

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.: 2010-2770  
Issue No.: 2009  
Case No.: [REDACTED]  
Load No.: [REDACTED]  
Hearing Date:  
January 4, 2010  
Macomb County DHS (12)

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Colleen M. Mamelka

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 hearing was held in Clinton Township, Michigan on Monday, January 4, 2010. The Claimant appeared, along with [REDACTED], and testified. The Claimant was represented by [REDACTED] of [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] appeared on behalf of the Department.

During the hearing, the Claimant waived the time period for the issuance of this decision to allow for the submission of additional medical evidence. The additional documentation was received, reviewed, and entered as Exhibit 6. This matter is now before the undersigned for a final decision.

ISSUE

Whether the Department properly determined that the Claimant was not disabled for purposes of Medical Assistance ("MA-P") benefit program?

FINDINGS OF FACT

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

1. The Claimant submitted an application for public assistance seeking MA-P benefits on December 9, 2008. (Exhibit 1, pp. 61 – 79)
2. On June 17, 2009, the Medical Review Team (“MRT”) determined the Claimant was not disabled for purposes of the MA-P benefit program. (Exhibit 1, pp. 80 – 81)
3. On July 20, 2009, the Department sent an Eligibility Notice to the Claimant informing him that he was found not disabled. (Exhibit 2)
4. On October 8, 2009, the Department received the Claimant’s timely written Request for Hearing. (Exhibit 3)
5. On October 28, 2009, the State Hearing Review Team (“SHRT”) determined that the Claimant was not disabled. (Exhibit 4)
6. The Claimant’s alleged physical disabling impairment(s) are due to chronic back pain, disc herniation, radiculopathy, and decreased range of motion.
7. The Claimant’s alleged mental impairment(s) are due to depression and anxiety.
8. At the time of hearing, the Claimant was 28 years old with an [REDACTED] birth date; was 6’8” in height; and weighed 180 pounds.
9. The Claimant completed through the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and has a work history as a welder, general laborer, and prep cook.
10. The Claimant’s impairment(s) have lasted, or are expected to last, continuously for a period of 12 months or longer.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Medical Assistance (“MA”) program is established by Subchapter XIX of Chapter 7 of The Public Health & Welfare Act, 42 USC 1397, and is administered by the Department of Human Services (“DHS”), formerly known as the Family Independence Agency, 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 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) 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 make appropriate mental adjustments, if a mental disability is alleged. 20 CFR 413.913 An individual’s subjective pain complaints are not, in and of themselves, sufficient to establish disability. 20 CFR 416.908; 20 CFR 416.929(a) Similarly, conclusory statements by a physician or mental health professional that an individual is disabled or blind, absent supporting medical evidence, is insufficient to establish disability. 20 CFR 416.927

When determining disability, the federal regulations require several factors to be considered including: (1) the location/duration/frequency/intensity of an applicant’s pain; (2) the type/dosage/effectiveness/side effects of any medication the applicants takes to relieve pain; (3) any treatment other than pain medication that the applicant has received to relieve pain; and (4)

the effect of the applicant's pain on his or her ability to do basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.929(c)(3) The applicant's pain must be assessed to determine the extent of his or her functional limitation(s) in light of the objective medical evidence presented. 20 CFR 416.929(c)(2)

In order to determine whether or not an individual is disabled, federal regulations require a five-step sequential evaluation process be utilized. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(1) The five-step analysis requires the trier of fact to consider an individual's current work activity; the severity of the impairment(s) both in duration and whether it meets or equals a listed impairment in Appendix 1; residual functional capacity to determine whether an individual can perform past relevant work; and residual functional capacity along with vocational factors (i.e. age, education, and work experience) to determine if an individual can adjust to other work. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4); 20 CFR 416.945

If an individual is found disabled, or not disabled, at any step, a determination or decision is made with no need evaluate subsequent steps. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4) If a determination cannot be made that an individual is disabled, or not disabled, at a particular step, the next step is required. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4) If an impairment does not meet or equal a listed impairment, an individual's residual functional capacity is assessed before moving from step three to step four. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4); 20 CFR 416.945 Residual functional capacity is the most an individual can do despite the limitations based on all relevant evidence. 20 CFR 945(a)(1) An individual's residual functional capacity assessment is evaluated at both steps four and five. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4) In determining disability, an individual's functional capacity to perform basic work activities is evaluated and if found that the individual has the ability to perform basic work activities without significant limitation, disability will not be found. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(iv)

In general, the individual has the responsibility to prove disability. 20 CFR 416.912(a) An impairment or combination of impairments is not severe if it does not significantly limit an individual's physical or mental ability to do basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.921(a) The individual has the responsibility to provide evidence of prior work experience; efforts to work; and any other factor showing how the impairment affects the ability to work. 20 CFR 416.912(c)(3)(5)(6)

In addition to the above, when evaluating mental impairments, a special technique is utilized. 20 CFR 416.920a(a) First, an individual's pertinent symptoms, signs, and laboratory findings are evaluated to determine whether a medically determinable mental impairment exists. 20 CFR 416.920a(b)(1) When a medically determinable mental impairment is established, the symptoms, signs and laboratory findings that substantiate the impairment are documented to include the individual's significant history, laboratory findings, and functional limitations. 20 CFR 416.920a(e)(2) Functional limitation(s) is assessed based upon the extent to which the impairment(s) interferes with an individual's ability to function independently, appropriately, effectively, and on a sustained basis. *Id.*; 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(2) Chronic mental disorders, structured settings, medication, and other treatment and the effect on the overall degree of functionality is considered. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(1) In addition, four broad functional areas (activities of daily living; social functioning; concentration, persistence or pace; and episodes of decompensation) are considered when determining an individual's degree of functional limitation. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(3) The degree of limitation for the first three functional areas is rated by a five point scale: none, mild, moderate, marked, and extreme. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(4) A four point scale (none, one or two, three, four or more) is used to rate the degree of limitation

in the fourth functional area. *Id.* The last point on each scale represents a degree of limitation that is incompatible with the ability to do any gainful activity. *Id.*

After the degree of functional limitation is determined, the severity of the mental impairment is determined. 20 CFR 416.920a(d) If severe, a determination of whether the impairment meets or is the equivalent of a listed mental disorder is made. 20 CFR 416.920a(d)(2) If the severe mental impairment does not meet (or equal) a listed impairment, an individual's residual functional capacity is assessed. 20 CFR 416.920a(d)(3)

As outlined above, the first step looks at the individual's current work activity. An individual is not disabled regardless of the medical condition, age, education, and work experience, if the individual is working and the work is a substantial, gainful activity. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4)(i) In the record presented, the Claimant is not involved in substantial gainful activity therefore is not ineligible for disability under Step 1.

The severity of the Claimant's alleged impairment(s) is considered under Step 2. The Claimant bears the burden to present sufficient objective medical evidence to substantiate the alleged disabling impairments. In order to be considered disabled for MA purposes, the impairment must be severe. 20 CFR 916.920(a)(4)(ii); 20 CFR 916.920(b) An impairment, or combination of impairments, is severe if it significantly limits an individual's physical or mental ability to do basic work activities regardless of age, education and work experience. 20 CFR 916.920(a)(4)(ii); 20 CFR 916.920(c) Basic work activities means the abilities and aptitudes necessary to do most jobs. 20 CFR 916.921(b) Examples 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.

*Id.* The second step allows for dismissal of a disability claim obviously lacking in medical merit. *Higgs v Bowen*, 880 F2d 860, 862 (CA 6, 1988). The severity requirement may still be employed as an administrative convenience to screen out claims that are totally groundless solely from a medical standpoint. *Id.* at 863 citing *Farris v Sec of Health and Human Services*, 773 F2d 85, 90 n.1 (CA 6, 1985) An impairment qualifies as non-severe only if, regardless of a claimant's age, education, or work experience, the impairment would not affect the claimant's ability to work. *Salmi v Sec of Health and Human Services*, 774 F2d 685, 692 (CA 6, 1985)

In the present case, the Claimant alleges disability due to chronic back pain, disc herniation with impingement, radiculopathy, decreased range of motion, depression, and anxiety.

On [REDACTED], a MRI of the lumbar spine revealed a moderate sized disc extrusion at L5-S1 which leads to mass effect on the exiting S1 nerve root. The central spinal canal itself was not narrowed and the neural foramina were not compromised.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant attended a neurological assessment due to complaints of right-side leg and buttock pain. The physical examination revealed a positive straight leg raising test on the right at 40 degrees and crossed leg raise on the left at 60 degrees. Mild lumbar paravertebral muscle spasm was also documented. The [REDACTED] MRI results were reviewed. The Claimant was found to have L5-S1 right-sided disc herniation with right L5-S1 radiculopathies with possible extruded fragment in the L5-S1 foramen. Epidural injections

with transforaminal blocks were recommended with a microdiscectomy planned if the injections did not resolve the Claimant's pain.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant presented to the hospital with a self-inflicted stab wound to the abdominal area for a suicide attempt. The Claimant underwent multiple abdominal surgeries. The Claimant was diagnosed with major depressive disorder, single episode (severe) with a Global Assessment Functioning ("GAF") of 20. The Claimant was transferred to a psychiatric hospital. The Claimant was discharged on [REDACTED] with the diagnoses of dehydration, status post suicidal ideation with self-inflicted stab wound to the abdominal region with duodenal injury, status post exploratory lap with duodenal repair and gastrostomy tube placement, and acute renal failure.

On [REDACTED], a Medical Examination Report was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The diagnoses were hypertension and back pain. The physical examination revealed a decreased range of motion, rigid gait, and healed abdominal soars. The physician was unable to determine whether the Claimant had any physical and/or mental limitations based upon the one examination.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant was admitted to the hospital with complaints of abdominal pain. The Claimant was discharged on [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the diagnoses of wound infection.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant attended a psychiatric/psychological evaluation. Although the medical evidence discussed a suicide attempt, the Claimant denied any such incident. The Claimant was diagnosed with alcohol abuse/dependence and depression and Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder ("ADHD") was not otherwise specified. The GAF was 50 and the prognosis was guarded.

On [REDACTED], the Claimant attended a consultative evaluation. The physical examination revealed severe restriction of range of motion at the lumbar spine with decreased deep tendon reflexes on the right lower extremity. The Claimant sat in a tilted position due to low back pain. The Claimant was unable to bend, stoop, carry, push, pull, tie shoes, pick up coin/pencil, squat and arise, and climb stairs. The diagnoses were chronic lumbar pain with radiculopathy and chronic lumbar disc disease, L5-S1 (as evidenced by the MRI).

On this same date, [REDACTED], the Claimant attended a psychological evaluation. The WRAT-III test results placed the Claimant at the low high school level for reading and spelling but at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade range for arithmetic/calculation skills. The full scale IQ 77 which place the Claimant in the upper range or borderline intellectual functioning to low average. The Claimant did not have any problems with short-term or remote memory, concentration, or attention that would prevent him from performing routing work related activities at a sustained pace. The diagnoses were mild learning disorder (not otherwise specified) with a Global Assessment Functioning (“GAF”) of 60.

As previously noted, the Claimant bears the burden to present sufficient objective medical evidence to substantiate the alleged disabling impairment(s). As summarized above, the Claimant has presented some medical evidence establishing that he does have some physical and mental limitations on his ability to perform basic work activities. The medical evidence has established that the Claimant has an impairment, or combination thereof, that has more than a *de minimis* effect on the Claimant’s basic work activities. Further, the impairments have lasted continuously for twelve months; therefore, the Claimant is not disqualified from receipt of MA-P benefits under Step 2.

In the third step of the sequential analysis 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. The Claimant has alleged disability based on chronic back pain, disc herniation, and radiculopathy, decreased range of motion, depression, and anxiety.

Listing 1.00 defines musculoskeletal system impairments. Disorders of the musculoskeletal system may result from hereditary, congenital, or acquired pathologic processes.

1.00A Impairments may result from infectious, inflammatory, or degenerative processes, traumatic or developmental events, or neoplastic, vascular, or toxic/metabolic diseases. 1.00A Regardless of the cause(s) of a musculoskeletal impairment, functional loss for purposes of these listings is defined as the inability to ambulate effectively on a sustained basis for any reason, including pain associated with the underlying musculoskeletal impairment, or the inability to perform fine and gross movements effectively on a sustained basis for any reason, including pain associated with the underlying musculoskeletal impairment. Inability to ambulate effectively means an extreme limitation of the ability to walk; i.e., an impairment(s) that interferes very seriously with the individual's ability to independently initiate, sustain, or complete activities.

1.00B2b(1) Ineffective ambulation is defined generally as having insufficient lower extremity function to permit independent ambulation without the use of a hand-held assistive device(s) that limits the functioning of both upper extremities. (Listing 1.05C is an exception to this general definition because the individual has the use of only one upper extremity due to amputation of a hand.) *Id.* To ambulate effectively, individuals must be capable of sustaining a reasonable walking pace over a sufficient distance to be able to carry out activities of daily living.

1.00B2b(2) They must have the ability to travel without companion assistance to and from a place of employment or school. . . . *Id.* When an individual's impairment involves a lower

extremity uses a hand-held assistive device, such as a cane, crutch or walker, the medical basis for use of the device should be documented. 1.00J4 The requirement to use a hand-held assistive device may also impact an individual's functional capacity by virtue of the fact that one or both upper extremities are not available for such activities as lifting, carrying, pushing, and pulling. *Id.*

Categories of Musculoskeletal include:

\* \* \*

- 1.04 Disorders of the spine (e.g., herniated nucleus pulposus, spinal arachnoiditis, spinal stenosis, osteoarthritis, degenerative disc disease, facet arthritis, and vertebral fracture), resulting in compromise of a nerve root (including the cauda equine) or spinal cord. With:
- A. Evidence of nerve root compression characterized by neuro-anatomic distribution of pain, limitation of motion of the spine, motor loss (atrophy with associated muscle weakness or muscle weakness) accompanied by sensory or reflex loss and, if there is involvement of the lower back, positive straight-leg raising test (sitting and supine); or
  - B. Spinal arachnoiditis, confirmed by an operative note or pathology report of tissue biopsy, or by appropriate medically acceptable imaging, manifested by severe burning or painful dysesthesia, resulting in the need for changes in position or posture more than once every 2 hours; or
  - C. Lumbar spinal stenosis resulting in pseudoclaudication, established by findings on appropriate medically acceptable imaging, manifested by chronic nonradicular pain and weakness, and resulting in inability to ambulate effectively, as defined in 1.00B2b. (see above definition)

In this case, the objective findings establish disc herniation with mass effect on the exiting S1 nerve root; radiculopathy; positive straight leg raising; and muscle spasms. The most recent evaluation found the Claimant with severe restriction of range of motion with decreased

deep tendon reflexes on the right lower extremity. The Claimant was unable to bend, stoop, carry, push, pull, tie shoes, pick up objects (pencil, coin), squat/arise, and climb stairs. Based on the foregoing, it is found that the Claimant's impairment(s) meets, or is the medical equivalent thereof, Listing 12.04A as detailed above. Accordingly, the Claimant is found disabled at Step 3 with no further analysis required.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the findings of fact and conclusions of law, finds the Claimant disabled for purposes of the Medical Assistance program.

It is ORDERED:

1. The Department's determination is REVERSED.
2. The Department shall initiate review of the December 9, 2008 application to determine if all other non-medical criteria are met and inform the Claimant and his representative of the determination.
3. The Department shall supplement for any lost benefits (if any) that the Claimant was entitled to receive if otherwise eligible and qualified in accordance with department policy.
4. The Department shall review the Claimant's continued eligibility in May 2011 in accordance with department policy.

*Colleen M. Mamelka*

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Colleen M. Mamelka  
Administrative Law Judge  
For Ishmael Ahmed, Director  
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: 4/30/2010

Date Mailed: 4/30/2010

**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 the Circuit 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.

CMM/jlg

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