



Surviving Cuts

by Barbara Wakeen, MA, RD, LD, CCHP, CCFP

This fall I had the opportunity to visit the correctional facility in Republic of Palau. If you are not familiar with Palau, it is a group of islands in the Pacific, between Guam and the Philippines, 7 degrees above the equator. It is on the western edge of a vast area known as Micronesia.

I toured the Palau Division of Corrections (DOC) in Koror, Palau and spent time with Chief Julio Ringang, Lietenant Serafin Akiwo and the head cook Justin, who is an inmate. I brought a copy of the CD-HCF *Nutrition and Food Service Management in Correctional Facilities* manual to share with Chief Ringang.

The facility has a population of 97 (males and females) plus those who are on the “6 to 6” program. This is a work-release type of program where the inmates work off-site 6 am to 6 pm and are housed at the facility the remaining time.

The length of stay is usually 6 months or less, some are more depending on the crime. All offenders, regardless of the crime, are housed in this facility. We met one inmate who was a former police officer, and another serving more than one life sentence.

Food Service

Lt. Akiwo escorted us (Randy, my husband and photographer, and I) through the facility and to the kitchen where we met Justin, who was ‘in charge’ of food service. Upon our meeting, he asked excitedly if we were from the health department and seemed somewhat disappointed that we weren’t. Through conversation, I learned Justin (originally from Guam) once



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worked in Missouri in the 80s for Steak ‘n Ale and Bennigan’s doing pre-prep and working with ‘shelf-life extension’ among other duties. He had also received some dietary training when he worked with RD at the John Knox long term care facility in Missouri. Justin will be there for an extended period and realizes it.

There is no set menu, standards, or guidelines. Food offered is what is available and what may be donated; this is usually noodles and canned fish. When we toured the kitchen we observed Tyson brand, Halal, chicken leg-thigh quarters thawing on the counter.

There were no ovens or fryers. Most cooking was done in two crock-pot type vessels). *(Continued on page 10)*



THERE WERE BUDGET CUTS AT

THE PALAU FACILITY. The once \$3,000/month budget for food and sanitation was cut to \$2,000 for food only and no sanitation supplies. Justin shared that he used his own money once to purchase cleaning supplies.



Three meals per day are served. The typical menu is pancakes (made without eggs) and syrup for breakfast and ramen type or somen noodles with canned tuna, sardines or mackerel for lunch and dinner. Six—6 oz. cans of tuna and three—10 oz. packages of somen noodles feed the population. That's it...no fruit, juice, milk, vegetables, bread or dessert.

The 6-to-6 inmates eat off site. No sack meals are prepared for them to take along. All inmates have the opportunity to purchase some items from outside the facility or their family may bring food and other needed items.

Just as in the US, there were budget cuts at the Palau facility as well. Justin informed us, the once \$3,000/month budget for food and sanitation was cut to \$2,000 for food only and no sanitation supplies. He shared that he used his own money once to purchase cleaning supplies. The current price of rice was \$1,000 for 30-50 lb. bags. He said he used to cook stir-fry, but now there was no vegetables due to the budget cuts.

He also expressed his concern for lacking vitamin C in their diets with the limited funds. When one gets sick, everyone does due to limited hygiene.

Justin voiced that rats are a problem. Some are as “big as cats;” Lieutenant Akiwo concurred. The refrigerator does not store food, but holds pots and pans and is secured with a bungee type hook to prevent rodent entrance.

The chest freezer holds perishable food items. Justin told us, rats climbed in where the (missing) handle would be and ate the mixed vegetables.

At mealtime, inmates bring their own food vessels, usually a plastic container of sorts to receive their meal. They are responsible for washing and storing their own containers as well. No beverages are served. There are no medical or religious diets served. Inmates requiring medical diets are sent to the hospital.

A recent election and change in government brought changes to this correctional environment as well. Previously, there was fresh fish as the prison had its own boat and they caught fish for inmate consumption. There was a prison farm too, but this was closed due to ‘mismanagement,’ according to Justin.

Housing

Inmates are housed 8-10 per cell. There are male, female, juvenile and isolation cells. Juveniles are defined as less than 18 years.

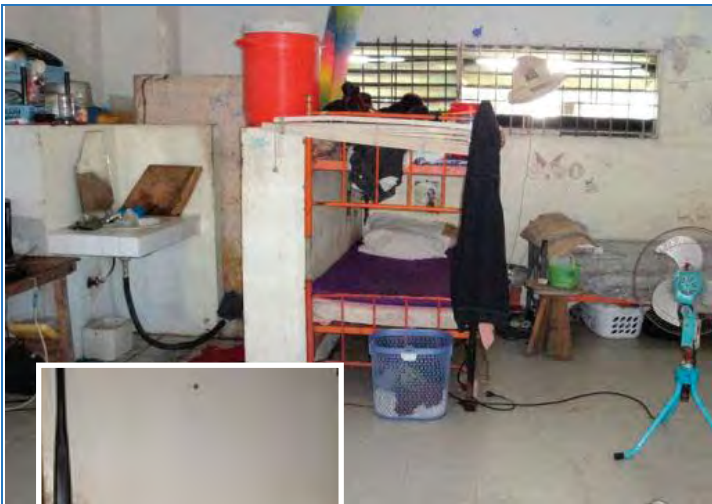
Medical Care

US Navy Seabees provide medical services weekly. Inmates going to the hospital must pay their own hospital bills.

Budget Cuts

Budget cuts are the only kind of cut that takes place here. Inmate workers who work 4 hours or more per day earn 2 hours extra “carving time” or work assignments are shortened.

This facility is also part of a tourist stop where storyboards and jewelry made by inmates are available for purchase. There are two rooms full of storyboard carvings by various inmates.



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Storyboards are amazing and beautiful carvings representing one of several Palauan legends. They are various shapes including many types of fish and sea creatures carved of mahogany. They range in price from approximately \$50 to more than a thousand. They are priced high as bartering is anticipated. The inmate who carved the storyboard gets to negotiate the price and keep the money, but has to pay some taxes to the government. Some are sold to gift shops, the local museum and other retail venues.

By now you might be saying, inmates are carving? Yes, they are and they purchase their own carving tools. We observed the carving area where there were many stages of carving and finishing in process.

We observed the inmates making jewelry too. Earrings, bracelets and necklaces made of tortoise shell and/or coral were also available. On weekends these wares are sold in a marketplace.

Despite what we consider contraband in the US, it was noted that ‘hooch production’ with pineapple was an issue when it was available. Some things never change!

On our second visit to the prison, we met with Chief Ringang and learned he has two children in the US military stationed in the US.

This was an educational and an enlightening experience to see corrections on the other side of the earth, and the talents displayed with pride. ▲



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