

Nnamani v Afaneh

2025 NY Slip Op 34673(U)

December 2, 2025

Supreme Court, New York County

Docket Number: Index No. 805088/2025

Judge: John J. Kelley

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**SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
NEW YORK COUNTY**

PRESENT: HON. JOHN J. KELLEY PART 56M

Justice

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ALEX NNAMANI, as the Proposed Administrator of the
Estate of LYDIA NNAMANI, Deceased, and ALEX
NNAMANI, Individually,

Plaintiff,

- v -

CHEGUEVARA AFANEH, M.D., and NEW YORK
PRESBYTERIAN HOSPITAL WEILL CORNELL MEDICAL
CENTER,

Defendants.

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INDEX NO. 805088/2025
MOTION DATE 10/06/2025
MOTION SEQ. NO. 001

**DECISION + ORDER ON
MOTION**

The following e-filed documents, listed by NYSCEF document number (Motion 001) 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26

were read on this motion to/for DISMISS.

In this action to recover damages for medical malpractice based on alleged departures from good and accepted practice, lack of informed consent, negligent hiring, training, supervision, and retention of healthcare personnel, wrongful death, and loss of spousal consortium, the defendants move pursuant to CPLR 3211(a) to dismiss the complaint based on the plaintiff's lack of capacity to prosecute the action (CPLR 3211[a][3]) and for failure to state a cause of action (CPLR 3211[a][7]). The plaintiff opposes the motion in part. The motion is granted on the ground that the plaintiff lacked capacity to commence this action on the date that he commenced it, and the complaint is dismissed, albeit without prejudice to commencement of a new action against the defendants for the same relief under a new index number by a duly authorized representative of the estate of the decedent, provided that the new action is timely commenced in accordance with CPLR 205(a).

The decedent, Lydia Nnamani, died on March 31, 2023. On March 31, 2025, the plaintiff commenced the instant action, naming himself as a party plaintiff, and purported to prosecute

this action on behalf of the decedent as a “proposed administrator” of the decedent’s estate.

There is no evidence that the plaintiff has yet to petition an appropriate court of competent jurisdiction for appointment as administrator of the decedent’s estate.

“A personal representative who has received letters of administration of a decedent’s estate [or letters testamentary] is the only party who is authorized to commence a survival action to recover damages for personal injuries sustained by the decedent or a wrongful death action to recover damages sustained by the decedent’s distributees on account of his or her death”

(*Shelley v South Shore Healthcare*, 123 AD3d 797, 797 [2d Dept 2014]; see *Gulledge v Jefferson County*, 172 AD3d 1666, 1667 [3d Dept 2019]; *Jordan v Metropolitan Jewish Hospice*, 122 AD3d 682, 683 [2d Dept 2014]; *Mingone v State of New York*, 100 AD2d 897, 899 [2d Dept 1984]; EPTL 1-2.13, 5-4.1 [1]; 11-3.2 [b]). Consequently, a “proposed administrator” lacks capacity to prosecute either a personal injury “survival” action or a wrongful death action on behalf of the estate of a decedent (see *Rodriguez v River Val. Care Ctr., Inc.*, 175 AD3d 432, 433 [1st Dept 2019]; *Richards v Lourdes Hosp.*, 58 AD3d 927, 927-928 [3d Dept 2009]; *Mendez v Kyung Yoo*, 23 AD3d 354, 355 [2d Dept 2005]; *Duran v Isabella Geriatric Ctr., Inc.*, 2023 NY Slip Op 30500[U], *9, 2023 NY Misc LEXIS 669, *12-13 [Sup Ct, N.Y. County, Feb. 15, 2023] [Kelley, J.]; *Castro v Fraser*, 2022 NY Slip Op 30903[U], *5, 2022 NY Misc LEXIS 1368, *7 [Sup Ct, N.Y. County, Mar. 15, 2022] [Kelley, J.]; *Stroble v Townhouse Operating Co.*, 2019 NY Misc LEXIS 18865 [Sup Ct, Nassau County, Dec. 16, 2019]; *Fleisher v Ballon Stoll Bader & Nadler, P.C.*, 2015 NY Slip Op 31855[U], *5, 2015 NY Misc LEXIS 3625, *6 [Sup Ct, N.Y. County, Oct. 5, 2015]).

The burden is on the defendants to establish that the plaintiff lacked capacity to commence this action (see *Bartel v Farrell Lines*, 215 AD3d 517, 526 [1st Dept 2023]). The defendants here have established that the plaintiff lacked capacity to commence the action on the date that he filed the summons and complaint, by noting that he had not been appointed as administrator or executor of the decedent’s estate as of that date. Where a plaintiff lacks capacity to prosecute an action, and a defendant timely moves to dismiss the complaint on that

ground, the complaint must be dismissed, and is not subject to an amendment to substitute either a proper plaintiff or an existing plaintiff who secured appointment as a proper administrator or executor of a decedent's estate during the pendency of the action. This is so because it is a "fatal defect" for a person who lacks capacity to commence an action, and that defect constitutes a "failure to comply with a condition precedent" (*Morris Investors, Inc. v Commissioner of Finance*, 121 AD2d 221, 224 [1st Dept 1986]). Even if the plaintiff had secured letters of administration during the pendency of this motion, the complaint must still be dismissed, since he may not make a belated motion to amend the complaint herein to allege that he now has capacity to prosecute the subject claims (see *Mingone v State of New York*, 100 at 899; *Cianciotto v Hospice Care Network*, 32 Misc 3d 916, 919 [Dist Ct, Nassau County 2011]; cf. *Favourite, Ltd. v Cico*, 42 NY3d 250, 260 [2024] [where dismissal of complaint due to dissolution of corporate plaintiff was without prejudice, Supreme Court did not lack discretion to consider motion to amend the complaint under CPLR 3025[b] where corporation thereafter was revived and motion was made within six months of dismissal]).

Nonetheless, although the plaintiff lacked capacity to prosecute this action at the time that he commenced it, his lack of capacity did not technically render the action a "nullity," and, hence, while the action remains "subject to grounds for dismissal," it nonetheless is "within the ambit of CPLR 205(a)" (*Sokoloff v Schor*, 176 AD3d 120, 124, 135-136 [2d Dept 2019]). As relevant here, CPLR 205(a) provides that:

"[i]f an action is timely commenced and is terminated in any other manner than by a voluntary discontinuance, a failure to obtain personal jurisdiction over the defendant, a dismissal of the complaint for neglect to prosecute the action, or a final judgment upon the merits, the plaintiff . . . may commence a new action upon the same transaction or occurrence or series of transactions or occurrences within six months after the termination provided that the new action would have been timely commenced at the time of commencement of the prior action and that service upon defendant is effected within such six-month period."

A "disposition based solely upon the absence of a duly appointed administrator does not preclude prosecution of the underlying claim through the mechanism of CPLR 205 (subd [a])

