

## INTRODUCTION

Each day more than 6,000 people die for various reasons: cancer, old age, disease, etc. There are many factors that affect a person's health, such as genetic disorders, contracted illnesses and diseases, and unexplainable sicknesses. While incarcerated, there are even more factors that can affect a person's health, both physically and mentally.

The Correctional Medical Care company (CMC) in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania has maintained death rates significantly below the national average for prisoners. From 2009-2011, only nine prisoners in a CMC-affiliated jail died. This is much lower than the average of 125 per 100,000 deaths that occurred during that three-year period. The causes of death were heart disease, suicide, and pneumonia. Heart disease and pneumonia are considered to be the highest rate of death among prisoners, year after year. Pneumonia is an illness that affects 50,000 Americans each year on average.

The goal of this article is to discuss the possible factors that affect prisoners at a higher rate than the average general population and why inmates are more likely to die from heart disease or suicide while incarcerated.

## SUICIDE

In the United States, suicide is the one of the leading causes of death, with a death occurring approximately every 13 minutes, 105 people per day. On average, more than 38,000 men and women commit suicide every year. It is also one of the leading

causes of death in local jails. Dr. Alexandra Fleischmann, from the World Health Organization's Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, is an expert in suicide prevention. She says there are initial examinations after a prisoner enters the system to evaluate risk factors to determine the prisoner's current mental and physical status.

The World Health Organization has listed persons in custody as one of the groups that are more likely to attempt committing suicide. In the last decade, suicide in prison has resulted, on average, in 29 percent of deaths in prison system. Men awaiting trial are 7.5 times more likely to attempt suicide compared to men outside of prison; as well, men who are already sentenced are six times more likely to attempt suicide. Imprisonment is a grievous state that can disturb the mental and physical status of men who were healthy previous to incarceration because it separates a person from loved ones, employment, freedom, etc. Suicide rates continue to be higher than average even once a prisoner is released.

## HEART DISEASE

Heart disease kills more than 600,000 people every year in the United States, averaging 1 in every 4 deaths. Heart attacks affect more than 700,000 Americans each year, and more than 200,000 of those people have already had a heart attack. On average, 200 men and women die every year in prison from a cardiovascular disease. There are a multitude of factors that affect heart disease risk, family history, smoking, stress, diet, etc.

While prisoners are provided three well-balanced meals per day, there is the commissary where they are able to purchase unhealthier snacks such as chips and candy. Eating food that has high saturated fats will negatively affect your heart health. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) recommends limiting your diet to be 5-6 percent of your calories to be from saturated fat. With a healthy diet, a person should also have regular physical activity.

Exercise and a healthy diet can be difficult to manage for people who are not incarcerated, when there are less stressful factors surrounding them. Prisoners, especially those who are there for the first time or are sentenced for life, are in what could be considered a very stressful situation. This can lead to depression, loss of appetite, lack of interest in everyday activities, etc.; just a few of the factors that could affect a prisoner's health. There are also the factors that made them more susceptible to heart disease before entering prison, such as a history of smoking. According to the NHLBI, "Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease. When combined with other risk factors—such as unhealthy blood cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, and overweight or obesity—smoking further raises the risk of heart disease."

## PNEUMONIA

In the United States from 2000 to 2011, pneumonia caused between 16-23 deaths per every 100,000. Pneumonia is an illness that a person's breathing, causing the lungs to fill with pus and eventually harden. In 2013, more than 50,000 people in the United States died from pneumonia. Studies have shown that the older a person is the

more likely they are to contract pneumonia, and is then more likely they are to die from the illness. Those 55 and older are on average at least 75% of the deaths.

Pneumonia can be contracted from a bacterial infection, from a germ that is practically unavoidable. Typically, these germs cannot get past our natural defenses, unless the person's health is compromised or weak, like those who are elderly, smokers, or those with a very serious disease or flu.

In a prison setting, there are people who may not have the same sense of hygiene and cleanliness that others have. This could result in contracting germs from an uncovered sneeze or cough. While there are protocols and procedures to keep inmates and prison staff from contracting diseases and illnesses, there are times those do not work. There is hand sanitizer in most homes and places of work, but people in the general population still manage to get sick every flu season.

## CONCLUSION

Thousands of people die every single day in the United States due to factors that are beyond their control or at least beyond the control of those in charge of their physical and mental health. With adequate medical care and a concerned staff of doctors and nurses, Correctional Medical Care, Inc. works tirelessly to manage the health of prisoners.