## IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF THE STATE OF NEVADA

MARILEE BROWN; MARILOU BROWN; AND GREGORY J. BROWN (FOR BEVERLY M. BROWN'S FAMILY),

Appellants,

vs.
ST. MARY'S REGIONAL MEDICAL
CENTER; TAMMY EVANS
(ERRONEOUSLY NAMED AS TAMI
EVANS); PREM REDDY, M.D.;
TANZEEL ISLAM, M.D.; AND SRIDEVI
CHALLAPALLI, M.D.; AND MARK
MCCALLISTER, M.D.,

Respondents.

No. 81434-COA

FILED

JAN 07 2021

CLERK OF SUPREME COURT
BY DEPUTY CLERK

### ORDER REGARDING PRO BONO COUNSEL

This is an appeal from an order dismissing appellants' claims for medical malpractice and associated claims. Having considered the documents transmitted by the district court, this court has determined that the appointment of pro bono counsel to represent appellants would assist this court in reviewing this appeal. By this order, the court expresses no opinion as to the merits of this appeal.

Pro bono counsel is an attorney who provides legal services without charge for the benefit of the public good. The appointment of pro bono counsel provides attorneys with an opportunity to volunteer legal services in furtherance of their professional responsibility and, at the same time, allows financially eligible litigants access to quality legal representation without cost. Counsel will be appointed for purposes of this appeal only and will participate in oral argument. Currently, the Pro Bono Committee of the Appellate Litigation Section of the State Bar of Nevada

COURT OF APPEALS
OF
NEVADA

21-00407

(Pro Bono Committee), in conjunction with the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, has developed a pro bono appellate program to assist the public and this court. This case is hereby referred to the program established by the Pro Bono Committee to evaluate whether appellants can benefit from the program.

Accordingly, the clerk of this court is directed to transmit a copy of this order and the attached district court order and case summary to the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada for financial eligibility screening. If appellants qualify and do not object to pro bono counsel, the Legal Aid Center in cooperation with the Pro Bono Committee shall locate a volunteer attorney from the program to represent appellants. Once an attorney is located, the attorney shall file a notice of appearance in this court within 60 days from the date of this order. Briefing and oral argument will be scheduled thereafter. Alternatively, if appellants are not financially eligible or object to pro bono representation, or if a volunteer attorney cannot be located, the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada shall notify this court in writing within 60 days from the date of this order. In such case, oral argument will not be held. The proceedings in this appeal shall be suspended pending further order of this court.

It is so ORDERED.

\_\_\_\_, C.J.

cc: Gregory J. Brown

Marilee Brown

Marilou Brown

Lemons, Grundy & Eisenberg

Hall Prangle & Schoonveld, LLC/Las Vegas

Hall Prangle & Schoonveld/Reno

Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, Barbara E. Buckley, Executive Director

Anne R. Traum, Coordinator, Appellate Litigation Section, Pro Bono Committee, State Bar of Nevada

Kelly Dove

Docket No. 81434

Brown v. St. Mary's Regional Medical Center

Appellants filed a medical malpractice action against respondents alleging that their mother, Beverly Morris Brown, died as a result of negligent treatment she received from respondents. The district court granted respondents' motion to dismiss, determining that dismissal was required as appellants failed to include the requisite affidavit pursuant to NRS 41A.071. In their informal opening brief, appellants argue that at least some of their claims were not based upon medical negligence and thus, should not have been dismissed for failure to include an affidavit.

F1LED
Electronically
CV20-00422
2020-06-08 08:12:55 AM
Jacqueline Bryant
Clerk of the Court
Transaction # 7912510

Brown's family),

VS.

ORDER GRANTING MOTION TO DISMISS PLAINTIFFS' COMPLAINT
FOR FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH NRS 41A.071

Currently before the Court is Defendants Saint Mary's Regional Medical Center

Defendants.

MARILEE BROWN, MARILOU BROWN, GREGORY J. BROWN (for Beverly M.

ST. MARY'S REGIONAL MEDICAL

BUSINESSES I through X, inclusive,

CENTER; TAMI EVANS; PREM REDDY,

M.D.; MARK McALLISTER, M.D.; TANZEEL ISLAM, M.D.; SRIDEVI CHALLAPALLI,

M.D., and DOES I through X, inclusive; ROE

Plaintiffs,

Currently before the Court is Defendants Saint Mary's Regional Medical Center, Tammy Evans (erroneously named as Tami Evans), and Prem Reddy, M.D.'s (collectively "Defendants Saint Mary's") Motion to Dismiss Plaintiffs' Complaint for Failure to Comply with NRS 41A.071 ("Motion") filed March 26, 2020. On April 13, 2020, Plaintiffs filed an Opposition to Defendants' Motion to Dismiss – to Include Amendments/Clarification, et al as Specified in Their Civil Complaint; and Amendment Request Here to Include Additional Plaintiff (Return Service of Summons and Additional Laintiff [sic] Documentation Submitted Separately) ("Opposition"). On April 20, 2020, Defendants filed a Reply in Support of Motion to Dismiss and submitted the Motion to the Court for

IN THE SECOND JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT OF THE STATE OF NEVADA IN AND FOR THE

COUNTY OF WASHOE

Case No .:

Dept. No.:

CV20-00422

consideration. On May 15, 2020, Defendants Saint Mary's filed an Errata to Defendants St. Mary's Regional Medical Center, Tammy Evans, and Prem Reddy M.D.'s Reply in Support of Motion to Dismiss. Plaintiffs filed Plaintiffs' (a) Opposition to Defendant Tammy Evans' (Tiffany Coury) / Prem Reddy MD's May 15, 2020 Errata Related to Plaintiffs' May 14, 2020 (& Prior) Default Motions Against Defendants Tanzeel Islam and Sridevi Chapallapalli; (b) in Support of Plaintiffs' May 6/14, 2020 Supplemental & Dismissal Filings Nexused to Defendants' Replies/Errata; (c) With Plaintiffs' Notice of Their Request for Submission of all Adjudicated Filings for no Response / Other (Separate Filings) on May 28, 2020.

## I. Background

On March 3, 2020, Plaintiffs filed the Civil Complaint ("Complaint") in this case which alleges medical negligence / malpractice. See generally Compl. On April 13, 2020, Plaintiffs filed an Amendment to Civil Complaint / Return Service of Summons ("Amendment to Complaint") which sought to substitute Tiffany Coury for Defendant Tammy Evans and add Mr. Gregory J. Brown as a Plaintiff but did not alter or add to the factual allegations set forth in the Complaint. See generally Am. to Compl. Plaintiffs allege Beverly Morris Brown ("Ms. Brown") died on March 5, 2019 as a result of the treatment she received in December 2018 and February 2019 from Defendants. Mot. at 3:8–12.

#### II. Relevant Legal Authority

In reviewing a motion to dismiss pursuant to Nevada Rules of Civil Procedure Rule 12(b)(5) for failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, the "court must construe the pleadings liberally and accept all factual allegations in the complaint as true . . .[and] draw every fair inference in favor of the non-moving party. 'A complaint will not be dismissed for failure to state a claim unless it appears beyond a doubt that the plaintiff could prove no set of facts which, if accepted by the trier of fact, would entitle him or her to relief." Blackjack Bonding v. City of Las Vegas Mun. Court, 116 Nev. 1213, 1217, 14 P.3d 1275, 1278 (2000) (citing Simpson v. Mars. Inc., 113 Nev. 188, 190, 929 P.2d 966, 967 (1997)). As Nevada is a "notice-pleading" jurisdiction, a complaint need only set forth sufficient facts to demonstrate the necessary elements of a claim for relief so that the defending party has "adequate notice of the nature of the claim and relief sought." Hay v. Hay, 100 Nev. 196, 198,

678 P.2d 672, 674 (1984); see also Stockmeier v. Nevada Dep't of Corrections, 124 Nev. 313, 316, 183 P.3d 133, 135 (2008) (dismissing a claim, pursuant to NRCP 12(b)(5), is proper where the allegations are insufficient to establish the elements of a claim for relief).

NRS 41A.071 provides:

If an action for professional negligence is filed in the district court, the district court shall dismiss the action, without prejudice, if the action is filed without an affidavit that:

- 1. Supports the allegations contained in the action;
- 2. Is submitted by a medical expert who practices or has practiced in an area that is substantially similar to the type of practice engaged in at the time of the alleged professional negligence;
- 3. Identifies by name, or describes by conduct, each provider of health care who is alleged to be negligent; and
- 4. Sets forth factually a specific act or acts of alleged negligence separately as to each defendant in simple, concise and direct terms.

The Nevada Supreme Court has held that pursuant to NRS 41A.071 "a complaint filed without a supporting medical expert affidavit is void ab initio and must be dismissed. Because a void complaint does not legally exist, it cannot be amended . . . and an NRS 41A.071 defect cannot be cured through amendment." Washoe Med. Ctr. v. Second Judicial Dist. Court of State of Nev. ex rel. Cty. of Washoe, 122 Nev. 1298, 1301–02, 148 P.3d 790, 792 (2006). The court went on to state that the "shall" in NRS 41A.071 "is mandatory and does not denote judicial discretion." Id. at 1303 (citations omitted).

NRS 41A.015 defines professional negligence as: "[t]he failure of a provider of health care, in rendering services, to use the reasonable care, skill or knowledge used under similar circumstances by similarly trained and experienced providers of health care." When a plaintiff's claim is for injuries resulting from negligent medical treatment, the claim sounds in medical malpractice. Szymborski v. Spring Mountain Treatment Center, 133 Nev. 638, 642, 403 P.3d 1280, 1284 (2017) (citations omitted). Szymborski stands for the proposition that "allegations of breach of duty involving medical judgment, diagnosis, or treatment indicate that a claim is for medical malpractice." Id. When a plaintiff's claim is for injuries resulting from negligent acts that did not affect the medical treatment of a patient, the claim sounds in ordinary negligence. Id. (citations omitted). If the alleged breach of

a duty of care set forth in the complaint is one that was based upon medical art or science, training or expertise, then it is a claim for medical malpractice. *Id.* (citations omitted). By extension, if the jury can only evaluate the plaintiff's claims after presentation of the standards of care by a medical expert, then it is a medical malpractice case. *Id.* (citing, *Humboldt Gen. Hosp. v. Sixth Judicial Dist. Court*, 132 Nev. 544, 550–51, 376 P3d 167, 172 (2016). If, on the other hand, the reasonableness of the health care provider's actions can be evaluated by jurors on the basis of their common knowledge and experience, then the claim is likely based in ordinary negligence. *Id.* 133 Nev. at 642 (citations omitted). Given the subtle distinction, a single set of circumstances may sound in both ordinary negligence and medical malpractice, and an inartful complaint will likely use terms that invoke both causes of action. *Id.* (citing, *Mayo v. United States*, 785 F.Supp.2d 692, 695 (M.D. Tenn. 2011)). It is the nature of the grievance rather than the form of the pleadings that determines the character of the action. *Id.* (citing, *State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co. v. Wharton*, 88 Nev. 183, 186, 495 P.2d 359, 361 (1972)).

# III. Analysis

Defendants Saint Mary's argue all of Plaintiffs' factual claims arise out of medical care, treatment, and alleged breaches of the medical providers' duties of care and therefore sound in medical malpractice. Mot. at 4:3-5; 5:19-22. Defendants Saint Mary's maintain all of Plaintiffs' allegations fall within the definition of professional negligence pursuant to NRS 41A.015. *Id.* at 5:26-6:4. Defendants Saint Mary's contend Plaintiffs failed to satisfy the affidavit requirement pursuant to NRS 41A.071 and the Complaint must be dismissed. *Id.* at 6:5-7:10.

Plaintiffs request a hearing to clarify this matter. Opp. at 1:15. Plaintiffs contend their claims in the Complaint rely upon other statutes. *Id.* at 2:13–14. Plaintiffs assert the Complaint can be tolled pursuant to NRS 41A.097(2) and that should be considered as a mitigating factor and for this Court to maintain all the issues until Plaintiffs can obtain a medical expert affidavit because such a dismissal would be prejudicial to Plaintiffs as they may not be able to re-file any medical issues due to running of the statute of limitations. *Id.* at 2:15–3:5; 5:3–6. Plaintiffs assert it is within this Court's discretion whether to dismiss the action. *Id.* at 3:5–6. Plaintiffs insist the word "shall" in NRS 41A.071 is not mandatory and argue cases should be decided upon the merits rather than dismissed on procedural

grounds. *Id.* at 3:11–4:7. Plaintiffs claim because pleadings of a pro per litigant are held to a less stringent standard, the Complaint should not be dismissed. *Id.* at 4:8–9. Plaintiffs insist there are factual allegations in the Complaint that are non-medical including: (1) failure to follow protocol; (2) lack of communication; (3) age/other discrimination / jeopardy to the elderly; (4) negligence jeopardizing patients/others safety related to infectious persons; and (5) failure to expedite medical documentation that jeopardized this patient's case. *Id.* at 4:9–14; 5:6–12. Plaintiffs state that in the Complaint they requested the ability to amend the Complaint, and they should be allowed to do so in this instance without having all of their non-medical claims dismissed as that would cause significant hardship. *Id.* at 5:12–16.

Plaintiffs then claim they themselves are sufficiently familiar with this case to prepare a joint affidavit that illustrates their education, experience, and caretaking of patients that will suffice until Plaintiffs can obtain a proper medical expert affidavit if required. *Id.* at 6:11–24. Plaintiffs assert it is difficult to obtain written or testimonial support from medical experts because they fear reprisal, damage to their reputation, or denial of hospital rights in speaking out. *Id.* at 8:9–16. Plaintiffs allege Defendants Saint Mary's failed to perform an investigation into the facts surrounding Ms. Brown's death and instead engaged in a coverup. *Id.* at 9:16–20. Plaintiffs maintain a jury can evaluate Plaintiffs claims despite any procedural shortcomings, especially those based on the nonmedical functions. *Id.* at 11:14–19. Plaintiffs state that it is the substance rather than the form of the claim that must be examined. *Id.* at 16:21–17:1. Plaintiffs request this Court allow them to amend the Complaint to: (1) add age/other discrimination violations; (2) add Gregory J. Brown as a Plaintiff; (3) clarify, correct, and amend the Complaint; and (4) time to secure a medical expert affidavit if necessary. *Id.* at 20:13–22.

In the Reply, Defendants Saint Mary's maintain the application of NRS 41A.071 focuses on whether a defendant is a provider of health care and whether the allegations in a complaint contemplate a failure in rendering of services by that provider. Reply at 5:3-7. Defendants Saint Mary's argue that all of the allegations are in relation to medical care and treatment provided to Ms.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The Amendment to the Complaint adding/substituting parties was filed concurrently with the Opposition on April 13, 2020 and does not allege any claims for discrimination or request additional time to secure a medical expert affidavit.

Brown at Saint Mary's Regional Medical Center, a licensed hospital and the respective physicians who practice there. *Id.* at 5:8–18. Defendants Saint Mary's maintain a plaintiff cannot avoid application of NRS 41A.071 through artful pleading and emphasize Plaintiffs' claims arise out of breaches of duties involving medical judgment, diagnosis, or treatment. *Id.* at 5:19–6:2. Defendants Saint Mary's point out that the Nevada Supreme Court has held that "allegations of negligent maintenance of medical records are properly characterized as medical malpractice." *Id.* at 6:5–8; *Jones v. Wilkin*, 111 Nev. 1335, 1338, 905 P.2d 166, 168 (1995). Defendants Saint Mary's argue Plaintiffs seek to impose liability for treatment Ms. Brown received for a foot wound, an atrial fibrillation, an improper amputation, low oxygen levels, and a pulmonary injury. Reply at 6:14–16. Defendants Saint Mary's state these allegations clearly implicate professional negligence and the Complaint repeatedly describes these claims as one for medical malpractice. *Id.* at 6:14–19. Defendants Saint Mary's also contend Plaintiffs lack standing to bring this suit as self-represented litigants on behalf of their mother's estate. *Id.* at 7:1–8:2.

Having reviewed the pleadings on file and having reviewed the facts and legal support set forth therein, this Court finds good cause to grant the Motion. For NRS 41A.071 to apply to this action, it must be an action for professional negligence. Plaintiffs allege "Defendants did commit Medical Negligent actions to include Medicinal, Treatment, Judgment, protocol, Etc [sic] errors, against the Plaintiffs which led to the Wrongful Suffering and Death of their mother . . . ." Compl. at 14:26–27. This language or substantially similar language is repeated three times in this section of the Complaint. *Id.* at 14:22–15:13. Further, all of the allegations contained in the Complaint directly involve medical judgment, diagnosis, or treatment that Ms. Brown allegedly received or should have received, which the Nevada Supreme Court has held means the claim sounds in professional negligence. *Szymborski*, 133 Nev. at 642.

This Court has reviewed the allegations contained in the Complaint. Contrary to Plaintiffs' claim that there are factual allegations in the Complaint that are non-medical (to include failure to follow protocol, lack of communication, age/other discrimination/jeopardy to the elderly, negligence jeopardizing patients/others safety related to infectious persons, and failure to expedite medical documentation that jeopardized this patient's case) each of these allegations is inextricably tied to a

claim for professional negligence and Plaintiffs cannot now claim otherwise for the sole purpose of remedying a violation of NRS 41A.071.

To evaluate whether the medical professionals in this case followed established protocol necessarily requires expert testimony to explain the standard of care. *Id.* The protocol Plaintiffs claim was not followed related to the amount and type of medication administered to Ms. Brown which is rooted in professional negligence, as the Complaint contends that the physicians prescribed the medication. Compl. at 3:22–27.

As to the alleged "lack of communication," the only usage of the word "communication" in the Complaint deals with "the communication between providers and patients/patients' families so as to ensure the improvement of quality care, healthcare Improvement and less Medical Medicinal, Judgment mistakes/error that lead to the deteriorating medical condition, suffering and preventable death of patients as what happened in this case . . . ." Compl. at 16:26–17:2. The failure of communication alleged is related directly to quality of care, the deteriorating medical condition, suffering and preventable death of Ms. Brown and thus is rooted in professional negligence. Szymborski, 133 Nev. at 642. In some instances, the failure to communicate is co-extensive with the failure to follow procedure, and in other instances it overlaps with the failure to provide medical documentation. Mot. at 2:20–22; 9:16–10:2. Regardless, these do not form an independent basis for an ordinary negligence claim such that an expert affidavit would not be required in this case.

Further, the Complaint does not set forth a claim for age discrimination and there is no factual explanation or legal support for the allegation of "jeopardy to the elderly." Any negligence claim derived from exposure to an infected patient as alleged by Plaintiffs is purported to be the direct result of the medical decisions made for and treatment provided to Ms. Brown and as such falls squarely within the scope of a professional negligence claim. *Szymborski*, 133 Nev. at 642. As for the failure to expedite the medical documentation in this case, the Nevada Supreme Court has held "allegations of negligent maintenance of medical records are properly characterized as medical malpractice." *Jones*, 111 Nev. at 1338. Failure to expedite the medical documents is pertinent to the diagnosis and treatment of Ms. Brown and therefore does not state a claim for ordinary negligence. *Szymborski*, 133 Nev. at 642.

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

Moreover, and importantly, there are no separate claims for relief pled in the Complaint related to the purported non-medical claims. The Complaint sets forth a "Statement of Facts Main Medical Malpractice Information Summary," a "Background History," a "Primary Background Related to ISSUE AT HAND- Patient Beverly M. Brown," "ISSUE AT HAND FOR MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE/MALPRACTICE- History and Details," "MAIN MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE SUMMARY INFORMATION" and "MAIN MEDICAL MALPRACTICE INFORMATION (REITERATED)." With the exception of the "Background" sections, each of these headings references "Medical Malpractice" or "Medical Negligence" or both. There are no allegations in the Complaint related to ordinary negligence. By way of example, a reading of the section labeled "MAIN MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE SUMMARY INFORMATION" reveals allegations that pertain to Ms. Brown that relate to lack of care on behalf of treating physicians to include failure to look at Ms. Brown's "extensive medical information provided by the family," an "error in a pulmonary procedure by the Interventional Radiologist as they had been attempting to remove fluid from this patient's lungs" and removal of "critical life saving medication" "needed to prevent arterial blockages" that "ultimately led to Beverly M. Brown's blockages, stroke, heart stress/CHF UNCONTROLLABLE AFIB, returned infectious Pneumonia and Death at Renown hospital." Id. at 9:5-10; 10:18-20. To the extent Plaintiffs are now contending that claims for ordinary negligence were pled, they have failed to set forth the necessary elements of those claims and/or factual allegations sufficient to support those claims denying Defendants "adequate notice of the nature of the claim and relief sought" in violation of Hay.

Accordingly, this Court finds that Plaintiffs' Complaint (as originally filed and as amended to add or substitute parties) states a claim or claims for professional negligence and as such NRS 41A.071 applies. Plaintiffs admit that the Complaint does not contain a medical expert affidavit. Opp. at 3:3-6. As noted above, the Nevada Supreme Court has held that "a complaint filed without a supporting medical expert affidavit is void ab initio and must be dismissed. Because a void complaint does not legally exist, it cannot be amended . . . and an NRS 41A.071 defect cannot be cured through amendment" as well as pointing out that the word "shall" in NRS 41A.071 "is mandatory and does not denote judicial discretion." Washoe Med. Ctr., 122 Nev. at 1301-02, 1303.

The Nevada Supreme Court has acknowledged that NRS 41A.071 applies to all medical malpractice actions even if the person is representing themselves. Anderson v. Sierra Surgery Hosp., Case No. 58753, 2012 WL 2308670, \*1 (2012). As such, this Court finds that dismissal of Plaintiffs' Complaint is proper pursuant to NRS 41A.071. This Court does not reach Defendants Saint Mary's argument regarding Plaintiffs' standing because it has found the Complaint to be void ab initio pursuant to NRS 41A.071. Based upon the foregoing and good cause appearing, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that Defendants Saint Mary's Motion to Dismiss Plaintiffs' Complaint for Failure to Comply with NRS 41A.071 is GRANTED and this case is DISMISSED to include all motions that are pending or have been submitted to this Court. IT IS SO ORDERED. DATED this 8th day of June, 2020. Deskulut DISTRICT JUDGE 

1	CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE
2	CASE NO. CV20-00422
3	I certify that I am an employee of the SECOND JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT of
4	the STATE OF NEVADA, COUNTY OF WASHOE; that on the 8th day of June, 2020, I
5	electronically filed the ORDER GRANTING MOTION TO DISMISS PLAINTIFFS'
6	COMPLAINT FOR FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH NRS 41A.071 with the Clerk of the
7	Court by using the ECF system.
8	I further certify that I transmitted a true and correct copy of the foregoing document by the
9	method(s) noted below:
10	Electronically filed with the Clerk of the Court by using the ECF system which will send a notice
11	of electronic filing to the following:
12	EDWARD LEMONS, ESQ. for MARK MCALLISTER
13	RICHARD DE JONG, ESQ. for TAMI EVANS, PREM REDDY, M.D.,
14	ST. MARY'S REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER, et al.
15	ALICE CAMPOS MERCADO, ESQ for MARK MCALLISTER
16	Deposited to the Second Judicial District Court mailing system in a sealed envelope for postage
17	and mailing by Washoe County using the United States Postal Service in Reno, Nevada:
18	MARILEE BROWN
19	45 NIVES COURT
20	SPARKS, NV 89441
21	MARILOU BROWN
22	45 NIVES COURT SPARKS, NV 89441
23	
	GREGORY J BROWN 45 NIVES COURT
24	SPARKS, NV 89441
25	
26	

Department 1 Justicial Assistant