Transcript of Mental Health During your PhD: Impostor Syndrome by Dr Zoe Ayres for Accessibility

With over half of postgraduate students meeting criteria to classify them as depressed, this poster series explores common causes that affects PhD students during their studies.

What exactly is impostor syndrome?

A psychological phenomenon, impostor syndrome is intense feelings of self doubt, making people feel like a fraud. These feelings can often reach boiling point during a PhD, students feeling they have gained the system or fluked their way onto their PhD programme. someone is going to figure out I don't belong here soon is classic impostor syndrome. Everyone is smarter than me - you guessed it impostor syndrome who stop these feelings are often more heavily experienced by minority groups, due to lack of representation in academic settings.

So what can we do about it?

Personal growth

if this is the first time you've heard of impostor syndrome, considering reading around the area and finding coping strategies that work for you. Even if you have heard of the syndrome, consider whether you are being impacted by it. Writing a list of your achievements , personal and professional, to refer back to you when feeling low may helpful stop seeking medical help/counselling to discuss how you might be feeling is a positive step towards taking control of your inner critic.

Peer support

you may not suffer with impostor syndrome personally, but those around you might , including faculty. Aim to be open and honest about both successes on failures - doing frontier research for a PhD studies is often more failures. It is important to recognise that you can be part of the support network of researchers around you, where positivity and words of encouragement during difficult periods of research, can make the difference between a good day in a bad one. Helping build up the confidence of your peers around you is a good practise to becoming PI.

Role of the PI

it may seem obvious, but make sure to praise your PhD students when they do a good job. This does not mean only when they produce publishable quality work or have successes in the lab. In fact, going through through a failure and learning from mistake is in itself something that should be praised. The PI should also work towards a collaborate not compete group mentality to reduce cross PhD comparisons. No two PhD’s are the same so let's stop comparing them. This also helps improve peer-to-peer discussions.

The institution

Role models from all backgrounds are central to help pay she students with feelings of impostor syndrome, yet academia is typically lacking in diversity. Commitment to equality diversity and inclusion initiatives from the University is the central . People from underrepresented groups are more likely to become disheartened and leave academia entirely it is also the responsibility of the University to raise awareness and support for mental health issues during their PhD studies. Specific talks discussing impostor syndrome may be beneficial.

Struggling with isolation? Need someone to talk to you? Call Samaritans now on 116- 123

Part of the #mental health series by Dr Zoe Ayres (@zjayres). Free to distribute.