

## A HEARTFELT THANK-YOU

I am an inmate presently housed at the Medium Security ECI-East Prison in Westover, Maryland. It is the largest prison in the state however, being located on the Eastern Shore it often feels like being in another country. I have been incarcerated for 30 years and in that time I have seen the health care providers go from very good to very bad, to what it is now "Mediocre". As you can guess just about any inmate can give you some horror stories about the medical care in prison. My purpose for writing this article is not to trash the medical care, but instead highlight when it does work correctly.

On Wednesday June 8, 2016 I awoke with what I thought was a normal sore throat, in fact at the time both my cell mate and I had been feeling a little sore for the last two or three days. We thought it was because of running our fans on our heads at night. Anyway, by the end of the week mine seemed to have gotten worst. It hurt to swallow anything solid or liquid. On the following Saturday morning it was so bad I asked my tier officer (CO) (Ms. F.) to call the infirmary which she did. When I got there, I tried my best to explain to Nurse Pepper, (She is a good one), and she took my vitals and looked at my throat and saw that it was in fact inflamed. She told me that the PA (Physician Assistant) on call that weekend was on the other side of the jail and would not be back for at least 3 to 4 hours. Nurse Pepper gave me some throat lozenges, (Chloraseptic) to help with the soreness and told me to put in a sick-call slip.

I returned to my cell filled out the sick-call slip and my cell mate turned it in for me when he went to lunch, because the sick-call box is located in the chow hall. Ramadan had begun on June 6<sup>th</sup> and our meal would be served much later that evening. I however, did not go because during the rest of the day my throat had gotten progressively worse. The swelling was to the point that I was having problems getting my breath and the pain was really bad. My cell mate said that it looked like I had a golf ball in my throat.

Around 9:30 that night, I went to ask the CO (a different one) to call the infirmary for me again. That is the last thing I remember until I woke up in the infirmary some time later. I am told that as I was talking to the CO I just passed out.

When I regained consciousness I was in the infirmary, and the On Call Nurse told me I had passed out and that she could not see on the left side of my throat because it was closed off, I could only breathe laying on my side, but not flat on my back. She said she had seen enough and she sent me out by 911 to PRMC in Salisbury, Maryland, which is the closest emergency hospital to the prison. Now this is where my story gets really interesting. Most of the hospitals that the state uses are to say the least just a little better than a third world country.

*Peninsula Regional Medical Center (PRMC)* is a non-profit hospital, which was established in 1897 by Dr. George W. Todd with just six beds in an old home. From those humble beginnings, it has established a tradition of providing the best in emergency/trauma care on the Eastern Shore. It is a designated **Level III Emergency/Trauma Center**. The public is lucky to have this kind of care available, but I am a convicted felon and

ward of the State of Maryland... *Surely, inmates will not be getting the same kind of care as the paying public.* **Wrong!** As soon as I was wheeled in to the emergency room, the world and treatment I was used to changed dramatically.

The ER nurse was the first to tend to me, taking all my vitals and asking all the usual questions that are needed when you arrive. She spoke to the paramedics and got their earlier reading. She then asked the officers if the cuffs could be removed, but they said no, he may not be here long and they did not want to have put them right back on. After the nurse was done, the ER doctor looked at my throat and his first impression was the same as the nurse back at the prison. The left side of my throat was now almost completely closed. He sent me to have an MRI, so those handcuffs and ankle cuffs would indeed have to be removed. It turns out the cuffs were not the major problem with me having a MRI.

The fact that I could not lay flat on my back, however made having it done a lot harder. As soon as I would lay flat I would start choking, if you have ever had an MRI then you know that you must lay flat on your back and not move. Needless to say, I was having a problem not moving because I would start choking. The person who was doing the MRI, at no time made me feel like I was wasting her time or being a pain in the ass. This is how many of the prison medical staff make us feel. We had to start the procedure over about three or four times before I was able to lay flat and not move long enough for the MRI to be done. She spoke to me in a kind and smoothing voice and we got it done. After the MRI, back came the ankle & handcuffs.

About twenty minutes later just as I was starting to wonder what was going on, in walked Dr. Charles Schaefer, an Ear, Nose, & Throat Specialist. Now this man really knows his stuff, he asked me to open my mouth up as wide as I was able, which was not that wide. He took one look with his pen light, felt my throat, and then he looked over my MRI results. He then turned to the two COs who were with me and told them that he was admitting me. I would be moving to a room upstairs and later that night I'd have surgery.

Most of the medical staff at ECI, and I thought this would be tonsillitis, however, we were wrong after surgery I was told it was an infected Salivary gland. Later that night I was in fact taken to the surgery suite, needless to say I was a little afraid, the only other time I have been "under the knife", I was about eight or nine years old for a hernia operation. I really do not remember it, but I have the scar to show for it. Anyway off came the handcuffs and one ankle cuff, after Dr. Schaefer gave a general over view of what he planned to do, they gave the gas, "count backward from a hundred", they said. I remember getting down to about seventy something, after that everything is a blank until I woke up in ICU with a tube down my throat, so I could not speak, I was also introduced to the catheterization process when I realized I was peeing but the bed was not getting wet. ☺

I am a Moslem and member of the Moorish Science Temple of America, when this happened it was during our Holy Month of Ramadan, therefore when I woke up I was very hungry. With a tube down my throat, I would not be eating until it was removed. I did tell this

(3)

to my nurse (in writing) and she assured me that it would be removed as soon as possible. The tube was there to drain the incision, and allow the swelling to subside.

Later, the following day they did remove the tube, but I still could not eat, since I was still having some discomfort swallowing. My nurse gave a cup of ice-cold orange juice, I could barely get down, but it tasted good! They also released me from ICU and returned me to my room upstairs. As the swelling went down, I was able to make a deal with my nursing team to try to get something to eat.

She brought me two cups of pudding, and she said that if I could eat at least one of them she would get me something a little more solid like a honey bun for tonight and order me a light but solid breakfast. I not only got one down I ate then both.

My stay in PRMC was two and a half days, and for that short time, they restored my faith of the good in people. Prison can really make one jaded about life. If some one would have told me, that one of my best memories in my life would be a stay in the hospital I would have thought they were crazy. My reason for writing this essay is twofold, (1) I just love writing and I need the practice and/or opportunity to write something real, (2) I want to as I said from the very beginning of this essay give a truly **Heartfelt Thanks** to the men and women who of the small hospital with the **BIG HEART!** ☺

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