

Titus House Newsletter

Titus House Ministries, PO Box 2376, Tijeras, NM 87059

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Delayed, Deficient or Denied: Medical Care in the Civil Commitment Gulag

by Barbara Koeppel—The Washington Spectator

For the 6,000 men confined in compounds in the 20 states with civil commitment laws—which keep sex offenders behind bars and out of sight for decades after they complete their prison terms and often until they die—the mantra has got to be “don’t get sick.” (See [“Sex Crimes and Criminal Justice”](#), *The Washington Spectator*, May, 2018).

If they’re sick, whether with kidney disease, Covid or cancer, medical care is delayed, deficient or denied. It doesn’t matter if the facility is in “blue” states, such as New York, Massachusetts and California, or “red” ones, such as Texas and Virginia. Also, it doesn’t matter if it is run by the state or a private corporation (such as the Management and Training Corporation—MTC).

I interviewed 15 men in Minnesota, Texas and California (one has since died) as well as nurses and therapists who work in these facilities. I’ve also corresponded with men in Massachusetts and New York. All agree the medical care is deplorable and far better in regular prisons—where the men completed their sentences before being sent, indefinitely, into civil commitment.

Coalinga, California

At Coalinga, California’s civil commitment compound, one resident (we’ll call him Robert to shield his identity) said he “had severe stomach pain, was wetting himself and urinated frequently.” Still, he had to wait over a month to get an appointment at the medical clinic where the nurse practitioner (NP) told him his PSA numbers were high and he should see a specialist. That was in October 2018. But since the men aren’t allowed to book their own appointments, Coalinga must make the referrals. So it wasn’t until February that Robert saw a urologist—whose tests showed he had Stage 3 prostate cancer and needed chemotherapy and radiation immediately. “Still, seven months passed before Coalinga arranged for my treatments, and then, only because the court intervened,” Robert said.

Fast forward to August 2022. Robert saw blood in his urine and the NP said he should see an oncologist; still, it took Coalinga’s clinic five months to write a referral and get him an appointment. “In January 2023, the oncologist said I needed a PET scan to see if the cancer returned—which took Coalinga another four months to arrange. Because the scan, which was in June 2023, showed a new spot on my kidney, the oncologist said to see a urologist right away. It’s now December, and Coalinga hasn’t made the appointment,” he says. His lawyer is seeking a court order to make it happen.

Another huge problem is that inmates in severe pain—whether from surgery, renal disease, or dying from cancer—don’t get the meds they need. Robert (who was a registered nurse before he was sent to prison and Coalinga) says “even when hospital doctors send an inmate back to Coalinga with a prescription for strong pain killers, Coalinga’s clinic won’t comply. Instead, they give meds like Tylenol, which usually doesn’t help. Or if they give morphine, it’s not nearly enough.”

A therapist who works at Coalinga (and asked to be anonymous) told me “I saw lots of agony in the medical unit. One patient was screaming in pain and the Coalinga doctor said I can’t give him more meds because the program won’t let me. Another man kept pressing the call button for help and no one came.” Why not? She says “the staff complained he was pressing it excessively. He died a few hours later.” She adds “last month, five men in the medical unit died, many with terrible pain.”

Yet another inmate who fared badly is Douglas Hopper. In April 2021, he had a haircut and the barber saw a tiny growth on his ear. Hopper, who had to wait until June to be seen at Coalinga’s clinic, told the nurse practitioner (NP) that he already had a malignant growth removed from his arm and cancer runs in his family. “By the time I was seen, the growth was bleeding continuously. When Coalinga finally referred me to a dermatologist, he told me I had Stage 2 skin cancer which had to be removed right away. The operation was in October (2021) and the surgeon said ‘The margins are clear.’ But I read about the cancer and learned that immunotherapy can keep it from spreading. Of course I wasn’t able to get it.

“By August 2022, I was very sick and an MRI showed a new lump above my collarbone and that I had chronic lymphocytic leukemia. The surgeon said ‘don’t worry. It won’t metastasize.’ But by late October, I felt another lump behind my jaw.” The clinic gave Hopper an antibiotic but didn’t refer him to a specialist. Finally, in February (2023), new tests showed the cancer had spread to his parotid gland—which is in the neck.

Hopper had another operation and was told to start immunotherapy immediately. But Coalinga didn’t arrange it. So Hopper’s cancer is now at Stage 3. Another surgery in June (2023) removed the parotid gland tumor and lymph nodes in his neck. “The doctor told me the cancer had spread to my jaw and I needed even more surgery. But if Coalinga had arranged for the immunotherapy two years ago, maybe it wouldn’t have spread,” he says. Now, part of Hopper’s neck is gone and he can’t open his jaw without a lot of pain. Immunotherapy still hasn’t begun.

Leo Gutierrez, who’s 55, has battled kidney disease since 2016, when he started dialysis at the DaVita Kidney Care Center three times a week. He says the weekly bill is about \$20,000—which doesn’t include the cost of the guards who accompany him for the six-hour trip. One inmate at Coalinga offered to donate a kidney so Gutierrez could have a transplant, but Coalinga staff said they weren’t allowed to approve this. However, Ralph Montano, the spokesman for California’s Department of State Hospitals,



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emailed me to confirm that transplants are allowed.

When the cost of dialysis and transplants are compared, the choice seems a no-brainer: according to Vimo.com, a health cost website, the average price for a kidney transplant is \$143,500, although insurance companies negotiate the cost downwards (medications are extra). And that's far less than the \$2.5 million a year California pays for Gutierrez's dialysis. He desperately wants the transplant because, as he told me, "I don't want to die."

Robert says the long delays are partly due to a shortage of social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors, nurses and psych techs; and, since September, even more staff have left and not been replaced. Thus, conditions can only deteriorate further—particularly as the men get older and have ever more ailments.

To make matters worse, during this past year, 15 Coalinga inmates tested positive for Hepatitis C and one for HIV. Before now, none of them had experienced infections or had a drug issue. How could this happen? California's Department of Public Health (DPH) checked the medical records and saw that all 16 men were treated at Coalinga's pain clinic. Michael St. Martin, an inmate who collects data about the facility says the DPH thinks the infections were likely caused by cross-contamination at the pain clinic; it seems the staff re-used syringes (called pipettes) for a pain management procedure it performed instead of throwing them away after each use.

The men are furious because they weren't informed about their infections even after Coalinga staff knew. St. Martin says "we only found out when we learned the pain clinic had closed. Now, 187 of the men are suing Coalinga and

Dr. Francis Lagatutta, who ran the clinic, for malpractice.

Littlefield, Texas

At the Littlefield, Texas civil commitment facility, the medical clinic handled Covid in a way which ensured that many of the 390 inmates would get it. According to Mandi Brady, a security officer and medical assistant at Littlefield from 2018 to 2021, "Covid spread like wildfire every few days. It was the worst in 2021, when at least half the men had it and 12 died."

Brady says those who tested positive weren't quarantined from those who tested negative; the clinic didn't sanitize the examining room between patients; the sick and non-sick were sent back to their rooms, which hold two, four or 14 men. "We passed food trays through their doors and the infected and uninfected ate together in their rooms. Also, they weren't permitted to do their own laundry. Instead, staff threw their dirty clothes into the same sacks and washed them together," she adds.

Further, the men weren't given hand sanitizers, the staff weren't given masks until October 2020, and the men weren't given them until November. Wearing masks wasn't mandatory until the end of December.

As for treating their pain, even if they had high fevers, they only got Tylenol, ibuprofen or aspirin," Brady says.

Besides the Covid problem, Brady says one man (we'll call him John) had serious stomach pain last spring. The sole full-time doctor at Littlefield's clinic (who is retired from an OB-GYN practice in the town) gave him medicine 'to settle his stomach.' Since his pain persisted through July, he was referred to a doctor in Lubbock, TX. However, he couldn't keep the appointment because the Management and Training Corporation (MTC), the company which runs

Littlefield, wouldn't approve it. The clinic re-scheduled a second appointment and MTC refused again. John's wife contacted Marsha McLane, the executive director of the Texas Commitment Office, who called MTC headquarters to get the appointment approved. But MTC refused a third time. By early October, John was jaundiced and sent to an emergency room—which found he had a blocked bile duct. Surgery was performed to unblock the duct and the doctor also found Stage 2 pancreatic cancer. His chemotherapy began a week later. All told, it took him over a half year to get the diagnosis and start treatment.

Then there's the bureaucratic boondoggle. Every year, Texas signs MTC's contract—although the company has been caught in some messy maneuvers. According to a November 22, 2022 *Texas Tribune* article, "MTC billed Texas billions of dollars for inmate mental health programs it didn't offer. And it forced prisoners to fill out false time sheets stating they received treatment from MTC counselors. If they didn't, the inmates were warned they would be disciplined or lose their parole and be forced to return to prison."

And Texas is not alone.

The *Tribune* noted that "Mississippi... demanded MTC pay nearly \$2 million for improperly billing the state for thousands of unmanned prison guard shifts," based on an investigation by the Marshall Project.

A closer look at MTC's record shows that Texas may also be in on the take. The *Tribune* noted that the advocacy group, LatinaJustice, suggests that the Texas Department of Criminal Justice knew about the "the fraud that MTC was committing" and still renewed its contracts.

This is a two part article which we will print the second part in March. We will print about what is happening in other places like, Moose Lake and St. Peter, Minnesota We must stand up and help our brothers in these Civil Commitment Institutions. These Shadow Prisons are a detriment to our society.

We would like to thank everyone who sent us Christmas cards and stamps and donations. I wish we could answer everyone who did, but it is too many to do. Again thank you all!!



Jesus in Jail— by Sandy Z

I have never been in prison. My deceased husband spent some time behind bars and we have worked with others who have been in prison, so I have heard stories. I can only imagine that it's a scary place. You are now under the total control of an entity who's whole desire is to tear you down. I don't believe that prison is in any way reformative. You also find yourself in the company of some of the worst of society such as murderers, sex offenders, thieves, gang members, and others who have committed heinous crimes. But, there is one person who isn't yoked by anything the prison experience has to offer. That is Jesus. Why would Jesus dwell among those who have done some of the worst things that society shuns? Because He loves us, not because of who we are but because of who He is.

I can remember many stories that my husband, Greg, told me about his prison experience. You need to be careful what you pray for because you just might get it. Greg knew his life was spiraling out of control and asked the Lord to put him in a place where the Lord could speak to him. Eventually, there he was in a place where he had lost all his individuality, but also in a place where he had three hots and a cot, so he didn't have to worry about providing for himself. He had a chance to pray and study God's word like never before. He became much stronger in the Lord and came out of prison a changed man.

He also received many miracles while in prison. One such mira-

cle happened when the guards put a murderer in his cell with him. I believe their intent was to kill him. Greg woke up one morning, his roommates belongings were packed up, and he was gone. Greg was pulled into the counselors office and told a story. The story was that the murderer roommate had a shank and was about to stab Greg in the back with it when an invisible hand came out of nowhere and stopped his hand. The man was shaking and visibly upset. He asked to be removed from the cell immediately.

Another such man is one that I've known for nearly 20 years. I've never met him personally, but I've corresponded with him and talked with him on the phone for many years. I consider him one of my best friends. He went into prison because he became a part of a cult and killed both of his parents. He has never told me his whole testimony because he says it's too painful, but he did tell me that when he was first in prison he made it his goal to kill sex offenders. He did kill one and ended up in solitary confinement (or the hole as they call it.). During his time there he became so disturbed that they had to tie him down to keep him from hurting himself. There was only one guard that would help him.

Like I said he's never given me his whole testimony, but he was completely changed by the Lord. Since I've known him, he's been a stable influence in my life. When Greg was alive he became great friends with him. What a change! Greg was a sex offend-

er. He was also one of my angels after Greg died. He called me twice a week whenever he could using his own money to check on me.

He has also experienced many miracles. That guard, the only one who helped him when he was so demon possessed that he wanted to hurt himself, has somehow followed him nearly everywhere he's been. He was an Assistant Warden at one place and helped my friend get the job as a Chaplain's Assistant. He's now the main Warden at the place my friend is at. He helped him get into a pod that is very safe and where he can do exactly what he wants to do and that is to serve the Lord with all his heart.

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39 NIV) Because of all the many miracles that I have heard coming from men who have had a prison experience, I'm convinced that this Scripture passage is a true promise of God. He can work even in the worst places on earth.





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Hebrew 13:3 - Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Remember if you change your address you need to let us know if you want to continue to receive this newsletter



Greetings from Belmont Correctional Institution!

I miss everyone at home- and you, my bretheren in Christ, are my family!

One of the greatest benefits to a stay in prison is that I have little to do except pursue my faith, and I am BLESSED with two excellent chaplains. When I first met Chaplain Parker, he asked me a question – “Which are you, the thermometer or the thermostat?” Of course, I received one of many mini-sermons Chaplain Parker and Chaplain LeSure have given me over the last 5-1/2 months!

So, what IS the difference? Well a thermostat sets the temperature in an area. The thermometer simply READS the temperature. As Christians, as in people in general, we fall into one category or the other. The thermostats set things in motion, thermostats set the pace for others, thermostats are AC-TION and MOTION motivators. Meanwhile, thermometers receive the motion, they receive information, they store and record what thermostats create.

Both Thermostats and thermometers are valued in Christ! I tend to balance between being a doer and a keeper. I admit, when I was asked that question, I was a thermometer – a GREAT thing to be in prison! I stayed to myself and read the temperature. As I settled into this place, I also settled into some of the services offered at the Chapel- such as Men of Purpose, Kairos, Nooma, and Stepping Up. We now have after-

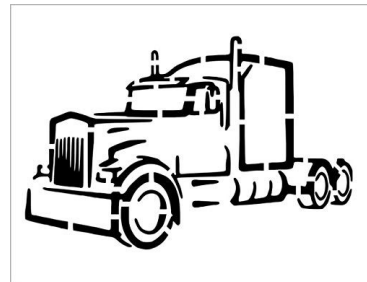
noon Bible studies in the library and I am close to our Stephen Ministers.

As I settled into my new routine, I started asking questions and sharing where the Holy Ghost was leading me. Before I knew it, people in my dorm started coming to my bed when I was doing my devotions. I had become a thermostat!

So, friends, which are you? Christianity is action- related. It is also knowledge- based. Some of us are quite comfortable in our roles as recipients of God's Word and His Spirit. Others are pace s-setters, those who start home-fellowship groups and pull others together. Together, thermostats and thermometers work together to receive the Word and set it into motion. Are you a thermostat or a thermometer?

I will be home on May 15 of 2024. That is only 5 months away! I am looking forward to my new life on the outside. I am praying that God can use ma and that I will be equally used, in both learning and leading. God is Great! Everyone has a role in Him!

Be Blessed! Trucker Jon



Circle of Concern has gone ZOOM

Circle of Concern is aimed at breaking down isolation and fear by providing a safe place for registrants and their loved ones to get together, build community, and learn ways to step out and take charge of their lives and overcome the stigma they face. The Circle of Concern is a group of concerned registered citizens, family and friends that meet together on the 3rd Sunday of each month. We are meeting this month on February 18, 2024 at 3 pm—4 p.m. MST (Mountain Standard Time). We will meet on Zoom. We encourage and try to help each other. It is a safe place to share our strengths and struggles. We hope you will join us. If you are planning to attend call Don at (505) 315-7940.. He will send you the link to join by computer or phone. You can contact him at the number above or email him at donmagicjohnston@gmail.com