



# State of Our Union

BY DAMON K. JONES

## **Correctional Health Care is Part of Public Safety Should not be a Budgetary option to Choose the Lowest Bidder.**

The decision to transport Westchester County inmates to Mt. Vernon and other places besides the Westchester medical center is a bad move by our County Executive. This decision puts the safety and security of the officers, inmates and ultimately the community of Westchester in jeopardy.

The agreement with the Westchester County Government and the new Correctional Health Care provider brings more questions than the answers of financial savings and Safety and Security of the Norwood E. Jackson Correctional Facility.

The reason Correct Care Solutions (CCS) cannot use the forensic unit to serve mental health inmates in the facility. The company is not accredited to use it. The Medical Center received accreditation from the New York State Department of Mental Health in the early 1970's. This was historic; Norwood E. Jackson Correctional Facility was the only county facility in the state with an in house mental health facility.

Constantly transporting inmates, especially mentally ill inmates to hospitals like Bellevue and far places like Utica puts the officer and the community at risk. Mt. Vernon Hospital is not prepared to handle the influx of inmates from Westchester, the state facility and those brought in by Mt. Vernon Police Department. Westchester law makers should be ashamed to expose the citizens of Mt. Vernon to this type of danger.

We also should question the inmates/detainee on methadone maintenance program and why the vendor decided to stop their treatment. The County Executive or his advisors should be aware of Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Service (OASAS) regulation 828 or NCCHC OTP standards 2004; both organizations give detail on how you get people off methadone maintenance treatment.

During the recent National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) conference in Boston, Massachusetts, this July, 2010, the Vice President of NCCHC Dr. R. Scott Chavez PhD. informed Correctional Health Representatives that with in six months Correct Care Solution will have to go through accreditation process because of the change of vendor. We hope the advisors to the County Executive realized this before the drastic change.

In the recent Department of Justice Report the Westchester County Department of Corrections violated the following NCCCHC Health and Mental Health standards:

Jail Standard B-01 Infection Control Program.

Jail Standard C-05 Medication Administration

Jail Standard E- 01 Information on Health Services

Jail Standard E-04 Initial Health Assessment

Jail Standard E-06 Oral Care

Mental Health standard C-04 Mental Health training Correctional Officers

Mental Health Standard C-05 Medication Administration Training

Mental Health Standard E -04 Mental Health Assessments and Evaluation.

Mental Health Standard E -07 Segregated Inmates

With the recent Department of Justice Report still looming over the County's head and the history of CCS's lawsuits around the country, we question CCS ability to resolve the violations in the DOJ report.

In a Journal News article, Ned McCormack, the county spokesperson, said the county would be indemnified for a legal risk in connection with the contract. Unfortunately for Westchester County, he's mistakenly wrong.

The Journal of Correctional Health Care, volume 14, Number 1, January 2008, quotes on the Supreme Court ruling on *West v. Atkins 1989*. The Journal continues to say that two important principals emerge from this ruling: First, private contractors to state and local governments who provide services to prisoners are "state actors" for the purpose of the Eight Amendment; second, the governments who hire them also remain liable for failing to provide constitutionally adequate care.

We have stated many times that Correction Officers have the highest exposure rate than any other occupation. Correction Officers are still commonly exposed to diseases like MRSA, Hepatitis, H1N1, and HIV/Aids. Correctional management just shared with the Correction Officer's Benevolent Association (COBA) their infectious disease policy last year. We need to ask the question: what about the officers that have been infected with MRSA, Hepatitis and other disease before then? Till this date, COBA President Alonzo West can not tell the mem-

bership what are the National Correctional Healthcare Standards or what Certified Correction Healthcare Professional was advised on this revision.

All above standards are essential to any correctional facilities function. The silence is deafening from Correction Officers Benevolent Association President Alonzo West. Proper mental health and health care of the inmates effects the operation of the rank and file inmate housing officer.

In Westchester County, a lone Corrections Officer operates housing units with up to 60 inmates by him/herself. Not receiving adequate healthcare can cause unruly inmates. This spells danger for one officer operating housing areas and threatens the safety and security of the facility.

Proper correctional health care is part of public safety and Public Safety should not be a budgetary option to the lowest bidder. Many lives are at risk and ultimately the community that we serve .