RICK SNYDER GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS MICHIGAN ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING SYSTEM

SHELLY EDGERTON



Date Mailed: September 14, 2018 MAHS Docket No.: 18-007330

Agency No.: Petitioner:

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE: Jacquelyn A. McClinton

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; 42 CFR 431.200 to 431.250. After due notice, a telephone hearing was held on August 27, 2018, from Detroit, Michigan. The Petitioner represented himself. Petitioner, ex-wife, also appeared on behalf of Petitioner. The Department of Health and Human Services (Department) was represented by General Services Program Manager and Eligibility Specialist.

<u>ISSUE</u>

Did the Department properly determine that Petitioner was not disabled for purposes of the State Disability Assistance (SDA) 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. On September 27, 2017, Petitioner submitted an application seeking cash assistance on the basis of a disability.
- On April 19, 2018, the Disability Determination Service (DDS)/Medical Review Team (MRT) found Petitioner not disabled for purposes of the SDA program (Exhibit A, pp. 7-13).
- 3. On April 24, 2018, the Department sent Petitioner a Notice of Case Action denying the application based on DDS/MRT's finding of no disability (Exhibit A, pp. 4-5).
- 4. On July 23, 2018, the Department received Petitioner's timely written Request for Hearing (Exhibit A, pp. 2-3).

- 5. Petitioner alleged disabling impairment due to degenerative disc disease, spinal stenosis, and opposition defiance disorder.
- 6. On the date of the hearing, Petitioner was years old with a birth date; he is in height and weighs about pounds.
- 7. Petitioner completed the ninth grade and has not yet obtained his GED.
- 8. At the time of application, Petitioner was not employed.
- 9. Petitioner has an employment history of work as food sampler and assistant manager at a restaurant.
- 10. Petitioner has a pending disability claim with the Social Security Administration.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

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

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.

Petitioner applied for cash assistance alleging a disability. A disabled person is eligible for SDA. BEM 261 (July 2015), p. 1. An individual automatically qualifies as disabled for purposes of the SDA program if the individual receives Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Medical Assistance (MA-P) benefits based on disability or blindness. BEM 261, p. 2. Otherwise, to be considered disabled for SDA purposes, a person must have a physical or mental impairment for at least ninety days which meets federal SSI disability standards, meaning the person is unable to do any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment. BEM 261, pp. 1-2; 20 CFR 416.901; 20 CFR 416.905(a).

Determining whether an individual is disabled for SSI purposes requires the application of a five step evaluation of whether the individual (1) is engaged in substantial gainful activity (SGA); (2) has an impairment that is severe; (3) has an impairment and duration that meet or equal a listed impairment in Appendix 1 Subpart P of 20 CFR 404; (4) has the residual functional capacity to perform past relevant work; and (5) has the residual functional capacity and vocational factors (based on age, education and work experience) to adjust to other work. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(1) and (4); 20 CFR 416.945. If an individual is found disabled, or not disabled, at any step in this process, 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).

In general, the individual has the responsibility 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, if a mental disability is alleged, to reason and make appropriate mental adjustments. 20 CFR 416.912(a); 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, are insufficient to establish disability. 20 CFR 416.927(d).

Step One

The first step in determining whether an individual is disabled requires consideration of the individual's current work activity. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4)(i). If an individual is working and the work is SGA, then the individual must be considered not disabled, regardless of medical condition, age, education, or work experience. 20 CFR 416.920(b); 20 CFR 416.971. SGA means work that involves doing significant and productive physical or mental duties and that is done, or intended to be done, for pay or profit. 20 CFR 416.972.

In this case, Petitioner was not working during the period for which assistance might be available. Because Petitioner was not engaged in SGA, he is not ineligible under Step 1, and the analysis continues to Step 2.

Step Two

Under Step 2, the severity and duration of an individual's alleged impairment is considered. If the individual does not have a severe medically determinable physical or mental impairment (or a combination of impairments) that meets the duration requirement, the individual is not disabled. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4)(ii). The duration requirement for SDA means that the impairment is expected to result in death or has lasted, or is expected to last, for a continuous period of at least 90 days. 20 CFR 416.922; BEM 261, p. 2.

An impairment, or combination of impairments, is severe if it significantly limits an individual's physical or mental ability to do basic work activities. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4)(ii); 20 CFR 416.920(c). Basic work activities mean the abilities and aptitudes necessary to do most jobs, such as (i) physical functions such as walking, standing, sitting, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying, or handling; (ii) the capacity to see, hear, and speak; (iii) the ability to understand, carry out, and remember simple instructions; (iv) use of judgment; (v) responding appropriately to supervision, coworkers and usual work situations; and (vi) dealing with changes in a routine work setting. 20 CFR 416.921(b). A claim may be denied at Step 2 only if the evidence shows that the individual's impairments, when considered in combination, do not have

more than a minimal effect on the person's physical or mental ability to perform basic work activities. Social Security Ruling (SSR) 85-28.

The individual bears the burden to present sufficient objective medical evidence to substantiate the alleged disabling impairments. While the Step 2 severity requirement may be employed as an administrative convenience to screen out claims that are totally groundless solely from a medical standpoint, under the de minimis standard applied at Step 2, an impairment is severe unless it is only a slight abnormality that minimally affects work ability regardless of age, education and experience. Higgs v Bowen, 880 F2d 860, 862-863 (CA 6, 1988), citing Farris v Sec of Health and Human Services, 773 F2d 85, 90 n.1 (CA 6, 1985). A claim may be denied at Step 2 only if the evidence shows that the individual's impairments, when considered in combination, are not medically severe, i.e., do not have more than a minimal effect on the person's physical or mental ability to perform basic work activities. Social Security Ruling (SSR) 85-28. If such a finding is not clearly established by medical evidence or if the effect of an impairment or combination of impairments on the individual's ability to do basic work activities cannot be clearly determined, adjudication must continue through the sequential evaluation process. Id.; SSR 96-3p.

The medical evidence presented at the hearing, and in response to the interim order, was reviewed and is summarized below.

On March 27, 2017, Petitioner underwent an Petitioner's Full-Scale IQ score fell within the "Low Average" range of functioning, at the 14th percentile. When taking Petitioner's low average cognitive baseline into account, there was no evidence of cognitive impairment. In addition to neurocognitive testing, Petitioner completed measures of mood and adjustment. His raw scores on the screening checklists (PHQ-9 and GAD-7) revealed levels of both depression and anxiety. It was noted that despite the presence of irritability and maladaptive anger, there was no clear evidence that he had bipolar disorder. Ongoing work with psychiatry and was recommended. The psychologist did not believe that Petitioner met the DSM-5 diagnostic criterial for Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). Petitioner was noted to have major depressive disorder. This was slightly contradicted by a later statement by the psychological in which she indicated that she believed that Petitioner's irritability and frustration can be better be explained by his ODD.

On August 27, 2017, Petitioner was seen at for a follow up of his left achilles tendon repair. Petitioner underwent the procedure six months prior and stated that he was having no pain. Petitioner was weight bearing on the extremity and was noted to be doing well. (Exhibit A, pp. 71-73).

On January 23, 2018, Petitioner was seen at the with a chief complaint of degenerative disc disease and spinal stenosis. The prognosis indicated that Petitioner could understand and retain concrete instructions/directions meant to lead to the completion of a task; however, his

depressed mood, symptoms of ADHD and Oppositional Defiant Disorder may combine to exacerbate his chronic pain and compromise his ability to follow through in a consistent and timely manner; restrict his ability to perform simple, repetitive tasks requiring a sustained psychical effort; as well as interfere with interpersonal interactions. Increasing the possibility that his performance in a competitive environment can be viewed as successful would depend, in part, on a psychiatric/pain medication review; psychotherapy; the alleviation resolution/management of his chronic pain and vocational training/job coaching. The psychologist did not believe that Petitioner was capable of competitive employment. (Exhibit A, pp. 84-88).

On February 15, 2018, Petitioner submitted to an evaluation with Petitioner presented for an evaluation of degenerative disc disease, spinal stenosis, and oppositional defiant disorder. Petitioner was noted to have tenderness to palpitation in the midline of his lumbar spine and over the posterior superior iliac spine bilaterally. Straight-leg raise test was positive while supine bilaterally and FABER test was positive bilaterally. Petitioner had decreased range of motion in his lumbar spine. It was further noted that Petitioner walked with external rotation in the bilateral lower extremity limp, mild right lower extremity limp. He was able to ambulate without the use of any assistive devices. He had moderate difficulty with toe walking, unable to complete heal walking and had moderate difficulty with tandem walking. Petitioner had severe pain with range of motion of bilateral hips and limited range in his hips. Petitioner showed signs of osteoarthritis in bilateral knees with severe crepitus and prominent patella bilaterally. Petitioner had limited range of motion in bilateral ankles, right greater than left. He had weakness in his hamstrings and quadriceps bilaterally. Petitioner was able to get on and off the table with some difficulty, make a fist, dial a telephone, dress and undress, tie shoes with difficulty due to pain with range of motion of his lumbar spine. button clothes, pick up a coin and a pencil, arise from sitting without aid, and maintain balance without aid. The doctor indicated that he would not trust Petitioner with prolonged walking or on uneven surfaces without aid. Recommendation was for Petitioner to have a full neuropsychological evaluation. (Exhibit A, pp. 76-80).

In consideration of the *de minimis* standard necessary to establish a severe impairment under Step 2, the foregoing medical evidence is sufficient to establish that Petitioner suffers from severe impairments that have lasted or are expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 90 days. Therefore, Petitioner has satisfied the requirements under Step 2, and the analysis will proceed to Step 3.

Step Three

Step 3 of the sequential analysis of a disability claim requires a determination if the individual's impairment, or combination of impairments, is listed in Appendix 1 of Subpart P of 20 CFR, Part 404. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4)(iii). If an individual's impairment, or combination of impairments, is of a severity to meet or medically equal the criteria of a listing and meets the duration requirement (20 CFR 416.909), the individual is disabled. If not, the analysis proceeds to the next step.

Based on the medical evidence presented in this case, listings 1.04 (disorders of the spine) and 12.05 (intellectual disorder) were considered. The medical evidence presented does **not** show that Petitioner's impairments meet or equal the required level of severity of any of the listings in Appendix 1 to be considered as disabling without further consideration. Therefore, Petitioner is not disabled under Step 3 and the analysis continues to Step 4.

Residual Functional Capacity

If an individual's impairment does not meet or equal a listed impairment under Step 3, before proceeding to Steps 4 and 5, the individual's residual functional capacity (RFC) is assessed. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4); 20 CFR 416.945. RFC is the most an individual can do, based on all relevant evidence, despite the limitations from the impairment(s), including those that are not severe, and takes into consideration an individual's ability to meet the physical, mental, sensory and other requirements of work. 20 CFR 416.945(a)(1), (4); 20 CFR 416.945(e).

RFC is assessed based on all relevant medical and other evidence such as statements provided by medical sources, whether or not they are addressed on formal medical examinations, and descriptions and observations of the limitations from impairment(s) provided by the individual or other persons. 20 CFR 416.945(a)(3). This includes consideration of (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).

Limitations can be exertional, nonexertional, or a combination of both. 20 CFR 416.969a. If individual's impairments and related symptoms, such as pain, affect only the ability to meet the strength demands of jobs (i.e., sitting, standing, walking, lifting, carrying, pushing, and pulling), the individual is considered to have only exertional limitations. 20 CFR 416.969a(b).

The exertional requirements, or physical demands, of work in the national economy are classified as sedentary, light, medium, heavy, and very heavy. 20 CFR 416.967; 20 CFR 416.969a(a). Sedentary work involves lifting no more than 10 pounds at a time and occasionally lifting or carrying articles like docket files, ledgers, and small tools and occasionally walking and standing. 20 CFR 416.967(a). Light work involves lifting no more than 20 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing up to 10 pounds; even though the weight lifted may be very little, a job is in the light 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. 20 CFR 416.967(b). 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). 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). Very heavy work involves lifting objects weighing more than 100 pounds at a time with frequent lifting or carrying of objects weighing 50 pounds or more. 20 CFR 416.967(e).

If an individual has limitations or restrictions that affect the ability to meet demands of jobs other than strength, or exertional, demands, the individual is considered to have only nonexertional limitations or restrictions. 20 CFR 416.969a(a) and (c). Examples of non-exertional limitations or restrictions include difficulty functioning due anxiousness, or depression; difficulty maintaining nervousness. attention concentration; difficulty understanding or remembering detailed instructions; difficulty in seeing or hearing; difficulty tolerating some physical feature(s) of certain work settings (i.e., unable to 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). For mental disorders, 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 are considered. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(1). Where the evidence establishes a medically determinable mental impairment, the degree of functional limitation must be rated, taking into consideration chronic mental disorders, structured settings, medication, and other treatment. The effect on the overall degree of functionality is evaluated under four broad functional areas: (i) understand, remember, or apply information; (ii) interact with others; (iii) concentrate, persist, or maintain pace; and (iv) adapt or manage oneself. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(3). For the first three functional areas, a five-point scale is applied (none, mild, moderate, marked, and extreme). 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(4). The last point on each scale represents a degree of limitation that is incompatible with the ability to do any gainful activity. 20 CFR 416.920a(c)(4).

In this case, Petitioner alleges both exertional and nonexertional limitations due to his medical condition. Petitioner testified that he could not lift more than ten pounds; could not walk more than one block without constant pain and further testified that he does not like rules. Petitioner testified that it takes him 20 minutes to get dressed. Petitioner denied that he could squat, bend at the waist, stand more than two to three minutes; reach; or kneel all due to constant pain. Petitioner indicated that he has difficulty with his memory because he has "pseudo dementia."

Petitioner's ex wife testified that he does not have a clear understanding of his physical illness. She indicated that Petitioner is going deaf and that he has not had medications in the past three months. She further indicated that Petitioner is aggressive. Petitioner's wife expressed frustration at what she believed was the inadequate medical care Petitioner has been receiving.

A two-step process is applied in evaluating an individual's symptoms: (1) whether the individual has a medically determinable impairment that could reasonably be expected to produce the individual's alleged symptoms and (2) whether the individual's statement

about the intensity, persistence and limiting effects of symptoms are consistent with the objective medical evidence and other evidence on the record from the individual, medical sources and nonmedical sources. SSR 16-3p.

The evidence presented is considered to determine the consistency of Petitioner's statements regarding the intensity, persistence and limiting effects of his symptoms. Based on a thorough review of Petitioner's medical record as well as the consultative exam performed, all of which are referenced above, with respect to Petitioner's exertional limitations, it is found, based on a review of the entire record, that Petitioner maintains the physical capacity to perform sedentary work as defined by 20 CFR 416.967(a).

Based on the medical records presented, as well as Petitioner's testimony, Petitioner has moderate to marked limitations on his non-exertional ability to perform basic work activities, with respect to performing manipulative or postural functions of some work such as reaching, handling, stooping, climbing, crawling, or crouching. Specifically, the February 2018 evaluation noted that he had difficulty, making a fist, dialing a telephone, dressing and undressing, picking up a coin and a pencil, and arising from sitting without aid.

Petitioner's RFC is considered at both Steps 4 and 5. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4), (f) and (g).

Step Four

Step 4 in analyzing a disability claim requires an assessment of Petitioner's RFC and past relevant employment. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4)(iv). Past relevant work is work that has been performed by Petitioner (as actually performed by Petitioner or as generally performed in the national economy) within the past 15 years that was SGA and that lasted long enough for the individual to learn the position. 20 CFR 416.960(b)(1) and (2). An individual who has the RFC to meet the physical and mental demands of work done in the past is not disabled. *Id.*; 20 CFR 416.960(b)(3); 20 CFR 416.920. Vocational factors of age, education, and work experience, and whether the past relevant employment exists in significant numbers in the national economy are **not** considered. 20 CFR 416.960(b)(3).

Petitioner's work history in the 15 years prior to the application consists of work as a food sampler and an assistant manager at a sub store. Petitioner's work as a caregiver for his handicapped mother required standing up to 8 hours per day and regularly lifting patients up to 130 pounds. Petitioner's employment as a factory worker required physical labor as he was a materials handler who was required to lift and pull 40 to 60 pounds or more regularly. As such, Petitioner's past employment is categorized as requiring medium to heavy exertion. Based on the RFC analysis above, Petitioner's exertional RFC limits him to sedentary work activities. As such, Petitioner is incapable of performing past relevant work. Because Petitioner is unable to perform past relevant work, he cannot be found disabled, or not disabled, at Step 4, and the assessment continues to Step 5.

Step 5

If an individual is incapable of performing past relevant work, Step 5 requires an assessment of the individual's RFC and age, education, and work experience to determine whether an adjustment to other work can be made. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4)(v); 20 CFR 416.920(c). If the individual can adjust to other work, then there is no disability; if the individual cannot adjust to other work, then there is a disability. 20 CFR 416.920(a)(4)(v).

At this point in the analysis, the burden shifts from Petitioner to the Department to present proof that Petitioner has the RFC to obtain and maintain substantial gainful employment. 20 CFR 416.960(c)(2); *Richardson v Sec of Health and Human Services*, 735 F2d 962, 964 (CA 6, 1984). 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).

When the impairment(s) and related symptoms, such as pain, only affect the ability to perform the exertional aspects of work-related activities, Medical-Vocational guidelines found at 20 CFR Subpart P, Appendix 2, 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).

However, when a person has a combination of exertional and nonexertional limitations or restrictions, the rules pertaining to the strength limitations provide a framework to guide the disability determination **unless** there is a rule that directs a conclusion that the individual is disabled based upon strength limitations. 20 CFR 416.969a(d).

In this case, Petitioner was years old at the time of application and at the time of hearing, and thus, considered to be a younger individual (age 18-44) for purposes of Appendix 2. He completed the ninth grade. As discussed above, Petitioner maintains the exertional RFC for work activities on a regular and continuing basis to meet the physical demands to perform sedentary work activities. Thus, based solely on his exertional RFC, the Medical-Vocational Guidelines, 201.21, result in a finding that Petitioner is not disabled.

However, as referenced above, Petitioner also has a nonexertional RFC imposing moderate to marked limitations on his ability to perform basic work activities, including noted difficulties performing manipulative or postural functions of some work such as reaching, handling, or stooping. The Department has failed to present evidence of a significant number of jobs in the national and local economy that Petitioner has the vocational qualifications to perform in light of his nonexertional RFC, age, education, and work experience. Therefore, the evidence is insufficient to establish that Petitioner is able to adjust to other work. Accordingly, Petitioner is found disabled at Step 5 for purposes of the SDA benefit program.

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 Petitioner disabled for purposes of the SDA benefit program.

DECISION AND ORDER

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 Petitioner **disabled** for purposes of the SDA benefit program.

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 THE ORDER WAS ISSUED:

- Reregister and process Petitioner's September 27, 2017 SDA application to determine if all the other non-medical criteria are satisfied and notify Petitioner of its determination;
- 2. Supplement Petitioner for lost benefits, if any, that Petitioner was entitled to receive if otherwise eligible and qualified;
- 3. Review Petitioner's continued eligibility in March 2019.

JAM/tlf

Jacquelyn A. McClinton Administrative Law Judge for Nick Lyon, Director

Department of Health and Human Services

NOTICE OF APPEAL: A party may appeal this Order in circuit court within 30 days of the receipt date. A copy of the circuit court appeal must be filed with the Michigan Administrative Hearing System (MAHS).

A party may request a rehearing or reconsideration of this Order if the request is received by MAHS within 30 days of the date the Order was issued. The party requesting a rehearing or reconsideration must provide the specific reasons for the request. MAHS will not review any response to a request for rehearing/reconsideration.

A written request may be mailed or faxed to MAHS. If submitted by fax, the written request must be faxed to (517) 763-0155; 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

Via Email:	
Petitioner – Via First-Class Mail:	