

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

IN THE MATTER OF:

[REDACTED]

Reg. No.: 2014-28209
Issue No(s): 4009
Case No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: June 25, 2014
County: Kent County DHS

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Colleen Lack

HEARING DECISION

Following Claimant's request for a hearing, this matter is before the undersigned Administrative Law Judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and 400.37; 42 CFR 431.200 to 431.250; and 45 CFR 205.10. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on June 25, 2014, from Lansing, Michigan. Participants on behalf of Claimant included [REDACTED] the Claimant, [REDACTED], sister, and Denice Shannon, sister. Participants on behalf of the Department of Human Services (Department) included [REDACTED] Hearing Facilitator, and [REDACTED], Assistance Payments Supervisor.

During the hearing, Claimant waived the time period for the issuance of this decision, in order to allow for the submission of additional medical evidence. The evidence was received and reviewed.

ISSUE

Whether the Department properly determined that Claimant was no longer disabled for purposes of the Medical Assistance (MA) 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. Claimant had been found disabled and was eligible for at least SDA based on a July 28, 2011, application.
2. In January 2014, the Department was to review Claimant's ongoing eligibility for benefits.
3. On February 4, 2014, the Medical Review Team (MRT) found Claimant not disabled for SDA.
4. On February 12, 2014, the Department notified Claimant of the MRT determination.

5. On February 12, 2014, the Department received Claimant's timely written request for hearing.
6. Claimant alleged disabling impairments including diabetes, gout, three bad discs lower-mid back, neuropathy, hypertension, asthma, vision problem, depression, and anxiety.
7. At the time of hearing, Claimant was 46 years old with a [REDACTED], birth date; was 6'5" in height; and weighed 329 pounds.
8. Claimant completed the 12th grade and has a work history including custodial work.
9. Claimant's impairments have lasted, or are expected to last, continuously for a period of 12 months or longer.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Department policies are contained in the Department of Human Services Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), Department of Human Services Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM), and Department of Human Services Reference Tables Manual (RFT).

The Medical Assistance (MA) program is established by Title XIX of the Social Security Act, 42 USC 1396-1396w-5; 42 USC 1315; the Affordable Care Act of 2010, the collective term for the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, Pub. L. No. 111-148, as amended by the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-152; and 42 CFR 430.10-.25. The Department (formerly known as the Family Independence Agency) administers the MA program pursuant to 42 CFR 435, MCL 400.10, and MCL 400.105-.112k.

The State Disability Assistance (SDA) program, which provides financial assistance for disabled persons, was established by 2004 PA 344. The Department administers the SDA program pursuant to 42 CFR 435, MCL 400.10 *et seq.* and Mich Admin Code, Rules 400.3151 – 400.3180. A person is considered disabled for SDA purposes if the person has a physical or mental impairment which meets federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability standards for at least ninety days. Receipt of SSI 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.

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 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).

Once an individual has been found disabled for purposes of MA benefits, continued entitlement is periodically reviewed in order to make a current determination or decision as to whether disability remains in accordance with the medical improvement review standard. 20 CFR 416.993(a); 20 CFR 416.994. In evaluating a claim for ongoing MA benefits, federal regulation require a sequential evaluation process be utilized. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5). The review may cease and benefits continued if sufficient evidence supports a finding that an individual is still unable to engage in substantial gainful activity. *Id.* Prior to deciding an individual's disability has ended, the department will develop, along with the Claimant's cooperation, a complete medical history covering at least the 12 months preceding the date the individual signed a request seeking continuing disability benefits. 20 CFR 416.993(b). The department may order a consultative examination to determine whether or not the disability continues. 20 CFR 416.993(c).

The first step in the analysis in determining whether an individual's disability has ended requires the trier of fact to consider the severity of the impairment(s) and whether it meets or equals a listed impairment in Appendix 1 of subpart P of part 404 of Chapter 20. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(i). If a Listing is met, an individual's disability is found to continue with no further analysis required.

If the impairment(s) does not meet or equal a Listing, then Step 2 requires a determination of whether there has been medical improvement as defined in 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1); 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(ii). Medical improvement is defined as any decrease in the medical severity of the impairment(s) which was present at the time of the most favorable medical decision that the individual was disabled or continues to be disabled. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(1)(i). If no medical improvement found, and no exception applies (see listed exceptions below), then an individual's disability is found to continue. Conversely, if medical improvement is found, Step 3 calls for a determination of whether there has been an increase in the residual functional capacity ("RFC") based on the impairment(s) that were present at the time of the most favorable medical determination. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(iii).

If medical improvement is not related to the ability to work, Step 4 evaluates whether any listed exception applies. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(iv). If no exception is applicable,

disability is found to continue. *Id.* If the medical improvement *is* related to an individual's ability to do work, then a determination of whether an individual's impairment(s) are severe is made. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(iii), (v). If severe, an assessment of an individual's residual functional capacity to perform past work is made. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(vi). If an individual can perform past relevant work, disability does not continue. *Id.* Similarly, when evidence establishes that the impairment(s) do (does) not significantly limit an individual's physical or mental abilities to do basic work activities, continuing disability will not be found. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(v). Finally, if an individual is unable to perform past relevant work, vocational factors such as the individual's age, education, and past work experience are considered in determining whether despite the limitations an individual is able to perform other work. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(vii). Disability ends if an individual is able to perform other work. *Id.*

The first group of exceptions (as mentioned above) 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) are as follows:

- (i) Substantial evidence shows that the individual is the beneficiary of advances in medical or vocational therapy or technology (related to the ability to work);
- (ii) Substantial evidence shows that the individual has undergone vocational therapy related to the ability to work;
- (iii) Substantial evidence shows that based on new or improved diagnostic or evaluative techniques the impairment(s) is not as disabling as previously determined at the time of the most recent favorable decision;
- (iv) Substantial evidence demonstrates that any prior disability decision was in error.

The second group of exceptions [20 CFR 416.994(b)(4)] to medical improvement are as follows:

- (i) A prior determination was fraudulently obtained;
- (ii) The individual failed to cooperate;
- (iii) The individual cannot be located;
- (iv) The prescribed treatment that was expected to restore the individual's ability to engage in substantial gainful activity was not followed.

If an exception from the second group listed above is applicable, a determination that the individual's disability has ended is made. 20 CFR 416.994(b)(5)(iv). The second group of exceptions to medical improvement may be considered at any point in the process. *Id.*

As discussed above, the first step in the sequential evaluation process to determine whether the Claimant's disability continues looks at the severity of the impairment(s) and whether it meets or equals a listed impairment in Appendix 1.

In the present case, Claimant alleged disabling impairments including diabetes, gout, three bad discs lower-mid back, neuropathy, hypertension, asthma, vision problem, depression, and anxiety.

An April 24, 2012, diabetic eye examination report documented a diagnosis of compound hyperopic astigmatism.

April 2012 to October 2013, records from Arbor Circle document diagnosis and treatment of depression and alcohol abuse. In May 2012, Claimant's Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) was 54. A July record indicates Claimant was doing okay with the depression. An October 2013, progress note indicates Claimant denied any difficulty with depression, but did note he was using an electric wheelchair.

Claimant was in a Skilled Nursing Facility September 1-11, 2013, for spinal stenosis and weakness. It appears Claimant had been hospitalized August 28, 2013 to September 1, 2013, and discharged to this facility. A list of diagnoses included backache, diabetes, depression, asthma, morbid obesity, gout, and hypertension. Claimant received physical therapy and pain management, met his goals, and was noted to have strengthened to baseline. At discharge, Claimant had improved to be independent with bed mobility and transfers, modified independent with ambulation over 200 feet with crutches, and modified independent with stairs. Claimant was instructed to use adaptive equipment at home such as crutches, walker, or his power chair.

March 22, 2014, MRIs showed significant degenerative changes at C5-6 and C6-7 interspaces with moderate to severe stenosis in some areas, as well as multilevel degenerate changes most prominent at L2-3, L3-5, and L4-5 interspaces leading to significant central spinal canal and foramina stenosis.

Claimant was seen in the emergency department on March 26, 2014, for a left shoulder pain of uncertain cause, non-cardiac chest pain. It was noted that Claimant had a negative heart catheterization in November 2013.

Records from the orthopedic doctor indicate Claimant was going to have bunion surgery or surgery for flat feet in March 2014.

April 2014 to June 2014 records from the pain management doctor document diagnosis and treatment of lumbar spinal stenosis, lumbar radiculitis, cervical spinal stenosis, and cervical radiculitis. The April 21, 2014, history and physical indicates the recent MRI findings included: severe central canal stenosis at C5-6 left greater than right neural foraminal stenosis; more of the same at C6-7 slightly less severe; left sided neural foraminal stenosis at L2-3 and L4-5; and severe central canal stenosis at L2-5. The June 2, 2014, progress note showed numerous abnormal exam findings.

Claimant was seen in the emergency department on May 30, 2014, for neck and chest pain that was thought to be musculoskeletal.

A May 15, 2014, rheumatology record documented ongoing diagnosis of gout with no evidence of current activity on that day's examination. While there was noted difficulty with medical compliance, it was due to Claimant's inability to pay for his medications.

Based on the objective medical evidence, considered listings included: 1.00 Musculoskeletal System, 3.00 Respiratory System; 9.00 Endocrine disorders, 11.00 Neurological, 12.00 Mental Disorders. However, the medical evidence was not sufficient to meet the intent and severity requirements of any listing, or its equivalent. Accordingly, the Claimant cannot be found disabled, or not disabled at this step.

Step 2 requires a determination of whether there has been medical improvement. However, there was no documentation of the basis of the prior disability finding. The records indicate that there may have been improvements with some impairments, such as depression by October 2013. However, the spinal impairments appear to have become severe enough in September 2014 to warrant a skill nursing facility stay for rehabilitative therapy. While there was some functional improvement during this stay, Claimant was still to use assistive devices for ambulation, including crutches, walker, and/or power wheelchair when he returned home. The March 2014 MRI reports document the severe abnormal findings in the lumbar and cervical spine. April 2014 to June 2014 records from the pain management doctor document diagnosis and treatment of lumbar spinal stenosis, lumbar radiculitis, cervical spinal stenosis, and cervical radiculitis. The June 2, 2014, progress note showed numerous abnormal exam findings. The evidence was not sufficient to establish that overall there has been medical improvement from the prior disability determination regarding the ongoing severe spinal impairments.

In consideration of all medical evidence, it is found that, overall, there was insufficient evidence to establish medical improvement. The exceptions contained in 20 CFR 416.994(b)(3) and 20 CFR 416.994(b)(4) are not applicable.

The Administrative Law Judge, based on the above Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, and for the reasons stated on the record, if any, finds Claimant disabled for purposes of the MA and/or SDA benefit program.

DECISION AND ORDER

Accordingly, the Department's determination is **REVERSED**.

THE DEPARTMENT IS ORDERED TO INITIATE THE FOLLOWING, IN ACCORDANCE WITH DEPARTMENT POLICY AND CONSISTENT WITH THIS HEARING DECISION, WITHIN 10 DAYS OF THE DATE OF MAILING OF THIS DECISION AND ORDER:

1. Reinstate Claimant's MA and/or SDA case(s) retroactive to the effective date of the closure, if not done previously, to determine Claimant's non-medical eligibility. The Department shall inform Claimant of the determination in writing. A review of this case shall be set for November 2015.

2. The Department shall supplement for lost benefits (if any) that Claimant was entitled to receive, if otherwise eligible and qualified in accordance with Department policy.



Colleen Lack
Administrative Law Judge
for Maura Corrigan, Director
Department of Human Services

Date Signed: October 31, 2014

Date Mailed: October 31, 2014

NOTICE OF APPEAL: A party may appeal this Hearing Decision in the circuit court in the county in which he/she resides or has its principal place of business in the State, or the circuit court in Ingham County, within 30 days of the receipt date.

A party may request a rehearing or reconsideration of this Hearing Decision from the Michigan Administrative Hearing System (MAHS) within 30 days of the mailing date of this Hearing Decision, or MAHS may order a rehearing or reconsideration on its own motion.

MAHS may grant a party's Request for Rehearing or Reconsideration when one of the following exists:

- Newly discovered evidence that existed at the time of the original hearing that could affect the outcome of the original hearing decision;
- Misapplication of manual policy or law in the hearing decision which led to a wrong conclusion;
- Typographical, mathematical or other obvious error in the hearing decision that affects the rights of the client;
- Failure of the ALJ to address in the hearing decision relevant issues raised in the hearing request.

The party requesting a rehearing or reconsideration must specify all reasons for the request. MAHS will not review any response to a request for rehearing/reconsideration. A request must be *received* in MAHS within 30 days of the date this Hearing Decision is mailed.

A written request may be faxed or mailed to MAHS. If submitted by fax, the written request must be faxed to (517) 335-6088 and be labeled as follows:

Attention: MAHS Rehearing/Reconsideration Request

If submitted by mail, the written request must be addressed as follows:

Michigan Administrative Hearings

201428209/CL

Reconsideration/Rehearing Request
P.O. Box 30639
Lansing, Michigan 48909-07322

CL/hj

cc:

