

Tips for Doctors Filling Out Applications for SSI and SSD

If you have a patient who wishes to apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability (SSD) you are a vital source of information and evidence. A common misconception about the application processes for SSI and SSD benefits is that an applicant will automatically be awarded benefits if she proves that she has a disability. The truth is, a successful applicant must prove that she has a disability **that makes her unable to work**. Medical records and evidence are necessary but insufficient. An applicant will not be awarded benefits based only on medical proof of a disability. She must also prove that her disability renders her unable to work.

The following tips will help you be a more effective advocate for your patient's application for SSI or SSD benefits. Keep them in mind when your patient or the Social Security Administration (SSA) asks you to fill out any forms or questionnaires. Consider writing a letter to SSA if the form does not allow sufficient space for you to follow these guidelines.

1. **Describe your treatment of the patient, including: the length of time you've treated her, how often you see her, her medical history, symptoms, and the treatment you've provided.**

This information is necessary for a successful application. However, it is insufficient by itself.

2. **Explain her limitations in the following areas:**

Activities of daily living, social interactions and concentration, persistence, and pace.

3. **Instead of simply listing your patient's symptoms and limitations, give details and specific examples.**

Don't write: "Ms. X has difficulty with social interactions."

Instead write: "Patient has difficulty with social interactions. For example, I have seen her with the other participants in our day treatment program. While others socialize, Ms. X sits in a corner. If someone approaches her to talk, she avoids eye contact and will not respond."

Don't write: "Ms. X has problems with activities of daily living."

Instead write: "Ms. X is frequently disheveled and malodorous. She cannot pay her own bills, so her case manager meets with her frequently to go over her finances with her. Her phone service has been discontinued twice in the past year because she forgot to pay her bill."

4. **Explain how her symptoms and the examples you've given make her unable to work.** Your expertise and knowledge of the patient are given great weight by the SSA. Again, the crucial issue is your patient's inability to work. You've explained her symptoms and given examples. Now, describe how that information makes her unable to work.

Continuing with the examples above: "Ms. X cannot work because she is severely impaired in her ability to interact with people, as I have described in detail. She could not perform a job that required interaction with supervisors, co-workers, or customers." "Ms. X's problems with personal hygiene would make her unsuitable for any job that required contact with others. Her inability to keep up with her bills shows that she could not handle tasks required by any job."

Utilize your patient's other treatment providers. A caseworker or social worker will often have more contact with your patient than you do. Ask them to provide information to assist you. Advise your patient to ask her caseworker or social worker to write a letter on her behalf. Give them these guidelines so they can write a more effective letter and be a better advocate for her, too.

DISCLAIMER: This fact sheet gives general information for NYC residents; it is NOT legal advice.