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By: Jeff Benson, Bedford, NH Resident, cancer patient

My Story: A Cancer Patient and the Proposed Affiliation

When I hear others talk about the proposed affiliation between Catholic Medical Center and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Manchester, all I can think about is my own experience and how the relationship has already affected my life in a profound way.

In January 2008 I was diagnosed with esophageal cancer near my stomach. When my doctor called me with the news, I was shocked. I could barely hear what she was saying. She told me it was okay and to keep listening. When I was finally able to speak, I asked where my treatment might take place. I reminded her that I have three young boys and that regardless of the final outcome, I did not want to be away from them for long periods of time.

She assured me that there were world-class treatment options right here in Manchester. In fact, she had already scheduled a PET nuclear scan for the next day and all of the initial “staging” appointments at Dartmouth-Hitchcock’s Norris Cotton Cancer Center located on the campus of Catholic Medical Center. Everything was in place.

My only reference to cancer treatment was my relatives traveling back and forth to Boston for weeks on end adding stress factors to an already traumatic life event. I wasn’t looking forward to my wife and I being away from my boys for a good portion of my treatment. I thought who would look after my kids and console them if they had a bad day? I wanted that to be my wife and me.

After getting a second opinion of the diagnosis and staging results, I researched different treatment centers to make sure that I was going to the right place for me and my family. It didn’t take long to find that Norris Cotton Cancer Center was an excellent option for my treatment and follow-up care. I found that Norris Cotton Cancer Center was one of only 39 Comprehensive Cancer Centers of the National Cancer Institute AND the only one in NH and it was local.

The collaboration of CMC and Dartmouth-Hitchcock’s Norris Cotton Cancer Center allowed me and my family to continue to live with the normalcy and structure that is so important for families to help them through this process. Because the treatment center was in my community, I was able to see my kids off to school and welcome them home for dinner. They were none the wiser except for daddy being tired. In fact, because it was so close to home, I was able to bring my children in for a tour of the facility. The staff showed them everything from the supply room to the infusion area. It was after that visit that my children became part of, if not comfortable with, the process.

After treatment and my subsequent surgery, I felt a lump at the bottom of my rib cage. Instantly all of the fears came rushing back. Had the cancer returned? After calling my doctor, she saw me that day. She felt the lump too and was concerned so she ordered some tests that were worked up immediately simply by walking across the skybridge to CMC, right then and there. By the time I returned, she had already received the results and informed me that I had broken a little rib and that my bones were in perfect order.

Nightmare avoided. Without the collaboration between Dartmouth-Hitchcock and CMC, this diagnosis would have taken several days and multiple appointments causing terrible stress and inconvenience on me and my family.

It's important to know that having cancer is as much a drain on the mind as it is on the body. If cured, the body can recover with few lasting symptoms. However, the mind is permanently altered. These world-class services together working as one in my community accelerates the pace of care which is directly attributable to my psychological well being, as I imagine it is for others.

I am also a patient at the New England Heart Institute at CMC where I have received the same world-class service. Being able to take advantage of this level of service in my local community and not have to waste time, money, and stress just getting there is invaluable. I can only imagine what the results would be if this collaboration and affiliation were to take place within other specialties of these two institutions. I urge people to support this proposed affiliation so that everyone in need can benefit from the services that these two prestigious facilities provide.