Qualifying for Disability Benefits Due to Hepatitis

A blogger who regularly covers social security disability issues provides some tips on how to navigate the system.

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Applying for Disability Benefits Due to a Hepatitis Infection

Hepatitis is a dangerous viral infection that can severely damage the liver. Hepatitis can lead to liver failure and increase a person's chances of developing liver cancer. Although some people who have hepatitis lead relatively normal lives, others are seriously debilitated by their condition. In some cases, hepatitis symptoms and treatment side effects can greatly limit a person's ability to perform even simple, day-to-day activities.

The younger and healthier an individual is when they contract hepatitis, the easier it is to suppress the symptoms. However, as the illness progresses and the immune system weakens, the condition can become increasingly debilitating. An individual with hepatitis may find that they can no longer work or earn a living. The resulting loss of income and lack of medical insurance can be financially devastating. If you find yourself facing these circumstances, you may qualify for Social Security Disability (SSD) benefits.

The following article will give you a general overview of the SSD program and will provide you with the information you need to begin the application process.

Is Hepatitis a Disability?

To qualify for SSD benefits, an individual must have a condition or illness that keeps them from working for at least 12 months. The Social Security Administration (SSA)—the governing body of

the SSD programs—recognizes several different types of hepatitis as physical disabilities. These include:

- Viral Hepatitis (Hepatitis A, B, and C)
- Toxic Hepatitis
- Autoimmune Hepatitis
- Ischemic Hepatitis

Qualifying for Social Security Disability Benefits with Hepatitis
Being diagnosed with hepatitis is not enough to qualify an individual for disability benefits. Applicants must meet very specific medical criteria to prove that their condition is, in fact, a disability. Medical criteria for all potentially disabling conditions can be found in the SSA's blue book. The blue book is a publication used by the SSA to determine what conditions and symptoms qualify a person for benefits.

The SSA evaluates hepatitis claims under section 5.05 of the blue book (Chronic Liver Disease). To meet this listing, applicants must have medical evidence documenting one or more of the following:

- Internal bleeding due to esophageal, gastric, or ectopic varices
- Fluid collection in the abdomen
- Hypoalbuminemia—or abnormally low levels of albumin
- Hepatic Encephalopathy—or confusion resulting from the body's inability to remove toxins from the blood
- High levels of bilirubin in the blood
- A confirmed diagnosis of hepatitis
- A confirmed diagnosis of liver disease

For a more detailed description of the SSA's blue book requirements for hepatitis, visit the following page:
www.disability-benefits-help.org/disabling-conditions/hepatitis-and-social-security-disability.

Do not panic if you do not meet the blue book's strict requirements, you may still qualify for SSD benefits under a "medical vocational allowance". This means that your condition causes severe limitations despite the fact that you don't match the specific symptoms listed in the blue book.

To determine whether you qualify for a medical vocational allowance, the SSA will consider your ability to complete common workplace tasks such as carrying lightweight items, following

instructions, and sitting or standing for extended periods of time. Hepatitis has been known to cause symptoms such as fatigue, nausea, and memory loss, which make it difficult to work. If medical evidence proves that your symptoms have limited your ability to function, you might qualify under a medical vocational allowance.

Technical Requirements for Social Security Disability
The Social Security administration governs two separate disability benefit programs-SSDI and SSI. Each of these programs has their own set of technical eligibility requirements. In addition to meeting the medical criteria for SSD benefits, applicants must also meet technical SSD requirements.

- SSDI stands for Social Security Disability Insurance. This program is funded by taxes paid into the system by workers all over the country. Therefore, to qualify for SSDI, applicants must have earned income and paid a specific amount of Social Security taxes throughout their employment history. Learn more about SSDI, here: www.disability-benefits-help.org/glossary/social-security-disability-insurance-ssdi.
- SSI stands for Supplemental Security Income. This program offers benefits to elderly and disabled individuals who earn very little income. SSI is a needs-based program. This means, that to qualify for SSI, applicants cannot exceed very strict financial limits. Learn more about SSI, here: www.disability-benefits-help.org/glossary/supplemental-security-income-ssi.

Social Security Disability Application Process
Prior to beginning the SSD application process, it is important that you collect the necessary records and documents to support your claim. Documentation should include medical records detailing your diagnosis, your treatment history, your response to treatments, any hospitalizations, lab test results, medical imaging, and personal statements from your doctors. You should also have copies of financial and employment records. The SSA will use these documents to determine whether or not you qualify for SSD benefits, so it is important that you include as much information as possible.

Once you decide to apply for SSD benefits, you can do so on the SSA's website. If you prefer to apply in person with an SSA representative, you can do so at your local Social Security office by scheduling an appointment ahead of time. It is important to note that the SSD application process can be long and overwhelming.

If your application is denied, it is important that you do not give up. You can appeal this decision. The key to being awarded benefits is to remain persistent in your efforts. Once you are awarded SSD benefits, you will be able to focus on your health rather than your finances.

Molly Clarke writes for Social Security Disability Help, a site that works to promote disability awareness and assist those throughout the Social Security Disability application process. You can contact Molly at mac@ssd-help.org.

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