

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF DELAWARE

GERONE L. WEATHERSBY,

Plaintiff,

v.

CENTURION MANAGEMENT
CARE LLC, et al.,

Defendants.

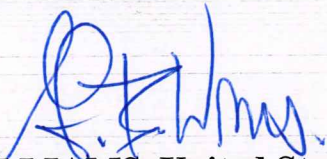
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: Civ. Action No. 23-144-GBW

Gerone L. Weathersby, Sussex Correctional Institution, Georgetown, Delaware,
Pro Se Plaintiff.

MEMORANDUM OPINION

November 1, 2023
Wilmington, Delaware



WILLIAMS, United States District Judge:

I. INTRODUCTION

Plaintiff Gerone L. Weathersby, an inmate at Sussex Correctional Institution (“SCI”) in Georgetown, Delaware, filed this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. (D.I. 3). He has filed two motions to amend (D.I. 8, 11). The Court will grant both motions and read the three pleadings as one. Plaintiff appears *pro se* and has been granted leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*. (D.I. 5). The Court proceeds to review and screen the Complaint, as amended, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(b) and § 1915A(a).

II. BACKGROUND

The following facts are taken from the Complaint and assumed to be true for screening purposes. *See Shorter v. United States*, 12 F.4th 366, 374 (3d Cir. 2021). In April 2022, Plaintiff experienced a medical emergency, stopped breathing, and was flown by helicopter from SCI to a hospital where he had surgery for cardiac arrest. Thereafter, however, Defendants Centurion Management Care LLC and Dr. Misty May never followed up with him. Although he feels healed, he feels that his medical injury is ongoing. He seeks \$5 million in damages.

III. SCREENING OF COMPLAINT

A federal court may properly dismiss an action *sua sponte* under the screening provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) if “the action is frivolous or

malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.” *Ball v. Famiglio*, 726 F.3d 448, 452 (3d Cir. 2013) (quotation marks omitted); *see also* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2) (*in forma pauperis* actions); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (civil actions filed by prisoners seeking redress from governmental entities or government officers and employees). The Court must accept all factual allegations in a complaint as true and take them in the light most favorable to a pro se plaintiff. *See Phillips v. County of Allegheny*, 515 F.3d 224, 229 (3d Cir. 2008). Because Plaintiff proceeds *pro se*, his pleading is liberally construed and his Complaint, “however inartfully pleaded, must be held to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.” *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007). A complaint is not automatically frivolous because it fails to state a claim. *See Dooley v. Wetzel*, 957 F.3d. 366, 374 (3d Cir. 2020). Rather, a claim is deemed frivolous only where it relies on an “‘indisputably meritless legal theory’ or a ‘clearly baseless’ or ‘fantastic or delusional’ factual scenario.’” *Id.*

The legal standard for dismissing a complaint for failure to state a claim pursuant to § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and § 1915A(b)(1) is identical to the legal standard used when ruling on Rule 12(b)(6) motions. *Tourscher v. McCullough*, 184 F.3d 236, 240 (3d Cir. 1999). However, before dismissing a complaint or claims for

failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted pursuant to the screening provisions of 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915 and 1915A, the Court must grant Plaintiff leave to amend his complaint unless amendment would be inequitable or futile. *See Grayson v. Mayview State Hosp.*, 293 F.3d 103, 114 (3d Cir. 2002).

A well-pleaded complaint must contain more than mere labels and conclusions. *See Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662 (2009); *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544 (2007). A plaintiff must plead facts sufficient to show that a claim has substantive plausibility. *See Johnson v. City of Shelby*, 574 U.S. 10, 12 (2014) (per curiam). A complaint may not be dismissed, however, for imperfect statements of the legal theory supporting the claim asserted. *See id.* at 11.

A court reviewing the sufficiency of a complaint must take three steps: (1) take note of the elements the plaintiff must plead to state a claim; (2) identify allegations that, because they are no more than conclusions, are not entitled to the assumption of truth; and (3) when there are well-pleaded factual allegations, assume their veracity and then determine whether they plausibly give rise to an entitlement to relief. *Connelly v. Lane Constr. Corp.*, 809 F.3d 780, 787 (3d Cir. 2016). Elements are sufficiently alleged when the facts in the complaint “show” that the plaintiff is entitled to relief. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2)). Deciding whether a claim is plausible will be a “context-specific task that

requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense.”

Id.

Plaintiff does not appear to allege an injury. Indeed, he alleges that he feels healed, but also feels that his injury is ongoing. It is unclear what this means, but it is insufficient to state a claim for deliberate indifference.

Furthermore, as to Centurion, when a plaintiff relies upon a theory of respondeat superior to hold a corporation liable (rather than its employees or agents themselves), he must allege a policy or custom that demonstrates such deliberate indifference. *See Natale v. Camden Cnty. Corr. Facility*, 318 F.3d 575, 584 (3d Cir. 2003) (because respondeat superior or vicarious liability cannot be a basis for liability under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a corporation under contract with the state cannot be held liable for the acts of its employees and agents under those theories). Ultimately, to establish that Centurion is directly liable for the alleged constitutional violations, Plaintiff “must provide evidence that there was a relevant [Centurion] policy or custom, and that the policy caused the constitutional violation[s] [Plaintiff] allege[s].” *Natale*, 318 F.3d at 583-84. The First Amendment to the Complaint attempts to accomplish this, but only through conclusory recitations of the legal standard just discussed.

As to Defendant May, a defendant in a civil rights action “cannot be held responsible for a constitutional violation which he or she neither participated in nor approved”; personal involvement in the alleged wrong is required. *Baraka v. McGreevey*, 481 F.3d 187, 210 (3d Cir. 2007); *see also Polk County v. Dodson*, 454 U.S. 312, 325 (1981) (holding that liability in a § 1983 action must be based on personal involvement, not *respondeat superior*). Such involvement may be “shown through allegations of personal direction or of actual knowledge and acquiescence.” *Evancho v. Fisher*, 423 F.3d 347, 353 (3d Cir. 2005). “Allegations of participation and acquiescence . . . must be made with appropriate particularity.” *Rode v. Dellarciprete*, 845 F.2d 1195, 1207 (3d Cir. 1988); *see also Parkell v. Danberg*, 833 F.3d 313, 330 (3d Cir. 2016). To the extent that Plaintiff has alleged an injury, he has failed to allege Defendant May’s personal involvement.

Accordingly, the Court will dismiss the Complaint for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and § 1915A(b)(1). However, since it appears plausible that Plaintiff may be able to articulate a claim, he will be given an opportunity to amend his pleading. *See O'Dell v. United States Gov't*, 256 F. App’x 444, 445 (3d Cir. 2007) (unpublished) (leave to amend is proper where the plaintiff’s claims do not appear “patently meritless and beyond all hope of redemption”).

IV. CONCLUSION

For the above reasons, the Court will: (1) grant Plaintiff's motions to amend; and (2) dismiss the Complaint pursuant 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and § 1915A(b)(1). Plaintiff will be given leave to file an amended complaint.

An appropriate order will be entered.