

Proposed Abstract – International Balint Conference, Aarhus

Title:

Aging, Continuity, and Letting Go: Personal and Professional Transitions in Balint Leadership

Summary:

As Balint work increasingly spans entire professional lifetimes, a growing number of leaders and supervisors remain actively engaged well beyond retirement. While the Balint literature has addressed mentorship and succession, less attention has been given to the lived, subjective experience of aging within Balint leadership. This workshop brings together senior Balint leaders to explore aging not only as a professional transition but as a deeply personal and relational process.

Background and context:

Drawing on reflective narratives and clinical experience, including the existential perspective articulated through Carl Gustav Jung's reflections on later life and Erik Erikson's concept of integrity versus despair, we will examine how aging reshapes our relationship to time, authority, relevance, and attachment within the Balint community. Aging introduces both enrichment—wisdom, patience, emotional depth—and challenges, including physical limitations, cognitive changes, and shifting identity. It also evokes questions of continuity, loss, and the difficulty of "passing the baton."

Aim:

The workshop will explore how Balint cases increasingly mirror the leader's own life stage—encounters with illness, loss, family transitions, and finitude—while also reflecting broader global uncertainties such as war, pandemics, and social upheaval. Participants will be invited to consider how these parallel processes influence group leadership, supervision, and the capacity to remain open, curious, and ethically grounded.

Method:

Using a dialogical format, a panel of experienced Balint leaders will share personal reflections to stimulate further in-depth discussion in small groups. Together, we will explore themes of attachment to the Balint community, motivations for continued engagement, and the absence of structured "off-ramps" for transition. The workshop aims to create a reflective space that integrates personal aging with professional identity, fostering a nuanced understanding of how to sustain involvement while also allowing for transformation, continuity, and eventual letting go.

Format: 120 minutes, combining brief reflective presentations and facilitated small-group dialogue.

Presenters:

Mary Wassink (Chair), Andrew Elder, Penny Elder, André Matalon