

Schwartz Awards
Most powerful Round

Are we too busy to care?

April 2018, The Christie NHS Foundation Trust

Too busy to care

I saw a **man** die today
It wasn't a peaceful end
He bled and bled beyond belief
Not surrounded by family and friends

The cup of tea I promised you
Was a little late I agree
But I was holding the hand of a dying man
Not thinking about tea

I saw a **husband** die today
Although you wouldn't know
As I answer your relentless call bell and paint on a smile
A wife just became a widow

I see your disapproving look
I promised you a shower
But a grieving family needed me
And ten minutes turned into an hour

I saw a **father** die today
In the most horrific way
But there's obs still to do and drugs to give
No time to reflect and pray

The toilet trip I should have taken
The brew that's gone stone cold
All pales into insignificance
When a daddy's girl's just been told

I saw a **brother** die today
But your stressed, overwhelmed and behind
Go and take a break, let me help you
I'll see to myself another time

NGs, RIGs and Ryles tubes blocking
Cannulas still to site
That overdue IV can't wait
Whilst I take time to grab a bite

I saw a **son** die today
I'm sorry you're upset I'm late
To take the handover for another patient
To fill the space where this man lay

Your relatives aren't happy
As they have to wait for me
To tell them how you're doing
Don't they know what I've just seen?

I saw a **soul mate** die today
I'm working late again
I'm sorry that I should be home
But I'm really not to blame

I promised I'd be home on time
You'd made my favourite tea
But something terrible happened today
A family of four just became three

I saw a **soldier** die today
He could not win this fight
But I'll try to make it up to you
Let's do it again tomorrow night

Another important role to play
My kids need a mum that's alert
Dinner money, PE kits
Where the hell is that school shirt?

I saw a man die yesterday
But it's world book day at school
Harry Potter needs his cloak and wand
Cinderella can't find her glass shoes

Your homework's due on Wednesday
We've gotta make a volcano that erupts
Papier Mache and paints, are they kidding me?
Since when was reading a book not enough?

'Mum I'm hungry, Mum I'm bored
Why won't you answer me?'
I just need time to process and think
Why won't you leave me be?

The guilty sinking feeling
The bed time story I missed
Does full time nurse mean part time mummy?
All adds to the self-doubt list

I love my family dearly
I need to put them first
They deserve the very best of me
Not the shell of a worn out nurse

Tomorrow is another day
My smiling face you'll still see
I love my job, but I care too much
And I'm still *too busy to care* for me!

Gemma Jones

What our audience saw and heard on 17th April 2018 was this incredibly moving poem read by panellist Gemma Jones, a ward sister at The Christie. Undoubtedly it was one of the most moving Schwartz Rounds we have organised at The Christie in the past three years and also the first time that our audience has burst into spontaneous applause!!

Gemma talked about the pressures of time and demands upon her, both at work and at home. She eloquently captured the impact of a patient's death in her poem, '*Too busy to care*'. As she shared her poem, the emotion in the room built and people were in tears as she reached the end and the room echoed to applause. The release of tension was cathartic to many in the room.

The Schwartz steering group specifically chose the theme of this Round to capture the tension between the desire to offer each patient the best possible care and the reality of ever-increasing demands and squeezed resources. By exploring this theme, our three panellists were very eloquently able to explore one of Ken Schwartz's key observations about compassionate healthcare.

As a specialist cancer hospital, the single focus of the organisation is the care of people affected by cancer and this brings with it a constant challenge to manage the emotional impact of the work. We have been running Schwartz Rounds for several years.

During this Round, one of our infection control nurses, Gary, described his own experience as a patient in another hospital. He had felt let down by his colleagues when he became "the abscess in bed 9". During this period when he thought that he was going to die, the staff were so weighed down by tasks that they were too busy to care for him with the kindness and compassion that he needed.

Ruth, a nurse educator, also shared her experience as a patient but with a very different experience. She told of the impact on her of a kind gesture from the consultant looking after her. She had been in the hospital for many weeks and one day he came back to the ward after he'd finished work and wheeled her outside into the fresh air. Knowing that he was so busy amplified the kindness of his actions and her confidence in his care.

Staff who attended the Round said:

- Excellent – great stories and audience participation.
- The stories resonated with me.
- Very inspirational stories, amazing. Thank you.
- Very emotional and completely understand how we can forget to take care of ourselves.
- It was great. I'll be back!
- Powerful stories that I can relate to. Loved the poem. I think Schwartz Rounds make us realise that we are not the only ones feeling like we do.

What happened next?

Gemma's poem has been shared throughout the Trust and beyond. It has particularly resonated with nurses. Colleagues have read it out at nursing conferences and it has spread on social media. Gary says, "Gemma's poem is very emotive and highlights modern nursing in terms of work-life balance. I love her poem and have recited it a number of events I have been to – it gets to people every time."

Gary has joined the Schwartz steering group and Gemma has become an enthusiastic advocate for the Schwartz Rounds. She has invited the steering group to organise a pop-up Round on her ward. This will be a great opportunity to bring Schwartz to a group of ward staff who cannot get away to the longer Rounds and for them to experience acknowledging the emotional impact of their care amidst the busy working day.

Gemma says, "I would highly recommend Schwartz Rounds to anyone. It was one of the most meaningful and thought-provoking experiences I have had the privilege to be a part of. I'm overwhelmed by the positive response I've had from everyone. I didn't realise it would resonate with so many people. I'm thrilled to share my poem."