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***prisonHEALTH* EXTERNAL SPEAKER (November 2022)**

Assistant Professor Chris Seeds, University of California, Irvine

"The prison hospice: palliative care at the end of life sentences"

Dr Cathie Traynor

*prison*HEALTH

'Prisons, Health and Societies' is a new, multidisciplinary research group which exists to encourage high quality scholarship, engagement and knowledge transfer regarding all aspects of mental and physical health, in and around prisons and detention sites. The *prison*HEALTH arm is directed by Dr Philippa Tomczak and Dr Catherine Appleton. We were joined by Chris Seeds from UCI, who presented a paper "The prison hospice: palliative care at the end of life sentences".

Chris Seeds is an Assistant Professor of Criminology, Law and Society at the University of California, Irvine, and a capital defence lawyer. Chris began by discussing his current research project, which aims to explore the sociology of a prison hospice, and portray what palliative care looks like in prison. Data was initially collected through focus groups. The second phase of the project will involve



visits to a specific hospice to gain the perspectives of medical staff and prisoners regarding the nature and quality of care. Chris and the subsequent discussion raised several key points.

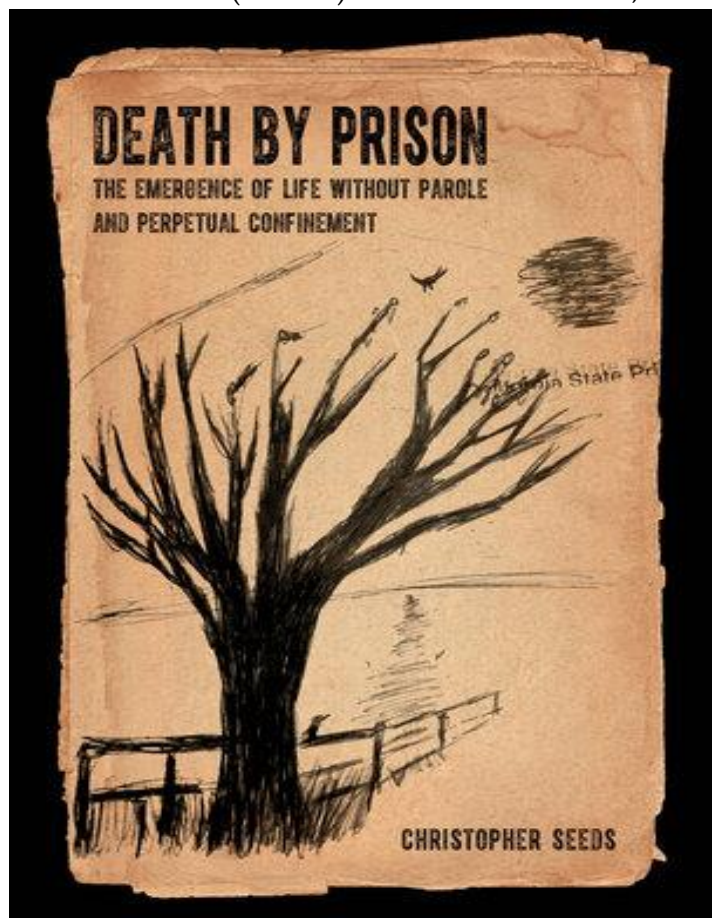
Firstly, Chris described the difference between the metrics and the experience of palliative care. The metrics show the quality of care is adequate in California. However, while they illustrate that standards are met and can suggest a level of care that compares favourably to outside prison (e.g. waiting times for an appointment),

prisons lack concern and care for chronically and terminally ill people. In many cases, the care they receive is awful and in our discussion, it was raised that people can die, chained to their beds.

Chris explained that the Californian hospice offered a space to die *as well as possible*. It was characterised by some extremely willing and dedicated staff, a relaxed custody level and family visits. Attempts to spread best practice were in the pipeline such as a field guide and a film. Nevertheless, Chris stressed how the existence of such a hospice (with only 17 beds) raised numerous, other pressing questions. For example, why are people reluctant to go to the hospice, or critical care beds within prisons or institutions outside?

Chris highlighted the prevalence of anxiety and agreed that this was relevant to all those with disabilities, or chronic or terminal illnesses in prison. High levels of anxiety were absent in public health literature, which was mostly concerned with physical and material conditions in prisons. This led to a discussion about the imminent publication of a new strategy for older prisoners in England and Wales, which includes the provision of training for detecting dementia. Our group were cautious about how successful this would be in the light of current pressures and resources.

Finally, Chris explained what motivated his research on the hospice and palliative care. Driven by abolitionist reform and the idea of a 'self-immolating geriatric prison', his aim was to shock people into how they could incarcerate older people, and allow deaths in custody devoid of dignity to happen. However, he was aware that his work revealing good examples of palliative care and prison hospices, might to some extent legitimise the penal system. Chris also contextualised his work through his recent book entitled 'Death by Prison'. Based on extensive, historical research, it traces the evolution of Life Without Parole (LWOP) in the United States, which impacts on the age of prisoners and their needs. Such death sentences by stealth are hard for many practitioners and researchers to tolerate and witness, yet the public appear to have normalised them, along with the gradual disappearing act of clemency. Our group eagerly supports Chris's efforts to raise the importance of these issues with legislators and policy makers, and wishes him huge success with the hospice project and his new book.



References:

Seeds, Christopher (2022) *Death by Prison: The Emergence of Life without Parole and Perpetual Confinement*. University of California Press.

See also: <https://www.ucpress.edu/blog/58177/qa-with-christopher-seeds-author-of-death-by-prison/>

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We welcome new applications from academic researchers – particularly early career researchers across sectors and scholars with lived experience of the criminal justice system. To apply, please email a summary (max one side of A4) of your interest in the subject and what you think you could bring to the [Prisons Health and Societies](#) research group to philippa.tomczak@nottingham.ac.uk