

Alcohol treatment center expands services

The Alaska Native Alcohol Recovery Center — ANARC — has expanded its services to include the treatment of alcoholics suffering from psychosis.

Staff members say the expansion in services shows the growth ANARC has experienced since opening its doors in December 1988, but they note that treatment of the psychotic alcoholic presents a unique challenge.

"Most alcoholics that come in suffer psychosis, but within 30 days it's under control," said Ernie Turner, ANARC director. "Although many alcoholics display strange behavior that takes time to heal, the psychotic alcoholic has more severe problems."

Turner explained that in some cases it is unclear whether the psychosis existed before the alcohol problems, or whether the alcohol problem is the

result of the psychosis.

"Each case and treatment is unique," he said.

Psychiatrist Dr. Robert Morgan visits the center weekly and remains on call the rest of the time to help the staff at ANARC treat and evaluate the clients. These particular clients require medication, usually lithium, which has to be carefully monitored and dispensed by a licensed physician.

Some of the psychotic alcoholics who are referred to ANARC arrive with little comprehension of why they are there. Turner admitted to losing the first two or three clients in this category who were referred to the center.

"They didn't like it here," he said. "Since we are not a security facility,

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• Absolutely no wait for pregnant women

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we can't force them to stay. The people who do stay do so because they have made a commitment to becoming well. The ones that walk away are the people who slip through the cracks."

Turner said, however, that the people who "slip through the cracks" are usually destined to wander homeless again in the streets.

One obstacle in the way of successful treatment for these people, he said, is that many of them are developmentally disabled, lacking basic reading or writing skills. Turner and the staff at ANARC are combating this problem by testing the clients to determine those who are truly developmentally disabled and those suffering cultural problems.

As for the cultural problems, most of the staff members at the center are Alaska Natives, which makes it easier for them to develop a rapport with the clients in the counseling process.

Now available to the clients at ANARC are tapes for those unable to read or write. Unfortunately, the tapes are in English and useless to the many Yupik speaking clients. Currently, Turner is seeking means to have the tapes translated to Yupik.

Besides doubling the bed capacity to 24 during the first year, another change that has occurred at the center is the new "no-wait" policy for pregnant women.

"If a pregnant woman calls us for help, there is absolutely no waiting for admittance," said Marie Stark, admit

coordinator. "Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, along with expectant mothers abusing drugs, is a real priority with the staff at ANARC."

Stark also said that drug and alcohol abuse is no longer a matter of ignorance, but a matter of choice on the mother's part.

Both Turner and Stark are finding a strong network of support developing with the people who have completed the program. They find that even though ANARC has been open for less than a year, people are reaching out sooner when they feel depressed or are tempted to start drinking again.

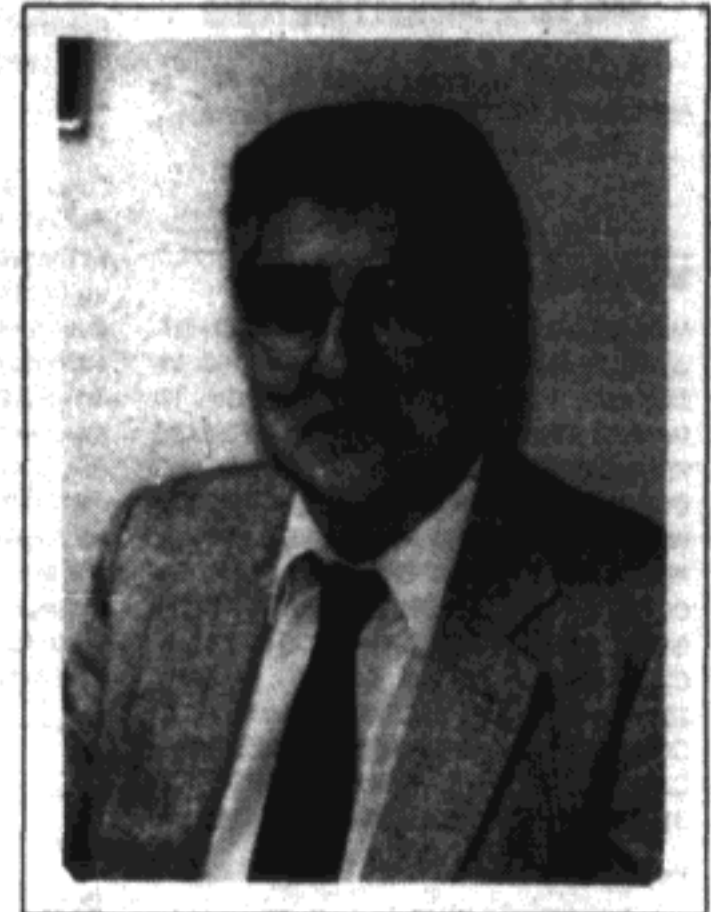
After the initial 60-day alcoholic portion of the program is completed by a client, he or she continues to par-

ticipate in the "continuance of care" part of the recovery process.

Because ANARC is an intermediate care facility and therefore not staffed as a detox program, clients are accepted who have been sober for at least three days. A team of experienced counselors and education specialists provide instruction and lead discussions on the recovery process.

Two former patients are now working at the center. One is a full-time employee; the other works part-time while attending classes at UAA.

ANARC is a nonprofit program managed by the Cook Inlet Tribal Council. The center is located at 120 North Hoyt Street in Anchorage. Those who would like more information may call 278-2627.



Ernie Turner, ANARC director