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In Our View/Snohomish County Corrections

## Jail reforms starting now

An innate right to ethical treatment and respect is the essence of human dignity. It's a definition that needs to be practiced and repeated like a mantra by every corrections officer, medical staffer and employee at the Snohomish County Jail.

As [The Herald's Diana Hefley and Scott North report](#), a just-issued operational assessment by the National Institute of Corrections underscores the need for a series of reforms to produce a safer, more humane jail. Most of the reforms are manageable policy and procedural tweaks that Snohomish County Sheriff Ty Trenary is likely to embrace (a promising signal that Trenary posted the full report on the sheriff's website.) Changing an organizational culture, however, will take some doing.

Training is the cornerstone, numero uno in retooling a culture that mortars professional behavior. Even Florida requires 22 weeks of academy training. As the report states, "It is difficult to not judge the Washington program as deficient. This is especially so when there seems to be no training in 'direct supervision' and little relative to the mentally ill in jail."

Observers Timothy Ryan and John Ford highlight the case of a mentally ill inmate in an observation cell. Ryan and Ford notice the inmate on a Wednesday and see him in the same observation cell on a Friday. He had been "recalcitrant," staffers said, and still hadn't been booked (Think Ken Kesey meets Kafka.)

"Mental health should be on hand to evaluate, almost immediately, to assess his condition and make appropriate treatment recommendations," they write. "Early intervention by mental health staff should reduce the possibility of a use of force and the improper housing of the mentally ill inmate."

Amen to that. A proactive response ensures the dignity and care of everyone.

Formal accreditation also could safeguard services for those living with mental illness and other measures for the safety of staff and inmates. The report recommends accreditation through the "Core Jail Standards," a bare minimum.

One takeaway is that after the 2009 transfer of the jail from the executive to the sheriff's office, the "full transition remains incomplete." Trenary looks to close the circle. From the thrust of the report, Trenary might consider applying a jail version of the broken-window theory: Norms are set when you take better care of what you have.

The operative metaphor is the empty drink bottle observers saw near the facility's entrance. It was in the exact same spot two days later. Might it still be there?

From a grimy booking area, to untended rat traps, to slipshod adherence to the basics (when medical staff prescribe a therapeutic diet, "it is important that the inmate actually receive such a meal"), the little things add up to one big thing. Now, all of this must change.

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