

Implementing the Schwartz Center Rounds

Strategies for promoting thoughtful discussion among staff



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Health care providers face clinical challenges every day, and their organizations provide numerous ways for them to address and learn from those challenges. However, care providers—particularly those who care for the seriously ill—also face many emotional challenges. To help their staff handle the difficult emotional and social issues that arise in their daily work, some organizations have begun offering *Schwartz Center Rounds*.

The Schwartz Center Rounds are a forum in which physicians, nurses, and other caregivers at a health care organization can share stories and experiences with patients and provide support to each other. (For more information, see “Rounding Out the Caregiver Perspective” in the February 2006 issue of *Patient Safety*.)

The Rounds were developed by the Boston-based Kenneth B. Schwartz Center in 1997, and today more than 21,000 clinicians attend Rounds annually at 82 sites in 21 states. Organizations offering the Rounds range from academic medical centers and community hospitals to rehabilitation centers and long term care facilities.

“Organizations of all types and sizes can benefit from the Rounds,” says Marjorie Stanzler, director of programs at the Schwartz Center. “Caregivers face difficult emotional and social issues every day but do not have time during the hectic workday to discuss them. The Rounds provide a safe, comfortable forum to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings.”

Following are some tips from individuals who have helped implement the Rounds in their organizations.

TIP Observe the Rounds at another organization. Many participants have found that their understanding of the Rounds has been enhanced by sitting in on the program at another organization.

“A colleague described the Rounds to me, but the concept isn’t easy to understand at first,” says Michael Fisch, M.D., medical director, Community Clinical Oncology Program Research Base, and associate professor, General Oncology and Palliative Care at The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. “Without seeing them firsthand, I might not have truly understood how the Rounds really work and how they affect attendees.”

TIP Use a variety of means to promote the Rounds. Participating organizations recommend using a combination

of methods to communicate to staff about the Rounds. At MidMichigan Medical Center, Midland, the schedule is published in the employee newspaper and on a monthly flyer distributed to managers.

“At the beginning, we put tentcards on the tables in the cafeteria,” says Paula Headbloom, M.D., chair of the Medical Staff Health Affairs Committee at MidMichigan. “We also knew how valuable word of mouth would be, so at the first few Rounds, we handed out buttons that said ‘Ask me about Schwartz Rounds’ to attendees.”

Technology can also be an important tool: Organizations use targeted e-mails to those who might have a particular interest in the Rounds, mass e-mails to all staff, and other computerized messages.

TIP Include a diverse group of caregivers. An effort should be made to include not only physicians and nurses but also social workers, physical therapists, chaplains, and other staff members who care for patients.

“A good mix of people gives everyone a clearer picture of the issues we all face,” says Fisch. “In addition to a mix of positions and departments, you also need to make sure your invitation list includes a balance of junior and senior people. Junior staff members can be especially overwhelmed by the emotional challenges in health care, so it really helps them to see how the work affects senior staff members and how they handle it.”

TIP Manage time constraints. Many of those involved in implementing the Rounds report that they often face difficulties with finding time in caregivers’ already-packed schedules to allow them to participate in the event.

“We’ve had good attendance, but we also know that some people are missing out because they just can’t get away,” says Ellen Levinson, M.S.W., executive director of Life Care Center of Nashoba Valley, a nursing home in Littleton, Massachusetts. “One strategy we’re considering is having managers cover for people who have not yet been able to come.” Travel times may be an issue also because staff members from outlying clinics may have to drive to a central location, such as the medical center, for Rounds.

TIP Find the right space. At Maine Medical Center, in Portland, Rounds were held in several different venues before staff found the best one. “We tried to have Rounds in

an auditorium, but that didn't work at all—it didn't foster open dialogue," says Craig Hurwitz, M.D., director for Palliative Care at Maine Medical Center, Portland. "What eventually worked was a large room with plenty of chairs. It feels more intimate. You also need good acoustics—if people have trouble hearing each other, make sure to have a microphone and someone to pass it around."

TIP Avoid "clinical-speak." "Physicians and nurses are accustomed to talking about the technical details of a case, so facilitators have to try to get them away from that to discuss their human reactions," says Headbloom.

"We had trouble with that until one physician told the group exactly what he said when he lost his patience with a very difficult patient, and that opened things up for everyone."

Levinson participated as a panelist in her organization's first Rounds. "I talked about the emotional challenges I faced," she says, "and I think that having the executive director do that helped other people open up and understand what we were here for."

For more information on the Schwartz Center and the Rounds, visit <http://www.theschwartzcenter.org>. **PS**
