

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

MICHAEL TROY CARNEY,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 1:11-cv-89

v.

Honorable Robert Holmes Bell

J. PRELESNIK et al.,

Defendants.

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OPINION

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, PUB. L. NO. 104-134, 110 STAT. 1321 (1996), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A; 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must read Plaintiff’s *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff’s allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, Plaintiff’s action will be dismissed for failure to state a claim.

Discussion

I. Factual allegations

Plaintiff Michael Troy Carney presently is incarcerated with the MDOC and housed at the Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility (MTU). He sues the following MTU employees: Warden J. Prelesnik, Assistant Deputy Warden (unknown) Ball, Resident Unit Manager (unknown) Brown, and Correctional Officer (unknown) Fisher. He also sues an MTU inmate, (unknown) Matsey.

According to the complaint, Defendant Matsey arrived at MTU on December 2, 2009 and was assigned to Plaintiff's cell. Plaintiff claims that Matsey was obviously mentally unstable at the time. Plaintiff complained to Defendant Brown about Matsey, but he was informed that no bed was available in a specialized mental-health unit. On December 4, 2009, Matsey attacked Plaintiff, stabbing him in the face with a pencil. Plaintiff contends that the assault could have been avoided if Matsey had been properly classified. He complains that Defendants were negligent, thereby compromising his safety. In addition, he alleges that the Warden was responsible for approving a policy of randomly placing all new prisoners, regardless of their histories.

Plaintiff seeks an injunction restricting the placement of MTU inmates, together with compensatory damages.

II. Failure to state a claim

A complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim if “it fails to give the defendant fair notice of what the . . . claim is and the grounds upon which it rests.” *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (quoting *Conley v. Gibson*, 355 U.S. 41, 45-46 (1957)). While a complaint need not contain detailed factual allegations, a plaintiff's allegations must include

more than labels and conclusions. *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555; *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 1949 (2009) (“Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.”). The court must determine whether the complaint contains “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570. “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Iqbal*, 129 S. Ct. at 1949. Although the plausibility standard is not equivalent to a “probability requirement,’ . . . it asks for more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted unlawfully.” *Iqbal*, 129 S. Ct. at 1949 (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 556). “[W]here the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged – but it has not ‘show[n]’ – that the pleader is entitled to relief.” *Iqbal*, 129 S. Ct. at 1950 (quoting FED. R. CIV. P. 8(a)(2)); see also *Hill v. Lappin*, ___ F.3d ___, 2010 WL 5288892, at *2 (6th Cir. Dec. 28, 2010) (holding that the *Twombly/Iqbal* plausibility standard applies to dismissals of prisoner cases on initial review under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A(b)(1) and 1915(e)(2)(B)(i)).

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Dominguez v. Corr. Med. Servs.*, 555 F.3d 543, 549 (6th Cir. 2009). Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

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, 345-46 (1981). The Amendment, therefore, prohibits conduct by prison officials that involves the "unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain." *Ivey v. Wilson*, 832 F.2d 950, 954 (6th Cir. 1987) (per curiam) (quoting *Rhodes*, 452 U.S. at 346). The deprivation alleged must result in the denial of the "minimal civilized measure of life's necessities." *Rhodes*, 452 U.S. at 347; *see also Wilson v. Yaklich*, 148 F.3d 596, 600-01 (6th Cir. 1998). The Eighth Amendment is only concerned with "deprivations of essential food, medical care, or sanitation" or "other conditions intolerable for prison confinement." *Rhodes*, 452 U.S. at 348 (citation omitted). Moreover, "[n]ot every unpleasant experience a prisoner might endure while incarcerated constitutes cruel and unusual punishment within the meaning of the Eighth Amendment." *Ivey*, 832 F.2d at 954.

In its prohibition of "cruel and unusual punishments," the Eighth Amendment places restraints on prison officials, directing that they may not use excessive physical force against prisoners and must also "take reasonable measures to guarantee the safety of the inmates." *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 832 (1994) (quoting *Hudson v. Palmer*, 468 U.S. 517, 526-527 (1984)). To establish liability under the Eighth Amendment, plaintiff must show that the prison officials acted with "deliberate indifference" to a substantial risk that the defendant would cause prisoners serious harm. *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834; *Helling v. McKinney*, 509 U.S. 25, 32 (1993); *Greene v. Bowles*, 361 F.3d 290, 294 (6th Cir. 2004); *Curry v. Scott*, 249 F.3d 493, 506 (6th Cir. 2001); *Woods v. Lecureux*, 110 F.3d 1215, 1222 (6th Cir. 1997); *Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). A finding of deliberate indifference has an objective and a subjective component. *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834. To fulfill the objective component, the prisoner "must show that he is incarcerated under conditions posing a substantial risk of serious harm." *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834.

The subjective component requires an inmate to show that prison officials have “a sufficiently culpable state of mind” in ignoring the risk to the prisoner. *Brown v. Bargery*, 207 F.3d 863, 867 (6th Cir. 2000) (citing *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834). Deliberate indifference “entails something more than mere negligence,” *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 835, but can be “satisfied by something less than acts or omissions for the very purpose of causing harm or with knowledge that harm will result.” *Id.* Under *Farmer*, “the official must both be aware of facts from which the inference could be drawn that a substantial risk of serious harm exists, and he must also draw the inference.” *Id.* at 837.

In the instant case, Plaintiff’s allegations, at best, show that Defendant officials were negligent in placing Matsey in the same cell with Plaintiff. Although Plaintiff alleges that “it was obvious [Matsey] had severe mental instability,” he alleges no facts that would show that an average prison employee would have understood that Matsey’s instability created a substantial risk that Matsey would attack Plaintiff. Plaintiff suggests that Matsey’s mental condition warranted placing him in a mental-health unit and that Brown implicitly agreed with that assessment by saying that such a placement was unavailable. But a mere understanding that a mental-health placement would be appropriate for a prisoner does not indicate an understanding that the prisoner presents a substantial risk of assaultive behavior. Plaintiff’s allegations therefore fall far short of demonstrating that any Defendant knew that Plaintiff was at substantial risk of serious harm.

Moreover, Plaintiff’s claim against Matsey is not cognizable under § 1983. As previously discussed, to state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must show that he was deprived of his constitutional rights by a person acting under color of state law. *West*, 487 U.S. 42, 48; *Dominguez v. Corr. Med. Servs.*, 555 F.3d 543, 549 (6th Cir. 2009); *Street*, 102 F.3d 810, 814. In order for a private party’s conduct to be under color of state law, it must be “fairly attributable to

the State.” *Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co.*, 457 U.S. 922, 937 (1982); *Street*, 102 F.3d at 814. There must be “a sufficiently close nexus between the State and the challenged action of [the defendant] so that the action of the latter may be fairly treated as that of the State itself.” *Skelton v. Pri-Cor, Inc.*, 963 F.2d 100, 102 (6th Cir. 1991) (citing *Jackson v. Metro. Edison Co.*, 419 U.S. 345, 351 (1974)). Plaintiff has not presented any allegations by which Matsey’s conduct could be fairly attributed to the State. Accordingly, he fails to state a § 1983 claim against Matsey.

Conclusion

Having conducted the review now required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Court determines that Plaintiff’s action will be dismissed for failure to state a claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c).

The Court must next decide whether an appeal of this action would be in good faith within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997). For the same reasons that the Court dismisses the action, the Court discerns no good-faith basis for an appeal. Should Plaintiff appeal this decision, the Court will assess the \$455.00 appellate filing fee pursuant to § 1915(b)(1), *see McGore*, 114 F.3d at 610-11, unless Plaintiff is barred from proceeding *in forma pauperis*, e.g., by the “three-strikes” rule of § 1915(g). If he is barred, he will be required to pay the \$455.00 appellate filing fee in one lump sum.

This is a dismissal as described by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

A Judgment consistent with this Opinion will be entered.

Dated: February 24, 2011

/s/ Robert Holmes Bell

ROBERT HOLMES BELL
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE