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Utah Corrections Provides Update on Medications Following Transition to New Records System

With support from the Utah Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Government Operations (DGO)/Division of Technology Services (DTS); the Utah Department of Corrections (UDC) completed a comprehensive medical records review Thursday. This effort included an assessment and update of every incomplete medical record that came through during a transition to a new Electronic Healthcare Records System (EHRS), along with a return to more normal operations in regards to the distribution of medications within correctional facilities.

“As we continue to reconcile the new Electronic Healthcare Records System with our operations, we feel that we have turned a corner in regards to prescription distribution,” said Brian Nielson, executive director for the UDC. “The filling and distribution of medications is at a more manageable level. I cannot express enough gratitude for our team members and partner organizations who have been here around the clock to assist with these efforts.”

In regards to actual prescriptions being filled, just a little over a week ago, there were more than 8,000 prescriptions in the queue to be refilled. As of Thursday morning, Sept. 1, that number has plummeted to 1,300. On a typical day – prior to migration – UDC had 1,000 prescriptions to fill.

“Following migration to the new system, many of the 17,000-plus active prescriptions that we manage needed to be reviewed,” said Nielson. “As we worked with our contracted EHRS to resolve the issues, it became apparent that each prescription would need to be analyzed and, in many cases, reentered into the system. At this time, all of those records have been reviewed.”

DHHS provided a total of 54 medical representatives, including registered nurses, physicians, advanced practice nurses, pharmacists, and pharmacy technicians. As UDC returns to more normal operations in regards to the distribution of prescriptions, DHHS will provide more limited ongoing support as co-leads of an Electronic Health Record Response Team.

“I’ve been proud to participate alongside our team in this effort,” said Dr. Michelle Hofmann, executive medical director for DHHS. “We will leverage this situation as an opportunity to optimize the performance of the Electronic Health Records database and help ensure it aids providers in improving the care of patients in the Utah prison system.”

Moving forward, UDC will continue to work closely with the EHRS provider (Fusion), the Governor’s Office, DGO, DTS, and DHHS on overall process management.

Helpful facts:

- UDC’s incarcerated population stands at 5,962, with 2,551 at the Utah State Correctional Facility in Salt Lake City, 1,723 at the Central Utah Correctional Facility in Gunnison, and 1,583 at county jails with which it contracts. (Please note that a few of these individuals in the total number are currently off-site or are compacted out.)
- The UDC’s Clinical Services Bureau operates with a staff of approximately 200 employees. Positions include registered nurses, physician assistants, medical technicians, medical doctors, pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, laboratory techs, optometrists, physical therapists, dentists and dental assistants.
- While the medication issue is absorbing a good deal of the CSB’s attention right now, the medical team continues to receive and respond to critical inmate care requests, including medical and mental health appointments.
- As part of UDC’s regular process, if incarcerated individuals have an urgent medical concern, they can notify the officer in their housing section. If incarcerated individuals need to be seen by medical staff or have a prescription filled, they can submit a health care request form (available on their housing unit) to be seen. And anyone concerned that their incarcerated loved one is not receiving critical medications is encouraged to contact the UDC.
- If families or friends are reaching out regarding the care of their loved one, they are encouraged to call the family hotline at 801-545-5505 or email UDC at corrections@utah.gov. The constituent services team is responsive and in constant communication with the medical team.