

Schwartz Rounds at The Christie

“A Day I’ll Never Forget”



21st April 2016

A Day I'll Never Forget

The Christie NHS Foundation Trust is a specialist cancer hospital which sees patients at all stages with this disease. Clinical staff may reflect on the emotional impact on them of their work but other staff may not. It is easy to forget that our non-clinical colleagues are also interacting and forming relationships with patients and their families.

The panel for our first Schwartz Round were a senior manager, a health promotion advisor, and a porter who told their stories about *A Day I'll Never Forget*. The stories complemented each other. Everyone was struck by our porter's story of how he got to know a particular patient and accompanied him, not only down the corridors of the hospital but also through the ups and downs of his cancer journey. He eloquently brought to life his own and his patient's experience in a way that resonated around the room.

We were not sure how Schwartz Rounds would work in our Trust. Would it be too much for people to cope with their emotions and perhaps listen to a story that may also have a personal impact given that cancer affects us all in some way? Would the format work as well in practice as in the training?

Patients meet many staff on their visits to the hospital and the Round highlighted that each staff member is significant to them. Support staff such as porters can spend a lot of time with patients and really get to know them. The panellists' stories also helped to demonstrate that making a difference to a patient is not the sole privilege of the clinician. It reminded the audience that all of the Trust staff work to a common goal - that of caring for patients at The Christie.

This was our first Schwartz Round and it was wonderful to see it come to life and powerfully lay the foundations for Rounds within our Trust. Since this Round, attendance has continued to increase with a growing range of staff groups represented. There is a discernible cohesion amongst staff who have attended the Rounds and more respect and understanding across the different staff groups. Corridor conversations about Schwartz have been noticeable across the Trust. For the Trust, our first Schwartz Round itself became *a day we'll never forget*.

Staff said:

- Fabulous day. Emotional yet controlled. I found the different stories to be thought provoking and touching each in their own way.
- I found the session both interesting and valuable. It is good to hear that other people are affected by things they witness at The Christie. It makes me wonder what support is available for non-clinical non- patient facing staff. It isn't something that I have experience being discussed with administration staff.
- Very done to all the panel members for sharing their experiences. It was very interesting and thought provoking.
- Very emotional and relevant to working at The Christie. The stories were all fantastic and very well delivered with some humour and sadness. The panel should be commended for bravery.
- A very moving experience. Feel very proud to be a member of the Christie workforce.
- This was a very positive experience and I would encourage others to attend.
- Excellent. So proud of working at The Christie and even more so after today.
- Well done for arranging, hoping to attend again in the future
- Thank you! Congratulations to the porter- he has really inspired me.



A word cloud of positive feedback words. The words are arranged in a roughly circular shape. The largest word is 'emotional' in dark red. Other large words include 'inspiring' in dark blue, 'moving' in dark blue, and 'excellent' in orange. Smaller words include 'brilliant', 'insightful', 'positive', 'relevant', 'touching', 'fabulous', and 'cathartic'.

excellent moving brilliant emotional insightful inspiring cathartic
positive relevant touching fabulous

The Porter's Story

The day I will never forget working at the Christie is the day I met "Sean". Sean was a patient I transferred from ward to ward; he was a friendly, larger than life character. He asked me if I was his driver, I replied I am sir and your Chariot awaits. His wife Julie; was more reserved. I sensed she was worried about him, she was checking and double checking all his belongings were packed. Sean teased she'd be unable to make a brew when she got home as the kitchen sink had also been packed. Julie rolled her eyes and continued to make sure we were ready to go. I could tell the couple had been together for a long time. I asked them where they lived, and found we live in the same town. This really kicked off the conversation. I live around the corner from his workplace for the last 35 years, we joked about what a small world it is. The conversation then focused on our town residents two favourite subjects, how bad traffic is and when we thought the heavy snow would fall. Before I knew it we'd arrived at the next ward and it was time to say goodbye. Sean told me he hoped to be home soon and said he'd keep a look out for me in the local pubs.

A week later towards the end of my shift Sean's name appeared on my IPod to go for an x-ray, I was looking forward to finding out how he'd been getting on. On arrival to his bed side I had to do a double take. Sean looked thinner and his complexion was more yellow. He looked up to acknowledge me, I said "hello again Sean, I'm here to take you down for an X-ray if that's ok?" he replied in a weak voice "OK, let's go!" He moved slower and more cautiously than before. I couldn't believe this was the same man I meet a week before, his larger than life personality and jovial disposition seemed to be a figment of my imagination to the man who now sat in my wheelchair. I was reluctant to start up the conversation but I wanted to make sure he was ok so I asked him "You don't seem yourself today Sean, is everything OK?" He replied "No really, I've been told I have pancreatic cancer today!" I was instantly aware that the conversation was taking a turn for the worse but we'd gone past the point of no return. I asked what his prognosis was. Sean told me had six months to live at best. I told him I was very sorry to hear this. All I could think to ask him was if he was in a lot of pain. At this point we had stopped to wait for the lift. Sean grabbed my forearm and looked me straight in the eye and said "I'm not bothered about the pain. I just don't want to die!" I was stunned; my brain went into overdrive trying to think of something comforting or appropriate to say to fill the void of silence. I came up short... the lift doors opened; I pushed Sean into the lift. A large mirror faced us...we both stared into it. My brain was still in pause mode so without thinking I did the only thing I could, I rested my hand on his shoulder to offer him comfort. The rest of the journey to radiology was in complete silence. I told the Radiographer Sean had arrived and said goodbye, Sean gave me a thumbs up and said "Thanks".

I started making my way home. I kept thinking what did Sean have to be thankful to me for? I was angry with myself, why couldn't I have said something? Why didn't I have any words of comfort to offer? I clocked out and made my way to the car. The 40 minute journey home felt like 10. I kept thinking about his wife living without him, I wondered if they'd be able to enjoy their last Christmas together or if Sean would make it to Christmas. I kept thinking of my wife and kids and how they'd manage without me? I wondered what I'd want someone to say to me if I told them I only had months to live... I still came up short...I had no answers.

I saw Sean a few times after that night but mainly in passing. He seemed to revert to the person I first meet; he was back to making jokes, smiling and laughing. I was glad he seemingly bounced back and could only assume I'd caught him that night as he'd hit rock bottom. I was full of admiration for him, not only because we happened to be from the same town or both from similar walks of life but mainly because of the way he was dealing with his situation, he was still thinking about others around him and continued being a positive and fun character to be around.

The last time I saw Sean was unexpectedly while doing the big Christmas shop with my family. I heard his voice say "Hiya!" he lifted his hat up as if to remind me who he was. I introduced Sean to the family; he leant down to my son and shook his hand. He then turned to my daughter sitting in the shopping trolley dressed from head to toe in her Frozen outfit; he asked her if she was the real Princess Elsa? She went all shy but nodded clearly to indicate that she was. Julie then came over to say Hello. After a few minutes of us all chatting Julie teased him saying "come on big mouth, let the family finish their shopping!" Sean turned and said "I'd best be off then, the boss has spoken! You have a beautiful family, treasure these years while their young they really are the best!" It felt all the more poignant coming from Sean. We shook hands and wished each other all the best for

Christmas and New Year. The festive period had ended and I was back at work. A job came on my I-Pod to transfer a deceased patient to the mortuary. After putting her body in the mortuary fridge I went to write her name on the board. As I wrote on the board I turned to see Sean's name beside hers. It took me by surprise; I was initially overwhelmed with feelings of sadness and loss but ultimately I had no regrets about meeting Sean. I felt richer from having known him even if it was only for a short while.

We all deal with patients in our own way; colleagues have said to me in the past that they don't like to get too close to patients because it is hard to deal with the emotional impact of them dying. I don't deny that in many ways it would be easier to just be polite and professional enough to get by without making a real connection with someone. But I personally think it's a flawed logic, as I have learnt from meeting Sean, there is always at least one patient that you will relate to and feel empathy for and that's never something I want to shy away from. Distancing yourself from someone can only desensitise us to the job we do. I think we're a better workforce when we feel and when we relate to our patients. So the day I never want to forget working at the Christie is the day I meet Sean.