

President's Report for AGM
Marion Lustig
July 16, 2007

I am delighted to be presenting the second annual President's Report for the Balint Society of Australia. I am even more delighted to be stepping down from my role as President. After 5 years of leadership, commencing with the establishment of a Balint interest group in 2002, then a steering committee in 2004 and finally our Society in 2005, it is a relief to me, not only that I do not have to continue holding the reins, but that we have a robust and growing Society with gifted and committed successors, capable of and willing to take over the leadership.

We have had a busy and very successful year.

Activities and achievements

1. Membership

Our membership has increased from 34 members at our last AGM to 57 currently.

2. Balint groups

Our failure to establish many new ongoing groups has perhaps been our only disappointment for the year.

Melbourne has 5 ongoing groups led by our members (plus a couple of others we know about) and one new group in the planning stages. Sydney has one new group, plus a "practice group" in which leaders rotate to practise leadership. There is a new group in the north coast area in NSW. Brisbane and Hobart each have ongoing groups. We know of a teleconference group run from Sydney. There is interest in starting groups in Perth and Canberra.

It is evident that new groups have formed very slowly and that there are still well qualified leaders who have so far not led ongoing groups. We don't really know why it seems so difficult to start new groups. Are GPs deterred by time constraints, cost, not understanding what Balint groups

are, or not thinking they are relevant to their practices? This is an area where research might be helpful.

3. Scientific meetings

The following scientific meetings, all well attended, were held this year:

- Heide Otten and Ernst Petzold (Germany) in Melbourne and Sydney, the latter in conjunction with the Doctors' Health Advisory Service (NSW).
- Frank Dornfest and Clive Brock (U.S.A.) in Sydney. In conjunction with the Doctors' Health Advisory Group.
- Frank Dornfest (U.S.A.), Penny Love (Brisbane) and Marion Lustig (Melbourne) in Brisbane with registrars from the South-East Consortium.
- Pauline Pearson (Melbourne) in Perth.

4. Workshops

In 2006 we ran workshops at the annual RACGP Scientific Convention in Brisbane, with the involvement of both Australian Balint leaders and overseas visitors Heide Otten and Ernst Petzold from Germany. This consisted of four 90 minute Balint group sessions for two groups, plus opportunities for general discussion about Balint work and debrief sessions for group leaders and rotating co-leaders. There was also a Balint Leaders' workshop led by Heide Otten and a Balint Psychodrama workshop led by Heide Otten and John Barton (Melbourne). Feedback from the workshops was very positive. In addition, the collegial relationships among our members fostered at the Balint workshop in particular led to our decision to organize our first Balint Leadership Workshop.

Perhaps our most exciting development this year was the first Balint Leadership Workshop held in Australia. This took place in Hobart in March. Faculty consisted of visiting leaders from the U.S.A. (Frank Dornfest, Clive Brock and Lisa Buck), Australian leaders (Marion Lustig, Laurie Lovell-Symons and Leonie Sullivan) and Penny Love (workshop convenor). All of the above were part of a very hard-working organizing committee convened by myself and also including Frank Meumann, Alexa Gilbert-Obrart and John Barton. 34 people attended. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive and our highly experienced American visitors also complimented us on the high calibre of both the workshop and of our participants and leaders.

We also ran a half day workshop in Brisbane for the Australian College of Psychological Medicine, with Frank Dornfest, Penny Love and Marion Lustig.

John Barton has continued to run weekend workshops in New Zealand.

Sydney members were involved in a weekend workshop held for members of the Australian College of Psychological Medicine.

We see workshops in general as an important way to raise the profile of Balint , by giving participants a taste of Balint work and encouraging them to become involved in an ongoing group. They also provide opportunities for leaders to gain experience

Workshops and activities in the planning stages include:

- Workshop in Perth (October 20-21, 2007) in association with the Churchill Clinic. Marion Lustig, John Barton, and possibly other Melbourne leaders.
- World Psychiatric Congress in Melbourne (November 29 – December 2, 2007). Primary care stream. John Barton, Bill Betts, possibly Don Nease (U.S.A.).
- Don Nease from U.S.A. visiting early December, 2007.
- 13th Ottawa International Conference on Medical Education (Ozzawa), Melbourne March 5-8, 2008. Possible workshop with BSA in collaboration with Shake Siegal (U.K.).
- RACGP Annual Scientific Meeting 2008. Possible workshop.

5. Committee of Management

We have a hard-working Melbourne based committee which meets monthly. Members currently are: myself (president), John Barton (vice-president), Ann-Marie Diggins (secretary), Ruth Dunn (treasurer) and ordinary members Bill Betts and Pauline Pearson.

Our former secretary Larry Osborne resigned during the year. Larry played a formative role in the establishment of the Society and his contribution was greatly valued. Mike Hampton also resigned from the committee and thanks are due to him for his thoughtful participation. Pauline Pearson has been a welcome new member in 2007.

John Barton has continued to be a wonderful vice-president. He has taken on considerable responsibility (including overall co-ordination of Heide Otten and Ernst Petzold's visit) and has been an unfailing source of support and good advice to me. I am delighted that he has agreed to be nominated for president and I am sure he will do a great job in that role. Since taking over the role of secretary, Ann-Marie Diggins has acquitted herself admirably and with good humour in a task which has been increasingly time-consuming as our activities increase. Ruth Dunn has continued her quietly efficient role as treasurer, with an increased workload associated with the Leadership Workshop. Bill Betts has made thoughtful contributions to the Committee's work as well as maintaining our links with the RACGP peer support project and with the Australian Psychoanalytical Society. I am delighted that he has agreed to be nominated for vice-president.

This has been an energetic and effective committee, with which it has been a pleasure to work.

A new development this year has been the establishment of sub-committees to deal with specific projects. So far these are:

- Leadership Workshop (chaired by myself).
- Perth Balint weekend (chaired by myself).
- Leadership accreditation and training (chaired by Penny Love).
- Balint in GP training (chair not yet confirmed).

We would like more participants on the Committee of Management and would welcome interest from any member.

6. Interstate liaison

We continue to liaise with contact people for the Society in each state for those interested in joining, starting or leading groups.

The steering committee for NSW, chaired by Laurie Lovell-Symons, has been working hard to raise the profile of Balint there, with much work devoted to building relationships with Divisions of General Practice. This Sydney based committee has also worked on building its members' skills with extensive reading and the "practice Balint group" mentioned earlier. Sydney members organized two scientific meetings and three members were involved in organization and/or faculty for the Leadership Workshop in Hobart. The NSW committee has been exploring

possibilities for Balint work in N.S.W. other than in Sydney as well as by teleconference.

Queensland also has an active steering committee, chaired by Penny Love, which has similarly worked to raise the profile of Balint work, build relationships with Divisions of General Practice, organized two scientific meetings and the workshop for the Australian College of Psychological Medicine and was also represented on faculty for the Leadership Workshop in Hobart. The Queensland committee has also been exploring possibilities for Balint work outside the Brisbane area.

Perth has a mailing list of interested people, co-ordination of which was taken over recently from Wendy-Lynn Wolman by Dhyana Stein. Unfortunately, a planned seminar and a weekend workshop, which were to be held in Perth with Albert Lichtenstein (U.S.A.) had to be cancelled when Albert had to cancel his trip to Australia. However, a recent evening meeting with Pauline Pearson from Melbourne attracted considerable interest, and a Balint weekend will now be held in Perth in October with leaders from Melbourne, including Marion Lustig and John Barton.

This year Jane Sheedy has become a contact for the ACT, where efforts are being made to start a new group led by Deborah McIntyre.

Frank Meumann, our contact person for Tasmania, was a generous and hard-working host for the Leadership Workshop in Hobart.

We also have contact people for S.A. (Jill Benson) and N.T. (Sam Heard).

7. Newsletter

We have continued to produce Balint Bulletin, an Email newsletter (written by myself), with 3 editions in the last year, with a mailing list of about 120. The newsletter is now on our website, together with archived previous bulletins.

8. Website

The website at www.balintaustralia.org is well established. It includes educational material about Balint groups, with many articles available

directly on the site or through web links. There is also information about the Society, contact information, newsletters both current and archived and links to other Balint websites. Thanks are due to our member Kerri Boase-Jelinek in Perth and her husband, Daniel Boase-Jelinek. They designed our logo and Daniel has provided generous assistance with the ongoing maintenance of the website.

9. Publications and press

The following articles have been published in the last year:

- Marion Lustig (2006). "Balint groups: an Australian perspective". Australian Family Physician. 35 (8): 639-652.
- Albert Lichtenstein and Marion Lustig (2006). "Integrating intuition and reasoning: how Balint groups can help medical decision making." Australian Family Physician 35(12), 987-989.

My paper "From psychoanalytic psychotherapy to Balint groups: what do leaders need to learn?" will be published in the proceedings of the International Balint Federation Congress to be held in Lisbon in September, 2007.

Douglas Kirsner User 15/7/07 12:56 PM
Comment:

There were articles about Balint groups in Medical Observer (August 18 and 25, 2006) and Australian Doctor (August 27 and December 8, 2006).

We are currently working on a brochure about Balint groups and the Society.

10. Conference presentation

I presented a paper about Balint work at the RANZCP Psychotherapy Section Conference in Sydney in 2006.

11. Research

Leonie Sullivan and I have slowly continued with our project to compile a comprehensive database of Balint group literature, as well as a literature review about the effectiveness of Balint groups. We are exploring the possibility of collaborating with colleagues from the American Balint Society.

12. International liaison

We were affiliated to the International Balint Federation in March, 2007. We have continued to provide twice yearly reports for their Council meetings. Alexa Gilbert-Obrart has attended two council meetings in Europe. Seven members are planning to attend the International Balint Federation Congress in Lisbon this September.

We maintain close links with overseas colleagues, especially in the U.K., the U.S.A. and Germany. In particular, we have been delighted to host a number of international visitors during the last year: Heide Otten (President of the International Balint Federation and Secretary of the German Balint Society), Ernst Petzold (President of the German Balint Society), Frank Dornfest (founding President of the American Balint Society, past President of the International Balint Federation), Clive Brock (founding vice-President and past President of the American Balint Society), Lisa Buck (American Balint Society).

Current priorities and future directions

1. Structure and member involvement.

Over the last year there has been an increase in the involvement of members not on the Committee of Management, especially from interstate, in the running of the Society. I believe there is now a much greater sense of this being a national organization and that there is a growing sense of national cohesiveness and bonding. I hope these developments will be sustained and increased in the coming year.

Thought needs to be given to the future evolution of the COM. Should this continue to be a face to face committee, and could it be taken over by another state in perhaps two years' time? Or should we work towards a COM run across states by telephone link-up?

Thus far our organization has had members from both general practice and psychotherapy/psychoanalysis backgrounds, with perhaps a majority from psychotherapy/psychoanalysis in leadership and organizational roles. I think we need to encourage more GPs to become actively involved in the running of the organization.

2. Establishing Balint groups

As mentioned earlier, new Balint groups have only started slowly and this is something our Society needs to think about. So far we have

addressed this issue mainly by exposing GPs and potential Balint group leaders to the approach (especially through scientific meetings, workshops including RACGP conferences, publications and conference presentations) and approaching Divisions of General Practice. No doubt we will continue with these activities. But what else can we do to stimulate interest?

We need to continue thinking about the needs of rural and remote GPs. There has been some Balint teleconference work done in Australia. This needs further work. In addition, I believe we should be pursuing varied ways of providing Balint training to GPs living in areas where there are no Balint group leaders. For example, as well as one-off workshops to stimulate interest, we could offer ongoing Balint experiences with visiting leaders. Perhaps these could be less often and of longer duration than traditional Balint groups (e.g. 4 weekends per year).

Research to identify the factors which might encourage or be obstacles to GPs' participation in Balint groups could be useful. We need to keep firmly in mind the existing body of research which identifies the benefits of Balint groups and find ways to disseminate these research findings, as well as starting research of our own.

Most importantly, in my opinion, is for us to become involved in medical education, particularly with young doctors training to be GPs and also with medical undergraduates (see below). This has the potential to put Balint training firmly on the map in Australia. Teaching Balint to a captive audience has its difficulties and challenges but is perhaps the best way we have of influencing the doctors of the future so that the benefits of Balint training can become much more widely available in this country.

3. Leadership accreditation and training

Now that we have held our first Leadership Workshop, I believe the time has come to turn our minds to establishing training pathways for Australian Balint leaders and accreditation criteria for leaders. We need to continue to be encouraging and inclusive in our approach to people interested in leadership, whilst at the same time underlining the importance of training and defining the skills involved in competent Balint group leadership. We need regular leadership workshops for both

new and existing leaders. We need to evolve approaches to leader supervision and peer support.

4. Medical education

Balint work has been used very little in medical education in Australia. However, the situation is very different overseas, for example in the U.S.A. (where there are Balint groups in about half of all family medicine residency programs), Germany (where Balint training is integrated into both undergraduate and postgraduate medical training across many areas of medicine) and the U.K. (where most Balint work takes place in GP training programs and where its value is endorsed in the new MRCGP curriculum).

We are in the process of setting up a sub-committee to organize a Balint workshop specifically for medical educators. Hopefully this will be the beginning of our involvement at all levels of medical education, both undergraduate, vocational training and continuing professional development for doctors.

I would like to see our involvement in medical education based in a vision which is broadly based. We know the research shows that Balint groups for GPs develop skills which are essential to good doctoring. I would like us to be inspired by Michael and Enid's Balint's creativity in forming a discipline born of a marriage between psychoanalysis and general practice. We need to honor their profound understanding of general practice itself as a unique and specific discipline. And at the same time, there is surely enormous scope for creative interchange between psychoanalysis and medicine and this could go well beyond Balint groups for GPs to encompass approaches to many aspects of medical education. I believe medicine needs this interchange so that doctors can be competent in the human encounter with their patients, without which they cannot practise good medicine. I believe psychoanalysis can benefit enormously from its involvement with the health professions. There is also scope for this approach in areas outside medicine and individual members of our Society have pursued such interests.

Thanks

At last year's AGM I was foolhardy enough to thank many people by name. This year, I simply want to thank all our members and supporters for a very productive year. We are an energetic, creative and thoughtful

organization and I feel confident we will grow in numbers, activities and influence and that our work will benefit the practice of medicine in Australia.