

PSYCHIATRIC PHARMACISTS: CORRECTIONAL HEALTH CARE CARING FOR INMATES



“Dr. Nelson manages the psychiatric medications for our women in a focused and logical manner. She supports her recommendations with current literature. Physicians and other providers are NOT able to do what she does!”

- Julie Pao, MD

Obstetrics & Gynecology

“Clinical pharmacists are integral in amplifying the impact that physicians and other members of the health care team have on providing high quality care and outcomes to patients.”

- Esmaeil Porsa, MD

*Medical Director, President & CEO,
Harris Health System, Houston, TX*

Managing Psychiatric Medications in Pregnant Inmates

It can be lonely leading the way, but after 15 years as a Board Certified Psychiatric Pharmacist practicing at one of the nation’s largest correctional systems, Dallas County Jail, Dr. Jennifer Nelson, has never looked back. As the Senior Clinical Pharmacy Specialist in Psychiatry and Psychiatric Pharmacy Program Director at Parkland Health and Hospital System, she gradually gained the trust of medical staff members by accepting strategic projects.

Her current primary role of managing psychiatric medications for pregnant inmates is highly valued by the medical team and obstetrician. Her collaborative practice agreement with the psychiatry medical director allows her to manage medications for inmates with mental health and substance use disorders.

Dr. Nelson also manages complex medication side effects. She shares her expertise by lecturing and precepting physician assistant students and psychiatry residents.

Special Considerations in the Correctional Setting

In addition to the knowledge and skills acquired during her psychiatric pharmacy residency, some of Dr. Nelson’s expertise in corrections came while on the job.

Special considerations in the jail setting that impact medication use include no glass vials, the majority of medication administration only twice a day, limitations on the use of medications with a high risk of misuse, and a lack of access to previous medical records or corroborating information from family or friends. Clinical Pharmacy Specialists within correctional systems, like Dr. Nelson also optimize psychiatric medications, allowing inmates to function at their highest level of competency in court.

A Typical Month of Making a Difference



145 patient visits



10 pregnant female consultations



5-12 clozapine patients including all monitoring



3 interventions for clozapine side effects (mostly constipation and sialorrhea)

“Working collaboratively with Dr. Nelson helps psychiatrists, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants navigate some of the hurdles of providing care in a correctional setting which is complex and at times daunting. **She is a good resource on medication combinations, interactions, and treatment options in complex cases.**”

- Ukamaka Osuagwu, APRN

“I can say without reservation that I could not do my job without her knowledge and support.”

- John Quinn, MD

Psychiatry



Restoring Quality of Life

After development of a severe movement disorder caused by one of her psychiatric medications, a 60-year-old woman is thankful for Dr. Nelson’s intervention. The patient was able to obtain the “life-changing” medications during both her incarceration and as she transitioned to being released from jail.

Another pregnant inmate was very hesitant to take medications for her schizoaffective disorder and restless legs syndrome because she had a previous child with a birth defect. The patient worked closely with Dr. Nelson and the medical team to select medication and non-medication treatments that would minimize fetal risks, ultimately leading to the arrival of a healthy newborn baby.

College of Psychiatric
& Neurologic Pharmacists



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This information brought to you by the College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP), a professional association representing psychiatric pharmacists nationwide. Our members integrate into teams of health care professionals, making a difference in overall costs, treatment efficiencies, patient recovery and quality of life.

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