



Emotional security, compliance and mutuality in the GP consulting room: some psychological and cultural considerations

This workshop will explore difficulties in communication between patients and their doctors arising from the vicissitudes of professional relationships and ‘cultural’ misunderstandings. Attachment theory (hitherto unexplored in primary care) suggests that different behaviours can be understood by reference to attachment patterns and that professional functioning can be enhanced if practices are considered as ‘secure bases’ for doctors as well as patients. Different attachment styles might considerably affect patient care. A Balint group can become a ‘secure base’ for doctors to develop their individual skills for working with a wide variety of different patients.

Doctors are often surprised by the poor compliance of their patients. They are faced with the paradox that patients consult out of free choice but often do not follow the doctor’s advice. Conversely, how relevant is the doctor’s advice from the patient’s point of view? A framework for understanding such divergencies and the dynamics of poor compliance will be provided.

Gifts in GP practice also highlight the cultural and psychological complexities of the GP consulting room. A special study of the main purposes of gifts was done by a GP Balint group. We found a wide range: from belittling to true expressions of gratitude and esteem. Undetected “poisoned” gifts have a particular power to affect the GP’s mental state and thus can be a precipitating factor for burn-out.

Theories and methods: Attachment theory, narrative research using the Balint group as an investigative tool; Balint group work

H Jablonski: psychiatrist, Stockholm: Introduction. Cultural and psychological problems in the GP consulting room

A Elder, London: Patterns of attachment in primary care: the GP practice as a “secure base”

M-A Puel, Paris: Understanding poor compliance

H Jablonski: The GP, her patients and the gifts



Empowering patients' transformations - an exploration with and through the Balint method

Aims: Primary care patients often present with problems that although medically expressed have their roots in behaviors and psychological constructs that prevent patients from achieving healthy lives. In these situations the usual pharmaceutical and reassurance tools available to primary care clinicians often fail. Balint groups have traditionally been used to help clinicians reframe their understanding of patients and their relationships with patients. Often clinicians report that this reframing is transforming for the relationship and empowering for patients. This workshop will examine the nature of this phenomenon.

Methods: Workshop leaders will give a brief overview of the Balint method and theories of transformation and empowerment. Following this the participants will be divided into small groups which will use the Balint method to explore participants' own experiences of transformative patient encounters. Finally, a large group discussion will explore the findings emergent from the Balint groups.

Results: Participants will be able to discuss the Balint method and theories of transformation and empowerment. Participants will gain an understanding of how patient encounters can be transformative and empowering for patients.

Conclusions: Understanding the process of how patients are empowered and their lives impacted through primary care clinicians' facilitation during visits is a critical yet little understood or taught skill. Participants will leave with a better understanding of the process and how to gain more skills.

Introduction and moderator:

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