

In the United States Court of Federal Claims

OFFICE OF SPECIAL MASTERS

No. 17-0341V

Filed: June 22, 2018

UNPUBLISHED

ALICIA DEBUSCA,

Petitioner,

v.

SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES,

Respondent.

Special Processing Unit (SPU);
Attorneys' Fees and Costs

*Randall Knutson, Knutson & Casey Law Firm, Mankato, MN, for petitioner.
Glenn Alexander MacLeod, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC, for
respondent.*

DECISION ON ATTORNEYS' FEES AND COSTS¹

Dorsey, Chief Special Master:

On March 13, 2017, petitioner filed a petition for compensation under the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, 42 U.S.C. §300aa-10, *et seq.*,² (the "Vaccine Act"). Petitioner alleges that she suffered severe right shoulder pain as a consequence of the influenza ("flu") vaccination she received on or about October 23, 2014. Petition at 1. On May 29, 2018, the undersigned issued a decision awarding compensation to petitioner based on the parties' stipulation. (ECF No. 41).

On June 1, 2018, petitioner filed a motion for attorneys' fees and costs. (ECF No. 45.) Petitioner requests attorneys' fees in the amount of \$19,838.00 and attorneys' costs in the amount of \$785.65. *Id.* at 1. In compliance with General Order #9,

¹ Because this unpublished decision contains a reasoned explanation for the action in this case, the undersigned intends to post it on the United States Court of Federal Claims' website, in accordance with the E-Government Act of 2002. 44 U.S.C. § 3501 note (2012) (Federal Management and Promotion of Electronic Government Services). In accordance with Vaccine Rule 18(b), petitioner has 14 days to identify and move to redact medical or other information, the disclosure of which would constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy. If, upon review, the undersigned agrees that the identified material fits within this definition, the undersigned will redact such material from public access.

² National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99-660, 100 Stat. 3755. Hereinafter, for ease of citation, all "§" references to the Vaccine Act will be to the pertinent subparagraph of 42 U.S.C. § 300aa (2012).

petitioner filed a signed statement indicating that petitioner incurred no out-of-pocket expenses. *Id.* at 1. Thus, the total amount requested is \$20,623.65.

On June 12, 2018, respondent filed a response to petitioner's motion. (ECF No. 46). Respondent argues that "[n]either the Vaccine Act nor Vaccine Rule 13 contemplates any role for respondent in the resolution of a request by a petitioner for an award of attorneys' fees and costs." *Id.* at 1. Respondent adds, however, that he "is satisfied the statutory requirements for an award of attorneys' fees and costs are met in this case." *Id.* at 2. Respondent "respectfully recommends that the Chief Special Master exercise her discretion and determine a reasonable award for attorneys' fees and costs." *Id.* at 3.

Petitioner has filed no reply.

The undersigned has reviewed the billing records submitted with petitioner's request. In the undersigned's experience, the request appears reasonable, and the undersigned finds no cause to reduce the requested hours or rates with the following exception.

It is clearly established that secretarial work "should be considered as normal overhead office costs included within the attorneys' fee rates." *Rochester v. U.S.*, 18 Cl. Ct. 379, 387 (1989); *Dingle v. Sec'y of Health & Human Servs.*, No. 08-579V, 2014 WL 630473, at *4 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Jan. 24, 2014). "[B]illing for clerical and other secretarial work is not permitted in the Vaccine Program." *Mostovoy*, No. 02-10V, 2016 WL 720969, at *5 (citing *Rochester*, 18 Cl. Ct. at 387). A total of 3.10 hours of time billed is considered administrative overhead. Examples of this time include December 4, 2015 (0.50 hrs) "Open file, create contact sheet, make labels, etc."; December 15, 2015 (1.40 hrs) "Send medical requests x7 facilities. Research fax numbers for ROI" and March 3, 2017 (0.80 hrs) "Organize records, separate past & present. Scan records, save & rename." (ECF No. 45-2 at 9-10). This time is considered administrative and the undersigned has reduced the request for fees in the amount of \$232.50.³

The Vaccine Act permits an award of reasonable attorneys' fees and costs. § 15(e). Based on the reasonableness of petitioner's request, the undersigned **GRANTS** petitioner's motion for attorneys' fees and costs.

Accordingly, the undersigned awards the total of \$20,391.15⁴ as a lump sum in the form of a check jointly payable to petitioner and petitioner's counsel Randall G. Knutson.

³ This amount is calculated by (3.1 * \$75 = \$232.50).

⁴ This amount is intended to cover all legal expenses incurred in this matter. This award encompasses all charges by the attorney against a client, "advanced costs" as well as fees for legal services rendered. Furthermore, § 15(e)(3) prevents an attorney from charging or collecting fees (including costs) that would

The clerk of the court shall enter judgment in accordance herewith.⁵

IT IS SO ORDERED.

s/Nora Beth Dorsey
Nora Beth Dorsey
Chief Special Master

be in addition to the amount awarded herein. *See generally Beck v. Sec'y of Health & Human Servs.*, 924 F.2d 1029 (Fed. Cir.1991).

⁵ Pursuant to Vaccine Rule 11(a), entry of judgment can be expedited by the parties' joint filing of notice renouncing the right to seek review.