

# prison health news

*-better health care while you are in and when you get out-*

Issue 7, Fall 2006

## Who We Are...

*We are on the outside, but we were inside before. We've been where you are now and know what it's like...and survived it. We are ex-offenders talking about health issues and trying to bring about a positive change for all people who are in prison now or ever have been in the past. This newsletter is about all of us.*

*We will be talking about health issues. For example, what is good nutrition? Where can you get services and information on the outside? We want to take your health questions seriously and break down complicated health information so that it is understandable.*

*We're also here to help you learn how to get better health care within your facility and how to get answers to your health questions. Don't get frustrated. Be persistent. In prison, it's often hard to get what you want, but with health information, it doesn't have to be impossible. Join us in our fight for our right to health care and health information.*

Read on...

From,  
John, Waheedah, Jeanette,  
Shake , & Sam



Freedom, by Juan Balderama, Books Through Bars, Contexts Collection

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## write an article!

We have gotten lots of requests for articles already, and we know that everyone who reads this newsletter will have questions or his or her own story to tell.

If you have advice for other prisoners dealing with health issues, write to us. We will feature you in "Words to Live By."

If you have a question, write to us. We will write you back and may publish an article on your question in *Prison Health News*.

If you want to write an article on something you think is important for prisoners' health, send it and we will consider publishing it in *Prison Health News*. You can also write us first to discuss ideas for articles.

*If you want your name kept confidential, you can sign your article with your first name or "anonymous."*

In coming issues, we will cover:

- \* Nutrition
- \* Exercise
- \* Getting Support While You Are Incarcerated
- \* How to Advocate for Yourself
- \* HIV Treatments
- \* Hepatitis C Treatments
- \* Treatment Strategies for HIV and Hepatitis C Co-infection
- \* Depression
- \* Getting Out
- \* Staying Clean When You Get Out
- \* Housing
- \* Welfare, food stamps, and medical assistance

page 2 ...and much more!

## Staying Healthy

by John Bell, ex-offender,

Staying healthy is extremely important, but it can be hard to do if you are incarcerated or have been recently released. If you are struggling with addiction, finding housing, accessing food, clothing, or other services, managing your health can be difficult.

There are some ways for you to stay healthy while you are inside and to ensure that you can be healthy when you get out. We have come up with some tips for how to fight for treatment and care when you're inside, and how to continue meeting your medical needs if you get released.

### While Inside

**Get Educated:** Visit the prison library to get a hold of basic health information. When you are getting information from books, it is really important to pay attention to the publication date. *Medical information changes, so try and read the most recent information available.*

For more specific health questions like HIV or Hep C, get on mailing lists for health information. For these topics, paying attention to publication date is extra important - HIV information is constantly being updated as new research happens. Try to stick to things that are no older than five or six years.

The library and health newsletters are some of the best resources you have access to when you're locked up. Confused by some of the things you're reading? Write down your questions - mail them to us at *Prison*

# When You're In & When You Get Out

and Hannah Zellman

*Health News*, or other prisoner publications. You can also bring your questions with you when you see the doctor or nurse. *However you get it, get information!* You are the best advocate for yourself when you are armed with knowledge.

**Work the System:** You have the right to care and treatment when locked up. First, it's important to remember that people are more likely to help you if you are polite. This applies across the board - from the guards to the medical staff. It also helps to get to know your CO's and make sure that they are on your side - they can be allies when you need them.

However, we know that getting your needs met isn't always as easy as being polite. **If you feel like you are being denied treatment or mistreated, find out the protocol for filing grievances and follow it.**

In addition to filing grievances, if you have friends or family on the outside, keep them informed. It can also be really helpful to have a case manager, social worker, or doctor on the outside who is willing to advocate for you. Whoever it is, use your supports on the outside to help you get access to the care and treatment you have a right to.

## **Preparing for Release:**

Release can be a hectic time. You should do everything you can while you're locked up to make sure that your reentry is smooth. Here are

some tips:

**Create your own medical records** Keep track of your care and treatment on the inside, because it won't always get forwarded on to your doc in the community. Ask for copies of your records, or keep track by writing down any meds you are prescribed or care you receive.

**Hook up with services on the outside** Ask around and find out about HIV/AIDS agencies in your area. Write to us or other prisoner mailing lists and we will help you find what you are looking for! One of the most important services to get linked up to is medical care.

**HIV clinics can be a gateway to other services** Once you are hooked up to medical care, the folks at the doctor's office can link you up to other services.

Services and benefits for folks living with HIV/AIDS are interconnected. In many places medical and social services operate like a web. The important thing to know is that there are services out there that can help you transition back into your community. The doctor's office can be a great connection to case management, housing, food, addiction, or other supportive services for folks living with HIV. ❖

# Standing in Line for Meds: What You

by Karen Goldstein, MD

Here are some things you may want to know about HIV medication. As you may have heard, the treatment of HIV has gotten much better in recent years. There are many more medications available. With anti-HIV medications and care from a good medical provider, people who are HIV positive are living longer and healthier lives

However, not everyone with HIV needs to take medication immediately. HIV makes people sick by damaging their immune system (the part of the body that fights disease and infection). Some people may be HIV positive, but not need to take medication because their immune system is still working well early on.

When you should start medications depends on a number of things, including your CD4 count (a measure of a type of cell in your immune system), your viral load (how much virus you have in your body) and other aspects of your health. You should discuss with your doctor when you should start medication for HIV

When you start taking medications, it is important that you take them exactly as prescribed by your doctor. This means taking them at the same time every day (within a few hours).

You need to be ready to make a commitment to taking your HIV medications consistently before starting them. This is something that is important to discuss with your doctor when deciding whether or

not you should start meds.

**Why is it so important to take your medications regularly?** If you take your medications some of the time but not others--missing pills here or there--the virus will be more likely to become resistant. When the virus becomes resistant, that means that certain medications will not work as well anymore. If the virus becomes resistant to enough different medications, it can be very hard to treat. A resistant virus is a dangerous virus

This also means that you should never stop taking one of your HIV medications and continue the others UNLESS instructed by your doctor. Taking some medications and not others can also lead to resistance. Your best defense against developing a resistant virus (i.e. difficult to treat) is by taking your medications on time, at the same time, everyday and never missing your medications for any reason.

**Why so many medications?** It is important to take multiple medications at the same time, because when taken in combination, HIV drugs work like a team fighting together against the HIV in your body.

Fighting the virus from several directions means that it will be harder for HIV to make you sick. Taking multiple medications also reduces the chance that your virus will become resistant.

Sometimes the medications come in a combination pill (multiple medications in one pill). Your doctor and you can

# Need to Know

find the best combination for you based on your virus and your other health conditions. Not all medications work the same for everyone.

**How can I remember to take medication every day?** Some people with HIV use different methods of remembering to take their medications on time every day. Some people develop a daily routine and time their medications accordingly. For example, some people take their meds at the beginning of their favorite TV program. Other folks ask a friend they can trust to remind them. It is important that you choose whatever method works best for you.

**What if I don't have possession of my medications?** If you are in a situation where someone else is giving you medications on a dose-by-dose basis, it is still important to be committed to your HIV medications. Try to make sure you are getting all the medications you are supposed to get every day. If you think you are not getting the medication as prescribed, you should put in a sick call to talk to your doctor or nurse **IMMEDIATELY!**

Your HIV medication will only work if you actually take it! HIV has become a much more treatable disease and unlike 15 years ago, you can live a normal and healthy life with HIV.

HOWEVER, you must take your medications consistently to stay healthy. ❖

**submit your art!**  
if you have artwork that you would like to see featured in an upcoming issue of *Prison Health News*, send it to us and we'll consider publishing it!

*Prison Health News*  
c/o Philadelphia FIGHT  
1233 Locust St, 5th Floor  
Philadelphia PA 19107



# Succeeding In The Face of Struggle

*-Jeanette Moody, ex-offender*

Hello, my name is Jeanette Moody, and I am a 44-year-old black female and a grateful recovering addict living with AIDS.

I need to say I'm a mother of two wonderful sons and a grandson who means the world to me. For so many years my life has been so chaotic, confusing, and unmanageable to the point that living wasn't even an option for me.

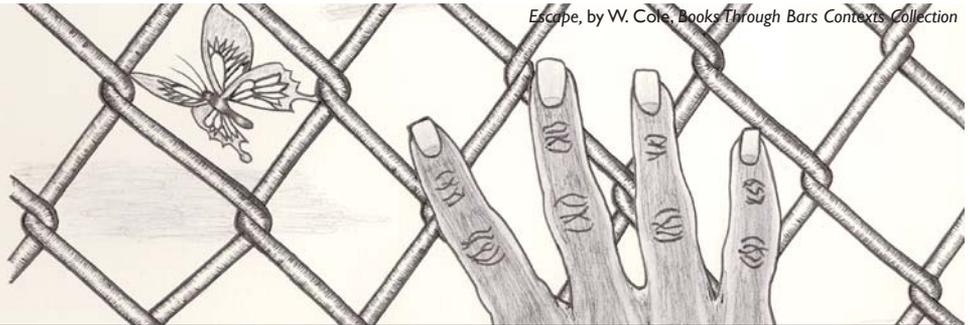
What happened is that I was raped by six guys in 1991 and then I was told in 1992 that I was HIV positive. After that my life seemed over, and then I started to use drugs to medicate my

feelings of feeling dirty, and not worthy of life itself.

Today I'm now living a clean and sober life with 10 years clean, a viral load that's undetectable, and a CD4 count of 280. Every day is a blessing. I'm now in the position to help others with addiction and help them learn to live with HIV/AIDS.

Through all my struggles I need to say my strength came from helping others, and my coping skills are at a point now where it allows me to carry on and trust in a power higher than myself, and to know that no matter what, I'm a survivor. ❖

*Escape, by W. Cole, Books Through Bars Contexts Collection*



## poems from the inside

*Going Down -By Tom Gallagher, prisoner*

I was brought up  
I fired up  
I got fucked up  
I drank up  
I puked up  
I shot up  
I smoked up  
I got caught up  
I stuck someone up  
I got set up  
The cops creeped up

I got beat up  
I got locked up  
I got sent up  
I gave up  
I got fed up  
I woke up  
I wised up  
I looked up  
I gave it up...  
Now things are looking up

## poems from the inside

### *A Love of Learning*

~ By Bobby Bostic, prisoner

I love to learn

The engines of my mind continue to  
churn

Everyday I learn something new  
Knowledge and wisdom I pursue  
When I was a child my mother said  
that I loved to learn new things  
Everything that I came across I was  
curious to know what it means

There is so much to learn in this world  
that I stay busy

Trying to find the answer to all of  
these questions with my own integrity  
Learning is something that I love to do  
That's why when it comes to books I  
am always on cue

I do not consider myself as a nerdy  
type of person

I just have a love of learning for  
certain

Discovering new things makes me feel  
good

That's why I study like a lifetime  
student should

Because a person can never learn too  
much

I hope to learn every language from  
Arabic to Dutch

Lessons are to be learned in every-  
thing that we experience and see

I am still learning new things about  
me

I keep on studying as the world is  
turning

Inside of me is this great love of  
learning

poem from Bobby's book of poems  
titled "Knowledge In A Poem"

## information resources for people in prison

**If you need information while you are  
locked up, contact:**

### **Project Inform**

Outreach and Education Department  
205 13th Street, Suite 2001  
San Francisco, CA 94103-2461  
information & newsletters on HIV  
\*free to prisoners

### **Fortune News**

Subscriptions  
c/o The Fortune Society  
53 West 23rd Street  
New York, NY 10010  
newsletter on criminal justice issues  
\*free to prisoners

### **Prison Legal News**

2400 NW 80th St. #148  
Seattle, WA 98117  
newsletter on prisoner rights & court rulings  
\*sample issue \$1. unused stamps OK.

### **Southern Poverty Law Center**

PO Box 548  
Montgomery, AL 36101  
Publish "Protecting Your Health and Safety:  
A Litigation Guide for Inmates"  
\*\$10 for inmates.

### **The Books 4 Prisoners Crew**

P.O. Box 19065  
Cincinnati, OH 45219  
Publishes "Inside Out" a prisoner resource  
guide with over 600 listings for prisoner  
support groups and a review of services  
provided by each one.  
\*\$6 for free world folk. Prisoners who  
would like a copy should send one of the  
following--\$0.60 in unused stamps, a  
\$0.60 prisoner money order made out  
to "Books For Prisoners," or 2 clean  
embossed envelopes.

As always, if you have specific questions  
or are looking for information, write us!  
Prison Health News c/o Philadelphia FIGHT  
1233 Locust St 5th Floor  
Philadelphia PA 19107

# advocacy and support resources for people in prison

If you need help while you are locked up, or when you get out, contact:

## **In Philadelphia, PA**

Philadelphia FIGHT

1233 Locust Street, 5th Floor

Philadelphia PA 19107

(215) 985-4448--no collect calls

Contact: Hannah Zellman

## **In Miami, FL**

Care Resource, Miami

3510 Biscayne Blvd, Suite 300

Miami, FL 33137

(305) 576-1234--no collect calls

Contact: Intake Counselor

## **In New York City, NY**

Women Prison Association

& Home Inc.

175 Remsen Street, 9th Floor

Brooklyn, NY 11201

(718) 797-0300--for collect calls from

inside New York Jails/Prisons

(718) 637-6818--no collect calls

Contact: Leah Bundy

## **In San Francisco, CA**

Continuum Springboard

225 Golden Gate Avenue

San Francisco, CA 94102

(415) 823-0414--no collect calls

(415) 823-0415--no collect calls

Contact: Helen Lin or Charlie Wilson

## **In New Brunswick, NJ**

Project Connect

PO Box 824

New Brunswick, NJ 08901

999-999-9999--for free calls from

inside New Jersey State Prisons

1-800-433-0254--toll free in NJ

Contact: Nadia Matar

## **In Houston, TX**

Legacy Community Health Services, Inc.

215 Westheimer

Houston, TX 77006

(713) 830-3002--no collect calls

Contact: Jay Slemmer, RN

Every organization on this list provides case management, medical care and support services for people when they get out of prison. Most of these organizations specialize in HIV care. Every organization distributes Prison Health News.

If you need resources in a city not listed here, **write to us!**  
We will help you track down answers to your specific questions.  
**Write to us** if you know a great organization that is missing from this list.

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**Edited By:**  
Hannah Zellman  
John S. James  
Adam Feldman  
John Bell  
Waheedah Shabazz-el  
Jeanette Moody  
Clayton "Shake" Clark  
Sam Morales

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