



the schwartz center
FOR COMPASSIONATE HEALTHCARE

The Schwartz Center Rounds®



THE STRESSES of today's healthcare system threaten the delivery of compassionate care. Financial pressures and administrative demands mean less face-to-face time with patients and families. Many caregivers are anxious, frustrated and under pressure – with no structured outlet for expressing their feelings and little preparation for the difficult communication issues that are an inevitable part of patient care.

The Schwartz Center Rounds® program offers healthcare providers a regularly scheduled time during their fast-paced work lives to openly and honestly discuss social and emotional issues that arise in caring for patients. In contrast to traditional medical rounds, the focus is on the human dimension of healthcare. Caregivers have an opportunity to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings on compelling topics drawn from actual patient cases. The principle is that caregivers are better able to make personal connections that improve their

relationships with patients and colleagues when they have greater insight into their own responses and feelings.

The program was first piloted at Boston's Massachusetts General Hospital in 1997. As the Schwartz Center's fastest growing and most far reaching initiative, the program is now offered in hundreds of healthcare sites across the country and continues to expand rapidly. The Schwartz Center Rounds program has succeeded in diverse settings, including adult and pediatric hospitals, outpatient practices, cancer centers, nursing homes, hospice, and health insurers.

Supporting Providers. Improving Quality of Care.


Benefits of The Schwartz Center Rounds

Schwartz Center Rounds discussions strengthen the patient-caregiver relationship and remind caregivers why they entered their profession. A comprehensive evaluation¹ has demonstrated that the program has a unique and profound impact on caregivers as well as host institutions. Caregivers who participated in multiple sessions reported:

- Increased insight into social and emotional aspects of patient care, increased feelings of compassion toward patients, and increased readiness to respond to patients' and families' needs.
- Improved teamwork, interdisciplinary communication, and appreciation for the roles and contributions of colleagues from different disciplines.
- Decreased feelings of stress and isolation, and more openness to giving and receiving support.

In many cases, participants reported that insights gained at a Schwartz Center Rounds session led to the implementation of specific changes in departmental or hospital-wide practices or policies to benefit both patients and providers. The study also found that the more sessions caregivers attended, the greater the benefits they experienced.

At many Schwartz Center Rounds sites, physicians, nurses and social workers can receive continuing education credits for attending. Requirements vary by state. Attendance can also help satisfy Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education core competency requirements for post-graduate residency programs. The Joint Commission includes the Schwartz Center Rounds on its list of recommended resources for improving caregiver-patient communication.² At some participating hospitals, Joint Commission surveyors have put a special note of commendation about the program in their report.



“The format allows for a free exchange of ideas, feelings and reactions, reinforcing the common humanity of caregivers, patients and families. They are clearly now part of the fabric of our institution.”

— Raymond J. Mayewski, MD
Vice President and Chief Medical Officer
University of Rochester Medical Center

¹Lown, BA; Manning, CF. The Schwartz Center Rounds: Evaluation of an Interdisciplinary Approach to Enhancing Patient-Centered Communication, Teamwork and Provider Support. *Journal of Academic Medicine*. June 2010. v. 85.6; pp1073-1081.

²The Joint Commission: Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient- and Family-Centered Care: A Roadmap for Hospitals. Oakbrook Terrace, IL: The Joint Commission, 2010; pp39, 89.

³Lown, BA; Rosen, J; Marttila, J. An Agenda For Improving Compassionate Care: A Survey Shows About Half of Patients Say Such Care is Missing. *Health Affairs*. September 2011. v. 30.9; pp772-1778.

Compassion is Good Medicine

Underpinning the program are the following research findings³ that demonstrate the value of improved communication between patients and caregivers:

- Effective communication has been shown to build trust, increase patient adherence to treatment recommendations and improve such important clinical outcomes as diabetes control, pain control and quality of life.
- Compassionate communication has been linked to improved patient and family satisfaction as well as decreased anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress among family members whose loved ones are critically ill.
- Patient-centered communication is associated with lower spending on diagnostic testing for various conditions, and significantly lower readmission rates for conditions such as heart failure and pneumonia. Effective communication by physicians has also been correlated with fewer malpractice claims.

How it Works

The Schwartz Center Rounds model utilizes a case-based format to stimulate discussion about an identified topic with a skilled facilitator who encourages interaction and highlights salient points. A clinical leader and planning committee at each site choose a case and identify a small panel of caregivers to share their perspectives on the social and emotional challenges it raised.

A hallmark of the program is interdisciplinary dialogue. Professionals from diverse disciplines participate in the program, including physicians, nurses, social workers, psychologists, allied health professionals and chaplains. After listening to panelists' brief presentations, caregivers in attendance are invited to share their own perspectives on the case and broader related issues. Patient identifiers are omitted to protect confidentiality, and all participants are expected to maintain the confidentiality of what caregivers themselves share.

Patients and family members do not generally attend. However, once the program is well established, sites are encouraged to occasionally hold a special session where the case presentation includes a patient or family member perspective, enabling caregivers to comment and ask questions. These are always powerful sessions.

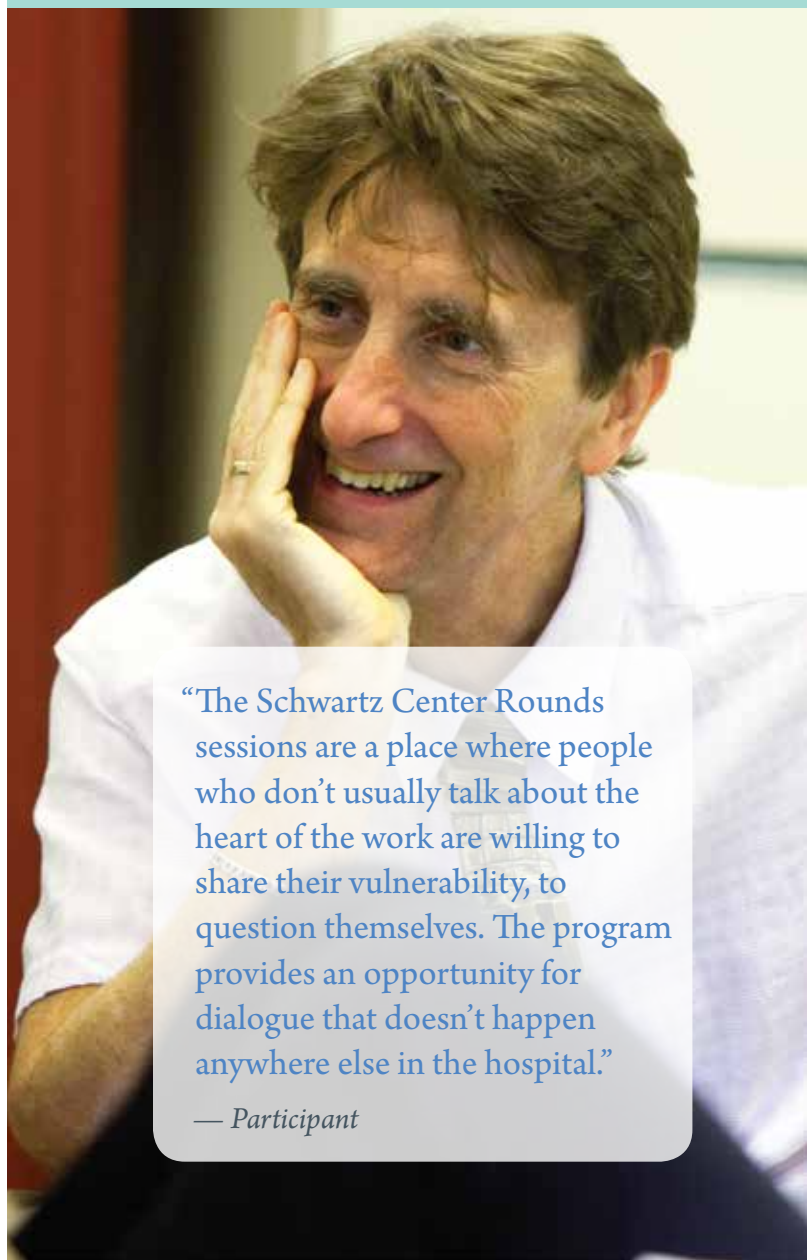
Most sites conduct the program monthly or bi-monthly, generally in conjunction with a healthy meal. This is not only an incentive for busy caregivers to attend but also a way to nurture them.

Some Schwartz Center Rounds Cases

A middle-aged man with a long history of alcohol and IV drug abuse complains bitterly of cancer pain, even though medicated. Because of his drug history, his body is tolerant of standard doses of pain medication, preventing relief. The care team struggles with the conflict of helping to manage the patient's pain and exacerbating addiction.

A young woman with a history of mental illness refuses nutrition and medical interventions due to complaints of severe esophageal pain. Clinicians pursue guardianship to treat her. Caregivers initially wrestle with feelings of helplessness, then with the discomfort of treating a patient against her will.

A dying mother is not preparing her young children for impending loss. Her family refuses to acknowledge how sick she is and believes prayer will heal her. Knowing this patient's prognosis and sensing that efforts to prepare the woman and her family are in vain, her nurse feels she is failing this patient and her family.



“The Schwartz Center Rounds sessions are a place where people who don't usually talk about the heart of the work are willing to share their vulnerability, to question themselves. The program provides an opportunity for dialogue that doesn't happen anywhere else in the hospital.”

— Participant



“Since we started the program, there is more of a focus on what is best for the patient whenever we are contemplating changes in policies, procedures or unit processes.”

— Participant

For a glimpse of powerful discussions in two hospitals, view the seven-minute video *Schwartz Center Rounds: Voices of Caregivers* on our website in the Rounds section.

Getting Started

Healthcare institutions must be a member of The Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare to conduct Schwartz Center Rounds. Rounds are only one of the many benefits of membership, which include training to implement and maintain highly effective Rounds, a site visit from a Schwartz Center expert, opportunities to learn from and network with compassionate care leaders from other institutions, access to our “Compassion in Action” webinar series, Schwartz Center updates on innovations in compassionate care, and recognition as an organization that values compassion.

Our staff works closely with each member to assure that the support and training needed to launch and sustain a high quality

program is in place. Top administration and medical and nursing leadership must support the program for it to succeed, and managers must be willing to give staff time to attend. In order to ensure the quality and integrity of the Rounds, sites sign a membership agreement that details our and their responsibility in conducting the program.

To become a member and start the Schwartz Center Rounds at your institution, please visit www.theschwartzcenter.org and click “Join” on the home page.

The Schwartz Center

As a national non-profit organization that relies on philanthropic support, we are grateful for the many corporate, foundation and individual donors that make our work possible each year. We hope you will consider supporting the Schwartz Center. Please visit our website at www.theschwartzcenter.org.

Our Mission

To support and advance compassionate healthcare in which caregivers, patients and their families relate to one another in a way that provides hope to the patient, support to caregivers and sustenance to the healing process.