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The Wrong Approach

I'd like you to consider the state of healthcare in the Massachusetts Department of Corrections. I'd like to think the state of our healthcare services is identical to corrections departments across the country. I'm sure major variances exist, certain states may offer excellent healthcare. However, here in Massachusetts I would rate our overall healthcare as atrocious on a scale of decent to horrific. Here's why, instead of searching for a healthful minded method of treating a medical issue you're prescribed a pill. It's absolutely insane how many pills men 50+ take in the Massachusetts Department of Corrections. You'll see inmates walking up the med-line with fifteen empty pill packets in their hands on 'renewal day', the day you receive new pill packets. I'm not a doctor, but none of my relatives outside of prison ever took that many pills? It makes you question the nature of health services in the D.O.C.

I'm sure you're asking yourself, "Well, what's the alternative?" Good question! I'm glad you asked. I've been considering this question on and off for a few years now and here's my thoughts. First, and possibly foremost, we need to stop feeding inmates garbage food. Serving massive quantities of starches to meet the 2,000 calorie per inmate, per day, requirement isn't healthful. Grade 'D' meat, and overcooked vegetables don't offer a lot of nutrients and viatimins. The food is garbage! If you eat garbage

you feel awful. Guys walk around all day with low energy levels, exhausted, zapped and its directly related to our diet.

Another source of diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, etc...is the commissary we're allowed to purchase. Not every inmate is capable of purchasing commissary, I feel sorry for those who are unable. However, the canteen commissary we're allowed to purchase is extremely unhealthy! They've begun to limit the pastries, cakes, cookies and other processed sugar bombs, but even so, 95% of what we're able to purchase to vary our regular diet is junk food! Chocolates, chips, bagged chili, processed cheese (that never needs to be refridgerated), meat sticks, ramen noodle soup, cheese rice, tubs of cheese and other disgusting foodstuff you wouldn't allow your dog to eat.

Let's add this up and make a general calculation on the overall healthcare in the Massachusetts Department of Corrections. We're fed food daily that has no fiber (except for the apples), virtually no nutrients or viatimins and you expect us the aging prison population to be healthy? Our canteen commissary has nothing organic, not one organic item (at Souza-Baranowski, Shirley Medium, Old Colony Correctional Center and MCI-Gardner) and you expect inmates to have that certain glow of health as they fade off into their sixties and seventies? If that's the expectation after this gross and insubordination of health forget about it, we'll all be lucky to see our sixtieth birthday!

Wait, that's right, I promised you a solution! I almost forgot...thanks for staying with me.

First off, fire Keefe Food Supply Company and bring canteen in state. The State of Massachusetts would stand to earn a tidy sum from the products sold, possibly a 40% margin. It would create jobs in the State of Massachusetts and inmates would receive a better quality product. We'd also have a say on what was available per the D.O.C. and I think that would result in a number of healthier choices.

Next, feed us better Seymore! Increase the food services budget. Quarter to quarter food services budgets are cut in the Massachusetts Department of Corrections. The Food Services Director receives a bonus when food costs come down. That policy needs to change. The food services budget should increase so we get leafy greens, I can't remember the last time I had a bite of iceberg lettuce, or a tomato, or a raw pepper, or a cucumber...those are organic dreams to me. I'd give you everything in my cell for a farm fresh carrot with a little dirt on it, oh my goodness, heaven. I'll give the Massachusetts Department of Corrections one point, they serve us a lot of fruit. Well, when I say fruit, I mean apples and oranges.

There's one prison in Massachusetts that's a whole different beast. Massachusetts Correctional Institution Norfolk offers a wide

array of quality food to inmates, but they have kitchenettes set up inside the housing units. Inmates are able to purchase sandwich meats, shredded cheese, frozen chicken, frozen hamburger, green peppers, onions, garlic, apples, bananas, flour, pancake batter, ice cream, sherbert and other delicious goodies. There's also a garden on the prison grounds and inmates will receive little natural wonders with their trays of food such as a few leaves of romaine lettuce, or a handful of cherry tomatoes. It's quite delicious!

Now, if we were able to take a close look at the healthfulness of inmates at MCI-Norfolk versus the rest of the Massachusetts Department of Corrections, I think you'd see quite a contrast in healthcare costs. There's a — I'm not sure exactly what to call it — hospice unit at MCI-Norfolk and you'd have to remove that from the equation to get an accurate number. I'm sure the healthcare costs for taking care of those gentlemen is staggering.

Also, as a side note, I know nothing about Framingham. If I did I'd express an opinion. I don't want to lessen the value of a women's prison by not discussing their needs or concerns, but I know absolutely nothing about it! Therefore I'm not going to attempt to mansplain the healthcare process for those women.

The government hasn't caught up with the idea of feeding inmates healthy food to reduce health services costs. It's a homeopathic solution that's too simple to grasp on the senate floor.

Basic solutions evade complex systems, they always have!
Also, it would be seen as rewarding these evil people who've done awful things, right? But, Massachusetts is all about the bottom line right now and the Department of Corrections is a money vacuum. I'm not a statistics guy, I believe statistics can be manipulated to show whatever you'd like to express numerically. I worked in media and used statistics I knew to be false to sell media plans. But, certain things just make sense. The rising cost of healthcare, we're talking huge money, versus increasing a food budget to reduce the number of medications inmates take, the number of hospital trips and hospitalizations...it just makes sense.

I don't want to call the people who run these institutions manic, but they're taught from day one to cut, reduce and chop. It's the nature of the job. There getting pressure from the Governor's office to decrease costs. There comes a point however, when it stops making sense to decrease costs. It becomes ineffective and defeats the purpose of what you originally intended to accomplish. All I'm saying is the legislature in the great State of Massachusetts should consider a more thoughtful approach to the very human condition of the inmates housed under the umbrella of their care. After all, most of us are people trying to get past the biggest mistake of our lives. Thanks for hearing my words. Thanks for considering my idea.