



Teamwork at work. A meeting of healthcare professionals at Saint Louis University Hospital; from left: Wendy Bruner; Mitch Semar; Joyce Williams, OP; Sheila Hammond, RSCJ; Kathy Herron; Jim Goeke, SJ; Garrett O'Brien, and Mary Beth Hartenstein.

Connecting with each other:



A ministry of teamwork, healthcare, and education

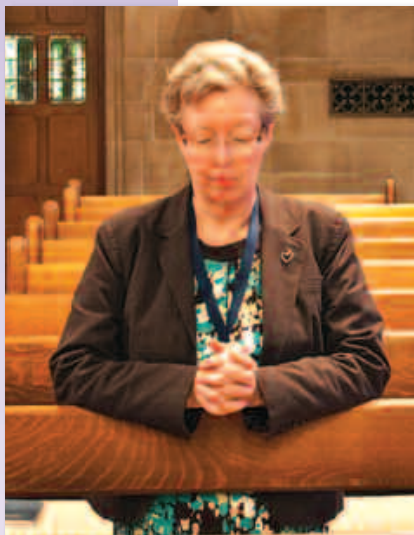
WHAT IS MOST CRITICAL to the work of Sheila Hammond, RSCJ, BCC (Board Certified Chaplain), and the team of healthcare professionals she manages is the human element of mutuality. As director of the Pastoral Care department at Saint Louis University (SLU) Hospital and a certified Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) supervisor, Sister Hammond works with both a pastoral care staff serving the spiritual needs of the hospital and an educational program serving the educational needs of pastors and chaplains in the community. And yes, life and death issues are often part of what she does.

But pastoral care goes beyond “holding the hands” of people who are dying. Chaplains and pastoral caregivers are professionals who are trained to guide discussions of painful subjects and help people explore the difficult questions arising in the context of loss and crisis. Sister Hammond reports that these questions address issues such as: How can the dignity of this patient be preserved? What treatments are beneficial and necessary – and which are burdensome? Who is making decisions for patients if they are unable to decide for themselves? “And we also work with the nurses and other staff,” she says, “about such sensitive subjects with respect to a particular patient or family.”

continued



Left: Cristina Stevens leads a Clinical Pastoral Education seminar.



Right: Sister Hammond at prayer in the Desloge Chapel at Saint Louis University Hospital.

“There is a profound power in the educational process... a spiritual power that brings together diverse people, different religious traditions, and various economic backgrounds to promote compassion, respect, and the building of authentic communities. CPE connects us with one another...”

— Rev. Ute Schmidt, CPE supervisor, Burlington, Vermont

In addition to encompassing a broad range of life-and-death issues and people skills, the discipline of pastoral care contains a large educational component. Pastoral caregivers need to reflect continually on their own responses to critical situations in order to offer the most authentic and knowledgeable care.

A way to integrate her faith

Sister Hammond was teaching at the Academy of the Sacred Heart in Chicago, her hometown, when she first heard of Clinical Pastoral Education. At the time, she was trying to better integrate her faith and her life – her beliefs and her actions – and CPE seemed like something that would foster that process.

“I thought this particular mode of education offered a way to honor what we RSCJ call the ‘fourth vow’ that is, the promise to educate,” she said. “CPE provides essential support and

information for caregivers who are there for people when some of life’s most critical decisions must be made.”

And Sister Hammond recognized that SLU Hospital would uphold the values dear to her when she observed the hospital’s mission statement: *To the glory of God and the health of his people.* “I try to keep that mission in the forefront of my consciousness as it ties in beautifully with the Society’s charism to discover and make known the love of God,” she says.

Because SLU Hospital is an academic medical center – a “teaching hospital” – offering CPE is a natural fit. Seminarians, theology students, ministers, and other pastoral caregivers come to learn in an experiential program that combines service and education. They are given opportunities to reflect on their own ministry styles in addition to pastoral encounters in the context

Left: Joy Nance-Johnson, hospital administrative assistant in the pathology laboratory and director of the hospital choir.



Right: Oncology chaplain Rob Hartmann.



of group learning. CPE students learn from “the living human documents” of real people in times of suffering and stress.

Training for relationships, not paperwork...

Even the administrative aspects of the chaplain’s work – the paperwork, the electronic recording, the institutional reviews, and various committees, – are related to the hospital mission of “offering quality innovative care” through healing, teaching, and research. Teamwork makes it do-able.

Sister Hammond says the hospital staff at SLU has worked hard to integrate chaplains into the work of the medical team. “I believe that this is the most integrated pastoral care available in the area,” she said, “and that the chapel of Christ the Crucified King is a good place to pray.”

“In my position, I serve as the overall manager of chaplains who each work with specific departments such as cardiology, neurology, oncology, behavioral medicine, transplant surgery, and so on,” she said. “Building relationships and maintaining relationships are key to excellent patient care. The chaplains work as part of an interdisciplinary team on all these services, and they know teamwork is essential.”

All of the chaplains would agree with Reverend Rob Hartmann, oncology chaplain, who believes that patients truly appreciate that someone steps into their lives and is willing to walk with them through their struggles. “We accept people just where they are, regardless of their financial, educational or religious background,” he says, “and the most awesome experience I have as a chaplain is being allowed into another person’s life.”

Clinical Pastoral Education at SLU

CPE director Cristina Stevens, MDiv, BCC, is responsible for educating people going into parish ministry and institutional chaplaincy. She points out the value of an ecumenical group setting, in which students are exposed to different faiths and in which they are expected to learn, work, and pray together. In such settings, they learn ways to observe themselves and become attuned to their own reactions in challenging and sensitive situations. Sister Hammond agrees. “People minister best when they are aware of their own motivations and blockages, when they realize that they too are in crisis,” she said.

“For example, a woman whose husband had been in an auto accident was in the midst of making difficult decisions about his treatment. I introduced her to the chaplain in the unit where her husband was so that she might have someone to help her explore her beliefs as she tried to make those decisions. Later, when the chaplain reflected on their encounter and shared with me his responses, he said that, as he listened to the woman’s concerns, he was aware of the common humanity we all share and how we all need to come from our hearts when we reach out to another human.”

Joy Nance-Johnson, a hospital administrative assistant in the pathology laboratory and director of the hospital choir, says Sister Hammond’s department speaks volumes about the mission of St. Louis University Hospital. “Physiologically speaking, the heart keeps the blood flowing through our bodies and keeps us functioning properly,” said Ms. Nance-Johnson, “and our Pastoral Care department provides the same life-giving flow of heart energy to our patients, to their families, and to all the other hospital employees as well.” ❖



The Saint Louis University Hospitals mission statement is lived – as well as displayed in the lobby.