



In the Neighborhood

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When was the last time your doctor broke out in song to tell you how to stay healthy?

If your answer is “never,” then you haven’t met Dr. Jesse. Dr. Jesse and his crew called “The Prevention Gang” are puppets created by Ira Combs, the community liaison nurse coordinator at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. He also is the voice of Dr. Jesse.

Dr. Jesse and The Prevention Gang have their own local cable show in Omaha, Nebraska. They teach people of all ages about important health issues in a way that is easy to understand.

“Dr. Jesse can say things that I couldn’t say. He gets people to listen. He jokes around and makes health fun,” says Combs.

Dr. Jesse talks about topics on a basic level. He tells people to write a list of questions before visiting the doctor. He talks about healthful eating, blood pressure and prostate cancer.

Combs thought of the idea five years ago. He wanted to find a new way to reach people with his health information. His coworkers at the medical center told him to do a talk show or create a brochure. But he thought those ideas were boring and stale.

“The important thing is to get people to listen to the message,” says Combs. “I could make a brochure with great information in it, but no one would read it because it’s boring and black and white. Unless your message stands out, people won’t listen to it.”

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— Ira F. Combs

So Combs created Dr. Jesse. Today, other characters such as Prevention Man and Medical Dude join the jewelry-wearing doctor. The characters visit health fairs, schools and community events. They have comic books as well as “rap” videos on YouTube.

“Whatever the message, it must be tailored to the audience. You don’t talk to a 3-year-old the same way you talk to a 10-year-old. That may seem basic. But sometimes when doctors talk, they talk down to people. That turns off people,” says Combs, who is a former schoolteacher.

Combs says teaching people to be more health literate is much more effective than the alternative.

“Helping people learn how to take care of themselves is so cheap and so effective,” he says. “It’s much better to stop childhood obesity or prostate cancer before they develop than to pay for their treatment — both with money and with quality of life.”

It’s safe to say Dr. Jesse would agree.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 1889: Frederick Douglass named U.S. Minister to Haiti.	2 1872: Elijah McCoy patents first self-lubricating locomotive engine. The quality of his inventions helped coin the phrase “the real McCoy.”	3 1688: The Quakers in Germantown, Pennsylvania, make first formal protest against slavery.	4 Independence Day 1900: Traditional birthdate of Louis “Satchmo” Armstrong, jazz pioneer.	5 1892: Andrew J. Beard patents rotary engine. 1991: Nelson Mandela elected president of the African National Congress.
6 1957: Althea Gibson wins women’s singles title at Wimbledon, first black to win tennis’s most prestigious award.	7 1948: Cleveland Indians sign pitcher Leroy “Satchel” Paige.	8 1943: Faye Wattleton, first black director of Planned Parenthood, born. 2000: Venus Williams wins women’s singles championship at Wimbledon.	9 1893: Dr. Daniel Hale Williams performs first successful open-heart operation.	10 1875: Educator Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of Bethune-Cookman College, born.	11 1905: W.E.B. DuBois and William Monroe Trotter organize the Niagara Movement, a forerunner of the NAACP.	12 1937: Actor, comedian Bill Cosby born. 1949: Frederick M. Jones patents cooling system for food transportation vehicles.
13 1965: Thurgood Marshall becomes first black appointed U.S. solicitor general.	14 1951: George Washington Carver Monument, first national park honoring a black, is dedicated in Joplin, Missouri.	15 1867: Maggie Lena Walker, first woman and first black to become president of a bank, born.	16 1822: Violette A. Johnson, first black woman to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court, born. 1862: Anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett born.	17 1959: Singer Billie Holiday dies.	18 1899: L.C. Bailey issued patent for the folding bed. 1998: African American Civil War Soldiers Memorial dedicated, Washington, D.C.	19 1925: Paris debut of Josephine Baker, entertainer, activist and humanitarian.
20 1950: Black troops (24th Regiment) win first U.S. victory in Korea.	21 1896: Mary Church Terrell elected first president of National Association of Colored Women.	22 1939: Jane M. Bolin of New York City appointed first black female judge.	23 1962: Jackie Robinson becomes first black baseball player in the major leagues inducted into baseball’s Hall of Fame.	24 1807: Shakespearean actor Ira Aldridge born in New York City.	25 1916: Garrett Morgan, inventor of the gas mask, rescues six people from gas-filled tunnel in Cleveland, Ohio.	26 1948: President Harry S. Truman issues Executive Order 9981, ending segregation in armed forces.
27 1880: Alexander P. Ashbourne patents process for refining coconut oil.	28 1868: 14th Amendment, granting blacks full citizenship rights, becomes part of the Constitution.	29 1895: First National Conference of Colored Women Convention held in Boston.	30 1822: James Varick becomes first bishop of African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.	31 1874: Rev. Patrick Francis Healy inaugurated president of Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.	Fact Number 7 Oral and visual tools help patients absorb new information, which increases learning.	