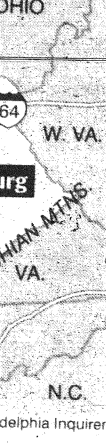


# ...icts' drugs



Napier, a chunky man with a mustache as thick as broom bristles. "I took two kinds of diet pills a day. Six Tylox. Six Valium and 150 milligrams Sinequan. I got more and more depressed and felt like hanging myself on the ceiling fan. Even the underwriter for the workers' compensation program told the doctor he was overprescribing me.

"I'll tell you, buddy, these prescription drugs are bad news. But you can see why people mess with them. Look around; there's nothing up here. If you don't work in the mines, there's nothing. So people get on disability and they get prescriptions for anxiety and depression. And pretty soon all they want is that buzz, and that government check every month."

When a new doctor comes to the mountains, the "pill eaters" gather like moths at his door.

Dr. Ricky Collins found that out in 1992 when he opened a clinic in Letcher County, where his family has lived for 200 years. "The first 10 people I saw in this office were drug seekers," said Collins, a thin man with a huge map of the world wallpapered in his office. "They try you out, see what they can get. . . ."

"I know people who have been on Valium and other prescription drugs for 30 years. The doctors didn't realize back then how addicting the stuff really was. And this is mining country, where injuries run high. Backs are crushed, legs broken. That's how a lot of miners became addicted. But younger people look at these drugs as a way out. A lot of them have pharmacy and medical books, and they know what to tell you. We've had them throw absolute conniption fits because I don't give them what they want."

Mary Beth Thacker, 19, has had her share of fits and now faces a list of worries. Beyond her arrest for a forged prescription for 60 Valium and Lorcet. She is also charged with receiving stolen property from her boyfriend, Scott Wampler, who was arrested on charges that he broke into several pharmacies and stole thousands of pills. Police say Wampler sold much of his booty in George's Branch, a ragged hollow where cars waited in line to buy dope and fence anything from guns to TVs.

Thacker, her ashy arms crossed, her hazel eyes teary under russet eyebrows, leaned against the jail window as outside gray haze reached into the mountains. She wondered how she tumbled into a world where she met guys like the one who she said cut his finger off and slashed open his belly to get painkillers. One time he jumped in front of a car.

"Some of them are just plumb crazy," she said as a fan pushed hot air over a tiled floor. "So much of my life has been a blackout. I'm not doing too good."

## Obituaries

# Jose A. Alvarez, 34; AIDS social worker

By Andy Wallace  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Jose A. Alvarez, 34, of Northeast Philadelphia, a social worker praised for bringing AIDS programs to Philadelphia's Latino community and admired for giving — as he sometimes did — the shirt off his back; died Thursday of complications of AIDS at Frankford Hospital.

"Jose Alvarez was one of the first Latinos in Philadelphia to recognize the problem that AIDS posed to the Latino community, and to do something about it," said Alba Martinez, executive director of Congreso de Latinos Unidos.

That role did not surprise his sister, Maria del Carmen, who said her brother "was most of all about caring for other people. All of his projects seemed to be helping somebody in one way or another."

His work in AIDS began in 1986 when, as a employee in the admissions department of Episcopal Hospital, he volunteered time to comfort isolated AIDS patients and to educate their families about the disease.

In March 1988, he took his passionate commitment to the welfare of AIDS patients to Congreso. There he served as a hotline counselor, outreach worker, HIV testing counselor and case manager with Programa Esfuerzo, which he helped establish.

While an outreach worker, Mr. Alvarez moved the AIDS program to the community, visiting bars, drugstores, shopping centers, crack houses and beauty parlors to find people with AIDS.

In 1991 he was chosen Employee of the Year by his fellow workers. Two years later, he was named director of Programa Esfuerzo, which reaches 40,000 Latinos a year through education, testing, counseling and other programs.

"He was very laid-back and shy, but in the way of some shy people, he was passionate and single-minded in his commitment to doing whatever he could to help people with AIDS," said David Fair, executive director of We the People Living with AIDS.

Though he did not enjoy "the bureaucratic stuff," Fair said, Mr. Alvarez took part in planning meetings where needs were assessed and

money distributed and often was the only one speaking out for low-income Latino people.

"He was a loyal advocate for those people — counselor, dishwasher, whatever it would take," Fair said. "He did not get into it because he was a professional but because he cared."

He was pivotal in developing Programa Esfuerzo from a small volunteer effort into the major provider of AIDS service in the Latino community.

Creative and intelligent, Mr. Alvarez was admired as well for his positive, can-do outlook.

"He had a lot of ideas, a lot of energy," said Rebeca Barragan, director of program operations at Congreso. "When something needed to be done, he would just jump in and do it, rather than waiting for someone else."

That attitude created a problem for Mr. Alvarez. On one hand, he took pride in his appearance; on the other, he was moved to give away things — even clothing — to those in need.

"He was always well dressed," Barragan said. "He was proud of being Puerto Rican and he wanted to make sure he would portray a positive

image with his appearance."

But charity limited his wardrobe.

"He only owned one pair of shoes," Barragan said. "When he bought one pair, he would give the other away."

The sweaters she bought for him he gave to clients. He literally gave away the shirt he was wearing and went around in his undershirt. Mr. Alvarez, who was born in Puerto Rico, moved with his family to New York and then, when he was 13, to Philadelphia. He graduated from South Philadelphia High School in 1978 and studied at Shippensburg and West Chester State Universities.

He is survived by his mother, Nerida Alvarez; his father, Jose Maria Alvarez; his stepfather Jorge Viegas-Pires; sisters, Maria del Carmen and Mercedes Alvarez; brothers, Noel, Frankie and Jose David; and his maternal grandmother, Dolores Torres.

A viewing will be held Monday from 5 to 9 p.m. and Tuesday from 9 to 11 a.m. at St. Luke and the Epiphany Church, 330 S. 13th St., where the service will be at 11 a.m. Tuesday.

Burial will be at Oakland Cemetery, Adams and Ramona Avenues.



Jose A. Alvarez

# Police

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# Girl in

By Anne G  
ASSOCIATED

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**AU**

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