

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: 2009-6694

Issue No: 2009; 4031

Case No: [REDACTED]

Load No: [REDACTED]

Hearing Date:

March 19, 2009

Kalamazoo County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Landis Y. Lain

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 March 19, 2009. Claimant personally appeared and testified.

ISSUE

Did the Department of Human Services (the department) properly deny claimant's application for Medical Assistance (MA-P) and State Disability Assistance (SDA)?

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 11, 2008, claimant filed an application for Medical Assistance and State Disability Assistance benefits alleging disability.

(2) On October 22, 2008, the Medical Review Team denied claimant's application stating that claimant could perform other work.

(3) On November 3, 2008, the department caseworker sent claimant notice that his application was denied.

(4) On November 13, 2008, claimant filed a request for a hearing to contest the department's negative action.

(5) On December 30, 2009, the State Hearing Review Team again denied claimant's application stating in its analysis and recommendation: The claimant has complaints of back pain which improved with surgery. He should avoid heavy lifting and frequently stooping, crouching and twisting. He should be capable of performing a wide range of light work. Medical opinion was considered in light of CFR 416.927. The evidence in the file does not demonstrate any other impairment that would pose a significant limitation. The claimant's impairments do not meet/equal the intent or severity of a Social Security listing. The medical evidence of record indicates that the claimant retains the capacity to perform a wide range of light work. Therefore, based on the claimant's vocational profile of closely approaching advanced age, high school education and a history of skilled medium work, MA-P is denied using Vocational Rule 202.14 as a guide. Retroactive MA-P was considered in this case and is also denied. SDA is denied per PEM 261 because the nature and severity of the claimant's impairments would not preclude work activity at the above stated level for 90 days.

(6) The hearing was held on March 19, 2009. At the hearing, claimant waived the time periods and requested to submit additional medical information.

(7) Additional medical information was submitted and sent to the State Hearing Review Team on April 7, 2009.

(8) On April 14, 2009, the State Hearing Review Team again denied claimant's application stating that the claimant has a history of back pain. He underwent a L4-5

laminectomy in [REDACTED]. A MRI in [REDACTED] showed improvement in his spinal canal stenosis. There was no evidence of significant neurological abnormalities on exam. He was also treated for depression in [REDACTED] and noted improvement in his depression in [REDACTED]. The claimant is capable of simple unskilled light work. The claimant's impairments do not meet/equal the intent or severity of a Social Security listing. The medical evidence of record indicates that the claimant retains the capacity to perform a wide range of simple, unskilled light work. In lieu of detailed work history, the claimant will be returned to other work. Therefore, based on the claimant's vocational profile of closely approaching advanced age, high school education and a history of unskilled and semi-skilled work, MA-P is denied using Vocational Rule 202.13 as a guide. Retroactive MA-P was considered in this case and is also denied. SDA is denied per PEM 261 because the nature and severity of the claimant's impairments would not preclude work activity at the above stated level for 90 days.

(9) Claimant is a 51-year-old man whose birth date is [REDACTED]. Claimant is 6' tall and weighs 168 pounds. Claimant recently lost 40 pounds. Claimant graduated from high school and is able to read and write and does have basic math skills.

(10) Claimant last worked August 2008 making bar stools. Claimant has also worked as a phone technician, a truck driver and a medical assistant.

(11) Claimant alleges as disabling impairments: pinched sciatic nerve and back pain.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

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).

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).

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

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).

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).

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).

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).

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).

At Step 1, claimant is not engaged in substantial gainful activity and has not worked since August 2008. Claimant is not disqualified from receiving disability at Step 1.

The objective medical evidence on the record indicates that an operative report of [REDACTED] indicated that claimant had a laminectomy at L4-5. Post op note of [REDACTED] reported that claimant was showing good improvement of back and leg pain. His strength and reflexes were good. The physician released him to work with limitations in excessive heavy lifting and repetitive bending and twisting. (Page 23)

A mental status report dated [REDACTED], showed the claimant was neat and clean. His facial expression was flat. His mood was sad and depressed. His speech progression and productivity were within normal limits. Diagnosis was major depressive disorder, recurrent and severe. His mental status in [REDACTED] showed the claimant's speech was clear and not

pressured. Affect was fairly bright. He answered questions very interested. He had smiling and laughing at times. On [REDACTED] the claimant denied radicular symptoms but he had some pain down the side of the leg. Objective findings were stable. A MRI dated [REDACTED] showed improvement in his spinal canal stenosis since surgery. A [REDACTED] report indicates that claimant stated that his ex-wife killed herself a few months ago and that he had had some suicidal thoughts but didn't go through with it because he feels it is wrong. A DHS-49 form dated [REDACTED] indicates that claimant was normal in all examination areas except his musculoskeletal where he had some back problems at L4 and at L5. He was 6' tall and weighed 180.9 pounds and his blood pressure was 120/58 and he was right hand dominant. Claimant could use both of his upper extremities for repetitive actions such as simple grasping, reaching, pushing/pulling, fine manipulating and he could not use his feet or legs for foot or leg controls. Claimant had no mental limitation. The Social Security Administration also denied claimant's application for disability [REDACTED] stating that claimant was not disabled.

At Step 2, claimant has the burden of proof of establishing that he has a severely restrictive physical or mental impairment that has lasted or is expected to last for the duration of at least 12 months. There is insufficient objective clinical medical/psychiatric evidence in the record that claimant suffers a severely restrictive physical or mental impairment. Claimant has reports of pain in multiple areas of his body; however, there are no corresponding clinical findings that support the reports of symptoms and limitations made by the claimant. Although claimant did have some problems with his back, the clinical impression is not that claimant is deteriorating. Claimant has no medical finding that he has any muscle atrophy or trauma, abnormality or injury that is consistent with a deteriorating condition. In short, claimant has restricted himself from tasks associated with occupational functioning based upon his complaints

of pain (symptoms) rather than medical findings. Claimant's treating physician has stated that claimant can work with limitations and that he should not have excessive heavy lifting or repetitive bending or twisting. (Page 23)

There is insufficient objective psychiatric evidence in the record indicating claimant suffers mental limitations resulting from his reportedly depressed state. The evidentiary record is insufficient to find that claimant suffers a severely restrictive mental impairment. Claimant was oriented to time, person and place during the hearing. He was able to answer all the questions at the hearing and was responsive to the questions. A mental status exam in [REDACTED] showed the claimant's speech was clear and not pressured and that his affect was fairly bright. He answered questions very interested and he was smiling and laughing at times. For these reasons, this Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant has failed to meet his burden of proof at Step 2. Claimant must be denied benefits at this step based upon his failure to meet the evidentiary burden.

If claimant had not been denied at Step 2, the analysis would proceed to Step 3 where the medical evidence of claimant's condition does not give rise to a finding that he would meet a statutory listing in the code of federal regulations.

If claimant had not already been denied at Step 2, this Administrative Law Judge would have to deny him again at Step 4 based upon his ability to perform past relevant work. Claimant's past relevant work was selling or assembling bar stools, and as a phone technician and a truck driver. This Administrative Law Judge finds that there is insufficient objective medical evidence upon which this Administrative Law Judge could base a finding that claimant is unable to perform any of the prior work in which he was engaged in in the past. Therefore, if claimant had not already been denied at Step 2, he would again be denied at Step 4.

The Administrative Law Judge will continue to proceed through the sequential evaluation process to determine whether or not claimant has the residual functional capacity to perform some other less strenuous tasks than in his prior jobs.

At Step 5, the burden of proof shifts to the department to establish that claimant does not have residual functional capacity.

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.

Sedentary work. Sedentary work involves lifting no more than 10 pounds at a time and occasionally lifting or carrying articles like docket files, ledgers, and small tools. Although a sedentary job is defined as one which involves sitting, a certain amount of walking and standing is often necessary in carrying out job duties. Jobs are sedentary if walking and standing are required occasionally and other sedentary criteria are met. 20 CFR 416.967(a).

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).

Claimant has submitted insufficient objective medical evidence that he lacks the residual functional capacity to perform some other less strenuous tasks than in his prior employment or that he is physically unable to do light or sedentary tasks if demanded of him. Claimant testified that he does have a driver's license and he drives two to three times per week to the grocery store and to the doctors and he usually has to drive five to six miles. Claimant does cook two times per day and usually microwaves food. Claimant does grocery shop bi-monthly and his son helps if there's large amounts. Claimant testified that he does dust and do dishes and that he can walk a quarter to one-third of a mile, can stand for 15 minutes to a half an hour at a time and can sit for an hour to an hour and a half at a time. Claimant testified that he is able to shower and dress himself and that he is right handed and that his hands and arms are fine but his legs and feet do have some pain in the hips to the calves. Claimant testified that his level of pain on a scale from 1 to 10 without medication is 5 to an 8 and with medication is a 3 to a 6. Claimant testified that he does smoke a pack of cigarettes per day and his doctor has told him to quit but he is not yet ready to quit and he's not in a smoking cessation program.

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).

Claimant does continue to smoke despite the fact that his doctor has told him to quit. He is not in compliance with his treatment program.

Claimant has submitted insufficient objective medical evidence that he lacks the residual functional capacity to perform some other less strenuous tasks than in his prior employment or that he physically unable to do light or sedentary tasks if demanded of him.

Claimant testified on the record that he does have depression because he can't do anything and has no income and has had depression for approximately two years.

For mental disorders, severity is assessed in terms of the functional limitations imposed by the impairment. Functional limitations are assessed using the criteria in paragraph (B) of the listings for mental disorders (descriptions of restrictions of activities of daily living, social functioning; concentration, persistence, or pace; and ability to tolerate increased mental demands associated with competitive work).... 20 CFR, Part 404, Subpart P, App. 1, 12.00(C).

There is insufficient objective medical/psychiatric evidence contained in the file of depression or a cognitive dysfunction that is so severe that it would prevent claimant from working at any job. Claimant was able to answer all the questions at the hearing and was responsive to the questions. Claimant was oriented to time, person and place during the hearing. Claimant's complaints of pain, while profound and credible, are out of proportion to the objective medical evidence contained in the file as it relates to claimant's ability to perform work. Therefore, this Administrative Law Judge finds that the objective medical evidence on the record does not establish that claimant has no residual functional capacity. Claimant is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 5 based upon the fact that he has not established by objective medical evidence that he cannot perform light or sedentary work even with his impairments.

The department's Program Eligibility Manual contains the following policy statements and instructions for caseworkers regarding the State Disability Assistance program: to receive State Disability Assistance, a person must be disabled, caring for a disabled person or age 65 or older. PEM, Item 261, page 1. Because the claimant does not meet the definition of disabled under the MA-P program and because the evidence of record does not establish that claimant is

unable to work for a period exceeding 90 days, the claimant does not meet the disability criteria for State Disability Assistance benefits either.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that the department has appropriately established on the record that it was acting in compliance with department policy when it denied claimant's application for Medical Assistance, retroactive Medical Assistance and State Disability Assistance benefits. The claimant should be able to perform a wide range of light or sedentary work even with his impairments. The claimant should be able to perform his prior work even with his impairments. The department has established its case by a preponderance of the evidence.

Accordingly, the department's decision is AFFIRMED.

/s/ _____
Landis Y. Lain
Administrative Law Judge
for Ismael Ahmed, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: May 13, 2009

Date Mailed: May 14, 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.

2009-6694/LYL

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.

LYL/vmc

cc:

