

A big welcome back at Shore Cancer Center

On Monday, August 4, the infusion room at Shore Cancer Center in Nassawadox felt more like a Hawaiian island. Giant posters decorated the windows and everyone – doctors, nurses and technicians – was decked out in flamboyant floral leis.

The occasion was a homecoming of sorts. Few people might be comfortable thinking of Shore Cancer Center as home, but for Lynn Williams, it had become one after he was diagnosed with aplastic anemia, a serious blood disease for which the Center offers transfusion treatments. Williams, like so many others undergoing treatment at the Center, had become close to the staff and regarded them as extended family with whom he joked and shared stories ... he even played his beloved banjo for their entertainment.

This positive journey toward health was abruptly interrupted in March of 2008 when a new, darker chapter in Williams' life began. One day, Williams, who works as an electrician for the Northampton school system, was performing some routine maintenance on a roof unit, when he began to feel unwell. He shrugged it off, but the feeling persisted into the next day as he ventured back up on the roof to complete the job. Suddenly, his joints began to lock up, and numbing paralysis rapidly overtook his entire body. Coworkers had to carry him down off the roof.

Williams thought he was having a stroke, his mind reeled and he began to wonder how he would care for his family if he became permanently disabled. By the time he reached the hospital, the paralysis had spread to his lungs and he needed a tracheotomy to enable him to breathe. The situation was both mysterious and dire. Fortunately, the mystery was quickly solved by neurologist Dr. Robert Paschall. Williams wasn't suffering a stroke, but from a little known condition known as Guillaume-Barré syndrome, an inflammation of the nerves that is characterized by a sudden and rapid onset such as Williams experienced. Although the onset of Guillaume Barré is rapid, recovery is painfully slow. Williams spent months in ICU, battling back from pneumonia, then fighting for movement and sensation in every square inch of his body.

He isn't all the way back yet, but the man who greeted his many well-wishers at the Center on August 4, has retained a toughness, positive outlook, and sense of humor that will make anyone a believer. It was evident in the eyes of his former doctors, nurses and therapists who coached his recovery of motor skills and taught him a new way to speak when tubes interfered with his normal vocalizing. It

was palpable in the enthusiasm that pervaded the Cancer Center staff as he returned to their care. When asked about the banjo, Williams allowed as how he wasn't back to playing that as yet—but he had been playing the mandolin!