Sharing the Gift of Listening: the Anam Cara Program

By Chris Klein

Acting as a mirror. That’s what the special people of Anam Cara do best.

Now in its ninth year, Anam Cara (Gaelic for “soul friend”) has 10 volunteers who work two or more hours a week. Once a week these volunteers visit patients throughout Good Samaritan Hospital. At each visit they talk. But more important, they listen. Then, by reflecting back what they’ve heard, they help patients sort out their problems and see their issues more clearly.

Craig Schneider is the hospital’s Spiritual Care Coordinator and directs the Anam Cara program. “Some patients don’t have someone close to talk to. Others don’t want to burden their family and friends. That’s when Anam Cara volunteers are most valuable,” he says. “Many times our patients aren’t worried about their illness. Instead, they are burdened by problems at home or at work. If, by listening, we can help them see their issues more clearly, or lighten their load, then we have done our job.”

Not every patient is critically ill, but most patients have something they’d like to discuss. “Everyone has some struggles and challenges,” says Craig, “and that’s what patients tend to talk about.” Results have shown the experience is nearly as rewarding for the volunteers as it is the patients.

To learn more or to become an Anam Cara volunteer, contact Craig at crschnei@sph-dayton.org or (937) 278-6251, extension 2163.