



# Evaluating participant experience in Balint online sessions held during the Covid19 pandemic – lessons learnt and moving forward

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## Background

The Balint Group, first introduced by Michael and Enid Balint, offers clinicians a space to meet and discuss various challenges they face with their patients, helping them cope with difficult situations. During the Covid-19 pandemic the way we practiced everyday life changed dramatically. As a result of this, there has been a shift from in-person to online Balint, allowing these groups to continue offering support to clinicians around the country.

“It doesn't matter what kind of patients you're seeing or where you are in the world, the doctor/patient relationship is still there at the focus.”

## Aims and Methods

Participants of Balint groups were interviewed to identify their experiences of online Balint. These interviews were recorded and transcribed and thematic analysis applied. We aimed to identify the **experiences of the participants** and consider **benefits and challenges of online Balint**.

“I suppose interacting in the room there is something different, you know, the immediacy of somebody of responding and seeing a little bit more about the person.”

## Results

Key **positive** themes of online groups were ***ease of access, anonymity, attention to facial expressions and interaction with participants from different parts of the country***. The most common **drawbacks** were a ***lack of socialising*** and different ***group dynamic*** as well as the expected ***technical and environmental*** challenges. Interestingly all participants reported that ‘silence’ and ‘sitting back’ were still used in their online sessions. Core theme analysis indicates the virtual Balint descriptions draw out sentiments of ***safe, open and structured sessions***. In these sessions a frequent theme was the ***increased role of the leader***.

## Conclusion and looking to the future...

We plan to continue with interviews, after these interesting preliminary results. **Now we are interviewing leaders of Balint groups to see how their experiences compare to the participants.**

The fact some interviewees would prefer to maintain online Balint groups even when ‘in person’ options resume makes it likely this will not be a transient change. Based on this, the role for feedback and constant evaluation and improvement will be central to virtual Balint evolution.

“I think if the leaders hadn't established clear boundaries and rules online it would have been more chaotic as we were relying less on social cues”

## References

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