

Darin Bufalino
W 100579
PO.Box 1218
Shirley, MA 01464

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I am going to describe an incident that were it not indicative of U-MASS MEDICAL'S treatment of prisoners in the Massachusetts prison system, It would be hilariously funny. Unfortunately it is not a funny story but a true display of the ineptitude and antipathy shown by medical staff to men and women in the care and custody of the Mass. Department of Correction.

Lunch served at MCI Shirley medium prison today was labeled " Beef Patty, Bun, Cottage Potato, Corn, Pudding and Punch ". Leaving aside " Beef Patties " have not been served at MCI Shirley for so long that no-one can remember when the last time a " Beef Patty " was actually served. That is to say a patty made out of real beef ! While chewing my " Beef Patty " I bit down on something that broke a bottom molar tooth.

As per DOC rules I informed the duty Lieutenant of the incident. He made note of the incident and called the Health Services Dept. informed them of the incident and asked that I be seen by Dental as soon as possible. He then instructed me to " Go see Medical Staff Rep. at Staff access " which was being held at that moment out front of the inmate dining hall. I wait in line along with 20 to 30 other inmates (not all waiting to see medical) finally my turn to speak with a Staff member. I explain what has happened only to be told " Fill out a sick slip, The dentist is not in today ".

I ask if he will be in tomorrow ? " I do not know " is her reply. O.K. But what do I do ? My tooth is broke, The nerve is exposed and I am already in agonizing pain and nauseous. What can be done ? Her response with a straight face is as follows; " Put a piece of chewing gum on it and in the meantime fill out a sick slip ".

This is the attitude that permeates DOC staff and has seeped into the so-called Health Care Professionals from U-MASS MEDICAL which has been contracted by Mass. DOC to provide medical care to inmates. (U-MASS MEDICAL is paid over 50 million per year for this contract) In her mind she actually believed she helped me with my medical emergency. " Chewing Gum and a sick slip " !!!!

For those of you who do not know, Chewing Gum is a contraband item in the prison system. Inmate possession would lead to segregation (The Hole) and investigation with disciplinary sanctions as a result such as loss of visits, telephone and or commissary.

Imagine if you will- You have a broken tooth, You only have one dentist you can use. Not only do you not know when you can see him Tomorrow, 2 days or maybe next week ? But to add to your agony, If you think he is going to fix your tooth you are sadly mistaken ! Fillings are rarely performed, Root canals even less if ever.

The Mass. DOC spends over 90 million dollars per year for medical care of its inmates. (DOC 2010 annual report, supra @ 44) Just like there is no more rehabilitation in the prison system, There is no preventive medicine or even adequate health care. The response to every ailment within the prison system is to " Put some Chewing Gum on it " or it will be extracted. This is the position the DOC takes with all inmate issues.

When did it become acceptable to treat animals bred for consumption better than human beings ? I do not know, But if I had to guess I would say about the time they switched those " Beef Patties " for something else without informing the men and women eating them that in fact they were not actually " Beef Patties ".

Post Script;

Days later on Friday 8/31/2012 the dentist is in, Although I am not on the list to see him. A call is placed to the superintendent of MCI Shirley from my attorney regarding treatment. At 9 a.m. through the intervention of my housing officer I am sent to Health Services. I am seen by the dentist. An x-ray is taken and I am told to wait outside while it develops. While standing there the woman I had spoken to at Staff access says to me " You got me in big trouble " and walks away. I am called back into dental and brusquely told " If we can fit you in today we will call you back, If not it may be Tuesday " (Monday being Labor Day) all I am thinking is fit me for what ?

Tuesday comes and I am first on the dental list. Everyone is friendly, A patch job on my broken molar and while the going was good I ask the dentist if he would do something on another tooth, Which he did: putting a temporary patch on it.

Yes it took six miserable days and the phone call from my attorney along with everything else. In the end I still have the tooth, Which is more than I could have hoped for. Will it and the temporary fix last until my release date in 2017 ? I doubt it, But they will have a better chance if I skip the " Beef Patty " in the dining hall.