

Introduction to the Connecticut Department of Correction

Welcome! You have been selected from your classmates for this exciting opportunity to have your clinical experience in one of the Connecticut Department of Correction facilities. The information provided below is a brief introduction intended to stimulate your thought process, to encourage you to be more acute in your observations, to be prepared, and an astute and engaged learner. We are proud of you as one of our nursing students, and expect you to represent us well, to conduct yourself with the utmost professional courtesy and respect for correctional personnel, health professionals, and for the incarcerated individuals we care for.

Incarcerated persons:

Incarcerated persons are often perceived by society as a socially deviant group who are responsible for their incarceration because of their criminal behavior. They often come from stigmatized social and cultural groups and socioeconomic classes that limit their access to primary health care and prevention services. These individuals are exposed to more environmental and social health risk factors than many other Americans. Some possess characteristics and exhibit behaviors that could evoke negative responses from health care providers. Yet, as a nurse, you have a professional responsibility to provide care “not limited by personal attitudes or beliefs” according to the American Nurses Association Code for Nurses.

*How are you going to reconcile this issue within yourself?
In what ways might this affect the way you interact with patients in this environment?*

In *Estelle v. Gamble* 1976 the US Supreme Court determined that failure to provide adequate health care to individuals confined in correctional institutions violated prisoners’ constitutional rights. It is acknowledged by the correctional community that the standard of care should be equivalent to that which is provided in the community. The obligation to provide quality care across diverse correctional settings is the responsibility of the healthcare team, which in these settings needs to include the corrections officer.

*Think of a basic standard of care that you have learned about.
Keep it in your mind and look to see if and how it is provided within this healthcare setting.
Is it different than what would be expected in the community?*

Custody and Caring:

Correctional facilities are among the most challenging settings for nursing practice. In a prison setting, nurses must adjust their responsibilities and expectations without letting go of professional values and attitudes (Willmott, 1997). The range of roles assumed by nurses working in prisons is unlike any other nursing specialty. Responsibilities include elements of outpatient care, emergency nursing, psychiatric-mental health, occupational health, and community health (Zimm, 1998). Unlike nursing in any other health care setting in which the primary goal is patient care, priorities of the secure environment center on order, control, and discipline. Correctional institutions are paramilitary in nature, and as such, highly controlled environments. Correctional officers control access to inmates, as it is their responsibility for movement of inmates.

*Have you been in environments with many rules before?
If so, how did you feel or respond?
If not, how do you think it might make you feel?*

Correctional nursing practice:

Nurses practice in a variety of correctional settings, including jails, prisons, boot camps, detention centers, transition units, group homes, in-home and community programs. The populations cared for in these programs range from juveniles to elderly and include both men and women. Given that the duration of incarceration spans from hours until death, correctional systems are responsible for providing a broad array of health services. Correctional nurses practice at basic and advanced practice nursing levels, with a major focus of nursing care in the provision of primary care services. These include: health screening, physical exams, assessment and treatment of health complaints, administration of medications, triage and treatment of health crises, health education and counseling. The nurse must be skilled at the provision of these services for individuals with co-existing conditions, complicated by mental illness and substance abuse disorders.

*Did you know that nurses worked in such a wide variety of correctional settings?
Be sure to observe the many roles nurses fulfill and see if there were any you did not expect!*

Special Issues in Correctional Nursing:

Correctional nurses cite professional autonomy as a major factor related to their choice of this practice area (Flanagan & Flanagan, 2001). This is surprising to many who perceive correctional nurses as being controlled and limited by custody personnel. In thinking about this issue, it is important to understand that professional autonomy has been defined as the ability "to function independently yet collaboratively in a complex health environment" (Wood, Tiedje, & Abraham, 1986). Professional autonomy is a productive use of power to achieve objectives that include helping others to formulate and achieve goals.

*When in your prison placements, think about the issues of security, control and power.
What are the special meanings of these issues to the different people in these settings-
health providers, correctional workers, and inmates?*

Boundaries

The challenge to achieve balance between providing care and the need for security dominate in an environment where values, practices and expected outcomes differ significantly among the custody staff, the nurses and the inmates. Gadow (2003) describes the practice of nursing in these settings as ethically unique. She says the premise is the contradiction between causing harm (imprisonment) and acting for the patient's good (health care). "Oppositional practice" is the name she uses "not because it tries to overthrow or undermine the correctional system, but because it accepts the system as a context for practice that is based on opposing values."

How will you balance your ethical considerations as you practice in this unique setting?