Schwartz Rounds: Improving staff and patient experience

**What is a Schwartz Round?**
Schwartz Rounds are an evidence-based forum for hospital staff from all backgrounds to come together to talk about the emotional and social challenges of caring for patients. The aim is to offer staff a safe environment in which to share their stories and offer support to one another. Founded in United States, they are based on the idea of medical “grand rounds”; however, Schwartz Rounds focus on the non-clinical aspects of care in a multi-professional meeting. Schwartz Rounds were developed following the death of Ken Schwartz in 1995, a seemingly healthy non-smoker who died of lung cancer. Mr Schwartz set up the not-for-profit Schwartz Centre for Compassionate Healthcare prior to his death to promote kindness and compassion in healthcare workers and the Centre continues to research and fund his vision to this day.

In the words of an American Schwartz Round participant:

"Rounds are a place where people who don't usually talk about the heart of the work are willing to share their vulnerability, to question themselves. Rounds are an opportunity for dialogue that doesn't happen anywhere else in the hospital."

**Why are Schwartz Rounds necessary?**
Acute healthcare is a demanding work environment and staff members are vulnerable to emotional burn-out. For example, surveys from staff at the Royal Free hospital in 2009 revealed their tired, hard-working staff feel “under-valued” and “lost” with no clear sense of vision or mission. As staff well-being and patient well-being are demonstrably inter-linked; compassionate, high-quality, patient-focused care may suffer if staff members do not receive support for their psychosocial and emotional issues raised in their day-to-day working. Schwartz Rounds offer protected, confidential forums for this reflection and support.

**What is the format of a Schwartz Round?**
Rounds are typically held once a month, at lunchtime, with lunch provided. Fifteen minutes is dedicated to a small panel of staff members describing their experience of a patient-care scenario. Panelists take it in turns to describe their involvement, how it made them feel and the challenges or issues it raised for them. Following this, the facilitator leads 45 minutes of discussion and reflection to explore issues raised by this case. Only staff members partake in the rounds and all discussion is confidential. The Rounds are evaluated by attendees at the end of each session.

Topics are diverse – a recent Round at King’s focused on a patient who died from unforeseen complications despite having a relatively straightforward case, described by the consultant as “like watching a slow car crash.” Another Round involved the case of an unresponsive, terminally ill woman arriving into the hospital with “no notes” prompting a discussion of whether to continue to feed her. The Round reflected on the anger felt by staff members and the challenges of community working.

**Evidence Base**
Schwartz Rounds are well established in United States, running for over 16 years and held at over 230 sites. Independent evaluations of Rounds in the United States show that they benefit individuals, teams and hospital culture. As a consequence of attending Rounds, staff can benefit from:

- Decreased stress,
- Decreased isolation
• Greater understanding and appreciation of their colleagues roles and contributions
• Feeling more supported in their work
• And feeling more able to provide compassionate care.

The more Rounds an individual attends, the greater the benefit.

Rounds were first piloted in the UK in 2009 at two sites: Royal Free Hospital and Cheltenham Hospital. The year-long pilot was an overwhelming success; the Rounds became firmly established, received a great deal of support from staff and directors, demonstrated the need for the forum and were rated very highly by attendees.

During the UK Pilot, a sample of participants were interviewed about their experiences of the Rounds. Three themes emerged from these discussions and example vignettes from the Pilot are given below. Firstly, there were personal benefits including acknowledging and validating emotions, and increasing empathy, for example:

“Everyone else has benefited from doctors talking about the emotional impact on them. It is not part of the culture of medicine to talk about the emotional content, and these are senior consultants talking too. It is important for staff to hear it. Having the Rounds made it happen.”

Interviewees also felt their team working was strengthened, for example:

“It restores faith that you are working with colleagues who can share. There is a lot of angst and low morale in the health service, but this shows there is heart here and we want to do the best for patients. It is quite uplifting.”

Finally, interviewees felt Rounds contributed to their Trust vision and improved hospital culture, making the environment less hierarchical. For example:

“It generates pride in our identity. The hospital has lost its way in its identity. This is about grounding us in what it is about. The care has gone out of medicine and it is time to bring us back to there. We need to re- emphasise that we are here to care for patients so we need to look after staff.”

On the basis of this pilot project, Rounds were replicated across the UK. They are now conducted in over 20 hospitals and hospices attracting between 20 to 200 staff members each time, and continue to grow in number.

Support from Government

The proven success of Schwartz Rounds in the United States and here in the United Kingdom has lead the Department of Health to pledge £650,000 to the Point of Care Foundation (the UK licence holder for Schwartz Rounds) to expand the scheme. Furthermore, Robert Francis QC specifically recommended the positive impact of Schwartz Rounds within his report for the Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust Public Enquiry.
Requirements

Schwartz Rounds must be implemented with contracted support from the Point of Care Foundation. Firstly, interested parties are invited to observe an established Schwartz Round and discuss the implications of the scheme with the Point of Care Foundation. Several criteria must be met to provide Schwartz Rounds:

- A senior doctor must lead the Rounds
- A facilitator must be identified
- There must be demonstrable support from the Trust Chief Executive and Board
- A multi-disciplinary organising committee (“steering group”) must plan the topics and cases in advance, manage the publicity and evaluate each Round

There must be dedicated administrative support and ownership for the Rounds situated within a suitable department of the Trust. At South Tees Hospitals NHS FT, a Band 8b Organisation Development Lead chairs the Steering Group and oversees all aspects of the Round, with administrative support provided by the Business Coordinator. It is helpful to have a core team of the Senior Doctor, Facilitator, Chair and Business Coordinator who are in regular close communication as Rounds form and take place. It is unrealistic for the coordination of the Rounds to be undertaken by fewer people.

The Schwartz Round contract sets clear guidelines which Trusts must follow. The Point of Care Foundation uses a tried-and-tested method to provide the Rounds and all advice, materials and training must be adhered to. It takes between three and six months from the initial observation of an established Schwartz Round to delivering the first Round in your own hospital.

To be a facilitator, an individual must possess:

- Training and facilitation skills
- Group work skills, including understanding and experience of managing, group processes
- Counselling/ clinical psychology/social work skills
- Presentation skills
- Understanding of organisational culture and staff and patient experience issues.

Costs

Schwartz Rounds are a low-cost intervention. Costs include:

- Venue bookings
- Breakfast/lunch for all attendees
- Facilitator’s time (4 days a month)
- Medical Lead’s time (2 days a month)
- Administration time (3 days a month)
- Steering group members’ time (Steering Group size 8-12)(three hours per month)
- Steering group chair (1 day a month)

In addition, there are costs to be paid to the Point of Care Foundation. Currently, Trusts are asked to sign an initial two-year training and support contract at a cost of £8,640 in year one and £3,720 in year two.

Inviting and preparing speakers/topics for Rounds

Experience from STEES has been as follows:

“All Round presenters do so voluntarily and are involved in shaping the topic of their Round. It can take several months to engage speakers (for example a Round with
Junior Doctors took several visits to Junior Doctor training days to explain the Rounds and to see if a small group would be interested in speaking. They were worried about what effect it might have on their career if they spoke up about what it felt like to be a Junior Doctor working in the Trust. In preparing the Round we had several meetings to ensure that they and we as the facilitation team were comfortable that they would be psychologically safe. In the event it was a highly successful Round which attracted 120 staff and was presented by an FY1, FY2, Registrar and a Senior Consultant reflecting on his time as a junior doctor too). Typically we have two or three preparation meetings with the panel of speakers. Ensuring that there are presenters every month is a key ongoing challenge for those organising Rounds. It is rare to have 3 or 4 Rounds “in the bank” and circumstances mean that on occasion the Steering Group has to cancel the Round at short notice. Our experience is that this hasn’t diminished attendance at following Rounds. Keeping Steering Group membership open to new members, and allowing members to leave lightly, helps to generate new ideas and contacts for Rounds”.

**Extending reach and depth of Rounds**
The Steering Group needs to consider strategies for extending reach and depth of Rounds, in particular releasing junior frontline staff to attend, and ensuring that different voices and viewpoints are given space in the Rounds.

**Training**
Facilitators must complete two days of training. Additionally, when the Rounds begin, the Trust would become a member of the Schwartz Centre Rounds network. Point of Care Foundation facilitates continued virtual learning and events providing peer learning and support. Following the end of the training and support period, network membership can be extended to provide continuing support, review and quality control.

**Process of instigating Schwartz Centre Rounds**
1. The Point of Care Foundation sends an information pack and follows up with a phone call to discuss the process of signing up for the Rounds
2. The site identifies a facilitator, clinical lead and administrator
3. The site sets up multi-disciplinary planning committee
4. Point of Care Foundation arranges for a potential facilitator and/or medical lead to observe a Schwartz Round in a site with established Rounds
5. Point of Care Foundation sends out the contract and invoice
6. The site sends Point of Care Foundation a letter of support from their CEO along with the signed contract
7. Initial training is arranged for 2 facilitators from the site
8. The site planning committee has on-going meetings to plan and review Rounds, and the annual schedule of Rounds and evaluations are returned to Point of Care Foundation.

**Summary**
Schwartz Rounds are an effective, evidence-based and low-cost strategy to providing support to health-care professionals. Rounds may foster communication, teamwork and reduce emotional burn-out in staff. The implementation of Schwartz Rounds is supported by the Department of Health and is a recommendation of the Francis Report to improve hospital culture.

**Supporting information and references**
Academic references


Journalism and press


What are Schwartz Centre Rounds? Joanna Goodrich (2013) [http://eapcnet.wordpress.com/2013/03/12/what-are-schwartz-rounds/](http://eapcnet.wordpress.com/2013/03/12/what-are-schwartz-rounds/)


PowerPoint presentation by Adrian Tookman, Medical Director, Royal Free Hospital (2009) [http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/PDF/Adrian%20Tookmans%20Schwartz%20Round%20presentation.pdf](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/PDF/Adrian%20Tookmans%20Schwartz%20Round%20presentation.pdf)

General information

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