

Essential Characteristics of Effective Balint Group Leadership

Alan Johnson, Donald Nease, Laurel Milberg and
Ritch Addison
for the American Balint Society

History of Balint work in the U.S.A.

- Michael Balint visits in the 1960's
- Rapid adoption of concepts in the 1970's and '80s
- Many groups formed in training settings
- Few leaders trained in Balint principles
- Balint groups were of variable quality
- 1990 - Formation of the American Balint Society
- 1990's - Leader training prioritized by the Society
- 2000 - Credentialing system introduced

Common beliefs

- “It’s a support group”
- “Oh, Balint is just like a _____ group”
- “Anyone can run a Balint group, what’s to learn?”
- “We don’t need Balint, we already get lectures on patient-centeredness”
- A general misunderstanding of the Balint process is common

Our goals...

- Develop a descriptive model of effective Balint leadership
- Derive the model from experienced leaders
- Utilize qualitative and quantitative data to inform the model
- Disseminate the model
 - “This is what makes Balint work similar, and this is what makes it different.”

Methods

- Utilized data from 1999
Credentiailling Pilot
with 21 leaders

Written
observations
by group
members



Interative
text analysis

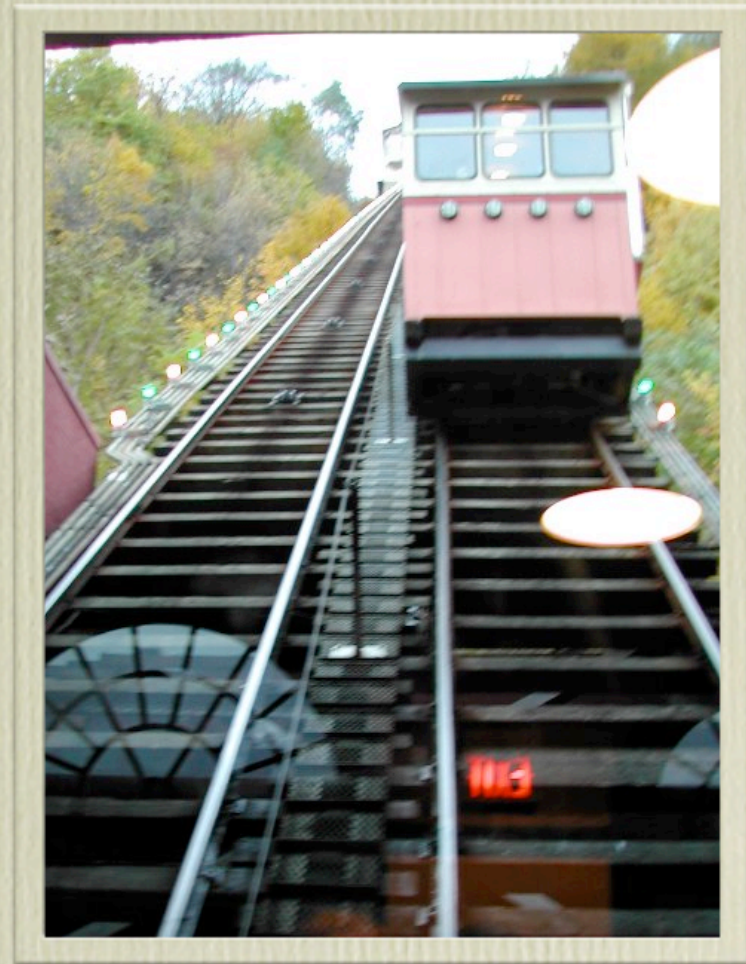
- Focus group
notes

Evaluations
of group
leaders



Factor
analysis

- Common themes
developed



Form 1
 American Balint Society
Leader Evaluation Form
Group Member's Form

LEADER'S NAME _____ OBSERVER'S NAME _____

Please rate the individual's competency as 1 = Never to 5 = Always

<i>Providing Model Behavior</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Made clear interventions						
Sat comfortably with uncertainties						
Elaborated, reflected and clarified thoughts						
Elaborated, reflected and clarified feelings						
Legitimized emotions						
Assumed different roles						
Was empathic with group's process						
<i>Creating an Atmosphere of Safety</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Set rules and boundaries as necessary						
Protected presenter/members from group cross examination						
Respected all points of view						
Provided opportunity for all to speak						
Avoided in-depth personal psychological probing						
Cultivated a climate of trust						
<i>Observing Group Process</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Intervened to promote group process						
Intervened appropriately to developmental stage of group						
Used knowledge of parallel process to facilitate group insight						
Helped group explore different patient-doctor scenarios						
Identified moods of the group related to the case						
Noted themes or topics avoided by group						
Positive impression of the Balint group leader's performance						

Comment further on back with examples or clarifications of your ratings.

Form 2
American Balint Society
Leader Evaluation Form
Presenter's Form

LEADER'S NAME _____ OBSERVER'S NAME _____

Mark one box per row, from 1=Never to 5=Always

<i>Evaluation of Presenter's Feedback</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
The leader helped the group reach an understanding of my difficulties with this patient						
The leader helped the group focus on the doctor-patient relationship						
I felt protected and supported by the leader						
I came to see new facets of the patient's problems						
I now feel I can relate to the patient differently						
I have some new sense of hope for improving my care of this patient						
I believe I can understand how the patient and I may have become stuck						
I would choose to present another case in a group with this leader						
The leader avoided in-depth personal psychological probing						
The leader avoided making an educational lesson of my behavior						
Positive overall impression of the Balint group leader's performance						

Comment further on back with examples or clarifications of your ratings.

Common themes identified

An effective Balint leader:

Creates a climate of safety, acceptance and trust

Establishes and maintains group norms

Promotes movement toward the group's task (grappling with the presenter's case)

Understands group process

Personality/Style of the leader

Creates a climate of safety, acceptance and trust

Textual comments	Evaluation Factors
“Protects the presenter from interrogation”	Providing individual support <i>Group members</i>
“Models empathy and respect for all group members”	
“Fosters a positive holding environment in the group”	Preserving presenter safety <i>Presenters</i>
“Allows for divergent viewpoints”	

Establishes and maintains group norms

Textual comments	Evaluation Factor
“Facilitates self reflection and exploration of meaning”	Providing group structure <i>Group members</i>
“Does not use the group to teach or engage in inappropriate self-disclosure”	
“Keeps the group responsible for doing the work”	
“Does not let the group focus just on problem solving”	

Promotes movement toward the group's task

(grappling with the presenter's case)

Textual comments	Evaluation Factors
“Encourages speculation and exploration of both the presenter's and the patient's point of view”	Promoting group movement <i>Group members</i>
“Focuses the group on the doctor - patient relationship”	Focusing group process Facilitating case reframe <i>Presenters</i>
“Facilitates a change of perception or role in the presenter's relationship to the patient”	

Understands group process

Textual comments	Evaluation factors
“Perceives multiple meanings of the case as manifest by presenter’s and group’s behavior”	Providing group structure Providing individual support <i>Group members</i>
“Understands issues and dynamics of the case”	
“Can articulate what happened in the group”	Focusing Group Process <i>Presenters</i>
“Demonstrates ability to self-reflect and evaluate own intervention decisions”	

Personality/Style of the Leader

Textual comments	Evaluation Factors
“Tolerates silence and sits comfortably with uncertainty”	Providing group structure Maintaining group focus <i>Group members</i>
“Models playfulness, curiosity and enthusiasm”	
“Views the group in a non-authoritarian, group-centered way”	

Conclusions

- Balint leaders rely on behaviors common to other small group formats...
- However, they use these and their understanding of the dynamics of the case
- To create a space and purpose defined by:
 - Safety
 - Exploration of meaning rather than problem solving
 - Group responsibility

Implications

- Characteristics of effective Balint group leadership are definable and unique
- Aspiring Balint leaders, including those familiar with other small group methods, will benefit from formal training in Balint methods
- Attempting Balint leadership without prior experience or training is inadvisable