

Entry category: 'Most powerful Schwartz Round' South London & Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust

'Blinded by Certainty': A team shared their experience of secondary trauma

8th December 2015

The Stories

Three SLaM staff members shared their stories about working across boundaries with a case that spanned CAMHS and Adult Mental Health Services. They were an arts therapist working with children, a team manager and an adult psychotherapist. The team administrator had been involved in the two panel preparation meetings but unfortunately was unable to attend the Round.

The stories spoke of key moments in a complex case, which was saturated in safeguarding concerns, risk management and procedural duties, but at the core of this, was a family making a connection to professionals to try to heal. Our colleagues' spoke of bearing witness to sorrow's tears, of knowing the weight of a child's abusive history and of holding the fragile hope of a mother nurturing herself, as best she could. They also shared their moments of vulnerability. One mother meeting another mother in the park watching their children play; both women aware of their different worlds - one a professional and one a patient. The ice-cold shock of suddenly seeing the full truth in the child's story. Everyone frozen; thawing only through supporting each other and asking the question – 'were we good enough?' After the endings, watching from the bus, perhaps hoping to see the mother or child whilst passing through their neighbourhood.

The Connections

A pause; a breath; and the audience began to share. At first a comment on gratitude, when teams support each other to carry the shame of our work. A colleague spoke about the contrasting pain and love of foster care, a connection to her life beyond the professional, permitted by the authenticity of the panel stories. Isolation in our work and the impact of this to push us into dark places was voiced. We made connections to the 'normal' lives we lead outside of our discipline, when we are all human, all have other roles, where we occasionally collide with patients as people. We spoke about the lasting effect of unfinished stories and unknown endings – the things we carry. We wondered if we were 'good enough' and permitted a space for guilt and shame in that room, for that hour.

Afterwards

In the months after the Round, I met each panellist incidentally. All three spoke of the impact of Schwartz Rounds on them. For the team manager, she said 'it was put to bed'. This case had surfaced each time they saw each other in the years since – 'I wonder how they are'; 'what could we have done differently?' they asked when there were no answers. The art therapist told me she was able to dispose of the child's art work after the Round. She'd held on to it – with no clinical necessity – keeping it safe for several years. The team met as a whole and reconsidered their reflective practice and how it could support them better to manage the residue of patient stories. They also extended support to the administrator who they realised, during panel preparation, had learned of the minutiae of the case through typing letters but had not asked for support to make sense of it all.

Schwartz Round Feedback

- Qualitative Feedback

At each Schwartz Round anonymous feedback is collected. Although this cannot capture the power of the stories shared and the experience of bearing witness to our colleagues. It enables us to record 'live' responses and to monitor both quality and impact.

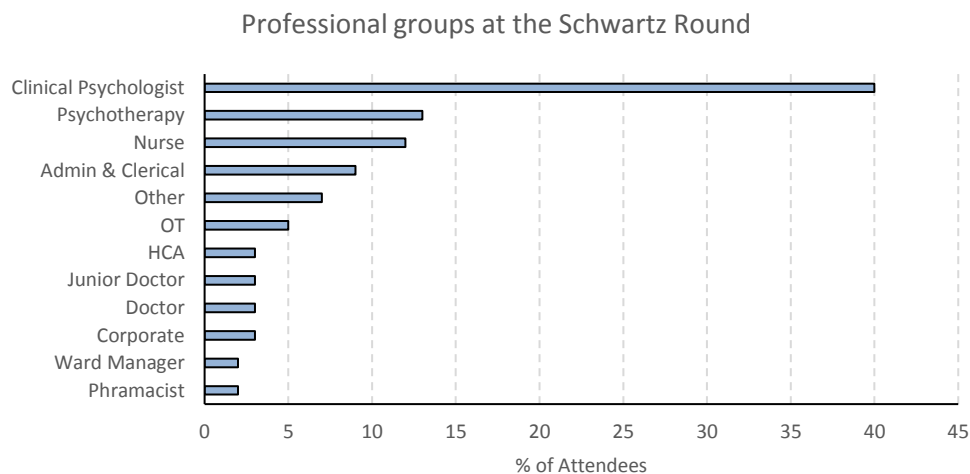
- 80% of the audience agreed that they gained knowledge to help them care for patients
- 76% of the audience agreed that the Schwartz Round will help them to work better with their colleagues

Here are some of the audience views on this Round:

- *"Very interesting session, I was not expecting it to be so powerful. Really impressed by the panel and the transparency of the group"*
- *"Amazed, shocked and thankful for everyone's honesty. Very poignant - but with moments of tenderness and light"*
- *"So emotional - so real and really connected with what everyone said"*
- *"Facilitator was thoughtful and drew out themes in a very adept and eloquent manner"*

- Quantitative Feedback

A large group of staff attended (n=67), although it was a reasonable heterogeneous group in terms of disciplines attending. This is likely to have been related to both the Round title and the panellists' professional discipline.



This was our third Round in SLAM, with 70 % of our audience were attending their first Round and 30% having attended up to five Rounds. Our audience was 79% female. Word of mouth was cited by a quarter of attendees as their reason for coming to the Round. Almost 30% of attendees came in their own time.