It used to be that laboratories were fixed, enclosed, often dingy spaces occupied by the same chief scientist for years or even decades. But that traditional model is fading away at Dartmouth Medical School. In 2003, the flexible, open-concept labs of the Norris Cotton Cancer Center were completed, and now DMS is renovating its older labs and plans to construct two new research buildings.

The School has committed a minimum of $25 million to renovate labs in the Vail and Remsen buildings on the Hanover, N.H., campus, and plans are rapidly evolving for a new $140-million complex on DHMC’s Lebanon, N.H., campus.

The Lebanon complex will consist of two rectangular buildings arranged in a V and linked to each other and to the existing Borwell Research Building by a large open meeting area called the LeBaron Commons. One of the new buildings will house lab space for research in areas such as neuroscience and cardiology. The other will provide a much-needed home for DMS’s Center for the Evaluative Clinical Sciences (CECS).”

“The idea,” says Mannix, “is they’ll meet in the LeBaron Commons and talk to each other,” thereby facilitating collaboration and a more rapid transfer of new knowledge from researchers to the patient bedside. “Just by their very design,” says Mannix, the new buildings “are going to make a statement that we can transform medicine.”

Move: To make room for the complex, the road that encircles DHMC will need to move. Construction crews will break ground next spring and begin expanding the Loop Road south. The roadwork is scheduled to be finished next fall.

The new buildings are tentatively set to open in 2009. But a lot needs to happen between now and then. This fall, DMS will seek approval from the Dartmouth College Trustees for the final building plans and a funding strategy. The Trustees gave preliminary approval for the project this past spring.

Life: The Trustees also have other plans that affect DMS. Next spring, the College will demolish several DMS buildings in Hanover—Strasenburgh, Butler, and the modular brick building installed on the Medical School lawn in 1989—to make way for a new life sciences building. This has caused some concern about the future of the DMS lawn, according to Mannix. But not to worry, he says: the lawn area will actually be bigger when construction is done. Though DMS does not expect to have lab space in the College’s new building, it does anticipate sharing class-rooms and meeting rooms.

Collaboration has always been a hallmark of DMS, Mannix points out. And now, with the renovations and the new complex, “our buildings will actually symbolize that.”

Jennifer Durgin