



Boston Children's Hospital

Center for Educational
Excellence & Innovation

Understanding & Addressing Imposter Syndrome in Health Professional Learners

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Boston Children's

Where the world comes for answers



Disclosures

The speaker(s) do not have any financial relationships to disclose.



To receive credit for today's BCH Academy Seminar:

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Introductions



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*Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine,
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Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Identify signs that a learner is experiencing distress that could be arising from imposter syndrome.
2. Identify ways that teachers can support resilience and realistic self-assessment in learners.
3. Facilitate discussion of topics, such as self-doubt, anxiety, or burn-out, in learners.





Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

Alden M. Landry MD MPH
Assistant Dean, Office for Diversity Inclusion and
Community Partnership
Associate Director and Advisor, Castle Society
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Objectives

- Define Imposter Syndrome
- Explain the Impact of Imposter Syndrome
- Develop strategies to address Imposter Syndrome

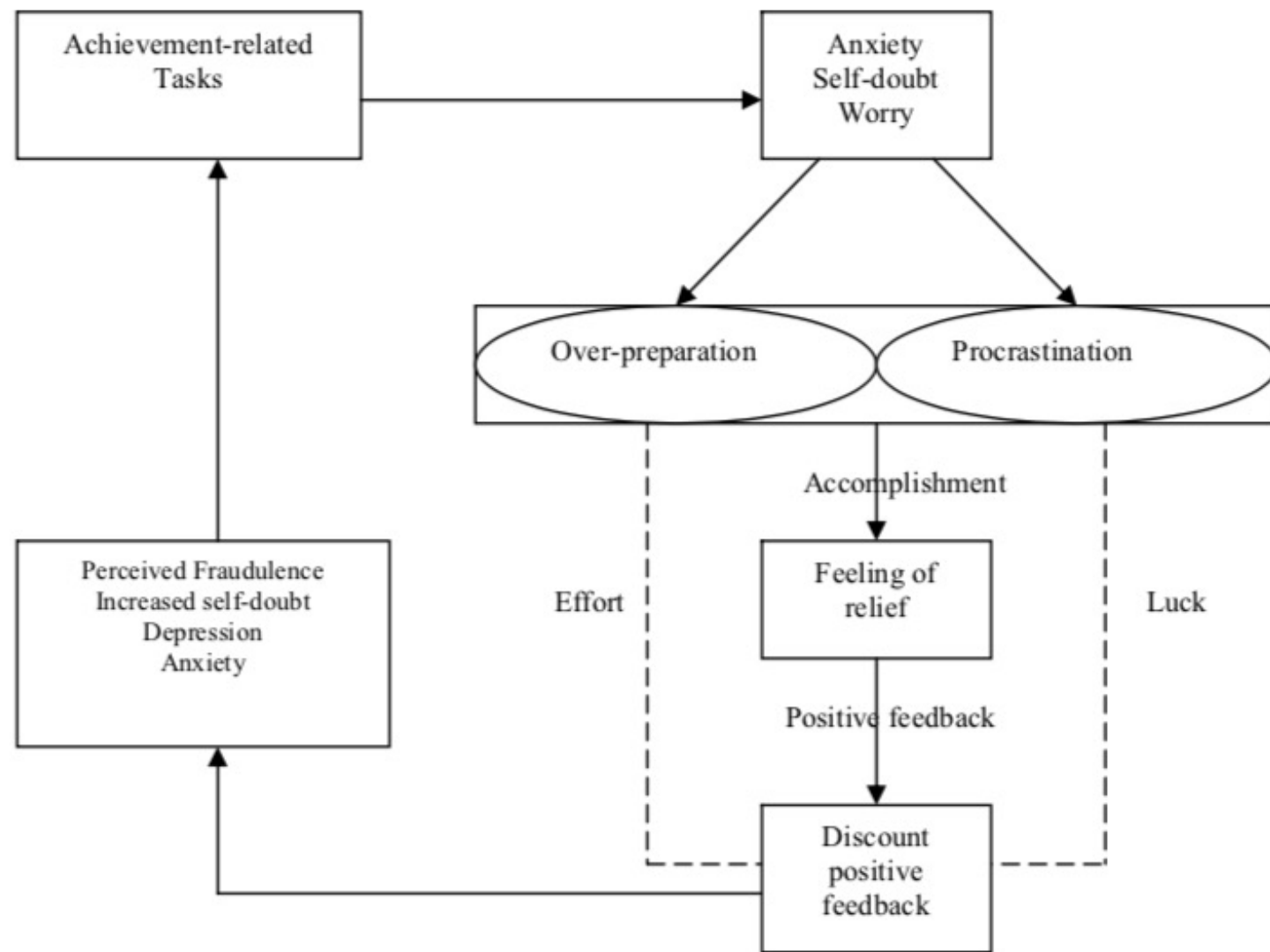
I am an imposter.



What is Imposter Syndrome?

When do I feel Imposter Syndrome the most?

What are the Impacts of Imposter Syndrome?



How do I to Overcome Imposter Syndrome?

Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

- Admit you played a role in your own success
- Emphasize the importance of self-worth
 - Differences does not equal being fake
 - Your background makes you unique
 - Your lived experience brings a different perspective and adds value
- Don't compare yourself to others
- Know your limitations.
 - Challenge yourself to expand beyond those limitations
- Extract self-doubt before the situation occurs
- Fake it until you make it

You have a story.



What can your institution,
university, hospital, place of
employment, etc do for you to help
you address your imposter
syndrome?



Inspirational Quotes (from Twitter)



- “The fear of failure will sometimes have you masking procrastination as “planning.”
- “Yall will have imposter syndrome over stuff (edited version) but will confidently put “proficient in excel” on your resume.”
- “Do you actually have imposter syndrome, or is it just that you’ve spent much of your life having your knowledge and skills subtly dismissed and devalued?”

Questions

Alden Landry MD MPH

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Enter End Title

Imposter Syndrome

What Can We Do?

Roberta Isberg



Not an individual disorder, but a systemic phenomenon

It's natural to feel “I don't belong here” when...

(e.g. there is a Nobel Prize winner down the hall)



Creating awareness on an institutional level

Combatting isolation



Creating Awareness

- As educators, we can recognize and understand what individuals are experiencing and what kind of support is helpful
- Naming the phenomenon and acknowledging it as a shared condition
 - What we are doing now
- Institutional, peer and individual interventions



Why Relationships are Important

- We depend on relationships to manage the inevitable stress and disappointments in life
- Our earliest relationships
 - How we feel about ourselves
 - How we cope with stress
 - Our ability to feel accepted as we are, to feel genuine in a relationship
- Decades of research on attunement and responsiveness to a young child's communication are associated with:
 - greater capacity for emotion regulation in the face of stress,
 - with social competence,
 - empathy,
 - a capacity for self-reflection
 - healthy relationship patterns



Why Relationships are Important

- Throughout adulthood, the presence of a trusted relationship supports
 - self-regulation
 - ability to think clearly
 - problem solve during times of stress
- Why relationships with trusted supervisors can improve functioning
- What can we do?
 - Recognize and respond to signs of distress and delight!
 - Give a name to an experience



Exercise

- Think of your most valued supervisors/mentors (imagine how they looked, interacted with you)
- What was most helpful to you?
- What aspects of your relationships with supervisors, and teachers, have helped you to manage IP?
- Write down 4-5 traits or behaviors of these teachers, that you can intentionally bring to your work with learners and peers



Will the Quality of Our Work Decline, If We Are NOT driven by IP?

- Hasn't IP motivated people to constantly strive to do better?
- At a price:
 - Risk of burnout, anxiety, depression
 - Fear of asking questions in a moment when it is important to get help
 - If we judge ourselves very harshly,
 - too painful to reflect thoughtfully on our errors
 - avoid the process of understanding what went wrong and how to do things differently the next time
- How relationships help:
 - Our anxiety about failure makes it hard to think clearly and flexibly in a moment of crisis.
 - Support each learner in being confident about their actual capabilities and accepting of their limits



Naming the experience for Individual

- Health professions educators can
 - recognize both verbal and non-verbal signs of distress (withdrawal, procrastination, hesitancy to try new things)
 - validate that these feelings are an understandable response to this environment
 - that IP is NOT a sign of weakness
- What learners report finding helpful:
 - self-disclosure of how teachers have coped with self-doubt and made mistakes
 - accepted themselves as imperfect learners
- Caveat: Never presume—“I know how you feel,” as we cannot know exactly how our experience compares with someone else’s, nor do we know all the elements of prior experience that contribute to IP in someone else



Educational Interventions for IP in Healthcare*

- Outcome Measures: Clance Imposter Phenomenon Score (self-report); measure of other related symptoms (burnout, depression, anxiety); usually assessed immediately after the intervention; few studies look at longer-term impact
- All studies reported positive outcomes, whether self-report scales, increased awareness, intent to utilize strategies
- An RCT on individual coaching—in Industry, not Medicine (IP scores, goal attainment, inclination to conceal errors)
- Not enough evidence to support any specific program as more effective, but general agreement on the importance of awareness and validation
- Siddiqui et al., 2024: Review of 17 articles



Acceptance and Commitment Strategies

- Intention is NOT to get rid of IP, but to learn how to become aware of IP thoughts as they arise, without “buying into” them
- Acceptance that this old friend, Imposter Syndrome, is not entirely going away
- Commitment to doing (acting on) what we value—contributing to the team, taking care of sick children, supporting learners and peers
- Nor do we want to get rid of some of the associated traits: striving for excellence, motivation for reaching goals
 - You can thank IP for the ways it has benefited you, while recognizing it's adverse effects
- Lots of exercises in a workbook that is aptly called “Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life.”



Important Role of Supervisors and Mentors: How Health Professions Educators Can Help

- Foster Communities of Support: peers, supervisors, mentors
- Structured supervision for IP related experiences
 - Coaching for dealing with "IP habits" (managing fear of failure, procrastinating, recognizing stuck points)
- Understanding personal vulnerabilities to IP. Recognizing the role of:
 - Our individual histories with our families,
 - Previous learning experiences
- How we fit into the predominant cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, or gender expectations in any given field
- Repeated experiences of "being questioned," of micro-aggressions from colleagues, teachers and patients



Educating/Empowering Supervisors about IP

- To Understand its Prevalence
- Name it: We can talk about it
- Validate: You are not alone