

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. 200934743  
Issue No. 2009  
Case No. [REDACTED]  
Load No. [REDACTED]  
Hearing Date: November 4, 2009  
Bay County DHS

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE:** Carmen G. Fahie

**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, an in-person hearing was held on Wednesday, November 4, 2009. The claimant personally appeared and testified with her authorized representative, [REDACTED].

**ISSUE**

Did the department properly deny the claimant's application for Medical Assistance (MA-P) and retroactive Medical Assistance?

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the competent, material, and substantial evidence on the whole record, finds a material fact:

1. On January 22, 2009, the claimant applied for MA-P and retroactive MA-P to October 2008.
2. On January 27, 2009, the Medical Review Team (MRT) denied the claimant's application for MA-P and retroactive MA-P stating that the claimant had a non-severe impairment per 20 CFR 416.920(c).
3. On January 30, 2009, the department caseworker sent the claimant a notice that his application was denied.

4. On May 4, 2009, the department received a hearing request from the claimant, contesting the department's negative action.
5. On September 17, 2009, the State Hearing Review Team (SHRT) considered the submitted objective medical evidence in making its determination of MA-P and retroactive MA-P eligibility for the claimant. The SHRT report reads in part:

The claimant is 52 years old with 12 years of education and an unskilled work history. Disability is alleged due to gastrointestinal bleed, low back pain, shortness of breath, and muscular weakness. The claimant did not meet applicable Social Security Listings 5.01, 1.01, and 3.01. The claimant's alleged impairments lack duration per 20 CFR 416.909.

6. During the hearing on November 4, 2009, the claimant requested permission to submit additional medical information that needed to be reviewed by SHRT. Additional medical information was received from the local office on January 21, 2010 and forwarded to SHRT for review on January 22, 2010.
7. On January 29, 2010, the SHRT considered the newly submitted objective medical evidence in making its determination of MA-P and retroactive MA-P. The SHRT report reads in part:

The claimant is 52 years old and alleges disability due to gastrointestinal bleed, low back pain, shortness of breath, and muscular weakness. He has a high school education and a history of unskilled work.

The claimant has a long history of alcohol abuse. In October 2008 he was admitted due to a gastrointestinal bleed. An esophagogastroduodenoscopy showed a single esophageal varix, but no active bleed. In July 2009, the claimant had an esophageal stricture which was dilated. The current evidence is insufficient to evaluate any of the other allegations.

Additional medical information is suggested to assess the severity of the claimant's impairment(s). Please obtain a complete physical examination, by a licensed physician in narrative format. MA-P is denied per 20 CFR 416.913(d), insufficient evidence. Retroactive MA-P was considered in this case and is also denied.

8. On March 3, 2010, this Administrative Law Judge and [REDACTED] received notice from the department caseworker that the claimant was a no call, no show for his scheduled physical exam on February 17, 2010 as ordered by SHRT. (Department Exhibit D-E)
9. On May 10, 2010, the department caseworker sent the Administrative Law Judge and [REDACTED] a fax stating that the claimant was once again for the second time a no call, no show for his medical evaluation on May 5, 2010 and they were unable to reschedule. (Department Exhibit F-H)
10. The claimant is a 53 year-old man whose date of birth is [REDACTED]. The claimant is 5' 10½" tall and weighs 145 pounds. The claimant has lost 40 pounds in the past year because he can't retain food, hospitalization, and surgery. The claimant has a high school education. The claimant can read and write and do basic math. The claimant was last employed as a maintenance worker in 2001 at the heavy level. The claimant has also been employed as a carpenter at the heavy level and plumber at the heavy level.
9. The claimant's alleged impairments are low back pain, gastrointestinal bleed October 2008, hernia, COPD, cirrhosis, muscular weakness, and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

### **CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

The Medical Assistance (MA) program is established by the 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 (formerly known as the Family Independence Agency) 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).

"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.

...We follow a set order to determine whether you are disabled. We review any current work activity, the severity of your impairment(s), your residual functional capacity, your past work, and your age, education and work experience. If we can find that you are disabled or not disabled at any point

in the review, we do not review your claim further.... 20 CFR 416.920.

...If you are working and the work you are doing is substantial gainful activity, we will find that you are not disabled regardless of your medical condition or your age, education, and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(b).

...[The impairment]...must have lasted or must be expected to last for a continuous period of at least 12 months. We call this the duration requirement. 20 CFR 416.909.

...If you do not have any impairment or combination of impairments which significantly limits your physical or mental ability to do basic work activities, we will find that you do not have a severe impairment and are, therefore, not disabled.

We will not consider your age, education, and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(c).

[In reviewing your impairment]...We need reports about your impairments from acceptable medical sources.... 20 CFR 416.913(a).

...Statements about your pain or other symptoms will not alone establish that you are disabled; there must be medical signs and laboratory findings which show that you have a medical impairment.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

...You must provide medical evidence showing that you have an impairment(s) and how severe it is during the time you say that you are disabled. 20 CFR 416.912(c).

... [The record must show a severe impairment] which significantly limits your physical or mental ability to do basic work activities.... 20 CFR 416.920(c).

...Medical reports should include --

- (1) Medical history.
- (2) Clinical findings (such as the results of physical or mental status examinations);
- (3) Laboratory findings (such as blood pressure, X-rays);
- (4) Diagnosis (statement of disease or injury based on its signs and symptoms).... 20 CFR 416.913(b).

...The medical evidence...must be complete and detailed enough to allow us to make a determination about whether you are disabled or blind. 20 CFR 416.913(d).

Medical findings consist of symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings:

- (a) **Symptoms** are your own description of your physical or mental impairment. Your statements alone are not enough to establish that there is a physical or mental impairment.
- (b) **Signs** are anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which can be observed, apart from your statements (symptoms). Signs must be shown by medically acceptable clinical diagnostic techniques. Psychiatric signs are medically demonstrable phenomena which indicate specific psychological abnormalities e.g., abnormalities of behavior, mood, thought, memory, orientation, development, or perception. They must also be shown by observable facts that can be medically described and evaluated.
- (c) **Laboratory findings** are anatomical, physiological, or psychological phenomena which can be shown by the use of medically acceptable laboratory diagnostic techniques. Some of these diagnostic techniques include chemical tests, electrophysiological studies (electrocardiogram, electroencephalogram, etc.), roentgenological studies (X-rays), and psychological tests. 20 CFR 416.928.

It must allow us to determine --

- (1) The nature and limiting effects of your impairment(s) for any period in question;
- (2) The probable duration of your impairment; and
- (3) Your residual functional capacity to do work-related physical and mental activities. 20 CFR 416.913(d).

Information from other sources may also help us to understand how your impairment(s) affects your ability to work. 20 CFR 416.913(e).

...You can only be found disabled if you are unable 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. See 20 CFR 416.905. Your impairment must result from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which are demonstrable by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory diagnostic techniques.... 20 CFR 416.927(a)(1).

...Evidence that you submit or that we obtain may contain medical opinions. Medical opinions are statements from physicians and psychologists or other acceptable medical sources that reflect judgments about the nature and severity of your impairment(s), including your symptoms, diagnosis and prognosis, what you can still do despite impairment(s), and your physical or mental restrictions. 20 CFR 416.927(a)(2).

...In deciding whether you are disabled, we will always consider the medical opinions in your case record together with the rest of the relevant evidence we receive. 20 CFR 416.927(b).

After we review all of the evidence relevant to your claim, including medical opinions, we make findings about what the evidence shows. 20 CFR 416.927(c).

...If all of the evidence we receive, including a medical opinion(s), is consistent, and there is sufficient evidence for us to decide whether you are disabled, we will make our determination or decision based on that evidence. 20 CFR 416.927(c)(1).

...If any of the evidence in your case record, including any medical opinion(s), is inconsistent with other evidence or is internally inconsistent, we will weigh all of the evidence and see whether we can decide whether you are disabled based on the evidence we have. 20 CFR 416.927(c)(2).

[As Judge]...We are responsible for making the determination or decision about whether you meet the statutory definition of disability. In so doing, we review all of the medical findings and other evidence that support a

medical source's statement that you are disabled.... 20 CFR 416.927(e).

...A statement by a medical source that you are "disabled" or "unable to work" does not mean that we will determine that you are disabled. 20 CFR 416.927(e).

...If you have an impairment(s) which meets the duration requirement and is listed in Appendix 1 or is equal to a listed impairment(s), we will find you disabled without considering your age, education, and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(d).

...If we cannot make a decision on your current work activities or medical facts alone and you have a severe impairment, we will then review your residual functional capacity and the physical and mental demands of the work you have done in the past. If you can still do this kind of work, we will find that you are not disabled. 20 CFR 416.920(e).

If you cannot do any work you have done in the past because you have a severe impairment(s), we will consider your residual functional capacity and your age, education, and past work experience to see if you can do other work. If you cannot, we will find you disabled. 20 CFR 416.920(f)(1).

...Your residual functional capacity is what you can still do despite limitations. If you have more than one impairment, we will consider all of your impairment(s) of which we are aware. We will consider your ability to meet certain demands of jobs, such as physical demands, mental demands, sensory requirements, and other functions, as described in paragraphs (b), (c) and (d) of this section. Residual functional capacity is an assessment based on all of the relevant evidence.... 20 CFR 416.945(a).

...This assessment of your remaining capacity for work is not a decision on whether you are disabled, but is used as the basis for determining the particular types of work you may be able to do despite your impairment(s).... 20 CFR 416.945(a).

...In determining whether you are disabled, we will consider all of your symptoms, including pain, and the extent to which your symptoms can reasonably be accepted as consistent

with objective medical evidence, and other evidence.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

...In evaluating the intensity and persistence of your symptoms, including pain, we will consider all of the available evidence, including your medical history, the medical signs and laboratory findings and statements about how your symptoms affect you... We will then determine the extent to which your alleged functional limitations or restrictions due to pain or other symptoms can reasonably be accepted as consistent with the medical signs and laboratory findings and other evidence to decide how your symptoms affect your ability to work.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

If you have more than one impairment, we will consider all of your impairments of which we are aware. We will consider your ability to meet certain demands of jobs, such as physical demands, mental demands, sensory requirements, and other functions as described in paragraphs (b), (c) and (d) of this section. Residual functional capacity is an assessment based upon all of the relevant evidence. This assessment of your capacity for work is not a decision on whether you are disabled but is used as a basis for determining the particular types of work you may be able to do despite your impairment. 20 CFR 416.945.

...When we assess your physical abilities, we first assess the nature and extent of your physical limitations and then determine your residual functional capacity for work activity on a regular and continuing basis. A limited ability to perform certain physical demands of work activity, such as sitting, standing, walking, lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, or other physical functions (including manipulative or postural functions, such as reaching, handling, stooping or crouching), may reduce your ability to do past work and other work. 20 CFR 416.945(b).

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). At Step 1, the claimant is not engaged in substantial gainful activity and has not worked since 2001. Therefore, the claimant is not disqualified from receiving disability at Step 1.

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 (6<sup>th</sup> 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.

The objective medical evidence on the record further substantiates the following:

On [REDACTED] the claimant had exploratory surgery at [REDACTED] to rule out the possibility of ulcer disease and probability of reflux esophagitis. There were no complications. The claimant tolerated the procedure well and left the operating room in satisfactory condition. The claimant had an underlying esophageal stricture, which likely could be responsible for his symptoms of recurrent vomiting. The treatment recommended was an anti-reflux treatment program where the claimant would take Prilosec and Zantac. (Department Exhibit B1-B2)

On [REDACTED], the claimant saw his treating physician as a result of vomiting and heavy stomach acid. The claimant had a normal physical examination where the treating physician's assessment was GERD and he recommended medication with diet and exercise. (Department Exhibit 16)

On [REDACTED], the claimant was seen at [REDACTED] with a discharge date of [REDACTED]. The claimant's discharge diagnosis was esophageal varix, a GI bleed stable, chronic alcohol dependence, thrombocytopenia, and cirrhosis of the liver. The claimant was admitted to the hospital with massive upper GI bleed and was vomiting blood. He was admitted to the intensive care unit and hemoglobin was monitored closely. His hemoglobin was 9.1 with hematocrit of 25.9 on admission. The claimant's hemoglobin went down to 7.7 on [REDACTED] where he used two units of packed red blood cells. The claimant was given a GI consultation that did not show any bleeding ulcers, but did show esophageal varix, but no active bleeding. The claimant was discharged home in stable condition with folic acid, thiamine, Prilosec, and multivitamin medications. (Department Exhibit 11-12)

At Step 2, the objective medical evidence in the record indicates that the claimant has established that he has a severe impairment. The claimant was admitted on [REDACTED] to the hospital for massive upper gastrointestinal bleeding, but was released on the [REDACTED] in stable condition. The claimant has continued to have issues with GERD and gastritis as cited by his treating physician on [REDACTED] where he was treated with medication. On [REDACTED] the claimant underwent exploratory surgery that showed an underlying esophageal stricture where the claimant was recommended for anti-reflux treatment program. The claimant had a flare-up that required hospitalization and subsequent treatment, but it is not expected to last more than 12 months, which would make the claimant not meet the criteria for meeting duration. Therefore, the claimant is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 2. However, this Administrative Law Judge will proceed through the sequential evaluation process to determine disability because Step 2 is a *de minimus* standard.

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). This Administrative Law Judge finds

that the claimant's impairments do not rise to the level necessary to be listed as disabling by law. Therefore, the claimant is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 3.

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 the claimant does not have a driver's license and does not drive as a result of two DUIs in 1999 and 2001. The claimant does not cook because he loses track and burns the pan when he forgets. The claimant does not grocery shop because he has a problem walking. The claimant does clean his own home by picking up. The claimant doesn't do any outside. His hobby is watching TV. The claimant felt that his condition has worsened in the past year because he is having a problem keeping food down, weakness, and dizziness. The claimant stated that he did not have any mental impairment.

The claimant wakes up at 4:00 a.m. He sits with his girlfriend. He watches the news in bed. He goes back to sleep. He gets up at 7:00 a.m. He stays in the room. He lets the dog out. He picks up. He goes from the sofa to a chair and back to the bedroom. He talks on the telephone. He goes to bed at 9:00 p.m.

The claimant felt that he could walk 20-30 feet. The longest he felt he could stand was 2 minutes. The longest he felt he could sit was 10-15 minutes. The heaviest weight he felt he could carry was 2-3 pounds. The claimant is right-handed. The claimant's level of pain on a scale from 1 to 10 without medication is a 10 that decreases to a 2-3 with medication.

The claimant does smoke a pack of cigarettes a day. He stopped drinking alcohol on October 28, 2008 where before he would drink one-fourth of vodka a day. The claimant stopped smoking marijuana 10 years ago. The claimant did not think there was any work he could do.

At Step 4, this Administrative Law Judge finds that the claimant has established that he cannot perform any of his prior work. The claimant has lost 40 pounds in the past year as a result of his gastrointestinal issues. He was previously employed as a maintenance worker, carpenter, and plumber at the heavy level. The claimant may have a difficult time performing heavy work, but should be able to perform at least medium work. Therefore, the claimant should be able to perform his employment at the medium to light level. Therefore, the claimant is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 4. However, the Administrative Law Judge will still proceed through the sequential evaluation process to determine whether or not the claimant has the residual functional capacity to perform some other less strenuous tasks than in his prior jobs.

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.

...To determine the physical exertion requirements of work in the national economy, we classify jobs as sedentary, light, medium, heavy, and very heavy. These terms have the same meaning as they have in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, published by the Department of Labor.... 20 CFR 416.967.

**Sedentary work.** Sedentary work involves lifting no more than 10 pounds at a time and occasionally lifting or carrying articles like docket files, ledgers, and small tools. 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. Jobs are sedentary if walking and standing are required occasionally and other sedentary criteria are met. 20 CFR 416.967(a).

**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).

...To be considered capable of performing a full or wide range of light work, you must have the ability to do substantially all of these activities. If someone can do light work, we determine that he or she can also do sedentary work, unless there are additional limiting factors such as loss of fine dexterity or inability to sit for long periods of time. 20 CFR 416.967(b).

**Medium work.** Medium work involves lifting no more than 50 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 25 pounds. If someone can do medium work, we determine that he or she can also do sedentary and light work. 20 CFR 416.967(c).

The objective medical evidence on the record is insufficient that the claimant lacks the residual functional capacity to perform some other less strenuous tasks than in his previous employment or that he is physically unable to do any tasks demanded of him. The claimant's testimony as to his limitations indicates his limitations are exertional.

At Step 5, the claimant should be able to meet the physical requirements of medium work, based upon the claimant's physical abilities. Under the Medical-Vocational guidelines, a closely approaching advanced age individual with a high school education, and an unskilled and skilled work history, who is limited to medium work, is not considered disabled. 20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Rule 203.22. Using the Medical-Vocational guidelines as a framework for making this decision and after giving full consideration to the claimant's physical impairments, the Administrative Law Judge finds that the claimant can still perform a wide range of medium activities and that the claimant does not meet the definition of disabled under the MA program.

### **DECISION AND ORDER**

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law decides that the department has appropriately established that it was acting in compliance with department policy when it denied the claimant's application for MA-P and retroactive MA-P. The claimant should be able to perform any level of medium work. The department has established its case by a preponderance of the evidence.

Accordingly, the department's decision is **AFFIRMED**.

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Carmen G. Fahie  
Administrative Law Judge  
For Maura D. Corrigan, Director  
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Mailed: \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTICE:** Administrative Hearings may or may not require 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.

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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.

CGF / vc

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