

Impostor Syndrome

You Are (NOT) a Fraud

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I have no actual or potential conflicts of interest in relation to this presentation.

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Learning Objectives

1. Define impostor syndrome.
2. Discuss the effects of impostor syndrome.
3. Review strategies to mitigate impostor feelings.



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REFLECT

How did you feel?





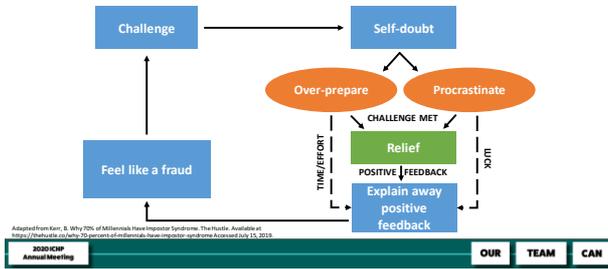
What is impostor syndrome?¹

- First described by psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes in the late 1970s
- Feeling of fraudulence experienced by successful individuals
- Struggle to internalize successes

What is impostor syndrome?¹

- Persistent belief in their lack of intelligence, skills, or competence
- Convinced that praise and recognition is undeserved
- Consider their achievements insignificant
- Attribute success to external factors
- Live in fear of being found out

Impostor Cycle²



Which of the following is a characteristic of someone with impostor syndrome?

- A. Can accept and internalize praise and success
- B. Is usually unsuccessful
- C. Attributes success to external factors such as luck or chance
- D. Overestimates their knowledge and skills

Never Good Enough¹

“Although people with impostor syndrome are often high achievers, they measure their competence not by their achievements but by an internal set of standards which are never perceived to be met.”
 - Chandra *et al*, 2019

The Perfectionist³

"If I were really competent, my performance would be perfect all the time."

- Anything less than perfect is a failure.
- In pursuit of perfection, overprepare and overwork
- Success is rarely satisfying because they can always see how it could have been done better.



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The Natural Genius³

"If I were really competent, success would be effortless."



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- Believes intelligence and skills are innate
- True competence is having inherent intelligence and skills
 - Expect to know without being taught
 - Get it right on the first try
- Culture values talent over effort.

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The Expert³

"If I were really competent, I would know everything there is to know."

- Competence is based on how much knowledge or skill they possess
- Uncomfortable with being considered an expert
- Might avoid speaking up for fear of being wrong



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The Soloist³

"If I were really competent, I could do everything by myself."



- The only achievements that count are those that were achieved on their own.
- Asking for help is a sign of failure
- Struggles to delegate

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Superwoman/man³

"If I were really competent, I would be able to do it all."

- Competence is being able to juggle multiple roles perfectly.
- When they drop the ball, they are extremely hard on themselves.
- Even if they do keep up, they always think they should be doing more.



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Who is susceptible?¹

- Affects both men and women across cultures, occupations, ranks, and levels of success
 - Trainees, faculty, leadership
- Does not always decrease with time, more experience, or more success



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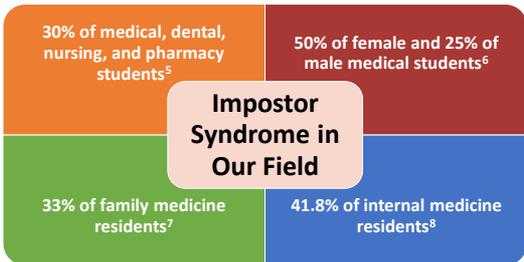
What percentage of people have reported experiencing impostor feelings at some point in their life?⁴

- A. 100%
- B. 70%
- C. 50%
- D. 25%



We Are Particularly Susceptible¹

- Competitive admissions process**
 - Process selects high achievers
- Surrounded by other high achievers**
 - Normalizes our achievements as "typical"
- Constant new challenges**
 - Often pushed out of our comfort zone
 - Heightens self-doubt





Impact of Impostor Syndrome

- Strongly associated with psychological distress⁵
 - Depression and anxiety
- Associated with burnout⁶
 - Emotional exhaustion
 - Cynicism
 - Depersonalization
 - Reduced sense of personal accomplishment



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Adaptive Behaviors³

- Overprepare
- Hold back
- Maintain a low or ever-changing profile
- Use charm
- Procrastinate
- Never finish
- Self-sabotage

You mentor a PGY1 resident who you suspect has impostor syndrome. It is nearing the end of the residency year and she has not started a job search.

Which of the following adaptive behaviors of impostor syndrome is she demonstrating?

- A. Procrastination
- B. Overpreparation
- C. Maintaining a low profile
- D. Use of charm

Helping Yourself

Combating Impostor Feelings in Ourselves

Combating Impostor Syndrome

To stop feeling like an impostor,
you have to stop thinking like an impostor.

Break the Silence⁹

- Many suffer in silence because they fear being "found out"
- Knowing there is a name for these feelings and that you are not alone can be tremendously freeing.
- Open dialogue



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Separate Feelings from Fact⁹

- Identify impostor feelings in yourself.
- There are times when you'll feel stupid.
- Just because you feel stupid, doesn't mean you are.



Recognize When You Should Feel Fraudulent⁹

- Feeling like an impostor might be a normal response to being an outsider.
- Put feelings of inadequacy and fraudulence in the right context.
- Self-doubt is normal and necessary, but it shouldn't make you feel like you don't deserve to succeed.



Accentuate the Positive⁹

- Re-evaluate your definition of competence.
- You can and should strive to do your best, but stop expecting to be the best all of the time.
- Do a great job when it matters most without over-investing in routine tasks.
- Sometimes good is good enough.



Develop a New Response to Failure and Mistake Making⁹

- Fail better – reflect, learn, and move on
- Accept that you are a work in progress.
 - To make a mistake does not mean you have failed.
- Growth mindset



Rewrite the Rules⁹

- What rules do you have for yourself?
 - I should always know the answer.
 - Never ask for help.
- You have just as much right as the next person to be wrong, have an off day, or ask for assistance.
- Practice self-compassion

Develop a New Script⁹

- Pay attention to how you minimize your successes.
- Practice thought-stopping
- Reframe

“Wait until they find out that I have no idea what I’m doing.” →
 “Everyone who starts something new feels off-base in the beginning.”

Reward Yourself⁹

- Own your successes.
- Create a success folder or list.
- Remind yourself of how you contributed to your success.
 - Persistence
 - Initiative
 - Teamwork



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You are working in the IV room, a new area for you. You forget to filter the vitamin K from an ampule while compounding. The pharmacist catches your mistake and you think to yourself, "I'm so stupid. I shouldn't have made that mistake."

Which of the following is an appropriate reframing of the impostor thought?

- A. The pharmacist is mean. This whole place is stupid.
- B. I'll just ask not to work in the IV room anymore.
- C. I'm human and I'll do better next time.
- D. It's too busy in here. Of course, I'm going to make mistakes.

Helping Others

Those We Lead, Train, Mentor, and Teach

Helping Others¹

- Help identify impostor feelings and adaptive behaviors
 - E.g. procrastination, holding back, overpreparation
- Let them know they are not alone
 - Builds trust in the relationship
 - Makes it easier to share objective feedback
- Encourage self-reflection

Helping Others¹

- Shift from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset
 - View setbacks as an inherent part of learning and growth
- Focus on facts of accomplishments by attributing them to skill and ability
- Reframe competence

Helping Others¹

- Create a supportive learning environment
 - Opportunity to learn versus a venue to compare and contrast themselves to peers
- Avoid teaching in a way that seeks to expose inadequacies
 - Support creativity and intellectual curiosity
 - Lessen the fear of embarrassment
 - Be clear about whether you accept educated guesses.

Which of the following strategies can you employ as a trainer to help mitigate impostor syndrome in a trainee?

- A. Question the trainee directly in front of their peers
- B. Compare the trainee to other trainees
- C. Act like you know everything
- D. Be open about your initial struggles in the job



Caveats

- Don't assume everyone has impostor syndrome
- Dunning-Kruger effect



Fake It 'Til You Make It

- A healthy dose of self-doubt is valuable.
- In order to grow, you have to push yourself out of your comfort zone.
- Healthy confidence comes from accepting that you can't know everything but jumping in anyway.



Takeaways

- Impostor syndrome is the feeling of fraudulence experienced by successful individuals who struggle to internalize their success.
- Contributes to anxiety, depression, burnout, and missed opportunities
- Use strategies to combat these feelings in yourself and others.
 - Identify impostor feelings
 - Evaluate your idea of competence
 - Cultivate a growth mindset
 - Remember you are not alone



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