

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

PAUL BLACKMORE/
CAPE COD TIMES
Paul Dussault, president and founder of the Infusion Network of the Cape and Islands in Falmouth, is a medical miracle himself. With his second chance at life and his pharmacy background, he opened this first-of-its-kind intravenous therapy facility.



THE INFUSION NETWORK

First accredited free-standing infusion facility in Massachusetts

About the author

Barbara Ravage moved to Cape Cod from her native New York City in 2000, after the youngest of her children went off to college. She considers heavy doses of ocean air and Cape light the best cure for empty nest syndrome. A graduate of Barnard College, she is the author of nine books, including a biography of Rachel Carson for middle-school students and "Burn Unit: Saving Lives After the Flames," which explores the history and science of burn treatment. She balances her writing life with yoga, karate, and pottery. After years of making do with two summer weeks on the Cape, her favorite part about living here is that she's already home.

BY BARBARA RAVAGE

Paul Dussault has a rare appreciation for the important things in life. Maybe it's because he survived a life-threatening cancer and lived to see his family grow to six children and 15 grandchildren. Maybe it's because he sees new beginnings where others might see the end of the road. Maybe it's because he has built successful businesses that also serve the needs of the community. Most likely, it's all of those things.

Dussault (pronounced Dusso, a hint of his French-Canadian ancestry)

is the founder and president of the Infusion Network of the Cape and Islands. Located in a tidy building on Falmouth's Main Street, INCI opened for business in 2001 as the first accredited free-standing infusion facility in Massachusetts.

Infusion is a method of delivering measured doses of medication, fluid replacement, or nutrients in liquid form. It is usually done intravenously (IV), directly into the circulatory system by way of a vein. Although outpatient chemotherapy for can-

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Quickhits

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Treating Lyme Disease with IV Antibiotics

Cape Codders know only too well that a bull's eye rash is a sign of Lyme disease. The rash develops within 3 to 30 days after the bite of a black-legged tick, also called a deer tick. In most cases, a single dose of antibiotics will stop the disease in its tracks, if taken early enough. But that's a big if. Experts believe that treatment must begin within 72 hours of the bite to be effective. If it is delayed because the rash takes more than three days to develop or does not develop at all, the consequences can be serious.

At first, Lyme disease feels like the flu

(headache, fever, fatigue, muscle aches). Later, it can affect the heart, nervous system, and brain, often causing lasting damage. Many people with untreated Lyme disease develop severe arthritis. If the disease causes these and other late-stage conditions, many doctors prescribe treatment with daily intravenous (IV) antibiotics for two to four weeks, and in some cases longer than that. Intravenous treatment is more than a simple injection. Rather than a quick shot under the skin or into a muscle, IV medication goes slowly into a vein through a thin plastic tube called a catheter. Patients who are not hospitalized must go to an infusion center, either at a hospital-based or other outpatient facility. For those who are too ill to leave home, arrangements can be made for a nurse specially trained in infusion therapy to make home visits. Reliable information about Lyme disease can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site:

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/lyme

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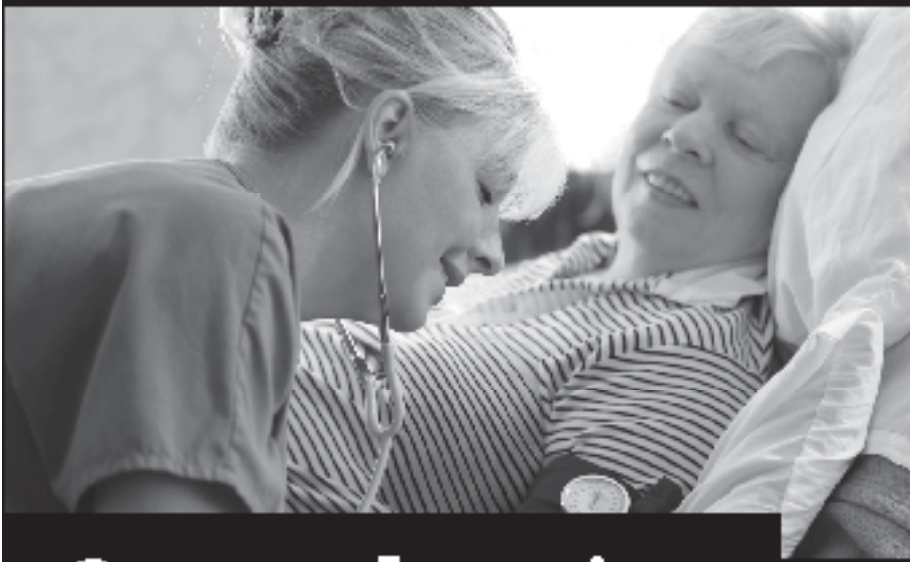
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Infusion

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cer may be the first thing we think of, infusion therapy is also used for multiple sclerosis, Lyme disease, and other infections, as well as for pain management, hydration, fluid feeding, and other conditions for which administration by mouth or injection is not feasible or effective.

Clients served by INCI are referred by their doctors and, depending on their condition and preference, may receive treatment in a hospital, nursing home, or long-term care facility, at home or in the quiet comfort of the Falmouth infusion suite. If they are well enough, INCI will fit them with a portable infusion pump, which is worn in a specially designed fanny pack and dispenses the correct dose of medication while they go about their normal lives.

Dussault's father was a pharmacist in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. After earning a degree in pharmacy in 1960 from Northeastern, Dussault worked in his father's shop for a few years. Along with his brother, he inherited

the business when their father died, but he decided it was time to move on. "It was in a neighborhood that was not growing. My brother didn't want to be in that business. I did, but I wasn't quite ready to take on the ownership," he says.

He came to Cape Cod in 1970, for reasons that will sound familiar to those who love it: "We wanted to be near the water. We picked the Cape because it was so beautiful and we thought it would be a good place to raise kids."

Today, those kids – four daughters – have grown, and he has blended his family with Rita Maxwell, who brought two sons to their 1991 marriage.

"I had a degree in pharmacy, so I knew I wouldn't have any trouble getting a job," he says, with his characteristic calm assurance. The job he got was at the Liggett Rexall drugstore in Falmouth Plaza. After four years of working in a chain drugstore that was open seven days a week, 365 days a year, he says, "I realized I couldn't spend enough time with my family. I wanted to be home with my kids at dinner time."

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Instead of making do or giving up, he seized the opportunity by opening the Falmouth Prescription Center in 1974. It was an old-fashioned apothecary shop of the sort some of us may remember but that has disappeared from small-town America.

As Dussault describes it, "It was not a general drug store," filled with over-the-counter medicines and all manner of merchandise. "I had cough syrups, aspirin, and Tylenol, and that was pretty much it. All the rest was prescription medications." An important service the shop provided was compounding, making up formulations and forms of medication to fit the special needs of customers. For example, he made lollipops for children who had trouble swallowing pills or otherwise could not or would not take their medicine. In the 1970s, long before the adhesive patch was a widely available way to administer

medicine, he formulated transdermal creams designed to penetrate several layers of skin and get into the bloodstream.

"It was an interesting business," he says, adding, "It was never a business you could survive on, but it was always worthwhile. The chain stores didn't want to do it – too risky, too complicated, took up too much time."

Dussault personally benefited from his own innovative thinking in 1987, when he was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a cancer that attacks the immune system. "They gave me three months to live," he recalls 20

Infusion is a method of delivering measured doses of medication, fluid replacement, or nutrients in liquid form.

years later.

He underwent two courses of chemotherapy, which he knew from professional experience would bring on nausea and vomiting. With the consent of his doctor and working with pharmacist colleagues, he developed an anti-nausea formula dubbed

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Infusion

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"Chemoblockers," which helped him get through the grueling treatment.

"It worked so well for me," he says, "that my doctor prescribed it for quite a few patients after that." Since then, he explains, the pharmaceutical giants have come up with many drugs to control chemotherapy-related nausea, but at the time, the only solution was the sort of compounding Dussault excels in.

The Chemoblockers worked, but regrettably, the chemotherapy did not. His only hope – and a faint one at that – was an experimental bone marrow transplant at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. Dussault felt he had no other choice. "I was 46 years old and a single dad with four daughters."

His oldest was 16, the youngest was 9. "They told me I had a two out of ten chance of surviving," he recalls. "I said: Well, as long as I'm one of the two. And that's what I focused on."

The treatment was brutal. Marrow is the material from which the body manufactures blood cells, including infection-fighting white cells. It is extracted from the hip bones through a long needle, then purged of cancer and preserved for later reinjection. Next, Dussault was subjected to full-body radiation and extremely high-dose chemo designed to totally destroy his immune system and with it, cancerous cells. That left him vulnerable to infections of all kinds, any one of which would kill him. "I spent five months in a bubble," he says, waiting for his body to replenish his marrow and rebuild his immune system. It took a year to recover fully.

By then the Falmouth Prescription Center was a flourishing enterprise, with a spin-off business, the Personal

Care Center, which provided home medical equipment such as hospital beds, wheel chairs, oxygen, and respiratory equipment. Dussault eventually sold both businesses as national drug store chains and home care services began to dominate the market. "Big companies come in and they can do it for less money, so you end up feeling it's not worth it anymore," he observes.

Is he discouraged when he sees a decline in demand for the kind of personal service he offers? "No," he answers. "One thing you have to learn in business is that everything has a life. You just ride it as long as you can, and maybe fill niche markets that others can't be bothered with because it's not enough revenue for them." To his mind, "Change is not always a bad thing. What we've done is evolved."

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PAUL DUSSAULT, OWNER
INFUSION NETWORK OF THE
CAPE AND ISLANDS

The Infusion Network is part of that evolution. It serves the Cape and Islands and southeastern Massachusetts. The majority of INCI clients are treated at home. Dussault has contracted with the VNA and other agencies, which send specially trained nurses to insert and maintain IV lines, and to teach technicians and the patients themselves to administer medication. He maintains that INCI services are both cost-effective and "provide a better quality of care because we don't have the high infection rates of the hospitals."

The business is successful enough that Dussault has handed over the day-to-day operations to his able staff under the leadership of CEO Karen Rowley. That frees him to enjoy the life that was saved two decades ago. He plays golf and spends summers boating and water-skiing with his children and grandchildren in Quisset Harbor. In the winter, he and his wife, Rita, visit national parks, camping in their luxuriously appointed 40-foot motor home.

As far as Paul Dussault is concerned, he is living in the best of both worlds.

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