

Most Powerful Schwartz Round: My best /worst day ever

The Schwartz Round started as many others have done, the lunch had been eaten, the attendees had settled expectantly into their chairs, the conversation and chatter from the audience had come to a natural quietness and the four panelists were prepped and ready to share their stories. The facilitator opened the round with the usual housekeeping and introduction to Schwartz Rounds and explained that this round was based upon the theme of a best or worst day at work. There were four stories that day, two best days and two worst days.

One panelist, an experienced nurse, told of one of her best days at work, a story of how she developed a relationship with a patient, Mabel, who was terminally ill. There are some patients with whom you have a deeper and more natural rapport with than others and this was one such patient. The nurse looked after Mabel for a period of several consecutive days and got to know the patient and her close family very well. Although Mabel had lots of care needs she never rang the bell and so the nurse would frequently check her to ensure she had all care required, was not in pain and had everything she wanted or needed. Every time she passed Mabel's bed, Mabel would wave to say she was ok. Mabel's family shared lots of personal things about their family with the nurse as the rapport deepened, a much-longed for grandchild was due to be born and they shared photos of a recent family wedding.

While the nurse had two days off Mabel was moved to a side room. The nurse came back on duty, and noticed how much Mabel had deteriorated as she cared for her again. It was during a really hot spell of weather; all the ward fans were being used and the side room became very hot and stuffy. Although the nurse tried everything to get

Mabel a fan she was unable to. At the end of her shift, the nurse went off duty and her husband collected her from work, the nurse felt sad that she felt she hadn't given her best care that day, and so her husband drove her to a local shop where they purchased an electric fan and then took it back into the side ward for Mabel. (yes - it did get pat tested)

Mabel's family were completely amazed at this nurse's extreme thoughtfulness and her act of kindness. During that night, Mabel sadly passed away, and her family later wrote to the Chief Executive about how grateful they were for the care Mabel had received, they also wrote to the nurse thanking her for her kindness, compassion and care to their mum, they would never forget her. The nurse said that she didn't feel she had done anything special but that she would never forget Mabel and her family.

A member of the audience, Jessica, then spoke about her similar experience where she had built up a special rapport with a lady, Sarah who was very young and was terminally ill.

It was towards the beginning of Jessica's career, she had only been qualified a few years when she cared for Sarah. (At the time of the Schwartz Round Jessica was a very senior, well respected, well liked and well-known nurse within the hospital.) She reflected that Sarah had two young children and had asked her to help her write letters for her children, for them to open and read after she had died.

As a young nurse, Jessica found this very difficult, however as Sarah dictated what she wanted to say, Jessica wrote it down, word for word, in the letters for her two children. There were letters for each of them for their first day at secondary school, their significant birthdays, for the

following Christmas, for their wedding day and for the birth of their first child.

Sitting in the audience and while reflecting upon what she had heard in today's round, Jessica suddenly started to weep openly as she recounted that the previous week she had been contacted by one of Sarah's children who had opened their 18th birthday letter and how they had written to thank her for helping their mum write the letters.

She explained that when she received the thankyou card she was overwhelmed with emotion and was immediately transported back to when she wrote them with Sarah. She hadn't thought of Sarah in many years and she couldn't believe how the children had bothered to write to the hospital after all this time – and that their letters found their way to her.

This small act of kindness, undertaken so long ago as a junior nurse had practically been forgotten, but the Schwarz Round stories had brought it all back and she wanted to share it as she felt it meant so much.

