

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

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Reg No.: 2012-60658
Issue No.: 2009
Case No.: ██████████2
Hearing Date: October 4, 2012
Wayne County DHS (76)

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Colleen M. Mamelka

AMENDED HEARING DECISION

This decision is amended for the sole purpose of removing the incorrect Authorized Hearing Representative.

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 Wednesday, October 4, 2012. The Claimant appeared and testified. Participating on behalf of the Department of Human Services ("Department") was Antonio Ward.

During the hearing, the Claimant waived the time period for the issuance of this decision, in order to allow for the submission of additional medical evidence. The records were received, reviewed, and forwarded to the State Hearing Review Team ("SHRT") for consideration. On December 14, 2012, this office received the SHRT determination which found the Claimant not disabled. 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 the 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 January 17, 2012.

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2. On May 2, 2012, the Medical Review Team (“MRT”) found the Claimant not disabled. (Exhibit 1, pp. 5, 6)
3. On May 8, 2012, the Department notified the Claimant of the MRT determination.
4. On June 18, 2012, the Department received the Claimant’s written request for hearing. (Exhibit 1, pp. 2 – 4)
5. On August 2nd and December 5, 2012, the SHRT found the Claimant not disabled. (Exhibit 2)
6. The Claimant alleged physical disabling impairments due to bilateral ankle pain/inflammation, low back pain, high blood pressure, closed-head injury, and cognitive dysfunction.
7. The Claimant alleged mental disabling impairments due to depression.
8. At the time of hearing, the Claimant was 49 years old with a [REDACTED] birth date; was 5’6” in height; and weighed 182 pounds.
9. The Claimant has the equivalent of a high school education with an employment history of as a food service attendant.
10. The Claimant’s impairments have lasted, or are expected to last, continuously for a period of 12 months or longer.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Medical Assistance 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, 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 Tables (“RFT”).

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 416.913. 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 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 416.945(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 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 416.920(a)(4)(ii); 20 CFR 416.920(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 416.920(a)(4)(ii); 20 CFR 416.920(c). Basic work activities means the abilities and aptitudes necessary to do most jobs. 20 CFR 416.921(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 bilateral ankle pain/inflammation, low back pain, high blood pressure, closed-head injury, cognitive dysfunction, and depression.

On August 20, 2011, x-rays of the right ankle confirmed bimalleolar fracture with soft tissue swelling.

On October 20, 2011, the Claimant attended a follow-up appointment for his fractured fibula. X-rays showed a spiral oblique fracture with displacement noted of the fibula, fragment proximal and posterior, non-union. Due to the non-union, the Claimant was to remain non-weight bearing with surgery recommended (open reduction internal fixation "ORIF"). The diagnoses were bi-malleolar fracture (closed) and non-union fracture.

On February 7, 2012, a Medical Examination Report was completed by the Claimant's podiatrist. The current diagnosis was non-union of a right ankle fracture. X-rays showed displaced spiral fibular fracture at the ankle joint.

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On April 11, 2012, the Claimant attended a consultative evaluation. The physical examination was essentially unremarkable. The Internist opined that the Claimant was able to work an 8-hour workday noting the ability to sit, stand, and walk short distances, minimal bending, and lifting at least 15 pounds without difficulty. The diagnoses were mild hypertension, history of right ankle fracture (noting complaints of mild residual pain), and remote history of scalp laceration.

On this same date, a mental status evaluation was performed. The Psychologist found the Claimant able to acquire and use information, attend to task presented, and was able to understand, retain, and follow simple instructions. The Claimant was restricted to performing simple, routine, repetitive, concrete, tangible tasks. The diagnoses were adjustment disorder with depressed mood and cocaine dependency. The Global Assessment Functioning ("GAF") was 60.

On April 17, 2012, the Claimant sought treatment for right ankle pain, right dide nerve damage, and neck pain. Aggravating activities were standing, driving, walking, physical activity, and stairs. The Claimant's right ankle fracture from September 2011 was not healed.

On April 19, 2012, the Claimant attended a follow-up appointment for a comprehensive rehabilitation and pain management evaluation. The physical examination revealed reduced range of motion of the cervical spine with mild cervical spasms; mild lumbar spasms, and negative bilateral straight leg testing. The right ankle showed moderate swelling and tenderness. The diagnoses were right ankle swelling/pain with bimalleolar fracture and cervical/lumbar spasms.

On May 3rd, May 31st, June 26th, July 26, 2012, the Claimant attended a follow-up appointment with complaints of neck pain with spasms, low back pain with radiation to both legs/feet, and right ankle pain. The Claimant was unable to meet his needs in the home.

On May 26, 2012, the Claimant presented to the emergency room after a physical assault requiring suturing/stapling a scalp laceration.

On August 23, 2012, the Claimant attended a follow-up appointment with complaints of low back pain and stiffness, neck pain, right ankle pain/swelling, and hand numbness. The Claimant was unable to perform work around the house.

On September 17, 2012, the Claimant attended a follow-up appointment with complaints of neck pain/spasms and right foot pain.

On September 18, 2012, the Claimant attended a follow-up appointment. Right ankle swelling and fracture, right bimalleolar fracture, cervical, thoracic, and lumbar spasms

were documented, noting the need for right ankle surgery, MRI scans of the neck, mid- and lower back, and physical therapy. The physician opined that the Claimant was disabled and unable to work.

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 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 evidence confirms non-union right ankle fracture; hypertension; cervical pain/spasms, back pain/spasms, hand numbness; and adjustment disorder.

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:

- 1.02 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 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

- 1.06 Fracture of the femur, tibia, pelvis, or one or more of the tarsal bone with:
- A. Solid union not evident on appropriate medically acceptable imaging and not clinically solid;
- and
- B. Inability to ambulate effectively, as defined in 1.00B2b, and return to effective ambulation did not occur or is not expected to occur within 12 months of onset.

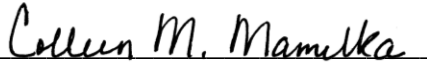
In this case, Claimant fractured his right ankle in September 2011. Recent objective findings which include x-rays, show that the Claimant continues to suffer with a non-healing bimalleolar fracture. The evidence shows that the Claimant is unable, and has been unable, to ambulate effectively despite the passing of a 12 month period. In September 2012, the Claimant's treating physician found him unable to meet his needs in the home and found him disabled from work. Due to the non-union, the Claimant is in need of an ORIF. In light of the foregoing, it is found that the Claimant's non-union bimalleolar fracture, meets, or is the medical equivalent of, a Listing impairment within 1.00 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 on the above findings of fact and conclusions of law finds the Claimant disabled for purposes of the MA-P benefit program.

Accordingly, it is ORDERED:

1. The Department's determination is REVERSED.
2. The Department shall initiate processing of the January 17, 2012 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 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 April 2014 in accordance with Department policy.



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

Date Signed: May 20, 2013

Date Mailed: May 20, 2013

NOTICE: Michigan Administrative Hearing System (MAHS) 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. MAHS 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. (60 days for FAP cases)

The Claimant may appeal the Decision and Order to Circuit Court 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.

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Claimant may request a rehearing or reconsideration for the following reasons:

- A rehearing **MAY** be granted if there is newly discovered evidence that could affect the outcome of the original hearing decision.
- A reconsideration **MAY** be granted for any of the following reasons:
 - misapplication of manual policy or law in the hearing decision,
 - typographical errors, mathematical error, or other obvious errors in the hearing decision that effect the substantial rights of the claimant:
 - the failure of the ALJ to address other relevant issues in the hearing decision.

Request must be submitted through the local DHS office or directly to MAHS by mail at
Michigan Administrative Hearings
Reconsideration/Rehearing Request
P. O. Box 30639
Lansing, Michigan 48909-07322

CMM/tm

cc: [REDACTED]
Wayne County (76) DHS/1843
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C. Mamelka