

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF OHIO
EASTERN DIVISION

Estarling Melendez,)	CASE NO. 1:15 CV 2603
)	
Plaintiff,)	JUDGE PATRICIA A. GAUGHAN
)	
v.)	
)	<u>Memorandum of Opinion and Order</u>
Doctor Houghlen, et al.,)	
)	
Defendants.)	

INTRODUCTION

Pro se Plaintiff Estarling Melendez filed this action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against Grafton Correctional Institution (“GCI”) Doctor Houghten and GCI Infirmary Employee John Doe. In the Complaint, Plaintiff claims Defendants refused to refer him to an orthopedic surgeon after he exacerbated an old injury to his right leg, foot, and ankle. He seeks an order from this Court requiring the Defendants to refer him to a specialist, and monetary damages.

BACKGROUND

Plaintiff claims he injured his right leg, ankle and foot in 2012 while he was incarcerated at the Marion Correctional Institution. Some time thereafter, he was transferred to GCI, where his cane and bottom bunk restriction were removed. On July 9, 2014, he fell from the top bunk.

He alleges he requested immediate care from the infirmary, but was not scheduled to see a physician. He states he was denied an MRI because x-rays taken of his leg, ankle, and foot showed no signs of injury. He contends the decision to deny his referral to an orthopedic surgeon or other specialist was based solely on cost. He alleges he continues to suffer pain and loss of mobility. Plaintiff asserts the Defendants were deliberately indifferent to his serious medical needs in violation of the Eighth Amendment.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

Although *pro se* pleadings are liberally construed, *Boag v. MacDougall*, 454 U.S. 364, 365 (1982) (per curiam); *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), the Court is required to dismiss an *in forma pauperis* action under 28 U.S.C. §1915(e) if it fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or if it lacks an arguable basis in law or fact. *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319 (1989); *Lawler v. Marshall*, 898 F.2d 1196 (6th Cir. 1990); *Sistrunk v. City of Strongsville*, 99 F.3d 194, 197 (6th Cir. 1996). A claim lacks an arguable basis in law or fact when it is premised on an indisputably meritless legal theory or when the factual contentions are clearly baseless. *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327.

A cause of action fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted when it lacks “plausibility in the Complaint.” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 564 (2007). A pleading must contain a “short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 677-78 (2009). The factual allegations in the pleading must be sufficient to raise the right to relief above the speculative level on the assumption that all the allegations in the Complaint are true. *Bell Atl. Corp.*, 550 U.S. at 555. The Plaintiff is not required to include detailed factual allegations, but must provide more than

“an unadorned, the-Defendant-unlawfully-harmed-me accusation.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678. A pleading that offers legal conclusions or a simple recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not meet this pleading standard. *Id.* In reviewing a Complaint, the Court must construe the pleading in the light most favorable to the Plaintiff. *Bibbo v. Dean Witter Reynolds, Inc.*, 151 F.3d 559, 561 (6th Cir.1998).

DISCUSSION

The Eighth Amendment imposes a constitutional limitation on the power of the states to punish those convicted of crimes. Punishment may not be “barbarous” nor may it contravene society’s “evolving standards of decency.” *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 346 (1981). The Eighth Amendment protects inmates by requiring that “prison officials ... ensure that inmates receive adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medical care, and ... ‘take reasonable measures to guarantee the safety of the inmates.’ ” *Id.* at 832 (quoting *Hudson v. Palmer*, 468 U.S. 517, 526-27 (1984)). This, however, does not mandate that a prisoner be free from discomfort or inconvenience during his or her incarceration. *Ivey v. Wilson*, 832 F.2d 950, 954 (6th Cir. 1987) (per curiam) (quoting *Rhodes*, 452 U.S. at 346). Prisoners are not entitled to unfettered access to the medical treatment of their choice, see *Hudson v. McMillian*, 503 U.S. 1, 9 (1992), nor can they “expect the amenities, conveniences and services of a good hotel.” *Harris v. Fleming*, 839 F.2d 1232, 1235 (7th Cir.1988); see *Thaddeus-X v. Blatter*, 175 F.3d 378, 405 (6th Cir. 1999). In sum, the Eighth Amendment affords the constitutional minimum protection against conditions of confinement which constitute health threats, but does address those conditions which cause the prisoner to feel merely uncomfortable, or cause aggravation or annoyance. *Hudson*, 503 U.S. at 9-10 (requiring extreme or grave deprivation).

The Supreme Court in *Wilson v. Seiter*, 501 U.S. 294, 298 (1991), set forth a framework for courts to use when deciding whether certain conditions of confinement constitute cruel and unusual punishment prohibited by the Eighth Amendment. A Plaintiff must first plead facts which, if true, establish that a sufficiently serious deprivation has occurred. *Id.* Seriousness is measured in response to “contemporary standards of decency.” *Hudson*, 503 U.S. at 8. Routine discomforts of prison life do not suffice. *Id.* Only deliberate indifference to serious medical needs or extreme deprivations regarding the conditions of confinement will implicate the protections of the Eighth Amendment. *Id.* at 9. A Plaintiff must also establish a subjective element showing the prison officials acted with a sufficiently culpable state of mind. *Id.* Deliberate indifference is characterized by obduracy or wantonness, not inadvertence or good faith error. *Whitley v. Albers*, 475 U.S. 312, 319 (1986). Liability cannot be predicated solely on negligence. *Id.* A prison official violates the Eighth Amendment only when both the objective and subjective requirements are met. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 834 (1994).

In the context of a claim regarding medical treatment, an inmate must show two elements to demonstrate a violation of his Eighth Amendment rights: 1) that he was suffering from a “serious” medical need; and 2) that the prison officials were “deliberately indifferent” to the serious medical need. *Id.* It is clear from the foregoing that the duty to provide a certain level of health care to incarcerated offenders under the Eighth Amendment is a limited one. “Not ‘every ache and pain or medically recognized condition involving some discomfort can support an Eighth Amendment claim.’” *Sarah v. Thompson*, No. 03–2633, 2004 WL 2203585 (6th Cir. Sept. 15, 2004) (quoting *Gutierrez v. Peters*, 111 F.3d 1364, 1372 (7th Cir.1997)).

When evaluating an Eighth Amendment claim regarding medical treatment, the Court must first

determine whether Plaintiff's medical condition is sufficiently serious to invoke Eighth Amendment protection. If it is, the Court must then proceed to inquire whether the Defendants exhibited deliberate indifference to that condition.

In this case, Plaintiff has not demonstrated a sufficiently serious medical condition. He indicates he aggravated an old injury and wants to be referred to a surgeon or a specialist for treatment. He does not elaborate on the type of injury he had originally at the Marion Correctional Institution. He alleges the prison physicians will not grant his request to see a surgeon because the x-rays taken of his leg, foot and ankle do not show an injury. Based on these allegations, it appears Plaintiff simply disagrees with the medical diagnosis. Differences of opinion, without more, do not rise to the level of an Eighth Amendment violation. *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 107 (1976).

CONCLUSION

Accordingly, this action is dismissed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1915(e). The Court certifies, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3), that an appeal from this decision could not be taken in good faith.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

/s/ Patricia A. Gaughan
PATRICIA A. GAUGHAN
United States District Judge

Dated: 2/1/16