

**FILLER**

This is my house – respect it

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My first day working in the prison was an eye opening experience. I had never previously worked in an environment that was enclosed by high barbed wire fences, surrounded by watchtowers, and patrolled by armed officers. As I entered the medical clinic, I stepped in an unknown fluid, uttered an expletive, and said, “This place sucks.” In the hallway, sitting on a chair, was—unbeknownst to me—my first patient. I went to the restroom, wiped off my shoes, and washed my hands. After I got settled, I escorted my patient from the hallway to my office. I introduced myself, closed the door, and we both sat down.

He then said, “Doc, I heard what you said in the hallway. Let me tell you something. You come here, do what you need to do, and then you get to leave. You get to go to home, eat whatever you want, and do whatever you please. I don’t. This is my home. This is where I live, eat, and sleep. If you don’t like the décor, don’t work here.”

I was stunned by his comment. I apologised to him and addressed his mental health concerns. As I walked out of prison later that day, I realised that he was spot on. I got to go home at the end of the day; he did not. The prison was his home for the duration of his sentence. Just as I would not have appreciated someone making a negative comment about my home, neither did he. He did not enjoy being in prison, but that was his home and I disrespected it. For those patients in institutional settings, the institution is their home. I never thought about it that way until that moment. I haven’t forgotten that lesson since.

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