

Aug 5, '21

FREE HEALTHCARE, BUREAU OF PRISONS STYLE

FOR APWA

I WAS WORRIED ABOUT HAVING TO SELF-SURRENDER TO PRISON. I'VE HAD DIABETES FOR OVER A DECADE, ALONG WITH SOME OTHER RELATED HEALTH ISSUES. POP CULTURE AND THE MEDIA GAVE ME NO REASON TO EXPECT DECENT HEALTHCARE WHILE I WAS LOCKED AWAY. SINCE I DIDN'T TRUST "SOME PRISON HACK" TO HANDLE MY DENTAL WORK, I HAD A GOOD BIT OF RENOVATION DONE IN MY MOUTH DURING THAT LAST MONTH OF FREEDOM. LATER, IT CAME TO LIGHT I WAS GOING TO A "LEVEL 2" CARE FACILITY: NOT QUITE TOP-NOTCH, BUT SUPPOSEDLY A BIG STEP UP FROM THE AVERAGE CARE PROVIDED IN THE B.O.P. I RELAXED A LITTLE, LEADING UP TO THE BIG DAY.

BOY, DID I GET SUCKERED IN. THE REALITY HAS TURNED OUT EVEN WORSE THAN HBO LED ME TO THINK. IN MY VERY FIRST CONVERSATION WITH THE PRISON DOCTOR (WHO WE SHARE WITH THE JAIL AND CAMP COMPOUNDS), HE LITERALLY TOLD ME, "WELL, YOU'RE A F#%! ING IDIOT, AREN'T YOU?," AFTER HEARING ABOUT MY CRIME. SO BEGAN MY MEDICAL ABUSES, AND A CONSTANT DREAD OF DEALING WITH OUR MEDICAL DEPARTMENT. A FEW MONTHS LATER, THIS SAME SUPERGENIUS MISDIAGNOSED THE TENDONITIS I'D DEVELOPED SINCE MY ARRIVAL AS NEUROPATHY. HE PRESCRIBED HARSH, LIVER-KILLING, MIND-FOGGING MEDICATION THAT DID ALMOST NOTHING TO HELP. TO BE FAIR, THE SIDE EFFECT OF NAUSEA DID HELP ME LOSE SOME WEIGHT. AT OTHER FACILITIES, A DIAGNOSES OF DIABETES, ESPECIALLY WITH NEUROPATHY, IS BASICALLY AUTOMATIC PERMISSION TO RECEIVE A "SOFT-SHOE PASS" AND MEDICAL SOFT SHOES, RATHER THAN BEING FORCED TO WEAR HARD-TOED WORKBOOTS CONSTANTLY. NOT HERE. IT TOOK OVER 9 MONTHS OF FIGHTING WITH THE MEDICAL STAFF WHILE MY FEET DEVELOPED A VARIETY OF BLEEDING BUSTERS AND SORES BEFORE I WAS FINALLY PERMITTED TO WEAR TENNIS SHOES. THE SHOES THEY ISSUE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE REPLACED ANNUALLY IF THEY SHOW SIGNS OF WEAR. DESPITE THE SOLES ON MINE HAVING WORN DOWN TO PAPER-THINNESS, WITH THE TOES COMPLETELY TORN OPEN ON ONE SHOE, THEY WOULD NOT ISSUE ME REPLACEMENTS FOR NEARLY A FULL EXTRA YEAR. WHAT THEY DID DO WAS REQUIRE I WALK TO THE CHOW HALL FOR MEALS THREE TIMES EVERY DAY, OUTSIDE, THROUGH SNOW, RAIN, AND GOOSE POOP. I COULD CHOOSE

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TO WEAR EITHER MY FOOT-EATING BOOTS OR MY HOLIER-THAN-JOB-HIMSELF TENNIS. BAREFOOT WAS NOT PERMITTED, THOUGH MANY GUARDS COMMENTED THAT MY SOFT SHOES, WITH MY TOES HANGING OUT, WEREN'T MUCH BETTER.

OUR AWESOME / ABUSIVE MEDICAL TEAM DO A BANG-UP JOB "CONTROLLING" MY DIABETES. EVERY YEAR OR TWO I GET A REGULAR CHECK-UP AND LAB WORK. THEY HAVE DECLINED TO PROVIDE A BLOOD-SUGAR TESTING DEVICE, CLAIMING THE NEEDLE FOR FINGER-STICKING IS A WEAPON. THAT'S PROBABLY FOR THE BEST, SINCE THEY WON'T PROVIDE ALCOHOL WIPES TO AVOID INFECTION FROM REGULAR LANCINGS. THE DOCTORS (WE ARE NOW ON THE FOURTH NEW DOCTOR IN MY 3 1/2 YEARS HERE) ARE VERY GOOD ABOUT DISCUSSING BLOOD TEST RESULTS WITH ME IN 10 MONTHS OR LESS. WHENEVER I HAVE THE AUDACITY TO GET SCHEDULED BY DIFFERENT STAFF MEMBERS TO BE MULTIPLE PLACES AT THE SAME TIME, OUR FAVORITE PHLEBOTOMIST (WHO WE LOVINGLY CALL "NURSE RATCHEN") IS MORE THAN HAPPY TO BERATE ME AND LEAVE A HUGE HEMATOMA IN MY ELBOW BY DIGGING AROUND TO TRY TO GET BLOOD DRAWN. I HAVE NEVER BEFORE BEEN A "HARD STICK" FOR BLOOD DRAWS. I GUESS MY VEINS ARE A LITTLE DIFFERENT ON DAYS SHE FEELS I'VE CHALLENGED HER ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY.

THEY DID EVENTUALLY FIGURE OUT MY HAND AND ARM PAIN WASN'T NEUROPATHY. IT TOOK DOCTOR #3 (THE BEST SO FAR-TOO BAD HE RETIRED WHEN COVID HIT) ABOUT THREE MINUTES TO FIGURE IT WAS ACTUALLY TENDONITIS. I HAVE NOW BEEN WAITING OVER 20 MONTHS FOR THE SIMPLE, OUTPATIENT SURGERY THAT CAN CURE MY CONSTANT PAIN. PAIN THAT WAKES ME MOST NIGHTS, THAT CAUSES ME TO DROP THINGS LIKE CUPS OF HOT COFFEE ALMOST EVERY DAY, THAT HAS LED TO INJURIES FROM FALLING WHILE TRYING TO CLIMB INTO MY TOP BUNK AT LEAST THREE TIMES. THE NUMBER OF FALLS WITHOUT INJURIES WORTH REPORTING IS MUCH, MUCH HIGHER. WHEN I PUSH FOR FASTER SCHEDULING I AM TOLD, "YOU'VE ONLY BEEN COMPLAINING FOR THREE YEARS, BE PATIENT," OR, "YOUR CASE IS NOT AN EMERGENCY, WE'LL GET TO YOU EVENTUALLY." THANK GOD WE'RE AT A LEVEL 2 FACILITY OR I MIGHT REALLY HAVE A WAIT ON MY (BURNING / TINGLING / SPASMING) HANDS. OF COURSE, I'VE WATCHED THEM REFUSE TO SEND MY NEIGHBOR FOR HIS "EMERGENCY ONCOLOGY CONSULT"

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FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS, SO I'M NOT SURE WHAT THEY THINK A SHORT WAIT SHOULD LOOK LIKE. (YOU READ THAT CORRECTLY. ONCOLOGY, AS IS CANCER. EMERGENCY CONSULT, WHICH IS PROBABLY NOT GOOD. AND TWO YEARS MEANS HE'S PROBABLY TOAST.) LUCKY FOR ME, GETTING MY TENDON-ITIS DIAGNOSIS CONFIRMED ALSO REVEALED THAT I'VE DEVELOPED HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE. OUR CRACK MEDICAL STAFF HAS TESTED ME OVER AND OVER AND OVER TO MAKE SURE, WAITED A FEW MONTHS, PUT ME ON MED'S THAT DON'T SEEM TO HAVE ANY EFFECT AT ALL, THEN TESTED ME FOR A FEW MORE MONTHS TO CONFIRM NOTHING HAS CHANGED. HUZZAH!

I'M ALSO A LITTLE AMAZED NOBODY DIED WHEN COVID TORE THROUGH HERE. I CAN ONLY GUESS IT'S BECAUSE REGIONAL REPLACED ALL THE REGULAR MEDICAL TEAM WITH DECENT (OR, AT LEAST, TRAINED) PERSONNEL. ALTHOUGH I'M PRETTY SURE OUR MEDICAL TEAM OF 3 (AT THAT TIME) WERE ALL OUT WITH THE COVID FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS THERE. THE NEW GALS FROM REGIONAL WERE DILIGENT ABOUT CHECKING OUR BLOOD-OXYGEN LEVELS AND TEMPERATURES (THROUGH A LOCKED SECURITY GRATE) MULTIPLE TIMES EACH DAY. BY SOME MIRACLE, DESPITE 650 POSITIVE COVID TESTS, THEY ONLY DISCOVERED ABOUT 75 PEOPLE WITH FEVERS. MOST TEMPERATURES SEEMED TO COME UP IN HIGH 70'S OR LOW 80'S. GUESS WE HAD A RAGING HYPOTHERMIA PANDEMIC. IT SEEMS THEIR CAREFULLY PLANNED CAMPAIGN OF SCREAMING "SOCIAL DISTANCING!!" IN OUR FACES FROM TWO FEET AWAY WHILE PACKING IN AT 200% CAPACITY MAY NOT HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY SUCCESSFUL AT PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF DISEASE.

I DON'T MEAN TO SAY WE HAVE NO COMPETENT MEDICAL STAFF. OUR OPTOMETRIST HITS HIS APPOINTMENTS LIKE CLOCKWORK AND GENERALLY GETS US THE GLASSES WE NEED WITHOUT ISSUES OR DELAYS. THE DENTAL TEAM WAS PROFESSIONAL AND RELIABLE, ESPECIALLY FOR PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE LIKE CLEANINGS, UNTIL THE DENTIST RETIRED AND COVID SHUT DOWN NON-EMERGENCY TREATMENT FOR OVER A YEAR. OF COURSE, B.O.P. POLICY ALLOWS NO DENTAL REPLACEMENTS OTHER THAN FULL DENTURES. IF YOU LOSE SOME TEETH, BE IT CAVITIES OR A LOCK-IN-A-SOCK TO THE FACE, YOU MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN HARDLY BEING ABLE TO CHEW, OR HAVING EVERYTHING YANKED OUT SO YOU CAN GET YOUR SHINY NEW CHOMPERS IN 12 TO 18 MONTHS. HOPE YOU ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO A YEAR OF APPLESAUCE.

AS YOU CAN SEE, A BIG PART OF THE ISSUE SEEMS TO BE HIGH TURNOVER

IN SENIOR STAFF. OUR SHARED DOCTOR FREQUENTLY TRANSFERS OR RETIRES, LEAVING US WITH NO DOCTOR AT ALL FOR MONTHS AT A TIME. THE MEDICAL DIRECTOR POSITION IS NEARLY AS BAD. FOR THE WHOLE TIME WE WERE OVER 80% INFECTED WITH COVID, BOTH POSITIONS WERE VACANT. "CARE" WE RECEIVED DURING THE DANGEROUS PANDEMIC SUFFERED AS A RESULT.

YET ANOTHER FUN FACT: OUR MEDICAL DEPARTMENT IS ON THE TOP FLOOR OF THE ADMIN BUILDING. YOU HAVE TO WALK UP FOUR FLIGHTS OF STAIRS TO TALK TO THEM. DO YOU HAVE A BROKEN FOOT? AN OPEN WOUND ON YOUR KNEE? AN INFECTED HIP BECAUSE YOU AREN'T ALLOWED ANTISEPTIC WIPES POST SURGERY?

YOU HAVE TO WALK UP FOUR FLIGHTS OF STAIRS TO TALK TO THEM. ARE YOU DIZZY? SHORT OF BREATH? EXPERIENCING CHEST AND JAW PAINS THAT RADIATE DOWN YOUR ARM? DID I MENTION YOU HAVE TO WALK UP FOUR FLIGHTS OF STAIRS TO TALK TO THEM?

WOULD YOU BELIEVE THE ABSOLUTE, #1, MOST FREQUENTLY GIVEN MEDICAL ADVICE GIVEN IS, AS REPORTED BY INMATES WHO BRAVE ALL THOSE STAIRS WITH ONE OF THE COMPLAINTS LISTED, "DRINK MORE WATER. GO WALK THE TRACK." YES, SERIOUSLY. SCUTTLEBUTT TELLS OF AT LEAST TWO INMATES IN THE LAST FEW YEARS WHO WERE TOLD THAT AFTER REPORTING CHEST PAINS, THEN DYING FROM HEART ATTACKS LESS THAN A WEEK LATER. THEY MAY NOT BE TRYING TO KILL US, BUT IT SURE DOESN'T SEEM LIKE THEY WANT TO KEEP US ALIVE.

THAT'S A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MY FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE WITH THE QUALITY OF MEDICAL SERVICE PROVIDED BY AN UPPER-TIER (NOT TOP-TIER) MEDICAL PRISON. AGAINST MY STRONG DESIRE TO THROW PEOPLE UNDER THE BUS, ALL REAL NAMES WERE OMITTED TO PROTECT THE GUILTY (AND AVOID RETRIBUTION). I ONLY WISH MY HUMOROUS ANECDOTES WERE EXAGGERATED FOR COMEDIC PURPOSES. THE ABUSE AND TERRIBLE CARE WE SUFFER AT THE HANDS OF THE BUREAU OF PRISONS AND THEIR SO-CALLED MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS WOULD BE PROSECUTED CRIMINALLY OUT IN THE REAL WORLD. BUT WE'RE JUST INMATES, SO NOBODY EXCEPT OUR FAMILIES GIVES A DAMN.