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Workhouse or Warehouse?

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Correctional facilities have a lengthy history steeped in mystery and public fascination, and are frequently the subject of popular culture. There has always been a “prison” of some kind; a place to keep individuals capable of doing harm to law-abiding citizens. A prison is designed to segregate a segment of individuals from others within the same facility. Some areas of the prison are intended for specific purposes geared toward certain outcomes. Those outcomes can be simply feeding the offender population; housekeeping for the facility; multipurpose areas designed for laundry or storage of clothing, or unauthorized property; and areas with more specific purposes. The outcomes or planned purposes of the area for which it is designed are time-period related and change from era to era. The purpose of a prison should have one common goal throughout any culture or era — change for those incarcerated.

We have always known that there is nothing that can really effect change within any individual. There is no magic potion that can be introduced to someone that will effect change. The only factor is the willingness of the individual to change. How is that achievable? Facility staff can introduce the opportunity for participation in a program or a variety of programs that will ultimately result in the individual’s participation and adoption of the program regimen or plan to change. At the point when the individual actively participates,

change will result. We all know that sometimes the participation is merely a “front.” He or she participates to show the “boss” that he or she is ready for release or ready to participate in programs that are more rewarding to the individual. Regardless of the reason for participation in a program, change likely will occur.

Once fashionable terms for programs included words that would result in the individual’s “rehabilitation,” and therefore the “offender” of society would become a useful member of society. The term “treatment” was the means to correct unacceptable behavior. The type of treatment, level of treatment and level of intensity of treatment satisfied those who subscribed to that means of correction. The individual improved and no longer needed treatment, therefore he or she was able to conform to the norms called for by society.

The pendulum swings from treatment to “warehousing,” and from rehabilitation to keeping individuals away from society. Some of the factors that influence the swing and subsequent type of correctional programming that exists are political, religious or just based on acceptable norms of the period. In the past, society demanded retribution for the crimes of the offender. Punishment took different forms with questionable results. The punishment of today is limited to restriction of movement, loss of choice of activity and generally loss of access to the

niceties of life. While those aspects of incarceration result in some level of protection of society, what are the long-term benefits compared to the cost of incarceration?

Programs equate to treatment and change. Change is success. If the purpose of incarceration is effecting change so that an individual will be a better person, how do we get there? We have eliminated in our 21st century society most forms of drastic methods of changing an individual. Therefore, the change must be internal and put into use by the individual who is changed. We have uniformly defined programs within the correctional facility. Some of the programs presented in a correctional setting require mandatory participation by the offender and some are voluntary. Programs are diverse and run the gamut of definitions. A few of the more acceptable and time-proven programs are those that develop the individual’s ability to function within society in a more acceptable manner.

Success in a correctional setting is releasing an individual from custody and him or her not returning at some future date. This is successful reentry. When that occurs, the program worked — and we as corrections practitioners are successful.

Programs are necessary and effective in reaching our ultimate goal — change. This issue of *Corrections Today* presents various types of programs and their benefits to offenders and to society. ♦