

Is it unhelpful to experience intense emotions at Schwartz Rounds?

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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 (3;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-judgemental (3).
- 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 is 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.

Theme	Freq	Example
Shared experience A positive description of feeling that others are experiencing the same emotions. Often found to promote a sense of connectedness within and between teams.	18	"a good space to listen and think about our work & how it affects us emotionally. It made me feel part of a whole team as people voiced things I fear, think, feel & wonder on a daily basis"
Insight Gaining an awareness of the emotional experience of the self and of colleagues which go beyond the professional.	12	"truly insightful hearing the experiences and feelings of others in the room"
Unique opportunity for reflection Noting that the space for reflection is a positive opportunity which is often not offered anywhere else in the trust.	6	"opportunity to discuss cases and emotions relating to that is very important and sometimes difficult in the clinical environment".
Normalising The feeling that acknowledging these experiences in such an environment allows enables an individual to perceive their emotional reactions as normal.	6	"allowed us to be vulnerable together; allowed us to acknowledge the abnormality of our job and how normal our emotional reactions are"
Importance/Need A comment on the importance of reflection and the need for a space for this.	5	"such an important element of our practice to reflect upon our emotions".
General reflections Comments on the emotional content which were neither positive nor negative.	5	"it did stick to the emotional aspect which was the intention here"
Suggestions for future A recommendation for future improvements.	4	"perhaps it would be good to broaden the implications of emotion"

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".

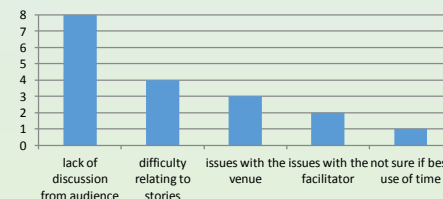
Attendees were asked to give their reasons for rating the Schwartz Round as they did; results are displayed in the graph opposite.

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.

Reasons given for 'negative ratings'



This would suggest that negative ratings were more related to the topic of the Schwartz Round rather than the emotional context or response.

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