Trading places. Three months after starting their new jobs as top executives of University of Colorado Health, Rulon Stacey (left) and Bruce Schroffel decided they’d be happier if they switched positions.

Rulon Stacey, Bruce Schroffel switch UCHealth roles

Job Switch at the Top

By Todd Neff

Switching jobs can be no big deal. At the kitchen sink, for instance: you wash, I’ll dry; now I’ll wash, you dry.

But when the two top leaders of University of Colorado Health (UCHealth) announced late last month they were swapping positions, it raised some eyebrows. And it’s happened about as fast as you can trade sponge for towel.

Just a couple of weeks after Schroffel broached the subject in a heart-to-heart chat with Stacey, the UCHealth board approved the switch, effective June 1. Stacey, who had been UCHealth CEO, is now president, while Schroffel stepped down as president and has taken over as CEO. Dick Monfort, the Colorado Rockies president and CEO, will become chairman of the board of UCH. health.

The move places Schroffel, who had been University of Colorado Hospital’s CEO since 2006 before moving to UCHealth on March 1, back into an operational role. He’s now in charge of running three hospitals (with two more potentially coming if Memorial Health System in Colorado Springs joins UCHealth later this year) and strengthening academic partnerships.

Stacey, as president, will be responsible for grand strategy, system development, future partnerships, government relations, marketing and development.

“Simply put, Rulon enjoys strategy more and Bruce loves operations,” the two wrote in a system-wide email.

Stellar resumes. In the four months since the signing of the joint operating agreement that created UCHealth (Insider, Feb. 1), it had become clear to Schroffel and Stacey that their strengths and roles weren’t aligning with their interests.

Both have strong track records in strategy as well as operations. Stacey led Poudre Valley Health System to a Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award as CEO, and he is the immediate past chairman of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

Under Schroffel’s leadership, UCH was named the nation’s top-performing academic hospital for quality by the University HealthSystem Consortium, the organization of academic medical centers (Insider, Sept. 28, 2011). He was also the Denver Post’s 2010 “Business Person of the Year.” Not to be outdone, Stacey was named Northern Colorado’s “Business Leader of the Year” by The Fort Collins Coloradoan in 2005.

Bruce Schroffel, right, and Rulon Stacey, signing joint operating agreement that formed University of Colorado Health earlier this year. As of June 1, the system leaders are switching roles, with Schroffel becoming CEO and Stacey taking on the role of president.

But Schroffel says his job as system president didn’t bring him as close to the day-to-day action as he wanted. He walked into Stacey’s office in mid-May and, as he recalled, “I started talking
about how I wasn’t happy, that I didn’t think I was using my skill set and didn’t think he was using his skill set, and just asked: ‘How would you like to switch jobs?’”

There wasn’t much of a discussion. “Sure,” Stacey said.

“We both felt like our strengths were in different areas,” Stacey added. “We switched up to better meet those strengths, and I think it will certainly make the organization more successful going forward. And I think it’s evidence of how well the organization is working.”

Schroffel floated the idea to UCHealth board members individually to gauge their response.

“I was surprised how unanimous their reaction was,” Schroffel said.

Richard Krugman, MD, dean of the University of Colorado School of Medicine and a UCHealth board member, said in an email that he has no reservations about the move and that UCHealth would benefit. Asked if he was surprised when Schroffel had brought it up, Krugman said, simply, “No.”

**Back in the halls.** Those at UCH and the School of Medicine know Schroffel relishes hands-on management, walking the hospital’s units and interacting with faculty and staff. While he’s one job removed from hospital leadership (UCHC Health hospital CEOs and the UCHealth executive team will be reporting to him), one can expect to see Schroffel in hospital halls again soon.

“I’m looking forward to interacting with the physicians and the staff,” he said.

His principal aim as CEO, he added, is to “raise the quality bar of the new system and help us learn from each other.”

For Stacey, the move is equally positive.

“I enjoy working on the strategic development side of the organization,” he said. “I’m looking forward to working with other organizations and with the communities we serve; developing a strategy that addresses health care reform; working with the board of directors and creating the mission, vision and values of University of Colorado Health; and creating a standard brand for what we are and what we’re going to be.”