

Susan Cardinal

Patient & Family Advisor

Optimist. Ever hopeful.



My experience with Tom Baker dates back to 2011 when my husband was first diagnosed with advanced cancer. In August 2014, I was diagnosed with an advanced cancer too – a double whammy for our little family. I know Tom Baker well both as a patient and caregiver. In December of 2014, I will undergo weekly chemo treatments for 4 ½ months straight.

Our story goes to the heart of design principles and what both my husband and I want to see in the new centre – a **centre that radiates hope**. Please walk in our shoes and share first impressions as we enter the Tom Baker through the revolving doors to a nondescript, dim lobby area. Not sure what to call it actually – lobby will have to do for now. We muddle around. Turn left. Find elevators and join the “herd” as we go down to the basement and to the “Day Care” (please rename). We line up to check in before heading to the “holding pen.” People try to avoid looking at each other but most chairs face another row of chairs. There is no privacy. The lighting is awful. Everyone looks pallid, anxiously awaiting their poisonous fix. An all-news TV station shares its depressing visuals and patter on a big plasma TV screen. It is hard to escape it. Nurses call out for people by their full names (not good) but at least it is not a number (small comfort). This is an awful, intimidating launch to what is a long and difficult journey. It is not only demoralizing but stirs your secret fear – that you may not make it.

Calgary’s new cancer centre **radiates hope** – a place where anything is possible including a life free of cancer.

Create a **main lobby that radiates hope** – basking in diffused sunlight with a huge plate glass exterior, like an **inviting high-end hotel lobby with comfy chairs, plants/trees and a horseshoe-shaped main reception**. Near reception, there will be **healthy eateries**, gift shops and/or shops specializing in resources/stuff for cancer patients. The **main areas of the Centre**, such as the chemo area, **radiate from this hub**.

The **chemo area**: This area like the main lobby **must radiate hope with natural light, natural materials** (wood/rundle stone etc. – please don’t use much chrome), a **water feature** (soothing sounds), **community spaces, fireplace for wintery days and private spaces that respect the needs of both patient and caregiver**. **Don’t crowd people together** in a “holding pen.” To ensure privacy and stop the practice of **nurses shouting out our names** – **give each of us a handheld device that vibrates when it is our turn** (we saw this used at the oncology offices at the old Holy Cross site). This way, we can sit where we want. Make sure the **reception area has room to store these things**. **Keep reception open and inviting**; store records elsewhere.