

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.: 2009-37241  
Issue No.: 2009  
Case No.: [REDACTED]  
Load No.: [REDACTED]  
Hearing Date:  
November 19, 2009  
Wayne County DHS (76)

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 November 19, 2009. Claimant appeared and testified. Claimant was represented by [REDACTED].

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 December 17, 2008, claimant's authorized representative filed an application on claimant's behalf for MA-P benefits. The application requested MA-P retroactive to September of 2008.
- 2) On January 20, 2009, the department denied claimant's application for benefits based upon the belief that claimant did not meet the requisite disability criteria.

The department did not provide a notice of the denial to claimant's authorized representative.

- 3) On April 21, 2009, claimant's authorized representative filed a hearing request on claimant's behalf to protest the department's determination.
- 4) Claimant, age 49, has a high-school education.
- 5) Claimant last worked in 2004 as a nurse's assistant. Claimant has also performed relevant work as a cashier. Claimant's relevant work history consists exclusively of unskilled work activities.
- 6) Claimant has a history of anterior cervical fusion at C5-C6.
- 7) Claimant was hospitalized [REDACTED] as the result of syncope. Her discharge diagnosis was syncope, degenerative joint disease of the cervical and lumbar spine, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, moderate obesity, obstructive sleep apnea, Type II diabetes mellitus, and gastroesophageal reflux disease.
- 8) Claimant was hospitalized [REDACTED] as a result of ulcerative colitis.
- 9) Claimant suffers from osteoarthritis of the cervical and lumber spine, hypertension, gastroesophageal reflux disease, Type II diabetes mellitus, chronic vertigo, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, obesity, obstructive sleep apnea, pancreatitis, major depression-recurrent type, panic disorder with agoraphobia, and ulcerative colitis.
- 10) Claimant has severe limitations upon her ability to walk, stand, lift, push, pull, reach, carry, or handle as well as ability to remember simple instructions, use of judgment, and ability to deal with changes in a routine work setting. Claimant's limitations have lasted or are expected to last twelve months or more.

- 11) Claimant's complaints and allegations concerning her impairments and limitations, when considered in light of all objective medical evidence, as well as the record as a whole, reflect an individual who is so impaired as to be incapable of engaging in any substantial gainful activity 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 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 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.

In this case, claimant has presented the required medical data and evidence necessary to support a finding that she has significant physical and mental limitations upon her ability to perform basic work activities such as walking, standing, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying, or handling; understanding, carrying out, and remembering simple instructions; use of judgment; and dealing with changes in a routine work setting. 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). It is the finding of this Administrative Law Judge, based upon the medical evidence and objective, physical and psychological findings, that claimant is not capable of the walking, standing, lifting, and carrying required by her past employment. Claimant has presented the required medical data and evidence necessary to support a finding that she is not, at this point, capable of performing such work.

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 you 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). Once claimant reaches Step 5 in the sequential review process, claimant has already established a *prima facie* case of disability. *Richardson v Secretary of Health and Human Services*, 735 F2d 962 (6<sup>th</sup> Cir, 1984). At that point, the burden of proof is on the state to prove by substantial evidence that the claimant has the residual functional capacity for substantial gainful activity.

In this case, claimant has a history of an anterior cervical fusion at C5-C6. She was hospitalized [REDACTED] with a discharge diagnosis of syncope, chronic degenerative joint disease of the cervical and lumbar spine, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, moderate obesity, obstructive sleep apnea, Type II diabetes mellitus, and gastroesophageal reflux disease. An MRI of the cervical spine performed during hospitalization documented the fusion hardware at C5-C6 as well as moderate left foraminal stenosis at C5-C6 and mild to moderate bilateral foraminal stenosis at C6-C7. Claimant was seen by a consulting psychiatrist for the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. The psychiatrist diagnosed her with major depression, recurrent type, and panic disorder with agoraphobia. On [REDACTED], claimant's treating internist diagnosed her with spinal arthritis, hypertension, gastroesophageal disease, diabetes mellitus Type II, chronic vertigo,

depression, and anxiety. The physician opined that claimant was limited to occasionally lifting less than ten pounds and opined that she requires the use of a walker and cane for ambulation. The physician indicated that claimant is incapable of repetitive activities with the upper and lower extremities and noted limitations with comprehension and memory. Claimant was re-hospitalized [REDACTED] as a result of ulcerative colitis. On [REDACTED] claimant's treating psychiatrist diagnosed claimant with depression secondary to chronic medical condition and cyclothymic personality disorder versus bipolar disorder, hypomanic. On [REDACTED] [REDACTED], claimant's treating psychiatrist noted a nervous mood, irritable behavior, euphoria, impaired judgment, obsessions, and compulsions. On [REDACTED], claimant's treating internist diagnosed her with spinal arthritis, hypertension, gastroesophageal reflux disease, diabetes mellitus Type II, irritable bowel syndrome, chronic vertigo, depression, anxiety, ulcerative colitis, and pancreatitis. The physician opined that claimant was limited to occasionally lifting less than ten pounds and reported that claimant required the use of a walker and cane for ambulation. The physician indicated that claimant was incapable of repetitive activities with the upper and lower extremities and noted limitations with regard to comprehension.

After careful review of claimant's extensive medical record and the Administrative Law Judge's personal interaction with claimant at the hearing, this Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant's exertional and non-exertional impairments render claimant unable to engage in a full range of even sedentary work activities on a regular and continuing basis. 20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix 11, Section 201.00(h). See Social Security Ruling 83-10; *Wilson v Heckler*, 743 F2d 216 (1986). The department has failed to provide vocational evidence which establishes that claimant has the residual functional capacity for substantial gainful activity and that, given claimant's age, education, and work experience, there are significant numbers of jobs

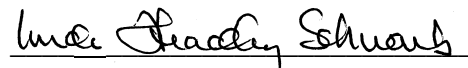
in the national economy which the claimant could perform despite claimant's limitations.

Accordingly, this Administrative Law Judge concludes that claimant is 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 claimant meets the definition of medically disabled under the Medical Assistance program as of September of 2008.

Accordingly, the department is ordered to initiate a review of the December 17, 2008, application, if it has not already done so, to determine if all other non medical eligibility criteria are met. The department shall inform claimant and her authorized representative of its determination in writing. Assuming that claimant is otherwise eligible for program benefits, the department shall review claimant's continued eligibility for program benefits in January of 2011.

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

Date Signed: February 3, 2010

Date Mailed: February 5, 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.

LSS/pf

cc:

