

They say addiction should be treated with compassion, care and urgency, but inside the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections they are three things you will not recognize if judging by the actions of the medical department and the administration in charge of treating those in its care. I am an inmate housed at SCI Chester, a Pennsylvania state prison in which its administration prides itself on being one of the more progressive ones within the state. A false claim in the eyes of the many here who are still being denied evidence-based medical treatment for opioid-use disorder, a chronic medical condition that is life threatening when left untreated. Here at SCI Chester not only have we not had an AA or NA meeting here within the last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but we also haven't had contact visits meaning all drugs within the facility have been either smuggled in by officers and other staff or diverted from medical. Here at this prison along with many other Pennsylvania state prisons there is currently an ever-growing drug crisis taking place, a drug crisis fueled by D.O.C. negligence and the non-treatment of its inmates.

Before being committed to the D.O.C. in 2011 with a 3 to 10 year sentence I've been suffering from opioid-use disorder for 7 years, I then spent another 4 years locked up without being treated, unless you consider a 120 day drug program adequate treatment for a life-long disease. Within a month after being released I was back on heroin, a month later I was sent to state prison to detox for 10 days before being sent to do the same D.O.C. drug program that previously proved ineffective, I absconded in less than 48 hours. A month later I admitted myself to rehab, I began making progress while on Suboxone (1 of 3 f.d.A. approved medications to treat opioid-use disorder) but days later they discontinued the medication and I left rehab and returned to heroin. I was caught by state parole a few months later and sent to another state prison for another 10 day detox before being brought to a drug infested parole violation center where I continued using for 60 days before being released to a halfway house. In under a week I absconded from the halfway house and was again caught by parole agents a few weeks later, I was now sent to a different drug infested parole violation center. While at the center I requested help and was sent to Friends Hospital where I was treated with Suboxone which didn't only help with treating my withdrawal but also helped to make me feel normal, able to function and be productive without having as strong of urges to use opioids. Some people say parole gave me alot of chances, I say they gave me absolutely none. Not one time that I was apprehended by state parole did they bring me somewhere to receive adequate treatment. Even the 2 times I was treated with life sustaining medication I wasn't given the opportunity for maintenance, they were treating my symptoms rather than my disease, and even them times were times that I committed myself.

In July of 2016 I was discharged from Friends Hospital but instead of returning to the parole violation center I escaped custody, for the next 9 months I remained homeless on the streets of Philadelphia where my disease rapidly progressed. I was arrested in April of 2017 for possession of heroin and I was brought to the Philadelphia County jail. If I would have been arrested in 2014 instead of 2017 I would have been given the option to be put on Suboxone maintenance while in the jail, that treatment would have transferred along with me into the D.O.C. Unfortunately for me it was still 2017 and I would be forced to endure many hardships in the D.O.C. due to non-treatment, in 2019 I was transferred from SCI Frackville to SCI Chester

in order to do the same drug program I did in 2015, the only difference was that now they taught and encouraged medication-assisted treatment, but they did not offer or provide it. In 2021 things were looking promising for me. I completed 2 college courses earning 6 credits, I had living arrangements and employment lined up considering I was expecting to be out the same year as I was to see parole in July. The only thing I wasn't comfortable with was the fact that I knew I still needed treatment, I didn't want to be released only to fatally overdose or return to prison like so many others. On May 15th I submitted a medical sick call slip stating "Severe-opioid use disorder, high anxiety, intense cravings, fear of prolonging incarceration and/or fatally overdosing due to not being treated. Requesting medical needs assessment" Instead of being called to medical on Monday May 17th the security search team entered my housing unit to search me, my cell and give me a urine. In the process of being searched I admitted to having ~~in~~ Suboxone which I've been using to prevent relapsing on opioids ever since being denied treatment the first time I requested help at the end of 2020. I am now receiving treatment in the form of solitary confinement and prolonged incarceration.

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has issued a directive stating "it will no longer do business with service providers who do not, at all levels, support the use of medication-assisted treatment." The medical doctors providing service here at SCI Chester must have not gotten the memo. "At all levels" does not mean Naltrexone (vivitrol) for those with a release date, it means Naltrexone, Suboxone or Methadone along with counseling and ~~individual~~ behavioral therapies depending on indications from a medical needs assessment. As of today the only people receiving medication-assisted treatment here at SCI Chester are individuals who were already being treated prior to being committed to the D.O.C. In other words, if you've relapsed while in the D.O.C. and your life is now unmanageable ~~due~~ due to addiction you are not eligible for treatment. If you developed a habit and became addicted to opioids while incarcerated you are not a candidate for treatment. "At all levels"... When the criteria in which qualifies an individual for medical treatment is based on nothing more than whether they had the opportunity to receive treatment before being incarcerated then there is something seriously wrong with the policies in place. I find it absurd that almost everyone I talk to, inmates, C.O.s, security, medical, psych, deputies, they all seem to know ~~that~~ that what is taking place is wrong yet noones pushing to get people treated. The majority of inmates who are suffering are scared to speak out or ask for help as they know they will only end up in the position that I am now in. It's going to take more than me to save the lives of present and future inmates to come, I urge you to contact anyone who advocates for M.A.T, anyone who advocates for prisoners rights and inform them of this injustice. I urge you to contact Secretary Wetzel of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections and speak for the many voices going unheard! Many lives have been lost due to these policies, policies that desperately need to be changed!

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