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FISHER,
(9/8) DR. ALVAN

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Pioneer in AIDS treatment, Alvan Fisher dies at 57

Dr. Fisher spent 22 years in clinical practice in Rhode Island treating and advocating for patients with HIV/AIDS.

BY TOM MOONEY
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Dr. Alvan E. Fisher, who in 1983 treated the first Rhode Islander diagnosed with AIDS and went on to become a pioneer in the treatment of people with the disease, died Friday of renal cancer in his California home. He was 57.

Dr. Steven Sepe, who worked with Fisher for more than 20 years, remembered his friend as a courageous man of conviction who in the early 1980s, as the disease spread, ventured into an area of treatment that some other doctors feared to tread.

"We were seeing lots and lots of people with dreaded illnesses who were dying and we didn't know what it was," recalled Sepe. "It was like fighting in the trenches and Al cared very deeply for his patients."

At times, said Sepe, they were both "scared as hell. We'd get stuck with needless and kind of look at each other, but Al was very brave. Even in his last days with his wife and his children around him, he died with dignity."

Fisher spent 22 years in clinical practice in Rhode Island treating and advocating for patients with

HIV/AIDS.

"In the beginning there was a lot of stigma associated with this disease as being a gay man's disease and this was the area Al really became involved with," said Sepe, "advocating for privacy rights and for public health issues and fighting the stereotypes."

A specialist in infectious diseases, Fisher was a founding member of AIDS Project Rhode Island where he was instrumental in establishing standards of care for patients with HIV and helping patients find doctors who would treat them. He served as chairman of the AIDS task force at Rhode Island Hospital and helped start the Brown University AIDS Program.

AIDS Project Rhode Island recognized him with its first "Red Ribbon Community Service Award" in 2002.

More recently, Fisher, who lived in Half Moon Bay, Calif., continued his work in the field of HIV/AIDS treatment as senior director of medical affairs for Gilead Sciences, a biotech company in Foster City, Calif.

He is survived by his wife of 35 years, Pamela, and their two sons, Andrew Fisher of Berkeley, Calif., and Jeremy Fisher of Half Moon Bay, Calif.

Funeral services are planned for today at 1 p.m. at Stanetsky Memorial Chapels, 475 Washington St., Canton, Mass.

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FISHER, DR. ALVAN, age 57, of Half Moon Bay, CA, formerly of Barrington, RI. Entered into rest September 28, 2007, after a short, but courageous battle with kidney cancer. Beloved husband of Pamela (Foster) for 35 years. Adored son of the late Maurice C. (MD) and Martha (Ellis) Fisher. Devoted father of Andrew Fisher of Berkeley, CA and Jeremy Fisher of Half Moon Bay, CA. Loving brother of Leanne Gitell of Hull, MA and Diane Cooper and her husband Harvey of Natick, MA. Caring uncle of Nancy Sciore, Steven Cooper, Seth and Deborah Gitell, and Ruth and Meryl Sherman. Cherished great-uncle of Marielle Sciore, Chloe Sciore and Max Gitell. Dear brother-in-law of Gerald Gitell and Paula and Michael Sherman.

Alvan spent 22 years in clinical practice in Rhode Island treating and advocating for patients with HIV/AIDS. As a founding member of the Board of Directors of Rhode Island Project AIDS he was instrumental in establishing standards for the comprehensive care of patients with this disease. More recently he continued his work in the field of HIV/AIDS treatment as Senior Director of Medical Affairs for Gilead Sciences in Foster City, CA.

Services will be held at Stanetsky Memorial Chapels, 475 Washington St., Canton, MA, Tuesday, October 2nd at 1 p.m. The family will be at the home of Harvey and Diane Cooper following interment through Wednesday evening and at the home of Dr. Ronald and Sharon Gilman in Barrington, RI Thursday and Friday evening, to receive relatives and friends. In lieu of flowers donations in memory of Alvan may be made to AIDS Project Rhode Island, 232 West Exchange St., Providence, RI 02903, or to The Dean R. O'Neill Renal Cell Cancer Research Fund, c/o Foundation for the NIH, One Cloister Court, Suite 152, Bethesda, MD 20814-1460.