

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No.: 2011-31785
Issue No.: 2009, 4031
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: July 5, 2011
Wayne County DHS (57)

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 telephone hearing was conducted from Detroit, Michigan on Tuesday, July 5, 2011. The Claimant appeared and testified. [REDACTED] appeared on behalf of the Department of Human Services ("Department").

ISSUE

Whether the Department properly determined the Claimant was not disabled for purposes of the Medical Assistance ("MA-P") and State Disability Assistance ("SDA") benefit programs?

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 and SDA benefits on September 13, 2010.
2. On January 1, 2011, the Medical Review Team ("MRT") deferred the disability determination requesting a consultative examination and other medical records. (Exhibit 1, p. 4.)
3. On February 14, 2011, the Claimant attended a consultative examination. (Exhibit 1, pp. 6 – 10.)

4. On March 14, 2011, the MRT found the Claimant not disabled. (Exhibit 1, pp. 4, 5.)
5. On March 21, 2011, the Department sent an Eligibility Notice to the Claimant informing him of the MRT denial. (Exhibit 1, p. 3.)
6. On April 18, 2011, the Department received the Claimant's timely written request for hearing. (Exhibit 2.)
7. The Claimant alleged physical disabling impairments due to degenerative arthritis in the right hip and left knee, musculoskeletal pain, and asthma.
8. The Claimant alleged mental disabling impairments due to anxiety and depression.
9. At the time of hearing, the Claimant was [REDACTED] years old with a [REDACTED] birth date; was 6'2" in height; and weighed 220 pounds.
10. The Claimant is a high school graduate with some vocational training and an employment history as a die setter and press operator.

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 Bridges Administrative Manual ("BAM"), the Bridges Eligibility Manual ("BEM"), and the Bridges Reference Manual ("BRM").

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 applicant 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 to 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. In the record presented, the Claimant is not involved in substantial gainful activity and, therefore, is not ineligible for disability benefits 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 degenerative arthritis in the right hip and left knee, musculoskeletal pain, asthma, depression, and anxiety.

On [REDACTED] the Claimant was treated via the emergency room for an acute cocaine binge and anxiety.

On [REDACTED] the Claimant sought treatment for weakness and memory loss. The diagnoses were anxiety, panic, weakness/fatigue (etiology unclear).

On [REDACTED] the Claimant attended a consultative examination. The Claimant was found able to work an 8 hour work day finding him able to sit, stand, walk, bend, and lift at least 10 pounds without difficulty. The diagnoses were asthma, right knee pain, left knee pain, elbow pain status post left elbow fracture repair; and chronic alcohol and drug addiction.

On this same date, the Claimant attended a mental status evaluation. Based on the examination, the Claimant was found able to understand, retain, and follow simple instructions and was generally restricted to performing simple, routine, repetitive, concrete tasks. The diagnoses were cannabis dependence, cocaine dependence, recurrent depression, and adjustment disorder. The Global Assessment Functioning ("GAF") was 58.

On [REDACTED] an ultrasound of the kidneys found no definite cystic or solid masses, hydronephrosis, or stones.

On [REDACTED] a Medical Examination Report was completed on behalf of the Claimant. The current diagnoses were anxiety, depression, low back pain, degenerative joint pain, and severe osteoarthritis of the knee and hip. The physical examination noted the use of a cane for ambulation. The Claimant's condition was deteriorating.

On [REDACTED] a Multiple Impairment Questionnaire was completed by a nurse practitioner. The diagnoses were anxiety, depression, low back pain, left knee pain, and right hip pain noting limited range of motion. The Claimant needs surgical intervention for his hip and knee pain. X-rays show a vascular necrosis to the right hip and joint narrowing of the left knee requiring a cane for ambulation. The Claimant was found able to stand and/or walk 2 hours during an 8 hour workday; sit 2 hours during this same time period; lift/carry frequently 10 to 20 pounds and occasionally 20 to 50 pounds; and unable to perform repetitive motions. The Claimant was found unable to do a full-time competitive job noting that pain, fatigue, or other symptoms would periodically interfere with his attention and concentration. Further, the Claimant was found incapable of tolerating low stress jobs due to his anxiety and depression. It was estimated that the Claimant would miss more than 3 days a month due to his impairment and/or treatment. The Claimant was unable to push, pull, kneel, bend, or stoop.

On [REDACTED] the Claimant attended a consultative evaluation. A lumbosacral spine x-ray [REDACTED] revealed mild degenerative joint disease. Right hip x-ray demonstrated advanced right hip degenerative joint disease. Left knee x-ray showed degenerative changes without evidence of fracture or dislocation. The physician stated that the Claimant has minimally limited mobility, especially with ambulation due to right hip and left knee arthritic changes.

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 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 minimus* 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 physical disabling impairments due to degenerative arthritis in the right hip and left knee, musculoskeletal pain, asthma, 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. 1.00B2a. The inability to perform fine and gross movements effectively means an extreme loss of function of both upper extremities. 1.00B2c. In other words, an impairment(s) that interferes very seriously with the individual's ability to independently initiate, sustain, or complete activities. 1.00B2c. To use the upper extremities effectively, an individual must be capable of sustaining such functions as reaching, pushing, pulling, grasping, and fingering to be able to carry out activities of daily living. 1.00B2c. Examples include the inability to prepare a simple meal, feed oneself, take care of personal hygiene, sort/handle papers/files, or place items in a cabinet at or about the waist level. 1.00B2c. Pain or other symptoms are also considered. 1.00B2d.

Categories of Musculoskeletal include:

- 1.02 Major dysfunction of a joint(s) due to any cause:
Characterized by gross anatomical deformity (e.g. subluxation, contracture, bony or fibrous ankylosis, instability) and chronic joint pain and stiffness with signs of limitation of motion or other abnormal motion of the affected joint(s), and findings on an appropriate medically acceptable imaging of joint space narrowing, bony destruction, or ankylosis of the affected joint(s). With:
 - A. Involvement of one major peripheral weight-bearing joint (i.e., hip, knee, or ankle), resulting in inability to ambulate effectively as defined in 1.00B2b; or
 - B. Involvement of one major peripheral joint in each upper extremity (i.e., shoulder, elbow, wrist, hand),

resulting in inability to perform fine and gross movements effectively as defined in 1.00B2c.

In this case, x-rays confirm advanced right hip degenerative joint disease; degenerative changes in the left knee; and mild degenerative changes in the lumbar spine. As a result, the Claimant requires a cane for ambulation and has limited mobility. The nurse practitioner opined that surgical intervention was warranted. The records show chronic right hip joint pain and stiffness with signs of limitation of motion which, in combination of the chronic left knee pain, result in the inability to ambulate effectively. Ultimately, it is found that the Claimant's impairment(s) meet, or are the medical equivalent thereof, a listed impairment within Listing 1.00, as detailed above. Accordingly, the Claimant is found disabled at Step 3 with no further analysis required.

The State Disability Assistance program, which provides financial assistance for disabled persons, was established by 2004 PA 344. DHS administers the SDA program pursuant to MCL 400.10 *et seq.* and Michigan Administrative Code ("MAC R") 400.3151 – 400.3180. Department policies are found in BAM, BEM, and BRM. A person is considered disabled for SDA purposes if the person has a physical or mental impairment which meets federal SSI disability standards for at least ninety days. Receipt of SSI or RSDI benefits based on disability or blindness, or the receipt of MA benefits based on disability or blindness automatically qualifies an individual as disabled for purposes of the SDA program.

In this case, the Claimant is found disabled for purposes of the MA-P program; therefore, the Claimant is found disabled for purposes of SDA benefit program.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based on the above findings of fact and conclusions of law finds the Claimant disabled for purposes of the MA-P and SDA benefit program.

Accordingly, it is ORDERED:

1. The Department's determination is REVERSED.
2. The Department shall process the September 13, 2010 application to determine if all other non-medical criteria are met and inform the Claimant of the determination in accordance with department policy.
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.

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4. The Department shall review the Claimant's continued eligibility in August 2012 in accordance with department policy.

Colleen M. Mamelka

Colleen M. Mamelka
Administrative Law Judge
For Maura Corrigan, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: July 19, 2011

Date Mailed: July 19, 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.

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.

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