Wheel of Misfortune

November 1, 2000 By Rachel Lewis

Despite the popularity of AIDS rides, Pallotta TeamWorks -- the for-profit, California-based group that produces them -- has sparked its share of controversy. In June, the bad publicity shifted into a new gear when, during the first day of the Washington, DC, AIDS Ride, a participant died. It was the first death in the the company's six-year history.

Eve Jaffe, a 31-year-old bookstore manager from the DC area, became ill on June 23 -- a 110-mile day of riding from Raleigh, North Carolina to Laurenceville, Virginia. She lost consciousness in a medical tent and died later that day at a Virginia Commonwealth University hospital. A hospital spokesperson told *The Washington Post* that the cause of Jaffe's death was an aneurysm, a hemorrhage inside her brain.

The company has been scrutinized in the past for its extremely high expenses, which eat into money raised by the rides and intended for AIDS organizations. Although the Rides have grossed nearly $128 million since 1994, less than $70 million has been handed over to beneficiaries. On average, 55 percent of donor contributions remain with the local charities paired with Pallotta TeamWorks for the event, but these figures vary widely -- from as low as 10 percent in Florida in 1997 to 71 percent in San Francisco in 1999. (Pallotta TeamWorks denied repeated requests for an interview with *POZ*.)

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