

Combating Burnout Culture and Imposter Syndrome in Medical Students and Healthcare Professionals: A Future Perspective

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Mohd Faizan Siddiqui¹  and Mouna Azaroual²

¹International Medical Faculty, Osh State University Medical Faculty, Osh City, Kyrgyzstan. ²CHU Mohammed VI de Marrakech HME, Marrakech, Morocco.

ABSTRACT: It is the year 2050, and the world of medicine has undergone significant changes. With the advent of advanced technology and medical breakthroughs, medical schools have become even more competitive. Medical students are now required to have an exceptional academic record, outstanding research experience, and a perfect social media presence. However, with the rise of social media, a new phenomenon has emerged, one that has been plaguing medical students for years - imposter syndrome.

KEYWORDS: imposter syndrome, burnout culture, international medical students, social media influencer, mental health

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: Mohd Faizan Siddiqui, International Medical Faculty, OSHSU, Akbura Campus, Yugovostok, Osh City, Kyrgyzstan.
Email: Fzn.imf@gmail.com

Introduction

As the world becomes increasingly connected through social media, the pressure to present a perfect image of oneself online has never been higher.¹ From Instagram influencers to Twitter celebrities, social media has created a culture of self-promotion that can leave many of us feeling inadequate and insecure. But what about those who are just starting out in their careers, like medical students? For medical students, this pressure can be particularly intense as they strive to build a professional reputation while also navigating the challenges of their rigorous academic and clinical training. With the constant pressure to present a flawless image online, many students find themselves struggling with imposter syndrome – the feeling that they don't truly belong in their field or are not as competent as their peers.²

Body

As we explore this question, it's important to remember that the concept of impostor syndrome, or impostor phenomenon, or imposterism is not a new one. It's a psychological term coined in the 1970s to describe the feeling of being a fraud or an imposter despite evidence of one's competence and success.³ But with the rise of social media, this feeling of inadequacy can be amplified for medical students who are constantly bombarded with images and stories of their peers' achievements. In the highly competitive world of medicine, where success is often measured by academic performance and clinical outcomes, imposter syndrome can be especially detrimental. It can lead to burnout, anxiety, and a lack of confidence that may ultimately impact patient care. In 2019, the World Health Organization classified Burnout in revision of International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as an occupational phenomenon, not a medical condition, and is described under

factors influencing health status. It results from chronic workplace stress and is characterized by exhaustion, mental distance or cynicism towards one's job, and reduced professional efficacy.⁴

As the medical profession becomes increasingly competitive, the pressure to perform and excel can lead to mental health burnout, with social media exacerbating these pressures. Burnout's mental and physical symptoms might arise from the cycle of over-preparation and self-doubt inherent in impostor syndrome. Study by Villwock JA et al (2016) revealed that US medical students experiencing impostorism also tended to exhibit symptoms very comparable to the World Health Organization's (WHO) criteria of burnout: increasing degrees of weariness, emotional tiredness, cynicism, and depersonalization. This result emphasizes the significant correlation among medical professionals between burnout and imposter syndrome.⁵

Medical students must balance rigorous academic demands with the need to build a professional reputation and cultivate their online presence. In this brave new world, the line between reality and the curated images and achievements displayed on social media can become blurred, leading to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.⁶ Imposter syndrome is a well-known phenomenon in the medical profession, with studies showing that up to 70% of medical students experience it at some point during their training. The implications of this are far-reaching, not just for the students themselves but also for the quality of care they provide to patients. A lack of confidence and self-assurance can lead to mistakes, misdiagnosis, and poor patient outcomes.⁷ Emily Stark et al in the Harvard Business Review define burnout culture as the state in which relentless, too demanding effort and stress become the norm.⁸ This especially affects healthcare



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professionals, who experience emotional exhaustion and long-term stress. Social media aggravates the situation by setting unrealistic standards and supporting constant contact, therefore blurring the line isolating the personal from the professional worlds. As healthcare professionals, new doctors and medical students undergo self-comparisons and feel pressured to show themselves as impeccable like the social media influencers, this might cause increased degrees of stress and anxiety among them.

But at what cost? Does this culture of self-promotion actually help medical students succeed, or does it create a toxic

environment that fuels imposter syndrome and undermines their confidence? As we delve deeper into this issue, it's clear that there are no easy answers. But one thing is certain: as medical educators and professionals, we need to be aware of the impact that social media can have on our students' mental health and self-esteem, and we need to find ways to support and empower them without contributing to a culture of imposter syndrome. For the USMLE tests, Match Week for instance causes rather great stress for unmatched medical graduates and doctors. Social media at such times may make

Table 1. Table highlights the current challenges, proposed strategies and recommended solutions for improving mental well-being and combating imposter syndrome.

Enhancing Mental Well-being and Combating Imposter Syndrome: Strategies for Medical Graduates in the Competitive Era of Medical Education		
Proposed Strategy	Current Challenge	Recommended Solution
Implement Supportive Mentoring Programs	Incorporating supportive mentoring programmes in LMICs confronts problems such as limited resources, poor mentor training, and a lack of established guidelines to promote successful mentorship.	Introduce mentorship programmes in which experienced medical professionals may provide assistance and support to medical students via an online training programme and resources. This project will help them navigate the hurdles of medical education while also cultivating a feeling of belonging within the profession.
Foster Open Dialogues on Mental Health	The possible stigma surrounding mental health concerns in the medical community is a substantial impediment. This stigma may make it difficult for kids to freely communicate their problems and seek appropriate treatment.	In open lectures and podcasts, encourage candid talks about mental health among medical students and professionals. Individuals may openly express their challenges and seek assistance in a secure and nonjudgmental setting, reducing the stigma associated with mental health disorders.
Cultivate Collaboration and Peer Support	Challenges impede resource accessibility, and there is a lack of personalization to address the individual requirements of medical students. Furthermore, there is no assessment mechanism in place to analyze the usefulness, relevance, and impact of these tools on medical students.	Encourage a collaborative and peer-supportive atmosphere among medical students. Support the formation of study groups, organize one-on-one personalised peer mentorship programmes, and provide chances for students to share their experiences and mutually support one another. These actions will help to decrease emotions of loneliness and self-doubt.
Foster a Balanced Perspective on Success	The successful implementation of collaborative and peer support techniques may face challenges due to the presence of competitive environments or limited avenues for collaboration for early career researcher and pre-med student with low reach of their social media profile	Contrary to popular belief, success in medical education does not rely exclusively on academic achievements and external approval. Stress the importance of self-care, personal development, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. By emphasizing many routes to achievement, unnecessary pressure to adhere to unreasonable expectations might be alleviated.
Provide Well-Being Workshops and Resources	Impact of social media in perpetuating unrealistic expectations and fostering unhealthy comparisons among students. Additionally, it is essential to recognize the role that parents' expectations, peer pressure from friends and colleagues, and societal influences can play in exacerbating these challenges.	Provide specialized training and materials addressing impostor syndrome and mental health issues. These services may include stress management approaches, mindfulness practices, resilience-building tactics, taking a break from social media, and empowering students to properly manage their well-being.
Ensure Access to Counseling and Psychological Services	Potential hurdles such as insufficient resources, long waiting times, and the stigma associated with seeking mental health help might discourage students from using counselling and therapy sessions.	Ensure that medical students have easy access to discreet counselling and psychological treatments. These websites will give expert assistance in dealing with impostor syndrome and other mental health issues. Creating AI-powered technologies supported by medical professionals for better tailored therapeutic care.
Professional Identity Formation (PIF)	Lack of organized frameworks and the overwhelming strain of medical training impede the implementation of Professional Identity Formation (PIF), therefore contributing to ongoing imposter syndrome and impaired mental health.	Artificial Intelligence (AI) has potential to strengthen PIF by monitoring mental health, supporting individualized learning, and enabling virtual mentoring—all of which help to It may also help to change courses and encourage community involvement, therefore addressing the particular needs of people.

this much more challenging as many people post on their matched into their intended industries. Individuals who are not Matched may have higher stress levels as a result, leading to increased anxiety, feelings of inadequacy and imposterism. Furthermore, the absence of adequate guidance from experienced residents and the challenge of managing peer pressure during post examination results might exacerbate the situation. Providing support sessions throughout the Match season or immediately after the release of results is a beneficial initiative to assist those who are facing difficulties. Facilitating open conversations about mental health, integrating mentoring initiatives, along with offering targeted workshops and resources to address imposter syndrome and mental health issues will help to create an environment conducive to personal and professional development among medical students. Furthermore, encouraging collaboration and peer support, promoting an equitable perspective of success, and ensuring access to professional counseling will enable medical students to navigate the challenges of their education while safeguarding their mental health. Medical schools can reduce the incidence of imposter syndrome by implementing proactive strategies that provide their students with the necessary training resources to thrive within the demands of a fiercely competitive medical education landscape (see table). Moreover, ethical questions about social media usage by influencers are becoming growing in significance. Several times, influencers negotiate fine lines where violations of professionalism and confidentiality might take place, therefore compromising patient trust and privacy of patients.⁹ Cases regarding sensitive medical information shared without consent or professional activity lacking ethics emphasize the potential risks of this digital era. Further significant risks include the promotion of home-based traditional medicine or products without scientific evidence and their consumption by scientifically ignorant or uneducated viewers. One prominent example is the extensive news coverage on the rare clotting condition (thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome - TTS) linked to the J&J and AstraZeneca vaccinations by social media influencers.¹⁰ This information, while significant, was often shared without fully considering its impact on public perception and vaccination campaigns. Such situations underscore the need for influencers to handle medical information more judiciously, as their content significantly influences general audiences and can affect attitudes towards medical services and vaccinations. Dealing with burnout in medical education calls for active participation in Professional Identity Formation (PIF), which helps individuals to develop a noteworthy and connected professional identity. PIF is the process of harmonizing medical sector norms with personal beliefs and professional identity. Along with offering direction and a sense of belonging within the medical community, it entails developing a lifelong professional identity, ethics, and professionalism. This approach helps to define how students and professionals see

and manage their interpersonal interactions, duties, and work responsibilities.¹¹ Table 1

The prologue of this article embodies the notion of a hypothetical framework of future prediction, which posits that our present actions hold the power to forecast the course of events yet to unfold. Moreover, it also means that by rectifying our current actions, we have the capacity to ameliorate future predicaments. Hence, should we embark on endeavors aimed at addressing the urgent and pivotal challenges faced by medical students, we are encouraged to contemplate the potential transformation of our forthcoming era and let's imagine what our future will look like after that.

Conclusion

In the year 2050, the medical profession has reached new heights thanks to cutting-edge technology and revolutionary advancements. Medical schools are more competitive than ever, and students are encouraged to strive for excellence in their academic achievements, research endeavors, and online presence. However, as social media has become an integral part of the medical landscape, medical students have faced a challenge: imposter syndrome, a phenomenon that can lead to self-doubt and undermine confidence. Thankfully, the medical community and social media influencer have recognized the impact of imposter syndrome on the professional development of medical students' mental health and healthcare professional. A supportive mentoring culture has developed among social media influencers, where seasoned medical professionals provide guidance and encouragement to their peers. Medical schools have implemented programs that promote mental wellness and build self-confidence, helping students to overcome imposter syndrome and reach their full potential. As a result, medical students and doctors have become more empowered and confident, able to handle the challenges of the profession with grace and skill. The medical profession is thriving, with patients benefiting from the dedication and expertise of a new generation of medical professionals. The future looks bright, and the medical community is excited to continue pushing the boundaries of what is possible.

Author Contribution

Mohd Faizan Siddiqui and Azaroual Mouna equally contributed to the conception, writing, and revision of this article. Both authors approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Ethics

N/A

ORCID iD

Mohd Faizan Siddiqui  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6634-076X>

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