Title: Am I an imposter? The potential impact of shame and imposter syndrome on well-being during transition periods

Submission Type: Sessions on Medical Education

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Topic Short Description: Shame is a powerful, ubiquitous emotion that occurs in response to perceived transgressions, including errors and failures to achieve expectations. Shame may manifest as self-doubt and imposter syndrome in practicing physicians and medical learners, particularly when they transition into new roles or environments. We seek to create a forum for attendees to 1) explore the transition period as potentially high-risk for shame, imposter syndrome, and emotional distress, and 2) identify strategies for mitigating this risk.

Presenters: 1) William Bynum, MD, Assistant Professor, Department of Community and Family Medicine, Duke University School of Medicine, Durham, NC2) Kori LaDonna, PhD, Assistant Professor, Departments of Innovation in Medical Education and Medicine, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada3) Lara Varpio, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Medicine, Uniformed Services University, Bethesda, MD

Facilitator: Session Facilitator: Anthony Artino, PhD, Professor, Department of Medicine, Uniformed Services University, Bethesda, MD Small-group Facilitator: Sebastian Uijtdehaage, PhD, Professor, Department of Medicine, Uniformed Services University, Bethesda, MD

Learning Objectives: 1) Define and identify shame and differentiate it from related emotions. 2) Define and identify imposter syndrome. 3) Report increased comfort in talking about their shame experiences with others.4) Articulate why transition periods may be “high-risk” periods for experiencing damaging shame reactions.5) List specific strategies to teach, practice, and promote shame resilience during transition periods (and beyond).

Session Plan: Background: Shame is a powerful, ubiquitous self-conscious emotion that occurs in response to perceived transgressions, including errors and failures to achieve expectations.[1,2] Shame results from a negative evaluation of the global self in response to a triggering event, and the shamed individual feels globally flawed, deficient, or unworthy.[2] In a recent qualitative analysis of shame in medical residents, we identified being in a transition period as a potential risk factor for experiencing major shame reactions[3], the effects of which included social isolation, impaired mental wellness, disengagement with learning, and other negative outcomes.[4] One potential driver of self-doubt and imposter syndrome during transition periods is the potential for physicians to perceive underperformance despite meeting or exceeding external expectations.[5] In other words, for physicians in transition periods, being competent does not necessarily equate to feeling competent, and frequent transition periods may engender self-doubt and insecurity in practitioners across a career in medicine and medical education.[5] Furthermore, the tendency to compare to others, hold perfectionist expectations, and struggle with subjective standards of performance may drive shame
susceptibility during transition periods. Finally, for practicing physicians and learners alike, experiencing shame in a culture that values both confidence and competence often means that it must be privately endured, rather than openly shared. In this session, we seek to create a forum for participants to openly explore the transition period as a potentially high-risk period for shame, imposter syndrome, and emotional distress. We will provide a brief overview about the psychology of shame and imposter syndrome, and discuss how transition periods may trigger or exacerbate these emotions. Using personal vignettes about our own struggles with shame during transition periods (as a learner and a senior faculty), we hope to normalize the emotion and create a safe environment that fosters honest dialogue amongst attendees. Attendees will explore the forces that contribute to feelings of shame and imposter syndrome during transition periods and will work to develop specific strategies for preventing or mitigating their effects. The content of the group discussions will be anonymously captured on handwritten notes and later analyzed for basic themes and actionable strategies. This analysis is intended to inform future research on the topic and will be submitted to Academic Medicine as a commentary or perspective piece that outlines the themes and future directions for this important topic. Session Map: 1) Overview of the basic psychology of shame and guilt and the transition period as “high risk” for shame – 12 minutes. Speaker: Will Bynum 2) Transition periods and imposter syndrome – 8 minutes. Speaker: Kori LaDonna 3) A shame story: the senior faculty perspective – 5 minutes. Speaker: Lara Varpio 4) Small group activity #1 (groups of 6-8) – 15 minutes. Moderator: Sebastian Uijtdehaage a. Topic: Reasons why transition periods might be high risk for shame b. Prompt: Think about a time when you felt shame (e.g. flawed, deficient, unworthy, and/or not good enough) and/or imposter syndrome during a transition period. Why did you feel that way? What forces, intrinsic to you and/or related to the learning environment, contributed to your feelings of shame or imposter syndrome? 5) Small group activity #2 (groups of 6-8) – 15 minutes. Moderator: Sebastian Uijtdehaage a. Topic: Identifying strategies to prevent or mitigate shame reactions during transition periods b. Prompt: what specific strategies, tools, and/or resources might be employed to prevent or address feelings of shame and imposter syndrome during transition periods? 6) Small group report-outs – 15 minutes. Moderator: Anthony Artino