

JOAN POTTER

IN CHEMO WORLD

We're all sitting in Infusion Suite II—the old lady in the grey wig snoozing under a bright yellow blanket, the hairless man wearing a baseball cap and reading the Daily News, the woman with short streaky brown hair in jeans and high-heeled boots, my lanky, bearded 77-year-old husband, Roy, and me.

I'm keeping my husband company and trying to read a magazine. Everyone is reclining on soft grey leather chairs. All have thin transparent tubes attached to their chests or the backs of their hands or the crooks of their elbows. Roy's tube pokes out between two buttons of his red plaid flannel shirt. Pinkish and colorless liquids drip into the various tubes from plastic bags hooked onto IV poles.

A heavysset blond nurse walks in from time to time and moves quietly around the room, examining the bags and tubes, adjusting some and adding to others. A TV mounted high on one wall mumbles faintly. Roy turns a page of his paperback mystery and smiles at me. This is the second once-a-week chemo treatment he's had since his colon cancer surgery. Only 50 more to go, or so we've been told.

Three months earlier, I was sitting by Roy's side in the ambulatory surgery center; he was resting up after a colonoscopy. I was happy to see that the sedative had worn off and he seemed in good spirits, looking forward to getting up and going home. The beds in the recovery room were separated by curtains, and we could hear doctors making their pronouncements to other patients: "Looks good...all clean...come back in five years."

Finally Roy's doctor appeared, dark hair slanting over his forehead, slightly crossed brown eyes, impassive expression. "So," he said, "I removed a couple of polyps that we're sending out to the lab, I saw a little diverticulitis, and, oh yes, a mass suspicious of cancer. Make an appointment with a

