

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Smith v. Schuyler

Smith · No. 23-cv-03864-JSC · Decided June 9, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California grants summary judgment to Drs. Sevaq Kalinjian and Mandeep Singh in a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action alleging deliberate indifference to a prisoner’s serious medical needs. The court concludes that the evidence does not support a finding that either defendant violated the Eighth Amendment and denies the plaintiff’s motion for appointment of counsel.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Jacqueline Scott Corley
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	June 9, 2025
DOCKET	23-cv-03864-JSC
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff, a California prisoner proceeding pro se, brought an action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging deliberate indifference to serious medical needs in violation of the Eighth Amendment. Defendants Dr. Kalinjian and Dr. Singh moved for summary judgment, and Plaintiff moved for appointment of counsel.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is proper when the pleadings, discovery, and affidavits show no genuine dispute as to any material fact and the moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The evidence must be viewed in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, but the nonmoving party must identify specific facts showing a genuine issue for trial.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished federal district court order; nonprecedential except as permitted by applicable rules.

PARTIES

Larry Smith v. Dr. Sevaq Kalinjian, Dr. Mandeep Singh, C. Schuyler, et al.

TOPICS

section 1983 prisoners rights cruel and unusual punishment summary judgment civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights constitutional law prisoner medical care civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the evidence created a genuine dispute of material fact that Dr. Kalinjian was deliberately indifferent to Smith's serious medical needs in violation of the Eighth Amendment.
2. Whether the evidence created a genuine dispute of material fact that Dr. Singh was deliberately indifferent to Smith's serious medical needs in violation of the Eighth Amendment.
3. Whether Plaintiff was entitled to appointment of counsel.

HOLDINGS

1. Dr. Kalinjian was entitled to summary judgment because no reasonable fact-finder could conclude that he knowingly disregarded an excessive risk to Smith's health. The evidence showed that he examined Smith, ordered diagnostic testing, provided or offered pain treatment, addressed the razor-blade ingestion and weight loss, arranged follow-up care, and immediately referred Smith for emergency treatment after the MRI revealed a spinal infection.
2. Dr. Singh was entitled to summary judgment because no reasonable fact-finder could conclude that she deliberately disregarded Smith's serious medical needs. Her repeated hospital referrals, diagnostic testing, specialist consultations, medication management, and efforts to address a possible recurrent infection constituted extensive medical care, and Smith's refusals or departures from recommended treatment did not support an inference that any worsening resulted from Singh's purposeful conduct.
3. Summary judgment was proper because Plaintiff failed to produce evidence from which a reasonable jury could find a genuine dispute of material fact on deliberate indifference.
4. Plaintiff's motion for appointment of counsel was denied because the court's ruling eliminated any upcoming court dates and required entry of judgment and closure of the case.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"A prison official is deliberately indifferent if the official "knows that inmates face a substantial risk of serious harm and disregards that risk by failing to take reasonable measures to abate it." (Discussion section B.1)

"To prevail on a claim involving choices between alternative courses of treatment, a prisoner must show that the chosen course of treatment was medically unacceptable under the circumstances, and was chosen in conscious disregard of an excessive risk to [the prisoner's] health." (Discussion section B.1)

“The record is undisputed Plaintiff left the hospital—where he could receive antibiotics, pain medication, testing, monitoring, and any necessary surgery—against medical advice each of the six times Dr. Singh sent him there.” (Discussion section B.3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Larry Smith, a California prisoner, experienced severe back pain and was later diagnosed with a spinal infection and epidural abscess requiring emergency surgery. He alleged that Dr. Kalinjian failed to adequately investigate his back pain, weight loss, and swallowing of a razor blade, and that Dr. Singh inadequately managed his pain and delayed or mishandled treatment for a possible recurrent spinal infection. The undisputed medical evidence showed that Kalinjian ordered testing, prescribed or offered multiple treatments, arranged referrals, and sent Smith for emergency care, while Singh repeatedly sent him to hospitals, ordered imaging and testing, consulted specialists, and provided pain medication. Smith repeatedly left hospitals against medical advice or refused recommended treatment.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The court previously granted summary judgment to defendants Dr. Jonathan Doherty and Dr. Kathryn Bergen. After briefing on the joint motion by Drs. Kalinjian and Singh, the court granted summary judgment to those defendants, denied Plaintiff's motion for appointment of counsel, directed the Clerk to enter judgment, and closed the case.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248 (1986)
- Celotex Corp. v. Cattrett, 477 U.S. 317, 323-24 (1986)
- Tolan v. Cotton, 570 U.S. 650, 656-57 (2014)
- Hunt v. Cromartie, 526 U.S. 541, 552 (1999)
- Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 104 (1976)
- Jett v. Penner, 439 F.3d 1091, 1096 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 837, 847 (1994)
- Simmons v. G. Arnett, 47 F.4th 927, 933-34 (9th Cir. 2022)
- Toguchi v. Chung, 391 F.3d 1051, 1058, 1060 (9th Cir. 2004)
- Franklin v. Oregon, 662 F.2d 1337, 1344 (9th Cir. 1981)
- Sanchez v. Vild, 891 F.2d 240, 242 (9th Cir. 1989)
- In re Olson, 37 Cal. App. 3d 783 (Cal. Ct. App. 1974)