

# In the United States Court of Federal Claims

## OFFICE OF SPECIAL MASTERS

No. 08-0008V

Filed: November 4, 2011

Not to be Published

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DONNELL VILLA and SHAYNA TATUM,  
parents of MICHAEL VILLA, a minor,

Petitioners,

v.

SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT  
OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,

Respondent.

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Autism; Failure to  
Prosecute; Failure to  
Follow Court Orders;  
Dismissal

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### DECISION<sup>1</sup>

On January 2, 2008, petitioners filed a Petition for Vaccine Compensation in the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (“the Program”),<sup>2</sup> alleging that Michael was injured by a vaccine or vaccines listed on the Vaccine Injury Table. See § 14.

Thereafter, petitioners failed to file all of the required medical records as ordered by the undersigned on numerous occasions. See Orders filed January 22, 2008, February 15, 2008, March 5, 2008, March 12, 2008, August 22, 2008, June 30, 2011 and August 11, 2011.

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<sup>1</sup> Because this unpublished decision contains a reasoned explanation for the action in this case, I intend to post this decision on the United States Court of Federal Claims' website, in accordance with the E-Government Act of 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-347, § 205, 116 Stat. 2899, 2913 (codified as amended at 44 U.S.C. § 3501 note (2006)). In accordance with Vaccine Rule 18(b), petitioner has 14 days to identify and move to delete medical or other information, the disclosure of which would constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy. If, upon review, I agree that the identified material fits within this definition, I will delete such material from public access.

<sup>2</sup> The Program comprises Part 2 of the National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99-660, 100 Stat. 3755, codified as amended, 42 U.S.C. §§ 300aa-10 *et seq.* (hereinafter “Vaccine Act” or “the Act”). Hereafter, individual section references will be to 42 U.S.C. § 300aa of the Act.

An Order to Show Cause was sent to petitioners' address of record by certified mail on June 30, 2011 directing petitioners to file the required records or show cause why this case should not be dismissed for failure to prosecute. That order was returned to the court as undeliverable.

The court endeavored to find a new address for petitioners and resent the order originally filed on June 30, 2011 to petitioners' address of record and that new address on August 11, 2011 by certified mail.<sup>3</sup> The order filed August 11, 2011 and sent to petitioners' address of record was returned to the court as undeliverable. Petitioners did not respond to the order filed on August 11, 2011 and sent to the newly identified address.

#### I. The Omnibus Autism Proceeding

This case is one of more than 5,400 cases filed under the Program in which petitioners alleged that conditions known as "autism" or "autism spectrum disorders" ["ASD"] were caused by one or more vaccinations. A detailed history of the controversy regarding vaccines and autism, along with a history of the development of the OAP, was set forth in the six entitlement decisions issued by three special masters as "test cases" for two theories of causation litigated in the OAP and will not be repeated here.<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately, the Petitioners' Steering Committee ["PSC"], an organization formed by attorneys representing petitioners in the OAP, litigated six test cases presenting two different theories on the causation of ASDs. The first theory alleged that the measles portion of the measles, mumps, rubella vaccine could cause ASDs. That theory was presented in three separate Program test cases during several weeks of trial in 2007. The second theory alleged that the mercury contained in thimerosal-containing vaccines could directly affect an infant's brain, thereby substantially contributing to the causation of ASD. That theory was presented in three additional test cases during several weeks of trial in 2008.

Decisions in each of the three test cases pertaining to the PSC's first theory rejected the petitioners' causation theories. *Cedillo*, 2009 WL 331968, *aff'd*, 89 Fed. Cl. 158 (2009), *aff'd*, 617 F.3d 1328 (Fed. Cir. 2010); *Hazlehurst*, 2009 WL 332306, *aff'd*,

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<sup>3</sup> The new address located by the court was 1153 S. Plymouth Blvd. Apt. 1, Los Angeles, CA 90019. The clerk is instructed to send the instant Decision to petitioner's address of record as well as to this new address.

<sup>4</sup> The Theory 1 cases are *Cedillo v. Sec'y, HHS*, No. 98-916V, 2009 WL 331968 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Feb. 12, 2009); *Hazlehurst v. Sec'y, HHS*, No. 03-654V, 2009 WL 332306 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Feb. 12, 2009); *Snyder v. Sec'y, HHS*, No. 01-162V, 2009 WL 332044 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Feb. 12, 2009). The Theory 2 cases are *Dwyer v. Sec'y, HHS*, No. 03-1202V, 2010 WL 892250 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Mar. 12, 2010); *King v. Sec'y, HHS*, No. 03-584V, 2010 WL 892296 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Mar. 12, 2010); *Mead v. Sec'y, HHS*, No. 03-215V, 2010 WL 892248 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Mar. 12, 2010).

88 Fed. Cl. 473 (2009), *aff'd*, 604 F.3d 1343 (Fed. Cir. 2010); *Snyder*, 2009 WL 332044, *aff'd*, 88 Fed. Cl. 706 (2009).<sup>5</sup> Decisions in each of the three “test cases” pertaining to the PSC’s second theory also rejected the petitioners’ causation theories, and petitioners in each of the three cases chose not to appeal. *Dwyer*, 2010 WL 892250; *King*, 2010 WL 892296; *Mead*, 2010 WL 892248. Thus, the proceedings in these six test cases are concluded. Petitioners remaining in the OAP must now decide whether to pursue their cases, and submit new evidence on causation, or take other action to exit the Program.

## II. Failure to Prosecute

It is petitioners’ duty to ensure the court has a valid address to which it can send filings. Failure to respond to a court order because petitioners have failed to update their address of record is deemed noncompliance with a court order, and noncompliance will not be tolerated. As I reminded petitioners in my August 11, 2011 Order, failure to follow court orders, as well as failure to file medical records or an expert medical opinion, shall result in dismissal of petitioners’ claim. *Tsekouras v. Sec’y, HHS*, 26 Cl. Ct. 439 (1992), *aff’d per curiam*, 991 F.2d 810 (Fed. Cir. 1993); *Sapharas v. Sec’y, HHS*, 35 Fed. Cl. 503 (1996); Vaccine Rule 21(b).  
Causation In Fact

To receive compensation under the Program, petitioner must prove either 1) that Michael suffered a “Table Injury” – i.e., an injury falling within the Vaccine Injury Table – corresponding to one of Michael’s vaccinations, or 2) that Michael suffered an injury that was actually caused by a vaccine. See §§13(a)(1)(A) and 11(c)(1). Under the Vaccine Act, a special master cannot find a petitioner has proven her case by a preponderance of the evidence based upon “the claims of a petitioner alone, unsubstantiated by medical records or by medical opinion.” § 13(a). Petitioners have failed to file sufficient medical records and evidence in this case. Thus, an examination of the record did not uncover any evidence that Michael suffered a “Table Injury.” Further, the record does not contain a medical opinion or any other persuasive evidence indicating that Michael’s autism spectrum disorder was vaccine-caused.

Accordingly, it is clear from the record in this case that petitioners have failed to demonstrate either that Michael suffered a “Table Injury” or that Michael’s injuries were “actually caused” by a vaccination. **This case is dismissed for insufficient proof and for failure to prosecute. The clerk shall enter judgment accordingly.**<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Petitioners in *Snyder* did not appeal the decision of the U.S. Court of Federal Claims.

<sup>6</sup> This document constitutes my final “Decision” in this case, pursuant to § 12(d)(3)(A). If petitioners wish to have this case reviewed by a Judge of the United States Court of Federal Claims, a motion for review of this decision must be filed within 30 days. After 30 days the Clerk of this Court shall enter judgment in accord with this decision. If petitioners wish to preserve whatever right petitioners may have to file a civil suit (that is a law suit in another court)

**IT IS SO ORDERED.**

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Gary J. Golkiewicz  
Special Master

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petitioners must file an "election to reject judgment in this case and file a civil action" within 90 days of the filing of the judgment. § 21(a).