

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: 2009-13271
Issue No: 2009; 4031
Case No: [REDACTED]
Load No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
April 20, 2009
Muskegon County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Janice Spodarek

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 telephone hearing was held on April 29, 2009.

ISSUE

Did the Department of Human Services (DHS) properly propose to close claimant's Medical Assistance (MA-P) at review and properly deny claimant's State Disability Assistance (SDA) application?

FINDINGS OF FACT

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

(1) At all relevant times prior to the proposed negative herein, claimant was an MA-P recipient with the Michigan DHS. Claimant was previously approved based upon an SSA approval.

(2) Claimant's social security case was closed in 2008. Claimant testified that it was due to not returning paperwork. A SHRT decision dated 2/11/10 states that claimant's social security claim was denied as a new application in 9/08. SHRT indicates: "it appears the claimant may have had an SSA cessation in 10/06."

(3) In the instant case herein, claimant's MA-P was reviewed in November, 2008. At that time, the department took a new SDA application.

(4) On 12/11/08 the MRT denied claimant continuing MA-P eligibility and SDA as a new application.

(5) On 12/15/08 the DHS issued notice.

(6) On 12/16/08 claimant timely filed a hearing request. The department reinstated the MA-P pending the outcome of the hearing.

(7) On 3/6/09 the State Hearing Review Team (SHRT) denied claimant. Pursuant to claimant's request to hold the record open for the submission of new and additional medical documentation, on 2/12/10 SHRT once again denied claimant.

(8) As of the date of application, claimant was a 38-year-old female standing 5' 6" tall and weighing 200 pounds. Claimant's BMI Index is 32.2 classifying claimant as obese under the Medical Obesity Index.

(9) Claimant testified that she does not have an alcohol/drug abuse problem or history. Claimant testified that she had a drug abuse history approximately 3 years ago. Contrary information indicates that as of July, 2008, claimant was positive for marijuana and cocaine. Claimant was not a credible witness.

(10) Claimant has a driver's license and can drive a motor vehicle.

(11) Claimant is not currently working. Claimant testified that she is currently a student at Baker College. Claimant left the work history section of the department's exhibits blank (see Exhibit 78). Claimant testified that she worked babysitting and also took care of her mother for years.

(12) Claimant alleges continuing disability on the basis of a mental impairment.

(13) The 2/12/10 SHRT findings and conclusions of its decision are adopted and incorporated by reference to the following extent:

...claimant has a history of poly-substance abuse and also a history of noncompliance with her medication regiment. Claimant reported or endorsed symptoms of racing thoughts, mood swings, thoughts of striking out at others and auditory hallucinations in 10/08... Recommendation: Unable to do an actual medical review without the medical file from the last approval...

(14) The DHS failed to apply their review standard due to the failure of the local office to submit the medical file for the last determination approving claimant. The DHS did not meet its burden of proof for the MA program.

(15) Medical evidence in the file documents statutory disability. See Exhibits 77, 76, 75, 66, 65, 64, 63, 51, 50 and 49.

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).

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).

Statutory authority for the SDA program states in part:

- (b) A person with a physical or mental impairment which meets federal SSI disability standards, except that the minimum duration of the disability shall be 90 days. Substance abuse alone is not defined as a basis for eligibility.

In order to receive MA benefits based upon disability or blindness, claimant must be disabled or blind as defined in Title XVI of the Social Security Act (20 CFR 416.901). DHS, being authorized to make such disability determinations, utilizes the SSI definition of disability when making medical decisions on MA applications. MA-P (disability), also is known as Medicaid, which is a program designated to help public assistance claimants pay their medical expenses. Michigan administers the federal Medicaid program. In assessing eligibility, Michigan utilizes the federal regulations.

As noted in the Findings of Facts, this case with regard to the MA-P is a review case.

Relevant federal guidelines provide in pertinent part:

...the medical evidence we will need for a continuing disability review will be that required to make a current determination or decision as to whether you are still disabled, as defined under the medical improvement review standard.... 20 CFR 416.993.

...In some instances, such as when a source is known to be unable to provide certain tests or procedures or is known to be nonproductive or uncooperative, we may order a consultative examination while awaiting receipt of medical source evidence. Before deciding that your disability has ended, we will develop a complete medical history covering at least the 12 months preceding the date you sign

a report about your continuing disability status.... 20 CFR 416.993(b).

...If you are entitled to disability benefits as a disabled person age 18 or over (adult) there are a number of factors we consider in deciding whether your disability continues. We must determine if there has been any medical improvement in your impairment(s) and, if so, whether this medical improvement is related to your ability to work. If your impairment(s) has not so medically improved, we must consider whether one or more of the exceptions to medical improvement applies. If medical improvement related to your ability to work has not occurred and no exception applies, your benefits will continue. Even where medical improvement related to your ability to work has occurred or an exception applies, in most cases, we must also show that you are currently able to engage in substantial gainful activity before we can find that you are no longer disabled. 20 CFR 416.994(b).

Medical improvement. Medical improvement is any decrease in the medical severity of your impairment(s) which was present at the time of the most recent favorable medical decision that you were disabled or continued to be disabled. A determination that there has been a decrease in medical severity must be based on changes (improvement) in the symptoms, signs and/or laboratory findings associated with your impairment(s).... 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(i).

Medical improvement not related to ability to do work. Medical improvement is not related to your ability to work if there has been a decrease in the severity of the impairment(s) as defined in paragraph (b)(1)(i) of this section, present at the time of the most recent favorable medical decision, but no increase in your functional capacity to do basic work activities as defined in paragraph (b)(1)(iv) of this section. If there has been any medical improvement in your impairment(s), but it is not related to your ability to do work and none of the exceptions applies, your benefits will be continued.... 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(ii).

Medical improvement that is related to ability to do work. Medical improvement is related to your ability to work if there has been a decrease in the severity, as defined in paragraph (b)(1)(i) of this section, of the impairment(s) present at the time of the most recent favorable medical decision **and** an increase in your functional capacity to do basic work activities as discussed in paragraph (b)(1)(iv) of this section. A determination that medical improvement related to your ability to do work has occurred does not, necessarily, mean that your disability will be found to have ended unless it is also shown that you are currently able to engage

in substantial gainful activity as discussed in paragraph (b)(1)(v) of this section.... 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iii).

As noted above, at review, there is a two prong process. The first process requires a showing that there has been improvement.

After a careful review of the substantial and credible evidence on the whole record, this Administrative Law Judge finds that the medical evidence in this file does not show a substantiate improvement. First and foremost, the evidence indicates a severe mental impairment which is statutorily disabling in and of its self. At the same time, as noted by SHRT, the department failed to include the entire medical packet which would allow the reviewer to assess prior approval which is necessary in order to make a determination as to whether claimant has improved. This is required by federal and state policy. The burden of proof is on the department at review. As the DHS/SHRT stipulated that it was unable to assess improvement, the DHS has not met its burden of proof and thus, must be reversed. For these reasons, improvement is not shown as required by federal and state law, and thus, claimant is entitled to continue MA-P.

With regards to SDA, this application is considered a new application. As a new application, the burden of proof is on claimant and the five step sequential analysis is applied without considerations as to review.

These relevant federal guidelines at application provide in pertinent part:

"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.

The federal regulations require that several considerations be analyzed in sequential order:

...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.

The regulations require that if disability can be ruled out at any step, analysis of the next step is not required. These steps are:

1. 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). If no, the analysis continues to Step 2.
2. Does the client have a severe impairment that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more or result in death? If no, the client is ineligible for MA. If yes, the analysis continues to Step 3. 20 CFR 416.909(c).
3. Does the impairment appear on a special Listing of Impairments or are the client's symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings at least equivalent in severity to the set of medical findings specified for the listed impairment that meets the duration requirement? If no, the analysis continues to Step 4. If yes, MA is approved. 20 CFR 416.920(d).
4. Can the client do the former work that he/she performed within the last 15 years? If yes, the client is ineligible for MA. If no, the analysis continues to Step 5. Sections 200.00-204.00(f)?
5. Does the client have the Residual Functional Capacity (RFC) to perform other work according to the guidelines set forth at 20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Sections 200.00-204.00? This step considers the residual functional capacity, age, education, and past work experience to see if the client can do other work. If yes, the analysis ends and the client is ineligible for MA. If no, MA is approved. 20 CFR 416.920(g).

At application claimant has the burden of proof pursuant to:

...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).

Federal regulations are very specific regarding the type of medical evidence required by claimant to establish statutory disability. The regulations essentially require laboratory or clinical medical reports that corroborate claimant's claims or claimant's physicians' statements regarding disability. These regulations state in part:

...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 sure, X-rays);
- (4) Diagnosis (statement of disease or injury based on its signs and symptoms).... 20 CFR 416.913(b).

...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).

...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 a 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).

It is noted that Congress removed obesity from the Listing of Impairments shortly after the removal of drug addition and alcoholism. This removal reflects the view that there is a strong behavioral component to obesity. Thus, obesity in-and-of itself is not sufficient to show statutory disability.

Applying the sequential analysis herein, claimant is not ineligible at the first step as claimant is not currently working. 20 CFR 416.920(b). The analysis continues.

The second step of the analysis looks at a two-fold assessment of duration and severity. 20 CFR 416.920(c). This second step is a *de minimus* standard. Ruling any ambiguities in claimant's favor, this Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) finds that claimant meets both. The analysis continues.

The third step of the analysis looks at whether an individual meets or equals one of the Listings of Impairments. 20 CFR 416.920(d). Claimant does not. The analysis continues.

The fourth step of the analysis looks at the ability of the applicant to return to past relevant work. This step examines the physical and mental demands of the work done by claimant in the past. 20 CFR 416.920(f).

In this case, this ALJ finds that claimant cannot return to past relevant work on the basis of the medical evidence. The analysis continues.

The fifth and final step of the analysis applies the biographical data of the applicant to the Medical Vocational Grids to determine the residual functional capacity of the applicant to do other work. 20 CFR 416.920(g). After a careful review of the credible and substantial evidence on the whole record, this Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant meets statutory disability with regards to the SDA program. See Exhibits 77, 76, 75, 66, 65, 64, 63, 51, 50 and 49.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department's actions were incorrect.

Accordingly, the department's proposed determination and denial of claimant's SDA is hereby reversed.

The department is ORDERED to make a determination if claimant meets the non-medical criteria for continuing MA-P eligibility and for a new SDA application. If so, the department is ORDERED to continue MA-P eligibility and open an SDA case from the date of application and

issue supplemental benefits to claimant. The department is ORDERED to schedule this case for review within two months of this Decision and Order. The local office is ordered to assemble claimant's complete medical packet for review, including all medical for which claimant was initially approved so as to allow the medical review team's evidence upon which to assess improvement as required by federal and state law. It is so ordered.

/s/

Janice Spodarek
Administrative Law Judge
for Ismael Ahmed, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: April 22, 2010

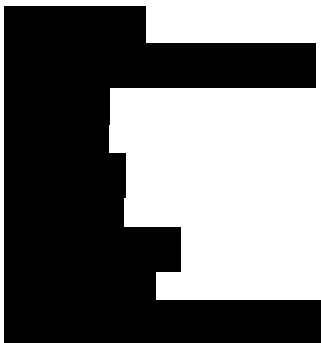
Date Mailed: April 23, 2010

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 mailing date of the rehearing decision.

JS/lk

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