

Do Residents in Prison Receive Adequate Health Care?

Priscila Moreno

George Mason University

Have you ever wondered how many issues individuals incarcerated in prison face with every day? Maybe not, since they are considered menaces to society; however, they are still human beings. Everyone makes mistakes, some more than others, but to just overlook how incarcerated individuals can be mistreated is plain inhumane. Out of the many problems that carceral residents must worry about, perhaps the most important one is their medical care. One may ask why to be even slightly concerned about their medical care, isn't it easily accessible? Prisoners have the right to relatively free medical care, yes, but is the health care that they are provided the best? No, it is not. As of July 2021, the United States holds the highest number of prisoners in the world (Statista Research Department, 2021). A total number of roughly 2.1 million people are incarcerated. With that number alone, it would make one question how the government manages to run so many correctional facilities while still having to be focused on giving that many people a proper health care. If that's even one of the government's priorities anymore could be questioned.

For some, it may come as a surprise that those incarcerated in prison even get healthcare to begin with. Many like to argue against prison residents receiving any type of health care. Under the 8th Amendment of the US Constitution, prison residents have the right to health care; it would be considered cruel and unusual punishment for them not to be given that right. It is important for residents to receive health care because, some may come from poor communities and could possibly bring in diseases that could potentially be a risk to the whole facility (including staff and other residents) and/or communities. It is important for residents to receive a proper health care due to most of them are to return to society eventually. Not only that, but residents also deserve the right to health care just as much anyone else. At the end of the day

these people are still human, and we must consider that a good number of residents are mentally ill; some just can't help but to act on impulsive thoughts or to what they believe is necessary.

Mental health plays an essential part to one's physical health. One's mental state could potentially cause one to feel physical pain. Studies have shown that addressing the mental health needs of prisoners can decrease incidents of re-offending, it can also reduce the number of people who return to prison, and it can help divert people with mental disorders away from prison into treatment and rehabilitation. One article shared a story about this man named Adnan Khan. He spent 16 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit; within the time he spent behind bars he was diagnosed with Alopecia (a genetic autoimmune condition that can be triggered by severe stress). Khan stated that it was clear he needed mental health care, however he did not receive any help. While incarcerated, Khan didn't even bother to address his symptoms when he was sick, that he would hope for the sickness to go away on its own because he didn't expect the health care providers to do much. How sad does it sound that our system has really come to this? To not give this man like many others, the reassurance that their health is as important as the government makes it seem to be.

People who are incarcerated face a greater chance for chronic health conditions, both while confined and long after their release. A study shows that close to one million incarcerated individuals in the United States have chronic diseases like: diabetes, cancer, asthma, and heart disease. Presently we are dealing with another virus, COVID-19, and this is extremely dangerous for individuals who already suffer from chronic conditions. Prisons, due to the inability to maintain a social distance and the severe limited access to hygiene products, have become an epicenter of the coronavirus. In one recent article, prison residents discussed receiving an anti-parasite drug instead of COVID-19 meds (Press, 2021). In a northwest Arkansas jail residents

were not warned when given ivermectin (used to treat people and animals for parasitic worms and for head lice and skin conditions). Residents found out that they were being used as guinea pigs to see if the anti-parasite drug would work to fight against COVID. Within the same article, one particular resident, Edrick Floreal-Wooten, said “With me being sick and all of us being sick, we thought that they were there to help us. I never thought they would do something shady.” This is just simply atrocious. Incarcerated individuals should not be considered tests for experiments that do not have FDA (Food and Drug Administration) approval. Prison residents are still human beings who should have a right to know what medications they are taking.

Individuals who are incarcerated do not receive an adequate health care. It’s sad really because since grade school we are taught not to discriminate each another and that everyone deserves care, comfort, and the ability to live a healthy life. Nowhere is this more true than in prisons! We should see one another as equals, regardless of the bad things we’ve done. Prisoners are no exception. There’s change to be done and we can only do so if as a whole society gets together.

Works Cited

Ah  b  e, S. (2021, April 9). Why good health care in U.S. prisons may be hard to come by.

WHYY. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://whyy.org/segments/why-good-health-care-in-u-s-prisons-may-be-hard-to-come-by/>.

Cecere, D. (2009, January 15). Inmates suffer from chronic illness, poor access to health care.

Harvard Gazette. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2009/01/inmates-suffer-from-chronic-illness-poor-access-to-health-care/>.

Lopez, G. (2020, April 22). Why us jails and prisons became coronavirus epicenters. Vox.

Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://www.vox.com/2020/4/22/21228146/coronavirus-pandemic-jails-prisons-epicenters>.

Press, T. A. (2021, September 2). Inmates weren't told they were given an anti-parasite drug

instead of Covid-19 Meds. NPR. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/02/1033586429/anti-parasite-drug-covid-19-ivermectin-washington-county-arkansas>.

Statista Research Department, & 2, J. (2021, June 2). Ranking: Most prisoners per capita by

country 2021. Statista. Retrieved October 19, 2021, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262962/countries-with-the-most-prisoners-per-100-000-inhabitants/>.