

An Evaluation of an Online Balint Group during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Aims

To evaluate the following dimensions of one particular Balint group for CTs and GPSTs in WLMHT:

- The helpfulness of the groups
- The impact, if any, of the move of groups to an online video platform

Introduction

The application of Balint groups within core psychiatric training is a mandatory aspect of the curriculum. There is a paucity of research literature on its benefits to participants and consistent findings have not been clearly evidenced. However, Balint groups vary widely on a multitude of factors and this heterogeneity has been a challenge to researchers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this particular Balint group within WLMHT was moved to an online video platform Zoom on the basis of recognising the need for containment amongst junior trainees, whilst also maintaining a safe setting from the perspective of infection control.

Method

An anonymised online survey with quantitative and qualitative outcomes, which included the objectives and potential benefits of Balint Groups listed by the Balint Society and the General Medical Council (GMC).

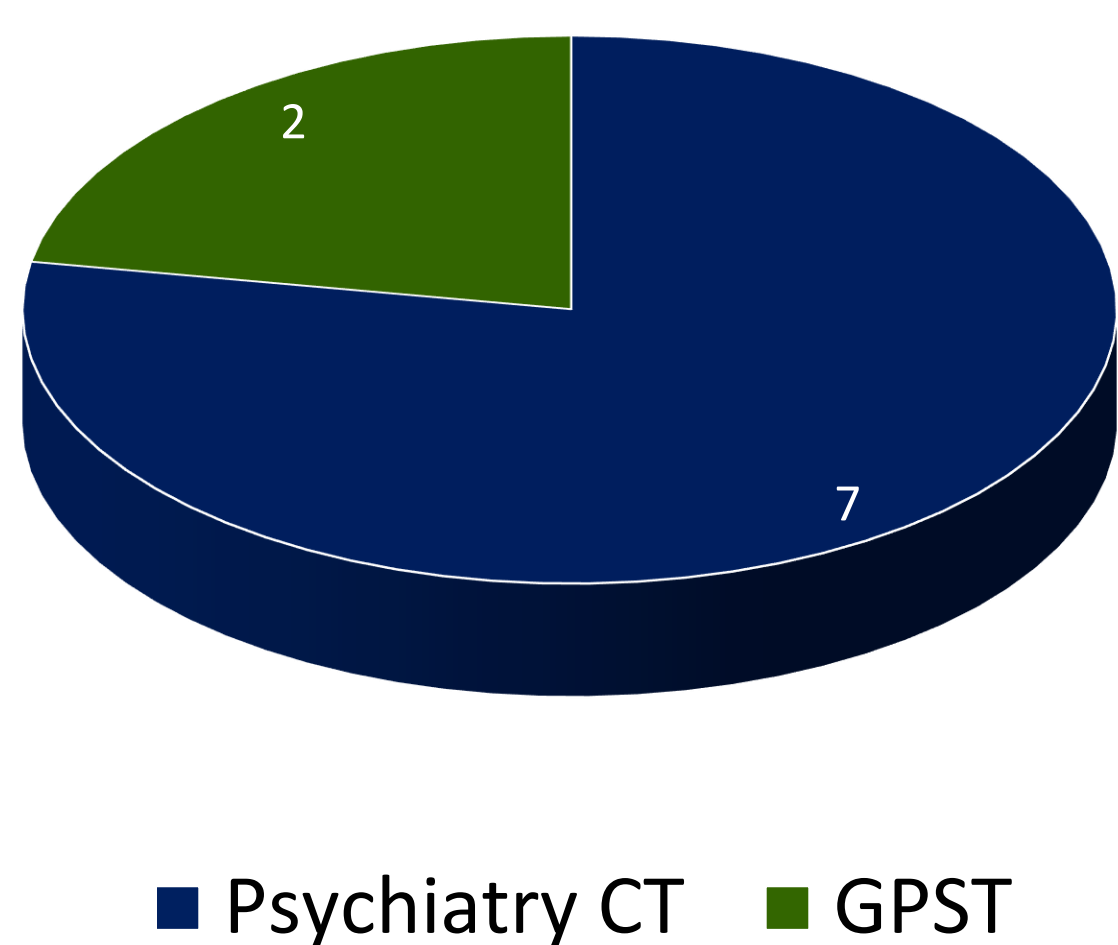
Results

- ✓ Out of the 10 participants in the group, 9 completed the survey.
- ✓ Trainees generally found the groups to be a positive experience, and their comments reflected these.
- ✓ Benefits derived from participation in the group were compromised to a slight extent by the move to an online video platform
- ✓ Despite these compromises, substantial appreciation was expressed by the trainees.

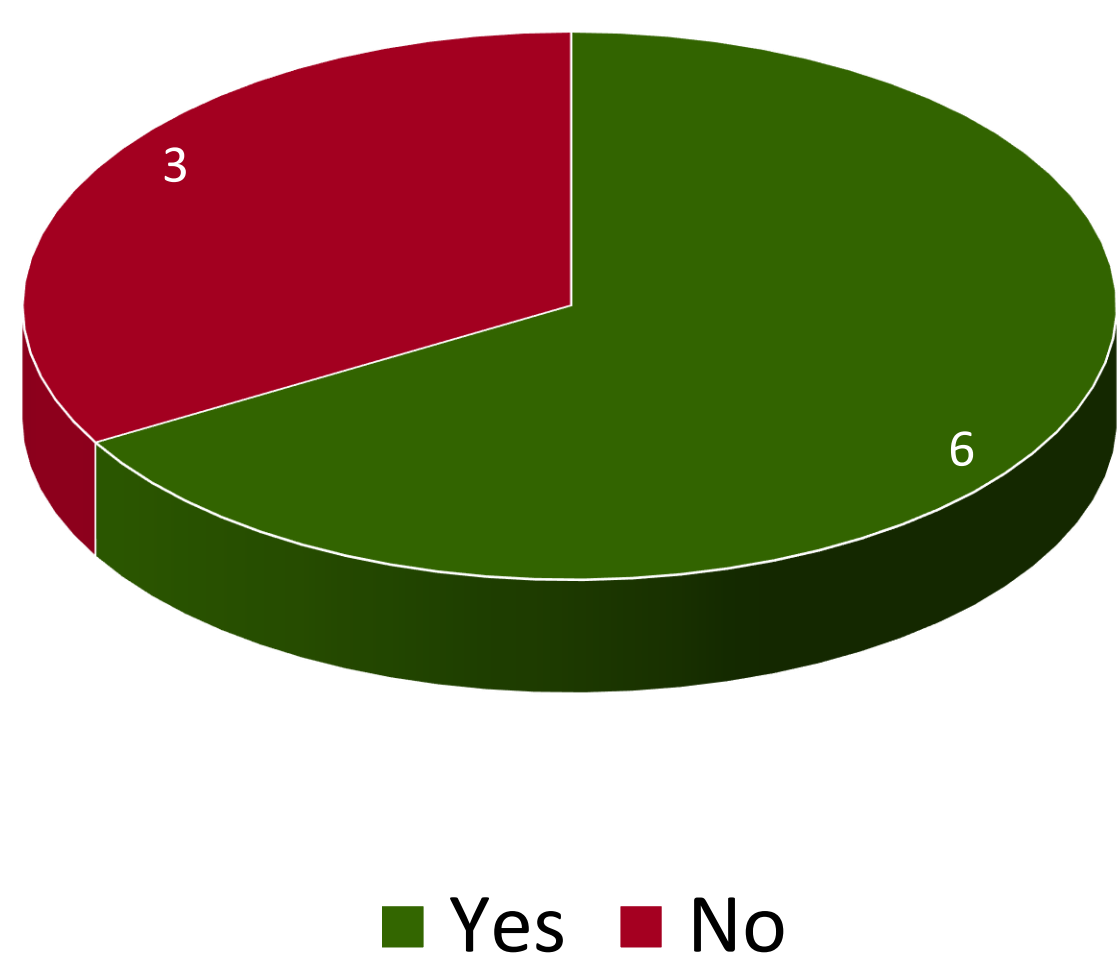
Thinking about your experience of attending the Balint groups so far, how helpful have you found the groups in the following areas: (0=not helpful at all, 10=extremely helpful)



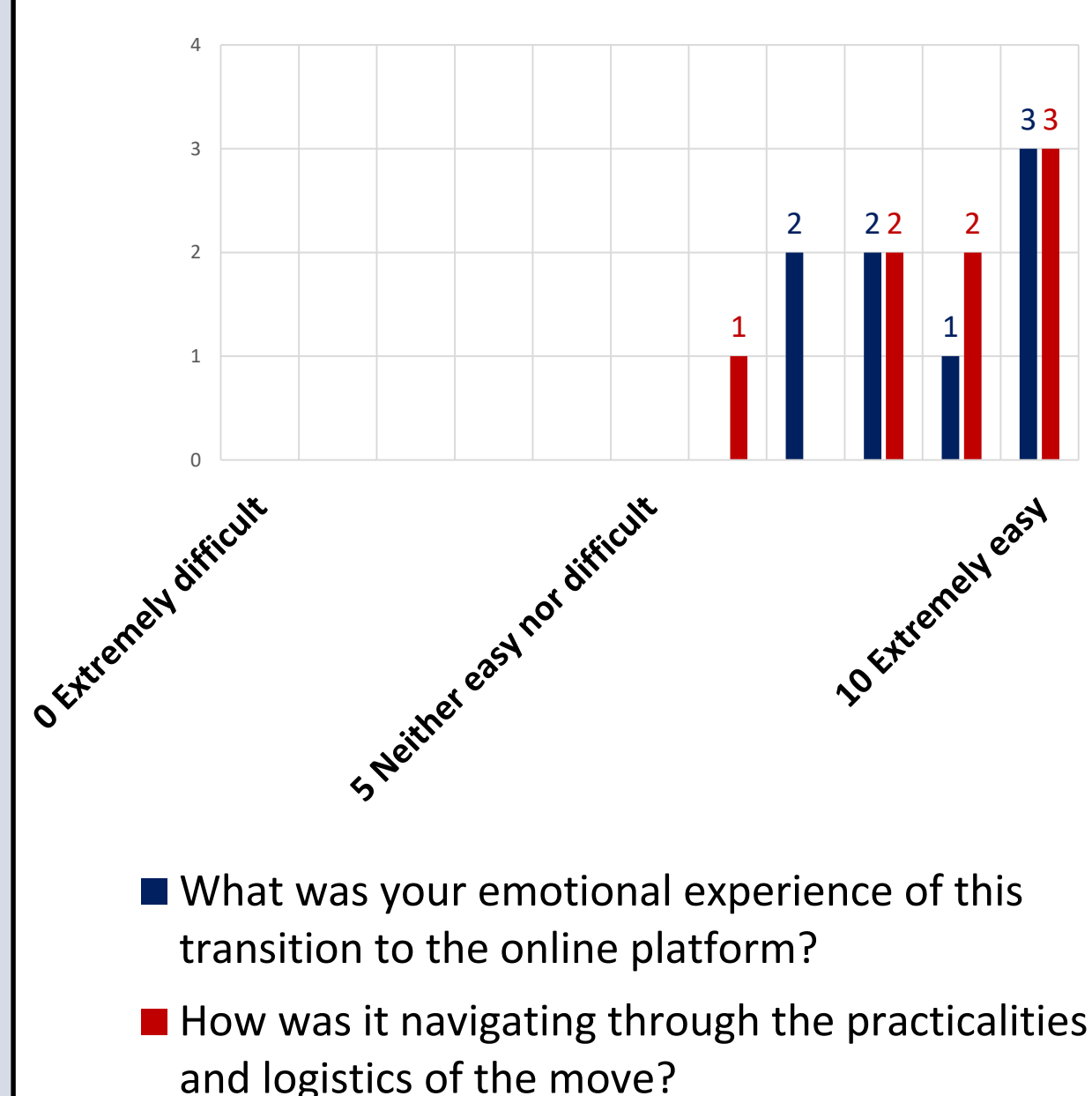
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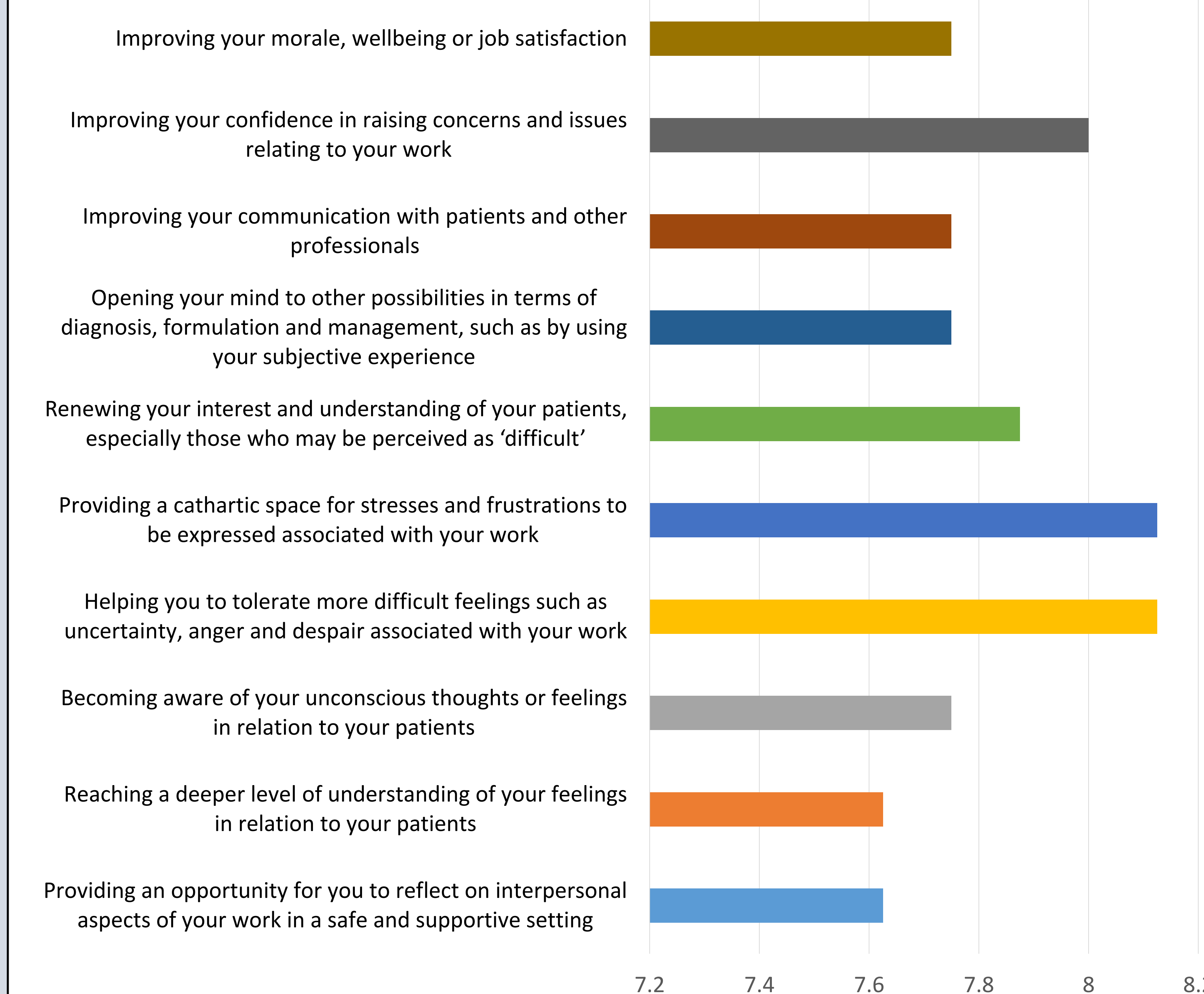
Previous Balint experience



What was your experience of the Balint Groups moving online?



Thinking of the same areas, how do you think they have been affected as a result of the move to the online video platform? (0=extremely badly affected, 10=not affected at all)



It has been a very positive experience. I will be taking this forward with me and implement it where I work as a GP in the future. From previous experience I have noticed there is a marked schism between how NHS staff treat one another and how we treat patients. Too often the mantra is all for patients and once this is done, I feel we don't look to do the same for ourselves which leads to a lot of "hidden" damage. I am glad to have been introduced to this in this psychiatry rotation and will take it forward with me.

The groups have been really helpful.

At times, doing it on screen can make things difficult to concentrate. Meeting up in person, it is easier to engage more actively but I would say overall it has been positive.

I do not think that the transition to online Balint has had much of a negative effect. It works quite well and does not impede the above goals.

It has been really appreciated these are online. Personally, attending in person is too much of a risk and I would heavily dislike coming to these meetings with the risks we face. The innovation of using Zoom has been great and is appreciated.

Conclusion

The results from this evaluation are encouraging towards recognising that online Balint groups could fulfil a need for consistent and stable support structures that are also feasibly safe, as junior trainees in psychiatric rotations continue to face enormous challenges amidst very unsettling and uncertain times. Although there is some compromise to the quality of engagement and the derived benefits, they do not appear to be too significant. Whether or not the online format could benefit participants outside of the COVID-19 pandemic remains of interest.