

## Most Powerful Round

### When people want to do their own thing

24 clinical and non-clinical colleagues attended this Schwartz Round at St Catherine's Hospice in Crawley. In a different location to normal it felt particularly intimate and emotional.

Three panellists spoke about the emotional impact of supporting, personally and professionally, people who wanted to 'do their own thing' when it came to managing their illness. These ranged from self-healing to juicing, and refusing any medical intervention.

Here, a facilitator, panellist and audience member share their reflections.

*"After a rare occasion of having to cancel our previous Schwartz Round because, despite our best efforts, we had no panellists to present, I was feeling additional responsibility as I approached this Round. This was compounded by being in a new venue and being a facilitator down because of illness.*

*Our panel, sharing on the subject of 'When people want to do their own thing', had prepared well. They were a mix of clinical and management/administrative staff and we had a range of relationships represented in their stories: a patient, a colleague, and a friend.*

*Each speaker, in turn, shared feelings of frustration, impotence, pain and sometimes even anger of respecting a person's choices even when they knew/could see the unhelpful, and even harmful consequences, those choices had on them/those who loved them. Having heard the stories in preparation, I was none the less moved on hearing them again in the Round. As I looked around the audience, who were listening intently, I knew I wasn't the only one feeling moved. I could see the stories having a powerful impact on all those in the room.*

*This Round particularly exemplified all that Schwartz is about for me: the courage and honesty of the panellists prompted the same from others listening; there was a genuine sense that the whole room was 'with' their colleagues, that this was a safe space; the open expression of difficult, often conflicting emotions; the tension of the personal and the professional exemplified, and acknowledged in a powerful and cathartic way. I felt humbled and privileged to be a part of it.*

#### **Lisa, Facilitator**

*"As Schwartz Rounds Administrator, I was sitting in a Steering Group meeting. With the title set for our next round we'd already begun to search for panellists. During the meeting, I realised that I could share a story on the theme so I volunteered to speak and was later joined by two other colleagues.*

*The Round was a breakfast Round, so an early start for me at 7.30am, not that I'd slept well anyway! It was also the first Round in a new venue, so I was apprehensive about how it would work out there, as well as the predictable nerves of being a panellist. After moving tables and chairs around in the room, sorting out the drinks, and collecting the food, we were ready to open the doors at 8.15am.*

*The room filled quickly with a good mixture of teams from across the hospice, which is something I'm always pleased to see as Rounds Administrator. I was speaking first and so following the usual introductions, I began to share my story. I tried not to look at anyone in particular – my way of dealing with my nerves, but I realised during my story how emotional I felt remembering my late ex colleague, and how vulnerable I felt, but feeling the secure Schwartz cloak around my shoulders kept me going. I breathed a silent sigh of relief at the end of my story and sat listening as my two colleagues shared their incredibly moving stories.*

*When I looked up after we'd all finished there didn't seem to be a dry eye in the room. People I wouldn't ever expect to share their emotions at work were crying in the safe space that is a Schwartz Round. The blanket of emotion over the whole room was immense. The debrief was very much needed after this Round."*

### **Jude, Panellist**

*"I was looking forward to this Round as I wasn't scheduled to facilitate so I was attending as a member of the audience. This meant I could participate in a different way.*

*The panel was made up of one clinician and two non-clinicians, one of which was our Schwartz Administrator. Before the Round, I'd expected the stories being shared to be about patients that did their own thing, so I was unsure what to expect when I saw the panellists.*

*All the stories were very personal. Every member of the panel chose to share a story about someone that had been close to them, either personally or professionally, and who had chosen either not to have treatment or to take a more alternative approach to their illness. All the people had died and had had an impact on the storytellers for various reasons.*

*Seeing people that I care about visibly distressed by their experiences was very moving. I could feel tears rolling down my face as I listened to each panellist and all I could think was "thank god I'm not facilitating". The atmosphere in the room was heavy with emotion and sadness, and the audience were still and quiet.*

*During the Round various questions were going around in my mind. Without Schwartz Rounds, where else would people be able to share these stories? Does working in a hospice make us more aware of the impact of experiences like these? What do other people do to help them cope with these experiences? I also thought how brave the panellists were to share such personal stories with a room full of colleagues. Their bravery was particularly appreciated as some colleagues were new to the hospice or new to Schwartz Rounds.*

*As a facilitator, a panellist, and an audience member, I've experienced Schwartz Rounds from three different perspectives. My response to this Round made me wonder if I'd have been able to contain my emotions if I was facilitating. I'm aware that I "take on the role" and so can sometimes, perhaps contain my emotions, whereas in the audience I felt completely open to getting in touch with how I really felt.*

*So why was this Round so powerful for me? I think it was partly because the stories shared were still having an impact on each person many years on. The pain in the room was tangible.*

*This Round was one of the moments when I felt – this is why I work at St Catherine’s, this is why I work with patients who are dying, and this is why I believe so wholeheartedly in Schwartz Rounds.”*

**Louise, Audience Member**

In this Round the panellist’s powerful stories truly reflected the ethos of *simple acts of kindness*. This is something that Ken Schwartz said mattered to him most when he was a dying patient.

Each panellist offered support and empathy to their friend, colleague or patient, despite the personal cost of doing so. Their actions made people “*feel like a human being, not just an illness*”. Feeling like a human being and not just an illness, was something else that Ken Schwartz identified as mattering most to him when he was unwell. And it’s something we strive to achieve for everyone we care for at St Catherine’s Hospice.

The Round was very positively received by all colleagues, and in the 18 evaluation responses that were returned, 11 people rated the Round as ‘*exceptional*’, and 7 people rated it as ‘*excellent*’. Over half of attendees said they would recommend Schwartz Rounds to colleagues and most of them plan to attend another Round in future.

People also reported that the Round helped them gain insights that will help them to meet the needs of patients’ and work better with their colleagues. They found the group discussion helpful and were able to gain a better understanding of how they feel about their own work.

**Feedback included:**

*“Very personal, emotional stories that were bravely shared*

*Excellent relevant stories that provoked many feelings*

*Very moving stories - really got me thinking*

*The brave presentation of stories was most appreciated*

*The presentation and depth of discussion was excellent*

*As always very supportive and cathartic*

*Very insightful*

*Very powerful, honest and humbling.”*

Since this Round, we’ve continued to hold successful Schwartz Rounds every couple of months at St Catherine’s. We already have a full panel of speakers lined up for our next Round.