

# FMLM Coaching webinar

Tackling the “imposter syndrome”

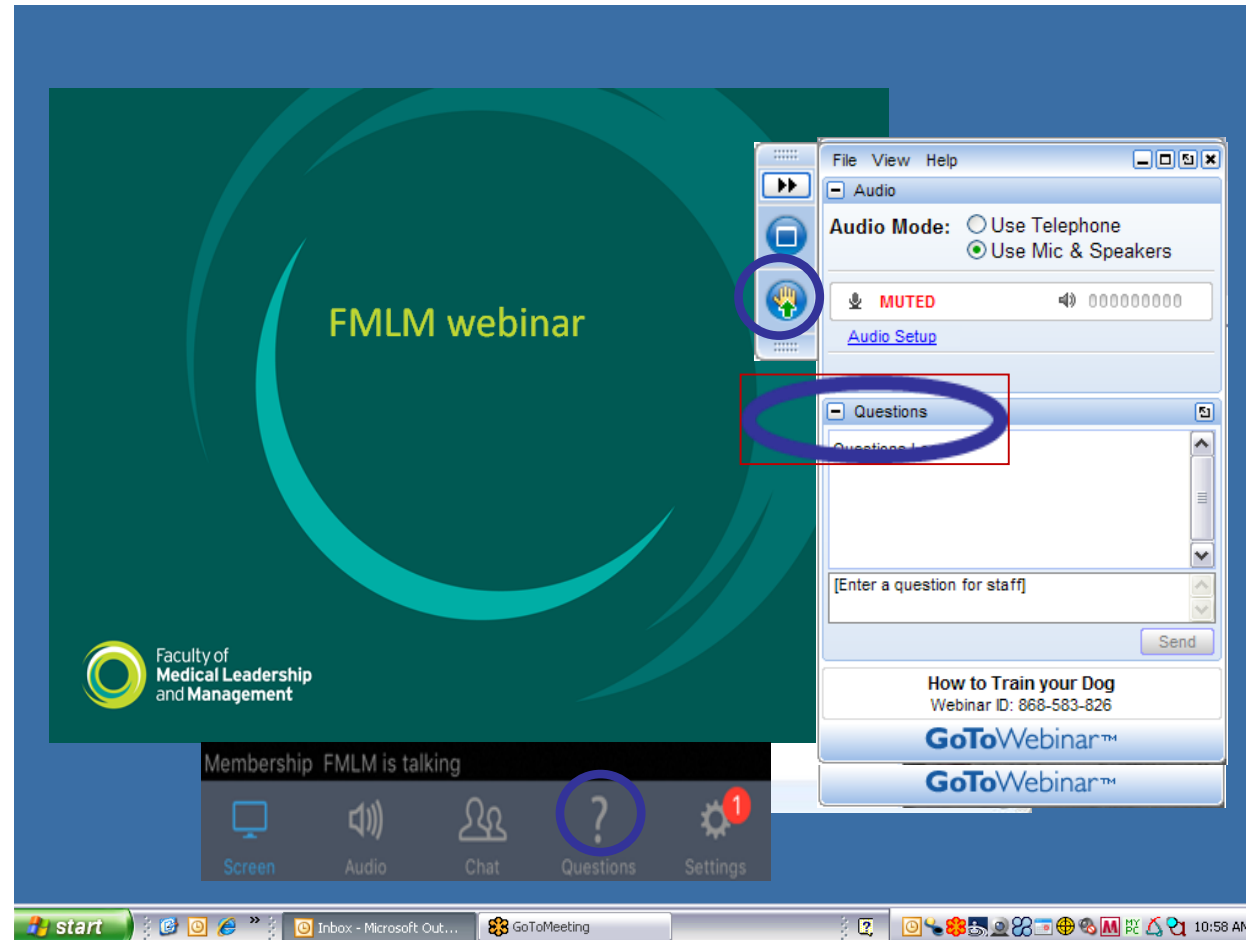
John Wilderspin

22 October 2018 Webinar



Faculty of  
**Medical Leadership  
and Management**

# GoToWebinar Interface



# FMLM Coaching webinar

- Fourth webinar this year produced by the FMLM coaching network
- FMLM has a network of over 20 approved coaching available along with a wide range of coaching resources available via [www.fmlm.ac.uk](http://www.fmlm.ac.uk)
- Tonight we are joined by John Wilderspin and the topic 'tackling imposter syndrome'



# What am I going to cover in this session

- What is “imposter syndrome”?
- How does it affect doctors (and others)?
- How can coaching help if you are affected by imposter syndrome?
  - Learning from my own coaching experience
  - Learning from others
- Questions, and sharing our collective insights and learning
- Finish at 7.15pm

# What is Impostor Syndrome?

“Impostor Syndrome is a pervasive feeling of self-doubt, insecurity, or fraudulence despite often overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It strikes smart, successful individuals... Impostor Syndrome doesn’t discriminate: people of every demographic suffer from feeling like a fraud.....”

(Source; Ellen Hendriksen, Scientific American Magazine May 2015)

## And what it isn't....

- Imposter syndrome isn't a mental health condition
- Despite common use of “syndrome” it is more a “phenomenon”
- It isn't just a lack of self-confidence.....
- Usually confidence grows with expertise and success; people with imposter phenomenon instead put their success down e.g. to luck

(Thanks to Kate Atkins, speaker and writer on Imposter Phenomenon for these and other insights)



# The origins of the term

## “The Imposter Phenomenon in high-achieving women”

- 1998 article in *“Psychotherapy Theory, Research and Practice”*
- Authors: *Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes of Georgia State University*

[http://paulineroseclance.com/pdf/ip\\_high\\_achieving\\_women.pdf](http://paulineroseclance.com/pdf/ip_high_achieving_women.pdf)



# What were the main findings ? (*Article abstract*)

- “The term ‘imposter phenomenon’ is used to describe a internal experience of intellectual phonies”
- “(It) appears to be particularly prevalent and intense amongst a select sample of high-achieving women”
- “Despite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments, women who experience the imposter syndrome persist in believing they are really not bright, and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise
- “Numerous achievements, which one might expect to provide ample object evidence of superior intellectual functioning, do not appear to affect the imposter belief”
- The clinical symptoms most generally reported are generalized anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, and frustration related to inability to meet self-imposed standards of achievement

NB The authors themselves ask whether or not men experience this phenomenon, but in their clinical experience it occurs much less frequently in men, and with much less intensity. Subsequent studies have challenged this finding.





# How does imposter syndrome manifest itself (1)?

(Source; “Overcoming Imposter syndrome” Gill Corkindale, Harvard Business Review May 2008)

“I feel like a fake”

- Imposters feel like they don’t deserve success or professional accolades
- Feel that others have been deceived into thinking otherwise
- At the same time, have a fear of being “found out” or “unmasked”
- Believe that they don’t deserve their position; “somebody made a mistake”

# How does Imposter Syndrome manifest itself? (2)

- “Its all down to luck/success is no big deal”
- “I just got lucky/it was a fluke” (may mask the fear that their luck might run out next time.....)
- A tendency to down-play success and discount it
- Attribute success to having support or the task being easy
- Often struggle to accept compliments



# How does Imposter Syndrome manifest itself? (3)

“I must not fail”

- Pressure not to fail in current situation in order not to be “found out”
- Paradoxically, success becomes a problem, because it brings the attendant pressure of responsibility and visibility
- In turn, this leads to an inability to enjoy success (i.e. self-reinforcing)



# How does Imposter syndrome affect doctors?

- No specific research that I'm aware of...(please tell me if there is so we can share it via FMLM)
- However; all the literature I have read refers to susceptibility of high achievers; doctors are clearly in that category
- Also lots of references to people transitioning to new, high visibility roles (eg students) being particularly susceptible; cf doctors moving into leadership roles...
- My personal experience = co-facilitating FMLM leadership programmes;
  - On all programmes ( including experienced GP leaders taking on larger roles) reference to tackling “imposter syndrome” or similar when participants asked about their devt. Needs
  - Group conversations confirmed “imposter syndrome” as a widespread phenomenon
  - Hence my suggestion of a webinar to share learning.....



# Learning from coaching; my experience

- First experienced when I was coaching a national professional leader
- Respected by colleagues in her organisation and more widely, but:

*“I felt I had been promoted beyond my capability and I was unworthy of this role”.*

*“I felt isolated, very anxious and exposed as a fraud”*

*“I later learned all about my inner critic and that very common imposter syndrome”*



# Learning from leadership development

- I have co-facilitated a number of FMLM GP leadership workshops
- In all the cohorts, in different geographies, manifestations of imposter syndrome/phenomenon (incl. self-reference)
- Specific issues as per Clance and Imes definitions;
  - *generalized anxiety*
  - *lack of self-confidence*
  - *frustration related to inability to meet self-imposed standards of achievement*

NB most pronounced in the more senior/experienced leaders....

# How can coaching help people who are affected?

## My own experience;

- Not always easy to spot imposter phenomenon; as with all coaching the coach needs to listen attentively
- As with most coaching, empathy is helpful eg “Be kind to yourself”
- Perseverance is required (for coach and coachee); it can be a very deep-seated phenomenon
- Group work can be effective; eg workshops were helpful in demonstrating that other people you see as successful/highly competent also felt like “imposters”



# Useful tips from Dan Beverly, Executive Coach

- Imposter syndrome is a very common phenomenon; says that research and his own coaching practice suggests up to 70% of professionals are affected
- Not easy to spot; by definition people affected don't go around talking about it
- Can be debilitating; symptoms include;
  - *excessive stress, intense fear of failure, performance anxiety*
- Often plays out as;
  - *Procrastination, Perfectionism, Indecision, Risk aversion, Micro-management and Workaholism*

(Source <http://danbeverly.com/5-powerful-coaching-questions-to-beat-impostor-syndrome/> )





# Dan Beverly: “5 powerful coaching questions”

- 1) Which of your successes are you not taking ownership of?
- 2) Which of your beliefs about success are holding you back?
- 3) Which of your strengths are you overlooking?
- 4) Who are you talking to about this?
- 5) When you beat the Impostor Syndrome, what will you be losing?  
*(cf 5) link to Kegan and Lahey’s book “Immunity to Change”)*

<http://danbeverly.com/5-powerful-coaching-questions-to-beat-impostor-syndrome/>



# Useful tips from Kate Atkins; speaker and writer on Imposter Phenomenon

- Spotting the imposter phenomenon;
  - *Everybody else sees that you are doing a great job, and have a good track record; you truly believe it is just a fluke*
  - *Objectively, you are successful, only you think you aren't*
- Helping people experiencing imposter phenomenon;  
*“Be kind to yourself”*
- See also Kate's website [www.kateatkin.com/imposter](http://www.kateatkin.com/imposter)





Questions, reflections and sharing learning



Faculty of  
**Medical Leadership  
and Management**