Tough Stuff

People in prison face must overcome many obstacles in order to access health care, and remain healthy.

March 1, 2013 By Kate Ferguson

Here, Amnesty International USA highlights some of the health risks faced by prisoners:

Seriously ill inmates face treatment delays. Prisoners who suffer from diseases such as asthma, diabetes, sickle-cell anemia, cancer and seizures have little or no access to medical attention, and inmates living with HIV/AIDS are often denied lifesaving meds.

Lack of qualified personnel and resources. There are long delays to get medical attention; inferior and disrupted treatment; overmedication with psychotropic drugs; and lack of mental health treatment. What's more, unqualified, non-medical staff often screen treatment requests.

Charges for medical attention. In violation of international standards, many prisons and jails charge inmates for health services on the grounds that it deters them from seeking medical attention for minor matters or from trying to avoid work.

Lack of treatment for substance abuse. The number of prisoners with histories of drug abuse is growing, but the proportion of prisoners receiving treatment declined from 40 percent in 1991 to 18 percent in 1997.

Inadequate mental health services. Very few prison systems provide counseling.

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