

Balint Society of Australia  
President's Report to the AGM  
John Barton  
July 23rd, 2008

This the third annual President's Report for the Balint Society of Australia. We have had a year with much activity, some change and some growth in the Society.

### **Thanks**

I would like to begin by thanking the growing number of people who have worked extremely hard to promote Balint work. The members of the COM, the Balint Intensive committee and the Medical Educators Hobart workshop committee especially have given huge amounts of personal time and energy. There are many others who have also given freely to this work. It is inspiring to see people put in many many hours of unremunerated work for the love of this method. Some of you are mentioned in the report below, others are not. Thank you all.

### **1. Membership**

Our membership has increased from 57 members at our last AGM to around 70 currently.

### **2. Balint groups**

There has been some growth in the number of Balint groups. One year ago we knew of fourteen established groups in Australia and NZ. New GP groups have started in Melbourne, Auckland and Port Macquarie. A group for psychotherapists has started in Brisbane and one with medical students in Tasmania.

A GP group is about to restart in Brisbane. In Dunedin a mixed group of psychotherapists and GPs who meet as a peer group are considering using the Balint format as their ongoing way of working. There is strong interest in starting a mixed group in Perth.

### **3. Committee of Management**

We have a very hard-working committee which meets monthly. In August 2007 the committee was expanded outside Melbourne with Penny Love (Brisbane), Alexa Gilbert-Obrart, Laurie Lovel-Simons and Leonie Sullivan (Sydney) all being co-opted. Meetings are held monthly with telephone link-up allowing the non-Melborne members to be present. Pauline Pearson resigned from the committee during the year and Sally Manuel joined in May. The other members are: Ann-Marie Diggins (secretary), Ruth Dunn (treasurer) Marion Lustig (immediate past president), Bill Betts (vice-president) and myself.

The workload of the committee has been very great and in my opinion some changes are needed in how the society runs and the tasks the committee takes on. It appears to me that the current activities will not be sustained by the committee as it now is.

There are now several subcommittees variously dealing with: Producing a brochure; developing leadership accreditation and training; considering how the BSA work with Medical Educators; and the major task of setting up and running our second Balint Intensive workshop which will take place near Sydney in August.

With the COM becoming an interstate body there are now committees to manage local Balint activities in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney.

### **4. Scientific meetings**

Scientific meetings were held in Melbourne where Shake Siegal and Bitty Muller from U.K. presented and Sydney with Albert Lichtenstein and Don Nease from U.S.A. presenting.

### **5. Workshops**

For the first time in three years the BSA did not run a workshop at the RACGP Scientific Convention.

The Society ran a two day workshop in Perth in October in association with the Churchill Clinic. Marion Lustig, Laurie Lovell-Simons, Leonie Sullivan and I were the leaders.

Bill Betts, Don Nease and Albert Lichtenstein presented a workshop at the World Psychiatric Congress in Melbourne (November 29 – December 2, 2007).

A two-day workshop for Medical Educators was run in Hobart in April and May with Frank Meumann the convener and Heide Otten (Germany), Don Nease, Laurie Lovell-Simons and Leonie Sullivan the leaders.

Marion Lustig and I ran an afternoon Balint workshop for registrars in Gippsland in late 2007

BSA members have run other workshops: Brenda Campbell and I ran one in Port Macquarie; Penny Love and Mary Emaleus one in Townsville.

I have run three two-day workshops in New Zealand including, by invitation, a pre-conference workshop at the RNZCGP annual conference 2008. David Dewes and Adrienne Ackermann have been the co-leaders.

## **6. Conference presentation**

Alexa Gilbert-Obrart and Jan Orman took part in a discussion on Balint work at the Sydney GPCE Conference this year.

## **7. Future Events**

The second Balint Intensive Workshop will take place in Windsor near Sydney 14th to 18th August. Four leaders from U.S.A. will join with four local leaders. Preparations are progressing very well and at the time of writing 34 participants have registered.

The American visitors will be offering scientific meetings in several

centres in the days after the Intensive.

The BSA will be running a four session workshop and a poster presentation at the combined WONCA and RACGP Annual Scientific Meeting in October 2008.

Herbert Hahn from UK will be in Australia late in the year and will offer probably meetings in Sydney and in Melbourne.

### **8. Interstate liaison**

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

### **9. Publications and press**

Marion Lustig has had one scientific article and one letter published this year.

Lustig, M. (2007). From psychoanalytic psychotherapy to Balint groups: what do leaders need to know? *Australasian Journal of Psychotherapy*, 26(1), 40-46. This article is of interest to psychotherapists interested in leading Balint groups.

A version of the above paper was also published in *Medicine, Evidence and Emotions*, 50 Years On: Proceedings of the 15th International Balint Congress, Lisbon 2007.

Lustig, Marion (2008). Humanising medical practice: the role of empathy. 188 (4): 263-264. This letter, which highlights the role of Balint groups in developing empathy is a reply to Haslam, Nick (2007) Humanising medical practice: the role of empathy. *Medical Journal of Australia*. 187: 381-2, an overview and brief literature review of the importance of empathy in medical practice.

Marion Lustig and I had an article about Balint groups appear in NZ Doctor magazine and members have been interviewed for articles in the medical press in Australia.

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

## **10. Newsletter**

We have continued to produce Balint Bulletin, an email newsletter with 2 editions in the last year, with a mailing list of about 140. The newsletter is now on our website, together with archived previous bulletins.

## **11. Website**

The website at [www.balintaustralia.org](http://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 Daniel Boase-Jelinek who has provided generous assistance with the ongoing maintenance of the website.

## **12. Research**

Ann-Marie Diggins is undertaking a literature search on factors which assist GPs to enter Balint groups and factors which are barriers.

## **13. International liaison**

Six members of this Society attended the Lisbon Congress of the International Balint Federation in September 2007. We have continued to provide twice yearly reports for their Council meetings. Alexa Gilbert-Obrart has attended council meetings in Europe.

We maintain close links with overseas colleagues, especially in the U.K., the U.S.A. and Germany. We are extremely grateful to the International visitors who come to offer their knowledge and expertise.

Leonie Sullivan, Marion Lustig and Ann-Marie Diggins are part of an international group who are in the process of producing a complete bibliography of Balint related articles in the medical literature.

## **14. Current priorities and future directions**

The primary aim of the BSA is to promote Balint work and this

seems to me to be best done by establishing ongoing Balint groups, primarily for GPs. The promotion of weekend workshops is one way of raising interest in ongoing Balint work but so far has not been very effective. Many of the other activities of the society have also been to raise awareness of Balint work generally and there is a sense, backed up by increasing requests from individuals, organisations and the medical press to society members, that this is happening. However some of the society's activities such as running leadership training results in more potential leaders with no groups to run and rising frustration among members.

The COM made a decision in 2007 to focus more on promoting Balint work with GP registrars and worked with Frank Meumann to organise the Hobart workshop for Medical Educators. The workshop was most successful and there are now several Medical Educators very keen to learn more about Balint work and to have it available for their registrars. Balint groups for registrars have not yet started but this approach is looking as if it will be more successful in getting ongoing groups started.

It is with regret that I am not putting myself forward for a second term as president. I have decided to spend more time and energy with my family and work. I have gained a great deal from my stint as president and am grateful for the opportunity to have done this and to the Committee of Management members who have supported me. At the moment of writing no-one has put themselves forward as a new president and I believe this is a reflection of the change and growth in the Society in the last two years and the way we have approached all the possible tasks that appear. I am confident that this crisis will lead to a productive outcome for us all, although I have no idea what form this might take.

John Barton  
23rd July, 2008