

# Should Medical Educators Help Learners Reframe Imposterism?

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Reference: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10401334.2020.1856112>

This opinion piece opens with an excellent succinct review of the issue of imposter syndrome in the medical profession, with a particular focus on medical students. The authors note that the elements of the competitive journey into medicine create pressures around perfectionism and fear of failure, important but not sole drivers of the phenomenon. They cite studies that have attempted to estimate prevalence which, while the studies face methodological challenges, is high with estimates ranging from 60 to 90%. The consequences are serious, whether they are personal in terms of anxiety, or depression, or at a system level where qualified individuals may feel inhibited from working to their full potential for fear that they are not as competent or capable as they feel they project. The mutually enabling relationship of imposter syndrome with burnout, with its deleterious effect on perception of effectiveness, is underscored.

The point of this article is its call to action; a call to recognize the issue, surface it, and support its management with culture change, curriculum, coaching, counselling and ongoing research and measurement.

**Comment.** Imposter syndrome in varying degrees is common thread in coaching conversations, particularly in the leadership context. This review underscores that physician coaches are likely seeing not leaders with imposter syndrome, but physicians with imposter syndrome who have become leaders. If the prevalence is as high as it seems, this is a theme that warrants some air time in any context of physician coaching.

## SBM Mid-Career Leadership Institute: replacing “fake it till you make it” with authentic leadership

Sandra J. Winter

Reference: <https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibaa046>

This commentary by a senior leader describes her journey through the Society for Behavioural Management (SBM) Mid Career Leadership Institute. The program aims to support leaders working in VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) environments blends formal workshops, the creation of small peer communities, access to formal mentors and regular follow up interaction with executive coaches. The program emphasizes assessment and reflection on leadership style and choices, and the author contrasted this approach with approaches providing instruction in specific leadership competencies. The author’s thesis, supported by past literature, was that focusing only on competencies can undermine leadership by fueling a sense of being incomplete in some way, driving the

“imposter” perception. Dr Winter reports that the program has been a potent enabler of her ability to manage significant career changes and accept additional challenges with confidence.

**Comment:** While not a scientific study, this is an interesting personal experience, not in the least because it is about someone moving past imposter syndrome, rather than just sharing that they suffer from it! The multifaceted approach and use of coaching in a longitudinal fashion to support the application of reflections about leadership style and self learnings are a model that is of interest to anyone designing leadership programs.