

Healthcare in Prison

The idea that incarcerated people receive adequate healthcare simply because they have access to medical services, is a misnomer. I have seen with regularity that caged humans receive the bare minimum of medical care, if they receive it at all. This means that serious health issues often get overlooked and/or untreated. I've experienced such neglect as well.

There are several reasons for this blatant negligence in healthcare for incarcerated people: (1) the public's indifference to sub-par HC; (2) contracted HC provider efforts to reduce costs; and (3) legislators and courts are slow to act. These factors contribute to the ongoing deficiencies in the quality of HC given to the incarcerated.

- (1) The public's indifferent view stems from the way society allows systemic dehumanization of people who are incarcerated. They are defined by their worst acts which allows the lack of adequate treatment to be quantified. Public perception is a driving force in maintaining the incarcerated person as sub-human and therefore unworthy of quality HC.
- (2) The Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) contracts with an "outside" HC provider, currently it is with "Wexford Health Sources". Wexford is in a number of state prison systems across America. Wexford's contract with the IDOC is coming to an end, it is likely it will be renewed at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars to taxpayers over a 2-3 year period. It is Wexford's protocol to provide "minimal" care when addressing medical issues of the incarcerated. Wexford HC providers try to avoid referrals to "outside" medical experts, the result is that serious medical problems like cancer, diabetes, and cardiac issues to be overlooked. Sadly, it causes irreparable damage to the individual and oftentimes results in death.
- (3) The last causes for poor HC are the legislators and courts are slow to act to correct this issue. Illinois legislators seemingly ignore any complaints of improper HC services. They won't employ any oversight and consistently vote for appropriation of money to a provider like Wexford who they know have a track record of ignoring the medical needs of the incarcerated. Likewise courts have been slow to act via decisions, the U.S. Supreme Court has clearly stated that an incarcerated person is only entitled to "minimal" healthcare. What minimal HC entails becomes blurred by state officials. On the one hand

it means minimal care which equals that of a HC professional in the “outside” world, on the other it means the bare minimum of care. The latter has become the norm, leaving thousands of incarcerated people with undiagnosed or untreated medical problems.

I have experienced the lack of medical care firsthand where a broken hand was treated as a minor fracture and my right hand has to be “rebroke” and set in a cast for healing. I had conjunctivitis (pinkeye) which was diagnosed as an eye allergy. More recently, I have “long haul” COVID-19 issue with nerves in my legs which they claim is caused by back pain. Still, untreated.

As long as the public view remains unchanged, and incarcerated people are dehumanized, IDOC officials, Ill. legislators, and counts will continue to ignore the sub-par HC treatment of the incarcerated. This narrative must change, oversight is needed over HC providers, and a demand for everyone who are incarcerated. Needless pain and suffering to human beings is not indicative of a civilized society. In this day and age we should all be appalled at sub-par HC treatment.