

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.: 2010-10800
Issue No.: 2009, 4031
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Load No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
February 18, 2010
Wayne County DHS (35)

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 February 18, 2010. 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) and State Disability Assistance (SDA) programs?

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 November 17, 2008, claimant filed an application for MA-P and SDA benefits. Claimant did not request retroactive medical coverage.

- 2) On October 30, 2009, the department denied claimant's application for benefits based upon the belief that claimant did not meet the requisite disability criteria.
- 3) On November 9, 2009, a hearing request was filed to protest the department's determination.
- 4) Claimant, age 44, has a tenth-grade education and has earned a GED.
- 5) At the time of the hearing, claimant was employed working at home twelve to fifteen hours per week as a telephone solicitor for [REDACTED]. Claimant has also performed relevant work as a customer services representative (telephone and computer work) as well as a hospital housekeeper. Claimant's relevant work history consists exclusively of unskilled work activities.
- 6) Claimant has had no recent hospitalizations.
- 7) Claimant currently suffers from hypertension, hyperlipidemia, diabetes mellitus, diabetic neuropathy of the lower extremities, diabetic retinopathy (claimant has 20/20 vision with best correction), plantar fasciitis, allergic rhinitis, and tobacco use.
- 8) Claimant has severe limitations upon her ability to walk or stand for prolonged periods of time and lift extremely heavy objects. Claimant's limitations have lasted twelve months or more.
- 9) 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 has the physical and mental capacity to engage in unskilled, sedentary 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 she 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 testified that she has been working twelve to fifteen hours per week from home performing telephone solicitation on behalf of [REDACTED]. Claimant reported that, in May of 2010, she will have performed the job for two years. The record does not support a finding that claimant is engaged in substantial gainful activity. See 20 CFR 416.974. Accordingly, 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 (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 she has significant physical limitations upon her ability to perform basic work activities such as walking and standing for long periods of time and 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). It is the finding of this Administrative Law Judge, based upon the medical evidence and objective, physical findings, that claimant is capable of her past work as a customer services representative. Claimant reported that this position was basically telephone work with customers and performing computer work, processing claims. The hearing record fails to support the position that claimant is no longer capable of performing such work. But, even if claimant were to be found incapable of performing past work activities, she would still be found capable of performing other 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 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 unskilled, sedentary work. Sedentary work is defined as follows:

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).

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 sedentary work. On [REDACTED], claimant was seen by a consulting internist for the [REDACTED]. The consultant provided the following impression:

1. **DIABETES:** The examinee has a history of diabetes, currently on medication and non-insulin dependent. The highest blood sugar was 208. She does not check it at home.
2. **HYPERTENSION:** The examinee has a history of hypertension since [REDACTED], currently on medication. Her blood pressure is under good control.
3. **ANEMIA:** The examinee has a history of anemia, currently on ferrous sulfate.
4. **PLANTAR FASCIITIS:** The examinee states she has pain on the plantar surfaces of both feet with mild calluses and plantar fasciitis. She also has diabetic neuropathy.
5. **BRONCHIAL INFECTIONS:** The examinee has a history of bronchial infections and history of smoking. She continues to smoke. She states she has been seen and treated in the emergency department on multiple occasions for the problem. She is using an inhaler as well.

The [REDACTED] consulting internist opined that:

“The examinee is able to occasionally lift and carry 15 pounds. She is able to stand or walk about 6 hours in an 8-hour work day alternating with sitting frequently. She is able to sit about 6 hours in an 8-hour work day. She is able to use her upper extremities for simple grasping, reaching, pushing, pulling and fine manipulation. She is able to operate foot or leg controls only minimally because of her paresthesias that will occur while sitting. She should also

avoid exposure to extremes in hot and cold and humidity due to bronchial infections. She should also quit smoking.”

On [REDACTED], claimant’s podiatrist diagnosed claimant with diabetes, neuropathy, and plantar fasciitis. On [REDACTED], claimant was seen by an ophthalmologist who diagnosed proliferative diabetic retinopathy. The specialist indicated that, with best correction, claimant had 20/20 vision in both eyes. On [REDACTED], claimant’s treating internist diagnosed claimant with hypertension, diabetes, hyperlipidemia, diabetic neuropathy, allergic retinitis and tobacco use. The treating physician opined that claimant was capable of frequently lifting less than ten pounds and occasionally lifting up to twenty pounds. The physician gave claimant no limitations with regard to standing, walking, or sitting and noted that claimant did not require an assistive device for ambulation. The treating physician found the claimant to be capable of simple grasping and reaching with the bilateral upper extremities. After review of claimant’s medical records, reports from treating physicians and a [REDACTED] [REDACTED] consultant, claimant has failed to establish limitations which would compromise her ability to perform a wide range of sedentary work activities on a regular and continuing basis. See Social Security Rulings 83-10 and 96-9p. The record fails to support the position that claimant is incapable of sedentary work activities.


Considering that claimant, at age 44, is a younger individual, has a tenth-grade education, has an unskilled work history, and has a sustained work capacity for sedentary work, this Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant’s impairments do not prevent her from doing other work. As a guide, see 20 CFR, Part 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Table 1, Rule 201.24. Accordingly, the undersigned must find that claimant is not presently disabled for purposes of the MA program.

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).

A person is considered disabled for purposes of SDA if the person has a physical or mental impairment which meets federal SSI disability standards for at least 90 days. Receipt of SSI or RSDI benefits based upon disability or blindness or the receipt of MA benefits based upon disability or blindness (MA-P) automatically qualifies an individual as disabled for purposes of the SDA program. Other specific financial and non-financial eligibility criteria are found in PEM Item 261. In this case, there is insufficient medical evidence to support a finding that claimant is incapacitated or unable to work under SSI disability standards for at least 90 days. Accordingly, the undersigned must find that claimant is not presently disabled for purposes of the SDA 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 and State Disability Assistance programs. Accordingly, the department’s determination in this matter is hereby affirmed.


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

Date Signed: March 30, 2010

Date Mailed: March 31, 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:

