

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

August 4, 2016

Where's My Pillow?

This is one of those prison situations that is so absurd that I can only laugh about it. First, a little background information.

I am 62 years old. When I was 18, I got in a motorcycle accident which crushed my leg. It took years to heal and I've been permanently crippled since then. My foot swells up every day and I elevate it every night so the swelling goes down. I have been doing this for over 40 years, 31 of which have been spent in prison.

Every year, I am required to get renewed authorization to have an extra pillow to elevate my leg to get rid of the swelling. Every year for the past 31 years I made the request, it was approved and that was the end of it for another year. But not this year. My authorization expired and I requested renewal through Health Services (HSU). The nurse told me that the "Special Needs Committee" (SNC) had to review it and gave me a 30 day extension to give them time to conduct the review.

I also wear special shoes with a lift provided by HSU and also need authorization to wear them. I get frequent visits and cannot wear my special shoes unless the authorization is current. I run the risk of not being allowed to go on a visit and having my visitor sent away if I do not have the authorization for my shoes. I cannot wear regular state-issued shoes which are required in the visiting if there is no authorization for special shoes. And, yes, some prison staff are so anal they will enforce the policy and deny me a visit. The 30 day extension expired without a renewal and I was at risk of getting my visits denied because of the shoe issue.

I filed a grievance about the failure of the SNC to renew my authorizations. My grievance was returned to me and I was told to exhaust the "chain of command" before I could file. The nurse had told me HSU had nothing to do with the SNC but the Complaint Examiner told me the HSU supervisor was the head of the SNC and I had to write to her. I wrote her a sarcastic letter criticizing her for failing to renew my authorizations and also wrote to the warden.



A couple of weeks later my authorizations were renewed for another year - except for my extra pillow. It was denied because it was deemed to be unnecessary. I filed another grievance because the SNC retaliated against me for criticizing them for not doing their job. Nobody asked me why I had an extra pillow. If they would have, I could have showed them my swollen foot and explained why I needed an extra pillow.

I tried asking HSU staff to address the chronic swelling but they refused, stating that the SNC had already denied my request for an extra pillow. I followed the chain of command without any result and filed another grievance. My grievance was dismissed "noting that this patient will be evaluated for lower edema swelling." I was called to HSU and showed them my swelled up foot and asked for an extra pillow. Their response was "Forward request for extra pillow to special needs."

Absolutely nothing was done. What is wrong with these people? Are they crazy? Or just sadistic SOBs who get their kicks making people suffer?

It is an insignificant issue that matters to no one but me. I am the one suffering. It's not a big deal, I won't die from the pain and discomfort. It is just another example of careless cruelty by decision makers who know they will never be treated the way they treat prisoners. I am powerless to do anything about it. I would buy my own pillow if they would let me but that isn't allowed either.