe walking, moderate difficulty partially squatting due to pain in his back and right knee, and mild difficulty hopping on the left and was unable to on the right. Diffuse tenderness over the lumbar spine was noted but the range of motion studies were normal except for slight decrease (140 degrees as opposed to 150 degrees) of the right knee. The physician opined that the Claimant's back pain was more related to the knee that has actual degeneration. As a result, a cane was found beneficial for walking more than 100 yards. The Claimant may require surgical interention to the right knee. The Claimant was also diagnosed with Hepatitis C with no findings of cirrhotic disease or hepatosplenomegaly. The Claimant's history of emphysema and hypercholesterolemia were also documented.

On [REDACTED], a Medical Examination Report was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The current diagnoses were low back pain and Hepatitis C. The musculoskeletal examination found a limited range of motion. The Claimant was in stable condition and was limited to the occasional lifting/carrying of 10 pounds; standing and/or walking at least 2 hours during an 8-hour workday with sitting at less than 6 hours during this same time frame. An assistive device for ambulation was not medically required.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant attended a consultative evaluation. The Claimant required a cane for ambulation. The neck examination revealed mild stiffness with spasms over the trapezius muscle (right greater than left). Tenderness of the cervical spine was also noted. The lumbar and thoracic spine were painful. The diagnoses were right knee pain (meniscus injury), lumbosacral spine pain, degenerative disc disease, sacroiliac joint pain with right radiculopathy (requiring further evaluation), Hepatitis C, cervical disc herniation with right side arm pain and numbness (confirmed with a MRI), and hyperlipidemia. X-rays of the lumbosacral spine revealed mild osteoporosis and scattered spurs from mild degenerative process. There was no evidence of fracture or intrinsic osseous abnormalities or spondylolysis or spondylolisthesis.

As previously noted, the Claimant bears the burden to present sufficient objective medical evidence to substantiate the alleged disabling impairment(s). As summarized above, the Claimant has presented some objective medical evidence establishing that he does have physical and mental limitations on his ability to perform basic work activities. Accordingly, the Claimant has an impairment, or combination thereof, that has more than a *de minimis* effect on the Claimant's basic work activities. Further, the impairments have lasted continuously for twelve months therefore, the Claimant is not disqualified from receipt of MA-P benefits under Step 2.

In the third step of the sequential analysis 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. The Claimant asserts disabling impairments due to low back pain, neck pain, leg pain/numbness, right arm numbness, arthritis, emphysema, and Hepatitis C.

Listing 1.00 defines musculoskeletal system impairments. Disorders of the musculoskeletal system may result from hereditary, congenital, or acquired pathologic processes. 1.00A Impairments may result from infectious, inflammatory, or degenerative processes, traumatic or developmental events, or neoplastic, vascular, or toxic/metabolic diseases. 1.00A Regardless of the cause(s) of a musculoskeletal impairment, functional loss for purposes of these listings is defined as the inability to ambulate effectively on a sustained basis for any reason, including pain associated with the underlying musculoskeletal impairment, or the inability to perform fine and gross movements effectively on a sustained basis for any reason, including pain associated with the underlying musculoskeletal impairment. Inability to ambulate effectively means an extreme limitation of the ability to walk; i.e., an impairment(s) that interferes very seriously with the individual's ability to independently initiate, sustain, or complete activities. 1.00B2b(1) Ineffective ambulation is defined generally as having insufficient lower extremity function to permit independent ambulation without the use of a hand-held assistive device(s) that limits the functioning of both upper extremities. (Listing 1.05C is an exception to this general definition because the individual has the use of only one upper extremity due to amputation of a hand.) *Id.* To ambulate effectively, individuals must be capable of sustaining a reasonable walking pace over a sufficient distance to be able to carry out activities of daily living. 1.00B2b(2) They must have the ability to travel without companion assistance to and from a place of employment or school. . . . *Id.* When an individual's impairment involves a lower extremity uses a hand-held assistive device, such as a cane, crutch or walker, the medical basis for use of the device should be documented. 1.00J4 The requirement to use a hand-held assistive device may also impact an individual's functional capacity by virtue of the fact that one or both upper extremities are not available for such activities as lifting, carrying, pushing, and pulling. *Id.*

Categories of Musculoskeletal include:

- 1.02 Major dysfunction of a joint(s) due to any cause: Characterized by gross anatomical deformity (e.g. subluxation, contracture, bony or fibrous ankylosis, instability) and chronic joint pain and stiffness with signs of limitation of motion or other abnormal motion of the affected joint(s), and findings on appropriate medically acceptable imaging of joint space narrowing, bony destruction, or ankylosis of the affected joint(s). With:

- A. Involvement of one major peripheral weight-bearing joint (i.e., hip, knee, or ankle), resulting in inability to ambulate effectively as defined in 1.00B2b; or
- B. Involvement of one major peripheral joint in each upper extremity (i.e., shoulder, elbow, wrist, hand), resulting in inability to perform fine and gross movements effectively as defined in 1.00B2c

* * *

1.04

Disorders of the spine (e.g., herniated nucleus pulposus, spinal arachnoiditis, spinal stenosis, osteoarthritis, degenerative disc disease, facet arthritis, vertebral fracture), resulting in compromise of a nerve root (including the cauda equine) or spinal cord. With:

- A. Evidence of nerve root compression characterized by neuro-anatomic distribution of pain, limitation of motion of the spine, motor loss (atrophy with associated muscle weakness or muscle weakness) accompanied by sensory or reflex loss and, if there is involvement of the lower back, positive straight-leg raising test (sitting and supine); or
- B. Spinal arachnoiditis, confirmed by an operative note or pathology report of tissue biopsy, or by appropriate medically acceptable imaging, manifested by severe burning or painful dysesthesia, resulting in the need for changes in position or posture more than once every 2 hours; or
- C. Lumbar spinal stenosis resulting in pseudoclaudication, established by findings on appropriate medically acceptable imaging, manifested by chronic nonradicular pain and weakness, and resulting in inability to ambulate effectively, as defined in 1.00B2b. (see above definition)

In this case, the objective medical evidence document the Claimant's back and right knee pain. There was however, no objective findings of a major dysfunction of a joint or disorder of the spine that resulted in nerve root compression, spinal arachnoiditis, and/or lumbar spinal stenosis. Ultimately, based on the medical evidence, the Claimant's impairment(s) do not meet a listed impairment within Listing 1.00 as detailed above. Accordingly, the Claimant cannot be found disabled or not disabled under this listing.

Listings 3.00 (respiratory system), Listing 5.00 (respiratory system), and 14.00 (immune system disorders) were considered in light of the objective evidence. Ultimately, based on the medical evidence alone, the Claimant's impairments do not meet the intent and

severity requirement of a listed impairment thus the Claimant cannot be found disabled, or not disabled, at Step 3. Accordingly, the Claimant's eligibility is considered under Step 4. 20 CFR 416.905(a)

The fourth step in analyzing a disability claim requires an assessment of the Claimant's residual functional capacity ("RFC") and past relevant employment. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4)(iv) An individual is not disabled if he/she can perform past relevant work. *Id.*; 20 CFR 416.960(b)(3) Past relevant work is work that has been performed within the past 15 years that was a substantial gainful activity and that lasted long enough for the individual to learn the position. 20 CFR 416.960(b)(1) Vocational factors of age, education, and work experience, and whether the past relevant employment exists in significant numbers in the national economy is not considered. 20 CFR 416.960(b)(3) RFC is assessed based on impairment(s), and any related symptoms, such as pain, which may cause physical and mental limitations that affect what can be done in a work setting. RFC is the most that can be done, despite the limitations.

To determine the physical demands (exertional requirements) of work in the national economy, jobs are classified as sedentary, light, medium, heavy, and very heavy. 20 CFR 416.967 Sedentary work involves lifting of no more than 10 pounds at a time and occasionally lifting or carrying articles like docket files, ledgers, and small tools. 20 CFR 416.967(a) Although a sedentary job is defined as one which involves sitting, a certain amount of walking and standing is often necessary in carrying out job duties. *Id.* Jobs are sedentary if walking and standing are required occasionally and other sedentary criteria are met. Light work involves lifting no more than 20 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying objects weighing up to 10 pounds. 20 CFR 416.967(b) Even though 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. *Id.* To be considered capable of performing a full or wide range of light work, an individual must have the ability to do substantially all of these activities. *Id.* An individual capable of light work is also capable of sedentary work, unless there are additionally limiting factors such as loss of fine dexterity or inability to sit for long periods of time. *Id.* Medium work involves lifting no more than 50 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 25 pounds. 20 CFR 416.967(c) An individual capable of performing medium work is also capable of light and sedentary work. *Id.* Heavy work involves lifting no more than 100 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 50 pounds. 20 CFR 416.967(d) An individual capable of heavy work is also capable of medium, light, and sedentary work. *Id.* Finally, very heavy work involves lifting objects weighing more than 100 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying objects weighing 50 pounds or more. 20 CFR 416.967(e) An individual capable of very heavy work is able to perform work under all categories. *Id.*

Limitations or restrictions which affect the ability to meet the demands of jobs other than strength demands (exertional requirements, i.e. sitting, standing, walking, lifting,

carrying, pushing, or pulling) are considered nonexertional. 20 CFR 416.969a(a) In considering whether an individual can perform past relevant work, a comparison of the individual's residual functional capacity with the demands of past relevant work. *Id.* If an individual can no longer do past relevant work the same residual functional capacity assessment along with an individual's age, education, and work experience is considered to determine whether an individual can adjust to other work which exists in the national economy. *Id.* Examples of non-exertional limitations or restrictions include difficulty function due to nervousness, anxiousness, or depression; difficulty maintaining attention or concentration; difficulty understanding or remembering detailed instructions; difficulty in seeing or hearing; difficulty tolerating some physical feature(s) of certain work settings (i.e. can't tolerate dust or fumes); or difficulty performing the manipulative or postural functions of some work such as reaching, handling, stooping, climbing, crawling, or crouching. 20 CFR 416.969a(c)(1)(i) – (vi) If the impairment(s) and related symptoms, such as pain, only affect the ability to perform the non-exertional aspects of work-related activities, the rules in Appendix 2 do not direct factual conclusions of disabled or not disabled. 20 CFR 416.969a(c)(2) The determination of whether disability exists is based upon the principles in the appropriate sections of the regulations, giving consideration to the rules for specific case situations in Appendix 2. *Id.*

The Claimant's work history includes employment in heavy machinery repair. In light of the Claimant's testimony and in consideration of the Occupational Code, the Claimant's prior work is classified as semi-skilled, medium to heavy work.

The Claimant testified that he can lift/carry approximately 5 to 10 pounds; can walk short distances with assistance; can stand and/or sit for short periods of time; and has difficulties when bending and/or squatting. The objective medical records find the Claimant able to occasionally lift/carry of 10 pounds; standing and/or walking at least 2 hours during and 8 hour workday with sitting at less than 6 hours during this same time frame. If the impairment or combination of impairments does not limit an individual's physical or mental ability to do basic work activities, it is not a severe impairment(s) and disability does not exist. 20 CFR 416.920 In consideration of the Claimant's testimony, medical records, and current limitations, it is found that the Claimant is unable able to return to past relevant employment thus Step 5 of the sequential analysis is required.

In Step 5, an assessment of the individual's residual functional capacity and age, education, and work experience is considered to determine whether an adjustment to other work can be made. 20 CFR 416.920(4)(v) At the time of hearing, the Claimant was 52 years old thus considered to be closely approaching advanced age for MA-P purposes. The Claimant has a high school education with some college and a work history as a general laborer. Disability is found if an individual is unable to adjust to other work. *Id.* At this point in the analysis, the burden shifts from the Claimant to the Department to present proof that the Claimant has the residual capacity to substantial gainful employment. 20 CFR 416.960(2); *Richardson v Sec of Health and Human*

Services, 735 F2d 962, 964 (CA 6, 1984). While a vocational expert is not required, a finding supported by substantial evidence that the individual has the vocational qualifications to perform specific jobs is needed to meet the burden. *O'Banner v Sec of Health and Human Services*, 587 F2d 321, 323 (CA 6, 1978). Medical-Vocational guidelines found at 20 CFR Subpart P, Appendix II, may be used to satisfy the burden of proving that the individual can perform specific jobs in the national economy. *Heckler v Campbell*, 461 US 458, 467 (1983); *Kirk v Secretary*, 667 F2d 524, 529 (CA 6, 1981) *cert den* 461 US 957 (1983).

In this case, the evidence reveals that the Claimant suffers from low back pain, neck pain, leg pain/numbness, right arm numbness, arthritis, emphysema, and Hepatitis C. In consideration of the foregoing, the Claimant's residual functional capacity for work activities on a regular and continuing basis does include the ability to meet at least the physical and mental demands required to perform sedentary work as defined in 20 CFR 416.967(a). After review of the entire record using the Medical-Vocational Guidelines [20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix II] as a guide, specifically Rule 201.14, it is found that the Claimant is disabled for purposes of the MA-P program at Step 5.

The State Disability Assistance ("SDA") program, which provides financial assistance for disabled persons, was established by 2004 PA 344. DHS administers the SDA program pursuant to MCL 400.10 *et seq.* and Michigan Administrative Code ("MAC R") 400.3151 – 400.3180. Department policies are found in BAM, BEM, and BRM. A person is considered disabled for SDA purposes if the person has a physical or mental impairment which meets federal SSI disability standards for at least ninety days. Receipt of SSI or RSDI benefits based on disability or blindness, or the receipt of MA benefits based on disability or blindness automatically qualifies an individual as disabled for purposes of the SDA program.

In this case, the Claimant is found disabled for purposes of the MA-P program therefore the Claimant is found disabled for purposes of SDA benefit program.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law finds the Claimant disabled for purposes of the MA-P and SDA benefit programs.

Accordingly, it is ORDERED:

1. The Department's determination is REVERSED.
2. The Department shall initiate review of the August 28, 2008 application to determine if all other non-medical criteria are met and inform the Claimant of the determination is accordance with Department policy.

- 3. The Department shall supplement for any lost benefits that the Claimant was entitled to receive if otherwise eligible and qualified.
- 4. The Department shall review the Claimant's continued eligibility in November 2011 in accordance with department policy.

Colleen M. Mamelka

Colleen M. Mamelka
 Administrative Law Judge
 For Ismael Ahmed, Director
 Department of Human Services

Date Signed: 10/05/2010

Date Mailed: 10/05/2010

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.

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