

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.: 2009-25105
Issue No.: 2009/4031
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Load No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: August 12, 2009
Wayne County DHS (41)

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 hearing was held in Detroit, Michigan on Wednesday, August 12, 2009. The Claimant appeared, along with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], and testified. The Claimant was represented by [REDACTED] of [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] appeared on behalf of the Claimant.

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 evidence. The new evidence was 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 a material fact:

1. The Claimant submitted an application for public assistance seeking MA-P benefits on December 23, 2008. (Exhibit 1, pp. 5 – 11)
2. On February 5, 2009, the Medical Review Team ("MRT") determined the Claimant was not disabled for purposes of the MA-P and SDA benefit programs. (Exhibit 1, pp. 13, 14)

3. On February 13, 2009, the Department sent an Eligibility Notice to the Claimant informing him that he was found not disabled. (Exhibit 1, p. 12)
4. On April 5, 2009, the Department received the Claimant's timely written Request for Hearing. (Exhibit 1, p. 2)
5. On June 15, 2009, the State Hearing Review Team ("SHRT") determined that the Claimant was not disabled. (Exhibit 2)
6. The Claimant's alleged physical disabling impairment(s) are due to right ankle pain status post surgical intervention with infection, deformity, and chronic back pain.
7. The Claimant's alleged mental impairment(s) are due to depression and anxiety.
8. At the time of hearing, the Claimant was 46 years old with a [REDACTED], [REDACTED] birth date; was 6' in height; and weighed 195 pounds.
9. The Claimant is a high school graduate with an employment history as a truck driver.
10. The Claimant's impairment(s) 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) 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 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 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 due to right ankle pain status post surgical intervention with infection, deformity, chronic back pain, depression, and anxiety.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant presented to the hospital after falling approximately 15 feet from a tree. The Claimant underwent surgery with ex-fix placement. The Claimant was discharged on [REDACTED] [REDACTED].

On [REDACTED], the Claimant attended a follow-up appointment for his right pilon fracture. The need for an open reduction internal fixation was noted but not possible at that time.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant underwent open reduction and internal fixation.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant underwent removal of failed hardware from the right tibia without complication. The Claimant was discharged on [REDACTED] [REDACTED].

On [REDACTED], the Claimant was admitted to the hospital with complications with his prior surgery. Irrigation and debridement was performed as well as VAC

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placement. On [REDACTED], the Claimant underwent an open distal right tibial fracture without complication. The Claimant was discharged on [REDACTED].

On [REDACTED], the Claimant attended a follow-up appointment to have his flap evaluated. The graft showed no signs of infection and appeared viable. The incision was well healed.

On this same date, x-rays of the right ankle were compared with ones from [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED]. The ankle was found to be relatively stable near anatomic alignment of the distal tibial and fibular fractures.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant underwent a split-thickness skin graft to the right lower extremity without complications.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant was admitted to the hospital with complaints of a rash and diarrhea. The Claimant's surgical wound was infected and continued to drain. The Claimant was discharged on [REDACTED] with the diagnoses of DRESS syndrome, clostridium difficile, and flap/graft of right ankle.

On [REDACTED], a Medical Examination Report was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The current diagnoses were split thickness skin graft. The physical examination found the Claimant able to ambulate with crutches however the right ankle skin graft was well perfused with no necrosis or drainage. The Claimant was able to occasionally lift/carry 10 pounds; stand and/or walk at least 2 hours in an 8 hour workday (with crutches); and able to perform repetitive actions with his upper extremities and lower left extremity.

On [REDACTED], a letter was submitted certifying the Claimant began mental health treatment since [REDACTED] for depression and anxiety.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant's treating physician authored a letter stating that due to a fall, the Claimant has had several surgeries in attempt to restore his right ankle. The Claimant's joint is destroyed and non-functioning. The physician opined that the Claimant was disabled.

On [REDACTED], a Medical Examination Report was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The current diagnoses were post-traumatic limb deformity and arthritis of the lower extremity. The physical examination revealed severe deformity and osteoarthritis of the right lower extremity. The Claimant's condition was deteriorating and he was found unable to work. The Claimant could not stand and required a cane or crutches for ambulation.

On this same date, a Physical Residual Functional Capacity Questionnaire was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The current diagnoses were post-traumatic limb deformity and joint destruction. The prognosis was poor. The Claimant's constant pain and decreased range of motion was also documented. Further, the impairment was expected to last more than 12 months. The need for possible amputation was also noted.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant attended a psychiatric evaluation. The diagnosis was dysthymic disorder. The Global Assessment Functioning ("GAF") was 49 and his prognosis was fair to guarded. The Claimant was found unable to handle his own benefit funds.

On [REDACTED], a Psychiatric/Psychological Examination Report and Mental Residual Functional Capacity Assessment were completed on behalf of the Claimant. The diagnosis was major depression. The GAF was 50. The Claimant was found markedly limited in his ability to understand, remember, and carry out detailed instructions. The Claimant was moderately limited in 9 of the 20 factors.

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 medical evidence establishing that he does have some physical and mental limitations on his 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 physical and mental disabling impairments due to right ankle pain status post surgical intervention with infection, deformity, chronic back pain, anxiety, and depression.

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

- 1.03 Reconstructive surgery or surgical arthrodesis of a major weight-bearing joint, with inability to ambulate effectively, as defined in 1.00B2b, and return to effective ambulation did not occur, or is not expected to occur, within 12 months of onset.

In this case, the Claimant suffered a right ankle fracture when he fell from a tree in July of 2008. Since that time, the Claimant has undergone several surgeries and as of October 2009, the Claimant continued to suffer from limb deformity, severe arthritis, and pain. The Claimant's condition is deteriorating and he is unable to ambulate without a

cane or crutch. The Claimant's treating physician noted that the Claimant's right ankle joint is destroyed and is non-functioning. As a result, the physician opined that the Claimant was unable to disabled and unable to work. In light of the foregoing, it is found that the Claimant's impairment(s) meet or is the equivalent thereof a Listed impairment within Listing 1.00, as detailed above. Accordingly, the Claimant is disabled at Step 3 with no further analysis required.

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 (MA-P) automatically qualifies an individual as disabled for purposes of the SDA program.

In this case, the Claimant is found disabled for purposes of the Medical Assistance ("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 Medical Assistance and State Disability Assistance programs.

It is ORDERED:

1. The Department's determination is REVERSED.
2. The Department shall initiate review of the August 5, 2009 application to determine if all other non-medical criteria are met and inform the Claimant and her authorized representative the determination in accordance with department policy.
3. The Department shall supplement for any lost benefits (if any) that 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 September of 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: 8/12/2010

Date Mailed: 8/12/2010

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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