

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
PENNSYLVANIA

Younkin v. Superintendent Eric Tice, et al.

Younkin · No. 3:21-cv-76-SLH-KAP · Decided January 6, 2026

SUMMARY

In this memorandum order, the court directs the parties to identify evidence concerning causation and exhaustion in a prisoner’s deliberate-indifference claim against a nurse. The court focuses on the plaintiff’s lack of expert testimony, the alleged suicide attempt and resulting injuries, and whether the plaintiff exhausted administrative remedies before filing suit. Responses and any related Rule 56(d) discovery motions are due February 9, 2026.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Keith A. Pesto
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania
DECIDED	January 6, 2026
DOCKET	3:21-cv-76-SLH-KAP
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	After screening the complaint and amended complaint under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the court accepted a recommendation allowing the deliberate-indifference claim against nurse Kelly to proceed while dismissing claims against other defendants. The court issued an interlocutory memorandum order directing the parties to submit or identify evidence concerning causation, injury, expert testimony, and exhaustion before considering possible sua sponte summary judgment.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The order discusses the summary-judgment standard and the court's authority to consider summary judgment sua sponte after notice, but it does not decide summary judgment.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

TOPICS

- summary judgment
- expert testimony
- section 1983
- prisoners rights
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

prisoner civil rights

civil procedure

medical causation

summary judgment

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Younkin can produce competent evidence, without expert testimony, that he suffered the alleged vocal-cord injury and that Kelly's conduct plausibly caused the suicide attempt.
2. Whether Younkin exhausted his administrative remedies as to his claim against Kelly before filing suit.
3. Whether the court may consider a sua sponte summary-judgment procedure after notifying the parties and giving them an opportunity to submit relevant evidence.

HOLDINGS

1. The court directed the parties to submit or identify all evidence bearing on medical causation, injury, and exhaustion, and allowed them to seek relevant discovery under Rule 56(d), before the court determines whether summary judgment is appropriate.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"In almost any medical matter where causation is more complicated than trauma immediately causing broken bones or damages to organs and tissue, expert evidence is necessary." (at 1)

"Accordingly, I direct the parties to submit or point to the existence of all evidence they contend shows:" (at 2)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Younkin alleged that nurse Kelly falsely reported that he was not taking psychotropic medication, causing a doctor to stop his prescriptions on October 8, 2020. He claimed that the resulting pain led him to attempt suicide on October 18 by tying a sheet around his neck, allegedly injuring his vocal cords. A grievance filed on the evening of October 8 challenged the medication stoppage but did not identify Kelly or allege malicious intent, and the record did not establish whether Younkin reported the alleged injury or exhausted a claim against Kelly.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Younkin, a prisoner proceeding pro se, filed a § 1983 complaint alleging that nurse Kelly maliciously reported that he was not taking psychotropic medication, leading to discontinuation of the medication and a subsequent suicide attempt. Following screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the magistrate judge recommended that the claim against Kelly proceed and that claims against Smucker, Tice, and Hyde be dismissed; the district court accepted that recommendation, and Younkin objected only to dismissal of Smucker. Because Kelly had answered and Younkin disavowed expert testimony, the court directed both sides to identify evidence supporting medical causation and exhaustion and permitted any relevant Rule 56(d) discovery request.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 104-105 (1976)
- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 326 (1986)
- Gibson v. Mayor & Council of City of Wilmington, 355 F.3d 215, 224 (3d Cir. 2004)
- Couden v. Duffy, 446 F.3d 483, 500 (3d Cir. 2006)

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