

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: 2010-13946

Issue No: 2009; 4031

Case No: [REDACTED]

Load No: [REDACTED]

Hearing Date:

February 24, 2010

Wayne 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 February 24, 2010. 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 July 1, 2009, claimant filed an application for Medical Assistance and State Disability Assistance benefits alleging disability.

(2) On November 17, 2009, the Medical Review Team denied claimant's application stating that claimant could perform prior work.

(3) On November 18, 2009, the department caseworker sent claimant notice that her application was denied.

(4) On December 7, 2009, claimant filed a request for a hearing to contest the department's negative action.

(5) On January 7, 2010, the State Hearing Review Team again denied claimant's application stating that claimant is capable of performing other work in the form of light work per 20 CFR 416.967(b) pursuant to Medical Vocational Rule 202.20.

(6) Claimant is a 48-year-old woman whose birth date is [REDACTED]. Claimant is 5' 1" tall and weighs 160 pounds. Claimant has a Bachelor of Arts in English and is able to read and write and does have basic math skills.

(7) Claimant last worked in May 2009, as a captain, and server and waitress. Claimant has also worked as a catering manager, doing real estate sales, and as a vice president of research at [REDACTED] menu planning and inventing new recipes.

(8) Claimant alleges as disabling impairments: ten cervical fusions and cervical stenosis, numb hands and arms, poor bowel control, a cyst on her ovary, and depression for the last six years because her mother was murdered.

#### 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 Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), the Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM) 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 Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), the Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM) 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 May 2009. Claimant is not disqualified from receiving disability at Step 1.

The objective medical evidence on the record indicates that a medical examination report contained in the file, dated July 13, 2009, indicates that claimant is normal in all areas of examination except neurological, where she has some weakness of her hands and abnormal reflexes because she had severe spinal cord compression. The clinical impression was that she was improving and that she has a temporary disability, which would be six months to one year depending upon her progress. Claimant did not require an assistive device for ambulation and she could frequently lift 10 pounds or less, but never lift 20 pounds or more. Claimant could stand and walk less than 2 hours in an 8-hour day and could do simple grasping and fine manipulating with both upper extremities, but she could do not reaching, pushing or pulling, and could not operate foot and leg controls because she was recovering from major neck surgery. (pages 5,6)

A medical update indicates that a physical residual functional capacity assessment was performed by the Social Security Administration on December 7, 2009. Claimant had done well since surgery. She said her hands have less tingling and her truck also has less tingling. She has some patchy distribution of numbness, however, like she had before surgery. Overall, things are showing a beneficial response even one month after surgery. She is ambulating well. She is wearing her collar. She is taking [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. On examination, surgical incisions have healed really well. She has a non-focal motor examination. Her hand intrinsics are slightly stronger than before surgery. Her examination was stable. Her x-rays look great. They show

good position of the hardware and interbody cages. She is status-post surgical decompression and fusion. She was doing well early on. The doctor wanted her to come back in six weeks.

(page 55)

A September 21, 2009 neurosurgery report indicates that claimant had a recent fall and was having increased pain across the back of her neck. There were no motor or sensory deficits. She was moving her neck fairly well, all things considered. The x-rays show a front and back cervical fusion. She had anterior hardware from C3-C5 as well as posterior hardware from C3-C6. She was status-post anterior and posterior cervical decompression and fusion. She has done very well. Her myelopathic symptoms have improved. She had a recent fall but things are improving. The doctor said to come back in three months. (page 54)

A physical residual functional capacity assessment performed for the Disability Determination Service indicates that claimant could occasionally lift 20 pounds, frequently lift 10 pounds, sit for about 6 hours in an 8-hour workday, and stand or walk for about 6 hours in an 8-hour workday. She could do limited pushing and pulling, and her condition was improving.

At Step 2, claimant has the burden of proof of establishing that she 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 evidence in the record that claimant suffers a severely restrictive physical or mental impairment. Claimant's impairments do not meet duration. Claimant last worked in May 2009. Claimant did not meet duration before May 2010, as her impairments have not kept her from working for at least 12 months. Therefore, claimant is disqualified at Step 2. Claimant has reports of pain in multiple areas of her body; however, there are no corresponding clinical findings that support the reports of symptoms and limitations made by the claimant. Claimant is status-post neck surgery and post-surgical decompression and fusion. Her condition has been steadily improving. The clinical impression is

that claimant is improving. There is no finding that claimant any muscle atrophy or trauma, abnormality or injury that is consistent with a deteriorating condition. In short, claimant has restricted herself from tasks associated with occupational functioning based upon her reports of pain (symptoms) rather than medical findings. Reported symptoms are an insufficient basis upon which a finding that claimant has met the evidentiary burden of proof can be made. This Administrative Law Judge finds that the medical record is insufficient to establish that claimant has a severely restrictive physical impairment.

There is insufficient objective medical/psychiatric evidence contained in the record indicating that claimant suffers mental limitations resulting from her reportedly depressed state. There is no mental residual functional capacity assessment in the record.

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).

Claimant testified on the record that she is depressed because her mother was murdered, and she has clinical depression. Claimant testified that she could stand for an hour at a time, sit for an hour at a time, and that she can walk one block and can squat with help.

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.



For these reasons, this Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant has failed to meet her burden of proof at Step 2. Claimant must be denied benefits at this step based upon her 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 she 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 her again at Step 4 based upon her ability to perform her past relevant work. Claimant's past relevant work was sedentary or light. As a real estate agent or a menu planner does not require strenuous physical exertion, there is insufficient objective medical evidence upon which this Administrative Law Judge could base a finding that claimant is unable to perform work which she has engaged in, in the past. Therefore, if claimant had not already been denied at Step 2, she would be denied again at Step 4.

Claimant does continue to smoke cigarettes despite the fact that her doctor has told her to quit. Claimant is not in compliance with her treatment 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).

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 her 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 she lacks the residual functional capacity to perform some other less strenuous tasks than in her prior employment or that she is physically unable to do light or sedentary tasks if demanded of her. Claimant's activities of daily living do not appear to be very limited and she should be able to perform light or sedentary work even with her impairments. Claimant has failed to provide the necessary objective medical evidence to establish that she has a severe impairment or combination of

impairments which prevent her from performing any level of work for a period of 12 months.

The claimant's testimony as to her limitations indicates that she should be able to perform light or sedentary work.

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 she has not established by objective medical evidence that she cannot perform light or sedentary work even with her impairments. Under the Medical-Vocational guidelines, a younger individual (age 48), with a college education and a skilled work history who is limited to light work is not considered disabled.

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. BEM, Item 261, p. 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

