

Vermont Just Justice Recommendations for Prison Health Care

Independent oversight of the current contract with Wellpath, LLC

VJJ has heard, and is still receiving, reports of the failure of the health care system in our prisons. Vermont has contracted with a private company that has to pay a return to its investors, that has a very poor record of providing adequate care, and has had many law suits against it for substandard care and unnecessary deaths. DOC tells us that Wellpath has agreed to provide the “Vermont standard of care.” It appears that DOC will take Wellpath’s word that this care is being provided.

When asked to see all of the Vermont Department of Corrections healthcare policies as they pertain to the health care of the incarcerated individuals of Vermont, the response our colleague received was a link to a list of department directives. The directives contain no specific information. All we learn is “all clinical decisions and actions pertaining to an inmate’s healthcare shall be made by a QHCP (Qualified Health Care Professional), in accordance with prevailing medical standards for correctional environments.” This appears contrary to what we are being told, that incarcerated people are receiving the community standard of care.

In response to a request for Wellpath LLC HealthCare Policies for our Vermont incarcerated persons, the same DOC staffperson told us that “Any policies developed and used by the Department’s Medical Services Contractor should be requested from the Contractor. The Department is not the custodian of those records.”

Currently, the only oversight to the current provider, Wellpath, is the Department of Corrections. VJJ believes there should be independent oversight of Wellpath to ensure that they are meeting Vermont’s standards of care. This oversight committee should not be comprised of DOC staff and legislators only; it should include health care professionals, formerly incarcerated people, and family members of the incarcerated.

Alternatives to Contracting with Corporate Providers

Roughly half of prisons and jails in the US do not contract with corporate health care providers. Corrections Commissioner Deml has told us that his department determined would cost Vermont \$80M or more to provide health care through the state. We would like to see how those estimates were reached. There are also other partnering options available. We want those options to be explored before signing another contract with Wellpath or any other for-profit healthcare provider.

Meg McCarthy

member, Vermont Just Justice

