“Students have a clinical experience where they really learn crisis intervention [and] pastoral skills that they don’t get in divinity school or seminary.”

**Pastoral Education Students Gain Spiritual Insight**  
*By Bill Kaluza*

Like any major academic medical institution, University of Colorado Hospital’s reputation is understandably tied to the clinical services it provides. UCH gives patients spiritual care as well, and is in the business of creating the capacity to offer more of it.

For the past 10 years, UCH has been training students in its Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) programs to minister to patients in need throughout the hospital and at the Center for Dependency, Addiction and Recovery (CeDAR). By providing comfort to these patients, CPE students not only help patients; they gain important insights into themselves and their roles as spiritual caregivers.

“CPE is about learning to listen as one spirit to another, learning the art of ‘being present’ with sensitivity and attentiveness and responsiveness,” says Wayne Van Kampen, Mdiv, who helps run the hospital’s CPE programs.

**Non-denominational.** CPE is a non-denominational method of learning pastoral practice that accepts students of di-
verse faiths and spiritual backgrounds. Ordained clergy, members of religious orders, theological students, and qualified lay people minister to persons in a supervised clinical setting.

Running UCH’s CPE programs are certified Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) supervisors Van Kampen and Julie Swaney, Mdiv. The CPE Center is part of the Department of Spiritual Care Services, in turn a part of Professional Resources, headed by director Mary Krugman PhD, RN, FAAN.

The hospital currently is seeking CPE program accreditation, and expects a site visit from ACPE reviewers next month (see accompanying story).

The hospital provides Level I, Level II, and Supervisory CPE programs through the Department of Spiritual Services, although seminary students often stop after completing Level I, which typically fulfills their degree requirements.

While their time commitments vary, the students’ requirements are rigorous. For example, Level I CPE students study biomedical ethics, attend classroom seminars, complete a clinical rotation – which usually includes time on at least one intensive care unit – and have hospital-wide, on-call responsibilities.

Level II students, in turn, are granted “residencies,” paid positions at the hospital that require a full-time, 40-hour-week commitment. In addition to continuing their seminar and clinical rotation work (including on-call responsibilities), the residents take University of Colorado Denver School of Medicine classes and attend the hospital’s ethics committee.

Students who complete Level II can go on to earn ACPE certification as “supervisors,” a CPE faculty designation. Supervisory education students participate in high-level training seminars and peer review sessions as additions to their Level II responsibilities.

**Goals of CPE training.** CPE students are challenged to improve the effectiveness of their pastoral relationships and ministry out of intense involvement with persons in crisis, supervisors, other students, and other professionals. Students witness complicated life situations from different viewpoints. They reflect on these encounters to gain insights and understanding about the human condition as they develop new awareness of themselves.

“Students want to have a clinical experience . . . where they really learn crisis intervention [and] pastoral skills that they don’t get in divinity school or seminary,” says Swaney.

“A few years ago,” she notes, “we had a transplant physician who took a year off. She came here because she really wanted to explore this dimension of patient care.”

**The places chaplains go.** The stu-
dents, technically “chaplain residents,” may be called to provide patient and family support to nearly every floor and unit of the facility. They may comfort patients and families in the Emergency Department who are coping with trauma and loss. In the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, they may offer guidance for ethical decision making involving pregnancy termination or anomalous births. They may find themselves providing support, sacraments, and guidance on a range of ethical dilemmas and end-of-life issues.

While many program enrollees at UCH are theology students, others with medical training enroll in CPE to develop their skills in relating to patients in crisis.

“We’ve had medical students and nurses do a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education,” Swaney says. “They’ll use their own clinical work as their rotation . . . but then utilize the education program to help them get [further] insight into their work.”