



In the School

Sharon L. Youmans, Pharm.D., M.P.H.

Associate Professor of Clinical Pharmacy
Vice-Chair for Educational Affairs, Department of Clinical Pharmacy
University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) School of Pharmacy
San Francisco, California

“Until [pharmacy students practice their communication skills], they can’t fully understand how important it is to break down the medical jargon when working with patients.”

— Dr. Sharon L. Youmans

Even Dr. Sharon Youmans sometimes has trouble understanding medical text.

“I read some things and think, ‘I don’t get this,’ and I consider myself well educated,” says Youmans, an associate professor of clinical pharmacy at the University of California, San Francisco. “I can’t imagine how it is for someone with low health literacy.”

Through research, Youmans is trying to better understand what pharmacists must do to help patients with low health literacy take medicines correctly. She passes this knowledge on to her students. She teaches them that the answer lies in open communication — both spoken and written — and cultural understanding.

An important part of Youmans’ lesson plan is role playing. One student plays the pharmacist and one plays the patient. She tells students to listen without judgment. She has them encourage the “patients” to ask questions.

Youmans recalls one role-play session in which she asked the “pharmacists” to create a medication reminder calendar for their “patients.” One student became upset because he didn’t know where to begin. Youmans suggested he ask the “patient” what she wanted.

“Pharmacists often have action plans for patients. But we need to ask them ‘What works for you?’” says Youmans. “Otherwise, the patient may just say he or she understands. But in reality, he or she may be unable to carry out the correct instructions or suggestions at home.”

These important lessons get students ready to take part in the school’s Medicare Part D outreach program. This is where students work one-on-one with seniors to choose the most cost-effective prescription drug plan.

“It’s a great opportunity for students to practice their communication skills,” says Youmans. “Until they do that, they can’t fully understand how important it is to break down the medical jargon when working with patients.”

When she’s not in the classroom, Youmans is working on studies that look at how pharmacists can improve patient relationships and communication.

“Being able to take medication the right way is key,” says Youmans. “Many people think that just because they’re taking the pills, they’re doing the right thing. But if they’re not taking them properly, it can mean the difference between a treatment working or not working, or between having side effects or not.”

“This is why it’s so important that we continue to develop training for pharmacists to improve their communication with patients. We can have the best technology and the best medication. The information required for people to take medications properly must be given in a way that patients understand it best. Anything less is unacceptable.”

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 1950: Blood research pioneer Charles R. Drew dies. 1989: Bill White elected president of the National Baseball League.	2 1984: Georgetown coach John Thompson becomes first African American coach to win the NCAA basketball tournament.	3 1826: Poet-oralist James Madison Bell, author of the Emancipation Day poem “The Day and the War,” born. 1990: Sarah Vaughan, jazz singer known as “The Divine One,” dies.	4 1968: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. 2007: Eddie Robinson, the winningest coach in college football, dies.	5 1951: Washington, D.C., Municipal Court of Appeals outlaws segregation in restaurants.
6 1909: Matthew A. Henson reaches North Pole, 45 minutes before Robert E. Peary.	7 1915: Jazz and blues legend Billie Holiday born. 1959: Lorraine Hansberry becomes first black playwright to win New York Drama Critics Award (for <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>).	8 1974: Atlanta Braves slugger Hank Aaron hits 715th career home run, surpassing Babe Ruth as the game’s all-time home-run leader.	9 1898: Paul Robeson, actor, singer, activist, born.	10 1943: Arthur Ashe, first black to win the U.S. Open and men’s singles title at Wimbledon, born. 1947: Brooklyn Dodger Jackie Robinson becomes first black to play major league baseball.	11 1899: Percy Julian, developer of physostigmine and synthetic cortisone, born. 1966: Emmett Ashford becomes first black umpire in the major leagues.	12 1983: Harold Washington becomes first African American elected mayor of Chicago.
13 1950: Historian Carter G. Woodson, author of <i>The Miseducation of the Negro</i> , dies. 1997: Tiger Woods wins Masters Golf Tournament.	14 1775: First abolitionist society in U.S. founded in Philadelphia.	15 1964: Sidney Poitier becomes first black to win Academy Award for Best Actor for <i>Lilies of the Field</i> .	16 1862: Slavery abolished in the District of Columbia.	17 1983: Alice Walker wins Pulitzer Prize for fiction for <i>The Color Purple</i> . 1990: Ralph David Abernathy, civil rights leader, dies.	18 1995: Margo Jefferson receives Pulitzer Prize for criticism.	19 Passover Begins (sundown) 1972: Stationed in Germany, Major Gen. Frederic E. Davidson becomes first African American to lead an Army division.
20 1894: Dr. Lloyd A. Hall, pioneering food chemist, born.	21 1966: Pfc. Milton L. Olive III awarded posthumously the Medal of Honor for valor in Vietnam.	22 1922: Jazz bassist and composer Charles Mingus born.	23 Administrative Professionals Day 1856: Granville T. Woods, inventor of the steam boiler and automobile air brakes, born. 1872: Charlotte E. Ray is first black woman admitted to the District of Columbia Bar.	24 1944: United Negro College Fund incorporated.	25 1918: Ella Fitzgerald, “First Lady of Song,” born.	26 1888: Sarah Boone patents ironing board.
27 1945: August Wilson, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, born. 1968: Dr. Vincent Porter becomes first black certified in plastic surgery.	28 1839: Cinque leads Amistad mutiny off the coast of Long Island, New York.	29 1899: Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington, jazz musician and composer, born.	30 1952: Dr. Louis T. Wright honored by American Cancer Society for his contributions to cancer research.			

Fact Number 4

Only about 50 percent of all patients take medications as directed.