

In the United States Court of Federal Claims

Office of Special Masters

No. 2-247V

Filed: December 21, 2010

SAMANTHA WARREN and TRAVIS WARREN *

Individually and as Next Friends of Travis *

Gabriel Warren, a minor, *

Petitioners, *

v. *

SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT *

OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, *

Respondent. *

Failure to Prosecute;
Failure to Provide
Address; Dismissal

DECISION¹

VOWELL, Special Master:

On March 29, 2002, petitioners² filed a petition for vaccine compensation in the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program [“the Program”],³ on behalf of Travis Gabriel Warren. The petition alleges that “mercury-containing vaccines” caused Travis to demonstrate “developmental problems.” Petition at 1.

¹ Because this unpublished decision contains a reasoned explanation for the action in this case, I intend to post this decision on the United States Court of Federal Claims' website, in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, 116 Stat. 2899, 2913 (Dec. 17, 2002). In accordance with Vaccine Rule 18(b), petitioners have 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.

² The clerk is instructed to send copies of this decision to petitioners' address of record and to the following address:

224 Spruce Aly
South Portsmouth, KY 41174

³ National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99-660, 100 Stat. 3755. Hereinafter, for ease of citation, all “§” references to the Vaccine Act will be to the pertinent subparagraph of 42 U.S.C. § 300aa (2006).

On March 15, 2010, I granted petitioners' attorney's motion to withdraw from this case, and on March 24, 2010, I ordered petitioners to contact the court to verify their contact information by May 24, 2010. Both orders were returned to the court as undeliverable. Petitioners did not respond to the March 24, 2010 order.

On September 13, 2010, petitioners were ordered to inform the court whether they intended to proceed with this case. This order was mailed to petitioners' address of record and was returned to the court as undeliverable. The court endeavored to find a new address for petitioners, and resent the order to petitioners' address of record and that new address on September 30, 2010.⁴ That order was also returned to the court as undeliverable from both addresses. Petitioners failed to respond to either order.

On October 19, 2010, petitioners were ordered to provide the court with a valid address and phone number or otherwise show cause by no later than Thursday, November 18, 2010, why this case should not be dismissed for failure to prosecute. The order was sent to both addresses, and it was returned as undeliverable from both. Petitioners failed to respond to that order as well.

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.⁵

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.

⁴ The new address located by the court was 224 Spruce Aly, South Portsmouth, KY 41174.

⁵ 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).

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*, 88 Fed. Cl. 473 (2009), *aff'd*, 604 F.3d 1343 (2010); *Snyder*, 2009 WL 332044, *aff'd*, 88 Fed. Cl. 706 (2009).⁶ 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. The petitioners in this case have failed to inform the court how they intend to proceed.

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 October 19, 2010 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).

III. Causation In Fact

To receive compensation under the Program, petitioners must prove either 1) that Travis suffered a "Table Injury" – i.e., an injury falling within the Vaccine Injury Table – corresponding to one of his vaccinations, or 2) that Travis suffered an injury that was actually caused by a vaccine. See §§ 300aa-13(a)(1)(A) and 300aa-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." 42 U.S.C. § 300aa-13(a) (2006). Petitioners have failed to file sufficient medical records,⁷ and any other evidence pertaining to causation, in this case. Thus, an examination of the record did not uncover any evidence that Travis suffered a "Table Injury." Further, the record does not contain a medical opinion or any other persuasive evidence indicating that Travis's autism spectrum disorder was vaccine-caused.

⁶ Petitioners in *Snyder* did not appeal the decision of the U.S. Court of Federal Claims.

⁷ The only evidence filed in this case is a vaccination record, filed as Exhibit 1 with the petition. This record is insufficient to demonstrate causation.

Accordingly, it is clear from the record in this case that petitioners have failed to demonstrate either that Travis suffered a “Table Injury” or that his 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.**⁸

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Denise K. Vowell
Special Master

⁸ This document constitutes my final “Decision” in this case, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 300aa-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) 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. 42 U.S.C. § 300aa-21(a).