

Prison Medical Checkup

Victor Becerra

Today, I had to go to the clinic to get a medical checkup. My ducat was for 7:30am. I arrived at the medical wing at about ten minutes passed seven, anticipating an overcrowded waiting room.

The guard at the entrance checked me in and told me to take a seat in the waiting area, a cage smaller than a two car garage. Inside the cage were eight long benches. Each bench sat three men comfortably, but sometimes I had seen over thirty prisoners crowded in there. To my surprise, there was only one guy waiting there before me. He was complaining that he was there to check his blood pressure, but that the nurse was trying to take some blood tests.

“You ain’t gonna take some blood out of me like a vampire!” The prisoner was not mad; he found it funny that they had made a mistake. But he talked louder than normal, and the concrete walls and empty room made his voice transmit louder. The guard came to him to explain that it was not him who made the mistake; he had only read what the ducat said — “lab” — so he had assumed that it was for blood.

As they talked, it sounded as though they were arguing. They were both very loud, although they were only five feet away from each other. I sat down at the farthest corner. By 7:23am, the medical personnel (mostly women) were coming in to start their work shift. If they were supposed to start at 7:00am, they were late; if they were supposed to start at 8:00am, they were way early. My guess is that they were late. They work for the state, so there is little oversight.

A prisoner who has been working there for the last few years as a trustee kept cleaning around the entrance. He made sure to greet every female who walked in. In the time I was there, I counted over 35 women coming in and going out. The trustee said something suave to each of them. A few of them actually smiled back.

In one of the offices, I saw a female guard in her mid-50s looking through some boxes. She appeared to be tired. Those who did not know better might see her and think she looked tired because she had been working overtime. But when I saw her, I immediately remembered what my ex-supervisor, who used to work as a teacher here in the prison, had told me about her. She told me that her friend, the female guard, would cry and feel lonely because she had no man in her life, and that even though she had been having a sexual relationship with a co-worker (a sergeant) for over ten years, she knew he did not love her because he had

a wife and only paid her a visit when he wanted to have sex. At work, they did not even talk.

The female guard was certainly tired, but not of working double-shifts; she was tired of being alone in life, of knowing that her lover would never leave his wife to be with her. She was tired of the realization that at 56-years-old, she did not know what to do with her life. That is all my ex-supervisor and her talked about when they went bar hopping, hoping for a quick one-night romance, which they would manage to get every once in a while, mostly with “undesirables”, never a “keeper”, as she would say. But that is all they could get, so they took it whenever the need was there.

At about 8:10am, I was still waiting and there were already 24 other prisoners in the waiting cage. So it was louder. Some guys were analyzing the previous night’s basketball game. One prisoner was giving his professional opinion: “LeBron’s done! As the series gets going, he’ll start making more and more excuses... *‘I couldn’t sleep, my elbow hurt’*, and the like. He’s done! Cleveland’s done!” Everyone in the waiting room was an expert.

The room was loud, with the occasional moment of silence every time a woman walked by the cage. The 24 men would stop talking in order to admire her beauty, as if enjoying a parade. Then, as soon as the woman was out of sight, most would go back to sports, but others felt compelled to make the obvious comments about the woman’s attributes.

A couple of men made different comments for every woman who walked by, speaking as if they were a combination of George Clooney and Denzel Washington.

“Man, she has a nice butt, but she’s too short”.

“...Look at that! She would be a’ight if she only lost a few pounds”.

“She’s not that pretty, but she’s got a nice body”.

“I like that one, but she’s too dark”.

“Ooh! She was probably fine when she was young”.

By that time the trustee was done with his female inspection. All the workers had made their way in, and seeing all the competition around, the trustee went to work at the specific areas where his moves could be more effective: the medical records office, the nurses area, the break room, and the like. He wanted to increase his odds of a one-on-one conversation. The biggest perk of working at the medical wing was having close contact with various women. A smooth talker playing the odds could win big, but if he’s not careful, he could get in a lot of trouble.

At 8:45am I was finally called. A lady in her mid-50s walked me to her office where a male nurse was working on some paperwork. Then she introduced herself as my new doctor (we are assigned by the last two digits of our prison number: 1-25, 26-50, 51-75,76-00).

I sat down as she checked my file in her computer.

“I see you had a hernia operation... right side?”

“Yes”.

After a few usual questions she checked my lungs, ears, nose, mouth, eyes, etc. Then, she said: “Okay, I’m gonna check your prostate, since you’re here. Drop down your pants and trousers for me”.

For a moment I did not register what was about to happen. It was not until I saw her put on some gloves and collect some small packages and creams from a couple of boxes that it clicked. I remembered how prostates are checked.

Suddenly I felt like I had taken a bite of an expensive dish I could not afford and that now I had to pay for. Confused, I looked at her and asked her where she wanted me to drop my pants.

“Right here. Face me”. She sat down on a chair in front of me. The male nurse was standing right behind her. I dropped my pants and boxers. She lifted my shirt and told me to hold it up. Then, she looked at my groin area. “Is this where you had your surgery?” She asked spreading my pubic hair to one side then to the other.

“Yes” I answered, looking up at the ceiling stains.

“Wow, look” she told the nurse, “you can barely see the scar. They did a good job”, talking about the hernia operation I had eighteen years ago.

Then she grabbed my penis and inspected it. I am not sure what she was looking for. Then she grabbed my right testicle, told me to turn my head toward the wall and to cough hard, twice. I coughed hard as fast as I could. Then she grabbed my other testicle. I did not wait for her instructions; I coughed hard four times before she let go. She was grabbing me kind of rough. I was hurting.

“Okay, you’re fine there. Turn around and bend over”, she said.

She rolled her chair around behind me and put her right hand up. Her nurse had some type of cream ready and put it on her latex glove, index finger. She checked my prostate for a few seconds. Then she put her hand up once more. The nurse applied more solution, that time on her middle finger. She checked my prostate once more. After that, the nurse had two sorts of cards; the doctor placed her index finger on one and her middle finger on

the other card, to put some of my bodily fluids there. All was done in a very rapid, systematic succession. They were fast and effective, indeed. I was glad they worked quickly.

Finally, she told me to pull my pants up. As I did that, she took off her latex gloves and deposited them in the trash can, washed her hands, and told me that my prostate was okay. Then she checked the cards and said she did not see any blood, so I was okay on that too.

It was 9:05am by the time I got out of there. When I got back to my wing, I felt tired, sweaty and thirsty. I took a shower and got in my cell. I decided I needed to take care of myself and watch what I eat. Those checkups are draining. I felt completely exhausted.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Victor Becerra is incarcerated in California. He can be contacted at:

Victor Becerra, K09324
CTF-Central
P.O. Box 689
Soledad, California 93960-0689
USA