

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

LEE MURILLO, ¹)	NO. CV 11-9670-MAN
)	
Plaintiff,)	MEMORANDUM OPINION
)	
v.)	AND ORDER
)	
CAROLYN W. COLVIN, ²)	
Commissioner of Social Security,)	
)	
Defendant.)	
_____)	

Plaintiff filed a Complaint on November 23, 2011, seeking review of the denial by the Social Security Commissioner ("Commissioner") of plaintiff's application for a period of disability, disability insurance benefits ("DIB"), and supplemental security income ("SSI"). On December 22, 2011, the parties consented, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(c), to proceed before the undersigned United States Magistrate Judge. The

¹ In the Joint Stipulation, it was noted that plaintiff's name was misspelled in the Complaint. (Joint Stipulation ("Joint Stip.") at 1.) According to the Joint Stip., the correct spelling of plaintiff's surname is Murillo, not Murrillo. (*Id.*)

² Carolyn W. Colvin became the Acting Commissioner of the Social Security Administration on February 14, 2013, and is substituted in place of former Commissioner Michael J. Astrue as the defendant in this action. (See Fed. R. Civ. P. 25(d).)

1 parties filed the Joint Stip. on September 4, 2012, in which: plaintiff
2 seeks an order reversing the Commissioner's decision and awarding
3 benefits or, alternatively, remanding for further administrative
4 proceedings; and the Commissioner requests that his decision be affirmed
5 or, alternatively, remanded for further administrative proceedings.

6
7 **SUMMARY OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEEDINGS**
8

9 On November 10, 2008, plaintiff filed an application for a period
10 of disability and DIB, and on January 26, 2009, he filed an application
11 for SSI. (Administrative Record ("A.R.") 19.) In both applications,
12 plaintiff alleged an inability to work since May 1, 2006 (*id.*), due to
13 "diabetes, ne[ur]opathic [pain,] cataracts left and right eye[s]" (A.R.
14 117) and, subsequently, due to "nerve and muscle damage" (A.R. 144).
15

16 The Commissioner denied plaintiff's application on May 28, 2009.
17 (A.R. 53-57.) On June 10, 2010, plaintiff, who was represented by
18 counsel, appeared and testified at a hearing before Administrative Law
19 Judge Edward C. Graham (the "ALJ"). (A.R. 31-50.) Jeanine Metildi, a
20 vocational expert, also testified. (*Id.*) On June 30, 2010, the ALJ
21 denied plaintiff's claim (A.R. 19-27), and the Appeals Council
22 subsequently denied plaintiff's request for review of the ALJ's decision
23 (A.R. 10-12). That decision is now at issue in this action.
24

25 **SUMMARY OF ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION**
26

27 The ALJ found that plaintiff met the insured status requirements of
28 the Social Security Act through December 21, 2010, and had not engaged

1 in substantial gainful activity from his alleged onset date of May 1,
2 2006, through the date of the decision. (A.R. 21.) The ALJ further
3 determined that plaintiff has the severe impairment of diabetes with
4 neuropathy. (*Id.*) The ALJ concluded that the impairment did not meet
5 or medically equal the criteria of an impairment listed in 20 C.F.R.
6 Part 404, Subpart P, Appendix 1 (20 C.F.R. §§ 404.1520(d), 404.1525,
7 404.1526, 416.920(d), 416.925, 416.926). (*Id.*) After reviewing the
8 record, the ALJ determined that plaintiff has the residual functional
9 capacity ("RFC") to perform "light work as defined in 20 C.F.R. [§§]
10 404.1567(b) and 416.967(b) except occasionally [he can] climb, balance,
11 stoop, kneel, crouch, and crawl." (A.R. 22.)
12

13 The ALJ also found that plaintiff was unable to perform his past
14 relevant work as a truck driver. (A.R. 25.) However, based upon
15 plaintiff's age,³ education,⁴ work experience, and RFC, the ALJ found
16 that other jobs exist in the national economy that plaintiff could
17 perform, including "bench assembler," "hand packager," "electronics
18 worker," "table worker," and "assembler." (A.R. 26.) Accordingly, the
19 ALJ concluded that plaintiff has not been under a disability, as defined
20 in the Social Security Act, since May 1, 2006, the alleged onset date of
21 his disability. (A.R. 27.)
22
23

24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100
101
102
103
104
105
106
107
108
109
110
111
112
113
114
115
116
117
118
119
120
121
122
123
124
125
126
127
128
129
130
131
132
133
134
135
136
137
138
139
140
141
142
143
144
145
146
147
148
149
150
151
152
153
154
155
156
157
158
159
160
161
162
163
164
165
166
167
168
169
170
171
172
173
174
175
176
177
178
179
180
181
182
183
184
185
186
187
188
189
190
191
192
193
194
195
196
197
198
199
200
201
202
203
204
205
206
207
208
209
210
211
212
213
214
215
216
217
218
219
220
221
222
223
224
225
226
227
228
229
230
231
232
233
234
235
236
237
238
239
240
241
242
243
244
245
246
247
248
249
250
251
252
253
254
255
256
257
258
259
260
261
262
263
264
265
266
267
268
269
270
271
272
273
274
275
276
277
278
279
280
281
282
283
284
285
286
287
288
289
290
291
292
293
294
295
296
297
298
299
300
301
302
303
304
305
306
307
308
309
310
311
312
313
314
315
316
317
318
319
320
321
322
323
324
325
326
327
328
329
330
331
332
333
334
335
336
337
338
339
340
341
342
343
344
345
346
347
348
349
350
351
352
353
354
355
356
357
358
359
360
361
362
363
364
365
366
367
368
369
370
371
372
373
374
375
376
377
378
379
380
381
382
383
384
385
386
387
388
389
390
391
392
393
394
395
396
397
398
399
400
401
402
403
404
405
406
407
408
409
410
411
412
413
414
415
416
417
418
419
420
421
422
423
424
425
426
427
428
429
430
431
432
433
434
435
436
437
438
439
440
441
442
443
444
445
446
447
448
449
450
451
452
453
454
455
456
457
458
459
460
461
462
463
464
465
466
467
468
469
470
471
472
473
474
475
476
477
478
479
480
481
482
483
484
485
486
487
488
489
490
491
492
493
494
495
496
497
498
499
500
501
502
503
504
505
506
507
508
509
510
511
512
513
514
515
516
517
518
519
520
521
522
523
524
525
526
527
528
529
530
531
532
533
534
535
536
537
538
539
540
541
542
543
544
545
546
547
548
549
550
551
552
553
554
555
556
557
558
559
560
561
562
563
564
565
566
567
568
569
570
571
572
573
574
575
576
577
578
579
580
581
582
583
584
585
586
587
588
589
590
591
592
593
594
595
596
597
598
599
600
601
602
603
604
605
606
607
608
609
610
611
612
613
614
615
616
617
618
619
620
621
622
623
624
625
626
627
628
629
630
631
632
633
634
635
636
637
638
639
640
641
642
643
644
645
646
647
648
649
650
651
652
653
654
655
656
657
658
659
660
661
662
663
664
665
666
667
668
669
670
671
672
673
674
675
676
677
678
679
680
681
682
683
684
685
686
687
688
689
690
691
692
693
694
695
696
697
698
699
700
701
702
703
704
705
706
707
708
709
710
711
712
713
714
715
716
717
718
719
720
721
722
723
724
725
726
727
728
729
730
731
732
733
734
735
736
737
738
739
740
741
742
743
744
745
746
747
748
749
750
751
752
753
754
755
756
757
758
759
760
761
762
763
764
765
766
767
768
769
770
771
772
773
774
775
776
777
778
779
780
781
782
783
784
785
786
787
788
789
790
791
792
793
794
795
796
797
798
799
800
801
802
803
804
805
806
807
808
809
810
811
812
813
814
815
816
817
818
819
820
821
822
823
824
825
826
827
828
829
830
831
832
833
834
835
836
837
838
839
840
841
842
843
844
845
846
847
848
849
850
851
852
853
854
855
856
857
858
859
860
861
862
863
864
865
866
867
868
869
870
871
872
873
874
875
876
877
878
879
880
881
882
883
884
885
886
887
888
889
890
891
892
893
894
895
896
897
898
899
900
901
902
903
904
905
906
907
908
909
910
911
912
913
914
915
916
917
918
919
920
921
922
923
924
925
926
927
928
929
930
931
932
933
934
935
936
937
938
939
940
941
942
943
944
945
946
947
948
949
950
951
952
953
954
955
956
957
958
959
960
961
962
963
964
965
966
967
968
969
970
971
972
973
974
975
976
977
978
979
980
981
982
983
984
985
986
987
988
989
990
991
992
993
994
995
996
997
998
999
1000

³ On the alleged disability onset date, plaintiff was 45 years old, which is defined as a younger individual. (A.R. 25; citing 20 C.F.R. §§ 404.1563, 416.963.)

⁴ In his decision, the ALJ found that plaintiff has at least a high school education and is able to communicate in English. (A.R. 25.)

1
2
3 **STANDARD OF REVIEW**

4 Under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g), this Court reviews the Commissioner's
5 decision to determine whether it is free from legal error and supported
6 by substantial evidence. Orn v. Astrue, 495 F.3d 625, 630 (9th Cir.
7 2007). Substantial evidence is "'such relevant evidence as a reasonable
8 mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion.'" *Id.* (citation
9 omitted). The "evidence must be more than a mere scintilla but not
10 necessarily a preponderance." Connett v. Barnhart, 340 F.3d 871, 873
11 (9th Cir. 2003). "While inferences from the record can constitute
12 substantial evidence, only those 'reasonably drawn from the record' will
13 suffice." Widmark v. Barnhart, 454 F.3d 1063, 1066 (9th Cir.
14 2006)(citation omitted).

15 Although this Court cannot substitute its discretion for that of
16 the Commissioner, the Court nonetheless must review the record as a
17 whole, "weighing both the evidence that supports and the evidence that
18 detracts from the [Commissioner's] conclusion." Desrosiers v. Sec'y of
19 Health and Hum. Servs., 846 F.2d 573, 576 (9th Cir. 1988); *see also*
20 Jones v. Heckler, 760 F.2d 993, 995 (9th Cir. 1985). "The ALJ is
21 responsible for determining credibility, resolving conflicts in medical
22 testimony, and for resolving ambiguities." Andrews v. Shalala, 53 F.3d
23 1035, 1039 (9th Cir. 1995).

24
25 The Court will uphold the Commissioner's decision when the evidence
26 is susceptible to more than one rational interpretation. Burch v.
27 Barnhart, 400 F.3d 676, 679 (9th Cir. 2005). However, the Court may
28 review only the reasons stated by the ALJ in his decision "and may not

1 affirm the ALJ on a ground upon which he did not rely." Orn, 495 F.3d
2 at 630; see also Connett, 340 F.3d at 874. The Court will not reverse
3 the Commissioner's decision if it is based on harmless error, which
4 exists only when it is "clear from the record that an ALJ's error was
5 'inconsequential to the ultimate nondisability determination.'" Robbins
6 v. Soc. Sec. Admin., 466 F.3d 880, 885 (9th Cir. 2006)(quoting Stout v.
7 Comm'r, 454 F.3d 1050, 1055 (9th Cir. 2006)); see also Burch, 400 F.3d
8 at 679.

10 DISCUSSION

11
12 Plaintiff alleges the following three issues: (1) whether the ALJ
13 properly considered the opinion of physician Dr. Baham Chavoshan;
14 (2) whether the ALJ properly considered the opinion of examining
15 physician John Sedgh, M.D.; and (3) whether the ALJ properly considered
16 plaintiff's subjective complaints. (Joint Stip. at 4.)

18 I. The ALJ Did Not Properly Consider The Opinions Of Drs. 19 Bahman Chavoshan And Uttan Reddy.⁵

20
21 It is the responsibility of the ALJ to analyze evidence and resolve
22 conflicts in the medical record. Benton v. Barnhart, 331 F.3d 1030,
23 1040 (9th Cir. 2003); Magallanes v. Bowen, 881 F.2d 747, 750 (9th Cir.
24 1989). In the hierarchy of physician opinions considered in assessing
25 a social security claim, "[g]enerally, a treating physician's opinion

26
27 ⁵ Although the ALJ's evaluation of the opinion of Dr. Reddy was
28 not raised specifically by plaintiff, Dr. Reddy's opinion, as noted
infra, supports Dr. Chavoshan's opinion and does not appear to have been
properly considered by the ALJ.

1 carries more weight than an examining physician's, and an examining
2 physician's opinion carries more weight than a reviewing physician's."
3 Holohan v. Massanari, 249 F.3d 1195, 1202 (9th Cir. 2001); 20 C.F.R. §§
4 404.1527(d), 416.927(d); see Carmickle v. Comm'r, Soc. Sec. Admin., 553
5 F.3d 1155, 1164 (9th Cir. 2008)(noting that "[t]hose physicians with the
6 most significant clinical relationship with the claimant are generally
7 entitled to more weight than those physicians with lesser
8 relationships"). "As such, the ALJ may only reject a treating or
9 examining physician's uncontradicted medical opinion based on 'clear and
10 convincing reasons.' . . . Where such an opinion is contradicted,
11 however, it may be rejected for 'specific and legitimate reasons that
12 are supported by substantial evidence in the record.'" *Id.*(quoting
13 Lester v. Chater, 81 F.3d 821, 830-31 (9th Cir. 1995)).

14
15 On October 23, 2009, Dr. Bahman Chavoshan, plaintiff's purported
16 treating physician at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, completed a one-page
17 "Physical Capacities Evaluation" of plaintiff. (A.R. 219.) On this
18 form, Dr. Chavoshan indicated that plaintiff can: sit for five hours
19 and stand for one hour in an eight-hour day; occasionally lift and carry
20 up to five pounds; do no repetitive grasping, pushing and pulling of arm
21 controls, and fine manipulation of the hands; do no repetitive pushing
22 and pulling of his legs; and occasionally bend, squat, and reach. (*Id.*)
23 Plaintiff would have a mild limitation in exposure to marked changes in
24 temperature and humidity and would be totally restricted from activities
25 involving unprotected heights, being around moving machinery, and
26 driving automotive equipment. (*Id.*) Dr. Chavoshan concluded that
27 plaintiff could not work more than part-time due to chronic pain,
28 fatigue, and the side effects from his medications. (*Id.*)

1 The ALJ asserts that he gave "little, if any weight" to Dr.
2 Chavoshan's opinion, because: (1) there was no evidence of the
3 frequency and type of treatment plaintiff received from Dr. Chavoshan;
4 (2) Dr. Chavoshan did not indicate the basis upon which his opinion was
5 made; and (3) Dr. Chavoshan's opinion was not supported by the evidence.
6 (A.R. 25.)

7
8 First, the ALJ noted that there was no evidence of the "frequency
9 and type of treatment Dr. Chavoshan" provided to plaintiff. (A.R. 25.)
10 Indeed, other than the one form, Dr. Chavoshan's name appears only one
11 other time in the record, when Dr. Chavoshan refilled a prescription of
12 Gabapentin for plaintiff. (A.R. 246.) Thus, based on the
13 administrative record, there is insufficient evidence to support the
14 conclusion that Dr. Chavoshan was plaintiff's treating physician, as
15 opposed to merely an examining physician. See 20 C.F.R. §§ 404.1502,
16 416.902 (defining a "treating source" as someone who provides medical
17 treatment or evaluation and who has or has had "an ongoing treatment
18 relationship with" the claimant, which means seeing the physician "with
19 a frequency consistent with acceptable medical practice for the type of
20 treatment or evaluation required for" the claimant's condition).

21
22 Further, an ALJ may discredit a treating physician's opinion if it
23 is conclusory, brief, and unsupported by the record as a whole or by
24 objective medical findings. *Thomas v. Barnhart*, 278 F.3d 947, 957 (9th
25 Cir. 2002); see also, *Batson v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec. Admin.*, 359 F.3d
26 1190, 1195 (9th Cir. 2004) (upholding the ALJ's rejection of an opinion
27 that was "conclusory in the form of a check-list," and lacked supporting
28 clinical findings).

1 As there does not appear to be a treating relationship between Dr.
2 Chavoshan and plaintiff, and Dr. Chavoshan's one-page evaluation of
3 plaintiff was conclusory and brief, the ALJ may refuse to afford Dr.
4 Chavoshan's opinion the same weight afforded to that of a treating
5 physician. However, Dr. Chavoshan's opinion cannot be ignored entirely
6 on these grounds, particularly in view of the fact that: (1) contrary
7 to the ALJ's conclusion, the findings contained in Dr. Chavoshan's form
8 are not inconsistent with the objective medical records, specifically,
9 with those of plaintiff's treating physician Dr. Uttan Reddy; and (2)
10 Dr. Chavoshan appears to be the only physician who had the opportunity
11 to consider plaintiff's "abnormal" May 2009 EMG and nerve conduction
12 studies when assessing plaintiff's functional limitations. See Gallant
13 v. Heckler, 753 F.2d 1450, 1456 (9th Cir. 1984)(holding that it was
14 error for an ALJ to ignore or misstate competent evidence in the record
15 to justify his conclusion).

16
17 The ALJ erroneously gave little weight to Dr. Reddy's opinion,
18 because it was not supported by "objective medical evidence, clinical
19 signs and observations, and treating history."⁶ (A.R. 25.) Dr. Reddy,
20

21 ⁶ The ALJ's reasons for rejecting Dr. Reddy's opinion were not
22 supported by substantial evidence. First, contrary to the ALJ's
23 contention, there was a treating history; Dr. Reddy was plaintiff's
24 primary treating physician in 2008 and 2009. Further, Dr. Reddy's
25 treatment notes contained his own objective findings. (See A.R. 166
26 (09/05/08 - plaintiff noted severe pain in both hands; Dr. Reddy
27 suspected "Raynaud's OS" and may start "CCB if points to Raynauds");
28 A.R. 164 (11/03/08 - Dr. Reddy noted that "rheum workup [illegible] on
last visit - negative"; as for plaintiff's bilateral hand pain, he will
continue to observe and will "refer to ortho if pt progresses/develops
contracture"); A.R. 162 (02/04/09 - Dr. Reddy noted "[u]nder etiology,
pt has component of Raynauds syndrome and of early contracture
(Dupuytren). Will refer to ortho clinic . . . and will get x-rays");
A.R. 268 (03/27/09 - Dr. Reddy diagnosed plaintiff with bilateral hand
pain and diabetes, noted that plaintiff "still [was] having similar

1 plaintiff's primary treating physician at UCLA-Harbor Medical Center in
2 2008 and 2009, determined plaintiff to be temporarily disabled from
3 March 2009, until September 2009, due to "neuropathy of unclear
4 etiology." (A.R. 178, 268.) Dr. Reddy also referred plaintiff to an
5 orthopedic hand specialist for additional diagnostic testing and
6 evaluation. (A.R. 268 - Dr. Reddy noting "[r]eferral to ortho [h]and .
7 . . . will refer for nerve conduction studies . . . will give disability
8 for 6 mos. given current determination.")

9
10 On May 13, 2009, plaintiff underwent EMG and nerve conduction
11 studies that indicated: "Bilateral tibial and peroneal motor studies
12 show decreased conduction velocities with normal latencies, somewhat
13 borderline normal amplitudes. R median motor onset is delayed,
14 otherwise normal, as is R ulnar motor. All sensory nerves tested were
15 unobtainable. EMG of select proximal and distal UE/LE muscles was
16 normal." (A.R. 223.) As such, it was an "[a]bnormal study. Results
17
18 are most consistent with a mixed sensorimotor polyneuropathy. Given his
19 h[istory], DM seems most likely cause . . . although differential would
20 continue to include others, and clinical correlation is advised."⁷ (A.R.

21
22 symptoms of feeling like he is walking on glass and feeling swollen cold
23 hands although not [illegible] swollen or cold," and referred plaintiff
24 to "ortho [h]and" for erve conduction studies for, *inter alia*, "possible
undefined neuropathy.").

25 ⁷ While the ALJ discusses these findings in his decision, it
26 appears the ALJ mistakenly believed that these tests were conducted on
27 June 17, 2008, when plaintiff first presented for treatment at Harbor-
28 UCLA Medical Center. (A.R. 23.) Based on the ALJ's mistaken belief, he
erroneously minimizes the results of the tests and concludes that the
testing does not support the extent of plaintiff's limitations, because
there was "no further confirmation of such diagnosis" and plaintiff was
"discharged the same day with instructions on insulin injection and

1 224.)

2
3 Thus, this "abnormal study" and Dr. Reddy's findings demonstrate
4 that the ALJ failed to consider properly evidence which could support
5 Dr. Chavoshan's opinions. While, at first blush, Dr. Chavoshan's
6 findings seem to be inconsistent with some of the treatment records,
7 that inconsistency appears to be a result of the chronic and recurrent
8 nature of plaintiff's condition. As such, the ALJ's reasoning cannot
9 constitute a specific and legitimate reason for rejecting Dr.
10 Chavoshan's opinion.

11
12 Further, as noted *supra*, Dr. Chavoshan appears to be the only
13 physician of record who had the benefit of considering plaintiff's
14 "abnormal" May 2009 EMG and nerve conduction studies when assessing
15 plaintiff's functional limitations. Indeed, Dr. Chavoshan's opinion is
16 the only one of record that was rendered after the completion of these
17 tests.⁸ Thus, the restrictions indicated by the nerve conduction and EMG
18 could very well support Dr. Chavoshan's limitations.

19
20 On remand, the ALJ must reconsider Dr. Chavoshan's opinion, as well
21 as the opinion of Dr. Reddy, particularly in view of the May 2009 EMG
22 and nerve conduction test results. Should the ALJ again elect to give
23 these opinions no weight, he should set forth specific and legitimate
24 reasons for so doing.

25
26 _____
27 proper administration." (A.R. 23.)

28 ⁸ Although the tests were conducted on May 13, 2009, it appears
the results were not released until May 26, 2009. (See A.R. 229.)

1 **II. The ALJ Failed To Give Specific And Legitimate Reasons**
2 **For Rejecting Certain Limitations Found By Examining**
3 **Physician Dr. John Sedgh.**
4

5 An ALJ may also reject the opinion of an examining physician by
6 providing specific and legitimate reasons supported by substantial
7 evidence in the record. Lester, 81 F.3d at 830-31.
8

9 The ALJ gave "significant weight" to the opinion of consultative
10 examiner Dr. John Sedgh and State agency physician Dr. K. Beig in
11 assessing plaintiff's RFC. (A.R. 24-25.) However, the ALJ specifically
12 rejected Dr. Sedgh's two hour walk/stand limitation in favor of Dr.
13 Beig's opinion that plaintiff could walk/stand for six
14 hours. (*Id.*) The ALJ rejected Dr. Sedgh's more restrictive stand/walk
15 limitation, because: (1) it was based on plaintiff's subjective
16 complaints; and (2) it was inconsistent with Dr. Sedgh's own physical
17 examination of plaintiff. (A.R. 24.) The ALJ's reasons are
18 unconvincing.

19
20 On May 12, 2009, Dr. Sedgh, after an examination of plaintiff's
21 musculoskeletal system and upper and lower extremities, as well as a
22 neurological exam, concluded as follows:
23

24 Diabetes. [Plaintiff] had subjectively decreased sensation in
25 the lower extremities. Gait is slightly to moderately
26 antalgic.
27

28 From a functional standpoint, [plaintiff] can lift and carry

1 [twenty] pounds occasionally and [ten] pounds frequently. He
2 can stand and walk two hours in an eight-hour day with normal
3 breaks. He can sit for six hours in an eight-hour day.
4 Kneeling, crouching and stooping should be limited to
5 occasional. It is my opinion [plaintiff] does not need a cane
6 or any type of assistive device.

7
8 (A.R. 191.)
9

10 On May 26, 2009, after reviewing plaintiff's medical record,
11 including Dr. Sedgh's report, State agency reviewing physician Dr. Beig
12 opined that plaintiff could: lift and/or carry twenty pounds
13 occasionally and ten pounds frequently; and stand, walk, and sit about
14 six hours in an eight-hour workday. (A.R. 195-201.) Plaintiff had
15 unlimited push and pull abilities and could frequently climb
16 ramps/stairs, balance, stoop, kneel, crouch, and crawl but could only
17 occasionally climb ladders/ropes/scaffolds and balance. (A.R.
18 197.) Dr. Beig assessed no manipulative, visual, communicative, or
19 environmental limitations. (*Id.*)
20

21 The ALJ's first reason for rejecting Dr. Sedgh's stand/walk
22 limitation, *i.e.*, that it "appears" to be based on plaintiff's
23 "subjective complaints of decreased sensation in the lower extremities,"
24 is not legitimate and suggests a need for further development of the
25 record. (A.R. 24.) Although, as noted by the ALJ, Dr. Sedgh's physical
26 examination of plaintiff showed "generally normal results," Dr. Sedgh
27 also determined that plaintiff's gait was "slightly to moderately
28 antalgic." (A.R. 24, 187-91.) This limitation could support Dr.

1 Sedgh's decision to limit plaintiff to only two hours of walking and
2 standing. To the extent the ALJ had any questions regarding what
3 objective evidence supported Dr. Sedgh's limitation, the ALJ should have
4 recontacted Dr. Sedgh in accordance with his duty to conduct an
5 appropriate inquiry. See 20 C.F.R. §§ 404.1512(e), 416.912(e) (noting
6 that the administration "will seek additional evidence or clarification
7 from your medical source when the report . . . from your medical source
8 contains a conflict or ambiguity that must be resolved, [or] the report
9 does not contain all the necessary information").

10
11 The ALJ also reasoned that Dr. Sedgh's two hour stand/walk
12 limitation was inconsistent with his own physical examination of
13 plaintiff, because Dr. Sedgh did not indicate evidence of muscle atrophy
14 and also determined that plaintiff did not need a cane or any type of
15 assistive device. However, these reasons constitute a medical opinion
16 that the ALJ is not qualified to make. See generally, Tackett v. Apfel,
17 180 F.3d 1094, 1102-03 (9th Cir. 1999)(ALJ may not substitute his own
18 interpretation of the medical evidence for the opinion of medical
19 professionals); Banks v. Barnhart, 434 F. Supp.2d 800, 805 (C.D. Cal.
20 2006)(noting that an ALJ "'must not succumb to the temptation to play
21 doctor and make [his] own independent medical findings'")(citing Rohan
22 v. Chater, 98 F.3d 966, 970 (7th Cir. 1996)).

23
24 Finally, rather than simply recontacting Dr. Sedgh for
25 clarification of his opinion, the ALJ relied upon the opinion of a non-
26 examining State physician. However, in finding that plaintiff could
27 walk/stand for six hours, Dr. Beig did not rely on any evidence that Dr.
28 Sedgh had not considered. (See A.R. 195-201.) Therefore, Dr. Beig's

1 six hour walk/stand limitation, alone, cannot constitute substantial
2 evidence, because it is not based on any independent findings, and the
3 ALJ failed to give legitimate reasons for rejecting Dr. Sedgh's opinion.
4 Andrews, 53 F.3d at 1041 (noting that where "a nontreating source's
5 opinion contradicts that of the treating physician but is not based on
6 independent clinical findings, or rests on clinical findings also
7 considered by the treating physician, the opinion of the treating
8 physician may be rejected only if the ALJ gives specific, legitimate
9 reasons for doings so that are based on substantial evidence of
10 record").

11
12 In any event, it appears that the ALJ's RFC assessment is not
13 supported by substantial evidence. As discussed above, neither Dr.
14 Sedgh nor Dr. Beig reviewed and analyzed the results of the May 2009 EMG
15 and nerve conduction studies, and therefore, neither physician took
16 these results into account. (See A.R. 187-91, 195-201.) If Drs. Sedgh
17 and Beig had considered the nerve conduction study, their opinions may
18 have been altered. Further, as noted above, the ALJ failed to consider
19 the EMG and nerve conduct tests in the proper time frame, and if the ALJ
20 had properly considered the test results, the ALJ also may have also
21 reached a different conclusion.

22
23 Given the ALJ's substantial reliance on the opinions of Drs. Sedgh
24 and Beig, whose opinions were rendered without review of relevant tests,
25 and the ALJ's own improper independent consideration of the tests, which
26 constituted legal error, the ALJ's RFC determination is not based on a
27 proper and sufficiently complete picture of plaintiff's condition. See
28 20 C.F.R. §§ 404.1545(a), 416.945(a) (a claimant's residual functional

1 capacity is an assessment based upon all of the relevant evidence);
2 Morgan v. Comm'r of Soc. Sec. Admin., 169 F.3d 595, 600 (9th Cir. 1999)
3 (medical expert opinions constitute substantial evidence only when they
4 are supported by the record and consistent with it).

5
6 The Commissioner argues that, even if the ALJ erred in crediting
7 Dr. Sedgh's stand/walk limitation, any error is harmless. (Joint Stip.
8 at 15.) However, the Court need not address this issue, because this
9 case is being remanded for the reasons stated *supra*, and the ALJ's
10 determination of plaintiff's RFC may change.

11
12 **III. The ALJ Must Reconsider Plaintiff's Subjective**
13 **Complaints.**

14
15 Based on the foregoing, there are several matters the ALJ needs to
16 review and reconsider on remand. As a result, the ALJ's conclusion
17 regarding plaintiff's credibility may change. When viewed fairly, the
18 opinions of Dr. Chavoshan and Dr. Reddy, as well as the EMG and nerve
19 conduction test results, may support plaintiff's complaints and alleged
20 limitations, which the ALJ had deemed to be "out of proportion to the
21 objective findings and observed functional restrictions." (A.R. 22.)
22 Accordingly, the Court does not reach plaintiff's third claim -- *to wit*,
23 that the ALJ erred in finding plaintiff to be not credible.

24
25 On remand, the ALJ should have a physician review the EMG and nerve
26 conduction studies and results, and take these findings into account in
27 assessing plaintiff's limitations. After doing so, the ALJ should view
28 these findings in the light of the record as a whole and revisit his

1 consideration of the various medical opinions and plaintiff's
2 credibility. Further, to the extent plaintiff's RFC may need to be
3 reassessed, additional testimony from a vocational expert likely will be
4 required.

5
6 **IV. Remand Is Required.**

7
8 The decision whether to remand for further proceedings or order an
9 immediate award of benefits is within the district court's discretion.
10 Harman v. Apfel, 211 F.3d 1172, 1175-78 (9th Cir. 2000). Where no
11 useful purpose would be served by further administrative proceedings, or
12 where the record has been fully developed, it is appropriate to exercise
13 this discretion to direct an immediate award of benefits. *Id.* at 1179
14 ("[T]he decision of whether to remand for further proceedings turns upon
15 the likely utility of such proceedings."). However, where there are
16 outstanding issues that must be resolved before a determination of
17 disability can be made, and it is not clear from the record that the ALJ
18 would be required to find the claimant disabled if all the evidence were
19 properly evaluated, remand is appropriate. *Id.* at 1179-81.

20
21 Remand is the appropriate remedy to allow the ALJ the opportunity
22 to remedy the above-mentioned deficiencies and errors. *See, e.g.,*
23 Benecke v. Barnhart, 379 F.3d 587, 593 (9th Cir. 2004)(remand for
24 further proceedings is appropriate if enhancement of the record would be
25 useful); McAllister v. Sullivan, 888 F.2d 599, 603 (9th Cir. 1989)
26 (remand appropriate to remedy defects in the record). On remand, the
27 ALJ must correct the above-mentioned deficiencies and errors.

1 **CONCLUSION**

2

3 Accordingly, for the reasons stated above, IT IS ORDERED that the
4 decision of the Commissioner is REVERSED, and this case is REMANDED for
5 further proceedings consistent with this Memorandum Opinion and Order.

6

7 IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Clerk of the Court shall serve
8 copies of this Memorandum Opinion and Order and the Judgment on counsel
9 for plaintiff and for defendant.

10

11 LET JUDGMENT BE ENTERED ACCORDINGLY.

12

13 DATED: March 27, 2013

14 *Margaret A. Nagle*

15 _____
16 MARGARET A. NAGLE
17 UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28