

JAIL BULLETIN

Number 69

October, 1990

SPECIAL NEEDS INMATES PART V

SUICIDAL INMATES

HEALTH CARE SERVICE

Prisoners must be provided with a full array of health care services throughout their period of confinement. Facility staff should receive guidance from health care personnel through procedures and training.

CLASSIFICATION

Prisoner housing, work and program assignments must be consistent with the findings of a classification process which is comprehensive, objective and verifiable. Classification efforts should begin upon admission.

A comprehensive classification system should be implemented in stages, beginning with admission. The system must determine prisoner housing, work and program assignments based on objective and verifiable information which is collected and analyzed.

Prisoners should be regularly informed of their status in the facility and should be offered periodic opportunities to request a review of their classification status. These steps will help to reduce prisoner stress by decreasing the uncertainty of their environment.

SEGREGATION/SEPARATION

Prisoners with special needs should only be segregated after the classification process determines that the placement will not compound the problems of the prisoner. Alternatives to segregation should be used for prisoners who are, or may be, self-destructive.

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Researchers have found that segregation is usually prescribed for the convenience of the staff and most often is a detriment to the prisoner. Isolation poses a special threat to prisoners, enhancing the chance of suicide. Some suggest that potentially suicidal prisoners be placed in the general population, rather than being isolated. In a few facilities, other prisoners are trained to serve as "Suicide Prevention Aides," working directly with fellow prisoners who are at risk.

SECURITY

Frequent searches should be conducted for contraband, including items which may be used for self-destruction. A continuum of custody levels should be established allowing prisoners to progress to lower levels in response to their improved behavior.

Physical restraints should only be used as a last resort to prevent prisoner self-injury, and should only be applied for the amount of time necessary.

Many institutional security practices produce stress and increase uncertainty for prisoners. While security concerns must not be compromised, managers should consider methods which will reduce the detrimental impact of security procedures on prisoners.

SUPERVISION

Prisoner supervision efforts are the heart of suicide prevention efforts. There is no substitute for human interaction and contact. Volunteers, and even other prisoners, can be used to supplement (but not replace) staff supervisory efforts.

Prisoner supervision must be provided around-the-clock at levels indicated by the custody and status of each prisoners. Prisoners who are intoxicated, under the influence of drugs, violent, self-destructive or who have other special physical or mental problems/needs must be provided with constant observation and with frequent personal supervision.

Prisoners in high custody status and others with special needs should be personally supervised at least every fifteen minutes; prisoners in medium security should be supervised at least every thirty minutes; prisoners in low security should be supervised at least every sixty minutes. Supervision, in this context, means that a staff member personally observes each prisoner from a distance of a few feet, preferably establishing verbal contact.

Many facilities employ new electronic devices which record the periodic staff visits to cell area. Such systems can also remind staff if checks have not been made on time, and are difficult to circumvent.

There seems to be increasing agreement that audio/visual equipment is not a substitute for staff supervision or observation of prisoners. Video monitors rarely are viewed as often as anticipated, and do not always provide the quality of image which is needed to be an effective surveillance tool.

VISITING, TELEPHONE AND CORRESPONDENCE

Maintaining ties with the "outside world" is often one of the best methods for reducing stress and anxiety; however, staff must be attentive to some of the anxieties which can result from such contact.

Prisoners should be provided with ample opportunities to maintain contacts with their families and friends. Staff should encourage prisoners to use visiting, telephone and mail resources.

PRISONER ACTIVITIES, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Programs provide prisoners with contact with the community. Idleness and lack of opportunities can contribute to prisoner depression. Programs, activities and services not only offer constructive guidance and treatment, and build self confidence, but also help to fill time which may otherwise be used for brooding.

A range of prisoner activities, programs and services must be provided in longer-term facilities in an effort to reduce idleness and relieve stress. Indoor and outdoor exercise should be available to all prisoners regularly (daily). Commissary privileges should be offered to prisoners. Work programs and projects allow prisoners to reduce idleness, learn work habits and make contributions to the facility. Prisoner program offerings should include education and counseling opportunities.

QUIZ

Nebraska Jail Standards require that jail staff receive eighteen (18) hours of in-service training each year. The Jail Bulletin may be used to supplement in-service training if an officer studies the Bulletin, completes the quiz and this process is documented by the jail administrator for review during the annual jail inspection.

SUBJECT: SPECIAL NEEDS INMATES - V **NAME** _____

NUMBER: 69 **DATE** _____

1. Placing an inmate in isolation always decreases the risk of suicide.
 True False

2. Prisoners who are intoxicated, under the influence of drugs, violent or self-destructive should be provided with _____ observation.

3. The article recommends supervision of high custody status inmates every _____ minutes.

4. Audio/visual equipment is a good substitute for staff supervision or observation.
 True False

5. Give reasons why providing inmate programs and service or work programs is a good idea: _____

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ANSWER SHEET SHOULD BE RETAINED BY JAIL ADMINISTRATOR OR TRAINING OFFICER

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____ True X False

5. Give reasons why providing inmate programs and service or work programs is a good idea: reduce idleness, constructive guidance & treatment, learn work habits, build self-confidence, contribute to the facility, help fill time.

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