

STATE OF MICHIGAN
STATE OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS AND RULES
ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No.: 2010-44514
Issue No.: 2009
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Load No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: September 2, 2010
DHS County: Wayne (82)

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 September 2, 2010. Claimant appeared and testified. Claimant was represented by [REDACTED].

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) program?

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 April 23, 2010, an application was filed on claimant's behalf for MA-P benefits. The application did not request retroactive medical coverage.
2. On May 17, 2010, the department denied claimant's application for benefits based upon the belief that claimant did not meet the requisite disability criteria.
3. On July 20, 2010, a hearing request was filed to protest the department's determination.
4. Claimant, age 57, has a high-school equivalent education with additional training and a certificate degree in food sanitation and repair of small and large appliances from a community college.

5. Claimant last worked as a clerk for [REDACTED] in March of 2010. Claimant has also performed relevant work as a janitor/maintenance person, roofer, construction worker, window washer, painter, and food service employee. Claimant's relevant work history consists exclusively of unskilled work activities.
6. Claimant has a history of IV drug abuse.
7. Claimant was hospitalized [REDACTED] as a result of necrotizing fasciitis of the left upper anterior chest and left (non-dominant) upper extremity. Claimant underwent extensive incision, drainage, and debridement. Claimant has had no further hospitalizations.
8. Claimant has seen his surgeon on a monthly basis since discharge. Claimant reports that his infection is under control.
9. Claimant complains of reduced range of motion and weakness of the left (non-dominant) upper extremity.
10. Claimant has severe limitations upon his ability to lift, push, pull, reach, carry, or handle with his left (non-dominant) upper extremity. Claimant's limitations are expected to last twelve months or more.
11. Claimant's complaints and allegations concerning his 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 one-armed light 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 (BAM), the Program Eligibility Manual (BEM) 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 he 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 is not working. Therefore, 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 he has significant physical limitations upon his ability to perform basic work activities such as lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying, or handling with his left (non-dominant) upper extremity. 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 may not be capable of the lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying, or handling with his left upper extremity as required by his past employment. Claimant has presented the required medical data and evidence necessary to support a finding that he is not, at this point, capable of performing such 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 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.

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 one-armed light work. Light work is defined as follows:

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).

In this case, 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 one-armed light work activities. Claimant was hospitalized [REDACTED] for necrotizing fasciitis of the left upper anterior chest and left (non-dominant) upper extremity. He underwent extensive incision, drainage, and debridement. Per claimant's testimony, claimant has seen his surgeon on a monthly basis since discharge. It is his understanding the infection is now under control. Claimant complains of a limited range of motion and weakness with the left (non-dominant) upper extremity. On [REDACTED], claimant's treating surgeon diagnosed claimant with necrotizing fasciitis. The surgeon opined that claimant had no physical or mental limitations. Specifically, the surgeon indicated that claimant was capable of the repetitive activities, such as simple grasping, reaching, pushing/pulling, and fine manipulation with the bilateral upper extremities. The surgeon noted that claimant's clinical condition was improving. At the hearing, claimant testified that he does engage in housework. When asked if there was anything he could not do or needed help with, claimant responded "no."


After a review of claimant's medical records and claimant's own testimony, claimant has failed to establish limitations which would compromise his ability to perform one-handed light work activities on a regular and continuing basis. See Social Security Ruling 80-11c. The loss, or loss of use, of a hand or arm is not disabling *per se*. Federal case law has held that an individual who has lost or has lost the use of an arm or hand can still engage in substantial gainful activity. See *Knott v Califano*, 559 F2d 279 (5th Cir 1977). Claimant undisputedly has full use of his dominant right upper extremity. Substantial evidence in the whole record supports the position that, even with limited use of his left upper extremity, claimant can perform a substantial number of jobs in the national economy. The record supports a finding that claimant is, indeed, capable of light work.

Considering that claimant, at age 57, has high-school equivalent education with advanced training in food sanitation and repair of small and large appliances, has an unskilled work history, and has a sustained work capacity for one-armed light work activities, the undersigned finds that claimant's impairments do not prevent him from engaging in other work. See 20 CFR, Part 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Table 2, Rule 202.05. Accordingly, the undersigned must find that claimant is not presently disabled for purposes of 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 of Human Services properly determined that claimant is not "disabled" for purposes of the Medical Assistance program.

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: September 8, 2010

Date Mailed: September 10, 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:

