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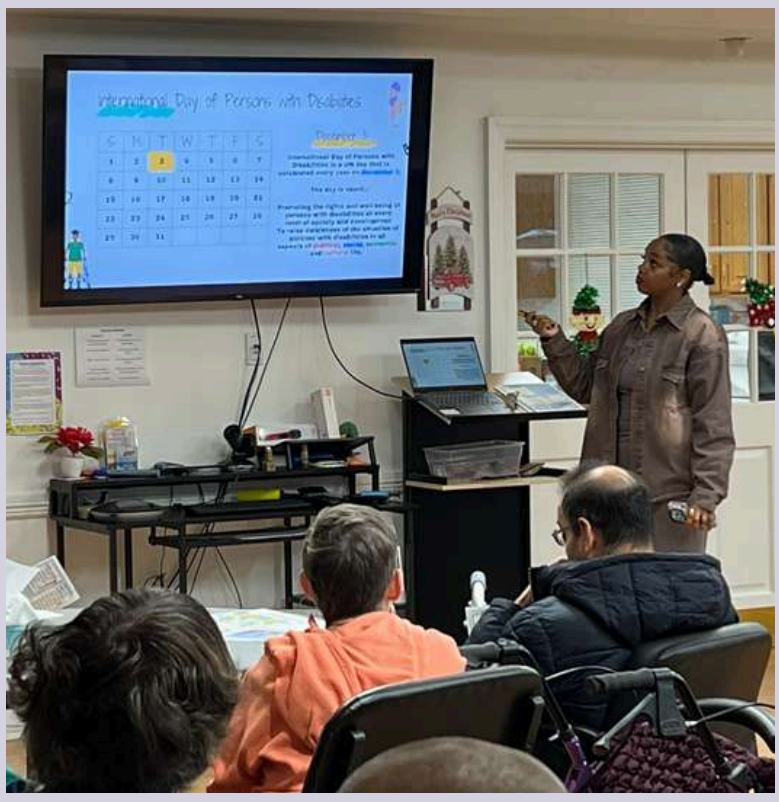
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"Marathon not a Sprint"

Hitting My Stride: Growing Through Service, Community, and New Opportunities

If the first 90 days of my fellowship felt like learning how to pace myself at the starting line, these past few months have been about finding my rhythm and learning the true meaning of impact. I am discovering the secret superpower that Dr. John and Dr. Anwari help all the fellows discover: **Empathy.** This fellowship is helping me harness the power of empathy to become a better healthcare professional. The more I engage in this work, the more I realize that the challenges communities are facing are not really different, regardless of where they are located. They all want to be heard, respected, and acknowledged in a meaningful way. This long-distance journey is best summarized by the Tanzanian Proverb: "Little by little, a little becomes a lot." This is the story of my progress, where every one-on-one conversation, every local workshop, and every national panel pushes me a little further to make an impact both locally and nationally."



Pictured: Dr. Charys Demery presenting at the Wellness Center for Older Adults (WCOA)

The Foundations of Empathy: Local Impact

This December, I had the opportunity to return to the Educate Before You Medicate (EBYM) series, this time focusing on disability awareness. Being in that sensitive space reminded me how important it is to approach every topic with clarity and deep understanding. The conversations we had reinforced something I'm learning over and over: when people feel seen, and that you are leading with understanding rather than assumptions, they feel empowered to take charge of their own health. These workshops show how little by little, I am growing into an educator who leads with empathy.





"If you are not the voice of the people, then you can not be the servant of the people." - John Lewis

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Pictured: Dr. Charys Demery presenting about medication safety at ARK church diabetes program

Deepening My Voice at Ark Church

The D.E.E.P. program at Ark Church continues to be one of the spaces where I feel most connected to the community. Teaching the second class on medication safety, helped me step more confidently into my educator role. Being trusted to guide these conversations, especially in a faith-based environment, affirmed the power of meeting people where they are.These sessions continually affirm why I wanted to be part of this fellowship: to make health information accessible, relatable, and actionable for the people who need it most. This is where I truly began to activate my Superpower: **Empathy**.

Herndon Health Fair: Learning From Our Seniors



Pictured: Dr. Charys Demery presenting at Herndon Health Fair along with Dr. Colon

From the foundation of trust built at Ark Church, I moved to the Herndon Health Fair, where I spent the day talking with seniors about nutrition and hydration. So many shared how they struggle with staying hydrated throughout their day, a reminder that health challenges are often rooted in simple daily habits. More than anything, it reminded me how valuable it is to slow down and truly listen. Sometimes the most impactful health education, that "little" bit of guidance happens in quiet, one-on-one conversations that start with empathy.

A statement from one of the participants resonated with me:

"You know, the hardest part of getting old isn't the symptoms; it's changing the habits. And we only listen to people we trust."

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The HEALUS Project: Building, Learning, and Leading

The H.E.A.L.U.S. (Helping to Empower Active Living, U.S.) Health & Wellness Project is where I've been able to translate successful community-level strategies into a national health movement. While the focus at Ark Church was on a single community, H.E.A.L.-U.S. scales that proven model: equipping trusted messengers, namely, community and faith leaders to reach congregations across the entire country. My work focuses on equipping messengers and congregations with the tools they need to foster healthier communities through tailored training and engagement materials. I take particular pride in ensuring that critical health information is translated into actionable, culturally relevant solutions for communities like my own. Although distilling technical public health data into localized strategies is a challenge, the reward lies in seeing this content drive meaningful, large-scale behavior change across the country



PCORI Conference: The Framework for Engagement

Attending the PCORI Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., reinforced the academic and philosophical necessity of my H.E.A.L.U.S work. The entire experience was a powerful reminder that truly effective public health isn't about top-down policy mandates; it is about co-creating solutions with the people we serve. I was particularyly struck by the discussions on patient-centered research, which diretly informs the H.E.A.L.-U.S philosophy. By ensuring that lived experiences are uplifted and are central to the design of our materials, we move beyond simply providing information to fostering true health empowerment.



Pictured: Dr. Charys Demery with NSC's Executive Director Dr. Donney John in Washington D.C.

A statement from one of the speakers touched me:

"If you are creating solutions for a community without creating them with a community, you haven't solved the right problem."

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National Influenza Vaccination Week Panel (NMQF): The Voice on the National Stage



The most fulfilling experience of my fellowship thus far was being invited to serve as a panelist alongside my colleague, Dr. Anwari, during National Influenza Vaccination Week, organized by the National Minority Quality Forum (NMQF). Sharing the stage with influential leaders who have dedicated their careers to addressing systemic health inequities was a full-circle moment. Our discussion focused on the critical role of community pharmacists in building vaccine confidence. This is vital because vaccination rates for influenza and other routine vaccines are often lower amongst communities of color. I shared insights on how the pharmacist, as the most accessible healthcare provider, can serve as a trusted source to combat misinformation. We know that pharmacist involvement as an immunizer or advocate significantly increases immunization uptake, particularly for the influenza vaccine. By leveraging community pharmacists, and the trust they've already built, we can directly address vaccine hesitancy and help close these critical immunization gaps for vulnerable populations.

Cultivating Care: Women's Health at 1st Nova Ghanaian SDA Church

I recently had the chance to share a presentation on women's cancer prevention and screening at 1st Nova Ghanaian SDA Church. It served as a powerful reminder that transformative health work isn't confined to medical facilities; it takes root in the shared, trusted spaces of a church hall. For me, this wasn't just about taking these heavy, complex medical topics and making them feel manageable through lens of faith and culture. I focused on why early detection matters and how to get past the barriers that often keep our community from getting screened. These are sensitive conversations, but having them in a space where people already feel safe makes all the difference.



Pictured: Dr. Charys Demery presenting at 1st NOVA SDA Church

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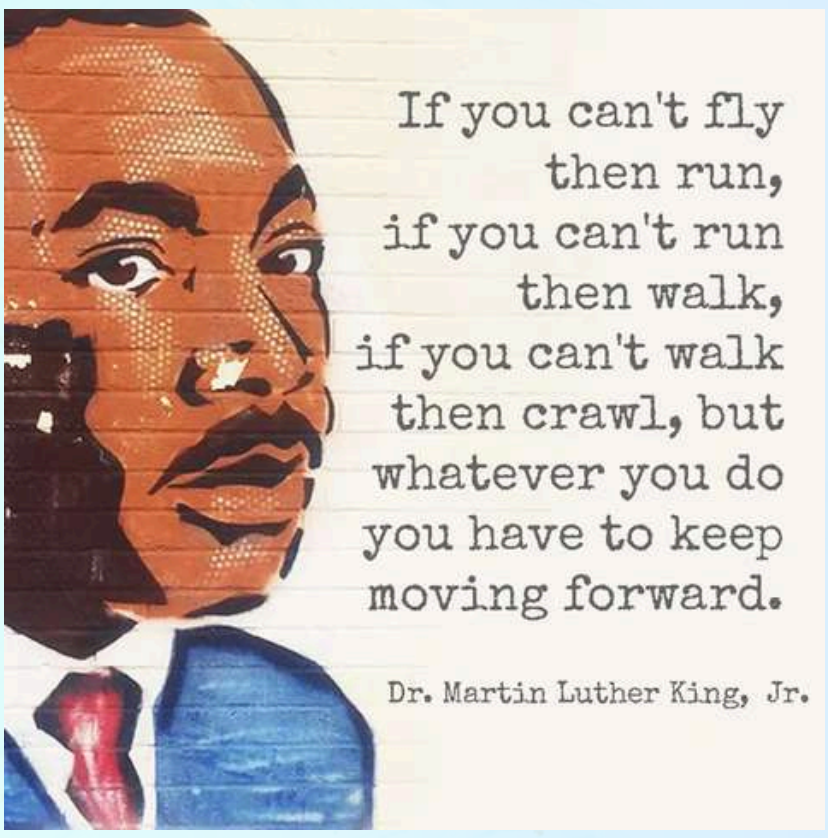
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Moving forward, I see that the foundation of my work is rooted in the very communities that raised me. I am learning that true growth isn't flashy; it is the commitment of being a leader who understands the lived experiences of those I serve. It is a distinct honor to walk into these rooms and be welcomed with open arms, knowing that my work directly impacts my own community. This journey has affirmed my purpose: that through steady, heart-centered dedication, 'Little by little, a little becomes a lot'.

Looking Ahead: A Heart Full of Gratitude



Beyond the professional milestones, this journey has gifted me something I never expected: the opportunity to lead and learn alongside my own family. Seeing my parents participate in the diabetes program cohort at ARK Church, watching them engage as I lead sessions, has been one of the greatest honors of my life. There is a unique, profound sense of pride in educating the people who first educated me. Walking into these community spaces and feeling that immediate sense of home is a constant reminder of why this work matters Representing and working directly with people who look like me my own community is more than just a job; it is a calling. This fellowship has given me the platform to serve the people I love most, and for that, I am deeply rewarded and forever changed.

Thank you for reading and Happy Holidays!

Stay tuned for more Nightingale News as I continue my journey as a Safety-Net Health Equity Fellowship with NOVA ScriptsCentral and the American Pharmacists Association...

