



# Providing Safe Spaces for Providers that promote connection, empathy and wellbeing

Robbie Sherman MD

Medical Director for the Patient Experience and Physician Development

The Polyclinic

# Loss of Meaning



"YES, I OWN THE WORLD, BUT IS IT MEANINGFUL?"

# Impoverished Relationships



"THE EARACHE IS IN ROOM NUMBER ONE, DOCTOR."

# Increasing Conflict

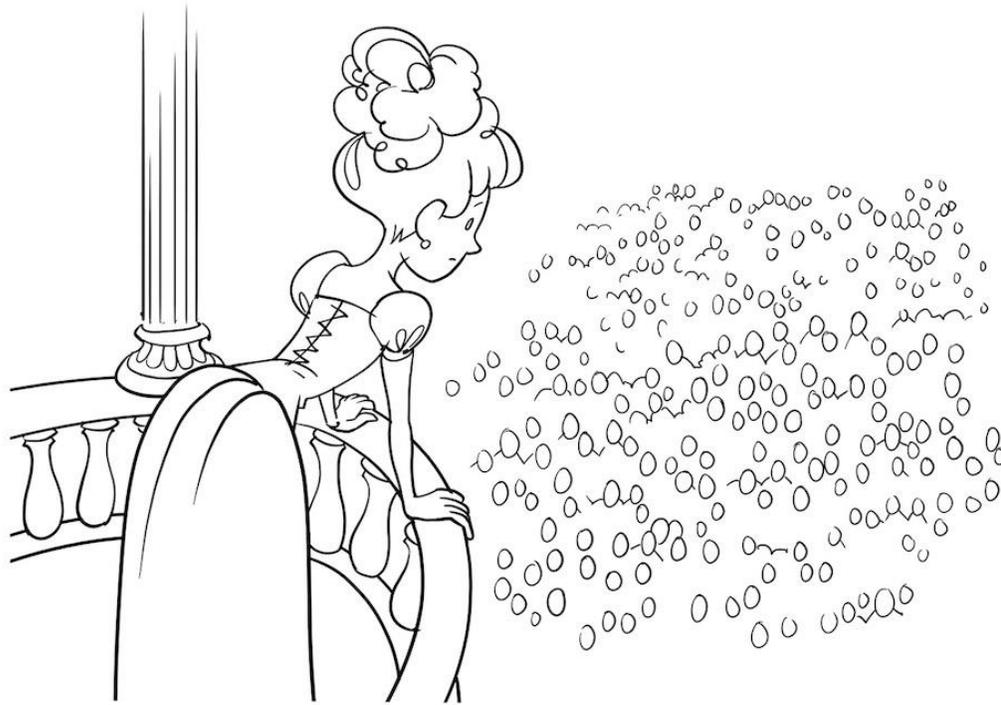


# Demoralization



"I KNOW JUST WHAT WILL MAKE YOU HAPPY."

# Emotional Distancing



"MAYBE THEY DON'T LIKE CAKE..."

# Exhaustion



"MY EVERYTHING IS TIRED."

# Reset



# Balint Groups



"SO I THOUGHT... I'LL TAKE IT TO MY  
BALINT GROUP."



Balint Groups are case based discussion groups for physicians, mental health providers, nurses, chaplains, social workers and others.

The topic of discussion is the relationship.

The emotional content of the case is central rather than the serum sodium or clinical facts.



“At the center of  
medicine there is  
always a human  
relationship  
between a patient  
and a doctor.”

-Michael Balint



# Michael Balint

- Born in 1896 in Budapest, son of a GP
- Psychoanalytic training in Berlin and Budapest, emigrated to London, worked at the Tavistock Clinic
- He and his wife, Enid, began the training/research seminars for GPs after WW II
- 1957 “The Doctor, his Patient and the Illness” published



# What a Balint Group is Not

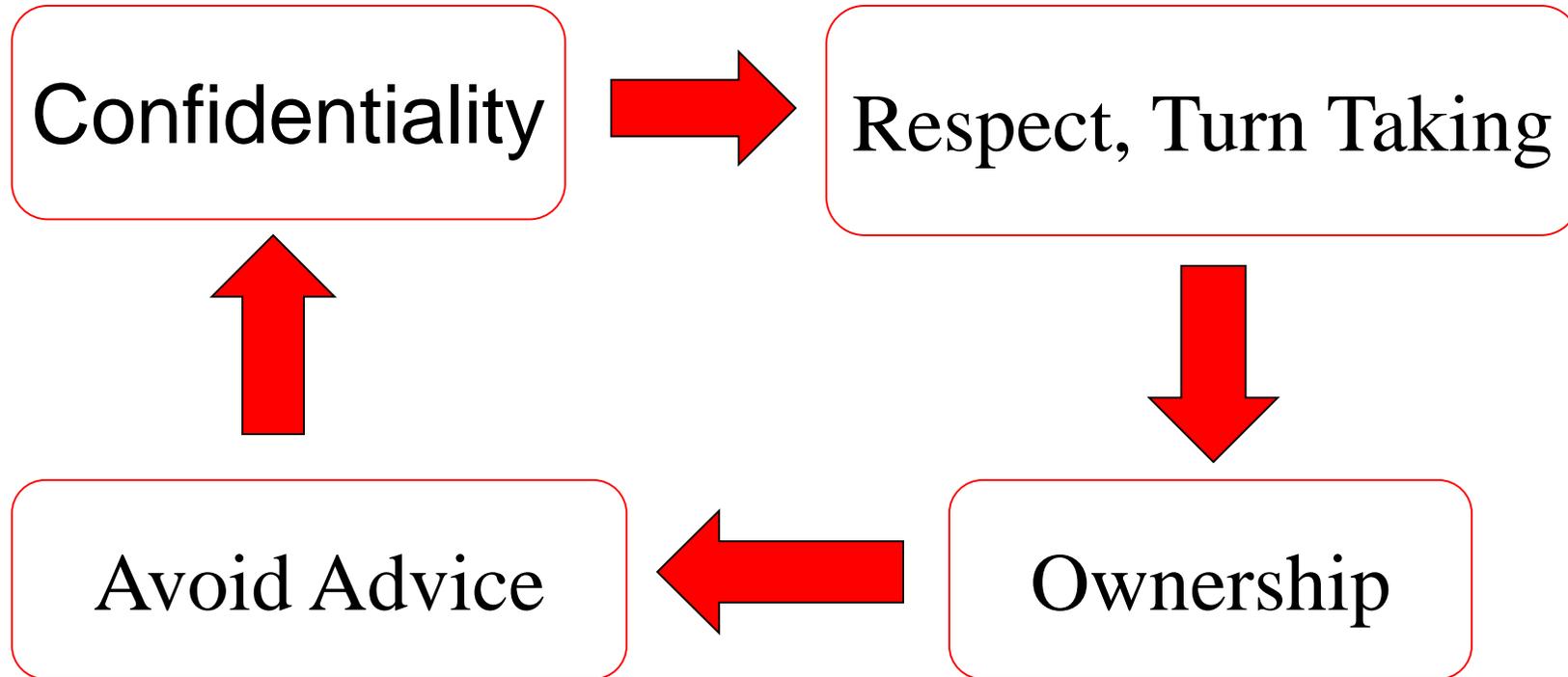
- Psychotherapy Group
- Encounter Group
- Traditional Case Consultation Group
- Topic Discussion Group
- Personal and Professional Development Group
- Not prescriptive, didactic, advice giving



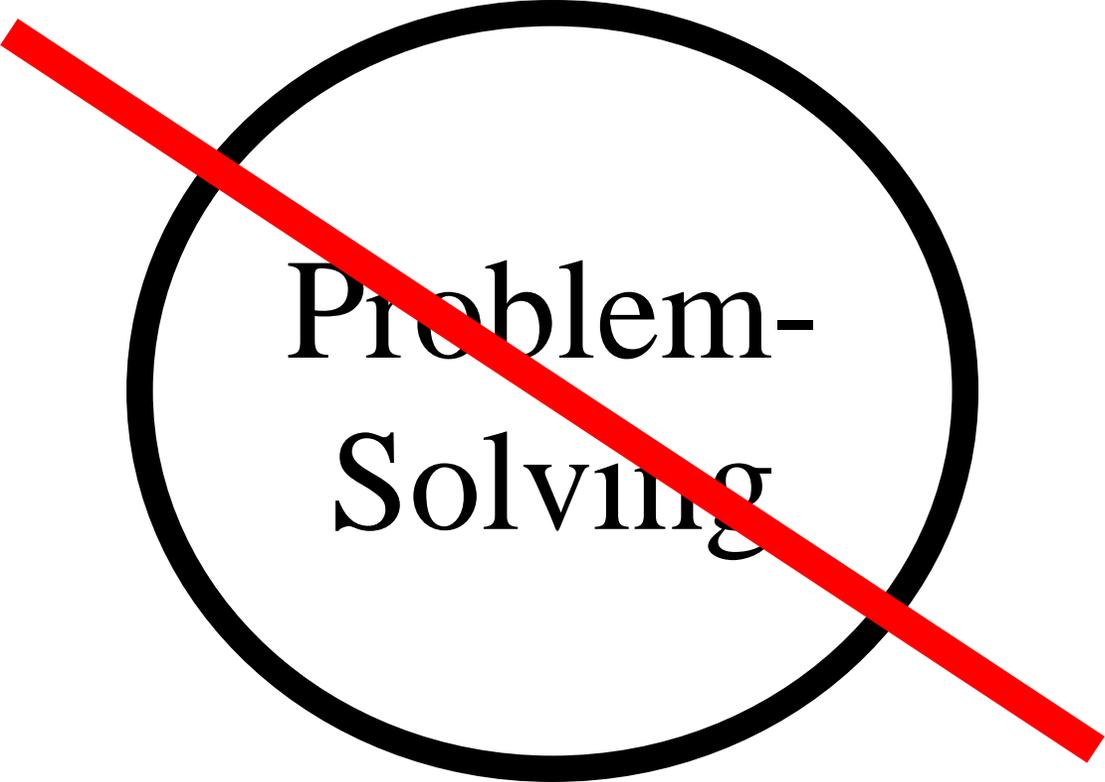
# Characteristics of a Balint Group

- Ideally fixed membership
- Two leaders
- Focus on doctor-patient relationship
- Power of the group
- Preference for an ongoing case
- Less conscious aspects of relationship

# Ground Rules



The Group's Job: Imagine Alternative Viewpoints

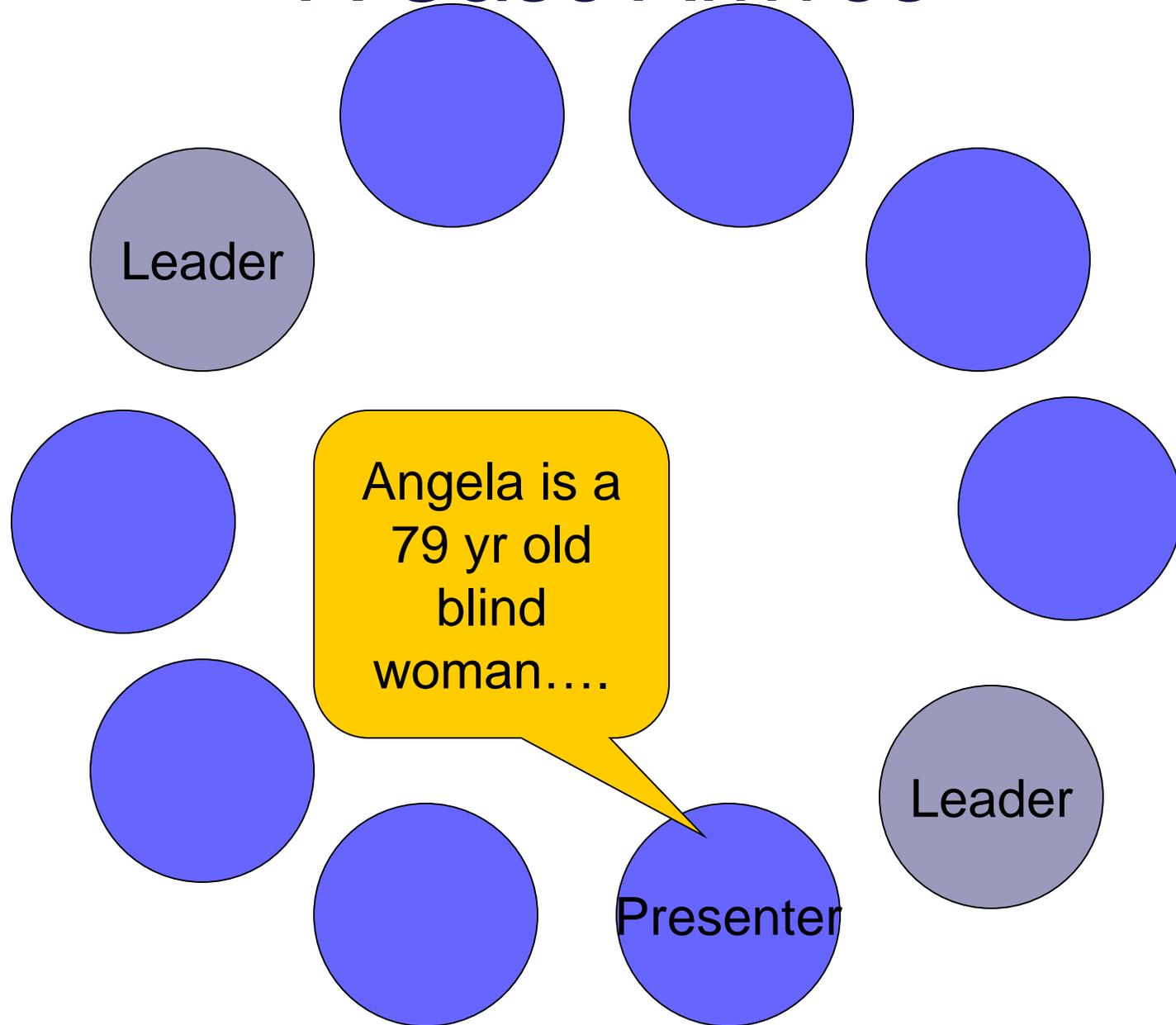


Problem-  
Solving

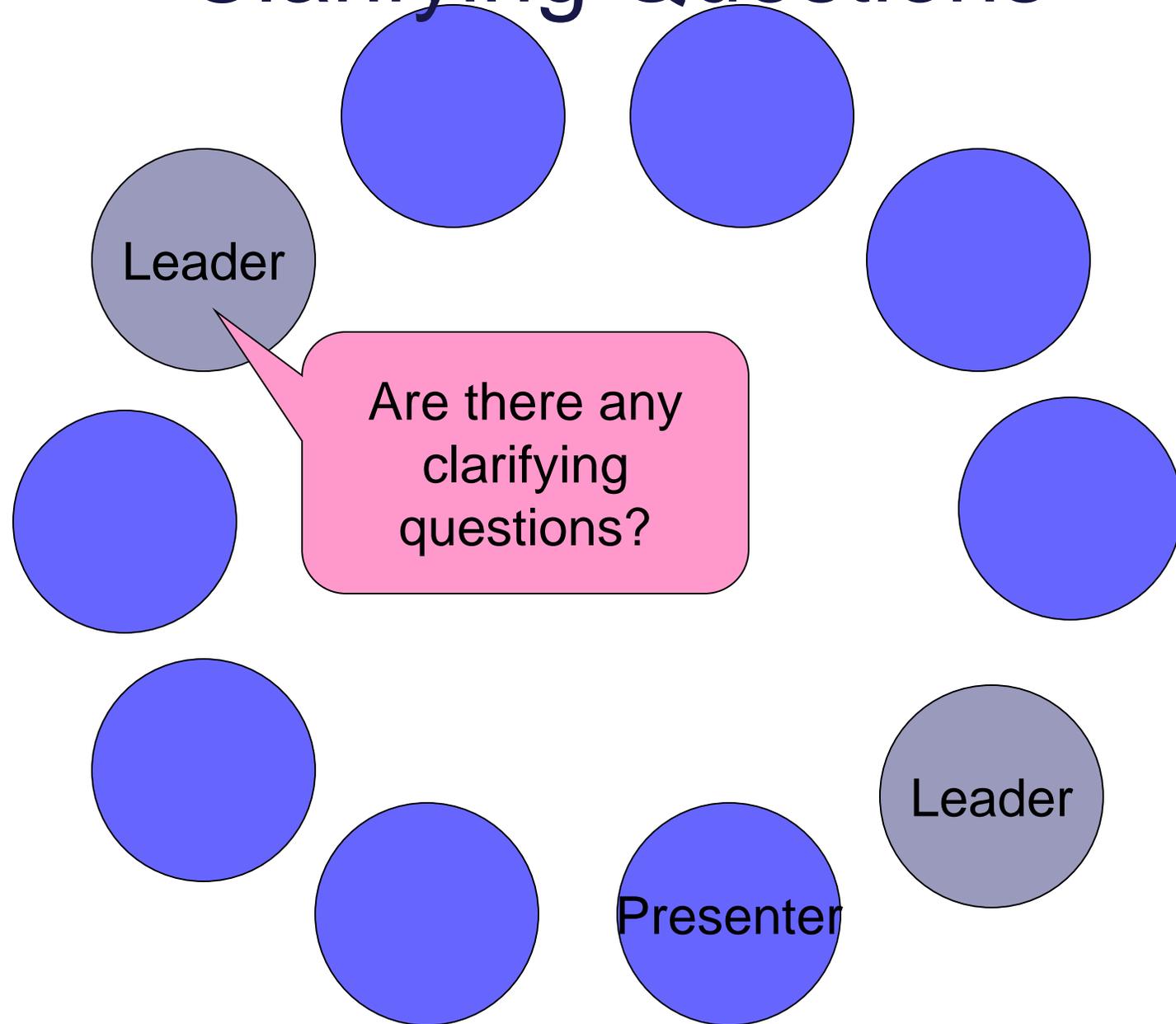
# Cases

- ❑ Presentations are spontaneous
- ❑ Patients we have ongoing relationships with
- ❑ Patients who we feel conflicted or strongly about
- ❑ Patients that leave us feeling unfinished, who we lose sleep over
- ❑ Patients that bubble up in the moment

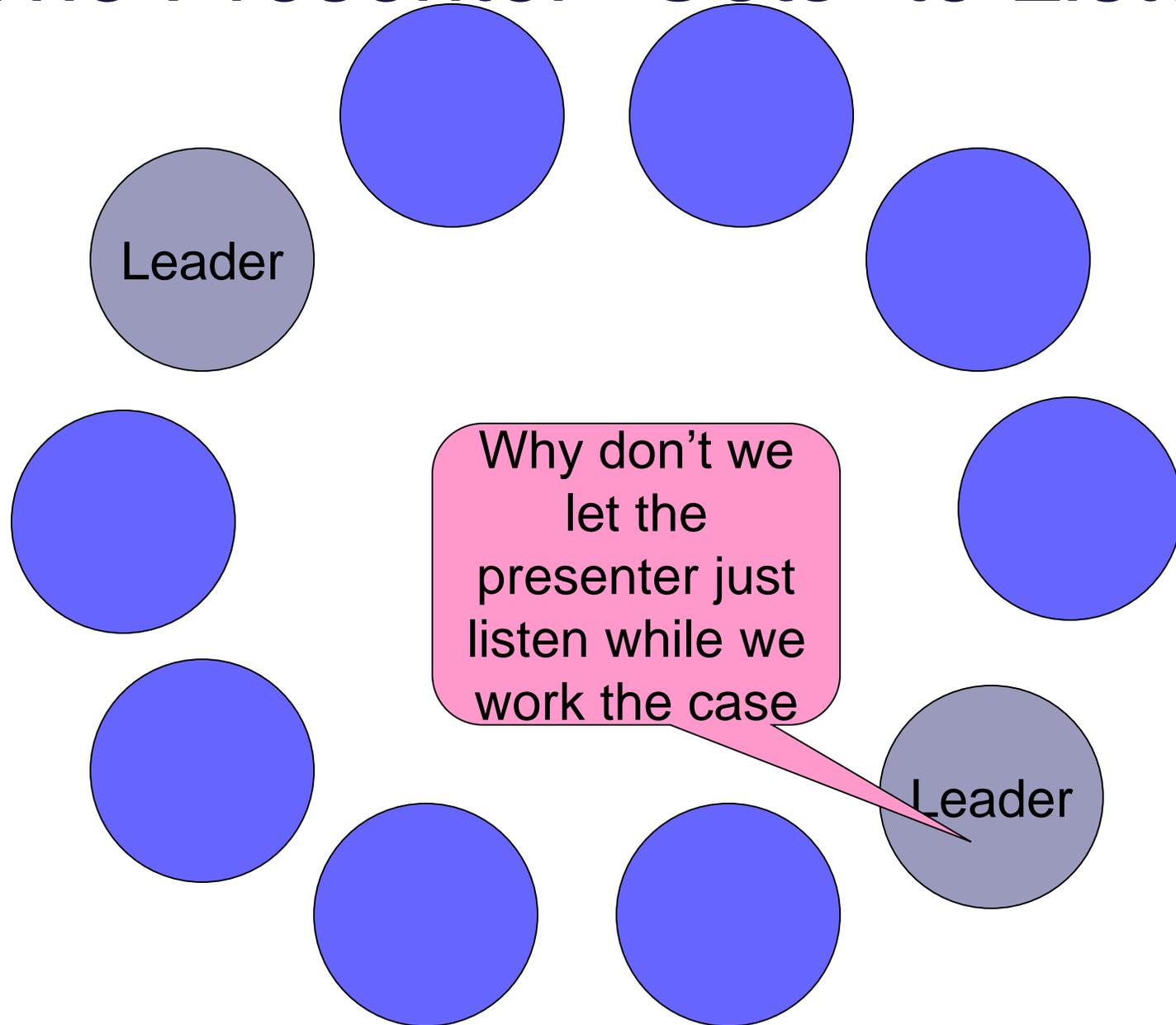
# A Case Arrives



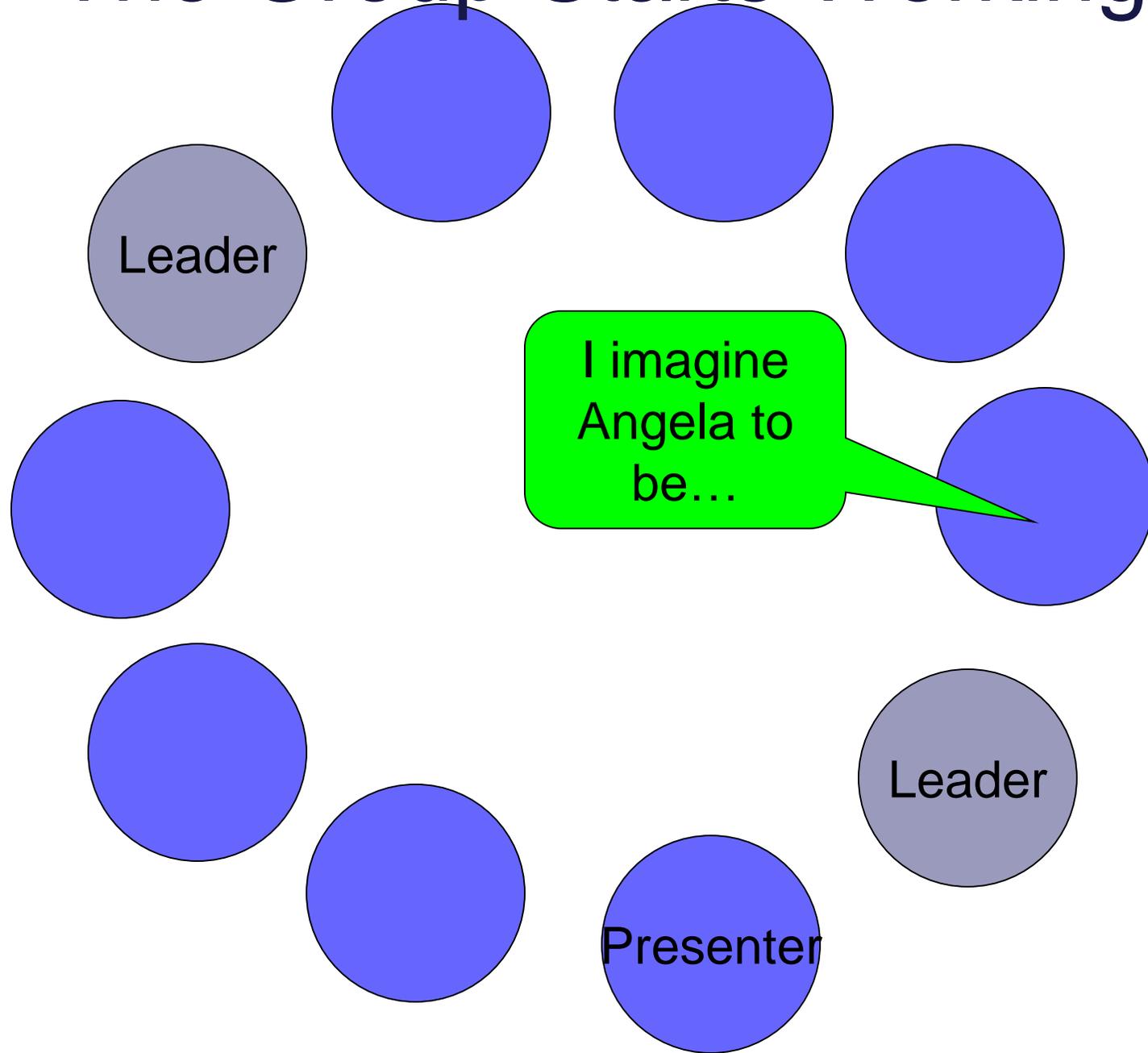
# Clarifying Questions



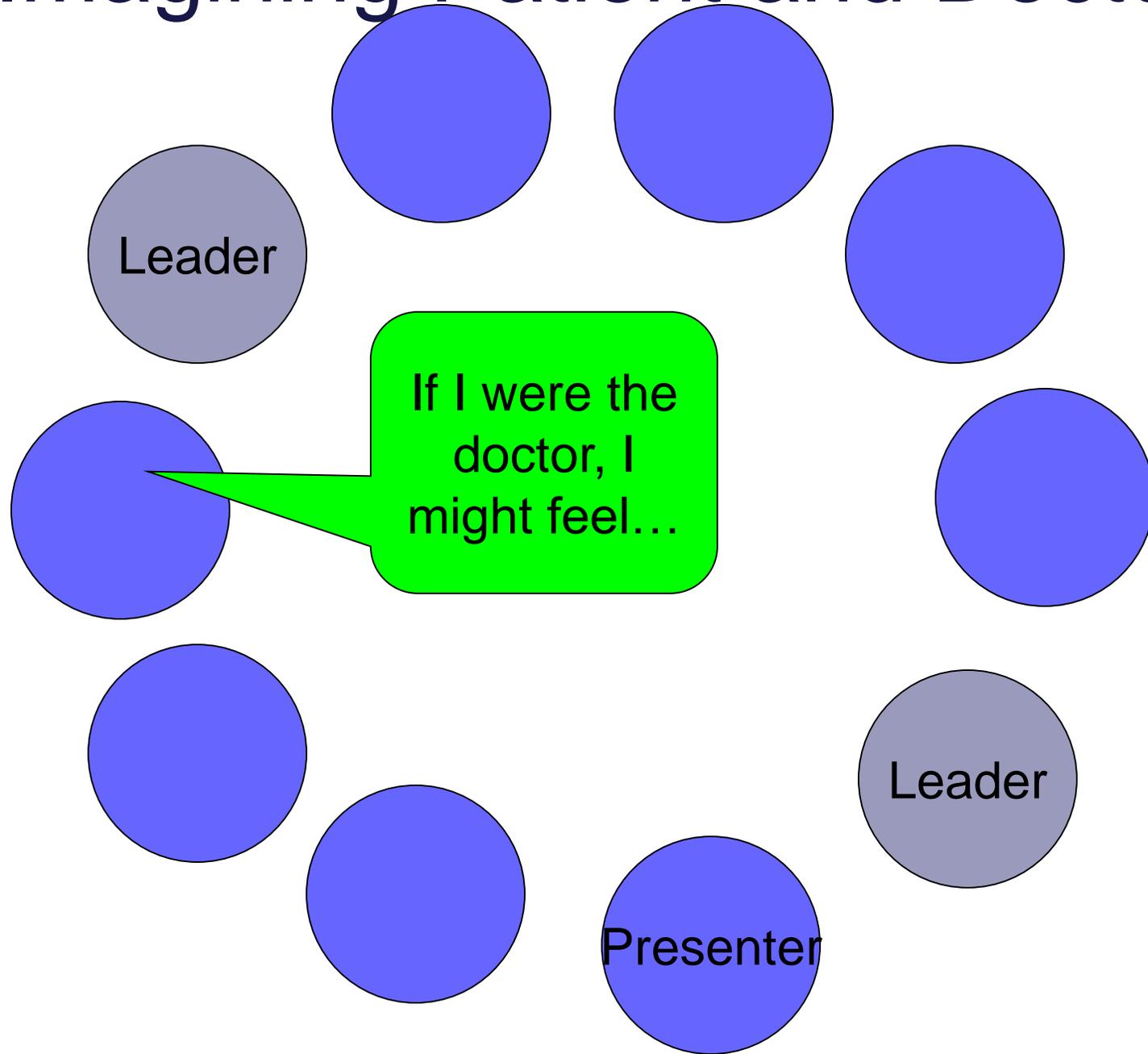
# The Presenter “Gets” to Listen



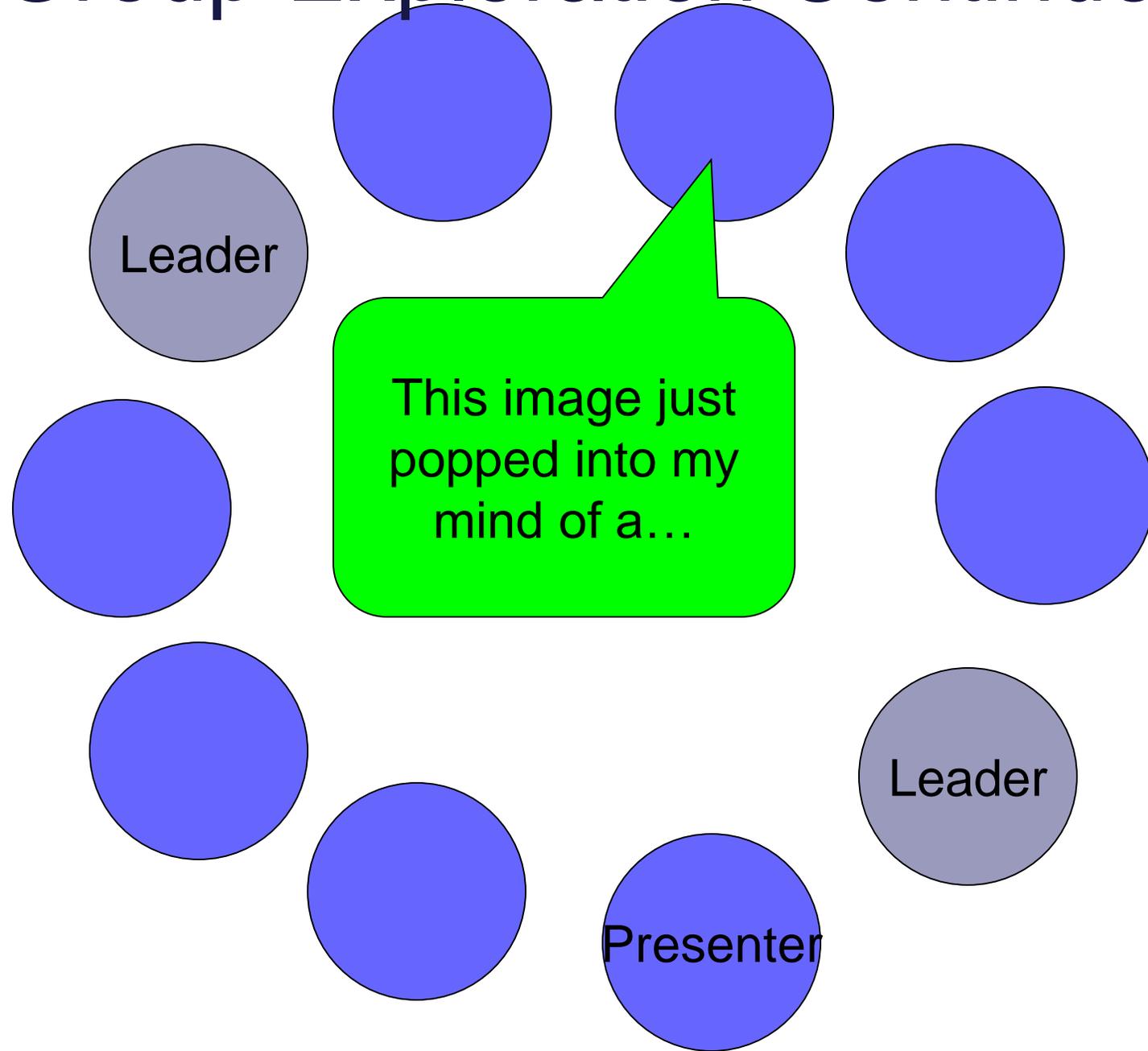
# The Group Starts Working



# Imagining Patient and Doctor



# Group Exploration Continues





# Functions of a Balint Group

- To provide a safe place for emotional reflection on troubling cases
- To help presenter consider other understandings about the case
- To look at blind spots, assumptions
- To help members feel less isolated, less shame, more open to learn
- To help members grow and develop



# Benefits for Physicians

- Explore difficult or troubling situations
- Refine crucially important patient-doctor relationship skills
- Hear and learn from others' cases
- Connect with others
- Experience the power of a group
- Remember what matters about our work
- Avoid burnout, increase engagement and resilience

# Resilience



# Cultural Competence



# Remoralization





# Find Out More About Balint Groups

- The American Balint Society offers training and experiences nationally [www.americanbalintsociety.org](http://www.americanbalintsociety.org)
- The Northwest Balint Circle is an association of local medical and mental health professionals with Balint training. They offer presentations, demonstrations and ongoing groups. <http://northwestbalintcircle.org/>