In Louisiana, Inmates With Hepatitis C Claim Prison Denied Them Treatment

Three lawsuits allege prison officials denied them treatment for more than a year, despite serious illness.

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Prisoners across the United States continue to file lawsuits claiming they have been denied access to hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment, most recently in Louisiana, The Advocate reports.

The lawsuits were filed on behalf of three HCV-positive inmates—Richard Henderson, Tony Cormier and Levell Doughty—who are incarcerated at Elayn Hunt Correctional Center in St. Gabriel, Louisiana. Each claims that by making medical decisions based on the cost of treatment and ultimately neglecting their care the state's Department of Corrections violated their right to protection from cruel and unusual punishment and their right to equal treatment under the 8th and 14th amendments, respectively.

What's more, while all three inmates named in the lawsuits are still alive, the latest filing alleges that multiple other inmates with more advanced cases of hepatitis C died of complications due to the disease, despite the availability of lifesaving treatment. In January, lawyers filed a motion to make public the autopsies of those inmates, saying they provide "damning evidence"—but those files remain sealed.

Meanwhile, the Louisiana Department of Corrections has denied making any medical decisions based on cost and disputes claims that it failed to properly treat inmates with the liver virus.

However, many state prison systems have found it difficult to pay for treatment for their inmates, with the cost estimated to be about $10,000 per patient (down from around $100,000 in 2014, when the direct-acting antiviral drugs that cure the virus in 95 percent of patients were first approved).

In fact, hepatitis C patients on Medicaid and in prison in several states have filed similar lawsuits demanding access to treatment. Indiana, Colorado and Pennsylvania recently had to add millions to their health care budgets to treat sick prisoners as a result of such suits.

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