

February 21, 2014

It's Friday, and for the last 4-days, my entire building, 1 of 2 on this yard alone, has been on a "pretend quarantine." We're told that the reason for this is because they've had several confirmed cases of the H1N1 virus in this building, prompting them to implement the quarantine in an effort to stop it from continuing to spread. However, there are several things wrong with this.

For starters, as it's been explained to us, the flu is contagious for several days prior to showing any symptoms, so it's more than likely that it's already spread throughout the entire facility. Still, better late than never, right? The only problem is that this isn't actually a quarantine. The only thing they're doing is keeping the inmates in this building from interacting with the inmates from other buildings. Even though our out-of-cell time is extremely limited, we still interact with each other when we do come out, for meals, recreation, medication and showers. If their concern was truly to prevent the flu from spreading, then why not impose a strict quarantine for a few days, one that prevents us all from having any contact with each other, until it can be determined who has, and who doesn't have, the virus?

Honestly, I think the idea of a quarantine is pretty stupid. It sounds good on paper, but in reality, it just doesn't work. What they should have done was offer everyone the flu vaccine (which they did), provide informational videos on how to avoid the flu (which they've done), and issued masks to everyone (which they haven't). Other than that, there's really nothing else you can do. The quarantine, while well-intentioned, operates more like a punishment than anything else. We're prevented from going to work, earning any money, getting regular recreation, using the phone, getting visits, getting our packages, and so much more.

The prison has taken a proactive approach, and on paper, that sounds like a great idea, but it's failing miserably, and here's another reason why. Each day, the nurses make their rounds, trying to find out whether or not anyone else is suffering flu-like symptoms, and knowing that new cases are only going to prolong the "quarantine," some of the guys in here (mostly gang members) have resorted to threats in an attempt to stop people from reaching out for medical assistance. While I certainly understand their frustration with being locked up in their cells despite being healthy and having taken their flu shot, threats of violence is no way to handle things, so now the nurses are taking everyone's temperatures during the rounds. And as you can imagine, threats have already begun circulating about this as people are being told that if they do feel sick, they're to refuse to let the nurse take their temperature, which subjects them to potential disciplinary action. But what do they (those resorting to threats of violence) care? It's all about them, no one else and nothing else matters.

I'd like to think that everything will be up and back to normal by Monday morning, mainly because I want to go back to work, but the fact of the matter is that it's not looking good. With 4 more suspected cases being discovered last night, plus at least 1 refusal, there's a pretty good chance that the prison will continue this "pretend quarantine" longer than anticipated.

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