

Tele-Balint @ KKH under the microscope: What really happens in Tele-Balint groups?

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Introduction

- Balint groups are a platform for clinicians to gain further insight into difficult patient cases and the clinician-patient relationship
- COVID-19 increases stress and burnout – Tele-Balint groups were started in KKH Department of Psychological Medicine to provide professional supervision and peer learning sessions

Study aims:

- Understand Balint groups in Singapore's context, through:
 - Exploring the experience and perceptions of mental health clinicians towards Balint and Tele-Balint groups
 - Examining if these groups help to address their needs

Methods

Recruitment of participants

Inclusion criteria: Clinicians from KKH Department of Psychological Medicine that have participated in Tele-Balint groups since March 2020. Informed consent was taken.

Study design



Results

Professional and personal growth of clinicians

Widening perspectives

"In the cases I've brought in, I've always felt like I've left with a new way of looking at what I'm presented with in a session... different curiosities about what might be happening"

Improvement of clinician-patient relationship

"I think it helps to increase my empathy... after these discussions probably there will be more understanding, more empathy"

Facilitation of personal growth

"So just by hearing them put it into words that helps me to think... that was what I was feeling, but I was not able to express it"

Providing emotional support to clinicians

Validation and affirmation

"Hearing, telling someone that... I think I will find it very difficult too, is affirming. It helps the person feel like actually it's not them, it's the case that's very difficult"

Extension of support beyond Balint sessions

"One colleague... was worried whether I was feeling OK, and... a few weeks down the line she actually checked in with me... so I guess that support even is carried outside the group"

Improving future emotional wellbeing

"So the fact that I know... I can expect that gives me a bit of comfort so that I don't get as affected... I'm definitely still frustrated, but at least I'm more prepared for it."

Burnout in clinicians: What contributes and what helps



Nature of work (increased complexity of cases) contributes to burnout

"More negative countertransference... definitely, I think it can lead to higher chances of burnout"

High workload contributes to burnout

"Burnout... is more of the workload than actual work itself... I think [preventing burnout] is more about having certain short breaks"



Current structure of Balint may limit effectiveness in preventing burnout

"It is that lack of... back and forth within the structure... can make it a bit challenging"

Psychological safety in Balint groups

Sense of psychological safety is stronger in group supervision within unique professional groups

"We are all fellow counsellors and we also have a relationship... the safety aspect in group supervision... it's a bit better"

Unfamiliarity with other colleagues can inhibit ability to share about vulnerable topics

"Sometimes the dynamics of the group has yet to reach that... level where you can really process all that"

Evolution of nature of Balint groups

Evolving group members causes nature of Balint groups to change

"It feels like there are differing ideas and... [Balint groups] then takes on a different form"

Juggling maintaining true Balint process with member's needs

Juggling individual needs with group needs

Balint as an evolving journey for each clinician

"We're... a heterogenous group that is in different stages of the journey... [Balint groups] may serve [members] a different purpose in time to come as it did for me"

Discussion

Benefits of Balint groups

- Balint groups help mental health clinicians manage difficulties in clinical work, and provides space for self-introspection to aid personal and professional growth

Challenges of Balint groups & recommendations

- Lack of psychological safety can negate benefits of Balint groups, although comparison was with an existing closed group supervision; methods to ameliorate this include maintaining consistent groupings, and having smaller group sizes of 6-8 people
- Rigid structure and lack of two-way conversation may be due to experiencing sessions on an e-platform
- Participants' need for a solutions-based approach highlights the challenge of conducting a group that provides the space for psychodynamic exploration, while remaining relevant to clinicians' needs
- Employing a fusion of approaches can be highly effective in group processes, improving teamwork and communication