Sindrome Del Imposter

Alexandra Bachman, MD

I am a first-year resident physician at the Lynchburg Family Medicine Residency Program. During my first month of orientation, I had participated in an imposter syndrome activity led by Janice Deeds, PSYD, LPC, who is the assistant director of Behavioral Health at Lynchburg Family Medicine Residency. Mark B. Stephens, MD, MS, interim associate dean for medical education at Penn State College of Medicine, had facilitated a professional identity formation workshop, which was part of Dr Deeds' activity.

Professional Identity

Professional identity is one of the most important lessons in medical education, and Dr Stephens is noted for his research in professional identity development through mask-making workshops. Professional identity formation embodies what it means to "think, act, and feel" like a physician.[1] As part of the professional identity activity, Dr Stephens conducted a virtual workshop on impostor syndrome, concluding with a mask-making activity.[1-3]

Impostor syndrome was first conceptualized by clinical psychologists Clance and Imes in 1978.[4,5] The concept refers

Figure. My mask from Dr Stephen's workshop shows the Cuban flag, which represents my heritage, and the women's health symbol, which represents me as a mother and my love for women's health.

to individuals who are in esteemed roles and positions yet feel as though it is an oversight or stroke of luck vs their legitimate right to be there as a result of their competencies.[4] Gottlieb and colleagues noted that impostor syndrome is increasingly recognized as a condition among physicians and physicians in training.[2,6]

It is especially problematic because of its association with increased rates of burnout and suicide.[2,6] In this article, I will reflect on Dr Stephen's workshop and reflect on the concept of imposter syndrome.

My Story

Being a new mom and a new physician are the most difficult challenges I have faced in my life, but I have worked through them with stride. The mask I made in Dr Stephen's workshop **(Figure)** shows 2 very important images for me, which stand for the difficulties I have faced during my medical school career. One depicts the Cuban flag to represent me being a child of immigrants, and the second image depicts the women's health symbol (mother and baby caressing), which represents me as a pregnant student. It also stands for my love of women's health and subsequent new role

as a mother. These images show why I have imposter syndrome and subsequently reveal that I can overcome the challenges represented by my mask.

Cuba is in political despair, and the Cuban flag on my mask is important because it symbolizes me being a first-generation Cuban American. It symbolizes how my parents and grandparents struggled to escape the Cuban communist regime for the sake of a better future for their children and their children's children. I am the result of my parents' and grandparents' struggles, and I am the promise of a better future for my family and for the generations to come.

Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

Cuba struggles on many fronts as do I. The flag on my mask symbolizes me facing the internal struggles associated with being a Cuban American with Spanish as my primary language. The second image depicts the women's health symbol and my struggle and suffering with postpartum depression after the birth of my first child. Yet, I was resolved to overcome, just as I had witnessed by parents and grandparents do before me. I overcame the challenge of Spanish being my primary language by continuously practicing English, even as a 32-year-old. There are days when I struggle with English more than others, yet my determination persists. I was determined to overcome my postpartum depression and create an emotional bond with my daughter by continuously breastfeeding her at home and pumping breastmilk at work, with the encouragement by my peers and residency faculty.

What my mask does not show are the steps I have taken and am taking to break down those barriers. Taking English for Speakers of Other Languages classes as a child helped strengthen my English language skills. Taking medication and seeking therapy for my postpartum depression helped strengthen my personal relationship with my daughter and my professional relationships at work. These

steps are what matter the most, and with them I can overcome anything—even imposter syndrome.

REFERENCES

1. Stephens MB, Bader KS, Myers KR, Walker MS, Varpio L. Examining professional identity formation through the ancient art of mask-making. *J Gen Intern Med*. 2019;34(7):1113-1115. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-019-04954-3

2. Gottlieb M, Chung A, Battaglioli N, Sebok-Syer SS, Kalantari A. Impostor syndrome among physicians and physicians in training: a scoping review. *Med Educ*. 2020;54(2):116-124. https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.13956

3. Feenstra S, Begeny CT, Ryan MK, Rink FA, Stoker JI, Jordan J. Contextualizing the imposter "syndrome." *Front Psychol*. 2020;13:1-6. https://doi.org.10.3389/fpsyg.2020.575024

4. Clance PR, Imes SA. The impostor phenomenon in high achieving women: dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychother Theory Res Pract*. 1978;15(3):241-247. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/h0086006

5. Stephens MB. Behind the mask. Lifelong Learning in Clinical Excellence. Johns Hopkins University. Published February 4, 2019. Accessed October 18, 2021. https://closler.org/lifelong-learning-inclinical-excellence/behind-the-mask

6. Thomas M, Bigatti S. Perfectionism, impostor phenomenon, and mental health in medicine: a literature review. *Int J Med Educ*. 2020;11:201-213. https://doi.org/10.5116/ijme.5f54.c8f8