

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
ILLINOIS

David A. Williams, Sr. v. Dr. Burke

Williams v. Burke · No. 21 C 5047 · Decided January 7, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois granted Dr. Patricia Burke’s motion for summary judgment in a pro se 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action brought by pretrial detainee David A. Williams, Sr. Williams alleged that prescribing nortriptyline for chronic back pain violated his Fourteenth Amendment rights and caused various health conditions. The court held that Burke’s treatment decisions were objectively reasonable and that Williams presented no admissible evidence establishing causation.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Elaine E. Bucklo
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois
DECIDED	January 7, 2026
DOCKET	21 C 5047
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff brought a pro se action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging that a physician violated his Fourteenth Amendment rights by prescribing nortriptyline for chronic back pain and failing to provide adequate medical care. Defendant moved for summary judgment.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is appropriate when there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The court viewed properly supported evidence in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, refrained from weighing evidence or making credibility determinations, and drew reasonable but not speculative inferences in the nonmoving party's favor.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district-court memorandum opinion; persuasive only
PARTIES	David A. Williams, Sr. v. Dr. Patricia Burke

TOPICS

summary judgment

section 1983

prisoners rights

due process

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

civil rights

constitutional law

prisoner medical care

health law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Burke's prescription of low-dose nortriptyline for Williams's chronic back pain was objectively unreasonable under the Fourteenth Amendment standard applicable to pretrial-detainee medical-care claims.
2. Whether Burke's failure to personally advise Williams about nortriptyline's uses and potential risks established a Fourteenth Amendment informed-consent violation.
3. Whether Williams presented evidence that Burke's prescription of nortriptyline or alleged failure to treat his elevated blood pressure caused an injury.

HOLDINGS

1. A pretrial detainee cannot defeat summary judgment on a Fourteenth Amendment medical-care claim merely by preferring a different treatment; the plaintiff must produce evidence that the provider acted purposefully, knowingly, or recklessly and that the challenged treatment was objectively unreasonable in light of the totality of the circumstances. Williams produced no such evidence regarding Burke's prescription of nortriptyline or blood-pressure monitoring.
2. A plaintiff asserting a Fourteenth Amendment informed-consent claim must show that he was deprived of information a reasonable patient would deem necessary to make an informed treatment decision, that the defendant acted with deliberate indifference to the plaintiff's right to refuse treatment, and that the plaintiff would have refused treatment had he received the information. The mere failure to provide every known risk of a medication, without evidence that the plaintiff requested information and was denied it or that the provider was deliberately indifferent to the right to refuse treatment, is insufficient.
3. A plaintiff claiming injury must present evidence of causation; speculation, hearsay, and a layperson's unsupported belief that a medication caused medical conditions do not create a genuine dispute of material fact. Williams therefore could not establish that nortriptyline or Burke's alleged failure to treat elevated blood pressure caused an injury.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"The plaintiff bears the burden to demonstrate objective unreasonableness[.]" (9)

"The Fourteenth Amendment does not mandate comprehensive disclosures." (11)

"no matter how serious a medical condition is, the sufferer from it cannot prove tortious misconduct (including misconduct constituting a constitutional tort) as a result of the failure to treat the condition without providing evidence that the failure caused injury or a serious risk of injury." (14)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Williams was a pretrial detainee at the Kane County Adult Detention Center with chronic back pain and facet arthropathy. After reviewing his medical history and the restrictions on opioid medications in the jail, Dr. Burke prescribed low-dose nortriptyline and Tylenol for his pain without personally examining him. Williams later attributed high blood pressure, facial twitching, numbness, and other conditions to nortriptyline, but his records showed that he did not report those conditions while at the jail, developed some of them after discontinuing the medication, and had no medical evidence linking them to Burke's treatment.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Williams filed suit in September 2021. The court screened the operative complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, allowed a Fourteenth Amendment medical-care claim to proceed against Burke, and dismissed the other claims and defendants. After considering Burke's motion for summary judgment and Williams's response, the court deemed Burke's properly supported facts admitted under Local Rule 56.1, considered relevant supported facts submitted by Williams despite his noncompliance, granted summary judgment, and directed entry of final judgment for Burke.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Kreg Therapeutics, Inc. v. VitalGo, Inc., 919 F.3d 405, 414 (7th Cir. 2019)
- Wilson v. Kautex, Inc., 371 F. App'x 663, 664 (7th Cir. 2010)
- Greer v. Bd. of Educ., 267 F.3d 723, 727 (7th Cir. 2001)
- Adams v. Falkner, No. 18 C 8223, 2021 WL 2681891, at *1 (N.D. Ill. June 30, 2021)
- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 322-23 (1986)
- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248, 250, 252, 255 (1986)
- Malekpour v. Chao, 682 F. App'x 471, 473 (7th Cir. 2017)
- Yeatts v. Zimmer Biomet Holdings, Inc., 940 F.3d 354, 358 (7th Cir. 2019)
- Logan v. City of Chicago, 4 F.4th 529, 536 (7th Cir. 2021)
- Viamedia, Inc. v. Comcast Corp., 951 F.3d 429, 467 (7th Cir. 2020)
- White v. City of Chicago, 829 F.3d 837, 841 (7th Cir. 2016)
- Swisher v. Porter Cnty. Sheriff's Dep't, 761 F. App'x 616, 620 (7th Cir. 2019)
- Miranda v. Cnty. of Lake, 900 F.3d 335, 352 (7th Cir. 2018)
- McCann v. Ogle Cnty., 909 F.3d 881, 886 (7th Cir. 2018)
- James v. Hale, 959 F.3d 307, 318 (7th Cir. 2020)
- Osborne v. Dorris, No. 3:16-CV-1292-JPG-MAB, 2019 WL 2517086, at *3, 6 (S.D. Ill. May 10, 2019)
- Ford v. Cnty. of Winnebago, No. 3:19-cv-50056, 2022 WL 180569, at *7 (N.D. Ill. Jan. 20, 2022)
- Knight v. Grossman, 942 F.3d 336, 343 (7th Cir. 2019)
- Spillard v. Ivers, 19-cv-01407-JST (N.D. Cal. Jan. 25, 2024)

- Spillard v. Ivers, No. 21-16772, 2023 WL 4992827, at *1-2 (9th Cir. Aug. 4, 2023)
- Hart v. Cogburn, No. 2:19-cv-01193-DGE-BAT (W.D. Wash. Nov. 8, 2021)
- Stewart v. Wexford Health Sources, Inc., 14 F.4th 757, 764-65 (7th Cir. 2021)
- Meneweather v. Ritz, No. 24-1214, 2025 WL 66040, at *3 (7th Cir. Jan. 10, 2025)
- Pearson v. Ramos, 237 F.3d 881, 886 (7th Cir. 2001)
- Jackson v. Pollion, 733 F.3d 786, 790 (7th Cir. 2013)

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