

CORONAVIRUS CRISIS AT

ELKTON PART: VII.

by

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It's the uncertainty of Fall and darkness of winter I worry about. This Part covers September and October. In these months I've detected a hitch, or what appears to be one, in the BOP's plans.

There are just a few things to share in Part VII., so I've opted to forego with the days format I've used previously.

September: This month saw few changes at the prison. The very same hand-washing / mask-wearing / COVID-19 materials posted in April and not again until August were reposted a third time at the outset of the month. That's eight pages, the same eight pages.

At some point in August or September I noticed that the housing sections were no longer being sprayed during recreation time outside. We are still receiving an hour of rec a day. Insulin - and pill-lines were no longer being administered at the housing unit but had returned to the medical waiting room. It was posted on Sept 23rd that flu shots would be coming soon. A few times sick call was a regular morning announcement, then suddenly stopped. I came to discover that, as word had it, someone wrote up medical for calling sick cell during rec. The administrative remedy process worked to higher offices and sick call . . . cancelled. Yes, cancelled. Why? Well, evidently sick cell,

like Education and indoor Rec and the Chapel, was supposed to be closed as part of the national lockdown. If we are sick we must address the issue with the unit officer, which can be difficult, especially having to explain medical issues with a non-medical person. An inconvenience, sure, but I do not fault whoever wrote up the complaint. Too often, even before the pandemic, the overcrowded prison would try and squeeze as many activities as possible into a limited time frame. Now we have to juggle, often, commissary shopping and rec and any possible medical call at the same time. And the four sections still operate separately, at a distance, which slows the schedule down more.

Rehabilitation is still limited, mainly focused on those working to earn a G.E.D. A.C.E. classes only one, per month, is but photocopied sheets from a textbook with a pre-test and final test of the same questions but merely rearranged.

There have been calls of a looming inspection but nothing major has passed through.

The pre-release and transfer quarantines got combined and moved to the SHU at the FCI. It was said that half the SHU would be sectioned off as a kind of housing unit section but a returnee, frequent during these supposed prioritized times to drop the population, said that it was nothing like the housing unit. Those called to transfer were stuffed into the medical waiting room and locked in before being moved to the SHU.

This around the time that medical and commissary had finally taken measures to demark distancing space, comprised of red tape and taped sheets with "One ~~Seat~~^{Seat}" printed on them. A sign on medical's door said "one person at a time," contradicting the new markings. But this is typical.

Yellow stripes of tape were added to the chow hall food lines.

A memo was posted detailing the conditions of visitation. An earlier

rumor said visitation would return October 3rd. The new new-normal rules of visitation were strict. Only prisoners in "general population" will be allowed visits. One must submit a copout (BP-8) a week ahead of the planned visitation so the schedule can be made. No visits on Thursday and Friday. Four week rotation of the units. Visit is limited to one hour per prisoner. Visitors are limited to two adults per prisoner. No food or drinks. Masks will not be provided, and a visitor's mask must be approved ahead of time. Visitors will be screened prior to visit for symptoms.

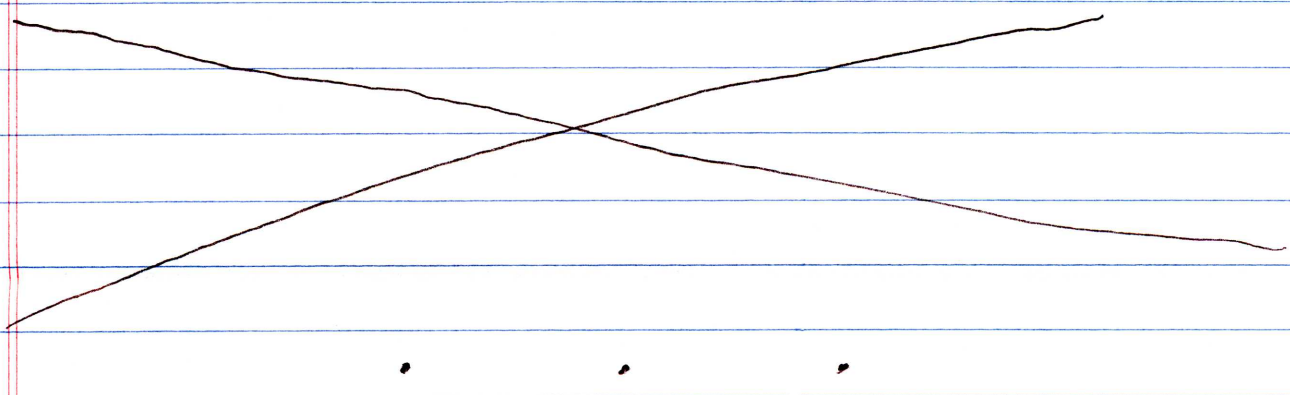
October: Those eight sheets were reposted for a fourth time. I have yet to see any up to date information covering the virus. And still no post-COVID-19 medical information for those who've had it.

Our masks are but a length of rough porous fabric folded over, loose. The staff, all this time, starting in ~~April~~ March, staff have had access to a variety of masks from hardware stores to m-95s to black, professionally made -- with BOP seal -- masks.

Our phone calls are still free. Though visitation has started, hardly anyone has had a visit, and Elkton never did add or facilitate video visitation. It's debatable as to if there is even space for such an addition but something (safer) is better than nothing, I suppose.

An Coronavirus update by the warden was posted on the 9th of October. He states that, while they've reduced the population greatly, there is still more to do. I'm not convinced that more than half of those prisoners no longer here at Elkton is due to compassionate release and increased home confinement and transfers. It's still crowded here, and their efforts at reducing the numbers by transferring people never appeared to get off with much speed or success. This is the hitch I mentioned. ~~It~~

Transfers have been talked about since May, and in a different form, in July, continuing up to now. But nothing had ever come of it. And sparse were the compassionate releases and extended home confinements. Halfway houses mostly were not interested in crowding their rooms. Too, mass incarceration is in play in this mess. Too many people to handle, not enough room for them, high reluctance to utilize home confinement. All BOP facilities battling the virus, and coronavirus can last for such a long stretch of time. I'm guessing that by the time Elkton sort of, kind of got its things in order, most other facilities were deep in the battle, quarantine and large transfers -- or any kind of transfers a bad idea -- that how that they have the transfer groups ready, um, they aren't sure where, or if, they'll be shipped at all. And crime doesn't stop -- how many people are waiting to go to prison?



In the second and third weeks of October, Health Services posted four information sheets on the electronic bulletin board concerning the flu. The first is from the CDC and says "Fight Flu" and says to get the vaccination. The second is on handwashing, one that is often posted. The third is a simple, new sheet about handwashing. And the fourth lists the symptoms of flu and provides "3 Steps" to take to fight flu: get vaccinated, lists preventative measures, and to take flu antiviral drugs, if prescribed.

Recreation posted a memo reminding prisoners to wear their mask when

outside. And not just a reminder, it is required. It mentions nothing about social distancing. And restates that failure to follow the rule will result in that entire unit (or section) losing outside rec-time and "you may receive disciplinary action."

I'm wondering how big a threat sending one to the SHU is at the moment. As I understand it, the SHU is primarily being used to house those awaiting transfers. Too, I doubt they're very inclined to write up prisoners -- this might still send some to the SHU, and could mess up any transfers for them.

Relating to this, also, is a new "prohibited act code: for pressuring inmates for legal documents." On one hand this might seem unnecessary. Or, it might seem a no-brainer. I would think that such a specific code would not be necessary, as intimidation or bullying or harassment or whatever would take care of the real issue here. Apparently not. What this is about is prisoners who insist/prod/pressure other prisoners in to showing their legal papers in order to find out if they snitched or have a sex offense or affiliated to any certain person(s) or group(s). The BOP admitted that many prisoners had to check in to protective custody and that such action made the BOP unsafe and unsecure. No doubt, if the Elkon experience has any similarity to the rest of the BOP, because of coronavirus and ~~crowding~~ crowding, staff have had to move prisoners around to different cubicles or cells, or in to quarantine areas, and there were a lot of safety issues related to how prisoners treated other prisoners. The change is a good step, but there are several inter-related issues not fixed by the new code act.

October 27th, this day, staff handed out ZRS forms.

No new information concerning coronavirus has been presented to us.

It's November 1st as I write this close to Part VII and today a staff member came, right before 10:00 AM standing count, shouting, telling us something about staff or some group were going to come down and inspect the FSH. We're given the usual threats on that our cubics should be clean, wear our masks at all time except when we are in our cubics -- none of which are large enough for two people to socially distance in -- while this staff member shouts all this out as he walks by our cubicles. It's never been about the virus and keeping people safe, it's only ever been about BOP and its power.

And I did get a bit of information concerning a recent transfer of prisoners from FCI Elkton to Fort Dix. Four buses, twenty-five people per bus. Moved in the middle of the night. Within two weeks around ten percent of those transferred tested positive. Some staff are sick. Threats from the population of Dix were shared with those transferred prisoners from Elkton, so the Elkton group has to be housed separately from the rest. None will be able to transfer for another eighteen months. I believe there is only one TV and two telephones and one or two computers for a very large group of those transferred. This news for me confirms that hitch I mentioned at the beginning. As I said, it's not about safety or security but about the BOP being about to act on its own with too little oversight so it can recklessly exercise its power. And no inspectors showed up today.

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