

# Balint Downunder

Winter 2023

## From the President



The solstice has now passed and much as I love the wintry months myself, I'm aware that most people are probably looking forward to longer, warmer days. But whatever the season, Balint ANZ is sure to have some news and events to nourish you.

### People

The new board was elected at the AGM in November last year and I welcome Sheila O'Neill and Tamara Holmes as new members, as well as Swapnil Sharma as Vice-President, Meredith Waugh as Secretary and Nish Jayarajan as Treasurer. I would also like to recognise the retirement from the board of Hilary Ash. Thank you, Hilary, for your service to the society.

Di Nash remains on the board as Immediate Past President ... and currently the only board member from New Zealand – any New Zealanders who are interested in joining, please contact me! Di deserves a particular vote of thanks for shepherding the society through the difficult times of Covid and making substantial progress in various avenues despite the challenges of the last few years. Thank you, Di!

Long-term administrative secretary Anne Malecki also retired at the end of 2022 and I would like to recognise Anne's service to the society over a long period and to offer her our best wishes for her retirement.

We welcome Tracy Barling as the new administrative secretary and I hope that we aren't already overwhelming her. Tracy can be contacted at [admin@balintanz.org](mailto:admin@balintanz.org).

### Events

The Covid years have driven many Balint events online and we have all had to adjust to the advantages and disadvantages of Balint life online. Happily, there is a lot on(line)...

The society's second online intensive workshop was held in March this year and feedback has been excellent.

Meredith Waugh and Ethel Tillinger are also coordinating a reading group which has begun meeting and I believe it is open to new members.

The Balint Online for Medical Students (BOMS) initiative is now in its fourth year and it is likely that we will be able to offer at least four groups of students a six-week online Balint experience. Meredith and I continue to coordinate BOMS and if you are interested in learning more about it or leading a group, do please send me an email.

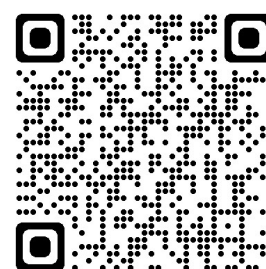
And we are moving towards offering a similar time-limited 'taster' series online via the society for clinicians other than medical students who might want to dip their toe in the Balint waters. It might not happen this year but hopefully in 2024. But we are looking for some people to coordinate this initiative. Again, if you are interested in learning more, please get in touch.

I am also very pleased to let you know that the annual in-room intensive workshop will resume in November 2023 in Hobart. Frank Meumann is chairing the intensive, assisted by Meredith Waugh, Chel Quinn and myself as the organising committee. Information will be posted on the society's website as it becomes available. This will be a great opportunity.

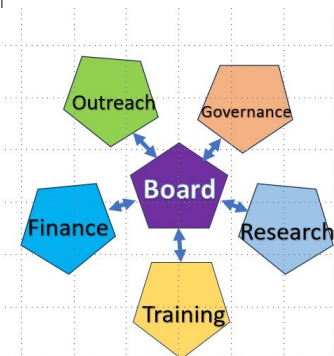
### Inside this issue:

<i>From the President</i>	1
<i>Congratulations Frank</i>	2
<i>BalintANZ 13th Intensive Workshop.</i>	3
<i>6th International Balint Group Leadership Conference</i>	3
<i>International Balint Congress 2024</i>	3
<i>Balint Online for Medical Students (BOMS)</i>	4
<i>Second Weekend Online Workshops Report</i>	4
<i>2023 Medical Student Reflective Essay Competition update</i>	4
<i>Contributed articles</i>	5-6
<i>Balint Groups for GP's working with indigenous Patients</i>	7
<i>Annual RANZCP Congress in Perth</i>	7

**Looking to join a Balint group or refer a colleague?**



## From the President cont.



*“We are hoping that members who have not (yet) joined the board of the Society will be interested in joining some of these committees and working groups to have a say in the direction of the Society.”*

tunity for participants from across the region, as well as hopefully international visitors, to come together ... and the society's first in-person event since 2019. Register your interest now to secure a place!

The Training Committee (chaired by Swapnil Sharma) is overseeing the training of a record twenty people on the Leadership Accreditation Pathway (LAP) as well as four accredited leaders who are working towards becoming Leader Trainers. The Training Committee is also reviewing the LAP and the Leader Trainer Pathway.

### In the background...

The board has made some changes to the way it functions with the formation of some smaller committees to make sure that we are pursuing our goals in the most efficient way. In addition to the existing training and finance committees, a research committee has been formed (chaired by Tamara Holmes) and a governance working group (chaired by Meredith Waugh as the Secretary of the society) is looking at our procedures and policies.

We are also working towards developing an outreach committee to ensure that we are taking best advantage of opportunities to make more people aware of Balint work and to offer an experience. A group met last year to discuss approaches to the recommen-

dation of the Victorian Royal Commission Mental Health Services that all junior doctors should complete a psychiatry rotation and that reflective practice should be a mandatory part of that rotation and we see this as an opportunity to make more doctors and health services aware of the value of Balint work. Thank you to those who have participated in this work to date. If members have links with organisations which might be interested in learning more about Balint groups and incorporating them into their work or curriculum, please contact me to discuss how we could think about advocating for wider inclusion of Balint work.

We are hoping that members who have not (yet) joined the board of the society will be interested in joining some of these committees and working groups to have a say in the direction of the society. Please contact me if you are interested in joining one of these groups or becoming involved in any other way.

So... there is a lot going on both in terms of events and work in the background. A big 'thank you' to everyone who is involved in all this work and a gilt-edged invitation to everyone else to join us in advancing our society and, most importantly, Balint group work in our region.

Daniel Brass  
president@balintanz.org



## Congratulations, Frank

In exciting news, our former president Dr. Frank Meumann was awarded the Medal (OAM) of the order of Australia in the general division for his service to medicine.

Three cheers to Frank for this amazing achievement!

## Registrations now open

### 13th Balint Intensive Workshop, Hobart, Tasmania 9—12 November 2023

Registrations are now open for the annual intensive workshop, to be held at The Woolstore, Hobart, Tasmania. This will be an immersive Balint group experience, open to those who have not had a previous Balint group experience, as well as to experienced group members and leaders.

We invite clinicians interested in participating in and learning more about Balint groups to join us. All clinicians are welcome, regardless of area of practice, experience or seniority, including students.

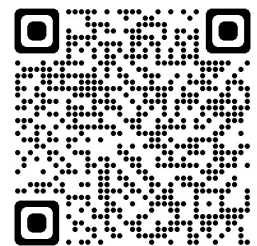
Most of the work will take place in small groups with experienced leaders. The membership of each group will remain

constant throughout the workshop. Reflections on leadership and group process will follow each case story and discussion. The workshop programme will also include large group events and social activities.

There is a limit on the number of participants due to group size so if you have not already registered and are wishing to attend the workshop, please scan the QR code on the right and you will find all the workshop information and registration process on that page. Alternatively, you can go to this webpage for more information: [www.balintanz.org/hobart2023/](http://www.balintanz.org/hobart2023/).



City of Hobart, Tasmania



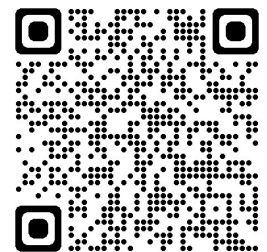
### 6th International Balint Group Leadership Conference, 29 Sept—1 Oct, 2023 Belgrade, Serbia

Applicants are invited to attend the Sixth International Balint Group Leadership Conference, which will be held at Hotel Palas in Belgrade, from 29<sup>th</sup> September—01<sup>st</sup> October 2023. Hotel Palas is ideally situated in the heart of the city of Belgrade and will provide a beautiful and peaceful setting for the conference.

The International Balint Federation (IBF) convenes the conference in association

with the Balint Society of Serbia. IBF holds a leadership conference every two years. The conference aims to provide a forum for Balint Group leaders worldwide to study Balint Group leadership together. There will be an opportunity to explore issues and themes in Balint Group leadership in more depth.

The conference theme will be: “Balint leadership under global conditions of uncertainty”



QR code for more information.

### International Balint Congress 2024 September 9–13, 2024 The 23rd International Balint Congress Boulder, Colorado, USA

Cultivating Understanding and Compassion Through Balint

When we face challenging times, it may help us to examine how, when, and where Balint groups work and what gets in their way. We will examine the ways Balint work has cultivated understanding and compassion in our varied settings and experiences. And

we will do more of that work together, through paper presentations, workshops and Balint sessions. The biennial IBF Congress offers uniquely rich fellowship as well as cultural and intellectual stimulation. Please plan to join us at The Colorado Chautauqua, a national historic landmark at the base of the Flatiron Mountains.

Registration opens soon!



The Flatiron Mountains

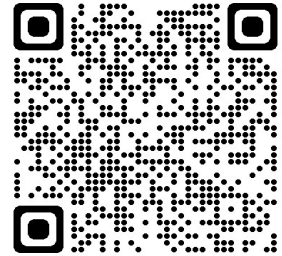
## Balint Online for Medical Students (BOMS)

BOMS got an early start to the year with thanks to Bill Betts and Sue Boucher who co-led the first group. The leaders shared how they had been struck by the enthusiastic participation and powerful case presentations.

The first BOMS Leaders' Forum was held on 12/03/23 with an excellent roll up of about 14 leaders and much thoughtful discussion. If you would be interested to join the BOMS Leaders' Forum, please contact Daniel Brass, BOMS - Leader Coordinator  
(Email: [drdbrass@gmail.com](mailto:drdbrass@gmail.com))

The basic structure of BOMS will remain similar in 2023 with six weekly meetings of 90 minutes and about eight students in each group. We aim to offer between 4-6 groups this year, depending on interest from students and leaders.

If you know of any medical students who could be interested in joining a BOMS Group, please encourage them to contact Meredith Waugh, BOMS - Student Coordinator  
(Email: [mwaugh4221@gmail.com](mailto:mwaugh4221@gmail.com))



Link to BOMS 2023 Flyer:  
<https://balintanz.org/about/join-a-balint-group/balint-groups-online-for-medical-students/>

## Second Weekend Online Workshops: Report

Since Covid online Balint groups have grown in popularity and reach. So the Board's plan to include online weekend workshops in addition to our Intensive Workshops (coming up in Hobart this November) in the Society's annual calendar is not surprising. This year we had two full groups of eight, with accredited leaders and participants spread across WA to NZ. Eighty-five percent of participants completed the after survey, and their responses were largely enthusiastic, including:

*"lively discussions" – "well organised" – "very convenient" – "less expensive" – "good structure" – "valuable and worthwhile" – "stimulating and insightful" – "a great weekend"*

Groups were organised to include five longer cases over the two days, as well as time for reflection on the process. Participants were able to meet and network with people they hadn't met before, and to experience the work of unfamiliar leaders. And leaders had the opportunity to build a new co-leader partnership.

Our online workshops also enable clinicians new to Balint an excellent way to try the experience. All in all, a very worthwhile learning activity.

The work contributed by Leonie, Prue, Judy, Swapnil, Chel, Hilary, Kerrie and Di in organising and leading the weekend workshops is very much appreciated.

## 2023 Medical Student Reflective Essay Competition UPDATE

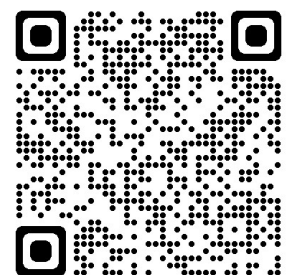
The closing date for the submissions of essays has been extended to 1st August, 2023. The competition is open to medical students attending Australian and New Zealand universities.

### Prizes

The Lawrence Gilbert Memorial Prizes of A\$500 will be awarded to the two top essays. The top 2-3 essays will be submitted to relevant medical journals for possible publication.

Winners or runners-up may be offered subsidised attendance at future BalintANZ annual workshops in Australia or New Zealand.

You can find out more by following the QR code or clicking this link: [The BSANZ Medical Student Reflective Essay Competition | Balint Society of Australia & New Zealand \(balintanz.org\)](https://www.balintanz.org/about/join-a-balint-group/balint-groups-online-for-medical-students/)





## Medicalising experiences

H.A.

Despite our best efforts, the terminology of diagnosis pops up with annoying frequency in Balint groups. This snippet comments on it as a shortcut to avoid thinking.

*The social practice of diagnosis as a way of talking about characters reflects our contemporary understanding of disease and illness as the master narrative to explain deviance, and to legitimise the diagnoses themselves.*

*These stories say more about us, the diagnosticians, and our contemporary views, than the lives of those they seek to describe. But this practice is*

*not without its downsides.*

*By using diagnosis to explain people, we medicalise our experience of the world and shut down other avenues of explanation. Calling someone a narcissist to explain political behaviour means we've given up on politics. We see pathology as the undergirding explanation for unpalatable policy, rather than structural failure. Just as explaining an imaginary character via diagnosis means we've lost faith in stories. Winnie the Pooh is simply a child's toy "of very little brain."*

"From Trump to Winnie the Pooh" [TheConversation.com](https://www.theconversation.com/2017/04/174056) 174056



*"Winnie the Pooh is simply a child's toy of very little brain."*

## Balint Autobiography—Addison, Ritch

N.J.

Balint Autobiography- Addison, R. (2020). Balint autobiography—Ritch Addison. *The International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 55(3), 210–213. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091217420919017>

In this article, Ritch Addison takes us on a personal journey through his experiences with Balint groups. From an early age, Addison was captivated by human interactions, leading him to delve into the fields of psychology and medical sociology. His studies centered around the intricate dynamics of the doctor-patient relationship, and he embarked on a fascinating research endeavor, following residents over three years to unravel the complexities of their professional socialization.

What emerged from Addison's research were two pivotal elements: Personal and Professional Development Groups and the transformative power of Balint groups. Recognizing the residents' insecurities and the need for connection, Addison initiated the former, fostering an environment for them to share their thoughts and experiences. The latter, the Balint groups, delved deeper into the intricacies of the physician-patient relationship, shedding light on the unexplored aspects. Addison became enamored with Balint's brilliant writings and recognized the significance of incorporating Balint experiences for the growth of both residents and faculty.

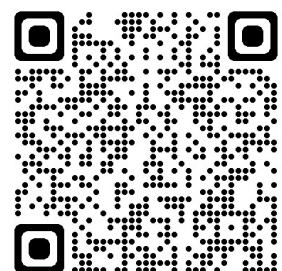
His involvement with the American Balint Society (ABS) and the International Balint Federation Congress marked a turning point in Addison's journey. He met influential figures within the Balint community, igniting

a passion to further contribute. Teaching at Leadership Training Intensives and organizing Balint Weekend programs became cherished activities, as Addison aimed to inspire healthcare professionals to partake in the transformative Balint process.

Flexibility and creativity became guiding principles for Addison in Balint work, discouraging a dogmatic approach and encouraging diverse reflections and growth. His love for the endless possibilities, emotional exploration, and the sense of community fostered by Balint work became evident.

In conclusion, Addison's account showcases the profound impact of Balint groups on his own life and those of countless healthcare professionals. Through the Balint journey, he forged meaningful connections, finding solace in the uncharted territories of the healthcare profession.

You can read the article via this QR code.



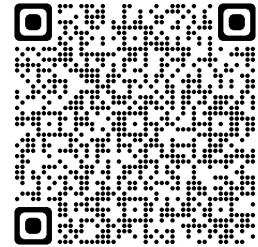
## The Day my Diya Burnt Out

N.J.

This article won an award at the World Psychiatric association congress in April, 2023. This short story takes the form of a journal entry where the author reflects on their life as a doctor. Growing up in a family of doctors and undergoing the rigorous training and selection processes of medicine conditioned them to be ruthlessly competitive and self-centred. However, their perspective shifts when their younger sister, also a medical student, unexpectedly takes her own life. The author realizes that despite being surrounded by doctors, they failed to recognize the signs of their sister's mental health

struggles and how they could have supported her. This traumatic experience leads the author to question the culture of medicine and the lack of emphasis on empathy and emotional support for both patients and fellow medical professionals. The story serves as a poignant reminder of the consequences of neglecting mental health and the importance of cultivating a more compassionate and understanding medical culture.

[https://journals.lww.com/jspf/Fulltext/2023/01000/The\\_day\\_my\\_Diya\\_burnt\\_out\\_The\\_shadows\\_that\\_remain.9.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/jspf/Fulltext/2023/01000/The_day_my_Diya_burnt_out_The_shadows_that_remain.9.aspx)



Read more of this story via the QR code above.

## Dear Life: A Doctor's Story of Love and Loss by Rachel Clarke

2020 Little, Brown ISBN: 978-1-4087-1251-1

H.A.

In *Dear Life*, UK NHS doctor Rachel Clarke tellingly describes her time as a med student, how she reached the decision to specialise in palliative medicine, and reflects with insight on the impact her patients have wrought on her thinking about life and how we live it.

Clarke lingers over memories of her adored father and greatest mentor, a GP of the old school, for whom kindness was the core of his approach to his patients. Although he recognised his daughter's potential to study medicine, he didn't try to influence her, and instead encouraged her choices. Thus it was that after achieving a successful career as a tv journalist, at 25 Clarke found the work hollow, and came to her own decision to apply for medicine.

A Balint leader, especially in the BOMS project, would find particular resonance in the chapters describing anomalies and brutality Clarke identifies in her medical training. On day one, ostensibly to encourage reflection about the need to be kind and to listen to patients, students were shown a film version of the 1999 play *Wit*, by Margaret Edson. The protagonist is a patient suffering dehumanising experiences during aggressive ovarian cancer treatment. Shortly afterwards, in the anatomy lab, Clarke observed: "... empathy – the ability to understand and identify with the feelings of another – was under assault from day one ... I strongly suspected from the outset that the real point of human dissection was to kickstart the process of detachment .... the peculiar act of doublethink required for young men and women, most of them still teenagers, to cluster, scalpels poised, around a slowly decomposing corpse

*while loudly pretending that carving up dead human flesh was a perfectly anodyne use of Tuesday and Thursday mornings."*

After qualifying, Clarke underwent the brutal initiation of a junior doctor's life (detailed in her earlier book\*). A personal watershed experience propelled her into palliative specialisation, prioritising patient care over heroic cures. Eloquent about the power and value of her speciality, provided in a beautiful, albeit unusual, London NHS palliative facility, the book cries out for widespread quality palliative access. Death comes to us all, although all too often today's drama-tinted medicine tends to view a dying patient as a shameful failure, better suited to abandonment than to the compassion of good palliative care.

This book certainly benefits from the skill the author gained as a journalist. Her writing throughout is clear, expressive and moving, sharing her personal experiences to reveal pertinent issues. The Postscript chapter provides resources, such as to prepare a will, an advanced care plan, and more; in a section on VAD, attentive to maintain an open and trusting relationship with her patients and their families, Clarke chooses not to discuss her personal views. To my mind, this exemplifies the author's patient-centred practice of medicine, a constant throughout the book.

\* Rachel Clarke *Your Life in My Hands: A Junior Doctor's Story* (2017), reviewed extensively here:

<https://www.medicinspires.com/your-life-in-my-hands-by-rachel-clarke-book-review/>

## BALINT GROUPS FOR GP'S WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS PATIENTS

Ruth Dunn and Frank Meumann are facilitating an online Balint Group for GPs working with Indigenous patients in Aboriginal Health Services in Victoria. The participants work in Melbourne clinics and regional Victorian health services. The work continues our on-going interest and work in Aboriginal affairs, offering support to GPs in this challenging and demanding area. Additionally Ruth has another online Balint group with GPs working in two Aboriginal Health services in Melbourne. Both these groups meet monthly.

RUTH DUNN (ruthdunn@ozemail.com.au)

## Annual RANZCP congress in Perth



Rebecca Wild and Nish Jayarajan conducted a Balint fish bowl experience for the Psychiatry Interest Forum (PIF) section of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) at the annual RANZCP congress in Perth on 28/06/23. This was attended by 44 medical students and junior doctors. The feedback received has been positive and encouraging.

### BalintANZ Board members 2022-23

<b>President:</b>	<b>Daniel Brass</b>
<b>Vice President:</b>	<b>Swapnil Sharma</b>
<b>Secretary:</b>	<b>Meredith Waugh</b>
<b>Treasurer:</b>	<b>Nish Jayarajan</b>

**Ordinary Members:** Di Nash (immediate past president), Sheila O'Neill, Tamara Holmes