

Heide Otten, Günther Bergmann, Donald E. Nease, Jr. (Eds.)
The Student, the Patient and the Illness

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Ascona Balint Award Essays 2017

With contributions by Katrina Bell,
Yohay Bloom, Kirsten Carlaw, Gaylan Dascanio,
Ashabilan Ebrahim, Andrea Gipperich,
Elizabeth Hamilton, George Huntington,
Jessica Ly, Eleesheva Mayo, Michal Rotem-Green,
Rebecca M. Shulman, Dominik Stosik,
Georges Tinawi, Nuphar Vinegrad, Michael Watson,
Kirsty Whitmore, Sarah Woolgar and Cecilia Xu

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info@psychosozial-verlag.de
www.psychosozial-verlag.de

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Illustrations by Birgit Heimbach © 2017 Birgit Heimbach, Hamburg
birgit.heimbach@hamburg.de
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Introduction

Beginning in 1968 general practitioners, clinic doctors, university staff and medical students met for International Seminars at the historical “Monte Verità” (the mountain of truth) in Ascona/Switzerland.

Ascona and the Monte Verità have been since the mid-nineteenth century at the same time both meeting places and metaphors for social commitment and critical developments of personality.

It was Boris Luban-Plozza (1923–2002) – a family doctor in the Centro Vally –, who in 1968 started the Balint meetings in Ascona. He was the inaugurator of the “Ascona-Model”, which had an influence on the young generation of doctors and students and is well known in Europe.

The “Ascona-Model” supported the principles of a relationship oriented education in medical training. It was a teaching and a learning model for students and it demonstrated how to understand the doctor-patient relationship in an empathic narrative- and process-based mode and as well providing a frame for understanding evidence based medicine.

Discussions were held in an international framework about positive developments such as how to impact deficits in education and continuing training in medicine concerning the doctor-patient relationship, also about the possibilities and opportunities of Balint work. Medical students, doctors, psychologists, and teachers of many disciplines were involved in the exchange of ideas. They discussed “pros and cons” of bio-medical and bio-psycho-social medicine, brought together in a holistic model.

The Ascona Balint Award for students of medicine is part of this concept. The Award was founded in 1976 in honor of Michael Balint (1896–1970). It has been offered regularly since then for medical students at national and international levels. The Award was given to medical students every year at the Ascona meeting with one exception: at Balint’s 100th birthday in 1996 the Conference and Ceremony was held in Budapest, the city, where Michael Balint was born.

In 1995 a sponsor donated money towards the Ascona Model and the “Fondazione Medicina Psicosomatica e Sociale – Stiftung Psychosomatik und

Sozialmedizin" (Foundation Psychosomatic and Social Medicine) was founded and supports the Ascona Award for students since then. The Board members of the Foundation work to further its goals.

After Boris Luban-Plozza's passing in 2002 the Foundation and the International Balint Federation (IBF) decided to continue the Ascona Award as partners. It was evident that this fit well with the goals of the IBF. A fruitful cooperation began. In 2003 we invited the prize winners for the first time to the International Balint Congress held in Berlin. The students presented their papers and took part in the congress events. Since that time the Award has been offered every two years, and presented to the winners at the bi-annual International Balint Congress.

The Foundation for Psychosomatic and Social Medicine and the International Balint Federation now continue to hold the Balint-Award-Ascona competition for essays by students in which they report and reflect on their personal experience of encounters and relationship with patients. Sometimes these encounters date from the very beginning of their medical studies. They are asked to include a detailed description of their meetings with the patient. This is to be followed by a theoretical analysis and a personal reflection on what it meant for the writer. Some students have also included the presentation of their work in Balint groups, in which they discuss the student-patient relationship with their peers.

The papers of the students from all over the world are extraordinary essays and illustrations of their progress in becoming a "good enough doctor" (D. W. Winnicott: "the good enough mother").

The student papers written for this Award over a period of 41 years – and not only those of the prize winners – are a unique collection of experiences with medical education and the healthcare systems all over the world.

In his lecture at the last Balint Award Ceremony June 15th, 2002 in Ascona (B.J. 2003, vol. 4, 19–20) Arthur Trenkel, the President of the Jury at that time, summarized what was important for him and his co-jurors:

"In an overall view the papers reflect a kind of painting of the spirit of the age from the students' perspective. This year a strong accent seems to lie on the critical view of the increasingly common exploitation of human beings caused by a reduction to simple roles or functions. In the hospitals especially the patients and doctors are affected by this collusion of anonymity. The students while practicing in the hospital stay so to say 'between the chairs' which grant them welcome opportunities for independent perceptions on another level."

In 2017 we received 50 papers altogether from Australia, Austria, Germany, Israel, Kenia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Poland, Ruanda, Serbia, Tanzania, UK and USA. 37 essays were written by female and 13 by male students. All papers were presented in English.

Learning from experience means to meet patients early in the students' career. Medical Schools all over the world have different programs to offer, wherein the students may follow patients with chronic illnesses for some time, or they have to make home visits to get acquainted with the living circumstances, the social environment and the support patients can get. In the clinics students take the history of patients and get well aware of the difference between theory and practice. Some students applied for an internship in a foreign country and described their impressive experiences.

Student Balint work is offered in some countries, where students exchange experiences, reflections, emotions with their peers. In the UK they invented the so called "Psychotherapeutic Scheme", where students practice Psychotherapy with a patient for one year under supervision and with participation in Balintgroups.

Prize competitions such as the Balint Award, should not be seen as a rivalry to the official programs of universities, but as a complement to problem oriented learning and an impulse to reflect about own emotions involved in professional relationships. The use of small group methods is invented and called attention to.

The reader of these essays will be able to appreciate, how a relationship between a student and a patient is established. It can happen on a ward, in an outpatient clinic, in a patient's home or in a surgery, or even during an internship in a foreign country.

Physician readers will remember how formative the encounter with their first patients was for their own development.

The Foundation

The Foundation moved from Ascona/Tessin (CH) to Liestal/Basel (CH) in the German-speaking part of Switzerland with the help of Rudolf Syz, a good friend of Boris Luban-Plozza, and became a central registration in the capital city of Bern (CH) as International Foundation. It has an advisory board consisting of 7–9 members.

The promotion of the International Balint Student Award with 5,000 CHF is still in the foreground and is its central concern.

Since the cooperation with the International Balint Federation (IBF) in 2003, the first 3 winners have presented their work every 2 years on the occasion of the International Balint Conference. This book is based on the competition 2017 and the three winners presented their work on the occasion of the 20th International Balint Conference in Oxford.

The submitted works will be evaluated by an international jury. Approximately 16–20 experienced Balint group leaders and -instructors from all continents carry out a systematic evaluation, taking into account the submitted text and its objective on the basis of defined criteria.

This book, *The Student, the Patient and the Illness*, presents the three winners of the award and their work. Essays that have been very well evaluated are also presented in this book. The dedicated applicants should also be supported in their personal professional development by the publication of their essays in this book. It also serves to inform the members of the Balint societies around the world and to support the distribution of those essays in the medical area.

Call for Donations

Particularly in times of low interest rates, we appreciate your support of the Foundation. By purchasing the book, you support this. Further donations, also in sustainable form, are very welcome. Donations can be transferred to the account:

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Heide Otten, Vice-president of the Foundation Psychosomatic and Social Medicine
Günther Bergmann, President of the Foundation Psychosomatic and Social Medicine
Donald Nease, President of the International Balint Federation (IBF)

The Winners of the Ascona Prize 2017

1. Elizabeth Hamilton, Australia
2. Nuphar Vinegrad, Israel
3. Michael Watson, USA

They present their essays at the International Balint Congress in Oxford/UK, September 2017.



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**Presentation
of the Winners**




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•

•
London

**International Balint Congress
6.-10. September 2017**



The International
Balint Federation