

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.: 2011-10946
Issue Nos.: 2009, 4031
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: April 18, 2011
DHS County: St. Clair

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Jonathan W. Owens

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 April 18, 2011. Claimant appeared and testified.

ISSUE

Whether the Department of Human Services (DHS or Department) properly determined 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 May 18, 2009, Claimant was approved for MA-P and SDA.
2. On review September 20, 2010, the Medical Review Team denied Claimant's request.
3. On October 6, 2010, Claimant submitted to the Department a request for hearing.
4. Claimant is 42 years old.
5. Claimant completed schooling up through high school with some college.
6. Claimant has a semi-skilled work history as a department manager at [REDACTED].
7. Claimant's limitations have lasted for 12 months or more.

8. Claimant suffers from fibromyalgia, depression, chronic pain, ankylosing spondylitis, scoliosis and degenerative disc disease.
9. Claimant has significant limitations on physical activities involving sitting, standing, walking, bending, lifting, and stooping.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

MA-P 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 administers MA-P pursuant to MCL 400.10 *et seq.* and MCL 400.105. Department policies are found in the Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), the Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM) and the Program Reference Manual (PRM).

In order to receive MA benefits based upon disability or blindness, the claimant must be disabled or blind as defined in Title XVI of the Social Security Act (20R 416.901). The Department, being authorized to make such disability determinations, utilizes the SSI definition of disability when making medical decisions on MA applications. MA-P (disability) is also known as Medicaid, which is a program designated to help public assistance claimants pay their medical expenses.

The law defines disability as the inability to do substantial gainful activity (SGA) 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).

Once an individual has been determined to be “disabled” for purposes of disability benefits, continued entitlement to benefits must be periodically reviewed. In evaluating whether an individual’s disability continues, 20 CFR 416.994 requires the trier of fact to follow a sequential evaluation process by which current work activities, severity of impairment(s), and the possibility of medical improvement and its relationship to the individual’s ability to work are assessed. Review may cease and benefits may be continued at any point if there is a substantial evidence to find that the individual is unable to engage in substantial gainful activity (SGA). 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5).

The first step to be considered is whether the claimant can perform SGA defined in 20 CFR 416.920(b). In this case, Claimant is not working. Therefore, Claimant is not disqualified at this step in the evaluation.

The second step the trier of fact must determine is whether the claimant’s impairment (or combination of impairments) meets or equals the severity of an impairment listed in Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR, Part 404. This Administrative Law Judge finds that Claimant’s medical record does support a finding that Claimant’s impairment(s) is a “listed impairment” or equal to a listed impairment, when considered in combination with her fibromyalgia and depression. See Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR Part 404,

Part A. However, this Administrative Law Judge will continue with the sequential evaluation process.

In the third step of the sequential evaluation, the trier of fact must determine whether there has been medical improvement as defined in 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(i). 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(iii). Medical improvement is any decrease in the medical severity of your impairment(s) which was present at the time of the most recent favorable medical decision that you were disabled or continued to be disabled. A determination that there has been a decrease in medical severity must be based on changes (improvement) in the symptoms, signs and/or laboratory findings associated with your impairment(s) (see §416.928). If there has been medical improvement as shown by a decrease in medical severity, the trier of fact must proceed to Step 4 (which examines whether the medical improvement is related to the claimant's ability to do work). If there has been no decrease in medical severity and, thus, no medical improvement, the trier of fact moves to Step 5 in the sequential evaluation process.

In this case, Claimant was most recently approved for MA-P on May 18, 2009. The Administrative Law Judge, after comparing past medical documentation with current medical documentation, finds there is no medical improvement. Specifically, Claimant's treating physician indicated in the previous medical documentation that Claimant had less than sedentary abilities. In the new medical documentation submitted for consideration, Claimant's treating physician continues to indicate less than sedentary abilities limiting her ability to sit, stand or walk. Claimant further testified her condition had not improved and had actually gotten worse.

In the fifth step of the sequential evaluation, the trier of fact must consider whether any of the exceptions in 20 CFR 416.994(b)(3) and (b)(4) applies. If none of them applies, Claimant's disability must be found to continue. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(v).

The first group of exceptions to medical improvement (i.e., when disability can be found to have ended even though medical improvement has not occurred), found in 20 CFR 416.994(b)(3), is as follows:

- *Substantial evidence shows that you are the beneficiary of advances in medical or vocational therapy or technology (related to your ability to work).*
- *Substantial evidence shows that you have undergone vocational therapy (related to your ability to work).*
- *Substantial evidence shows that based on new or improved diagnostic or evaluative techniques your impairment(s) is not as disabling as it was considered to be at the time of the most recent favorable decision.*
- *Substantial evidence demonstrates that any prior disability decision was in error.*

In examining the record, this Administrative Law Judge finds that there is nothing to suggest that any of the exceptions listed above applies to Claimant's case.

The second group of exceptions to medical improvement, found at 20 CFR 416.994(b)(4), is as follows:

- *A prior determination or decision was fraudulently obtained.*
- *You did not cooperate with us.*
- *Claimant cannot be found.*
- *Claimant failed to follow prescribed treatment which would be expected to restore your ability to engage in substantial gainful activity.*

After careful review of the record, this Administrative Law Judge finds none of the above-mentioned exceptions applies to Claimant's case. Accordingly, per 20 CFR 416.994, this Administrative Law Judge concludes that Claimant's disability for purposes of Medical Assistance and State Disability Assistance must continue.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, decided that the Claimant continues to be medically disabled.

Accordingly, the Department's decision is hereby REVERSED and the Department is ORDERED to maintain Claimant's eligibility for MA and SDA if otherwise eligible for program benefits. A review of this case shall be set for May 2012.



Jonathan W. Owens
Administrative Law Judge
for Maura Corrigan, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: April 21, 2011

Date Mailed: April 21, 2011

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.

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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.

JWO/pf

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