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The Nashua Telegraph, June 23, 2012

NASHUA – One wouldn't expect to hear a cancer patient refer to a trip to her oncology clinic as "relaxing."

But that's the phrase Sue Mousseau used for her visits to Dartmouth-Hitchcock's Norris Cotton Cancer Center in Nashua on Friday morning as she underwent chemotherapy for t-cell lymphoma.

Wearing a soft pink hat and sitting back in a large, beige reclining chair, Mousseau, of Hudson, detailed her difficult year and a half with the disease, her back to a wide window streaming sunlight into her room, which overlooks a healing garden.

"I'm doing OK," Mousseau said, sharing her trials with various chemotherapies after a primary-care physician discovered a lump in her leg in January 2011 and her cancer was diagnosed in September.

Mousseau's short trip from Hudson to Dartmouth-Hitchcock's new clinic in Nashua is no doubt a relief from the two-hour commutes she and her husband used to make for her aggressive, five-day treatments at Dartmouth-Hitchcock's inpatient location in Lebanon.

Mousseau said the trips often landed her back in the hospital when she got home because the long drive, mixed with feeling sick from chemotherapy, frequently left her feverish and ill with neutropenia days later.

Now, undergoing a new type of treatment at the Nashua facility, Mousseau can be close to her children, ages 13 and 15, and finish with treatments during the day to return home to sleep in her own bed each night.

"Emotionally, it's just so much better," Mousseau said. "My kids are all taken care of. My husband drops me off, goes home and works, and comes back and picks me up. I have friends come with me, too. It's very good."

It's people like Mousseau who brought together a slew of officials from Dartmouth-Hitchcock, the American Cancer Society, and U.S. Rep. Charles Bass, R-N.H., on Friday to discuss the importance of continued cancer research funding from the federal government.

Congress is considering a budget resolution to establish funding levels for next year, officials said.

Dartmouth-Hitchcock opened its five-story, 40,000-square-foot Norris Cotton Cancer Center on Southwood Drive in January.

Officials toured the facility Friday, including its nursing station, which allows views of and assistance with all patients undergoing infusions. The patients, in turn, can share their treatment experience with other patients through an open half-wall, or close a curtain to undergo treatments privately.

Next door is a central location for doctors and nurses to sit near patients, whether they're undergoing infusions or getting blood drawn, to allow caregivers to flow quickly to help people wherever they're needed.

"Design really matters," said Gerald Gehr, assistant professor of medicine at the Giesel School of Medicine at Dartmouth and the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Science. "You never would think that it would really affect the patient caregiving. But when they're in a positive environment like this, it's all about the flow."

At Dartmouth-Hitchcock's 17 locations, they see almost 5,500 new cancer patients a year, said Mark Israel, Norris Cotton Cancer Center director.

The budget for those clinics is between \$350 million and \$400 million a year, he added, and more than 300 people are employed in cancer research and patient services at those locations.

According to the American Cancer Society, New Hampshire received 196 grants totaling more than \$88 million in National Institutes of Health funding in 2011. Dartmouth-Hitchcock's Norris Cotton Cancer Center received half the funding flowing into the state for its designation as a "comprehensive care center" by the National Cancer Institute.

"We want to be a leader nationally while serving the people of this state," Israel said.

Bass shared his personal connections to cancer, losing his mother to breast cancer in 1972, and to the late U.S. Rep. Norris Cotton, R-N.H., for whom Dartmouth-Hitchcock's cancer centers are named.

Bass is co-sponsoring the Accelerating the End of Breast Cancer Act with 220 other co-sponsors to "streamline breast cancer research and ensure the most promising projects receive funding," he said.

"I'm really glad to be here today in this facility supporting an issue that I think is one of the nation's most significant challenges," Bass said, "and we will find a solution."