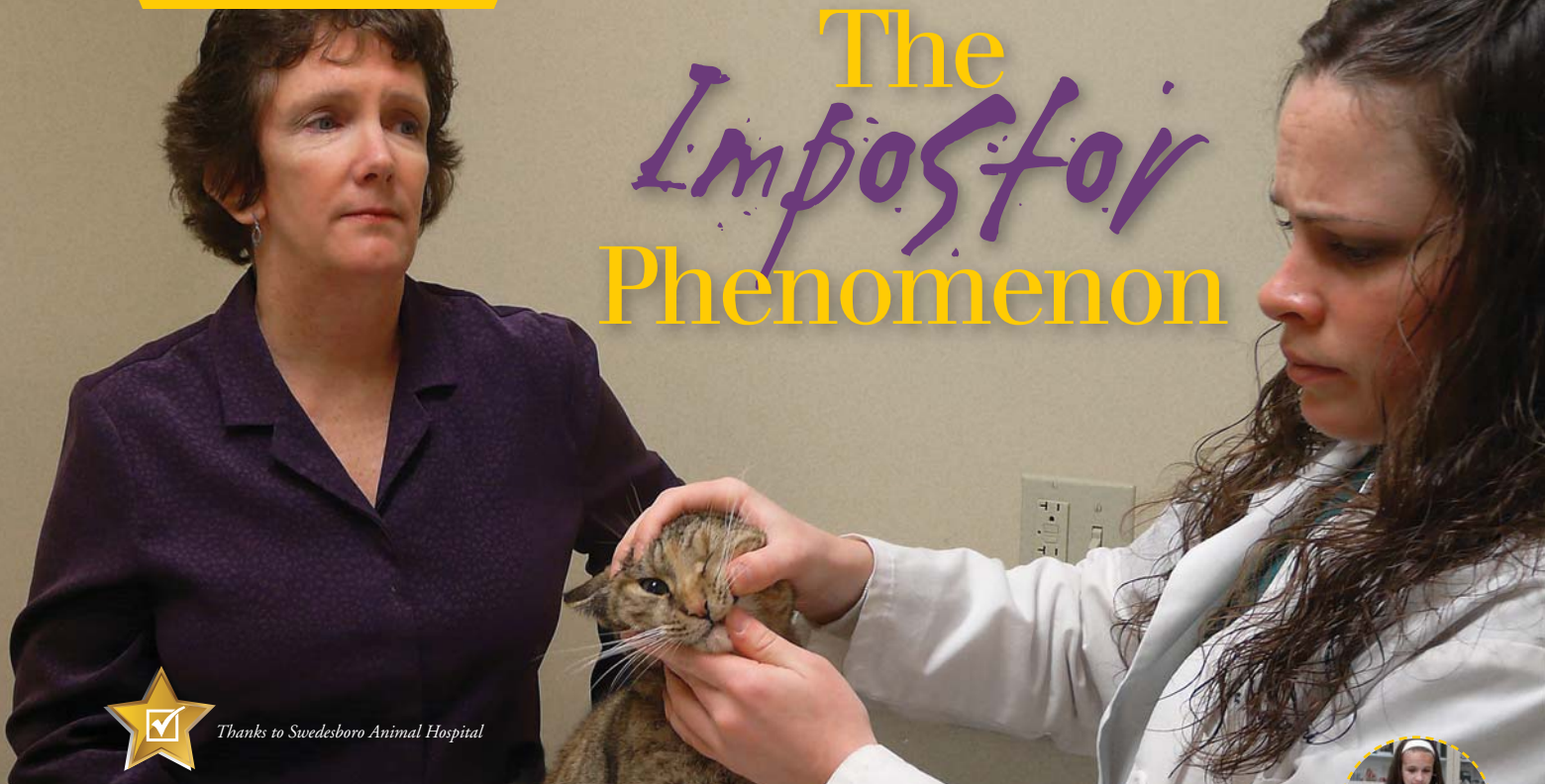


The Impostor Phenomenon



Thanks to Swedesboro Animal Hospital

IT was time for Grady's check-up and the first available appointment was with Chris Sheflin, DVM—proud graduate of the class of 2010. Dr. Sheflin expected a steep learning curve in her new career, but she had no idea that walking into the exam room to clients her mother's age would prove so daunting. After 4 years of training, several preceptorships, and an intense year of clinical experiences, she had expected to feel confident during a simple physical exam. In reality, her shaking hands and staccato communication style didn't do anything to put either her client or her patient at ease. She wouldn't be surprised if the client grabbed Grady off of the exam table and fled for her car.

A career transition can bring out the worst in everyone. Self-doubt in the midst of an unfamiliar endeavor is a normal part of career development. In fact, it is so common among new mothers, new employees, and new professionals that it has a name: the *Impostor Phenomenon*, and is characterized by feelings of unease, insecurity, and a fear of being discredited or discovered to be a fraud. Such apprehension is especially common in professions where public expectations are high and expertise is often portrayed as having a mature face. We suddenly fear being “unmasked.”

Remember that everyone has to start somewhere and that this fear is our worst enemy. Feeling awkward can lead to behaving clumsily and performing

ineptly. For most of us, this is a common response to a new challenge. It indicates that we are stretching personal limits and experiencing psychological growing pains, progressing to a new level. Allowing self-doubt to take root can create a vicious cycle of apprehension, anxiety, and paralysis. So don't fight it; understand it. ■

Suggested Reading

1. **Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway.** Jeffers S. Random House, 1987.
2. **The Impostor Phenomenon: Overcoming the Fear That Haunts Your Success.** Clance P. Peachtree Publishers, 1985.



Do You Feel Like An Impostor?
Take the online quiz at
myEVT.com/handouts

Dealing with the Impostor Phenomenon



- 1 **What you're feeling on the inside is not necessarily visible on the outside.** Taking a deep breath and holding your head high as you walk in the exam room can make you appear more confident.
- 2 **Concentrate on your client and your patient, not on your feelings of awkwardness or unease.** By focusing on those who have come for your expertise and care, you can often distract yourself from the worst of your apprehensions.
- 3 **Acknowledge your new status.** The Impostor Phenomenon can intensify if you attempt to hide your unease. Letting your client know that you are still learning your way around can put you both at ease.
- 4 **Accept compliments.** When we feel insecure, it's difficult to acknowledge that others may see something positive in our actions. Rather than deflecting positive remarks, simply smile and say thank you. Then repeat the compliment to yourself several times!
- 5 **Don't be afraid to ask for help.** Acknowledging the expertise of others and asking for needed assistance encourages mutual respect.
- 6 **Watch your negative self-talk.** Imagine what it would be like to have a colleague following you, criticizing you and pointing out every small error. Your self-critical voice can have the same destructive effect, so ease up on the self-assessment.

Skillsets addressed in this article: self-awareness; self-management