

In the community of shared experience, with sensitive and strong facilitation, we learn to support and trust each other. Cases with “risky” content, such as doubt about our medical knowledge, difficulty setting limits, or negative feelings toward patients, become normalized and safe to share and thus better understood. In this community, we heal ourselves while we practice the art of healing others. We believe that Balint groups provide a forum for the kind of professional development that leads to spontaneous personalization of care. We hope to share our enthusiasm and support for initiating this process with all interested colleagues.

If you’re interested in starting a Balint group, please contact Laura Morgan at [laura.morgan@kp.org](mailto:laura.morgan@kp.org). ❖

#### References

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4. The American Balint Society [homepage on the Internet]. The American Balint Society; [updated 2005 May 5; cited 2005 May 19]. Available from: <http://familymed.musc.edu/balint/mission.html>.

## Finding Meaning in Medicine

By Laura Morgan, MD

Since January of 2004, an extraordinary series of physician gatherings has been taking place at our homes each month. Most participants are from the Kaiser Permanente (KP) Oakland Medicine Department, but the group has grown to include physicians from the Oakland community and other KP facilities as well.

After a reasonably priced, catered dinner and homemade dessert (there’s stiff competition for best baked goods between two of us), we settle down to discuss the night’s “theme.” We follow a format created by Rachel Remen, MD, author of *Kitchen Table Wisdom*.

We contribute writings, drawings, songs, photos, objects or a group exercise that expresses our “take”

on a specific topic as it relates to our practice of medicine. This week, the theme is “silence.” Last month it was “listening.” In prior months, the themes have ranged from “celebration” to “loss.”

Through these gatherings, original writings have emerged, such as Roger Baxter’s haikus, which appeared in *The Permanente Journal* in the Summer 2004 issue. Stories of our experiences with patients easily fit a “narrative medicine” description. If shy or unprepared, group members may simply contribute their attention to their peers.

Distinct from the case-based colleague groups discussed above, “Meaning in Medicine” dinners are purely for clinician renewal. Most

of us practice in busy isolation, take care of everyone but ourselves, and have little time for reflection. These gatherings have created community, self-awareness, and a base of support for needed change in our professional and personal lives (not to mention hilarity and occasional rowdiness!).

Initiation and logistics are not difficult but require either one consistent host(ess) or an agreement to rotate homes. A simple e-mail to your facility or department can identify interested colleagues.

For further information, you may contact me or better yet, see “MeaninginMedicine.org,” or Rachel Remen’s Web site: [www.rachelremen.com](http://www.rachelremen.com). ❖