

CRISIS IN THE GULAG
"Dementia Patients at MCI Shirley"

by Timothy J. Muise

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The state medium security prison in Shirley, Massachusetts, known as "Shirley Medium" is home to the Assisted Daily living (ADL) Unit and Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) for all of Massachusetts state prisons. The rapidly increasing aging prisoner population end up housed in five (5) man dorm rooms or a 14 bed "corridor" in this combined unit hospital. Most of these elderly and infirm men no longer pose any type of threat to society but due to the fact that there exists no compassionate medical release vehicle in Massachusetts these men must serve out sometimes lengthy terms at an exorbitant cost to the state due to added security costs that would be eliminated in a freeworld managed care setting. It is a morally and economically woeful situation.

One of the saddest subsets within this aging prisoner demographic is the dementia patient. At this time the SNF Unit at Shirley has six (6) men with full blown dementia. They no longer even know that they are in prison: they don't even know where they are. These poor souls, as defenseless as newborn lambs, become targets of ridicule and abuse at the hands of draconian guards and medical staff. They are easy prey and prey they become. Unfed, uncleaned, and left in filth and despair they languish in the house of horrors that is this prison hospital unit with no one to advocate for them. It is an ugly underbelly that our state keeps tucked away behind prison razor wire.

Corrections staff, from the wardens right down to the guards, work in a world which makes no room for compassion. It is absolutely forbidden for a warden to pick up the phone and detail to the Governor's office or office of public safety, that a man in her charge should be released

due to his medical condition. The goal of modern corrections is to keep as many prisoners as possible locked up for as long as possible in the pursuit of job security. Massachusetts spends roughly \$520,000,000 on its prison system, with 68% of that for salaries alone, and the fact that it produces a 50% recidivism rate proves out the argument that this is a department of "employment", not corrections, and these poor and helpless dementia patients fall victim to this failed philosophy in one of the most shameful aspects of this failed system of corrections. We as a society should be repulsed and work to end this barbaric practice.

We must urge our legislators to pass the next version of the compassionate medical release legislation that comes before them. We must then demand that the governor sign this measure while calling for its immediate implementation. This shameful issue is at the heart of our high crime and recidivism rates as it creates a corrections system of hopelessness and despair. Rather than rehabilitate the errant the system works to create ever more dangerous criminals as a component of the job security machine it has become. Compassionate medical release will free up funds to educate, train and actually "correct" offenders. We do much to strengthen the social fabric when we make second chances available, and do even more when we temper justice with mercy and compassion.

To find out more about the compassionate medical release issue, as well as about other progressive corrections measures, please go to;

<http://betweenthebars.org/blogs/101/>
<https://www.facebook.com/curearminc>

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