

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING SYSTEM
ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

IN THE MATTER OF:



Reg No. 201043605
Issue No. 2009
Case No. [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: August 25, 2010
Ingham County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Carmen G. Fahie

HEARING DECISION

This matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and MCL 400.37 upon the claimant's request for a hearing. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on Wednesday, August 25, 2010. The claimant personally appeared and testified on her own behalf with Denise Reeves from Community Mental Health.

ISSUE

Did the Department properly deny the claimant's application for Medical Assistance (MA-P)?

FINDINGS OF FACT

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the competent, material, and substantial evidence on the whole record, finds a material fact:

1. On May 26, 2010, the claimant applied for MA-P.
2. On July 6, 2010, the Medical Review Team (MRT) denied the claimant's application for MA-P and retroactive MA-P stating that the claimant had a non-exertional impairment and P.L. 104-121.
3. On July 9, 2010, the Department caseworker sent the claimant a notice that her application was denied.

4. On July 20, 2010, the Department received a hearing request from the claimant, contesting the Department's negative action.
5. On July 26, 2010, the State Hearing Review Team (SHRT) considered the submitted objective medical evidence in making its determination of MA-P, retroactive MA-P, and SDA for the claimant. The SHRT report reads in part that the claimant is 30 years-old and alleges disability due to depression. She has a 9th grade education and a history of unskilled work. The claimant's impairments do not meet/equal the intent or severity of a Social Security listing. The claimant is capable of performing work at the unskilled level per 20 CFR 416.968 (a).
6. During the hearing on August 25, 2010, the claimant requested permission to submit additional medical information that needed to be reviewed by SHRT. The Department caseworker reviewed the additional information submitted, but the new information was the original medical packet sent to the claimant by the Department and the record was closed.
7. The claimant is a 31 year-old woman whose date of birth is [REDACTED]. The claimant is 5' 6" tall and weighs 237 pounds. The claimant completed the 8th grade of high school. The claimant can read and write. She can add and subtract, but cannot multiply and divide for basic math. The claimant was last employed as a pizza maker in 2006 at the light level. The claimant has also been employed as a fast food worker at the light level.
8. The claimant's alleged impairments are depression and bi-polar disorder.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Medical Assistance (MA) program is established by the 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 (formerly known as the Family Independence Agency) 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).

"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.

...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).

[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.

...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).

...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 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).

Information from other sources may also help us to understand how your impairment(s) affects your ability to work. 20 CFR 416.913(e).

...You can only be found disabled if you are unable 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. See 20 CFR 416.905. Your impairment must result from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which are demonstrable by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory diagnostic techniques.... 20 CFR 416.927(a)(1).

...Evidence that you submit or that we obtain 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 your impairment(s), including your symptoms, diagnosis and prognosis, what you can still do despite impairment(s), and your physical or mental restrictions. 20 CFR 416.927(a)(2).

...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).

...If all of the evidence we receive, including all medical opinion(s), is consistent, and there is sufficient evidence for us to decide whether you are disabled, we will make our determination or decision based on that evidence. 20 CFR 416.927(c)(1).

...If any of the evidence in your case record, including any medical opinion(s), is inconsistent with other evidence or is internally inconsistent, we will weigh all of the evidence and see whether we can decide whether you are disabled based on the evidence we have. 20 CFR 416.927(c)(2).

[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).

...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).

...If you have an impairment(s) which meets the duration requirement and is listed in Appendix 1 or is equal to a listed impairment(s), we will find you disabled without considering your age, education, and work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(d).

...If we cannot make a decision on your current work activities or medical facts alone and you have a severe impairment, we will then review your residual functional capacity and the physical and mental demands of the work you have done in the past. If you can still do this kind of work, we will find that you are not disabled. 20 CFR 416.920(e).

If you cannot do any work you have done in the past because you have a severe impairment(s), we will consider your residual functional capacity and your age, education, and past work experience to see if you can do other work. If you cannot, we will find you disabled. 20 CFR 416.920(f)(1).

...Your residual functional capacity is what you can still do despite limitations. If you have more than one impairment, we will consider all of your impairment(s) 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 on all of the relevant evidence.... 20 CFR 416.945(a).

...This assessment of your remaining capacity for work is not a decision on whether you are disabled, but is used as the basis for determining the particular types of work you may be able to do despite your impairment(s).... 20 CFR 416.945(a).

...In determining whether you are disabled, we will consider all of your symptoms, including pain, and the extent to which your symptoms can reasonably be accepted as consistent with objective medical evidence, and other evidence.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

...In evaluating the intensity and persistence of your symptoms, including pain, we will consider all of the available evidence, including your medical history, the medical signs and laboratory findings and statements about how your symptoms affect you... We will then determine the extent to which your alleged functional limitations or restrictions due to pain or other symptoms can reasonably be accepted as consistent with the medical signs and laboratory findings and other evidence to decide how your symptoms affect your ability to work.... 20 CFR 416.929(a).

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).

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 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). At Step 1, the claimant is not engaged in substantial gainful activity and has not worked since 2006. Therefore, the claimant is not disqualified from receiving disability at Step 1.

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.

The objective medical evidence on the record further substantiates the following:

On June 16, 2010, the claimant’s treating psychiatrist submitted a progress report on the claimant based on an examination on May 17, 2010. The claimant was diagnosed with mood disorder, alcohol dependence, cocaine dependence, and a tier 2 diagnosis of borderline personality disorder. She was given a GAF of 50. She could not manage her benefit funds. Department Exhibits 16-18. The claimant was markedly limited in 4 areas. Departments Exhibits 71-72.

On February 11, 2010, the claimant underwent a psychiatric examination with Clinton-Eaton-Ingham Community Mental Health. The claimant was diagnosed with mood disorder, alcohol dependence, cocaine dependence, and impulse control disorder. The claimant was given a GAF of 50. She was referred for counseling and medication to treat her mental impairments. There was no evidence of a thought disorder. Her judgment and insight appeared impaired. She was oriented times 3. Department Exhibits 19-22.

On January 13, 2010, the claimant was admitted to Kalamazoo Psychiatric Hospital with date of release of March 25, 2010. Her diagnosis was polysubstance dependence, bipolar disorder, mixed episode with a tier 2 diagnosis of borderline personality disorder. Her GAF on discharge was a 55 compared to the 35 on admittance. The claimant was stabilized at the time of release was compliant with her medications, attending classes with no aggressive or assaultive behavior. She was instructed to follow up with CMH. Department Exhibits 54-55.

At Step 2, the objective medical evidence in the record indicates that the claimant has established that she has a severe impairment. The claimant has mental impairments where she was hospitalized for several months. She was compliant, but when released missed appointments and was not taking her medications regularly. Therefore, the claimant is not disqualified from receiving disability at Step 2. However, this Administrative Law Judge will proceed through the sequential evaluation process to determine disability because Step 2 is a *de minimus* standard.

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). This Administrative Law Judge finds that the claimant's impairments do not rise to the level necessary to be listed as disabling by law. Therefore, the claimant is disqualified from receiving disability at Step 3.

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 and psychological findings that the claimant does perform her daily living activities. The claimant felt that her condition has worsened with an increase in depression and suicidal thoughts. The claimant stated that she is taking medications and in therapy at CMH. The claimant does smoke one-half pack of cigarettes a day. She drinks alcohol of 1 pint once a week. The claimant does not use crack cocaine since May to June 2010. She did think she could work in fast food.

At Step 4, this Administrative Law Judge finds that the claimant has established that she cannot perform any of her prior work. The claimant was previously employed as a fast food crew member at the unskilled level. The claimant is in treatment and taking medication for her mental impairments. There was no evidence of a thought disorder and she had no physical impairments. The claimant is not stable in her treatment and would not be able to perform work. Therefore, the claimant is not disqualified from receiving disability at Step 4. However, the Administrative Law Judge will still proceed through the sequential evaluation process to determine whether or not the claimant has the residual functional capacity to perform some other less strenuous tasks than in her prior jobs.

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 you 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.

...To determine the physical exertion requirements of work in the national economy, we classify jobs as sedentary, light, medium, heavy, and very 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.

The objective medical evidence on the record is sufficient that the claimant lacks the residual functional capacity to perform some other less strenuous tasks than in her previous employment or that she is physically unable to do any tasks demanded of her. The claimant's testimony as to her limitation indicates her limitations are non-exertional.

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).

In the instant case, the claimant testified that she had depression and bipolar disorder. She is taking medications and in therapy with CMH. See MA analysis step 2. The medical evidence on the record is sufficient to support a mental impairment that is so severe to prevent the claimant from performing any work.

At Step 5, the claimant should be able to meet the physical requirements of work, based upon the claimant's physical abilities. Under the Medical-Vocational guidelines, a younger individual with a limited or less, and an unskilled work history, who is limited to work, is not considered disabled. 20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Rule 204.00 (h) The Medical-Vocational guidelines are not strictly applied with non-exertional impairments such as depression and bipolar disorder. 20 CFR 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Section 200.00. Using the Medical-Vocational guidelines as a framework for making this decision and after giving full consideration to the claimant's mental impairments, the Administrative Law Judge finds that the claimant cannot perform a wide range of simple, unskilled work and that the claimant does meet the definition of disabled under the MA program.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law decides that the Department has not appropriately established that it was acting in compliance with Department policy when it denied the claimant's application for SDA, MA-P and retroactive MA-P. The claimant cannot perform any level of simple, unskilled work. The Department has not established its case by a preponderance of the evidence.

Accordingly, the Department's decision is **REVERSED**. The claimant is eligible for MA retroactive to May 2010 with a medical review required February 2013 where the claimant is required to participate in CMH services.

/s/
Carmen G. Fahie
Administrative Law Judge
For Maura D. Corrigan, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: January 17, 2012

Date Mailed: January 17, 2012

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.

CGF/jvd

cc: [REDACTED]
Ingham County DHS / DHS-1843
[REDACTED]
C. G. Fahie
Administrative Hearings