

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.: 2010-5107
Issue No.: 2009, 4031
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Load No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date:
December 17, 2009
Macomb County DHS (12)

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 December 17, 2009. Claimant appeared and testified.

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) and State Disability Assistance (SDA) programs?

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 February 13, 2009, claimant filed an application for MA-P and SDA benefits. Claimant did not request retroactive medical coverage.

- 2) On June 2, 2009, the department denied claimant's application for benefits based upon the belief that claimant did not meet the requisite disability criteria.
- 3) On July 7, 2009, a hearing request was filed to protest the department's determination.
- 4) Claimant, age 27, has an eleventh-grade education.
- 5) Claimant last worked in July of 2008 as cashier. Claimant has also performed relevant work as a kennel assistant at the [REDACTED] and as a sales person in a jewelry store. Claimant's relevant work history consists exclusively of unskilled work activities.
- 6) Claimant has a history of bipolar and panic disorder as well as fracture of her coccyx in [REDACTED].
- 7) Claimant currently suffers from bipolar disorder, NOS; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; panic disorder; nicotine dependence; and complaints of low back pain since fracture of the coccyx in [REDACTED]. Claimant's GAF score in [REDACTED] was 53.
- 8) Claimant has severe limitations upon her ability to lift extremely heavy objects as well as limitations upon her ability to respond appropriately to others and deal with changes in a routine work setting. Claimant's limitations have lasted or are expected to last twelve months or more.
- 9) Claimant's complaints and allegations concerning her 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 simple, unskilled, sedentary 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 (PAM), the Program Eligibility Manual (PEM) 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 she 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 she has significant physical and mental limitations upon her ability to perform basic work activities such as lifting extremely heavy objects; responding appropriately to supervision, co-workers, and usual work situations; and dealing with changes in a routine work setting. 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 her 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 claimant is capable of her past work as a cashier and/or jewelry sales person. Even if claimant were not capable of these past work activities, she would still be found capable of performing other 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 your 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 simple, unskilled, sedentary work activities on a regular and continuing basis. Sedentary work is defined as follows:

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).

There is insufficient objective medical evidence, signs, and symptoms to support a determination that claimant is incapable of performing the physical and mental demands necessary for a wide range of simple, unskilled, sedentary work. Claimant has complained of low back pain since a fracture of her coccyx in [REDACTED]. At the hearing, claimant reported that she is largely capable of every day activities with the exception of her inability to lift heavy amounts of weight. On [REDACTED], claimant's treating psychiatrist diagnosed claimant with bipolar disorder, NOS; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; and panic disorder. The psychiatrist gave claimant a current GAF score of 55 and noted that claimant was markedly limited with regard to her ability to accept criticism and respond appropriately to criticism from supervisors. He noted that she was moderately limited with regard to her ability to carry out detailed instructions; maintain attention and concentration for extended periods; perform activities within a schedule, maintain regular attendance, and be punctual within customary tolerances; the ability to work in coordination with or proximity to others without being distracted by them; the ability to interact appropriately with the general public; the ability to ask simple questions or request assistance; the ability to get along with co-workers or peers without distracting them or exhibiting behavioral extremes; the ability to respond appropriately to change in the work setting; and the ability to set realistic goals or make plans independently of others. The treating psychiatrist found that claimant was not significantly limited with regard to any category of understanding and memory; the ability to carry out simple, one or two-step instructions; the ability to sustain an ordinary routine without supervision; the ability to make simple work-related decisions; the ability to complete a normal work day and work week without interruptions from psychologically-based symptoms and to perform at a consistent pace without an unreasonable number and length of rest periods; the ability to maintain socially appropriate behavior and to

adhere to basic standards of neatness and cleanliness; the ability to be aware of normal hazards and take appropriate precautions; and the ability to travel in unfamiliar places and use public transportation. Claimant was seen by a consulting psychiatrist for the department on [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]. The consultant diagnosed claimant with chronic anxiety and panic disorder without agoraphobia; history of chronic marijuana abuse, now in remission; and nicotine dependence. The psychiatrist found claimant's current GAF score to be 53. The psychiatrist provided the following prognosis:

“Conditions such as claimant's are usually treatable. Reduction of coffee consumption and elimination of smoking would certainly improve her condition, with close cooperation with her therapist and participation in a vocational and trade rehabilitative activity will certainly improve her psychosocial adjustment. With greater motivation on her part, the prognosis should be favorable.

The claimant appears to be fit and competent to handle her benefit funds.”

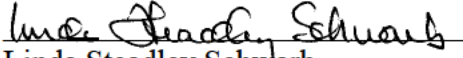
After review of claimant's hospital records, reports from claimant's treating psychiatrist and consulting psychiatrist, the undersigned finds that claimant has failed to establish limitations which would compromise her ability to perform a wide range of simple, unskilled, sedentary work activities on a regular and continuing basis. The record fails to support the position that claimant is incapable of simple, unskilled, sedentary work activities. Considering that claimant, at age 27, is a younger individual, has an eleventh-grade education, has an unskilled work history, and has a sustained work capacity, at the very least, for sedentary work, this Administrative Law Judge finds that claimant's impairments do not prevent her from engaging in other work. As a guide, see 20 CFR, Part 404, Subpart P, Appendix 2, Table 1, Rule 201.24. Accordingly, the undersigned must find that claimant is not presently disabled for purposes of the MA program.

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).

A person is considered disabled for purposes of SDA if the person has a physical or mental impairment which meets federal SSI disability standards for at least 90 days. Receipt of SSI or RSDI benefits based upon disability or blindness or the receipt of MA benefits based upon disability or blindness (MA-P) automatically qualifies an individual as disabled for purposes of the SDA program. Other specific financial and non-financial eligibility criteria are found in PEM Item 261. In this case, there is insufficient medical evidence to support a finding that claimant is incapacitated or unable to work under SSI disability standards for at least 90 days. Therefore, the undersigned finds that claimant is not presently disabled for purposes of the SDA 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 and State Disability Assistance programs. Accordingly, the department’s determination in this matter is hereby affirmed.


Linda Steadley Schwarz
Administrative Law Judge
for Ismael Ahmed, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: March 2, 2010

Date Mailed: March 9, 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:

