

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

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Getting New Glasses In Prison

Every prisoner who needs glasses can get his or her eyes tested every two years by paying the \$7.50 co-pay and will receive a pair of glasses.

I never wore glasses until I came to prison. I started getting headaches from reading so much. When I had my eyes tested I found out that my eyes focus at two different distances. I had to get reading glasses to get rid of the headaches. The glasses helped but my eyes still bothered me. I kept getting stronger glasses thinking that would solve the problem.

It wasn't until I was in prison for about 20 years and had enough money to buy a pair of personal glasses that I finally learned what the problem was. After returning the purchased glasses for the 3rd time and telling the company to keep them, they wrote me and told me about a condition called a "non-adapt" to polycarbonate. They gave me plastic lenses and I had no further problems.

I was so pleased with the plastic lenses and trouble-free vision that I resolved not to buy any more glasses and to stick with my current prescription. The only correction I needed was magnification and to focus my eyes at the same distance. My resolution worked very well for almost 10 years but lately it's getting harder to see small print and other details.

I finally saw the eye doctor and got a new prescription. I forgot to mention my non-adapt to polycarbonate so I wrote to the doctor to make sure he ordered plastic lenses. His response stated in pertinent part: "Polycarbonate is the only material allowed to Offenders according to High-Tech (the company we order our glasses through)."

I wrote a letter to Health Services Supervisor DeMars and explained the situation to her and asked her to order plastic lenses for me. She didn't respond so I filed an ICRS grievance to get plastic lenses. I assumed that someone would talk to me to verify the problem and order plastic lenses. WRONG! My grievance was dismissed stating in pertinent part:

"According to Ms. DeMars the glasses that were ordered are polycarbonate and are being kept in HSU. She stated to this ICE that she spoke to the Optometrist and according to him, since it has been more than 10 years since Inmate Richards received new glasses he should first try the glasses. If after trying the glasses he can contact the Doctor to discuss results and options."

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Are you kidding me? I'm 60 years old and have had this problem my entire life. Peoples' eyes don't change like that. How could any rational person believe that a life-long non-adapt to polycarbonate is going to go away just because I haven't had my eyes tested in 10 years? I wonder if HSU staff force prisoners who tell them they are allergic to penicillin to take a dose just to prove it?

I appealed my grievance which was dismissed because: "the inmate has provided no new information to warrant recommending overturning that decision . . ." During this entire process, no one has spoken to me or made any attempt to diagnose whether I have a non-adapt to polycarbonate. They spent more time and money in rejecting my grievance than it would have cost them to simply give me glasses with plastic lenses.

I went to HSU last week to pick up the glasses. I can see much better with the new prescription and of course I can only wear them for about 10 minutes before they begin to hurt my eyes.

I will write to HSU this week to tell them my non-adapt to polycarbonate is alive and well and making my eyes hurt when I put on the new glasses. I can predict the response. They will tell me that it always takes eyes a while to adapt to a new prescription and that I should keep wearing them until my eyes get used to them.

If anyone reading this has any information about eyes not adapting to polycarbonate, I would appreciate hearing from you.