



50 of 98 DOCUMENTS

Copyright 1986 The Washington Post  
The Washington Post

October 9, 1986, Thursday, Final Edition

**SECTION:** METRO; PAGE B5

**LENGTH:** 689 words

**HEADLINE:** Great Oaks Patient's Death Probed by Police;  
Woman Dies After Being Found Unconscious

**BYLINE:** Victoria Churchville, Washington Post Staff Writer

**BODY:**

Maryland State Police said yesterday they are investigating the death of an 18-year-old, profoundly retarded woman who died earlier this week after being found unconscious at the Great Oaks Center, a state facility in Silver Spring.

Sunday night, the 4-foot-3-inch, 72-pound Alicia Martinez was found sprawled across a bed, her head caught between its metal rails, by a staff member at the facility for the mentally retarded, officials said yesterday. She died six hours later at Greater Laurel-Beltsville Hospital.

It was unclear yesterday what caused her death, the Maryland Medical Examiner's office said, and results of an autopsy performed Tuesday will not be available for about six weeks.

Marvin Malcotti, director of Great Oaks, said yesterday he did not believe the woman died from having her head caught in the bed rails. Instead, Malcotti said he believed she died of a seizure, even though she had received medication to control such episodes -- which were described as mild -- three hours before she was found unconscious on the bed.

Martinez, who had the physical development of a 10-year-old and the mental ability of an infant, had been a permanent resident of the center since 1974.

She was the third patient to have died there this year. A severely retarded 18-year-old man died after swallowing a physician's vinyl examination glove, and a second resident choked to death on a sandwich, said Malcotti, the director of the center for the retarded and developmentally disabled since January.

Malcotti said the previous deaths were ruled accidental.

Great Oaks, the second-largest such institution in Maryland, was the focus of an investigation by the state Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Administration last year.

The center's director and deputy director were reassigned after the investigation found that the center was experiencing a "significant long-term employe management problem."

Alice and Jose Martinez of Greenbelt, the dead woman's parents, questioned yesterday the care she received at

Great Oaks Patient's Death Probed by Police; Woman Dies After Being Found Unconscious The Washington Post  
October 9, 1986, Thursday, Final Edition

Great Oaks and said a doctor at the hospital told them she died from asphyxiation rather than a seizure.

The hospital would not comment yesterday on the cause of death.

A doctor "told us that Alicia had been without breathing for a considerable amount of time," said Jose Martinez. "I have witnessed several seizures from Alicia, and they last three to five seconds and they don't represent a violent shaking of the body."

Martinez, a federal employe whose wife works for the American College of Psychiatry, said he believed their daughter's death was "a matter of Alicia not being supervised properly."

Malcotti, however, said, "So far, my own impression is that staff performed yeomen's service. . . . Something happened in a very short period of time but it was not the usual screwup at Great Oaks, so to speak. It was tragic, but I'd have to say accidental."

He gave this account of events leading to the woman's death:

Three staff members attending the 21 women and girls who live in Cottage 8 at the facility were calming a patient who became violent at 7:25 p.m.

Five minutes later, a woman attendant noticed that Martinez was missing from the community room where all the patients are supervised. She found her unconscious, her face blue and her head trapped in the bed rails in a room shared by four other patients.

A physician and nurse arrived at 7:35 and applied cardiopulmonary resuscitation and injected a drug to boost her heart rate.

An ambulance was called at 7:37. Fire Department records show that an ambulance arrived at 7:46 p.m., and a paramedic unit six minutes later. At 8:17 the ambulance left Great Oaks with Martinez. She was pronounced dead at the Greater Laurel Beltsville Hospital at 1:30 a.m. Sunday.

Alice Martinez, 40, recalled yesterday during an interview that their daughter was happy during a weekend visit home that ended hours before her death, and had laughed when her mother put a new pair of red tennis shoes on her feet. "She really liked them," Mrs. Martinez said, breaking into sobs. "That's the last memory I have of her."