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Information Regarding Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)

Hello:

Thank you for contacting us with concerns about your Hepatitis C treatment within the Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation & Reentry (“ADCRR”). We are sorry to send you a form letter but it is the only way we can answer you quickly, given the large number of letters we receive.

As you may know, our office represents the class in the case *Jensen v. Thornell* (formerly called *Jensen v. Shinn*, and *Parsons v. Ryan*). *Jensen* is a federal lawsuit that challenged medical care, including treatment for Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), as well as mental health care, and conditions in maximum custody isolation units in Arizona state prisons. On April 7, 2023, the Court issued an Injunction (a Court Order) that that requires ADCRR to fix the problems we identified. A copy of both orders should be available to you on your tablet or in your law library. There should be no charge for you to review these orders.

The Order requires ADCRR to expand access to care for HCV in the prison complexes. First, they must screen all incarcerated people for HCV by blood test, within a month of arrival, and periodically based on risk. By June 7, 2023, all currently incarcerated people who have not been screened for HCV should have been offered screening. The ADCRR must provide all people who test positive for the disease with HCV education.

There are currently many people in the ADCRR who have HCV. Some people may currently have significant symptoms and advanced disease, while other people are infected with the virus, but have virtually no symptoms. The Court Order requires ADCRR to create priority levels for HCV treatment, so that the people currently at risk of harm receive treatment promptly. If you test positive for HCV and agree to treatment, you will be placed on a list to receive treatment based upon your priority level. Each month, the ADCRR is required to start treatment for a substantial number of new patients from the list, and must use the “current standard of care medications.” By April, 2024, ADCRR must ensure that people who are released have been treated for HCV if they accepted treatment.

While the vast majority of people will be eligible for treatment, a small number may not be treated if there is insufficient time for them to complete the treatment before they leave prison, or they would not be expected to benefit from it.

If you have a question or request about HCV or HCV treatment, you should file a Health Needs Request (HNR) and discuss this with your provider. If you cannot resolve your question or request after that, appeal the response to your grievance. Prison Law Office will consider asking prison medical officials about your HCV concern if you send us the highest level response you received about the issue (urgent cases are an exception). Exhausting your remedies is also usually required before you can file your own formal legal action about a medical issue.

DISEASE INFORMATION:

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) is an infectious disease that can cause serious liver problems. Infection mostly happens from sharing bodily fluids, including when sharing needles. When the liver fixes the damage from HCV, the liver forms scars. This scarring is called **fibrosis**. Scarring may lead to **cirrhosis** (a serious liver disease). HCV infection is usually slowly progressive and may not result in clinically apparent liver disease in many patients. Generally approximately 5% to 30% of HCV patients develop cirrhosis over a 20-to-30-year period of time, although some patients develop serious liver disease more quickly.

HCV is treated using direct-acting anti-viral tablets. They are highly effective at clearing the infection in more than 90% of people. The tablets are taken for 8 to 12 weeks.