

# Local doctor: AIDS activist, educator

By AISHA LOFTON

Dr. Jim Atkins, a local oncologist (specialist in cancer and abnormal cell development), was born in Massachusetts.

He has an associate's degree in Liberal Arts and a bachelor's degree in zoology.

All of his medical training he achieved at NC Baptist Hospital.

As a captain in the Public Health Service (PHS), an arm of the military that provides medical services, he spent 3 years on a Navaho reservation.

When he finished his training as an internist, he began working with Dr. Sam McLamb, a specialist in internal medicine, in 1984.

Atkins, an oncologist for 12 years, became interested in AIDS in 1980 when the epidemic was on the rise.

He sees about 25 new patients each year, but he treats over 200 AIDS patients.

He said, "AIDS is on the increase both nationally and locally."

Wayne County has a high percentage of HIV patients. He said, "It is still true that people between the ages of 23-36 are dying of this virus, and it is the number one leading cause of their deaths."

Atkins feels if there is no cure, then education is the only solution left and the only cure is not to get infected.

Atkins feels that people don't protect themselves because they don't believe AIDS can happen to them.

He feels that prayer can be very helpful and powerful with both physical and spiritual healing.

Atkins stated that 50-75 percent of teenagers are sexually active by the time they graduate from high school.

He feels that Wayne County schools are committed to AIDS awareness because they have to be.

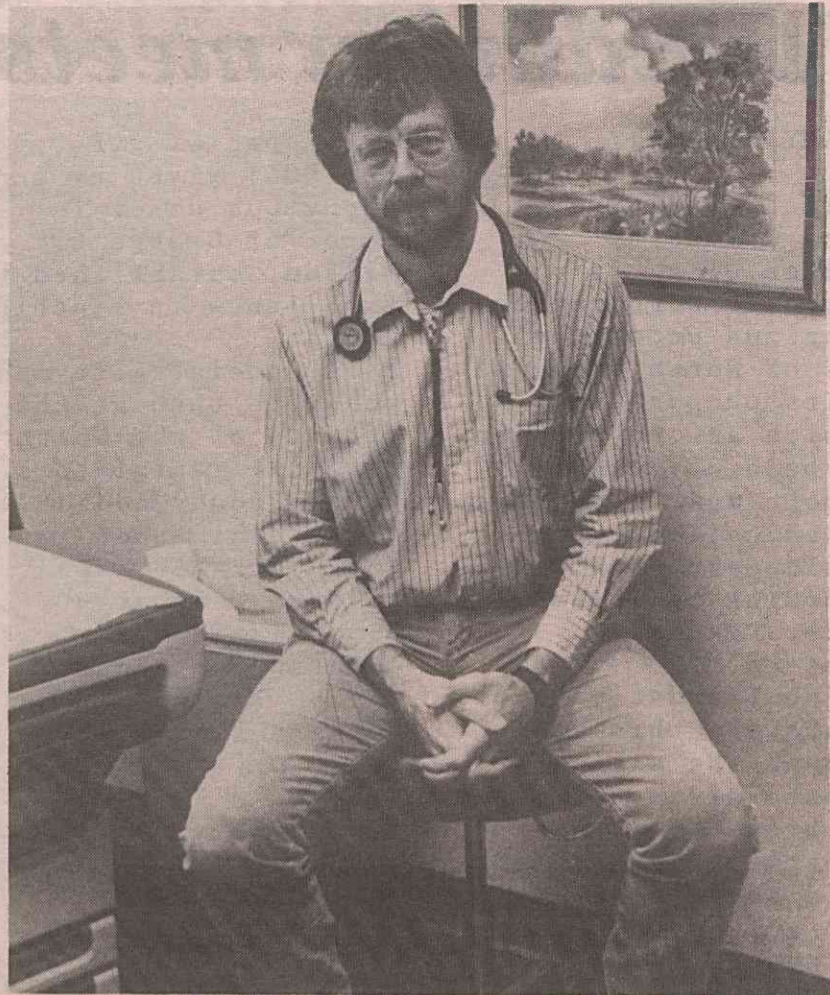
"Teaching AIDS awareness in seventh grade is mandatory according to state curriculum standards."

He became involved with the college because it wanted to have seminars.

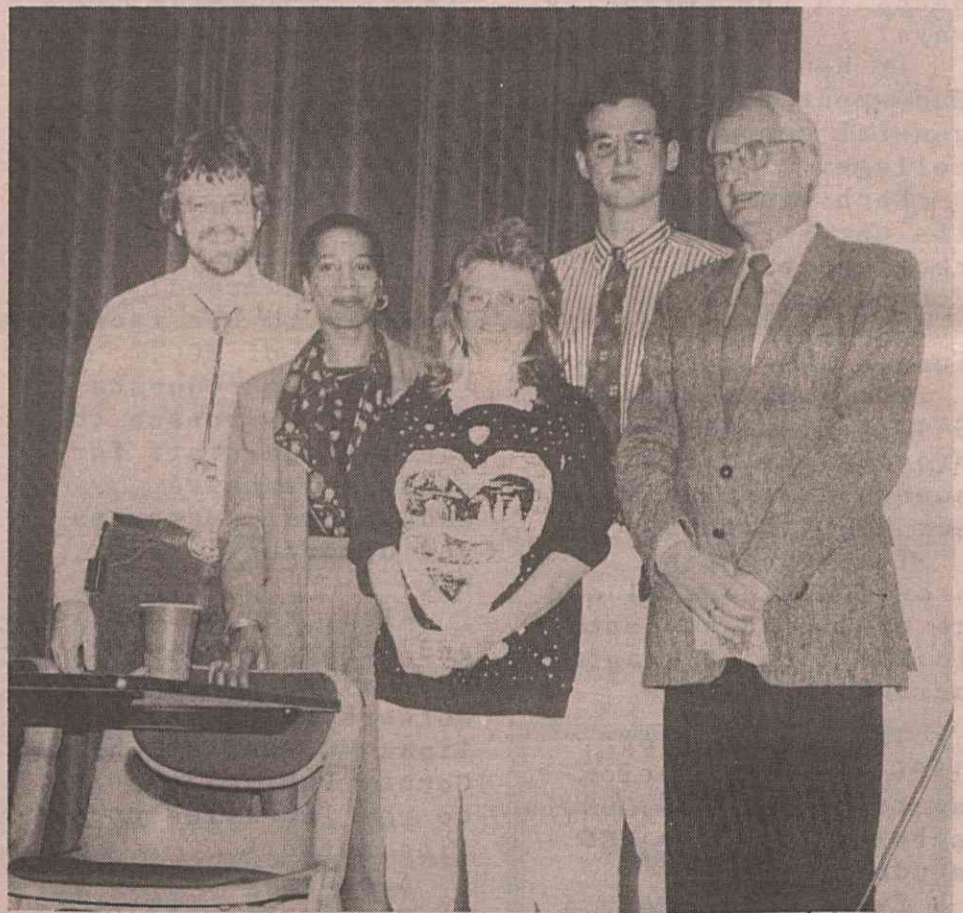
Over a period of 6 years, Atkins has been the lecturer about the origin of AIDS and has presented statistics at 18 seminars.

WCC audiences of nearly 8000 have heard Dr. Atkins do what he does well--educate about AIDS.

Atkins also speaks to church and civic groups throughout the community.



Dr. Jim Atkins poses in one of the examining rooms in his office. PHOTO: AISHA LOFTON



Panel participants at the AIDS Seminar included (l to r) Dr. Atkins, Jerri, Diane, John David, and Dr. Edmond Hogan.

## WCC site for Mental Health Alliance meeting

By JOHN LAPOINT

The Wayne County Chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), a support group for families and friends, met in LC 131 on November 14.

The guest speaker, Paula Wilcenski, is the parent of a mentally ill child.

She stressed that it is more difficult to be the parent of a child who is mentally ill than it is to have the illness yourself.

Having been diagnosed with bipolar disorder (also known as manic depression) in her past, she knows the pain of being mentally ill.

Wilcenski stated that she was institutionalized four times, twice involuntarily, and, although she is not ill anymore, she will always be on lithium, a drug used to treat manic depression.

Wilcenski said that parents of the mentally ill and health care givers, with good intentions, often over-medicate and see all emotions as mental breakdowns.

She said she felt that doctors are sometimes crazier than patients. "It is the patients, not the doctors, who help the other patients get well."

Wilcenski said that it is often up to patients to regulate their medication, since patients, whom she calls consumers, know their illness better than anyone else.

She said an unfortunate reality of the system is that consumers are not always told of all the

side effects of the medication provided and are not always treated as people.

This ignorance leads to what she calls "the death of the spirit."

She said that family members often inadvertently kill the spirits of their mentally ill family members.

Patients often gain between 45 and 125 pounds on medicine.

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