

Online Reflective Practice Groups for Interdisciplinary Trainees in Paediatric Hospitals During COVID-19 Pandemic: What's the Evidence?



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Doctors are experiencing ever-increasing rates of burnout according to a 2017 report on the National Well-Being of Doctors¹. Reflective practice groups are used to assist with increasing doctors' coping skills and enhance patient-centredness, in order to combat burnout and increase satisfaction at work². This study aims to assess the efficacy of online reflective practice groups in increasing satisfaction levels in interdisciplinary trainees using the Balint group methodology adapted for online use.

The Balint group methodology was adapted for an online format. The online format used Zoom as the meeting platform and doctors were asked to have their cameras on throughout the meeting to ensure maximum participation and analysis of the presenting doctor's case. The Balint methodology is a reflective practice which allows doctors to discuss amongst the group difficult ideas and emotions about specific cases they've encountered. Trainees from psychiatry, emergency and paediatric specialties who answered an online questionnaire before and after six sessions of Balint group meetings. There were nine responses to the pre-Balint questionnaire and eight responses to

the post-Balint questionnaire. Burn out was measured using a modified version of the WHO-5 Well-Being Index questions with participants rating questions one of the four options: Most of the time, Sometimes, Rarely and Never³. Microsoft Excel was used to tabulate and illustrate the data for analysis of trends.

7 of the 9 responses were associated with Crumlin Children's Hospital while 2 participants were from Temple Street Children's University Hospital. Most were females (n=6), aged 26-30 years with levels of experience ranging from three to eleven years within the specialty. Three participants preferred online groups while one preferred face to face groups with three participants indicating that they would enjoy both methods and one did not have a preference after the sessions were completed. Five participants indicated their teams were disrupted pre-Balint due to the Covid-19 pandemic which may cause mild burnout due to the struggles faced. In the Pre-Balint questionnaire, 7 participants indicated that they were burnt out most of the time or sometimes while in the Post-Balint questionnaire, there were no participants who were burnout most of the time.

There were 3 participants indicating sometimes they were burnt out and 5 participants rarely burnt out Post-Balint. Initial pilot study results suggest a potential reduction in subjective burnout ratings in participants following participation in six Balint sessions. The sessions were positively reviewed by the trainees with comments such as “I really enjoyed participating in the group” and “it was an interesting experience.” Additionally, there were no sessions cancelled. Participants were enthusiastic regarding the value of reflective practice groups in promoting self-reflection and reducing burnout.

Initial pilot study results suggest that there may be lower levels of subjective burnout in participants following six Balint sessions compared to pre-Balint scores. These results indicate higher work-related satisfaction and better doctor-patient relationships. Reflective practice programs can be adapted to various teaching or clinical settings as a tool for personal and professional resiliency. Moving forward, a randomized control trial could be carried out to further investigate the hypothesis that participation in a Balint group increases job satisfaction and decreases subjective burnout ratings in non-consultant doctors in a paediatric hospital setting.

References:

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