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## Imposter Phenomenon and Dunning-Kruger Effect: Leveraging Internal Conflicts for Professional Growth and Wellness

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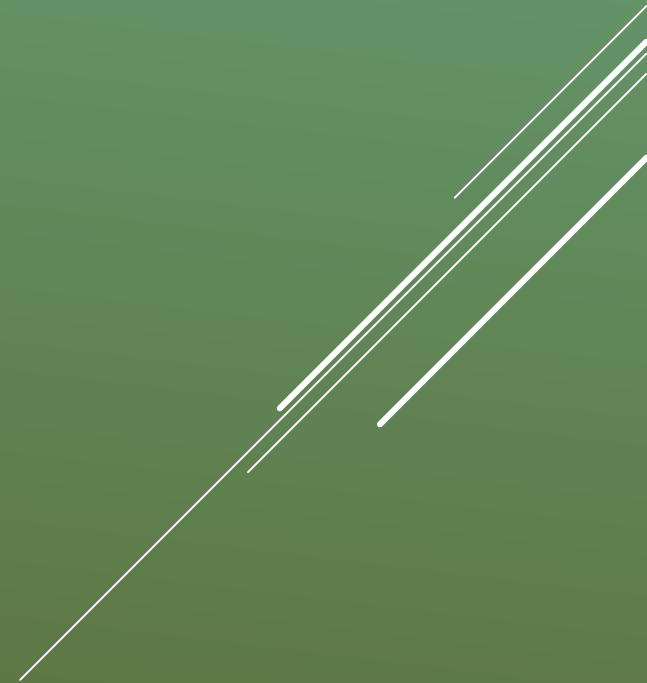
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IMPOSTER PHENOMENON  
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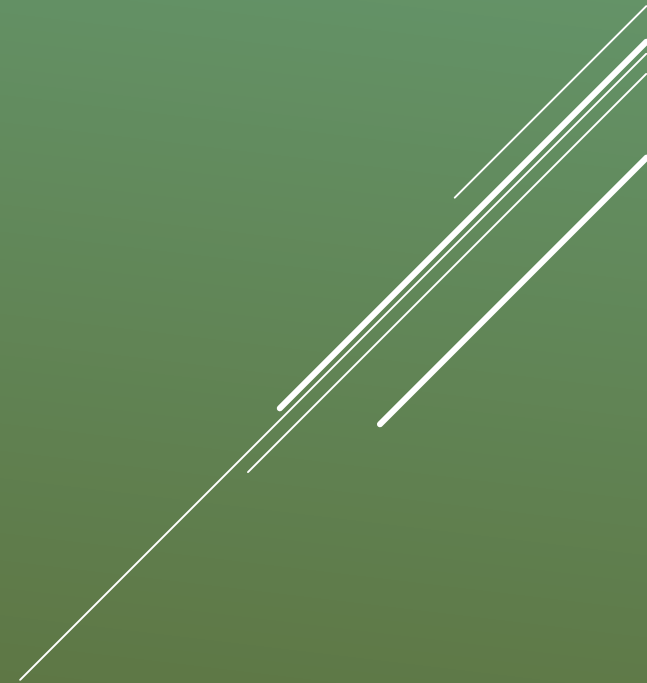
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# AUTHORS

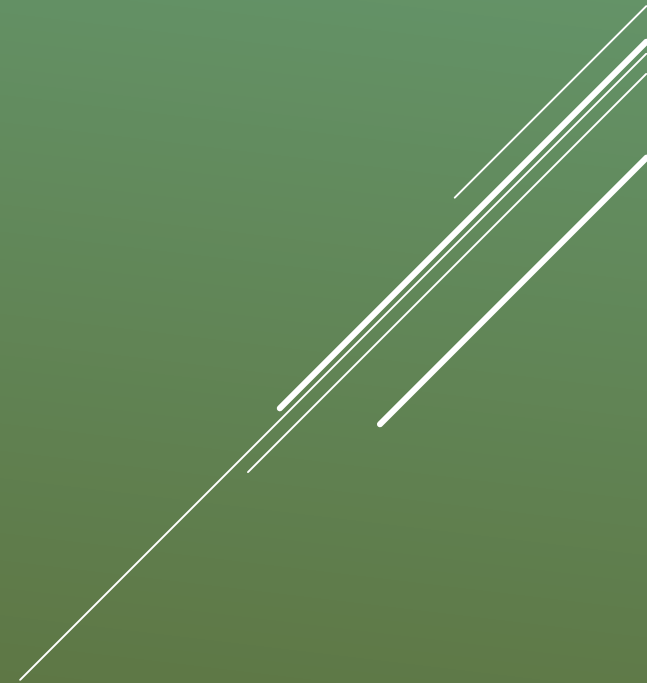


# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

- ▶ **Dr. Arkene Levy** is the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the Dr. Kiran C Patel College of Allopathic Medicine (NSU MD), where she is also an Associate Professor of Medical Education. She currently leads several funded projects that positively impact the physical and mental health of vulnerable groups in the South Florida community.
- ▶ **Dr. Algevis Wrench** is Assistant Professor of Medical Education at NSU MD. She is an active member of the Latino Medical Association (LMSA) where she mentors the NSU MD student chapter in research and projects related to mental wellness.
- ▶ **Dr. Maria Padilla** is the Executive Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs at NSU MD and is a passionate advocate for integrating and supporting student wellness activities throughout the schools' curriculum.
- ▶ **Dr. Vijay Rajput** is Chair of the Department of Medical Education at NSU MD and has an extensive background in faculty and student mentorship around wellness and professional development.


*Working together as a team, we all came to realize that addressing uncomfortable topics such as imposter phenomenon is important to build resilience among faculty and students.*

## AUTHORS' STATEMENT



*This piece is a collective effort of the authors and is inspired by our love of teaching, science, medicine, and daily interactions with our peers and students. Mental wellness is a topic that is dear to all our hearts. We are all passionate about using wellness as a tool to enhance learning in the classroom, and to build trust between future health providers and patients. We came together as a team because we have all been impacted by imposter phenomenon (IP) at some point in our lives or careers, and we have learned to recognize and mitigate it as it creeps up.*

*We are passionate about sharing tools and resources that can help others to do the same. We are all immigrant faculty of color with intersectional identities that have made our journeys as medical educators both rewarding and challenging. We all interact with diverse groups of students with similar identities and backgrounds, and this has heightened our passion for addressing IP. As medical educators, we believe wellness is critical to delivering culturally competent medical care and addressing internal conflicts that negatively impact teaching and clinical skills acquisition is paramount. Our hope is that this piece stimulates curiosity and action for those with whom it resonates.*



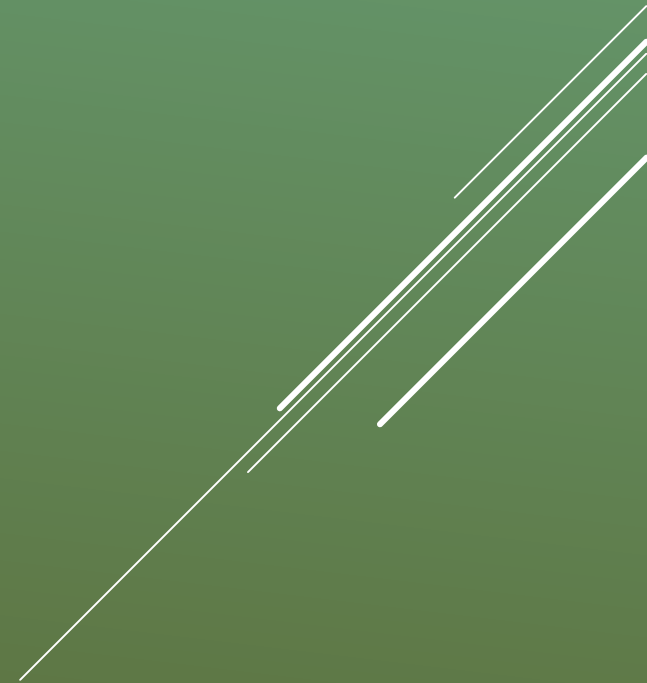
So, what really is imposter phenomenon (IP)?

IP also known as imposter syndrome or *imposterism* is a psychological state in which high achieving individuals fail to internalize their accomplishments and have persistent feelings of self-doubt and professional fraudulence, despite their successes. Individuals with IP display an inability to accurately self-assess their performance and have diminished self-confidence and fear of failure. Imposter phenomenon is quite the opposite to the *Dunning-Kruger's effect* (DKE), a specific form of illusory superiority in which people overestimate their own skills, knowledge, expertise and achievements.

Often defined as “*being ignorant of one's own ignorance*” DKE describes the scenario where less competent individuals overestimate their abilities and do not have enough insight to know that they are incompetent and fail to recognize competency in others. In other words, *they don't know what they don't know*. The truth is that we all have felt overly confident about our knowledge and skills at one point and felt unjustly like underachievers more often than not.


When we did our first session with year one medical students on IP, we were all uncomfortable and doubted whether we were equipped to really teach students about the topic. However, the two-hour session went well, and we were able to plan other sessions for more health professions students at NSU. We came to the realization that although IP and DKE appear to be opposite psychological states, they both are associated with inaccurate self-assessment of one's own abilities, and both reflect a state of inner conflict that can have negative implications in personal and professional interactions, if not addressed.

The implications of IP among medical educators and medical students are multifaceted as it negatively affects social, emotional, and psychological well-being and is linked to higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, and poor interpersonal relationships. Similarly, DKE masks the true competencies of an individual and can be a barrier to professional development, skills acquisition and accepting constructive feedback. We believe that it is crucial to increase awareness about IP and DKE in a competitive and a demanding medical education environment. It is vital to provide vulnerable individuals with tools and there are several academic assessment tools that have been used including the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale, and The Cognitive Reflection Test.





Mentorship, practicing mindfulness, peer support, and institutional support are strategies that have been successfully established that can assist. Our team have used four key steps to tackle imposter syndrome. When feelings of self-doubt creep up, we ask ourselves “*What is prompting these feelings of imposterism?*” Secondly, we try to reframe our thoughts to focus on our successes and accomplishments and third to “choose” to have a positive attitude towards the situation. The last step involves making a commitment to ourselves to release negative feelings by pursuing enriching activities such as Yoga, art, physical exercise or choosing any supporting activity that makes us feel whole.



Mentorship has also been shown to help individuals to become more self-aware. Metacognition is an awareness of one's thought processes and an understanding of the patterns that are behind those thoughts. Reflecting on our thinking habits is a wonderful way to improve your abilities to personal thinking patterns. Breaking the cycles of negative thought is not easy but replacing a negative thought with a positive one can help boost our self-esteem and offer personal power in our decision making.

The promotion of mental health wellness is very important to everyone and podcasts such as *A Beautiful Mindset* and *Who Am I to Talk About Impostor Syndrome* and mindfulness applications (*Ten Percent Happier*, *Calm* and *Headspace*) can help reframe your thoughts. The practice of gratitude and making a regular list of positive accomplishments also are quite helpful and very easy to do.

When our internal conflicts get in the way of living a happy and healthy and productive life, then it's not only important but necessary to dig deeper so we can all be empowered not only for professional growth but for individual growth. When we resolve our internal angst and get in touch with our talents and overcome negative self-talk we can develop our self-confidence and improve our wellness-mind, body and spirit. These strategies have certainly helped us to grow as individuals and we continue our inner work since after all, we are a work in progress!

