



# What to Expect as a Member of a Balint Group

## Why Balint?

Physicians frequently feel “stuck” with patients. Interactions with patients may leave the physician feeling frustrated, annoyed or just unsettled in some way. One way to better understand these challenging situations is to participate in an ongoing Balint group.

## What is a Balint Group?

A Balint group is a group of physicians who meet regularly and present clinical cases in order to better understand the physician-patient relationship.

Whereas physicians are usually trained to seek the “right” answer to medical problems, in a Balint group, the focus is on enhancing the physician’s ability to connect with and care for the patient. A Balint group session begins with a physician presenting a case for the group to discuss. The group learns about the patient through the presenting physician’s story. During the facilitated discussion, the group members uncover different and new perceptions about the patient and physician’s feelings.

Dr. Michael Balint began working with burned out physicians in Britain after WWII to help develop the therapeutic potential of the physician-patient relationship.

A Balint group usually has two leaders (often a physician and a psychologist, psychiatrist, clinical social worker or



counselor) who facilitate the process. The success of a group depends on group members to be honest, respectful, and supportive of divergent opinions. The content of the group is confidential. A Balint group may meet over the course of months or years, and group cohesion and trust develops over time.

### **Balint groups aim to help physicians:**

- Recognize they are not alone in having challenging interactions with patients
- Develop increased understanding and empathy for patients
- Explore how feelings and thoughts affect the physician-patient relationship
- Become more aware and accepting of their conscious and unconscious responses to the patient
- Expand their capacity and repertoire for handling difficult situations with patients

For more information about Balint groups and training opportunities, the American Balint Society Website is: <http://americanbalintsociety.org>



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