Is it unhelpful to experience intense emotions at Schwartz Rounds?

Helena Tee & the Schwartz Rounds Team at Imperial College Healthcare

Background

• The benefits of Schwartz Rounds to staff, patients and organisations have been widely reported (1,2,3).
  • In particular, the emotional focus of Schwartz Rounds nurtures a culture of teamwork, cuts across hierarchical boundaries, increases a sense of support and decreases feeling of isolation (2).
  • Emotional displays are common, helpful and, when handled sensitively, can help individuals to feel accepted and supported by their peers and organisation (4).
  • Allowing a space for emotions encourages self-compassion and protects staff against the challenges of working in healthcare (5,6).
  • A failure to address these concerns can lead staff to cut themselves off from the very feelings which influence empathy and compassion (5).

• The emotional context of a Schwartz Round is not simply a by-product, but rather the mechanism through which Rounds achieve their success (3,7).

• The focus on emotion eliminates problem solving and creates an environment which is safe (7) and reflections which are non-judgmental (8).

• It is also evident that precautions must be taken to protect participants and create a contained and compassionate environment where staff can express these emotions safely.

• At Imperial, it is important for us to examine our own data and ask ourselves: are we already doing this? And, how is this emotional focus being perceived by staff who attend?

Method

Our question will be explored in two ways:

• By looking at all qualitative feedback data related to emotion or distress, and exploring if participants’ comments about emotion are framed positively or negatively.

• By looking more closely at all quantitative negative feedback ratings, and exploring if these were linked to any feedback about emotion.

Exploring Qualitative Feedback

Data from 13 Schwartz Rounds was included in this analysis. This comprised of 500 attendances and 387 feedback forms.

The feedback forms contain 313 comments. A word search was carried out for comments containing the words emotion (34 instances), feeling (22), difficult (11), distress (1), upset (0) and sad (0); 61 comments were pulled overall (7 duplicates were removed).

This data was analysed thematically in to 7 categories; shared experience, insight, unique opportunity, normalising, importance/need, general reflections, suggestions for future.

Exploring Quantitative Ratings

Of the 387 feedback forms, 36 (9%) were found to contain at least 1 negative rating and were extracted for analysis.

A negative rating was judged to be a score of 4 or 5 on any one item ("somewhat disagree" or "completely disagree").

Of these responders, 12 gave an overall rating of "fair" (3% of overall feedback). No one gave a rating of "poor".

Attendees were asked to give their reasons for rating the Schwartz Round as they did; results are displayed in the graph opposite.

The items with the most negative responses were:
  • "I gained knowledge that will help me to care for my patients" (13)
  • "the stories presented were relevant to my daily work" (10).

No comments were made which indicated a negative experience of emotion.

Exploring Quantitative Feedback

Data from 13 Schwartz Rounds was included in this analysis. This comprised of 500 attendances and 387 feedback forms.

The feedback forms contain 313 comments. A word search was carried out for comments containing the words emotion (34 instances), feeling (22), difficult (11), distress (1), upset (0) and sad (0); 61 comments were pulled overall (7 duplicates were removed).

This data was analysed thematically in to 7 categories; shared experience, insight, unique opportunity, normalising, importance/need, general reflections, suggestions for future.

Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared experience</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>“a good space to listen and think about our work &amp; how it affects us emotionally. It made me feel part of a whole team as people voiced things I fear, think, feel &amp; wonder on a daily basis”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insight</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“truly insightful hearing the experiences and feelings of others in the room”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique opportunity for reflection</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“opportunities to discuss cases and emotions relating to that is very important and sometimes difficult in the clinical environment”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalising</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>&quot;allowed us to be vulnerable together; allowed us to acknowledge the abnormality of our jobs and how extreme emotional reactions are”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance/Need</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>&quot;such an important element of our practice to reflect upon our emotions”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General reflections</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“it did stick to the emotional aspect which was the intention here”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for future</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“perhaps it would be good to broaden the implications of emotion”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons given for 'negative ratings'

Conclusions

Emotional content within Rounds was described broadly positively.

It is thought to be linked to;
  • Facilitating a feeling of connection and shared experience
  • Providing insight into others’ emotions
  • Being an essential part of reflection and a space for expression
  • Normalising individuals’ feelings

Overall, the literature and our staff participant feedback suggest that displays of emotion at Schwartz Rounds are not perceived to be distressing or unhelpful, and are broadly seen as a helpful and necessary part of shared reflection.

Actions

Our findings suggest that staff at Imperial are protected by the process of Schwartz Rounds and it is vital to maintain current levels of positive practice to allow for safe displays of emotion.

Our on-going safeguards include;
  • A thorough pre-briefing and de-briefing of the panel by facilitators
  • An in-depth introduction to the audience of the principles of Schwartz Rounds
  • Following up on strong reactions from the audience by sensitively approaching to offer discussion & support as required
  • Linking effectively with staff support teams
  • Continuing to monitor participant feedback