

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

IN THE MATTER OF:



MAHS Reg. No.: 15-021490
Issue No.: 4009
Agency Case No.: [REDACTED]
Hearing Date: January 14, 2016
County: Wayne (76)

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Christian Gardocki

HEARING DECISION

Following Petitioner's request for a hearing, this matter is before the undersigned administrative law judge pursuant to MCL 400.9 and 400.37; 7 CFR 273.15 to 273.18; 42 CFR 431.200 to 431.250; 45 CFR 99.1 to 99.33; and 45 CFR 205.10; and Mich Admin Code, R 792.11002. After due notice, an in-person hearing was held on January 14, 2016, from Detroit, Michigan. Petitioner appeared and was unrepresented. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) was represented by [REDACTED], specialist.

ISSUE

The issue is whether MDHHS properly denied Petitioner's State Disability Assistance (SDA) eligibility for the reason that Petitioner is not a disabled individual.

FINDINGS OF FACT

The administrative law judge, based on the competent, material, and substantial evidence on the whole record, finds as material fact:

1. On May 15, 2015, Petitioner applied for SDA benefits.
2. Petitioner's only basis for SDA benefits was as a disabled individual.
3. On November 3, 2015, the Medical Review Team (MRT) determined that Petitioner was not a disabled individual (see Exhibits 4-11).
4. On November 14, 2015, MDHHS denied Petitioner's application for SDA benefits and mailed a Notice of Case Action informing Petitioner of the denial.
5. On November 19, 2015, Petitioner requested a hearing disputing the denial of SDA benefits (see Exhibit 1, pp. 2-3).

6. As of the date of the administrative hearing, Petitioner was a 39-year-old female.
7. Petitioner has not earned substantial gainful activity since before the first month of benefits sought.
8. Petitioner's highest education year completed was the 11th grade.
9. Petitioner has a history of unskilled employment, with no known transferrable job skills.
10. Petitioner alleged disability based on restrictions related to carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS).

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The State Disability Assistance (SDA) program which provides financial assistance for disabled persons is established by 2004 PA 344. MDHHS administers the SDA program pursuant to MCL 400.10, *et seq.*, and MAC R 400.3151-400.3180. MDHHS policies for SDA are found in the Bridges Administrative Manual (BAM), the Bridges Eligibility Manual (BEM) and the Reference Tables Manual (RFT).

SDA provides financial assistance to disabled adults who are not eligible for Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits. BEM 100 (1/2013), p. 4. The goal of the SDA program is to provide financial assistance to meet a disabled person's basic personal and shelter needs. *Id.* To receive SDA, a person must be disabled, caring for a disabled person, or age 65 or older. BEM 261 (1/2012), p. 1. A person is disabled for SDA purposes if he/she:

- receives other specified disability-related benefits or services, see Other Benefits or Services below, or
- resides in a qualified Special Living Arrangement facility, or
- is certified as unable to work due to mental or physical disability for at least 90 days from the onset of the disability; or
- is diagnosed as having Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).
Id.

There was no evidence that any of the above circumstances apply to Petitioner. Accordingly, Petitioner may not be considered for SDA eligibility without undergoing a medical review process (see BAM 815) which determines whether Petitioner is a disabled individual. *Id.*, p. 3.

Generally, state agencies such as MDHHS must use the same definition of SSI disability as found in the federal regulations. 42 CFR 435.540(a). Disability is federally defined as the inability to do any 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. SDA differs in that a 90 day period is required to establish disability.

SGA means a person does the following: performs significant duties, does them for a reasonable length of time, and does a job normally done for pay or profit. *Id.*, p. 9. Significant duties are duties used to do a job or run a business. *Id.* They must also have a degree of economic value. *Id.* The ability to run a household or take care of oneself does not, on its own, constitute SGA. *Id.*

The person claiming a physical or mental disability has the burden to establish a disability 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).

Federal regulations describe a sequential five step process that is to be followed in determining whether a person is disabled. 20 CFR 416.920. If there is no finding of disability or lack of disability at each step, the process moves to the next step. 20 CFR 416.920 (a)(4).

The first step in the process considers a person's current work activity. 20 CFR 416.920 (a)(4)(i). A person who is earning more than a certain monthly amount is ordinarily considered to be engaging in SGA. The monthly amount depends on whether a person is statutorily blind or not. The 2016 monthly income limit considered SGA for non-blind individuals is \$1,130.00.

Petitioner credibly denied performing current employment; no evidence was submitted to contradict Petitioner's testimony. Based on the presented evidence, it is found that Petitioner is not performing SGA and has not performed SGA since the date of application. Accordingly, the disability analysis may proceed to Step 2.

The second step in the disability evaluation is to determine whether a severe medically determinable physical or mental impairment exists to meet the durational requirement. 20 CFR 416.920 (a)(4)(ii). The impairments may be combined to meet the severity requirement. If a severe impairment is not found, then a person is deemed not disabled. *Id.*

The impairments must significantly limit a person's basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.920 (a)(5)(c). "Basic work activities" refers to the abilities and aptitudes necessary to do most jobs. *Id.* Examples of basic work activities include:

- physical functions (e.g. walking, standing, sitting, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying, or handling)
- capacities for seeing, hearing, and speaking, understanding; carrying out, and remembering simple instructions
- use of judgment
- responding appropriately to supervision, co-workers and usual work situations; and/or
- dealing with changes in a routine work setting.

Generally, federal courts have imposed a de minimus standard upon petitioners to establish the existence of a severe impairment. *Grogan v. Barnhart*, 399 F.3d 1257, 1263 (10th Cir. 2005); *Hinkle v. Apfel*, 132 F.3d 1349, 1352 (10th Cir. 1997). *Higgs v Bowen*, 880 F.2d 860, 862 (6th Cir. 1988). Similarly, Social Security Ruling 85-28 has been interpreted so that a claim may be denied at step two for lack of a severe impairment only when the medical evidence establishes a slight abnormality or combination of slight abnormalities that would have no more than a minimal effect on an individual's ability to work even if the individual's age, education, or work experience were specifically considered. *Barrientos v. Secretary of Health and Human Servs.*, 820 F.2d 1, 2 (1st Cir. 1987). Social Security Ruling 85-28 has been clarified so that the step two severity requirements are intended "to do no more than screen out groundless claims." *McDonald v. Secretary of Health and Human Servs.*, 795 F.2d 1118, 1124 (1st Cir. 1986).

SSA specifically notes that age, education, and work experience are not considered at the second step of the disability analysis. 20 CFR 416.920 (5)(c). In determining whether Petitioner's impairments amount to a severe impairment, all other relevant evidence may be considered. The analysis will begin with a summary of presented medical documentation.

Medical center documents (Exhibit A, pp. 5-6) dated November 29, 2011, were presented. A complaint of second and third finger bilateral hand numbness was noted, more severe in the left. A full range of wrist motion was noted.

Medical center documents (Exhibit A, pp. 1-2) dated July 23, 2012, were presented. An impression of bilateral positive Phalen's sign and CTS was noted. It was noted Petitioner was scheduled for CTS release surgery but instead opted for cortisone injections.

Medical center documents (Exhibit A, pp. 13-4) dated August 20, 2012, were presented. An ongoing complaint of finger tingling and numbness were noted. It was noted Petitioner's insurance company approved wrist injections. A 6 week follow-up was noted as scheduled.

An Electromyography Report (Exhibit A, pp. 7-8) dated April 23, 2015, was presented. An impression of moderate to marked sensorimotor demyelinating neuropathy at the left

wrist was noted. The findings were consistent with Petitioner's reports of pain, weakness, and numbness.

An Electromyography Report (Exhibit A, pp. 9-10) dated May 28, 2015, was presented. An impression of "very mild" right wrist median mononeuropathy was noted.

A Medical Examination Report (Exhibit 1, pp. 18-20) dated May 1, 2015, was presented. The form was completed by an internal medicine physician with an approximate 1 ½ month history of treating Petitioner. Petitioner's physician listed diagnoses of bilateral wrist pain and arthralgia. Current medications included naprosyn and neurontin. A tender to minimal palpation left wrist was noted. Positive Tinnel's sign was noted on Petitioner's right wrist. It was noted that Petitioner can meet household needs.

Physician office visit notes (Exhibit A, p. 11 dated June 11, 2015, were presented. It was noted that Petitioner reported for an EMG follow-up. An assessment of arthralgia and CTS was noted. A referral for an orthopedic specialist was planned.

An Operative Report (Exhibit A, pp. 12-13) dated September 1, 2015, was presented. A procedure for left carpal tunnel release was noted as performed.

Petitioner testified before her September 2015 surgery, her hand had been in pain for a period of 3-4 years. Petitioner testified pain medications did not help. Petitioner also testified her fingers locked-up to the point that she could not lift items (e.g. jugs of water) or open envelopes. Petitioner testified cortisone injections did not alleviate her pain.

Petitioner testified she is "pretty much" healed from her surgery and her pain has diminished. Petitioner testified she plans to have surgery on her right hand in February of 2016 due to ongoing numbness problems with the hand.

Petitioner testimony conceded she has no sitting or walking her restrictions. Her only restriction is to her hand dexterity and related pain.

Petitioner also conceded she is not permanently disabled. Petitioner testified she hopes to pursue employment, presumably after a period of recovery following right hand CTS surgery.

Presented medical records sufficiently verified that Petitioner had degrees of hand restrictions long before she applied for SDA benefits. Recent surgery reduced most of Petitioner's left hand pain though past and ongoing restrictions to both of Petitioner's hands can be inferred.

It is found that Petitioner established significant impairment to basic work activities for a period longer than 90 days. Accordingly, it is found that Petitioner established having a severe impairment and the disability analysis may proceed to Step 3.

The third step of the sequential analysis requires determining whether the Petitioner's impairment, or combination of impairments, is listed in 20 CFR Part 404, Subpart P, appendix 1. 20 CFR 416.920 (a)(4)(iii). If a petitioner's impairments are listed and deemed to meet the durational requirement, then the petitioner is deemed disabled. If the impairment is unlisted or impairments do not meet listing level requirements, then the analysis proceeds to the next step.

Claimant's only alleged disability was related to CTS. CTS is not covered by a SSA listing, but the symptoms of CTS resemble joint dysfunction which is covered by SSA listings. Disability by joint degeneration is established by the following SSA listing:

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, or wrist-hand), resulting in inability to perform fine and gross movements effectively, as defined in 1.00B2c.

On the Medical Examination Report dated May 1, 2015, Petitioner's physician stated Petitioner was restricted to occasional lifting/carrying of less than 10 pounds, never 10 pounds or more. It was noted Petitioner had no restrictions to standing or sitting. A statement of the duration of Petitioner's restrictions was not provided. Petitioner's physician opined that Petitioner was restricted from performing the following bilateral arm/hand repetitive actions: simple grasping, fine manipulation, pushing/pulling, and fine manipulating.

An inability to perform fine manipulation, pushing/pulling, and simple grasping is indicative of meeting listing requirements. The problem with the statement is that Petitioner's physician stated the basis for restrictions was a pending EMG test. A yet to be taken medical examination is not an appropriate basis for restrictions. As it happened, EMG results were provided.

Petitioner's left hand results could be construed to justify stated restrictions. Petitioner's right hand results were less supportive. Problems were noted, however, "very mild" right wrist median mononeuropathy is not highly indicative of an inability to effectively perform fine and gross movements. It is appreciated that Petitioner experience more serious problems in her primary hand (her left), however, "very mild" mononeuropathy does not equate to meeting SSA listing requirements for joint dysfunction.

It is found that Petitioner failed to establish meeting a SSA listing. Accordingly, the analysis moves to the fourth step.

The fourth step in analyzing a disability claim requires an assessment of the Petitioner's residual functional capacity (RFC) and past relevant employment. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4)(iv). An individual is not disabled if it is determined that a petitioner can perform past relevant work. *Id.*

Past relevant work is work that has been performed within the past 15 years that was a substantial gainful activity and that lasted long enough for the individual to learn the position. 20 CFR 416.960(b)(1). Vocational factors of age, education, and work experience, and whether the past relevant employment exists in significant numbers in the national economy is not considered. 20 CFR 416.960(b)(3). RFC is assessed based on impairment(s), and any related symptoms, such as pain, which may cause physical and mental limitations that affect what can be done in a work setting. RFC is the most that can be done, despite the limitations.

Petitioner testified her previous employment was buffing and waxing floors. Petitioner also testified she had employment involving assembling and installing car seats. Petitioner testified CTS would prevent the performance of her past employment. Petitioner's testimony was credible and consistent with presented records. It is found Petitioner cannot perform past employment amounting to SGA and the analysis may proceed to the final step.

In the fifth step in the process, the individual's RFC in conjunction with his or her age, education, and work experience, are considered to determine whether the individual can engage in any other substantial gainful work which exists in the national economy. SSR 83-10. While a vocational expert is not required, a finding supported by substantial evidence that the individual has the vocational qualifications to perform specific jobs is needed to meet the burden. *O'Banner v Sec of Health and Human Services*, 587 F2d 321, 323 (CA 6, 1978). Medical-Vocational guidelines found at 20 CFR Subpart P, Appendix II, may be used to satisfy the burden of proving that the individual can perform specific jobs in the national economy. *Heckler v Campbell*, 461 US 458, 467 (1983); *Kirk v Secretary*, 667 F2d 524, 529 (CA 6, 1981) *cert den* 461 US 957 (1983). To determine the physical demands (i.e. exertional requirements) of work in the national economy, jobs are classified as sedentary, light, medium, heavy, and very heavy. 20 CFR 416.967.

Sedentary work involves lifting of no more than 10 pounds at a time and occasionally lifting or carrying articles like docket files, ledgers, and small tools. 20 CFR 416.967(a). Although a sedentary job is defined as one which involves sitting, a certain amount of walking and standing is often necessary in carrying out job duties. *Id.* Jobs are sedentary if walking and standing are required occasionally and other sedentary criteria are met.

Light work involves lifting no more than 20 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying objects weighing up to 10 pounds. 20 CFR 416.967(b) Even though weight lifted may be very little, a job is in this category when it requires a good deal of walking or standing, or when it involves sitting most of the time with some pushing and pulling of arm or leg controls. *Id.* To be considered capable of performing a full or wide range of light work, an individual must have the ability to do substantially all of these activities. *Id.* An individual capable of light work is also capable of sedentary work, unless there are additionally limiting factors such as loss of fine dexterity or inability to sit for long periods of time. *Id.*

Medium work involves lifting no more than 50 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 25 pounds. 20 CFR 416.967(c). An individual capable of performing medium work is also capable of light and sedentary work. *Id.*

Heavy work involves lifting no more than 100 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 50 pounds. 20 CFR 416.967(d). An individual capable of heavy work is also capable of medium, light, and sedentary work. *Id.*

Finally, very heavy work involves lifting objects weighing more than 100 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying objects weighing 50 pounds or more. 20 CFR 416.967(e). An individual capable of very heavy work is able to perform work under all categories. *Id.*

Limitations or restrictions which affect the ability to meet the demands of jobs other than strength demands are considered non-exertional. 20 CFR 416.969a(a). Examples of non-exertional limitations include difficulty functioning due to nervousness, anxiousness, or depression; difficulty maintaining attention or concentration; difficulty understanding or remembering detailed instructions; difficulty in seeing or hearing; difficulty tolerating some physical feature(s) of certain work settings (e.g. can't tolerate dust or fumes); or difficulty performing the manipulative or postural functions of some work such as reaching, handling, stooping, climbing, crawling, or crouching. 20 CFR 416.969a(c)(1)(i)-(vi) If the impairment(s) and related symptoms, such as pain, only affect the ability to perform the non-exertional aspects of work-related activities, the rules in Appendix 2 do not direct factual conclusions of disabled or not disabled. 20 CFR 416.969a(c)(2)

The determination of whether disability exists is based upon the principles in the appropriate sections of the regulations, giving consideration to the rules for specific case situations in Appendix 2. *Id.* In using the rules of Appendix 2, an individual's circumstances, as indicated by the findings with respect to RFC, age, education, and work experience, is compared to the pertinent rule(s).

Given Petitioner's age, education and employment history, a determination of disability is dependent on Petitioner's ability to perform sedentary employment. For sedentary

employment, periods of standing or walking should generally total no more than about 2 hours of an 8-hour workday. Social Security Rule 83-10.


Physician statements of restrictions were provided. SSR 96-2p states that if a treating source's medical opinion is well-supported and not inconsistent with the other substantial evidence in the case record, it must be given controlling weight (i.e. it must be adopted). Treating source opinions cannot be discounted unless the Administrative Law Judge provides good reasons for discounting the opinion. *Rogers v. Commissioner*, 486 F. 3d 234 (6th Cir. 2007); *Bowen v Commissioner*.

As noted in the third step of the analysis, physician statements that Petitioner was unable to perform right-sided repetitive actions were not persuasive. Statements that Petitioner is unable to perform left hand repetitive actions (at least through her surgery and recovery time) were persuasive.

Evidence of employment still available to Petitioner was not presented. Employment that Petitioner could presumably perform would include jobs not reliant on use of primary hand dexterity or those requiring significant lifting/carrying. Such employment would include driving jobs (e.g. bus driver, chauffeur...), security guard, and office jobs requiring some or little computer use (e.g. telemarketing, receptionist, or office assistant). The availability of such jobs was not verified, but are presumed to be in ample supply so that Petitioner has reasonable access to such employment. Accordingly, it is found that Petitioner is and was not disabled and that MDHHS properly denied Petitioner's SDA application.

DECISION AND ORDER

The Administrative Law Judge, based upon the above findings of fact and conclusions of law, finds that MDHHS properly denied Petitioner's SDA benefit application dated May 15, 2015, based on a determination that Petitioner is not disabled. The actions taken by MDHHS are **AFFIRMED**.



Christian Gardocki
Administrative Law Judge
for Nick Lyon, Director
Department of Health and Human Services

Date Signed: **1/22/2016**

Date Mailed: **1/22/2016**

CG/tm

NOTICE OF APPEAL: A party may appeal this Hearing Decision in the circuit court in the county in which he/she resides, or the circuit court in Ingham County, within 30 days of the receipt date. A copy of the claim or application for appeal must be filed with the Michigan Administrative Hearing System (MAHS).

A party may request a rehearing or reconsideration of this Hearing Decision from 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
Reconsideration/Rehearing Request
P.O. Box 30639
Lansing, Michigan 48909-8139

cc:

