S you walk in the door of the Blackrock Hospice, you are welcomed warmly by Andrea, the soothing scent of essential oils and the calm that permeates the building. Then you look left and the choice of books from ‘Saying Goodbye to Daddy’ to ‘Finding a way through when someone close has died’ reminds you why people come here.

In Galway, when you enter the spacious atrium, motivational messages catch your eye, there are people everywhere and instinctively you feel that each person has a purpose – some are waiting for news over a cup of tea, others on a mission to attend appointments or visiting loved ones. The one connecting point for these two diverse settings is that the staff in each look after people at their most vulnerable, hear intimate thoughts and share their time with patients what are often their greatest joys and sorrows.

In healthcare, there is great privilege in this work yet when we help families hold it together, who holds us? Who cares for the carers?

The Quality Improvement Division in conjunction with the Point of Care Foundation (PoCF), is currently working with Our Lady’s Hospice & Care Services - Blackrock Hospice and University Hospital Galway to test the introduction of Schwartz Rounds in an Irish context.

WHAT ARE SCHWARTZ ROUNDS?

SCHWARTZ Rounds are monthly meetings for all staff working in a health care organisation. The Rounds provide an opportunity for staff to reflect on the emotional aspects of their work. The focus is on the human dimension of care.

Each round is based on the story of a particular patient or a theme and is briefly presented by 3 or 4 members of staff. This is followed by a facilitated discussion which involves the wider audience and is an opportunity to listen, share and support.

Schwartz Rounds provide a framework which helps to improve staff wellbeing, resilience and support which ultimately has an impact on improved patient centred care.

What are staff saying in Ireland about Schwartz Rounds so far?

The feedback from staff so far has been really positive – staff are telling us:

ENCOURAGES INSIGHT

“Amazing insight into other professional’s experiences”

“Felt glad that multidisciplinary from cleaner to consultant was emphasised”

“These rounds help break down barriers between all the different members of the hospital staff…”

“Takes time out to my day to see the patients on my waiting list but is a good way to focus on caring for ourselves”

REAFFIRMS VALUES

“Brings caring and kindness back into the workforce”

“Helps us remember why we are in a caring profession”

POSITIVE FEELING

“Feel-good factor - positive effect overall”

“Incredibly moving and human”

“Stunning - made me very proud to work with such compassionate, sincere and expert people”

“Well worth taking the time to attend despite a very busy schedule”

HIGHLIGHTING IMPORTANT ISSUES

“Highlighted other issues like open disclosure”

“Very positive and potent reinforcement of how an individual can impact on patient care through non-clinical means - smiles, compassion, greetings”

“Very thought-provoking about what we do well and when things go wrong”

For more information about Schwartz Rounds, please see www.qualityimprovement.ie

A MENTOR’S EXPERIENCE OF SCHWARTZ ROUNDS BY NICKI POWER, SCHWARTZ ROUND MENTOR

I HAVE facilitated, mentored and evaluated Schwartz Rounds since 2014 in the UK, working both within the National Health Service and with the Point of Care Foundation, who have supported the development of the Schwartz Round pilot in Ireland. For me, the power of Rounds is that they advocate for vulnerability as a strength, and see bravery in the emotions we display and acknowledge the positive impact of our human connections in a professional context. I have heard a choke in the throat of a ‘tough’ consultant as they talk about the guilt of making a mistake, seen tears in the eyes of audience members connecting to their own unforgotten patients and also, heard the silence of an audience engaged completely in listening to the story of a colleague, a human being.

Before coming to Ireland to mentor the
staff at Blackrock Hospice and University Hospital Galway, I had not considered that storytelling is innate in Irish culture and how this might impact on Schwartz Rounds. As an emigrant, resident in the UK, my cultural identity is obvious as soon as I speak – I am Irish. People often ask me why I’m passionate about Schwartz Rounds. I used to absentmindedly say that I have always liked stories and hearing people share their unique perspectives, but I had not linked this to my cultural heritage until now.

Ireland offers a unique context in which to apply this model of staff support – one where storytelling is already valued and culturally relevant.

A SCHWARTZ ROUND AT UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL GALWAY

THE reception at University Hospital Galway invites all those who enter to take care of themselves before caring for others. This is communicated through art work which invites visitors and professionals to reflect on the toll of caring. It sent a message to me that the organisation was already engaged in caring about its staff. The Schwartz Round I attended, entitled “Behind Closed Doors”, gave staff from the intensive care unit an opportunity to share their experience of treating patients and caring for families in a high pressure and critical environment where outcomes routinely involve life or death.

The openness of the audience discussion struck me immediately. Staff members not only shared their work related experiences, but connected to their personal lives. People spoke about the palliative care of their parents and the critical care of their children by other caring professionals. One woman said: “they carried myself”, referring to the emotional support she received from healthcare staff. This short statement has stayed with me since. There are few jobs where training equips staff with practical skills but the demands of the role go far beyond completing tasks and being effective in the job. Wherever we work in healthcare, from facilities provision to wards or therapy rooms, we work with people who are distressed.

The staff spoke about the needing to be kind to each other and to themselves. They spoke about the difficult power of knowing too much from a professional point of view and having to find a common language with families to communicate caring in these most difficult of circumstances. They also shared their vulnerabilities through expressing feelings of helplessness; when the helping profession cannot help, when death is imminent or when pain cannot be cured.

A SCHWARTZ ROUND AT BLACKROCK HOSPICE

BLACKROCK Hospice is tucked away on a back lane, a light-filled care setting which offers respite from the City as well as from life-limiting illness. Here, I felt the community of staff, cover had been arranged so that as many staff as possible could attend the Schwartz Round. The theme was “What a patient taught me” and four staff shared their learning from patients for the benefit of the audience.

The depth of the audience discussion was what struck me here. Staff spoke about the times when words fail, when only silence will suffice to acknowledge the needs of the patient. Courage was needed by staff to trust that at times the patient knows best. A senior colleague said: “don’t just do something, stand there”. By inverting this common saying the power of being with a patient or family member, without the need to act was recognised. This message, heard by all staff present communicates the value of a supportive culture which acknowledges the human moments of care.

The staff present were able to recognise their personal limitations as professionals, in that death cannot be prevented but a ‘good’ death is a privilege for the staff to facilitate for the families and people who cross the threshold of the hospice. As well as the challenge of absorbing strong emotions in the work, the positives of patient care surfaced, a nurse spoke about feeling renewed and energised through her work.

TOP: The Schwartz Rounds facilitators in Galway pictured in front of some of the artwork there.