Schwartz Rounds – An Organizational Intervention to Overcome Burnout in Hospitals

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Staff working in health care environments experience higher rates of work-related stress, burnout, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation compared to the general public. This impacts on the ability to provide compassionate care and thereafter patient safety. Various interventions and supports have been implemented within healthcare settings to increase patient care/empathy, improve staff wellbeing, and reduce burnout and work-related stress¹. However, few interventions allow for organization wide involvement and ongoing support, as most are held as one-off events, or solely rely on an individual's involvement (i.e., counselling). Moreover, a frequent critique of such interventions is that they place the blame on individuals rather than recognize the importance of addressing systemic challenges².

One approach promising to fill this void is Schwartz Rounds. Schwartz Rounds originated in the USA via the Schwartz Centre for Compassionate Care and provide health care workers (both clinical and non-clinical) with an opportunity to share their experiences about the social and emotional aspects of patient care. Rounds are held once a month and involve panelists (usually three people from multiple disciplines) sharing stories about the social/emotional aspects of care. An open discussion is then led by a facilitator where attendees are encouraged to reflect and share their thoughts on the story and share any similar experiences³.

Schwartz Rounds have previously been found to increase compassionate patient care and empathy, improve organizational/institutional culture and teamwork/staff relations. Schwartz Rounds have been found to assist to normalize/validate emotional reactions and eradicate the stigma of emotional responses within healthcare settings, lower levels of work-related stress and isolation and improve the psychological well-being of staff including renewed energy about their work^{1,3,4}.

While Schwartz Rounds have been widely introduced/evaluated in the US and UK, their adoption into Australian settings is still in its infancy. There has been no research to date examining the efficacy and sustainability of Schwartz Rounds in an Australian setting where the cultural context and systemic challenges may be different to that of North American or UK settings. Therefore, there is a potential role for psychiatrists, especially liaison teams, to lead here in drawing attention to compassion and driving the change. Additionally, this will help fulfil the educational function of mental health liaison teams and lead to greater impact than classroom approaches alone. Finally, Schwartz Rounds can assist in improving staff wellbeing and organizational culture in hospitals in the context of COVID-19 related repercussions.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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