

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: 2009-4103

Issue No: 4031

Case No: [REDACTED]

Load No: [REDACTED]

Hearing Date:

February 19, 2009

Tuscola County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Marlene B. Magyar

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 February 19, 2009. Claimant and his significant other personally appeared and testified.

ISSUE

Did the department properly determine claimant is not disabled by State Disability Assistance (SDA) eligibility standards?

FINDINGS OF FACT

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

(1) Claimant is a 43-year-old pack per day smoker with a valid driver's license and access to a roadworthy vehicle; he resides with his significant other and her teenage daughter in

[REDACTED].

(2) Claimant stands approximately 5'11" tall and weighs 170 pounds; he is right hand dominant and completed ninth grade, per self report.

(3) Claimant testified he has not been employed for several years and recalled his last job was unskilled factory work at [REDACTED] over five years ago.

(4) On October 2, 2008, claimant applied for a monthly cash grant (SDA) because he has no income; he claims disability based on "mental problems" (Department Exhibit #1, pgs 121 and 122).

(5) Eight months earlier, in February 2008, claimant was briefly hospitalized and treated for carbon monoxide poisoning which he got when he was attempting to repair a snow blower truck in an unvented garage with the engine running (Department Exhibit #1, pgs 100-116).

(6) Claimant received oxygen therapy and antibiotics for a sinus infection (secondary diagnosis); condition on discharge was good (Department Exhibit #1, pgs 101 and 103).

(7) On March 20, 2009, claimant underwent an initial [REDACTED] [REDACTED] assessment (Client Exhibit A, pgs 1-3).

(8) Clinically, claimant appeared fully oriented to person, place, time and purpose with intact attention span and concentration, although he and his significant other both insisted his recent/remote memory were not intact (Client Exhibit A, pgs 1-3).

(9) Claimant was diagnosed with: (1) Mood Disorder, NOS; (2) Prescription Drug Addiction ([REDACTED]) with a history of [REDACTED] use, possession and sale; and (3) Antisocial Personality Disorder (Client Exhibit A, pg 2).

(10) During this initial [REDACTED] assessment, claimant alleged a myriad of pain complaints across multiple body systems (i. g., back, head, neck, wrists) and poor vision (Client Exhibit A, pg 1).

(11) Claimant's November 2007 lumbar spine MRI scan reveals mild disc bulging throughout with some spinal stenosis, but no spondylolysis, fracture, dislocation, herniation or other severe impairments are shown (Department Exhibit #1, pg 8).

(12) Likewise, claimant's November 2007 cervical spine CT scan was unremarkable, as was his October 2007 head CT scan (Department Exhibit #1, pgs 7 and 9).

(13) In January 2008, claimant was referred for right upper extremity electrodiagnostic testing secondary to his pain complaints (Department Exhibit #1, pgs 63-67).

(14) Claimant's bilateral upper extremity range of motion was within functional limits without any observable pain or joint instability; additionally, no evidence of cervical radiculopathy or ulnar neuropathy was seen (Department Exhibit #1, pgs 63 and 64).

(15) In March 2008, claimant was treated and released from his local [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for shortness of breath symptoms secondary to an exacerbation of longstanding asthma not uncommon in smokers; claimant acknowledged at hearing smoking cessation has been medically advised.

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).

Pursuant to Federal Rule 42 CFR 435.540, the Department of Human Services uses the federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) policy in determining eligibility for disability under the Medical Assistance program. Under SSI, 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

The SDA program differs from the federal MA regulations in that the durational requirement is 90 days. This means that the person's impairments must meet the SSI disability standards for 90 days in order for that person to be eligible for SDA benefits.

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 to make appropriate mental adjustments, if a mental disability is being alleged, 20 CFR 416.913. An individual's subjective pain complaints are not, in and of themselves, sufficient to establish disability. 20 CFR 416.908 and 20 CFR 416.929. By the same token, a conclusory statement by

a physician or mental health professional that an individual is disabled or blind is not sufficient without supporting medical evidence to establish disability. 20 CFR 416.929.

A set order is used to determine disability. Current work activity, severity of impairments, residual functional capacity, past work, age, or education and work experience is reviewed. If there is a finding that an individual is disabled or not disabled at any point in the review, there will be no further evaluation. 20 CFR 416.920.

If an individual is working and the work is substantial gainful activity, the individual is not disabled regardless of the medical condition, education and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(c).

If the impairment or combination of impairments do not significantly limit physical or mental ability to do basic work activities, it is not a severe impairment(s) and disability does not exist. Age, education and work experience will not be considered. 20 CFR 416.920.

Statements about pain or other symptoms do not alone establish disability. There must be medical signs and laboratory findings which demonstrate a medical impairment.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

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

In determining disability under the law, the ability to work is measured. An individual's functional capacity for doing basic work activities is evaluated. If an individual has the ability to

perform basic work activities without significant limitations, he or she is not considered disabled.
20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iv).

Basic work activities are 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 residual functional capacity is what an individual can do despite limitations. All impairments will be considered in addition to ability to meet certain demands of jobs in the national economy. Physical demands, mental demands, sensory requirements and other functions will be evaluated.... 20 CFR 416.945(a).

To determine the physical demands (exertional requirements) of work in the national economy, we classify jobs as sedentary, light, medium and heavy. These terms have the same meaning as they have in the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*, published by the Department of Labor... 20 CFR 416.967.

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).

Medical findings must allow a determination of (1) the nature and limiting effects of your impairment(s) for any period in question; (2) the probable duration of the impairment; and (3) the residual functional capacity to do work-related physical and mental activities. 20 CFR 416.913(d).

Medical evidence may contain medical opinions. Medical opinions are statements from physicians and psychologists or other acceptable medical sources that reflect judgments about the nature and severity of the impairment(s), including your symptoms, diagnosis and prognosis, what an individual can do despite impairment(s), and the physical or mental restrictions. 20 CFR 416.927(a)(2).

All of the evidence relevant to the claim, including medical opinions, is reviewed and findings are made. 20 CFR 416.927(c).

A statement by a medical source finding that an individual is "disabled" or "unable to work" does not mean that disability exists for the purposes of the program. 20 CFR 416.927(e).

If an individual fails to follow prescribed treatment which would be expected to restore their ability to engage in substantial gainful activity without good cause, there will not be a finding of disability.... 20 CFR 416.994(b)(4)(iv).

The Administrative Law Judge is responsible for making the determination or decision about whether the statutory definition of disability is met. The Administrative Law Judge reviews all medical findings and other evidence that support a medical source's statement of disability.... 20 CFR 416.927(e).

When determining disability, the federal regulations require that several considerations be analyzed in sequential order. If disability can be ruled out at any step, analysis of the next step is not required. These steps are:

1. Does the client perform Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA)? If yes, the client is ineligible for MA. If no, the analysis continues to Step 2. 20 CFR 416.920(b).
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 416.920(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? If no, the analysis continues to Step 4. If yes, MA is approved. 20 CFR 416.290(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. 20 CFR 416.920(e).
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? If yes, the analysis ends and the client is ineligible for MA. If no, MA is approved. 20 CFR 416.920(f).

Claimant is not disqualified from receiving SDA at Step 1, because he has not been gainfully employed in several years. As such, the analysis must continue.

At Step 2, the required 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 finds claimant meets both. As such, the analysis must continue. However, it must be noted the law does not require an applicant to be completely symptom free before a finding of lack of disability can be rendered. In fact, if an applicant's symptoms can be managed to the point where substantial gainful employment can be achieved, a

finding of not disabled must be rendered. Claimant's current prescription pain medication appears fully capable of adequate pain control given his diagnosed conditions. Nevertheless, this Administrative Law Judge will continue the analysis.

At Step 3, the medical evidence on this record does not support a finding that claimant's diagnosed impairments, standing alone or combined, are severe enough to meet or equal any specifically listed impairments; consequently, the analysis will continue.

At Step 4, claimant testified he has not worked in several years and he last engaged in medium exertional factory work. Again, ruling any ambiguities in claimant's favor, this Administrative Law Judge finds such work may be too physically challenging for claimant to return to, in light of his orthopedic impairments. As such, this analysis will continue.

At Step 5, an applicant's age, education and previous work experience (vocational factors) must be assessed in light of the documented impairments. Claimant is a younger individual with minimal education (9th grade only) and an unskilled work history. Consequently, at Step 5, this Administrative Law Judge finds, from the medical evidence of record, that claimant retains the residual functional capacity to perform at least light work, as that term is defined at 20 CFR 416.967(b).

Claimant's biggest barrier to employability appears to be his displacement from factory work, in combination with his lack of recent connection to the competitive workforce. Claimant should be referred to [REDACTED] for assistance with job training and/or placement consistent with his skills, interests and abilities. Claimant is not disabled under the governing rules because he can return to unskilled light work, as directed by Medical-Vocational Rule 202.17.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides the department properly denied claimant's October 2, 2008 SDA application because he is not disabled by the required eligibility standards.

Accordingly, the department's action is AFFIRMED.

/s/

Marlene B. Magyar
Administrative Law Judge
for Ismael Ahmed, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: January 13, 2010

Date Mailed: January 14, 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 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.

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