

FACTSHEET

Medical information for ex-prisoners

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Charity Number 1093710



Following release many people feel they would like to get their health checked, this can be for a variety of reasons. You may have an on-going health problem for which you require medication, you may have developed some general health problems as a result of your imprisonment, or you may not have had any access to doctor's or medical treatment at all and want to have a thorough check. If you have lived out of the UK for many years you may also be wondering how health care is managed in this country and what will be available to you. This leaflet aims to give you some basic information about how to get medical assistance and how our Resettlement Team can help.

All British citizens returning to the UK after serving a prison sentence abroad are entitled to free medical treatment under the National Health Service (NHS). The NHS is funded by the British Government and provides free quality health care. Dental Treatment and Optical care can also be obtained at minimal cost if you are receiving welfare benefits. If the doctor prescribes medication for you, the charge for filling a prescription at a Pharmacist is currently £6.65 per item (May 2006). Prescriptions are filled free of charge if you are receiving benefits.

1 Emergency Treatment

If you arrive in the UK at night or over the weekend and need urgent medical treatment, you can receive this at the Accident and Emergency department (A&E) at most major hospitals. Most flights arrive at either Heathrow or Gatwick Airports. The nearest hospital to Heathrow with 24 hour A&E is Ashford Hospital and the nearest to Gatwick is East Surrey Hospital. Travelcare (Social Workers at the airports) can give you directions of how to get to these hospitals.

2 HIV/AIDS

If you are affected by HIV/AIDS, there are a number of organisations offering information, support and counselling in all major towns and cities in the UK. In London, there are services that work specifically with women and people from other ethnic and cultural groups.

There are specialist units in most major hospitals that provide confidential testing and treatment. These units are usually open during office hours and can be accessed directly without a doctor's referral.

3 Specialist Services

There are services available for a wide range of physical, mental and emotional problems. Some are run by the National Health Service and you can be referred to them by a doctor. Other services can be obtained privately by yourself, for example, counselling. Usually you will have to pay for treatment you arrange yourself, though in the case of counselling if you are on a low income very reasonable rates can be negotiated. There are also many support groups across the country which offer advice and assistance for people with specific health problems. The Resettlement Team will try and obtain information about any specific support you feel would be helpful.

4 Drugs and Alcohol

If you have current problems with a drug or alcohol dependency or if you have had in the past and would still like some support when you return, there are a wide range of drop-in's, treatment programmes and support groups such as Alcoholic's Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, you can contact on release. Please be aware that residential drug or alcohol treatment programmes are very difficult to get into and you will need to look at another option when you initially return. If you feel able, please fill in the Initial Needs Assessment enclosed with this leaflet and tell us about any addiction problems you have or have had in the past. This will give us some indication as to what assistance you could need when you return.

5 How Prisoners Abroad Resettlement team can help

- **Getting to see a doctor**

We can arrange for you to see an emergency doctor at one of the Primary Health Care Teams. These teams are comprised of medical professionals who will assess and prescribe medication for people who have no fixed address. They can give you treatment, as well as referring you to other specialist practitioners. When you have temporary or permanent accommodation, you can then register with a local physician, or GP (General Practitioner).

- If you are not returning to London, we can look for services in your area.

6 Useful Numbers

There is a free 24 hour telephone service where you can obtain health advice and information. This is called NHS Direct and can be contacted on 0845 46 47.

Sexual Health Information Line – This is a freephone helpline operated by the NHS which provides confidential advice and information on HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. They have details of treatment centres and can help you find the support most appropriate for your needs. Their number is 0800 567123 (free from within the UK).

Saneline provides information and support to anyone affected by a mental health problem, putting them in touch with available sources of help and support. Their number is 0845 767 8000.

Release – Helpline and support for drug users. Advice on drug related subjects, including health, welfare and legal issues. 0207 729 9904

National Drugs Helpline – 0800 776 600 (free from within the UK)

Drinkline – Advice and information for people with Alcohol problems – telephone 0800 917 8282 (free from within the UK)

If you require this leaflet in a large print format, please contact us. Our details are below.

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