

PS1.263**Medical practice in prisons: public health, ethical and legal aspects**

Vasilios Stoukas

Korydallos Prison Complex "St. Paul" Hospital, Athens, Greece

Corresponding author: Dr Vasilios Stoukas, "Agios Panteleimon" General Hospital of Nikaia, Piraeus, Internal Medicine, Peristeri, Athens, Greece. E-mail: stoukasb@yahoo.com

It is increasingly being recognized that good prison health is good public health. Getting medical services to people who need them the most, especially to those who are the hardest to reach, is a continuing challenge as a high proportion of those with multiple health problems are incarcerated in prisons. The position of the prison doctor is a multitasking one. The physician is responsible for the health of the prisoners, deals with addicted inmates, psychiatric patients, hunger strikers and riots. In many occasions the doctor is also required to operate as a peacekeeping factor between the inmates and the warden, mainly in order to maintain the fragile relations existing in correctional facilities. The detection of serious communicable diseases such as HIV infection and tuberculosis, accompanied by adequate treatment and the introduction of harm reduction measures as necessary, contributes significantly to the health status of the communities from which the prisoners come and to which they return. Public health opportunities in correctional facilities, even in an era of more restricted healthcare, may result in a cost-effective way of controlling the prevalence of such illnesses. In addition, it is now known that substance dependence can satisfactorily be treated in prisons and imprisoned mental health patients may be helped. More recent developments include the real possibility that the time in custody can be used to promote healthier lifestyles, with better control over smoking and alcohol and perhaps over the use of violence in interpersonal relationships. Last but not least, the profound knowledge of such delicate issues as medical confidentiality, informed consent of the patient and the correct medical certification and documentation is absolutely necessary in the prison working environment.