

SIPE INFUSION CENTER OPENS

Staff forms a special bond with patients



Sipe Infusion Center patient LIVIA BEBING with the Center's LOUISE LIDDLE, R.N.

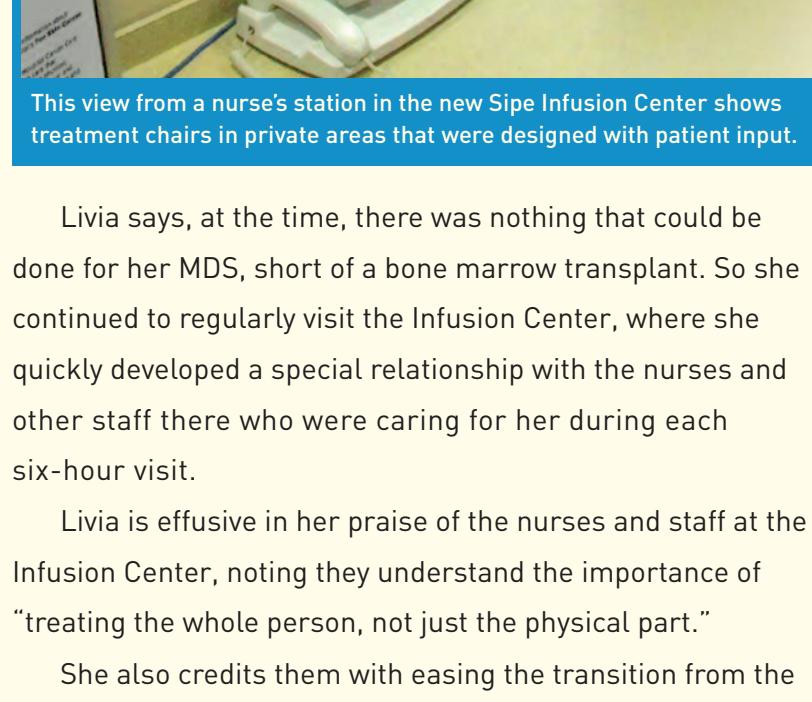
It's been 11 years since Livia Bebing was diagnosed with a bone marrow disorder, but she remembers the onset of symptoms like it was yesterday.

"I was exhausted," the Scott Township resident recalls. "I could fall asleep at any time. I couldn't breathe and was always cold."

But, as the daughter of an "old-school nurse," Livia says she grew up with the attitude of "get up and get on with it." So, she soldiered on. But when she suspected she might have pneumonia, Livia went to see her primary care physician. Her PCP, in turn, recommended she see a hematologist, a doctor who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of blood and blood-forming tissues.

Following a series of tests, including a bone marrow biopsy, St. Clair Hospital hematologist **Louis D. Pietragallo, M.D.** explained to Livia that she was suffering from MDS or Myelodysplastic Syndromes, a group of diseases that affect the bone marrow and blood. In MDS, a patient's bone marrow does not make enough normal blood cells for the body, requiring the patient to receive regular transfusions of blood.

That was Livia's introduction to the Hospital's Infusion Center, where she received some 187 units of blood over the next four years. In the beginning, her condition required her to get blood once a month. But the frequency soon increased to every two weeks.



This view from a nurse's station in the new Sipe Infusion Center shows treatment chairs in private areas that were designed with patient input.

Livia says, at the time, there was nothing that could be done for her MDS, short of a bone marrow transplant. So she continued to regularly visit the Infusion Center, where she quickly developed a special relationship with the nurses and other staff there who were caring for her during each six-hour visit.

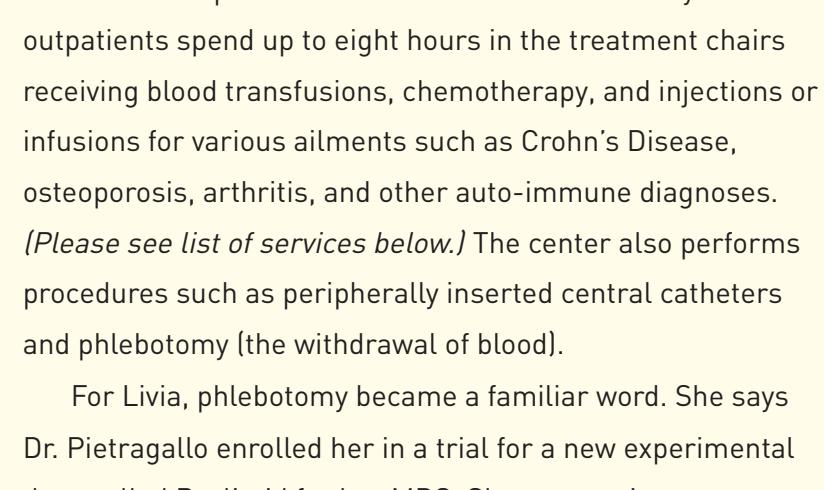
Livia is effusive in her praise of the nurses and staff at the Infusion Center, noting they understand the importance of "treating the whole person, not just the physical part."

She also credits them with easing the transition from the Hospital's former Infusion Center to its new Carol and Denny Sipe Infusion Center, which opened to patients in mid-July, following a formal dedication ceremony attended by members of the Sipe family.

Livia says she never met benefactor Denny Sipe, who was a patient at the former Infusion Center, but heard stories of his camaraderie with employees in the Infusion Center and throughout the Hospital.

Denny, who passed away in January of this year, helped gather input from other patients as to what they would like to see in the new center, which is on the Third Floor of the Hospital, just steps from the Visitors' Elevators.

The results include 11 heated treatment chairs that also provide a soothing vibration to the lower back. Each chair also comes with its own flat-panel television. Patients also have access to the Internet. Treatment areas are separated by privacy walls outfitted with frosted windows that patients can slide open if they wish to converse with patients in adjoining areas. In addition to the 11 treatment chairs, the center includes four private beds for patients.



A private bed in the new Sipe Infusion Center.

Comfort is paramount at the center in that many outpatients spend up to eight hours in the treatment chairs receiving blood transfusions, chemotherapy, and infusions for various ailments such as Crohn's Disease, osteoporosis, arthritis, and other auto-immune diagnoses. (Please see list of services below.) The center also performs procedures such as peripherally inserted central catheters and phlebotomy (the withdrawal of blood).

For Livia, phlebotomy became a familiar word. She says Dr. Pietragallo enrolled her in a trial for a new experimental drug called Revlimid for her MDS. She says patients on Revlimid require "lots of transfusions" when they first start taking the drug, which is administered in pill form. But getting four units of blood a week for four weeks can lead to an excessive amount of iron in the system. So she had to regularly visit the Infusion Center to have the excess iron removed.

Livia says so many visits were obviously time-consuming, but she credited the Infusion Center's convenient hours, which include Saturdays, with helping her manage her visits with her full-time job as a producer for INPEX, the Invention & New Product Exposition, which has been held in Pittsburgh for the last 26 years.

She also credits Dr. Pietragallo with helping her with her MDS. She says the Revlimid, which is now FDA-approved, "cleaned out my bone marrow and allowed my red blood cells to mature." Today, she no longer needs blood transfusions.

But she now comes to the Sipe Infusion Center for injections of Vidaza, a drug similar to Revlimid, for her MDS. She receives the injections on five consecutive days, once a month.

Livia says all of the medical personnel at St. Clair Hospital are both gifted and "incredibly nice," citing Dr. Pietragallo, her gynecologist **Stephanie S. Brown, M.D.**, and her podiatric surgeon **David C. Puleo, D.P.M.** of the Hospital's Wound Care Center, by name.

"The medical care you get at St. Clair is great," Livia says. "But it is the personal care and attention you get here that puts St. Clair above all others."

SIPE INFUSION CENTER SERVICES

- Administration of IV Chemotherapy agents, IV hydration, medications and antibiotics

- Administration of blood/blood components (6-8 hour procedure)

- Therapeutic phlebotomy

- Obtaining specimens for designated lab studies such as skin test, stimulation test, tolerance tests

- Peripherally Inserted Central Catheters and mid-line catheter insertions

- Maintenance of IV devices, including de-clotting of central IV catheters and repair of tunneled IV device

- Subcutaneous and intramuscular injections

- Administration of first dose for home infusion services