

Maximum Insecurity: A Doctor in the Supermax

William Wright, M.D.

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There's a doctor in the Big House, and he has some chillingly funny tales about his patients.

In his chilling and hilarious memoir, *Maximum Insecurity: A Doctor in the Supermax*, now-seasoned supermax prison physician William Wright shares his initiation into hard truths learned on the job. These include how to respond to ridiculous prisoner requests and lawsuits, the paperwork he came to know intimately, the irritable bowels that seem to accompany prison life, and the *n*th degree of idiocy in most attempts at manipulation of authority by prison denizens. When it wasn't fun anymore, Wright quit, but he left with some great stories—names changed to protect the guilty.

The portions of this book covering what Wright has learned about the history of prisons and prison life are fascinating, and the memoir is also a fast-reading character study. Not everyone will appreciate the laugh-a-minute approach, but Wright certainly provides levity, and many readers will need it. Although some people—including some prison administrators—might not care what happens to the most violent, sociopathic American citizens, the author cared about his patients, though he also made a few rookie mistakes caring too much, and got duped. As Wright notes, prisoners have all day to plan their manipulations.

While Wright clearly cared about his charges, and he suggests that his patients always knew that, there is also the sense that he learned not to take their requests too seriously. For example, while noting the hilarity of dozens of prisoners asking him to do something about their bowels, and the daily occurrence of someone trying to obtain narcotics, he never mentions the possibility that the low quality of prison food makes inmates sick or that high levels of compulsive, addictive behavior exist among prisoners.

The author reveals the shocking sociopathic criminal minds he worked with daily, and because of this there is not much room to explore the victimhood of these helpless federal prisoners. In fact, some may even find something just a little poetic about a rapist and murderer having an embarrassing medical problem. There is a hint of recognition of the endemic social problems most likely to land individuals in prison. For example, many prisoners are barely literate, but the author plays this to hilarious effect. Not once is he heavy-handed, nor does he get too serious about the weighty parts of the job.

Prison policies prohibiting staff from bringing in their own lunch bothered Wright just as much as the lack of Internet access on his work computer, and he gets loud about everything he had to deal with. There is an aura of insult aimed at certain other people around the workplace, but not unjustifiably. This is true when Wright discusses his thoughts on prisoners—"Herbie expressed his desire to establish a Hispanic network based on 'character' with an emphasis on love over hate. Herbie was serving three life terms for murder, conspiracy, and racketeering at the time. A perfect fit."—as well as when he waxes poetic about administration and his ever-expanding duties.

Interesting, well-written, and funny, this book deserves a wide readership.

CARRIE WALLACE (February 10, 2014)

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