

My first residency rotation at correctional facilities in Michigan

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When I started my Preventive Medicine Residency program, I was aware that I would be doing clinical rotations at a correctional facility. However, when the time finally came for me to go inside the Duane L. Waters Hospital, an infirmary inside a prison located in Jackson, I felt extremely anxious. My heart started racing as I entered the facility for the first time. My only exposure to the prison environment was through media portrayals, so I was fearful of the idea of caring for inmates in correctional settings. I had preconceived notions about prisons as unsafe environments and places of chaos. Even family and friends were concerned about my safety.



However, on my first day, I had the opportunity to tour the facility with the warden and was surprised at how quiet and orderly the place was. There were custody officers at every corner who escorted the inmates. After witnessing the strict supervision, security, and safety protocols, my initial uncertainty about safety issues subsided and my fear and anxiety were alleviated. I was able to focus more on learning about correctional medicine.

Since then, I have rotated at two other facilities, the Charles Egeler Reception & Guidance Center, also in Jackson, and I'm now at the Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility in Ypsilanti. I've learned how medical departments in each setting manage patients. I observed interesting pathologies and outbreaks and learned about the non-suicidal self-injuries that are prevalent in correctional facilities. The most valuable lesson for me was while rotating at the Egeler Reception & Guidance Center, which evaluates each inmate being transferred from county jails to state prisons and addresses all their health concerns.



After interacting with several inmates, I came to realize that most come from underserved and disadvantaged populations and commonly have little formal education and no insurance or money. Some are homeless and never go to a doctor, no matter how sick they get. This population's social determinants of health are strongly associated with negative health outcomes, and most inmates have multiple health problems, including mental health disorders, drug dependencies, infectious diseases, and chronic conditions. The intake clinic may be the first consistent medical care that they have had, with easy access to a doctor, a dentist, and a mental health professional. The majority of the inmates I interacted with were well-mannered and respectful, and many were grateful for getting medical attention.