

Purpose of Balint Groups- Balint Group's desired outcomes. Differentiating the Balint group process from a support group or personal and professional development group, healer's art group, or traditional case discussion, etc. Benefits of Balint Group training to residents, their program, faculty and to practicing physicians.

The essential goal of the Balint group process is to provide its members and leaders a personally safe forum for exploration of the internal world of feelings, particularly as they pertain to the provider, patient, and provider-patient relationship.

The goal is to translate emotional awareness through reframed understanding into enhanced therapeutic capacity of the participants.

- A. Balint groups help providers with the psychological aspect of their patients' problems and the provider's problems with their patients. Learning to listen with close attention to what the patient is saying and to be aware of the feelings aroused in the provider by the patient and their problem helps providers reach a better understanding of their patients and themselves.
- B. Balint groups make good "providers" better providers. A good provider is responsible for recognizing the actual reasons for the visit and implementing a management plan based on best practices. This desired role is threatened when the provider is distracted or deflected. Balint seminars are designed to allow the presenting provider to recalibrate and to again become a more objective observer.

Balint work helps providers develop the habit of seeking a deeper and more contextual understanding of their patients and the reason for their visit and in the process discover a more therapeutic, empathic way of being with their that patient than would otherwise be possible. It teaches providers to use their own reactions as a diagnostic tool: "What is being set off in me when I see this patient might have something to do with what troubles them."

Balint groups aim to develop the provider's potential for empathic observation, empathic listening and introspective self-awareness.

As a result of participating in Balint groups physicians feel listened to, supported and understood; become more accepting of 'difficult' patients; more empathic to patients' and colleagues' feelings, including negative ones. They may also gain insight into why they find some patients particularly difficult or disturbing, overcome feelings of isolation, confusion, guilt and inadequacy; learn to live with uncertainty; become more patient centered and rekindle their original desire to become providers.

Balint Groups are a special kind of case discussion exploring the provider's use of self—pharmacology of the drug doctor—concentrating only on the presented patient and his/her provider. Unlike traditional case discussions, they do not seek solutions or diagnoses, offer advice, pass judgment, discuss general issues or teach medical or psychological content.

Balint groups are not therapy for or analysis of the provider's personal self and prying into personal details of the provider's life is prohibited. Participants do stand to learn about their professional selves, their reactions to patients, their blind spots, allergies or habitual response modes to patients but these are usually private realizations.

The experience of being in a Balint group can be very supportive as a place to get rid of frustrations built up over time from dealing with patients; a forum that normalizes and accepts even negative feelings toward patients; a group that increases a sense of camaraderie and intimacy among residents and providers who are then better able to cope with the stress of practice. Unlike support groups Balint groups focus on the provider's feelings in service of returning them to their professional role.

Unique characteristics of the Balint process are: structured leader and group member roles; single case focused discussion; emphasis on divergent thinking and feelings evoked by the case; focus on the provider-patient relationship.