

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.: 2009-36280  
Issue No.: 2009  
Case No.: [REDACTED]  
Load No.: [REDACTED]  
Hearing Date:  
January 11, 2010  
Wayne County DHS (17)

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, January 11, 2010. The Claimant appeared and testified, along with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] appeared on behalf of the Department.

During the hearing, the Claimant waived the time period for the issuance of this decision in order to allow for the submission of additional medical records. The additional records were received, reviewed, and entered as Exhibit 4. 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 Medical Assistance ("MA-P") program?

FINDINGS OF FACT

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

1. The Claimant submitted an application for public assistance seeking Medical Assistance (“MA-P”) on July 14, 2009.
2. On July 21, 2009, the Medical Review Team (“MRT”) determined the Claimant was not disabled. (Exhibit 1, pp. 3, 4)
3. On July 27, 2009, the Department sent an Eligibility Notice to the Claimant informing her that she was found not disabled. (Exhibit 1, p. 2)
4. On July 31, 2009, the Department received the Claimant’s written Request for Hearing.
5. On September 28, 2009, the State Hearing Review Team (“SHRT”) determined the Claimant not disabled. (Exhibit 3)
6. The Claimant’s alleged physical disabling impairment(s) are due to back/shoulder/neck pain, severe headache and blurred vision attributed to Arnold Chiari malformation.
7. The Claimant has alleged mental disabling impairment(s) due to depression, anxiety.
8. At the time of hearing, the Claimant was 51 years old with a [REDACTED] birth date; was 5’5” in height; and weighed 140 pounds.
9. The Claimant is a high school graduate with some college and work history as a care provider.
10. The Claimant’s impairment(s) has lasted, or is 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 Program Administrative Manual (“PAM”), the Program Eligibility Manual (“PEM”), and the Program Reference Manual (“PRM”).

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) The individual has the responsibility to provide evidence of prior work experience; efforts to work; and any other factor showing how the impairment affects the ability to work. 20 CFR 416.912(c)(3)(5)(6)

In addition to the above, when evaluating mental impairments, a special technique is utilized. 20 CFR 416.920a(a) First, an individual's pertinent symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings are evaluated to determine whether a medically determinable mental impairment exists. 20 CFR 416.920a(b)(1) When a medically determinable mental impairment is established, the symptoms, signs and laboratory findings that substantiate the impairment are documented to include the individual's significant history, laboratory findings, and functional limitations. 20 CFR 416.920a(e)(2) Functional limitation(s) is assessed based upon the extent to which the impairment(s) interferes with an individual's ability to function independently, appropriately, effectively, and on a sustained basis. *Id.*; 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(2) Chronic mental disorders, structured settings, medication, and other treatment and the effect on the overall degree of functionality is considered. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(1) In addition, four broad functional areas (activities of daily living; social functioning; concentration, persistence or pace; and episodes of decompensation) are considered when determining an individual's degree of functional limitation. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(3) The degree of limitation for the first three functional areas is rated by a five point scale: none, mild, moderate, marked, and extreme. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(4) A four point scale (none, one or two, three, four or more) is used to rate the degree of limitation

in the fourth functional area. *Id.* The last point on each scale represents a degree of limitation that is incompatible with the ability to do any gainful activity. *Id.*

After the degree of functional limitation is determined, the severity of the mental impairment is determined. 20 CFR 416.920a(d) If severe, a determination of whether the impairment meets or is the equivalent of a listed mental disorder is made. 20 CFR 416.920a(d)(2) If the severe mental impairment does not meet (or equal) a listed impairment, an individual's residual functional capacity is assessed. 20 CFR 416.920a(d)(3)

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 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 non-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 upon back/shoulder/neck pain, severe headache and blurred vision attributed to Arnold Chiari malformation, depression, and anxiety.

On [REDACTED], an MRI of the Claimant's brain was performed which revealed Chiari I malformation as well as solitary area of abnormal increased signal intensity deep in the right frontal white matter.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant presented to the emergency room with complaints of headache, ataxia, and lightheadedness. A CT of the head revealed crowding of soft tissues in the foramen magnum which may have represented a Chiari I malformation versus mass effect from an underlying mass. An MRI was recommended for further evaluation.

On [REDACTED], a Medical Examination Report was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The current diagnosis was headaches attributed to Chiari malformation. The Claimant's condition was deteriorating and she was limited to occasionally lifting/carrying of 20 pounds; standing and/or walking less than 2 hours during an 8-hour work day; and able to

perform repetitive actions with all extremities. The headaches were noted as disabling. The Claimant's sustained concentration was also limited.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant attended a consultative examination. After review of the MRI, the physician recommended decompression surgery however no assurances were given that her symptoms would be completely resolved.

On [REDACTED] a Psychiatric/Psychological Examination Report was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The Claimant was found to have major depressive disorder and pain disorder with a GAF of 40. A Mental Residual Functional Capacity Assessment was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The Claimant was markedly limited in her ability to understand and remember detailed instructions; carry out detailed instructions; maintain attention and concentration for extended periods; perform activities within a schedule, maintain regular attendance, and be punctual within customary tolerances; work in coordination with or proximity to others without being distracted by them; complete a normal workday; accept instructions and respond appropriately to criticism from supervisors; maintain socially appropriate behavior and to adhere to basic standards of neatness and cleanliness; respond appropriately to change in the work setting; be aware of normal hazards and take appropriate precautions; and set realistic goals or make plans independently of others. The psychologist opined that the Claimant was not psychotic but cleared affected by her condition and has incapacitated her abilities to function socially or professionally.

On [REDACTED], a Psychiatric Evaluation was performed on the Claimant. The Claimant was found to have poor insight and judgment and was diagnosed with dysthymic and generalized anxiety disorders. The Global Assessment Functioning ("GAF") was 50.



On [REDACTED], a Mental Residual Functional Capacity Assessment was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The Claimant was not markedly limited in any of the 20 factors. The Claimant was found able to perform simple, sustained, unskilled tasks with persistence.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant attended a follow-up examination for her Arnold-Chiari malformation pain. The Claimant's current medication was increased and she was prescribed additional pain medication.

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 medical evidence establishing that she does have physical and mental limitations on her ability to perform basic work activities. The medical evidence has established that 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 has alleged disabling impairment(s) due to back/shoulder/neck pain, severe headache and blurred vision, Arnold Chiari malformation, depression, and anxiety.

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.

In this case, the Claimant's back, neck, and shoulder pain is documented however the objective evidence does not support a finding of disabled under a listed impairment within 1.00.

The Claimant was diagnosed with Chiari malformation resulting in severe headaches and blurred vision amongst other symptoms. Listing 11.00 discusses adult neurological disorders. Listing 11.19 defines Syringomyelia. To meet the intent and severity requirement of this listing an individual must also show significant bulbar signs or disorganization of motor function. Disorganization of motor function means significant and persistent disorganization of motor function in two extremities, resulting in sustained disturbance of gross and dexterous movements, or gait and station. 11.04

In this case, the objective medical records establish the Claimant's diagnosis of Chiari malformation, which, over-time, has progressed causing headaches, blurred vision, and balance concerns. The Claimant was restricted to less than sedentary work and decompression surgery has been recommended. Ultimately, in consideration of the objective medical records, it is found that the Claimant's condition meets, or is the equivalent thereof, a listed impairment, specifically 11.19. Accordingly, the Claimant is found disabled at Step 3 with no further analysis required.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the findings of fact and conclusions of law, finds the Claimant disabled for purposes of the Medical Assistance program.

It is ORDERED:

1. The Department's determination is REVERSED.
2. The Department shall initiate review of the July 14, 2009 application to determine if all other non-medical criteria are met and inform the Claimant of the determination in accordance with department policy.
3. The Department shall supplement for lost benefits (if any) the Claimant was entitled to receive if otherwise eligible and qualified in accordance with department policy.
4. The Department shall review the Claimant's continued eligibility in April of 2011 in accordance with department policy.

*Colleen M. Mamelka*

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

Date Signed: 3/29/2010

Date Mailed: 3/29/2010

**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 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.

CMM/jlg

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