

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: 2010-20693

Issue No: 2009/4031

Case No: [REDACTED]

Load No: [REDACTED]

Hearing Date:

April 7, 2010

Bay County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Jana A. Bachman

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, an in-person hearing was held on April 7, 2010. Claimant was represented by [REDACTED]

ISSUE

Whether claimant has established disability for Medical Assistance (MA). Whether the department has established that claimant no longer meets the disability requirements for 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) May 11, 2009, claimant applied for MA. During May 2009, claimant was a recipient of SDA. Medical review was requested for October 2009.

(2) October 5, 2009, the Medical Review Team (MRT) denied claimant's MA application and SDA medical review. Department Exhibit A.

(3) December 8, 2009, the department sent claimant written notice that the MA application and the SDA medical review were denied.

(4) December 28, 2009, the department received claimant's timely request for hearing.

(5) March 2, 2010, the State Hearing Review Team (SHRT) denied claimant's MA application and SDA medical review. Department Exhibit B.

(6) April 7, 2010, the in-person hearing was held. Prior to the close of the record, claimant submitted additional medical evidence. Claimant waived the right to a timely hearing decision. April 14, 2010, after review of all medical evidence, the SHRT again denied claimant's medical application and SDA medical review. SHRT Decision, 4-14-10.

(7) Claimant asserts disability based on impairments caused by being post surgery for herniated disc, depression, and anxiety.

(8) Claimant testified at hearing. Claimant is 22 years old, 6' tall . He completed high school and some electrician courses. He has a driver's license and is able to drive. Claimant cares for his needs at home.

(9) Claimant's past relevant employment has been as an electrician's apprentice and farm hand.

(10) At last positive decision in July 2009, December 15, 2008, claimant underwent x-rays of the lumbosacral spine that revealed levoscoliosis. December 15, 2008, claimant underwent x-rays of the thoracic spine that revealed dextroscoliosis but no other bony abnormality. December 15, 2008, claimant underwent a scoliosis study that revealed

levoscoliosis of the lumbar spine and dextroscoliosis of the thoracic spine. Department Exhibit A, pgs 173-175.

(11) On or about May 5, 2009, claimant underwent surgery to repair L4-5 and L5-S1 disc herniation. Claimant had exhibited instability in the lower back with intractable back and radicular leg pain, scoliosis. Department Exhibit A, pgs 138-139 and 146-147. March 4, 2008, claimant was admitted to hospital due to depression and suicidal thoughts. AXIS I diagnoses was major depression, moderate, single episode. GAF was assessed at 40. Claimant improved with treatment and was discharged on March 7, 2008. Department Exhibit A, pgs 81-104.

(12) At review, claimant's neurologist wrote a letter dated August 5, 2009, that indicates claimant is three months out of a lumbar decompression and fusion and is doing quite well. His legs are healing fine. He does get some back soreness depending on his level of activity. Plain x-ray shows stable fusion. At last x-ray, his TLIF graft had backed out a little bit, but since he was not having any leg symptoms doctor opined that there was no need to do much about it. Doctor plans to have claimant wean himself out of brace over the next week or so. He was scheduled to start with a physiotherapy program. Department Exhibit A, pg 27. October 7, 2009, claimant's neurologist completed a letter. Claimant is five months out of the lumbar decompression and fusion and is doing very well. His back feels great and he is starting to do exercises. He has a good range of motion but doctor cautions not to rush things too much. He is scheduled for a little bit of therapy for the back and advised to take up activities like swimming, stationary bike, to strength up his back. Doctor indicates that long-term, claimant should look at jobs that do not involve a lot of heavy lifting, a lot of bending or twisting, or prolonged periods of sitting. Claimant Exhibit A., pg 1.

(13) At review, claimant has medical improvement or was not disabled at the time of the last positive decision in July 2009.

(14) Claimant is able to perform at least sedentary work activities.

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).

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).

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).

If an individual fails to cooperate by appearing for a physical or mental examination by a certain date without good cause, there will not be a finding of disability. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(4)(ii).

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).

Medical improvement. Medical improvement is any decrease in the medical severity of your impairment(s) which was present at the time of the most recent favorable medical decision that you were disabled or continued to be disabled. A determination that there has been a decrease in medical severity must be based on changes (improvement) in the symptoms, signs and/or laboratory findings associated with your impairment(s).... 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(i).

Medical improvement that is related to ability to do work. Medical improvement is related to your ability to work if there has been a decrease in the severity, as defined in paragraph (b)(1)(i) of this section, of the impairment(s) present at the time of the most recent favorable medical decision **and** an increase in your functional capacity to do basic work activities as discussed in

paragraph (b)(1)(iv) of this section. A determination that medical improvement related to your ability to do work has occurred does not, necessarily, mean that your disability will be found to have ended unless it is also shown that you are currently able to engage in substantial gainful activity as discussed in paragraph (b)(1)(v) of this section.... 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iii).

Functional capacity to do basic work activities. Under the law, disability is defined, in part, as the inability to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment(s).... 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iv).

In determining whether you are disabled under the law, we must measure, therefore, how and to what extent your impairment(s) has affected your ability to do work. We do this by looking at how your functional capacity for doing basic work activities has been affected.... 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iv).

Basic work activities means the abilities and aptitudes necessary to do most jobs. Included are exertional abilities such as walking, standing, pushing, pulling, reaching and carrying, and non-exertional abilities and aptitudes such as seeing, hearing, speaking, remembering, using judgment, dealing with changes and dealing with both supervisors and fellow workers.... 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iv).

...A decrease in the severity of an impairment as measured by changes (improvement) in symptoms, signs or laboratory findings can, if great enough, result in an increase in the functional capacity to do work activities.... 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iv)(A).

When new evidence showing a change in signs, symptoms and laboratory findings establishes that both medical improvement has occurred and your functional capacity to perform basic work activities, or residual functional capacity, has increased, we say that medical improvement which is related to your ability to do work has occurred. A residual functional capacity assessment is also used to determine whether you can engage in substantial gainful activity and, thus, whether you continue to be disabled.... 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iv)(A).

...Point of comparison. For purposes of determining whether medical improvement has occurred, we will compare the current medical severity of that impairment(s) which was present at the time of the most recent favorable medical decision that you were

disabled or continued to be disabled to the medical severity of that impairment(s) at that time.... 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(vii).

If you have more than one impairment, we will consider all of your impairments of which we are aware. We will consider your ability to meet certain demands of jobs, such as physical demands, mental demands, sensory requirements, and other functions as described in paragraphs (b), (c) and (d) of this section. Residual functional capacity is an assessment based upon all of the relevant evidence. This assessment of your capacity for work is not a decision on whether you are disabled but is used as a basis for determining the particular types of work you may be able to do despite your impairment. 20 CFR 416.945.

...When we assess your physical abilities, we first assess the nature and extent of your physical limitations and then determine your residual functional capacity for work activity on a regular and continuing basis. A limited ability to perform certain physical demands of work activity, such as sitting, standing, walking, lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, or other physical functions (including manipulative or postural functions, such as reaching, handling, stooping or crouching), may reduce your ability to do past work and other work. 20 CFR 416.945(b).

...When we assess your mental abilities, we first assess the nature and extent of your mental limitations and restrictions and then determine your residual functional capacity for work activity on a regular and continuing basis. A limited ability to carry out certain mental activities, such as limitations in understanding, remembering, and carrying out instructions, and in responding appropriately to supervision, coworkers, and work pressures in a work setting, may reduce your ability to do past work and other work. 20 CFR 416.945(c).

...To be considered capable of performing a full or wide range of light work, you must have the ability to do substantially all of these activities. If someone can do light work, we determine that he or she can also do sedentary work, unless there are additional limiting factors such as loss of fine dexterity or inability to sit for long periods of time. 20 CFR 416.967(b).

...In deciding whether you are disabled, we will always consider the medical opinions in your case record together with the rest of the relevant evidence we receive. 20 CFR 416.927(b).

After we review all of the evidence relevant to your claim, including medical opinions, we make findings about what the evidence shows. 20 CFR 416.927(c).

[As Judge]...We are responsible for making the determination or decision about whether you meet the statutory definition of disability. In so doing, we review all of the medical findings and other evidence that support a medical source's statement that you are disabled.... 20 CFR 416.927(e).

At Step 1, claimant is not engaged in substantial gainful activity and so is not disqualified from receiving disability at Step 1.

At Step 2, the objective medical evidence of record indicates that during May 2009, claimant had lumbar decompression and fusion due to approximately three years of intractable back pain. Claimant did well after the surgery and in October 2009, claimant is starting to do exercise and has a good range of motion. Doctor reports his back feels great. On April 7, 2010, claimant's neurosurgeon wrote a letter indicating that due to his May 2009 surgery, claimant was unable to work from May 2009 through May 2010. Claimant Exhibit A, pg 7. This recommendation is not consistent with doctor's own treatment records. See above. Accordingly, doctor's treatment notes and previous letters will be given greater legal weight. In March 2008, claimant was briefly hospitalized due to depression and suicidal thoughts. This condition improved with treatment. Finding of Fact 10-12.

At Step 2, the objective medical evidence of record is not sufficient to establish that claimant has severe impairments that have lasted or are expected to last 12 months or more and prevent employment at any job for 12 months or more. Therefore, claimant is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 2.

At Step 3, claimant's impairments do not rise to the level necessary to be specifically disabling by law.

At Step 4, claimant's past relevant employment has been as an electrician's apprentice and farm hand. See discussion at Step 2 above. Finding of Fact 10-14. These jobs generally require repetitive heavy lifting and repetitive bending. These maneuvers would appear to be difficult for claimant due to his back condition.

At Step 4, the objective medical evidence of record is sufficient to establish that claimant has functional impairments that prevent claimant, for a period of 12 months or more, from engaging in a full range of duties required by claimant's past relevant employment. Therefore, claimant is not disqualified from receiving disability at Step 4.

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).

Medium work. Medium work involves lifting no more than 50 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 25 pounds. If someone can do medium work, we determine that he or she can also do sedentary and light work. 20 CFR 416.967(c).

Heavy work. Heavy work involves lifting no more than 100 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 50 pounds. If someone can do heavy work, we determine that he or she can also do medium, light, and sedentary work. 20 CFR 416.967(d).

At Step 5, see discussion at Step 2 above. Finding of Fact 9-14.

At Step 5, the objective medical evidence of record is sufficient to establish that claimant retains the residual functional capacity to perform at least sedentary work activities. Considering claimant's Vocational Profile (younger individual, high school graduate, history of skilled work, skills not transferable) and relying on Vocational Rule 201.28, claimant is not disabled.

Therefore, claimant is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 5.

Claimant does not meet the federal statutory requirements to qualify for disability. Therefore, claimant does not qualify for Medical Assistance based on disability and the department properly denied claimant's application.

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).

2004 PA 344, Sec. 604, establishes the State Disability Assistance program. It reads in part:

Sec. 604 (1) The department shall operate a state disability assistance program. Except as provided in subsection (3), persons eligible for this program shall include needy citizens of the United States or aliens exempt from the Supplemental Security Income citizenship requirement who are at least 18 years of age or emancipated minors meeting one or more of the following requirements:

- (a) Recipient of Supplemental Security Income, Social Security or Medical Assistance due to disability or 65 years of age or older.
 - (b) A person with a physical or mental impairment which meets federal SSI disability standards, except that the minimum duration of the disability shall be 90 days. Substance abuse alone is not defined as a basis for eligibility.
 - (c) A resident of an adult foster care facility, a home for the aged, a county infirmary, or a substance abuse treatment center.
 - (d) A person receiving 30-day post-residential substance abuse treatment.
 - (e) A person diagnosed as having Acquired Immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDs).
 - (f) A person receiving special education services through the local intermediate school district.
 - (g) A caretaker of a disabled person as defined in subdivision (a), (b), (e), or (f) above.
- (2) Applicants for and recipients of the State Disability Assistance program shall be considered needy if they:
- (a) Meet the same asset test as is applied to applicants for the Family Independence Program.
 - (b) Have a monthly budgetable income that is less than the payment standard.

- (3) Except for a person described in subsection (1)(c) or (d), a person is not disabled for purposes of this section if his or her drug addiction or alcoholism is a contributing factor material to the determination of disability. 'Material to the determination of disability' means that, if the person stopped using drugs or alcohol, his or her remaining physical or mental limitations would not be disabling. If his or her remaining physical or mental limitations would be disabling, then the drug addiction or alcoholism is not material to the determination of disability and the person may receive State Disability Assistance. Such a person must actively participate in a substance abuse treatment program, and the assistance must be paid to a third party or through vendor payments. For purposes of this section, substance abuse treatment includes receipt of inpatient or outpatient services or participation in Alcoholics Anonymous or a similar program. 1995 PA 156, Sec. 605.
- (4) A refugee or asylee who loses his or her eligibility for the federal Supplemental Security Income program by virtue of exceeding the maximum time limit for eligibility as delineated in Section 402 of Title IV of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Public Law 104-193, 8 U.S.C. 1612, and who otherwise meets the eligibility criteria under this section shall be eligible to receive benefits under the State Disability Assistance program.

At Step 1, claimant's impairments do not meet or equal any Social Security Listing.

Finding of Fact 7.

At Step 2, at last positive decision, claimant was recently post lumbar decompression and fusion. He was recently post hospitalization due to severe depression and suicidal thoughts. At review, claimant is not in treatment for depression and the record contains no objective medical evidence to establish ongoing severe depression. Claimant had good recovery from his surgery and in October 2009 was doing very well and feeling great. He was beginning to do exercises and had good range of motion. See discussion for Step 2 above for MA. Finding of Fact 10-14.

At Step 3, claimant has medical improvement or was not disabled at time of last positive decision. See discussion at Step 2 above. Finding of Fact 10-14.

At Step 4, claimant's medical improvement/lack of disability is related to the ability to perform work. See Step 3 above. Finding of Fact 10-14.

At Step 5, the objective medical evidence of record indicates that claimant is post May 2009 lumbar decompression and fusion. He recovered well and in October 2009 was beginning exercises and increasing his activity. Finding of Fact 10-14. Therefore, the objective medical evidence of record is sufficient to establish that as of October 2009, claimant does not have current severe impairments that prevent all work for 90 days or more.

At Step 6, claimant's past relevant employment has been as a electrician's apprentice and farm hand. Finding of Fact 9. The medical evidence of record indicates that claimant should have avoid repetitive heavy lifting and repetitive bending or twisting. Therefore, the medical evidence of record is sufficient to establish that claimant has impairments that are so severe as to prevent claimant from performing the tasks required by his past relevant employment. See discussion at Step 4 above for MA. Finding of Fact 10-14.

At Step 7, the medical evidence of record establishes that claimant is recovered from May 2009 back surgery as of October 2009. The objective medical evidence of record contains no statement to establish that claimant continues to be disabled. Letter indicating claimant has one year inability to work due to period of recovery is given less legal weight as at Step 2 above for MA. Accordingly, the objective medical evidence of record is sufficient to establish claimant is able to perform at least sedentary work activities. Considering claimant's vocational profile (younger individual, high school education, and history of skilled work, skills not transferable) and relying on Vocational Rule 201.28, claimant is not disabled. Finding of Fact 9-14.

After careful examination of the record and for reasons discussed above, the Administrative Law Judge decides that claimant does not have severe impairments that prevent work for 90 days or more. Therefore, claimant no longer qualifies for SDA based on disability as of his October 2009 medical review.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides that claimant has not established disability for Medical Assistance and is no longer disabled at medical review for State Disability Assistance.

Accordingly, the department's action is, hereby, UPHELD.

/s/ _____
Jana A. Bachman
Administrative Law Judge
for Ismael Ahmed, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: July 27, 2010

Date Mailed: July 28, 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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