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## “Doggedly Aggressive” Litigation: Success in Medical Malpractice Law with Smith Lacion’s Jason Williams

*By Emily Jackoway*



In his three years as a powerhouse trial lawyer at Chicago personal injury mainstay Smith LaCien, Jason Williams has yet to take a case to verdict.

He’s never needed to.

In just those few years, Williams has attained a stunning \$63.6M in wins for his clients – each one a victim of medical malpractice. The results range from a record-setting \$19M awarded to a family who lost a child due to an injury at birth, to a \$9.2M settlement reached at the end of 2024 on behalf of a family who lost a husband and father following an alleged delay in treatment at a Chicago-area hospital.

Those wins have been achieved through careful scientific research and fiery determination, proving in advance that going to trial would be the defense’s undoing. “If I had to

describe my style, it would be doggedly aggressive,” says Williams.

It’s a dedication he learned at the Virginia Military Institute and while he served in the Army’s 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and was deployed overseas. Williams graduated with a degree in International Studies from DePaul. He then earned his J.D. at the Chicago-Kent

College of Law at the Illinois Institute of Technology, leading him to a brief stint as a medical malpractice defense lawyer – inspired, in part, by his wife’s career as a doctor. Realizing he preferred being on the front foot, Williams began litigating plaintiffs’ commercial cases for a few years, and eventually opened his own shop, which he ran for eight years. In that time, he litigated a range of cases from medical malpractice to trusts and estates work to cutting-edge technology matters. Notably, he represented 17 governmental entities who had their data stolen in a widespread computer hacking litigation under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act – including arguing one case in the 7th Circuit.

In 2021, Williams moved over to Smith LaCien, where he has exclusively taken on plaintiffs’ medical malpractice cases. He’s seen major wins in that time, often in cases involving babies injured at birth. In 2023, for example, he reached a \$13.2M settlement with Cook County after a baby born in a county hospital was left with cerebral palsy and lifelong motor deficits because his mother was reportedly given too much of a contraction-enhancing drug during labor. Those cases often involve rigorous examination of the medical facts of the case, even attempting to disprove doctors’ medical findings; in one case, he took on the President of the Society for Maternal Fetal Medicine while demonstrating that the mother had likely experienced a placental abruption rather than an amniotic fluid embolism, as the defending hospital claimed.

A leader in the medical malpractice field, Williams is the current co-chair of the Medical Negligence Litigation Group for the American Association for Justice. “One of the true honors is to have a leadership role in the AAJ,” says Williams. “To interact with my peers and other leaders nationwide that are all ensuring access to our civil justice system for all persons.

“I’m lucky to be able to do the job that I do, and I am blessed to do it with the people that I work with every day,” he adds.

Williams is a member of the [Lawdragon 500 Leading Plaintiff Consumer Lawyers](#).

**Lawdragon:** How did you come to focus exclusively on medical malpractice?

**Jason Williams:** I’m married to a physician. So, I’ve had access to amazing teachers of medicine. That has been really helpful in terms of how I review and think about medical malpractice cases. Learning the medicine in a medical malpractice case is really about learning how doctors should behave – the standard of care. I’ve been exposed for a long time to what medicine looks like when it works properly, and what it looks like when it works improperly.

**LD:** How long have you focused exclusively on medical malpractice?

**JW:** Well, I started out as a med mal defense lawyer when my wife was in med school. I did that for about four years, and then I transitioned out of it, to commercial litigation and

estates and trust litigation. But I would still keep a hand in medical malpractice because people would refer me work, knowing what my wife did.

**LD:** And how did you meet Todd Smith and come over to Smith LaCien?

**JW:** The last case that I took to trial on my own – a medical malpractice case – actually ended up going up to the Supreme Court of Illinois, and that's how I met Todd.

**LD:** And this was while you had your own shop?

**JW:** Yeah, I had my own shop for about eight years, and then I had this medical malpractice case. Todd had heard about the case or read the opinion from the appellate court. He was interested in the issue. And I guess we had some mutual friends who put us in touch. I didn't know I knew people who knew Todd Smith. I mean, the man is an absolute legend. But Todd and I had a phone call, and he said to me, "This is such an important issue. I'll help you out in any way that I can."

**LD:** Wow.

**JW:** That just speaks to the quality of human being that Todd Smith is. Not only is he an amazing lawyer, but he's just one of the most decent and committed people who does what we do. It's an absolute honor to come to the same office every day. I don't view what I do as work. I am one of the luckiest people out there in that I get to really try and help people who have been wronged and who've been taken advantage of by big corporate medicine. And I get to work with just some of the best people who do this, and I get to learn from them.

**LD:** That's beautiful. So you came to the firm not long after that case?

**JW:** Not long after that case. Todd and I had a conversation where I expressed my gratitude for his help on the case. At one point he said, "Hey, I think we work well together. How would you like coming to work with me?" It took a nanosecond for me to say I would be very interested. I joined the firm shortly after that. And the most important word in that sentence is "with." We have such a collaborative environment.

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**LD:** Going back, what first interested you in a career in the law?

**JW:** In high school, I took an elective called American Problems and the Law, and it always interested me. And when I was 16, I went to the Soviet Union. It was the summer of 1989, and I was actually in Berlin about six weeks before the wall came down. I was sitting there

watching my TV in my living room in Naperville, Illinois, watching the Berlin Wall come down and just said to myself, "I was just there."

**LD:** Wow.

**JW:** That trip to Europe gave me two things. It gave me a sense of wanting to try and fix problems that I could see as much as I can. But it also gave me a sense of striving to get better and never being satisfied.

I had made a decision that I was going to go to the Virginia Military Institute and pursue a career in the military. I ended up in the 82nd Airborne Division jumping out of planes for a living. I learned in the Army that international law is either agreed to or done at the point of a weapon. So, international law is mainly about power, and whoever has the most power makes the rules. And that's what's really great about our system of civil justice in this country, is that we all have the same power to have our disputes resolved by 12 equal citizens. It is a great leveling of the playing field.

**LD:** So, you went to law school after the Army?

**JW:** After the Army, yeah. I got out of the Army because I met my wife in a bar in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She was a grad student there. We decided to get married and moved back to Chicago, and then she put me through law school, and then I put her through med school.

**LD:** That's great. So, when you switched from the defense side to the plaintiffs', what inspired that change? Why do you enjoy being on the plaintiffs' side?

**JW:** I prefer being a plaintiff because I prefer having the initiative. And the people that we are fortunate enough to represent here have truly been through horrific things. I do a lot of birth injury cases. One thing that's really compelling to me that I didn't really quite understand is just how dominated these people's lives are by having a disabled child. The things that they have to do and the schedules that they have to keep just so that their child's needs are met are really superhuman. It was amazing to me when I realized that these parents have not gotten a good night's sleep since their child was born. The most gratifying aspect of resolving those cases is being able to take care of a disabled child for life. I take great satisfaction in helping these vulnerable kids to live their best possible life. The second most gratifying thing about representing the parents of those clients is that if we can resolve a case for them in a way that takes care of their child, the pressure that comes off of them. The fact that Mom and Dad can now get a good night's sleep is one of the most gratifying feelings I can imagine.

**LD:** Can you talk about a couple of those cases that stand out in your mind?

**JW:** The first one, the defendant was the Cook County Health System. It was a young mom; Dad was not in the picture. The drug Pitocin can be a wonderful drug in moderation to get

labor going. When it is overused, it restricts blood flow to the baby. This child was born with severe neurologic disabilities, but his APGAR scores were normal, and he didn't need NICU admission for about 12 hours afterwards. So, it was an extremely challenging case in a lot of ways. There was absolutely no guarantee as to what was going to happen at trial. But we just kept building our case because we were convinced that our theory was right. We were able to get some really great admissions from the defense experts, and the case resolved. And what was great about this case was we were able to structure part of the settlement money to dedicate to mom being able to go back to school and finish her education, so that she can get some of her life back, too. And this child is now taken care of for life. His mom and family don't have to be his sole care providers.

The change in Mom's personality from the beginning of the case to after the settlement was reached with the county, it's almost like she's a different person. She's got a smile now. She cracks jokes. She can actually look long-term for the rest of her life. And that didn't happen while the suit was pending. She was living very much day-to-day, week-to-week. So that was special.

**LD:** Absolutely. How were you able to get those crucial admissions from the defense experts?

**JW:** Well, that comes down to just preparation. That is diving into who these experts are, what they've said previously on the topic, who they've testified for. This particular expert was just a professional witness, even though he puts on his CV that he's still affiliated with the University of California Health System. One of the most important things that I think any lawyer can do is utilize Freedom of Information Act laws. And for this particular expert, I dove into available information due to California's Freedom of Information Act, which showed that he hadn't drawn a salary from any University of California entity since 2017. This deposition happened in 2022. So, we were able to build from that that his opinions really weren't going to hold up in front of a jury.

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**LD:** Do any other cases stand out in your mind?

**JW:** Another birth injury case. This was a case that we came into late, which had a significant work up prior to our coming in to help. We realized we needed to change our approach to the case. It was a suburban Chicago hospital that told mom that she had had an amniotic fluid embolism. They said this was not a foreseeable event, and they didn't do anything wrong. What we were able to prove in that case was that in fact, Mom was having a placental abruption for about an hour and a half beforehand, and that the baby wasn't getting sufficient blood flow and ran out of steam, essentially, because of the oxygen deprivation.

That case was challenging because an amniotic fluid embolism is truly something that can happen. And the treating doctors wrote in the notes at the time, "We think this is an amniotic fluid embolism." They even probably believed it themselves. But we were able to analyze the fetal heart rate tracings in conjunction with ACOG Publications, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and state that what was more consistent was, based upon the fetal monitoring, that these were all signs of oxygen deprivation, probably due to placental abruption. With an amniotic fluid embolism, the literature says that 50 percent of the time they are misdiagnosed. So, we were able to attack that with some truly amazing experts.

**LD:** When you were asked to be involved in the case by the referring lawyer, where was it at that process in terms of proving the placental abruption?

**JW:** Oh, that had not even been done yet. We had to reevaluate the evidence quickly because we didn't become involved until right at the close of fact discovery.

**LD:** Wow. Does that case feel representative of the medical investigation that you have to undergo with most of your cases? Or was this a particularly complex one in that way?

**JW:** Well, that's what I think separates us at Smith LaCien, is that we do that work. We don't leave a stone unturned for our clients. And that is from the leadership of Todd and Brian, all the way down.

**LD:** And in all these cases, how would you describe your style as a lawyer?

**JW:** Doggedly aggressive. I like having the initiative, and I would say that my style is I will exploit everything the defense says that doesn't make sense. I don't let ridiculous statements past.

**LD:** And what do you enjoy doing outside the office?

**JW:** I like exploring the world with my wife and daughter when I have the time.

**LD:** Still keeping up that love from when you were 16.

**JW:** I have a little bit of a wanderlust. I love experiencing and diving into other cultures, other things I don't see every day. Anytime you can dig in someplace, you're always going to find some value. You're always going to find some joy.

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