



Establishing and evaluating a Balint group for 4th year medical students at an Irish University

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Objective

To establish and evaluate the impact of a 6-week Balint group on empathy and resilience in 4th year medical students during their psychiatry rotation.

Methodology

This prospective study used the Jefferson Scale of Empathy – Student Version and the Brief Resilience Scale before and after 6-week Balint groups. Participating students also completed a qualitative assessment of their experience. This was a single-site study. The study was conducted from February 2017 until April 2018 at Blanchardstown Hospital, Dublin. Eligible students were fourth-year medical students undertaking their 6-week psychiatry rotation at this hospital. A total of 50 students were eligible, 28 opted-in to the study.

Results

Students who participated were enthusiastic regarding the value of Balint groups in promoting self-reflection and gaining insight into self- and patient-care dynamics. There was a significant difference in empathy scores pre- and post-Balint intervention. There was no significant difference in resilience scores. Results from the JSE S-Version showed a significant improvement in mean empathy score of 116 in the post-Balint group compared to 109 in the pre-Balint group ($p < 0.0001$) out of a potential score of 140, with a mean change in score of -7.79 .

Conclusion

The establishment of a 6-week Balint group for 4th year medical students was successful in increasing empathy. Students were enthusiastic regarding the value of Balint groups in promoting self-reflection and gaining insight into self- and patient-care dynamics.

