

Impostor Syndrome

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Have you ever walked into a meeting or a boardroom and thought:

- Everyone here is so much smarter than I am, I think they sent me an invitation by mistake!
- What an accomplished group of people...I don't belong here !
- I hope no one discovers that I am such a fraud!
- I'm here due to luck!
- I'm not in the same league as these people, I will not come to these meetings anymore!
- I'm going to sit quietly so they don't realize I'm a fake!

If you answered yes to any of these questions join the club!



Impostor Syndrome

- First described in 1978 by psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes
- Synonyms:
 - Impostorism
 - Fraud syndrome
 - Impostor experiences
 - Impostor tendencies

Definition of Impostor Syndrome

- Feeling of fraudulence experienced by successful individuals
- They believe that their achievements are undeserved despite objective evidence to the contrary
- They attribute their success to external factors
 - Luck rather than ability
 - Being at the right place at the right time

Impostor Syndrome is a Constellation of Feelings

- Inadequacy and insufficiency
- Fear of being discovered as a fraud
- Inability to internalize or personally acknowledge your excellence
- Rejection of subjective and objective external evidence of success and competency

Impostor Syndrome Tendencies

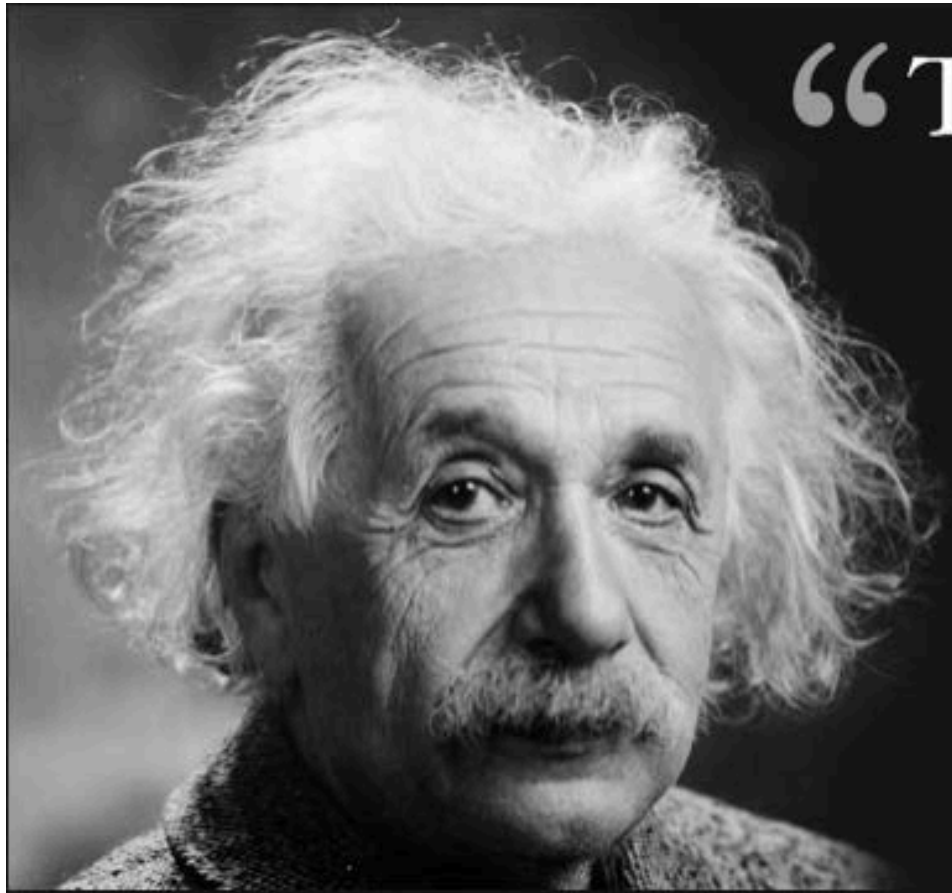
- You are afraid of being discovered as a fake or fraud
- You react strongly to negative criticism (real or imagined)
- You blame yourself for any and all struggles or failures
- You get stuck in loops of negative thinking and have intrusive thoughts
- You focus more on what you haven't done than what you have done
- You're convinced you're not enough and discount your successes
- You're an over-worker to a fault
- You avoid showing too much confidence
- You feel a compulsion to be the best and are described as a perfectionist
- The fear of failure can paralyze you, but you may also dread success
- You credit charm or luck for your successes
- You have difficulty accepting praise

Who can experience Impostor Tendencies?

- Everyone can!
 - Men and women
 - Teens and adults
 - Students and working professionals
- High prevalence in high achieving individuals
 - Professional women
 - Faculty in academia
 - Managers and supervisors
 - High performing students

Michelle Obama : “I Still Have Impostor Syndrome”





“The exaggerated esteem in which my lifework is held makes me very ill at ease. I feel compelled to think of myself as an involuntary swindler.”

Albert Einstein

"I have written eleven books,
but each time I think, *'Uh oh,
they're going to find out now.
I've run a game on everybody,
and they're going to find me out.'*"

– Maya Angelou



Neil Armstrong: “I just look at all these people, and I think, what the heck am I doing here? They’ve made amazing things. I just went where I was sent.”



How is This Relevant to Us in Health Care?

- Impostor Syndrome is Prevalent in Health Care Professionals!
- Trainees
- Advanced practice providers
- Allied health professionals
- Nurses
- Physicians

Perfectionism, the imposter phenomenon and psychological adjustment in medical, dental, nursing and pharmacy students.

Henning K¹, Ey S, Shaw D.

- Psychological distress, perfectionism and imposter feelings were assessed in 477 medical, dental, nursing and pharmacy students
- The results showed that 27.5% of the students were currently experiencing psychiatric levels of distress
- Strong associations were found between current psychological distress, perfectionism and imposter feelings within each program
- These character traits were stronger predictors of psychological adjustment than most of the demographic variables

Impostor syndrome and burnout among American medical students: a pilot study

Jennifer Villwock¹, Lindsay B. Sobin², Lindsey A Koester³, Tucker M. Harris⁴

Conclusions: Almost a quarter of male medical students and nearly half of female students experience IS and IS was found to be significantly associated with burnout indices.

Measuring Resident Well-Being: Impostorism and Burnout Syndrome in Residency

*Jenny Legassie, BSc (Hon), MD¹, Elaine M. Zibrowski, BSc (Spec), MSc, MSc²,
and Mark A. Goldszmidt, MD, MHPE, FRCPC^{1,2}*

MEASUREMENTS AND MAIN RESULTS: Short demographic questionnaire, CIS and MBI-HSS. Impostorism and burnout syndrome were identified in 43.8% and 12.5% of residents, respectively. With the exception of a negative correlation between CIS scores and the MBI's personal accomplishment subscale ($r = -.30$; 95% CI $-.54$ to $-.02$), no other significant relations were identified. Foreign-trained residents were more likely to score as impostors (odds ratio [OR] 10.7; 95% CI 1.2 to 98.2) while senior residents were more likely to experience burnout syndrome (OR 16.5 95% CI 1.6 to 168.5).

Impostor Phenomenon and Burnout in General Surgeons and General Surgery Residents ☆

Patricia K. Leach * ✉, Rachel M. Nygaard PhD † ② ✉, Jeffrey G. Chipman MD ‡ ✉, Melissa E. Brunsvold MD ‡ ✉, Ashley P. Marek MD † ✉

CONCLUSIONS

Contrary to studies in other medical fields, female general surgery faculty and trainees were no more likely than males to display characteristics of IP. Residents did; however, score higher than faculty on overall CIPS score. While we cannot determine how burnout and IP directly impact each other, our study shows that both faculty and trainees experiencing burnout are more likely to report symptoms of IP.

Why is Impostor Syndrome Prevalent in Healthcare Providers?

- We demand perfection of ourselves and those around us
- We rarely praise ourselves or others for a job well done
- We tend to attribute failures to a stable, inner core of ineptness
- Since science deals with objective things and absolute truths we feel that our own discoveries have an element of randomness and are just due to luck
- It can seem like people around us discovered things in a logical way since that is the way papers and seminars are presented

The Pyramid Effect

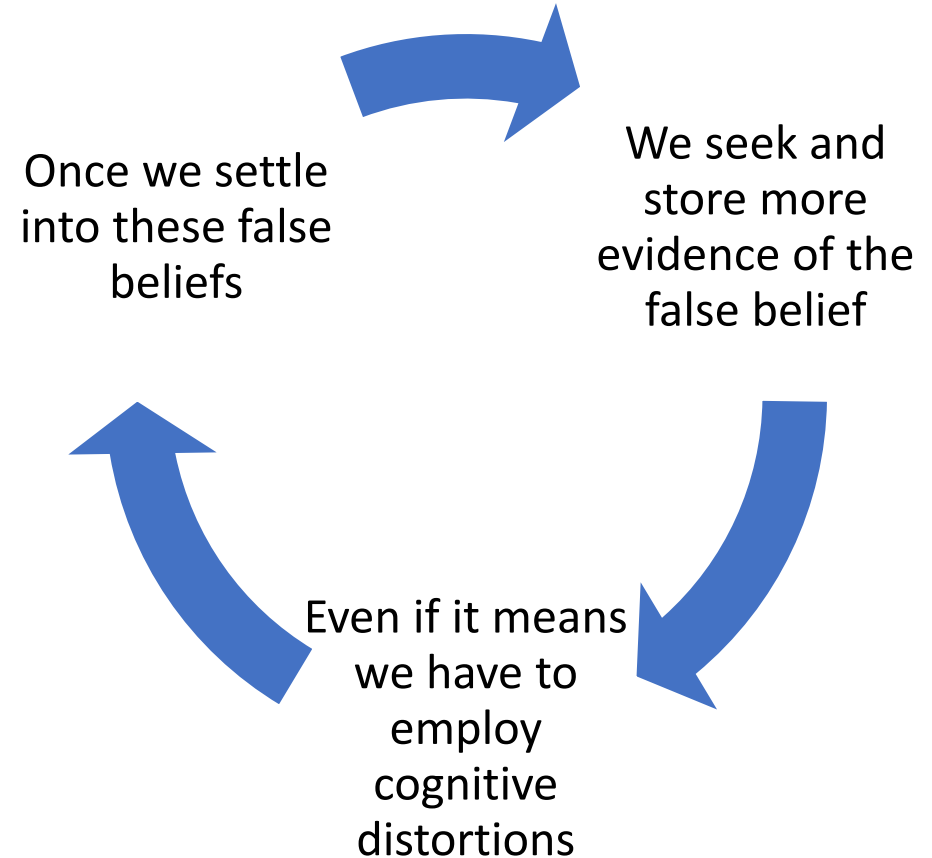


Imposter Syndrome is a Misnomer

- If you have diabetes = you are a diabetic
- If you have schizophrenia = you are a schizophrenic
- If you have Impostor Syndrome = You are NOT an Impostor !!
(even if you think you are!)
- There is abundant valid, scientifically sound external data to support this!

Simplified Definition of Impostor Syndrome

- The internal viewpoint does not match external data or viewpoints
- Our internal self image is negative, while other people think we are exceptional
- It is a self perpetuating cycle



What are Cognitive Distortions?

<p>All or nothing thinking</p>  <p>Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'</p> <p><i>If I'm not perfect I have failed</i></p> <p><i>Either I do it right or not at all</i></p>	<p>Over-generalizing</p>  <p>Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw</p>
<p>Mental filter</p>  <p>Only paying attention to certain types of evidence</p> <p><i>Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes</i></p>	<p>Disqualifying the positive</p>  <p>Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another</p> <p><i>That doesn't count</i></p>
<p>Jumping to conclusions</p>  <p>There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mind reading (imagining we know what others are thinking)• Fortune telling (predicting the future)	<p>Magnification (catastrophizing) & minimization</p>  <p>Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophizing), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important</p>
<p>Emotional reasoning</p>  <p>Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true</p> <p><i>I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot</i></p>	<p>should must</p> <p>Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed</p> <p>If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration</p>
<p>Labelling</p>  <p>Assigning labels to ourselves or other people</p> <p><i>I'm a loser</i></p> <p><i>I'm completely useless</i></p> <p><i>They're such an idiot</i></p>	<p>Personalization</p> <p>"this is my fault"</p> <p>Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault</p> <p>Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault</p>

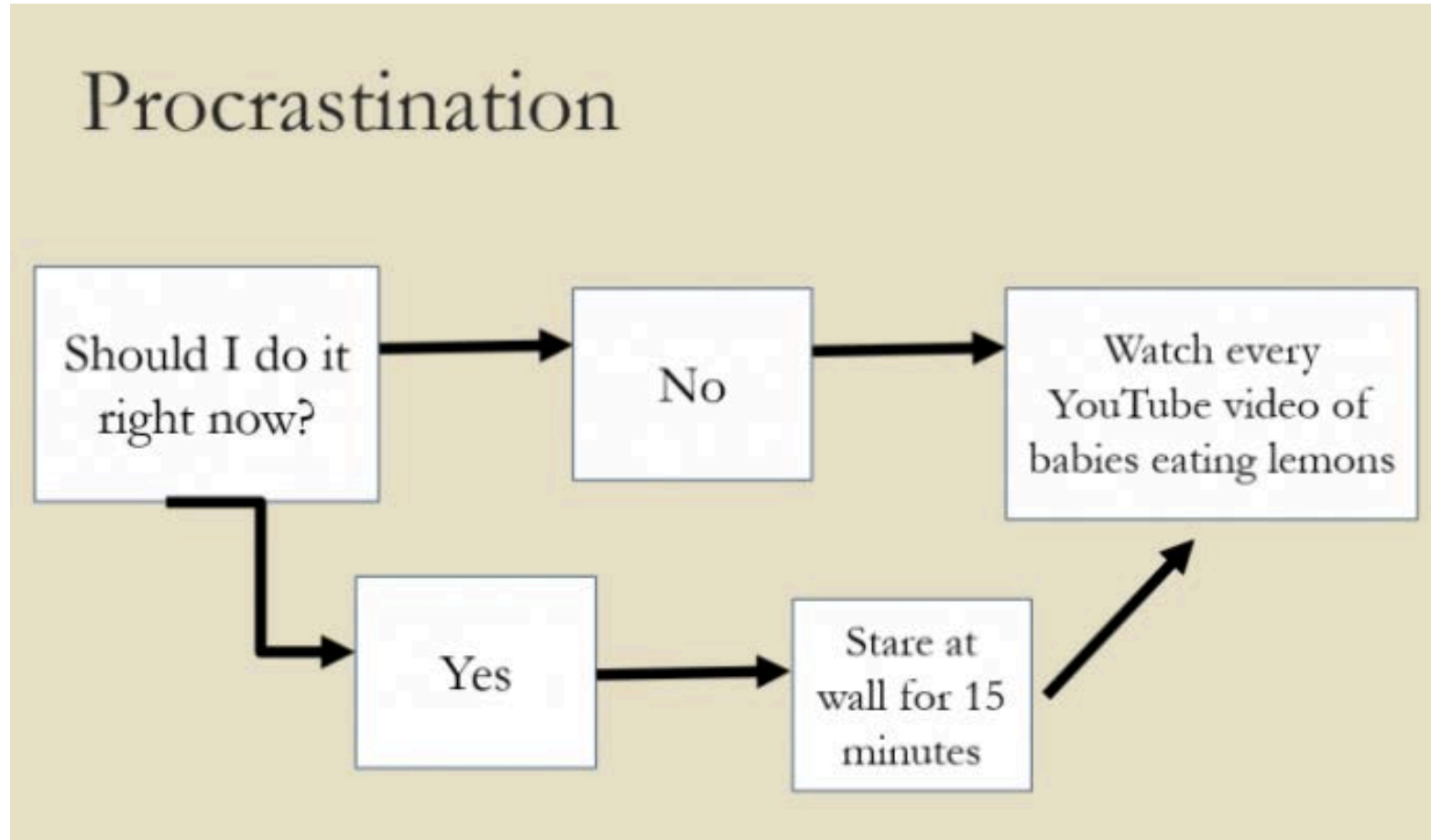
Impostor Syndrome Subtypes

SUBTYPE	CHARACTERISTICS
The Perfectionist	Perceives competence as 100% perfection. Anything short of this is considered failure. This individual always focuses on how something could have been done better.
The Natural Genius	Measures competence by how easily the achievement came to him/her. Hard work and perseverance are considered negative traits as this individual feels that success should have come more naturally to them.
The Superwoman/man or Superstudent	Perceives competence as the ability to juggle numerous roles and responsibilities simultaneously. Falling even slightly short in one role (parent, care giver, researcher etc.) constitutes overall failure even in the context of major successes.
The Expert	Measures competence by the volume of knowledge or skill. This individual fears being exposed as inexperienced due to lack of knowledge.
The Soloist	Perceives competence only if an achievement was obtained completely on their own without the aid of additional resources. Asking for help is considered a sign of failure.

Why Should You Care About Impostor Syndrome?

- Impostor syndrome is strongly associated with psychologic distress especially depression and anxiety
- It can make you less inclined to compete for advanced positions (such as faculty positions)
- It can instill a fear to pursue new ideas and to take risks
- It can make you reticent about offering potentially valuable insights, ideas, opinions and solutions to problems for fear of being wrong or exposing your “ignorance”
- It can be an unrecognized barrier to improving trainee wellness

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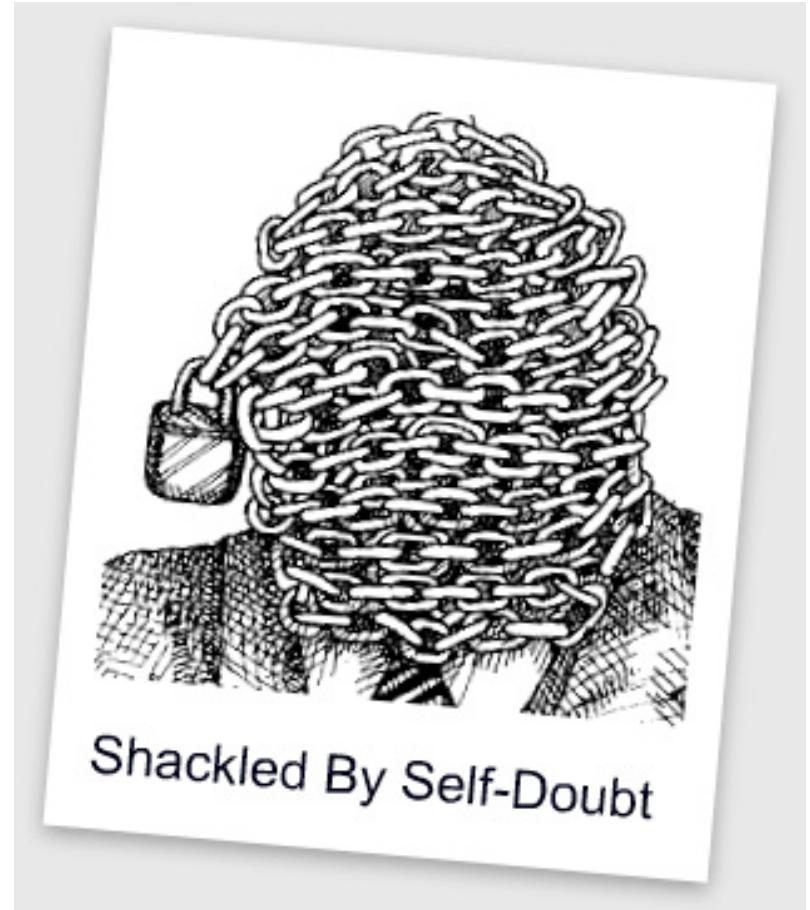




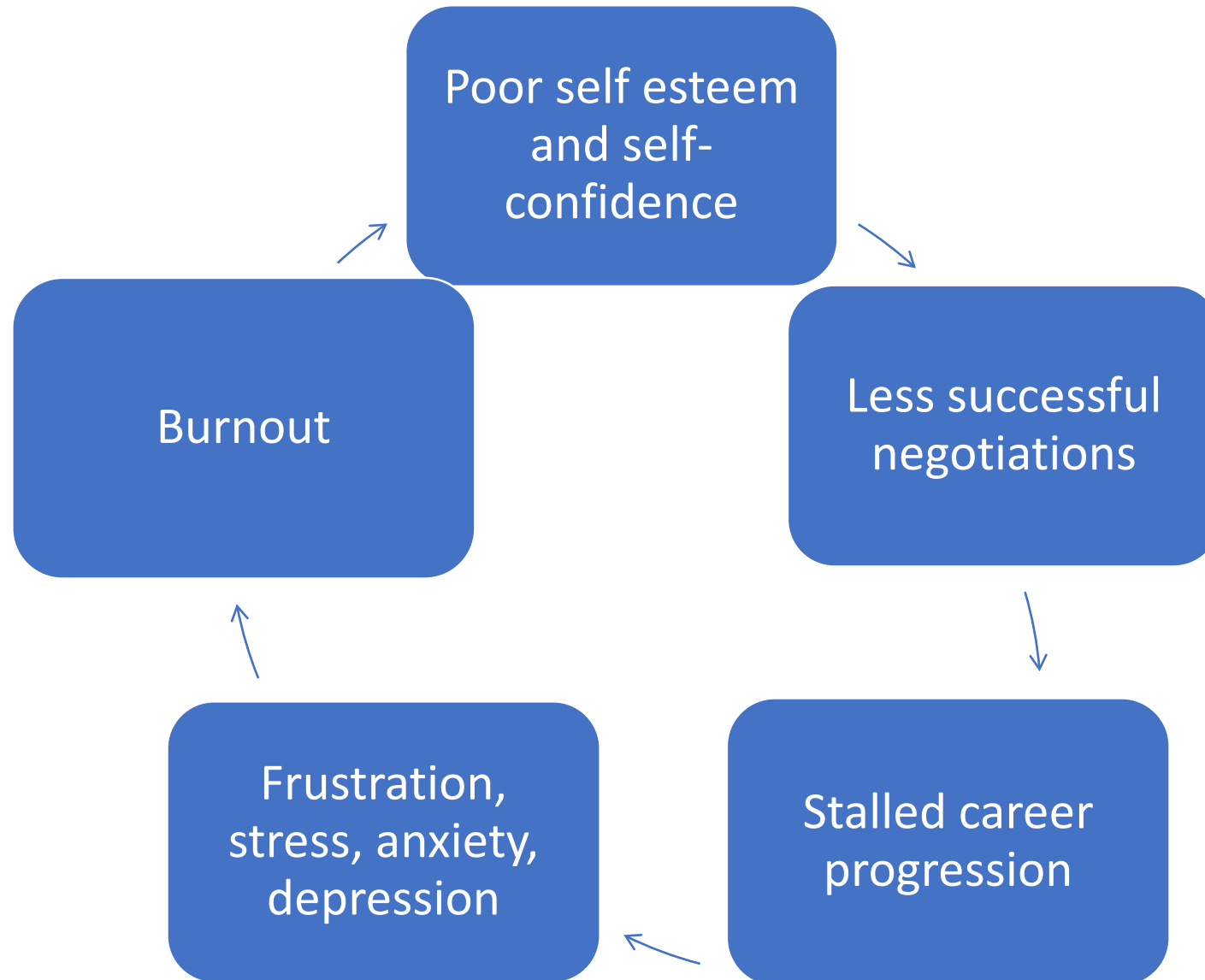
PROCRASTINATION

Why Should You Care About Impostor Syndrome?

- It can cause stress related problems leading to disease
- It makes you more likely to see constructive criticism as proof of your ineptitude → rather than using it to improve skills and knowledge



The Eventual Result is:



Is there a cure for Impostor Syndrome?

- Think of Impostor Syndrome as a correctable physical condition like poor vision
- There is no magical cure
- You can develop corrective lenses to improve the way you see yourself
- But when you take off the lenses → the vision will be poor again

Break Out Groups to Discuss Strategies to
Manage Impostor Syndrome

Managing Impostor Syndrome in Ourselves

- Recognize, acknowledge, and share feelings of impostor syndrome with trusted colleagues
- Realize you are not alone
- Ask mentors and trusted colleagues for objective and truthful feedback
- Reference your personal career success inventory
- Practice self-compassion
- Maintain a growth mindset
- Practice thought-stopping
- See a counselor

Addressing Impostor Syndrome in Those We Teach

A mentor can help a mentee:

- Understand that their feelings of inadequacy and fraudulence are in fact a result of Impostor Syndrome
- Attribute accomplishments to skill and ability rather than external factors to help trainees internalize their success
- Shift a fixed mindset to a growth mindset
- Providing multifaceted feedback
- Encourage self-reflection with goal-setting

Resources to help you on the journey to find your lens

- Young V. The secret thoughts of successful women: Why capable people suffer from the impostor syndrome and how to thrive in spite of it. Crown Pub; 2011.
- Clance PR, Imes SA. The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research Practice*. 1978;15(3):241.
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- <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/cognitive-distortions/#common-cognitive-distortions>