

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: 2009-1672
Issue No: 2009
Case No: [REDACTED]
Load No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
January 22, 2009
Wayne County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Linda Steadley Schwarb

HEARING DECISION

This matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and MCL 400.37 upon claimant's request for a hearing. After due notice, a hearing was held on January 22, 2009. Claimant appeared and testified.

ISSUE

Did the Department of Human Services (DHS or department) properly determine that claimant is not "disabled" for purposes of the Medical Assistance (MA-P) program?

FINDINGS OF FACT

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

(1) On September 7, 2007, claimant applied for MA-P benefits. Claimant did not request retroactive medical coverage.

(2) On July 22, 2008, the department denied claimant's application for benefits based upon the belief that claimant did not meet the requisite disability criteria.

(3) On September 5, 2008, claimant filed a hearing request to protest the department's determination.

(4) Claimant is currently a recipient of the Adult Medical Program (AMP) and the Food Assistance Program.

(5) The Social Security Administration has denied claimant's application for disability benefits. Claimant did not appeal the determination.

(6) Claimant, age 54, has a 10th grade education.

(7) Claimant reports that he has had no relevant work experience.

(8) Claimant has no history of significant health problems.

(9) Claimant suffers from degenerative disc disease of the spine with radiculopathy of the lower extremities and mild vision impairment (20/25 in both eyes).

(10) Claimant's complaints and allegations concerning his impairments and limitations, when considered in light of all objective medical evidence, as well as the record as a whole, reflect an individual who has the physical and mental capacity to engage in simple, unskilled, light work activities on a regular and continuing basis.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Medical Assistance (MA) program is established by Title XIX of the Social Security Act and is implemented by Title 42 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The Department of Human Services (DHS or department) administers the MA program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MCL 400.105. Department policies are found in the Program Administrative Manual (PAM), the Program Eligibility Manual (PEM) and the Program Reference Manual (PRM).

Federal regulations require that the department use the same operative definition for “disabled” as used for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) under Title XVI of the Social Security Act. 42 CFR 435.540(a).

“Disability” is:

...the inability to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months
... 20 CFR 416.905

In general, claimant has the responsibility to prove that he is disabled.

Claimant’s impairment must result from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which can be shown by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory diagnostic techniques. A physical or mental impairment must be established by medical evidence consisting of signs, symptoms, and laboratory findings, not only claimant’s statement of symptoms. 20 CFR 416.908; 20 CFR 416.927. Proof must be in the form of medical evidence showing that the claimant has an impairment and the nature and extent of its severity. 20 CFR 416.912. Information must be sufficient to enable a determination as to the nature and limiting effects of the impairment for the period in question, the probable duration of the impairment and the residual functional capacity to do work-related physical and mental activities. 20 CFR 416.913.

In determining whether an individual is disabled, 20 CFR 416.920 requires the trier of fact to follow a sequential evaluation process by which current work activity, the severity of the impairment(s), residual functional capacity, and vocational factors (i.e., age, education, and work experience) are assessed in that order. When a determination that an individual is or is not

disabled can be made at any step in the sequential evaluation, evaluation under a subsequent step is not necessary.

First, the trier of fact must determine if the individual is working and if the work is substantial gainful activity. 20 CFR 416.920(b). In this case, claimant is not working. Therefore, claimant may not be disqualified for MA at this step in the sequential evaluation process.

Secondly, in order to be considered disabled for purposes of MA, a person must have a severe impairment. 20 CFR 416.920(c). A severe impairment is an impairment which significantly limits an individual's physical or mental ability to perform basic work activities. Basic work activities mean the abilities and aptitudes necessary to do most jobs. Examples of these include:

- (1) Physical functions such as walking, standing, sitting, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying or handling;
- (2) Capacities for seeing, hearing, and speaking;
- (3) Understanding, carrying out, and remembering simple instructions;
- (4) Use of judgment;
- (5) Responding appropriately to supervision, co-workers and usual work situations; and
- (6) Dealing with changes in a routine work setting. 20 CFR 416.921(b).

The purpose of the second step in the sequential evaluation process is to screen out claims lacking in medical merit. *Higgs v. Bowen* 880 F2d 860, 862 (6th Cir, 1988). As a result, the department may only screen out claims at this level which are "totally groundless" solely from a medical standpoint. The *Higgs* court used the severity requirement as a "*de minimus*

hurdle” in the disability determination. The *de minimus* standard is a provision of a law that allows the court to disregard trifling matters. In this case, claimant has presented the required medical data and evidence necessary to support a finding that he has significant physical limitations upon his ability to perform basic work activities such as lifting extremely heavy objects. Medical evidence has clearly established that claimant has an impairment (or combination of impairments) that has more than a minimal effect on claimant’s work activities. See Social Security Rulings 85-28, 88-13, and 82-63.

In the third step of the sequential consideration of a disability claim, the trier of fact must determine if the claimant’s impairment (or combination of impairments) is listed in Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR, Part 404. This Administrative Law Judge finds that the claimant’s medical record will not support a finding that claimant’s impairment(s) is a “listed impairment” or equal to a listed impairment. See Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR, Part 404, Part A. Accordingly, claimant cannot be found to be disabled based upon medical evidence alone. 20 CFR 416.920(d).

In the fourth step of the sequential consideration of a disability claim, the trier of fact must determine if the claimant’s impairment(s) prevents claimant from doing past relevant work. 20 CFR 416.920(e). In this case, claimant reports that he has had no past relevant work experience. Accordingly, claimant may not be eliminated from MA at this step in the sequential evaluation process.

In the fifth step of the sequential consideration of a disability claim, the trier of fact must determine if the claimant’s impairment(s) prevents claimant from doing other work. 20 CFR 416.920(f). This determination is based upon the claimant’s:

- (1) residual functional capacity defined simply as “what can you still do despite your limitations?” 20 CFR 416.945;

- (2) age, education, and work experience, 20 CFR 416.963-.965; and
- (3) the kinds of work which exist in significant numbers in the national economy which the claimant could perform despite his/her limitations. 20 CFR 416.966.

See *Felton v DSS* 161 Mich. App 690, 696 (1987). This Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant's residual functional capacity for work activities on a regular and continuing basis does include the ability to meet the physical and mental demands required to perform simple, unskilled, light work activities. Light work is defined as follows:

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).

There is insufficient objective medical evidence, signs, and symptoms to support a determination that claimant is incapable of performing the physical and mental activities necessary for a wide range of light work. An MRI of claimant's left knee performed on [REDACTED], was negative for meniscal tear or ligamentous injury. The MRI documented mild osteoarthritis with mild cartilaginous thinning without full-thickness loss. On [REDACTED], claimant was seen by a consulting neurologist. The neurologist found claimant to be a well-developed, well-nourished male in no apparent distress. The physician indicated that there was no tenderness over the costovertebral angle and no clubbing, cyanosis, or edema. The neurologist provided the following clinical impression:

'... Subjective feelings of numbness without any objective evidence of the clinical examination. The patient reflexes are intact and the pinprick and vibration also intact in both lower extremities...'

An MRI of claimant's lumbar spine performed on [REDACTED] documented multilevel disc bulges. A bone scan on [REDACTED] documented moderately severe degenerative changes involving the thoracic spine. On [REDACTED], claimant's treating physician, [REDACTED], diagnosed claimant with degenerative disc disease of the back with radiculopathy and mild vision impairment. [REDACTED] indicated that claimant's visual acuity (best corrected) was 20/25 in both eyes. The physician opined that claimant was limited to occasionally lifting up to 10 pounds as well as standing and walking less than two hours in an eight-hour workday. The physician indicated that claimant was capable of repetitive activities with the bilateral upper extremities but incapable of operating foot or leg controls with the bilateral lower extremities. The treating physician indicated that claimant had no mental problems or mental limitations. The treating physician's opinion with regard to physical functional capacity is not supported by acceptable medical evidence consisting of clinical signs, symptoms, laboratory or test findings or other evaluative techniques and is not consistent with other substantial evidence in the record. Claimant's treating physician did not present sufficient medical evidence to support his opinion with regard to claimant's physical functional capacity. The medical record presented fails to support the position that claimant is incapable of a wide range of light work activities. Claimant has had no recent hospitalizations. Records from his treating and consulting physician as well as test results have failed to establish limitations which would compromise his ability to perform a wide range of light work activities on a regular and continuing basis. The record simply fails to support the position that claimant is incapable of light work. Considering that claimant, at age 54, is closely approaching advanced age, has a 10th grade education, has had no relevant work experience, and has a sustained work capacity for light work, the undersigned must find that claimant's impairments do not prevent him from doing other work. As a guide, see 20 CFR,

Part 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Table 2, Rule 202.10. Accordingly, the undersigned must find that claimant is not presently disabled for purposes of 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 of Human Services properly determined that claimant is not “disabled” for purposes of the Medical Assistance program. Accordingly, the department’s determination in this matter must be AFFIRMED.

/s/

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

Date Signed: February 10, 2009

Date Mailed: February 12, 2009

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 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.

LSS/tg

