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Introduction

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The Student,
the Patient
and the Illness

Ascona Balint
Award Essays
2026



Psychosozial-Verlag

Ascona Balint Award

2026, Seite 9–10

DOI: 10.30820/9783837964745-9

Psychosozial-Verlag



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Bibliographic information of the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
(German National Library)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available at
<http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Original edition

2026 Psychosozial-Verlag GmbH & Co. KG
Walltorstraße 10, 35390 Gießen, Germany
00 49 6 41 96 99 78 0
info@psychosozial-verlag.de
www.psychosozial-verlag.de

Print and binding: Druckhaus Bechstein GmbH,
Willy-Bechstein-Straße 4, 35576 Wetzlar, Deutschland
Printed in Germany

ISBN 978-3-8379-8590-0 (Print)
ISBN 978-3-8379-6474-5 (E-Book-PDF)
ISSN 3056-2309 (Print)
ISSN 3056-2317 (Digital)

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Ascona Balint Award Essays • 2026, 9–10
<https://doi.org/10.30820/9783837964745-9>
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<https://psychosozial-verlag.de/aba>



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Dear reader,

it is with pleasure that we present the most outstanding essays from the 2026 Ascona Student Prize competition, including the top three prize winners, which are the first three in the book.

This year we had a total of 56 student entries from 9 different countries, representing approximately 30 medical schools. This greatly exceeded the number of entries from the previous several competitions, and we hope reflects students' renewed spirit of interest in the relational aspects of medical practice.

As medicine itself continues to progress and adopt more technologies including most notably Artificial Intelligence in routine practice, the relational aspects of care take on ever more importance, and this is mirrored in the essays presented here.

Similarly, the impacts of violence from war, climate and relational disruptions are also a theme which is reflected in many of the essays.

As such the students' depictions and reflections offer a unique perspective on not just the medical, but also the current social, climate and political state of our planet.

The voices contained within these essays are to be treasured.

The prizes will be awarded to the three winners at the 24th International Balint Congress in Aarhus, Denmark, in October 2026. The three students are invited to participate in the Congress, take part in the Balint group work and will present their papers there.

You will find the three essays of the winners in Part I of this book. In Part II we present 9 more excellent essays from different countries, which had high rankings.

An international group of reviewers ($n = 22$) consisting of experienced Balint Group Leaders from different National Balint Societies performed the

initial evaluation and rating of the student papers, by using a scale of defined criteria according to the announcement of the Award.

Subsequently, a jury of representatives from the International Foundation Psychosomatic and Social Medicine and the International Balint Federation selected the three award winners.

Thanks to all who participated in the reviews and award selections. This was a valuable and competent work reading and rating the student essays, a model for our international partnership.

The Ascona Prize is awarded by the International Foundation Psychosomatic and Social Medicine, based in Basel (Switzerland) in cooperation with the International Balint Federation (IBF).

It is an important goal of both institutions to focus and improve the student/doctor-patient-relationship. To start early in the training with taking the “Doctor as a Drug” into account is important. As we can see and feel through the essays in early years it is a profound need to understand more about the patients and oneself and about the impact of one’s own attitudes and beliefs. This is the case worldwide.

The Foundation and the IBF are pleased to have brought this work together again to an impressive result – the number of works received, the commitment of the students, the impressive encounters and relationships that are presented are evidence of the worthwhile outcomes of the effort to design and offer this prize again and again.

This volume also serves to set a stimulus among the students in and through the National Balint Societies. We are happy to offer them to all Universities. This book will also be presented in Free Open Access.

The next Ascona Prize will be awarded in 2028. More information will be given on our websites: www.foundation-ps.com and www.balintinternational.com

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