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COVID-19 Preparedness In Stanley Prison

Last week I speculated about COVID-19 coming to Stanley. Now I'd like to tell about what preparations are being made.

On Friday March 13, 2020, the entire prison system suspended visitors and volunteers from entering prisons. This week, Stanley has introduced new sanitation procedures throughout the prison: cleaning and bleaching all areas multiple times per day and limiting how many prisoners can attend chapel or library or school classes. However, cleaning is not what they need to do.

Prisoners are still being transferred into Stanley every week. I used to go to the intake unit to do part of the orientation. I sent a letter on Sunday notifying the program director that I would no longer do that during the COVID-19 pandemic. I suggested that they prerecord all the presentations and play them on closed-circuit television. My suggestion was not accepted.

I also wrote to Kevin Carr, Secretary of the DOC, regarding his COVID-19 memo he issued. Here is what I said:

"I read your memo on COVID-19 restrictions and I don't think you went far enough. You did not mention anything about inter-prison transfers.

"The majority of people infected with COVID-19 will carry the virus with few or no symptoms. Unless you pretest every prisoner you transfer, you run the risk of an asymptomatic prisoner carrying the virus from one prison to another and eventually infecting everyone in the prison system.

It will be impossible to treat prisoners for the virus once it gets into a prison. In Stanley, we are packed like sardines, all cells are doubled and there is no place an infected prisoner can be safely isolated or treated. Also, there are hundreds of prisoners here who are over 60 and/or have compromised immune systems. A COVID-19 outbreak in Stanley could cause many deaths. We are like a land-locked cruise ship - self-contained and unable to avoid exposure once the virus enters the prison.

"I urge you to suspend all prisoner transfers unless you pretest the prisoners and/or isolate them at the receiving institution."

The current rumor is that the incoming prisoners will be quarantined for 15 days after they arrive in Stanley. That would be great except there is no place to put them where they are not in direct contact with general population prisoners. The intake unit has prisoner workers who are allowed to go to library, gym, chapel and hobby. They will not be wearing protective gear and will be living in the intake unit alongside of the new prisoners. The kitchen will be bringing them food at the same time and laundry workers will come to intake to measure all the new guys for clothing.

The procedure will reduce exposure but not eliminate it. All it takes is one infected prisoner to introduce the virus into the prison and since most infected people have no symptoms, their policy will delay rather than prevent the virus from entering Stanley.

In my opinion, the people making the decisions haven't got a clue about what they should be doing. If asked how they rate themselves, no doubt they would echo Donald Trump and say ten out of ten. The reality is more like how the medical expert rated Trump: "I'd give him a ten . . . on a scale of 100."

I hope and pray that I'm healthy enough to survive the virus if I become infected.