

Business Case for the **SCHWARTZ ROUNDS® PROGRAM**

Supporting staff well-being, enhancing teamwork and communication, and improving organisational performance around quality of care.

Note To Readers:

This business case is designed to be an adaptable resource. You are encouraged to modify the language based on your local context and audience, while being cautious to maintain the core messaging about the description, intent, purpose, and meaning of the Schwartz Rounds program. Should you have any questions or may benefit from additional support in preparing this business case for your organisation, please email community@theschwartzcenter.org.

Executive Summary

This business case seeks funding and executive endorsement for the implementation of the Schwartz Rounds program – a structured, evidence-based forum for caregivers and students to reflect on the emotional and social dimensions of their work. The dedicated budget covers facilitator time, administrative support, participant refreshments, and an annual licence that provides access to personalised mentoring, monthly communities of practice, and a rich suite of resources.

The Schwartz Rounds program supports the creation of a psychologically safe, compassionate culture that enhances staff well-being, improves communication across disciplines, and ultimately contributes to higher-quality patient care. By normalising emotional expression and sustaining compassion, the Schwartz Rounds program creates a fundamental cultural shift toward openness and humanity in care. The approach aligns with national recommendations, including those made in the **Francis Inquiry (2013)**, which highlighted the need for organisations to foster open, transparent cultures and ensure senior leaders are connected to the lived experience of front-line staff. Evidence from NHS Trusts and peer-reviewed studies substantiates both the qualitative benefits and cost savings of such initiatives.

With the estimated cost to the NHS of poor staff mental health and well-being of £12.1 billion per year, there is a need for initiatives that can create sustained and systemic change in organisational culture. A recent rapid evidence review and economic analysis of NHS staff well-being and mental health included the Schwartz Rounds program as one of its five case studies. The rapid review's analysis of providing support for staff found that running the Schwartz Rounds program was relatively low-cost (The International Public Policy Observatory, 2022). While initially developed within healthcare, the Schwartz Rounds program model has also demonstrated relevance across a growing range of high-stress caregiving, educational, and human service environments, reflecting the broader applicability of structured reflective practice in emotionally demanding work.

What Are Schwartz Rounds Sessions?

Licensed in the UK and Ireland by the Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare, Schwartz Rounds sessions are one-hour reflective forums that bring together staff from all levels of an organisation. Typically, they are run once a month. Unlike clinical case reviews, or any other all staff forum, Schwartz Rounds sessions address the human, emotional experience of caregiving, focusing on the personal experiences behind the professional roles, rather than the clinical or operational details. They are facilitated by trained staff, with stories shared by individuals from within the organisation followed by a guided group reflection to create a psychologically safe space in which participants discuss the challenges of caregiving, improve team cohesion, and reduce isolation.¹

Why Support the Schwartz Rounds Program?

1. Addressing Staff Stress and Burnout

- The Schwartz Rounds program significantly reduces feelings of stress and isolation (Lown & Manning, 2010; Goodrich, 2012, Maben et al., 2018).
- The latest NHS Staff Survey (2025) found that 42.36% of the survey respondents had felt unwell due to work-related stress in the past 12 months and 35.05% found their work emotionally exhausting
- The current NHS context has created an urgent need to increase the availability of emotional support to healthcare professionals in training and those in early career (Golding, 2024).

2. Improving Communication and Team Cohesion

- Only **31%** of staff report good communication between senior management and staff.
- Schwartz Rounds sessions enhance interdisciplinary understanding and help break down silos across departments.
- Schwartz Rounds sessions also enhance cross-disciplinary understanding and open communication by offering a structured space to surface shared challenges and promote cross-team empathy.

3. Supporting a Compassionate and Learning Culture

- The Schwartz Rounds program has led to concrete changes in departmental practices and improved empathy across teams.
- Attendees report increased confidence in handling emotionally difficult situations and improved patient-centred communication.
- Staff gain confidence in addressing difficult patient interactions and in supporting one another.
- Participating organisations have reported improved collaboration and quality of care outcomes.

¹ In the setting up of Schwartz Rounds some key questions to ask are outlined in Appendix 1

- The **Mid Staffordshire Public Inquiry (Francis, 2013)** identified poor communication, cultural silence, and leadership detachment as key factors contributing to unsafe care. Recommendation 196 explicitly supports mechanisms like the Schwartz Rounds program, stating:

"Staff who have concerns should be given the opportunity to discuss them openly and safely in forums that include management and senior leadership. These forums should not be considered optional extras but essential structures for cultural change."

The Schwartz Rounds program directly addresses this by:

- Enabling staff at all levels to speak openly about emotional and ethical concerns, and the emotional impact of the work they do
- Normalising the strong emotions that arise from working in healthcare
- Providing a routine channel for leaders to witness stories from those delivering care, and to share their own experiences
- Demonstrating visible senior support for well-being and transparency

Organisational Benefits

1. Improved Staff Well-being = Better Patient Care

- Staff well-being is an antecedent to patient well-being (Maben, 2012).
- The Boorman Report (2009) emphasises the direct link between staff health and quality of care and demonstrates the economic and performance return of staff well-being investment.
- Trusts that support staff well-being see improved productivity, morale, and patient satisfaction.

2. Cost Savings from Reduced Absenteeism

- The median cost of sickness absence to NHS organisations is £3.3 million annually.
- A modest improvement of 0.4% in absenteeism saves around **£350,590** per year per trust.

3. Lower Staff Turnover and Recruitment Costs

- Turnover costs can be **37%–114%** of annual salary per employee. (MIND, 2011; Work Foundation, 2009).
- Healthier workplace cultures foster retention and reduce reliance on expensive agency staff.

4. Reduced Patient Complaints

- Staff who attend Schwartz Rounds sessions report increased empathy and better communication with patients.
- Improved communication and compassionate care contribute to lower complaint volumes and referrals to regulatory bodies, especially those tied to communication (10%) and staff attitudes (11%). Reduced patient complaints save time, reputational cost, and legal resources.

Current Adoption and Benchmarking

Nearly 800 organisations are running the Schwartz Rounds program, across settings including acute, community and mental health, as well as hospices, higher education institutions, social services, County Councils and prisons. Over 170 are in the U.K. and ROI. This uptake reflects both the value placed on staff well-being and the practical, measurable benefits seen by adopters.

This growing adoption reflects national recognition of the model's value in addressing cultural and well-being challenges within health and care.

Funding Requirements

Item estimated cost (annual) justification²

Item	Estimated Annual Cost	Justification
Facilitator Time	[Insert]	Preparation, delivery, and debrief for 12 sessions annually.
Administrative Support	[Insert]	Planning, communications, attendance tracking, and coordination.
Food & Refreshments	[Insert]	Encourages participation, demonstrates care of employees and signals value placed on reflective time.
Initial training fee	[Insert]	Includes support to establish a steering group and Schwartz Rounds and train 5 facilitators.
One year Schwartz licence	[Insert]	Includes: unlimited mentoring support from a dedicated, UK based mentor, academic literature, Schwartz Center resources, opportunities to join national and international communities of practice and access to other Schwartz Center programmes.

Total Investment first year: [Insert]

Investment for future years

For the Schwartz Rounds program to continue to be licensed and supported in organisations after the first year, continued investment in the licence fee, facilitator time, administrative support and food and refreshments will be needed. These will increase moderately year on year on a set schedule and based on inflation.

The initial training fee is a one off fee to support the activities involved in establishing the Schwartz Rounds program in an organisation and is not charged after the first year.

Item estimated cost (annual)²

Item	Estimated Annual Cost
Facilitator Time	[Insert]
Administrative Support	[Insert]
Food & Refreshments	[Insert]
One year Schwartz licence	[Insert]

Total: [Insert]

Return on Investment

This investment is a fraction of the costs incurred by turnover, sickness absence, or patient complaints. It delivers high value through:

- Enhanced staff retention and engagement
- Reduced absenteeism and presenteeism
- Better teamwork and communication
- Improvements in care quality and patient experience

Conclusion and Recommendation

Schwartz Rounds sessions are not a “nice-to-have” – they are a vital tool in addressing workforce stress, communication breakdowns, and leadership disconnect. They respond directly to the failings identified in the Francis Inquiry and align with the Boorman Report’s call for strategic investment in staff well-being.

² (These are indicative costs – please contact the Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare team to discuss actual costs based on specific organisational requirements)

A Schwartz Rounds program offers a high-impact, low-cost intervention that directly supports strategic objectives around workforce well-being, retention, patient experience, and organisational learning. Their evidence base is robust, their structure is scalable, and their impact is transformative.

We recommend that the executive team approve an initial annual budget of £[Insert] to support the implementation of the Schwartz Rounds program, with full executive endorsement and integration into the broader health and well-being strategy. Executive presence at Schwartz Rounds sessions is also encouraged to model support and engagement and demonstrate active listening.

By investing in the people who deliver care, through the creation of a safe, supported space for reflection, we honour the emotional labour of our workforce and its toll on their well-being and mental health – and take meaningful action toward a safer, more compassionate care environment for our patients.

Prepared by:

[Your Name]

[Your Title]

[Date]

For further information, please contact: [Your Contact Details]

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Appendix 1

Some key questions to explore with colleagues/Steering Group members in preparing your business case:

1. Where do you want the Schwartz Rounds program to sit in your organisation?
2. What are the current issues for the organisation? Are there key levers that you could use to add into the business case? E.g., CQC standings, quality or cultural concerns, staff morale and turnover.
3. Who do you plan to be part of the steering group and could you add additional members that would help you to gain more support for the Schwartz Rounds program?
4. Do you have an exec or board champion?
5. Will you have a regular reporting mechanism for Schwartz Rounds sessions?
6. Could you identify Schwartz Rounds champions in the organisation's structure, such as divisional or network champions?
7. Is there a 3- or 5-year strategy to establish and extend the reach of the Schwartz Rounds program in the organisation?
8. If there is a strategy, are there specific groups that you would like to see more represented at Schwartz Rounds sessions and how might you target them?

This could form part of your Schwartz Rounds program strategy.