



NAVIGATING THROUGH THE SHADOW OF COVID-19 ...

HOW PRISONS AND JAIL ADMINISTRATORS ARE ADAPTING

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01 THE CHALLENGES BEFORE US
- 02 FROM RESPONSE TO RESILIENCE
- 03 CHARTING A NEW COURSE FORWARD
- 04 TECHNOLOGY WILL BE KEY
- 05 SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE



The Challenges Before Us

The correctional workforce is an essential component of the U.S. criminal justice system, responsible for managing incarcerated offenders, defendants and those released on probation and parole. It is a complex institution with correctional staff who must protect the public from convicted and sometimes dangerous individuals, while also monitoring those awaiting trial and preparing others for community reentry.

Faced with a harsh environment, limited resources and difficulty maintaining staffing levels, containing the spread of COVID-19 has presented additional challenges. With the close proximity of offenders to one another and correctional staff, the potential for spreading this highly infectious disease has been magnified.

There are several reasons. Many prisons and jails are typically overcrowded. They cannot consistently enact CDC guidelines and social distancing recommendations. Facilities may be understaffed and lack the ability to provide adequate sanitation efforts. This has created a strain on both staff and medical resources, further endangering employees and inmates.

UNPRECEDENTED CORRECTIONAL WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

- ◇ Adhering to COVID Center for Disease control policies, daily decontamination and sanitation processes
- ◇ Limitations in testing and screen of correctional workforce and inmate for COVID infections
- ◇ Adjusting the lack of social workers filling in for existing low staffing levels of officers due to increased quarantines
- ◇ Minimizing exposures due to limited diagnosis and treatment access, limited cleaning supplies, and prolonged contact in poorly ventilated spaces
- ◇ Under staffing of correctional healthcare providers
- ◇ Tracking COVID related cost for overtime and hazard pay
- ◇ Adapting sick leave accrual policies that do not provide for quarantine periods and clarifying policies for symptomatic versus asymptomatic infections
- ◇ Pre-COVID challenges that include staff recruitment, selection and retention, training and succession planning of agency personnel

From Response to Resilience

As the virus spreads, challenges are particularly complicated in our nation's jails and prisons where conditions are a breeding grounds for contagion. However, the criminal justice system has already begun adapting.

♦ Early release of inmates who do not pose public safety threat

Many jails have released large numbers of inmates to reduce density and possibility of exposures. Some jurisdictions have released inmates with a sentence of 90 or fewer days, or those who have heightened risk for COVID-19 complications like the elderly.

♦ No arrest for non-violent crimes

In some jurisdictions, law enforcement officers are being instructed to issue "appear in court" notices instead of arrest for low-level offenses. Some prosecutors are not opposing pretrial release for people charged with misdemeanors. Other locations are issuing court summons instead of arrest warrants.

♦ Limiting the number of visitors entering the facility

As many nursing homes have done, many prisons and jails have banned family visitors to reduce the risk of exposures in facilities. As an alternative, some have waived fees for phone calls and video chats. Others have included the suspension of volunteers and face-to-face legal visits.



Charting the Course Forward

Correctional leaders already had difficult jobs running secure facilities that keep their workforce, inmates and surrounding communities safe. Charting a course going forward that includes COVID will require a reevaluation of policies and procedures.

Administrators can plan and prepare by developing contingency plans for a reduced workforce due to absences. Now is the time to coordinate with public health and correctional partners. Also communicate clearly with your staff and the incarcerated about how these preparations will temporarily alter daily life.

Specially trained workforce members will be needed that can respond quickly to outbreaks while maintaining safety. Correctional staff must receive both emergency training and supplies to protect themselves. Ongoing acknowledgment and support of correctional officers and all healthcare professionals at the front lines of this pandemic will be essential.

Since funding will take center stage, many administrators are looking back at where their budget has been to plan and justify where it should be going. Cost allocations for personnel, training, or equipment will need to be carefully tracked for proactive planning. This level of detailed planning will help leaders successfully navigate through the uncertainties ahead.

Are You Asking the Right Questions?

- ◇ How can we use analytics to see where our budget has been used and where it should be allocated going forward?
- ◇ How can we use data to justify our funding requirements?
- ◇ What was our overtime cost due to quarantine vacancies?
- ◇ How can we proactively plan for future COVID related vacancies?
- ◇ How can we justify our COVID reimbursement applications?
- ◇ What's the best way to manage the fluidity of our schedules?
- ◇ How do we best align staffing with bed count levels?
- ◇ How can we ensure that our workforce is receiving the right training for their roles?

Technology Will Be Key.

While surveillance and jail management technologies will remain essential, managing your workforce from an operational and administrative perspective will be equally important.

Using manual, ad hoc processes augmented by spreadsheets simply won't cut it going forward. Relying on homegrown disparate systems or generic workforce management platforms will not provide timely information and will add cost to your work efforts.

As correctional leaders adapt to the realities of life with COVID, new policies and procedures will need to be socialized. As new training programs will be required, they will need to be scheduled and tracked. As staffing declines and COVID related vacancies increase, new scheduling methodologies will need to be clarified. As personnel assume multiple roles, compensation calculations will need to be applied. And as economic impact of the pandemic steadily declines, so will budget allocations.



How Will Technology Help?

Data-driven analytics that provide actionable insights will be critical – no matter if the data revolves around costs, personnel, schedules, training, or equipment. Having the ability to use one platform to manage your workforce both operationally and administratively will be incredibly valuable. Being able to use its own data or data consumed from other essential criminal justice platforms will bring a new level of understanding about workforce activities and costs. This is what life with COVID will require -- and technology will be key.



Serving Those Who Serve

It is inevitable that there will be budget adjustments, policy changes and many new challenges. Let us help you navigate the path to the road ahead. At Orion, our mission is to serve those who serve.



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