Nightingale News

Written by: Charys Demery, PharmD
Blog Post 3, Page 1
April 1st, 2025



Running With Purpose: Expanding My Impact Through Community, Leadership, and Advocacy

As my fellowship journey continues, I've started to notice a shift in my role. The early months were about learning and adjusting. Then came finding my stride. Now, I find myself running with purpose. I am stepping into spaces where I am not only learning, but also leading, mentoring, and expanding the reach of health equity work across communities.

What I continue to learn is that meaningful impact does not happen in one place. It happens across spaces. Sometimes those spaces are classrooms. Sometimes they are policy discussions. And many times, they are in community settings where people already feel comfortable. Community centers, churches, and local gatherings are often where people go looking for answers, support, and trusted guidance. I have found that I often end up in these spaces, and each time, I am reminded why this work matters. Whether in a church, community center, classroom, or national meeting, the mission remains the same. Meet people where they are and give them the tools to take control of their health.



Pictured: Dr. Charys Demery with participant Lisa at the Lorton Community Center during an Educate Before You Medicate (EBYM) session.

Meeting Communities Where They Are: Shiloh Baptist Church

One of the most meaningful experiences during this time was visiting Shiloh Baptist Church in Lorton, Virginia. This presentation was part of our Educate Before You Medicate initiative, also known as EBYM. EBYM is a community education program focused on providing accessible, culturally competent health education in trusted spaces. The goal is to help individuals better understand their health, medications, and prevention strategies in a way that feels practical and relatable. This topic was specifically requested by the church, which made the experience even more impactful. Conversations around disability awareness and how to support individuals with disabilities are not always prioritized within many communities. Often, these discussions only happen after a challenge arises, making them reactive rather than proactive.

Read more

Nightingale News

Blog Post 3, Page 2
April 1st, 2025



Shiloh Baptist Church intentionally wanted to change that. They were looking for ways to better understand disability, increase awareness, and identify resources to support members of their congregation. Their willingness to address this topic head-on reflected a proactive approach to inclusion and community support.

I had the opportunity to present alongside my colleague, Dr. Marcela Colon, PharmD along with two APPE students, Nardeen and Michelle. Together, we led a discussion centered on understanding disability, promoting inclusion, and encouraging supportive community environments.

Being in this space reminded me how important it is to approach conversations about disability with sensitivity and respect. These discussions were not just about sharing information. They were about creating awareness and encouraging empathy as well as making sure individuals feel seen, supported, and included.

What stood out most was the engagement from the congregation. The conversation felt natural and interactive. People shared their own experiences, asked thoughtful questions, and built off one another's perspectives. It felt less like a presentation and more like a shared conversation.



Pictured: Dr. Charys Demery delivering a presentation to members of the congregation on disability awareness.

Continuing the Journey: The D.E.E.P. Program

The Driving Education to Empower People (D.E.E.P.) program continues to be one of the most rewarding parts of my fellowship experience. This is a NOVA ScriptsCentral initiative designed to engage individuals through culturally relevant, practical health education that they can apply in their everyday lives. The program was created to help individuals better understand chronic disease prevention, lifestyle changes, and ways to take a more active role in their health.

Read more

Nightingale News



Blog Post 3, Page 3
April 1st, 2025

At this point, I am realizing I somehow always end up back in a church. No matter the program, the topic, or the audience, it always seems to come full circle. But honestly, it makes sense. Churches and community spaces are where many people go looking for answers, support, and trusted information. These environments already have relationships and trust built in, which makes conversations about health feel more comfortable and meaningful. Being present in these spaces as a healthcare professional who reflects the community also plays an important role. Representation matters! When participants see someone who looks like them, they see themselves in the message.



Pictured: Dr. Charys Demery presenting to Diabetes Cohort 2 about physical activity and the importance of staying active.

Diabetes disproportionately affects the black community, where adults are 60% more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes, reinforcing the need for programs like D.E.E.P. We are currently working with cohort two of the program. Each session builds on the previous one, allowing participants to grow in knowledge and confidence over time. During class five of seven, we focused on physical activity and the importance of incorporating movement into daily life. What made this session particularly memorable was hearing the many creative ways participants stay active. Some shared that they practice Tai Chi. Others talked about walking up the stairs in their homes. Some mentioned parking farther away when running errands or making a conscious effort to move more throughout the day. Watching participants share ideas, encourage one another, and celebrate small wins reminded me that behavior change often starts with simple steps. When people begin to see what is possible within their daily lives, those changes become more realistic and sustainable.

"If you want to make a real difference in health, you have to go where people are and listen first."

— Dr. Camara Phyllis Jones

Educate Before You Medicate: Cancer Prevention Month

Through the Educate Before You Medicate series, also known as EBYM, I had the opportunity to present on cancer prevention at both the Lorton Community Center and the Wellness Center for Older Adults. EBYM is a community education initiative focused on providing easy to understand health information in trusted community spaces. The goal is to help individuals better understand prevention, medications, and chronic disease topics so they can make informed decisions about their health.



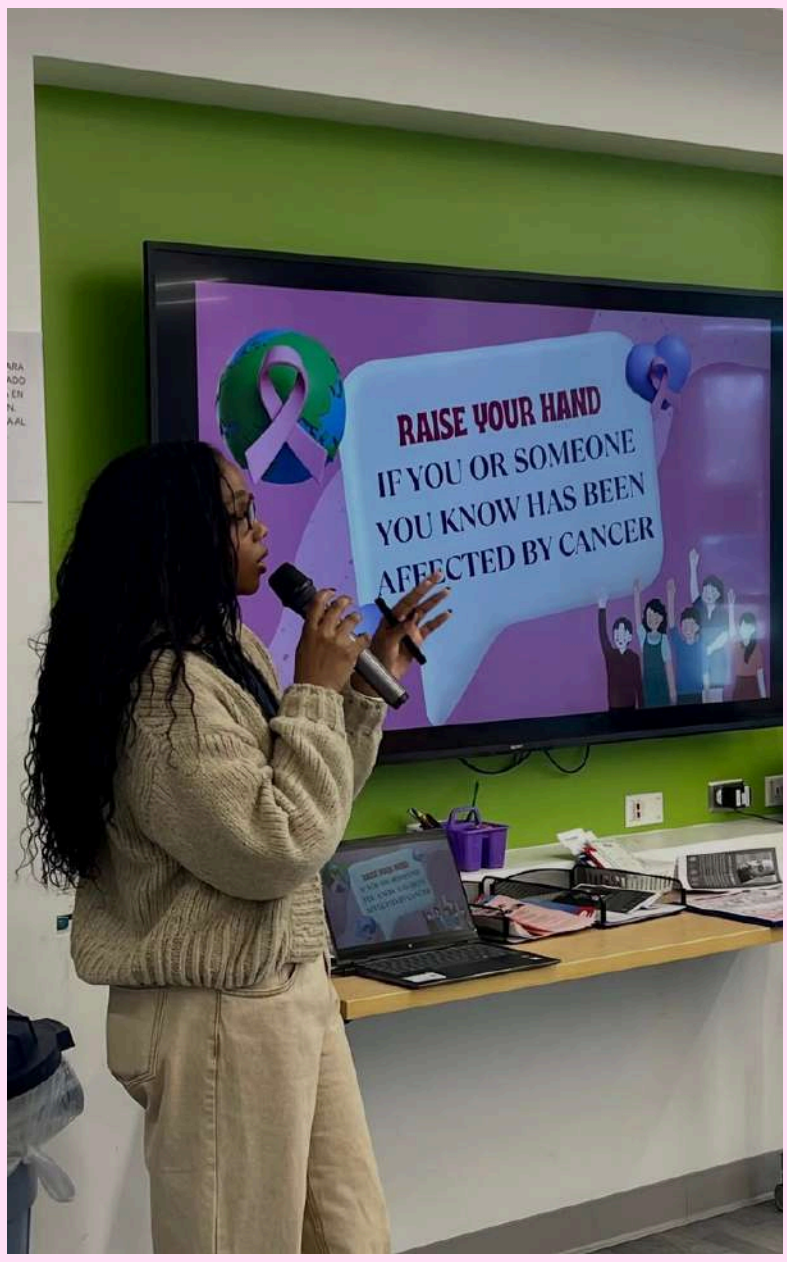
Read more

Nightingale News

Blog Post 3, Page 4
April 1st, 2025



Although the presentations covered the same topic, each location brought a unique audience and perspective. These sessions focused on cancer prevention, early detection, and the importance of routine screenings. Many participants shared that they wanted to prioritize prevention but were not always sure where to start. Providing this education in familiar spaces created an environment where people felt comfortable asking questions and sharing concerns. Presenting at both locations reinforced how adaptable community education must be. The content remained the same, but the conversation shifted based on the audience. These experiences reminded me that effective health education is not just about delivering information. It is about listening, responding, and tailoring conversations to each community.



Pictured: Dr. Charys Demery presenting on cancer prevention at the Lorton Community Center.

Building Leaders: Train-the-Trainer with H.E.A.L.U.S

Another major component of my fellowship work continues through the H.E.A.L.U.S. project. H.E.A.L.U.S. stands for Helping to Empower Active Living in the U.S. This initiative is part of the AME Zion Health Ministry and is supported through Sanofi's A Million Conversations program. The goal of H.E.A.L.U.S. is to expand community health education by training trusted messengers to bring information back to their own churches and communities.

Within this project, my role focuses on teaching the trainers the educational content they will later bring back to their communities. I help break down complex health topics, provide teaching strategies, and walk through how to present the material in a way that feels approachable and easy to understand. The goal is not just for them to learn the information, but to feel confident delivering it themselves. This project follows a train the trainer model. Instead of education coming from one person or one organization, community members become educators within their own spaces.

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."
— Mahatma Gandhi

Read more

Nightingale News

Blog Post 3, Page 5
April 1st, 2025



SCAN ME

Check out the website!!

Leaders of the AME Zion Health Ministry, Trusted Messengers, and the Sanofi team coming together to support community-based health education and outreach.

These trusted messengers are equipped with tools, resources, and communication strategies so they can lead conversations about health in environments where trust already exists. During session seventeen of eighteen, held virtually, we continued working with trusted messengers to strengthen those skills. We reviewed educational content, discussed ways to explain key concepts, and focused on helping participants feel comfortable teaching the material. These sessions emphasize building confidence, improving communication, and delivering accurate health information in ways that feel relatable.

What makes this model powerful is the ripple effect. One trained messenger can reach many individuals within their own congregation or community. That education then continues to spread beyond the training itself. Being part of session seventeen of eighteen also felt significant. It reflected the growth of participants over time. Watching individuals become more confident, engaged, and comfortable leading discussions has been incredibly rewarding. It highlights how structured education combined with community leadership can create lasting impact.

Mentoring the Future: George Mason University Pre-Pharmacy Honor Society Panel

Another meaningful opportunity was participating in a panel discussion for the GMU Pre Pharmacy Honor Society. I joined my colleague Dr. Shabnum Anwari,PharmD along with a military pharmacist and a clinical pharmacist. I was the only current fellow on the panel, which allowed me to share my perspective on fellowship training and community based work. Students asked thoughtful questions about career paths, mentorship, and how to become more involved in pharmacy. They were eager to understand the different opportunities within the profession and how each of us navigated our journeys.

What stood out most was how engaged the students were. They asked about challenges, decision making, and how to build meaningful careers. These conversations reminded me of my own journey and the importance of mentorship. Moments like this reinforce the importance of supporting the next generation of pharmacists and encouraging them to explore diverse career paths.

"A mentor is someone who allows you to see the hope inside yourself."
— Oprah Winfrey

Read more

Nightingale News

Blog Post 3, Page 6
April 1st, 2025

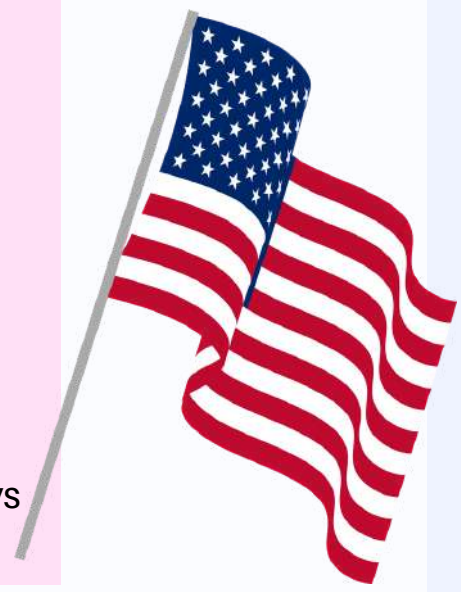


Celebrating Impact: Stars and Stripes Gala

Our Executive Director, Dr. Donney John, and I also attended the Stars and Stripes Gala for the Ball Business Awards, where our organization was nominated for Best Nonprofit in the Area. Although we did not win, the nomination itself was meaningful and reflected the impact our work continues to make. The event included a silent auction and provided an opportunity to network with others in the nonprofit space. Conversations throughout the evening highlighted the shared commitment among organizations working to address community needs. Being in a room filled with leaders dedicated to service reinforced the importance of collaboration. Recognition is not only about winning. It is also about being acknowledged for meaningful work within the community.



Pictured (left to right): Dr. Donney John, Executive Director; Dr. Charys Demery; and Dr. Michael Clarke, VCU Assistant Dean.



Health Equity Conversations Policy Dinner

Another impactful experience was attending the Health Equity Conversations policy dinner hosted by the National Minority Quality Forum Action Network. The evening brought together leaders, policymakers, and advocates committed to advancing health equity.

The conversations focused on policy solutions, collaboration, and improving equitable healthcare outcomes. Hearing perspectives from leaders across sectors reinforced how closely connected community work is to policy discussions. These conversations emphasized that meaningful change occurs when community experiences inform broader healthcare strategies. The evening provided an opportunity to build connections, exchange ideas, and continue learning.

"Health care is not just about treating illness — it's about addressing the social and economic factors that shape health in the first place."
— Rep. Raul Ruiz

Read more

Nightingale News

Blog Post 3, Page 7
April 1st, 2025



Advocating for Change: Taking Community Voices to Capitol Hill

As my fellowship has grown, I have also had the opportunity to step into advocacy work. While much of my experience takes place in community settings, this was a chance to bring those same conversations to Capitol Hill and connect what I see on the ground with policy level discussions. In preparation for these meetings, I created one pagers using data from the Congressional District Health Dashboard. This tool provides district level insights on chronic disease burden, disparities, and health outcomes. Using this information, I developed materials focused on diabetes, congenital heart disease, and cancer. The goal was to clearly show the impact of these conditions and highlight opportunities for pharmacists to support prevention, education, and chronic disease management. Walking into these meetings, I kept thinking about the communities I had been working with.

The conversations were not just about statistics. They reflected real barriers I have seen, including limited access to education, challenges navigating medications, and gaps in preventive care. Having those experiences in mind helped shape the discussion. During my time on Capitol Hill, I met with offices representing chairs and co chairs of the Diabetes Caucus, the Congenital Heart Caucus, and the Cancer Caucus. We discussed how pharmacists can help improve outcomes through patient education, medication management, and expanding access to preventive services. Each conversation felt like an opportunity to bridge community needs with policy solutions. This experience reinforced how connected community work and advocacy truly are. Sometimes meeting people where they are means being in a church or community center. Other times, it means sitting in a congressional office and sharing the same stories from a different perspective. Both spaces are important, and together they help move the work forward.



Pictured: Dr. Charys Demery and Christopher Schell, Assistant from Representative Michael McCaul's office.

APhA Annual Conference 2026: Redefining What's Possible

This year's APhA Annual Meeting centered around the theme "Redefining What's Possible," highlighting the expanding role of pharmacists in public health, patient access, and community-based care. The opening session set the tone for the weekend, featuring magician Devin Henderson, who challenged attendees to rethink limitations and consider new opportunities within the profession. Through an interactive demonstration, he emphasized the importance of asking, "What else is possible?" and encouraged pharmacists to let go of barriers that limit innovation and impact.

Read more

Nightingale News

Blog Post 3, Page 8
April 1st, 2025



Throughout the meeting, sessions focused heavily on immunization outreach, health equity, and improving access to care. One vaccine-focused session highlighted successful community-based immunization events and strategies to increase adult vaccination coverage. Speakers emphasized meeting patients where they are and building partnerships to improve public health outcomes.

The exhibit hall also showcased a wide range of organizations and companies working to support pharmacists in expanding their impact. Conversations centered around patient access programs, diabetes technology, vaccine initiatives, and innovative care delivery models. Networking opportunities allowed for meaningful discussions about collaboration and future initiatives.

Overall, APhA Annual 2026 reinforced the evolving role of pharmacists as community leaders, educators, and advocates. The meeting provided valuable insights into innovative approaches to care and inspired attendees to continue redefining what's possible in pharmacy practice.

Looking Ahead!



Pictured: Dr. Charys Demery wearing a NSC Polo

WHAT'S NEW!

As I reflect on this phase of my fellowship, I've come to understand that simply being present in these spaces carries meaning that cannot be replicated or taken for granted. Walking into rooms where community members see someone who looks like them, understands them, and is there to support their health often brings a sense of comfort and excitement that is felt immediately. There is something powerful about that moment, the smiles, the engagement, the openness, and the trust that forms before the presentation even begins. It reminds me that representation is not just important, it is impactful. I am deeply honored to serve in these spaces, knowing that my presence alone can help create connection, build trust, and encourage meaningful conversations within the community.

THANK YOU FOR READING!



Stay tuned for more Nightingale News as I continue my journey as a Safety-Net Health Equity Fellowship with NOVA ScriptsCentral and APhA!

