



In the Doctor's Office

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“When people feel they can get information easily — and have the right to it — it is easier for them to work with doctors.”

— Dr. Carolyn Barley Britton

It was a patient Dr. Carolyn Barley Britton treated early in her career who taught her to be a better listener.

Britton, an associate professor of clinical neurology at Columbia University in New York City, had reviewed a medicine card and instructions with the patient. But a few days later, he returned to the hospital. He wasn't feeling well. He didn't know what to do.

“I asked him if he took his medicine. He said he took all the pills on his card,” Britton says. “I realized he really didn't understand what I had told him. He had just nodded his head in agreement. He wanted to please me.”

“Sometimes, we [doctors] talk to patients, but we don't really see if we are being understood,” Britton says. “Low health literacy is the number one factor in poor health and increases your chances of going to the hospital. People who understand their health needs are more helpful partners with their doctors in making sure they have good health results.”

Britton is president-elect of the National Medical Association (NMA). She also was the main researcher for NMA's “Doctor Speak, Doctor Listen” health literacy campaign. The campaign includes community programs, such as Ask Me 3, which is offered with the Partnership for Clear Health Communication. It teaches people the

three questions they should always ask their doctors: What is my main problem? What do I need to do? Why is it important for me to do this?

The campaign also includes training programs for doctors. Britton and other NMA doctors are currently revisiting the NMA's cultural competency guide, which will be updated in the next two years. All NMA doctors receive the guide.

“Many doctors confuse cultural sensitivity with cultural competency,” says Britton. “Sensitivity is knowing about different cultures. Cultural competency is being able to use that knowledge to speak and better connect with patients. Doctors need basic education tools to help them communicate in ways that help patients understand how to manage their health.”

In her own practice, Britton spends time with new patients to make them comfortable and to learn how they speak and use body language. She asks patients to visit her office rather than call. Seeing them helps her know when something is wrong and builds a relationship.

“Many people are afraid of the medical community because they don't understand it or can't control it,” says Britton. “When people feel they can get information easily — and have the right to it — it is easier for them to work with doctors.”

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
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Fact Number 3

Up to 80 percent of patients forget what their doctor tells them as soon as they leave the doctor's office — and nearly 50 percent of what they do remember is recalled incorrectly.

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| <p>2 1867: Congress enacts charter to establish Howard University. 2006: Prominent blues bass guitarist Willie Kent dies.</p> | <p>3 1865: Freedmen's Bureau established by federal government to aid newly freed slaves.</p> | <p>4 1965: Bill Russell of the Boston Celtics honored as NBA's most valuable player for fourth time in five years.</p> | <p>5 1770: Crispus Attucks becomes one of the first casualties of the American Revolution.</p> | <p>6 1857: Supreme Court issues Dred Scott decision.</p> | <p>7 1965: Supreme Court upholds key provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. 1965: Photographer-filmmaker Gordon Parks, who captured the struggles and triumphs of black America, dies.</p> | <p>8 1977: Henry L. Marsh III becomes first African American elected mayor of Richmond, Virginia.</p> |
| <p>9 Daylight Saving Time Begins 1841: Amistad mutineers freed by Supreme Court.</p> | <p>10 1869: Robert Tanner Freeman becomes first black to receive a degree in dentistry. 1913: Harriet Tubman, abolitionist and Civil War nurse, dies.</p> | <p>11 1959: Lorraine Hansberry's <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> opens at Barrymore Theater, New York; the first play by a black woman to premiere on Broadway.</p> | <p>12 1932: Andrew Young, former U.N. ambassador and former mayor of Atlanta, born.</p> | <p>13 1773: Jean Baptiste Pointe Du Sable, black pioneer and explorer, founded Chicago.</p> | <p>14 1956: Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott ends when municipal bus service is desegregated.</p> | <p>15 1947: John Lee, first black commissioned officer in the U.S. Navy, assigned to duty.</p> |
| <p>16 Palm Sunday 1827: <i>Freedom's Journal</i>, the first U.S. black newspaper, is founded. 1846: Rebecca Cole, second black female physician in the U.S., born.</p> | <p>17 St. Patrick's Day 1885: William F. Cosgrove patents automatic stop plug for gas and oil pipes. 1890: Charles B. Brooks patents street sweeper.</p> | <p>18 1822: The Phoenix Society, a literary and educational group, founded by blacks in New York City.</p> | <p>19 1971: The Rev. Leon Sullivan elected to board of directors of General Motors.</p> | <p>20 1883: Jan E. Matzelliger patents shoemaking machine.</p> | <p>21 Good Friday 1965: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. leads march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, for voting rights.</p> | <p>22 1898: J.W. Smith patents lawn sprinkler.</p> |
| <p>23 Easter 1873: Slavery abolished in Puerto Rico.</p> | <p>24 1907: Nurse and aviator Janet Harmon Bragg born.</p> | <p>25 1931: Ida B. Wells-Barnett, journalist, anti-lynching activist and founding member of the NAACP, dies.</p> | <p>26 1872: Thomas J. Martin patents fire extinguisher.</p> | <p>27 1924: Jazz singer Sarah Vaughan, “The Divine One,” born.</p> | <p>28 1870: Jonathan S. Wright becomes first black state supreme court justice in South Carolina.</p> | <p>29 1918: Pearl Bailey, singer and actor, born.</p> |
| <p>30 1870: Fifteenth Amendment ratified, guaranteeing voting rights to blacks.</p> | <p>31 1988: Toni Morrison wins Pulitzer Prize for <i>Beloved</i>.</p> | | | | | |