

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: 2010-31933
Issue No: 2009/4031
Case No: [REDACTED]
Load No: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
May 19, 2010
Mason 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 May 19, 2010. Claimant personally appeared and testified.

ISSUE

Did the department properly determine claimant is not disabled by Medicaid (MA) and 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 divorced, 44-year-old high school graduate who lives independently in [REDACTED]; she has a valid driver's license and a roadworthy vehicle.

(2) Claimant's past relevant work history (15+ years) is in elder caregiving, both in residential and nursing home settings until January 2010 when she left that work secondary to

back pain stemming from her accidental fall at home in May 2008 (Department Exhibit #1, pg 9; Department Exhibit #2, pgs 58 and 59).

(3) On May 28, 2008, claimant was treated and released from a local Emergency Room (ER) with a pain medication prescription after five x-ray views of her lumbar spine did not show any acute traumatic injury (Department Exhibit #1, pg 23 and 27-33).

(4) Likewise, claimant's updated cervical, lumbar, thoracic and pelvic MRI scans done on May 12, 2009, show only mild degenerative changes with one small disc herniation at C5-C6 (Department Exhibit #1, pgs 21, 22, 24 and 26).

(5) An updated cervical MRI scan done on March 5, 2010 actually notes full resolution of the small C5-C6 herniation seen on claimant's previous study (Department Exhibit #2, pg 78).

(6) Additionally, claimant's May 5, 2010 thoracic MRI scan remained unchanged from the previous study (Department Exhibit #2, pg 79).

(7) Lastly, a treating specialist's neurosurgical progress report dated April 12, 2010 states in relevant part:

...Motor strength testing demonstrates no evidence of weakness, atrophy or fasciculation. Motor tone is normal throughout and there is no tremor. Sensory examination is normal to pinprick and position sense. Reflex testing demonstrates 2+ and symmetrical deep tendon reflexes. There are no pathologic reflexes noted. Cerebellar and gait testing is normal. At this time MRI scanning is reviewed. The findings of both the cervical thoracic and lumbar spine scanning shows no significant abnormality in my opinion. There is certainly no surgically correctable problem. I would not recommend any specific surgical intervention. I have nothing to offer her (Department Exhibit #3, pg 1).

(8) Claimant stated at the hearing she takes Norco as prescribed for pain management, and also, a previous hysterectomy necessitates she be maintained on thyroid and hormone replacement therapy.

(9) Claimant's medical records verify one hospitalization for an intense depressive episode in February 2010, that being her first psychiatric contact since age 15 (Department Exhibit #1, pgs 89-111).

(10) Claimant alleged no disabling mental, emotional or cognitive impairments at hearing and none are documented by the medical evidence submitted to date (Department Exhibits #1-#3).

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.

...We follow a set order to determine whether you are disabled. We review any current work activity, the severity of your impairment(s), your residual functional capacity, your past work, and your age, education and work experience. If we can find that you are disabled or not disabled at any point in the review, we do not review your claim further.... 20 CFR 416.920.

...If you are working and the work you are doing is substantial gainful activity, we will find that you are not disabled regardless of your medical condition or your age, education, and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(b).

...If you do not have any impairment or combination of impairments which significantly limits your physical or mental ability to do basic work activities, we will find that you do not have a severe impairment and are, therefore, not disabled. We will not consider your age, education, and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(c).

[In reviewing your impairment]...We need reports about your impairments from acceptable medical sources.... 20 CFR 416.913(a).

...Statements about your pain or other symptoms will not alone establish that you are disabled; there must be medical signs and laboratory findings which show that you have a medical impairment.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

...You must provide medical evidence showing that you have an impairment(s) and how severe it is during the time you say that you are disabled. 20 CFR 416.912(c).

... [The record must show a severe impairment] which significantly limits your physical or mental ability to do basic work activities.... 20 CFR 416.920(c).

...[The impairment]...must have lasted or must be expected to last for a continuous period of at least 12 months. We call this the duration requirement. 20 CFR 416.909.

...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).

...The medical evidence...must be complete and detailed enough to allow us to make a determination about whether you are disabled or blind. 20 CFR 416.913(d).

Medical findings consist of symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings:

- (a) **Symptoms** are your own description of your physical or mental impairment. Your statements alone are not enough to establish that there is a physical or mental impairment.
- (b) **Signs** are anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which can be observed, apart from your statements (symptoms). Signs must be shown by medically acceptable clinical diagnostic techniques. Psychiatric signs are medically demonstrable phenomena which indicate specific psychological abnormalities e.g., abnormalities of behavior, mood, thought, memory, orientation, development, or perception. They must also be shown by observable facts that can be medically described and evaluated.
- (c) **Laboratory findings** are anatomical, physiological, or psychological phenomena which can be shown by the use of a medically acceptable laboratory diagnostic techniques. Some of these diagnostic techniques include chemical tests, electrophysiological studies (electrocardiogram, electroencephalogram, etc.), roentgenological studies (X-rays), and psychological tests. 20 CFR 416.928.

It must allow us to determine --

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

...A statement by a medical source that you are "disabled" or "unable to work" does not mean that we will determine that you are disabled. 20 CFR 416.927(e).

[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).

Likewise, Social Security Ruling 96-4p (SSR 96-4p) states:

A “symptom” is not a “medically determinable physical or mental impairment” and no symptom by itself can establish the existence of such impairment. In the absence of a showing that there is a “medically determinable physical or mental impairment,” an individual must be found not disabled at Step 2 of the sequential evaluation process. No symptom or combination of symptoms can be the basis for a finding of disability, no matter how genuine the individual’s complaints may appear to be, unless there are medical signs and laboratory findings demonstrating the existence of a medically determinable physical or mental impairment.

In addition, 20 CFR 404.1529 and 416.929 provide that an individual’s symptoms, such as pain, fatigue, shortness of breath, weakness, or nervousness will not be found to affect the individual’s ability to do basic work activities...unless medical signs and laboratory findings show that there is a medically determinable physical or mental impairment(s) that could reasonably be expected to produce the symptom(s) alleged.

Claimant does not qualify for the MA/SDA disability coverage she seeks because she has not presented any objective medical records to establish the presence of a physical or mental condition, or combination of conditions, which would prevent employability in any number of unskilled jobs currently existing in the national economy. Furthermore, 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 medication can reasonably be expected to provide adequate symptom control for her diagnosed conditions. Consequently, this Administrative Law Judge concludes claimant is fully capable of working a wide variety of jobs currently existing in the national economy, which is the standard to be applied in disability determination cases. As such, claimant’s February 17, 2010 MA application and her March 3, 2010 SDA application must remain denied.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decides the department properly determined claimant is not disabled by MA/SDA 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: June 2, 2010

Date Mailed: June 3, 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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