

Harker: Dealing with my hospital fantasies

My second year at UT, I had a schedule that would have made even the busiest of people cringe a little. I worked 40 hours a week on third shift for Oasis, attended college full time and wrote for the Independent Collegian on top of trying to maintain an unstable relationship.

I felt like I was drowning.

One day, I found myself in a 7:30 a.m. class with Dr. Abdel Halim, barely hanging on. The class was interesting, but I was dragging and could barely even get myself there, even in my sweatpants with my thermos full of coffee.

That day in class she played a Ted Talk video of a woman who explained something that she called a “hospital fantasy.” A hospital fantasy is when you daydream about being taken so ill that you end up in the hospital and are physically incapable of fulfilling your obligations. Apparently, it is a pretty common daydream among women.

To some people, this may sound silly or even crazy, but for me it was all too real. I would often think about being in a car wreck, falling down the stairs or catching something and that illness would land me somewhere my responsibilities could not follow. I was suffocating, and I didn't know how to stop.

Unfortunately, this realization did not fix the problem, but, as it turned out, the end of the semester did. Once college and the newspaper stopped requiring my constant attention, my world came to a grinding halt.

Who was I if I wasn't constantly working? What purpose did I fulfill? My anxiety started to become worse and worse until I started applying for internships. I ended up with two new jobs

and, at first, even that didn't feel like enough. It didn't take long, though, for me to be overworked again and fall all the way back to square one.

It was a vicious cycle, one a lot of college students find themselves stuck in time and time again. But what can you do? How can we stop it?

For me, it came in small steps. In being honest with myself and forcing myself to take the time to do the things I enjoyed, instead of just fulfilling my obligations, I found that I was climbing my way out of the dark place I was in.

At first it was hard, but the more I did it and the more I talked about how I was feeling, the better my life was becoming.

Now, over a year later, I'm doing better. I'm free from my toxic relationship, I do yoga, I spend time reading books I enjoy and playing with my cats. I'm still insanely busy, but I've found ways to incorporate self-care into my everyday life.

I'm not suggesting that meditation and a go-getter attitude are going to magically fix your anxiety, depression and other problems. I still take medicine for my anxiety. It's the entire package that has finally gotten me to a place where I can say that I'm okay.

So take the time to take care of yourself, on whatever level you need it. New hobbies, friendships or even taking the time to chill: Find out what works for you. The cycle doesn't have to keep spinning. But only you can be the one to stop it.

Jessica Harker is a third-year communication student and the IC's Editor-in-Chief..