

Intergenerational Communication in Pharmacy



Four Workplace Generations

Currently, four generations exist in the workplace. These are the Veterans, the Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y.³ In general, each generation has been exposed to a variety of experiences that affect their attitudes, expectations, habits and behaviors.³ In order to be effective in intergenerational communication, individuals must develop a thorough understanding of each generation's shared experiences, as well as recognize their own, and how generational differences affect their communication style. Once they understand these differences, messages can be crafted in a way that will be most accepted by members of the generation with which they wish to communicate. Individuals will also be able to deliver messages through mediums that are most comfortable to other generations to improve the chance that messages will be appropriately received.

The Veterans, also referred to as Traditionalists, were born between 1922 and 1945.³ Their influencing experiences include the Great Depression and World War II.⁴ More than half the men of this generation were war veterans, and their social skills developed in an authoritarian environment of military formal etiquette.⁴ Women of this generation were primarily homemakers.⁴ As a group, Veterans place a high value on formality and demonstrate a respect for authority.⁵ Most of them grew up with a traditional nuclear family consisting of a father, mother and siblings living in a residence by themselves.^{3,5} This generation thought education was a dream to pursue, saved money and paid cash for purchases.^{3,5} Respect is the top psychological need for this generation.⁴ In the work environment, Veterans are considered to have the strongest work ethic of any generation. They are considered very loyal, often staying at one company for 30 years or more, with the utmost respect for authority and rules.^{3,5}

The Baby Boomers were born between 1946 to 1964 and are one of the largest generations in United States history.⁴ Baby Boomers grew up in a flourishing economy and respected their parents' traditional values. Boomers are optimistic, value involvement and were taught to think as individuals. As they grew up, the nuclear family began to disintegrate.⁵ They rebelled against the status

Learning Objectives:

1. List the primary characteristics of each generation and describe how these characteristics influence communication style.
2. Identify the methods of communication preferred by each generation.
3. Describe how the perception of age affects the messages that individuals present to members of different generations.
4. Describe strategies to individualize the delivery of medication information to members of each generation.

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Intergenerational communication has become very important in the workplace and in health care. The key to developing successful new pharmacy models, such as medication therapy management (MTM), hinges on the pharmacist's ability to effectively communicate with his or her patients. The future of pharmacy practice lies in the pharmacists' ability to disseminate drug information to a variety of audiences through effective communication.

Two important trends are converging to make intergenerational communication an

important issue in the profession of pharmacy. The nation as a whole is growing older and the average age of practicing pharmacists is becoming younger.^{1,2} There were 38.7 million Americans over the age of 65 in 2008, and that is expected to increase to 71 million by 2030.¹ Meanwhile, the average practicing pharmacist's age will decrease from 47 in 2004 to 43 by 2020.² A four year difference in the mean pharmacist age may not seem that important; however, large numbers of younger pharmacists are needed to bring the average down. These trends suggest that out of necessity, the youngest of the current workplace generations are going to be communicating with the oldest of generations on a more frequent basis.

quo by fighting for change in women's liberation, civil rights and the war in Vietnam.⁵ Boomers believe education is a birthright and have a strong work ethic, often putting in long hours to sacrifice for success.^{4,5} Like their parents, they don't change jobs often; however, most will never obtain a pension or retirement for their longevity with an employer.⁴ Boomers have taken a buy now, pay later approach with money and have a poor record of saving, which may necessitate them having to stay in the workforce for a longer period of time.^{3,4}

Generation X is one of the smallest generations, with members being born from 1965 to 1980.^{3,4} This generation grew up in a period of social, cultural and corporate volatility.⁴ More than half of the members of this generation lived with a divorced or single parent.^{4,5} Many were left at home without parental supervision while their parents worked, becoming known as latchkey kids.⁵ They learned from rapidly evolving technology, like the personal computer and video games.⁴ After observing their parents leading stressful, unbalanced lives that focused primarily on work, Generation Xers are skeptical, independent and desire balance between their work and social life.^{4,5} This generation would value increased time off rather than more pay or promotions.⁵ Gen Xers are outcomes-oriented individuals and consider meetings to be unnecessary.⁴ Xers have little fear of changing jobs and don't expect any loyalty from their employer.⁵ They see education as a means to an end and are more conservative with their money than the traditional Baby Boomer.⁵

Generation Y, also known as the Millennials, born between 1980 and 2000, are just beginning their entry into the work force.^{3,5} They have grown up in an era of instant communication and are highly proficient with technology.⁵ They often look to the Internet for answers, entertainment and socialization.⁴ Millennials are optimistic, highly collaborative and look for positive, creative options when problem solving.^{4,5} Generation Y likes to have a balance between work and home life and are often the product of merged families.⁵ These merged families are the result of single parents becoming married/remarried and involve step-parents, step-siblings and half-siblings. Education is often viewed as an incredible expense by this generation.⁵

Communication styles

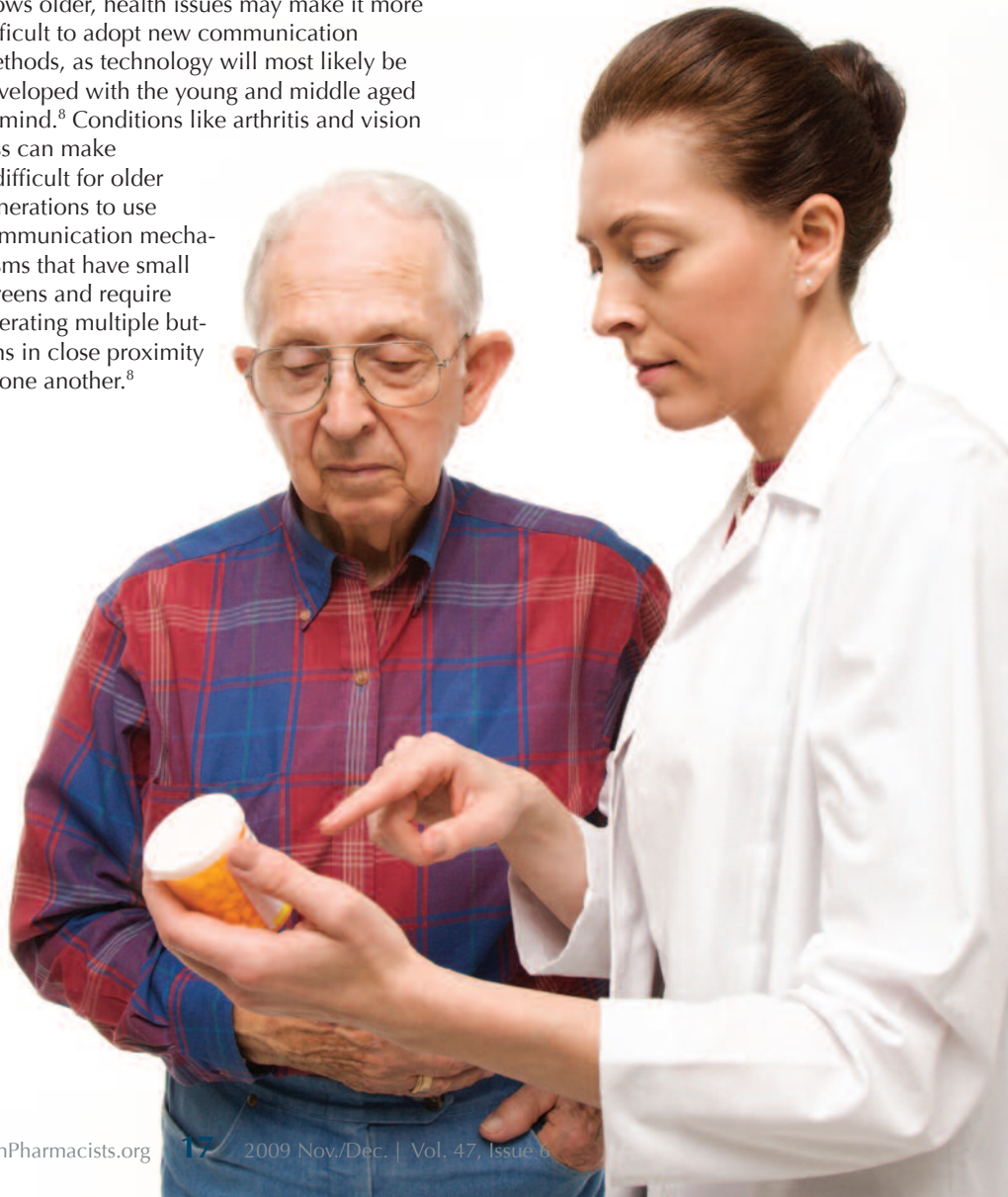
Communication between generations needs to be broken down into two categories. First is the vehicle through which the

communication takes place. The second is content that is sent through that vehicle.

The way the different generations prefer to communicate is essentially a function of technological adaptation. There are several reasons why generations generally prefer to communicate through the mechanisms that were popular during their formative years. First, people in general prefer intragenerational to intergenerational communication due to shared experiences that allow them to relate to another person from their own generation.⁶ Because the previous generation does not have a strong desire to be sociable with the next, they are slow to adopt the new generation's conventions for communication, and in some circumstances may even be ridiculed or disparaged for attempting to do so.⁷ A previous generation may sometimes even belittle new communication methods as inane (e.g., why should I press 20 buttons on a phone to send a message when I can press one and make a call).⁸ As a generation grows older, health issues may make it more difficult to adopt new communication methods, as technology will most likely be developed with the young and middle aged in mind.⁸ Conditions like arthritis and vision loss can make it difficult for older generations to use communication mechanisms that have small screens and require operating multiple buttons in close proximity to one another.⁸

Despite the preconceived notions that each generation has about the others' communication vehicles, be it outmoded or nonsensical, choosing the right format may make the difference in a message actually being heard. The Veterans prefer communication that is face-to-face or written.⁹ For this generation, one's word is considered almost contractual, so an emphasis is placed on what is spoken rather than body language.⁹ Members of this generation should be addressed with formal titles and personal visits should be scheduled versus spontaneous interactions.⁹ Most Veterans are more private and don't share their thoughts immediately.⁹

Traditionally, Baby Boomers prefer communicating in person or on the phone.⁹ When communicating in person, body language is an important component, and questions must be answered thoroughly.⁹ Boomers never thought they would get old, so they tend to adopt many of the newer forms of communication such as e-mail, text messaging, Facebook and blogs.⁸



When communicating through e-mail, Baby Boomers generally don't expect instant replies and in turn take longer to respond, so they avoid using instant messaging features.¹⁰ Their e-mails are usually more formal and contain many details.¹⁰

Generation X grew up in an age of changing technology and are comfortable communicating through cell phones, text messaging, e-mail, Instant Messenger (IM), Facebook, Twitter and blogs. Although they are proficient in most of the newer forms of communication, they prefer to receive messages through e-mail and wish to receive only social calls on their cell phone after work hours.³ Xers want messages that are short and informal, with regular feedback.⁹

Generation Y is comfortable with all forms of technological communication and prefer to get instant feedback through short and simple text messages or instant messages.¹⁰ This generation uses the Internet for social networking through sites like Facebook and Twitter, with a more visual communication style as seen with the popularity of sites like YouTube and Photobucket. Many of the members of Generation Y joined Facebook when it wasn't open to the general public. In fact, they may even consider friend requests from users that don't belong to their social group, such as their boss or human resources, as an invasion their privacy and personal life. This generation will use e-mail to communicate with older generations and when an immediate response isn't necessary. In addition, they use e-mail as a means to alert them to activity on their social network sites. For example, they may get an e-mail message on their mobile phone that notifies them of a new friend request on Facebook or that one of their friends have invited them to check out a new Facebook group.¹⁰

Understanding the ways in which generations exchange ideas is important; however, delivering the message in an acceptable form for another generation is not enough. Utilizing an acceptable medium for communication and recognizing the experiences that affect another's values and style of conversation is only one variable of the communication puzzle. The second piece lies in crafting a message that will be accepted by the other person that not only relies on the characteristics of the person's generation, but is also influenced by the perceived social identity of their age group.

According to social identity theory, people like to have a positive social identity when they are interacting with other individuals. This is achieved by aligning themselves with a group to which they ascribe positive

attributes and then seeking to accentuate those attributes in order to feel superior to other groups. For example, if a person liked football they would seek out other football fans and emulate their actions that they thought were most positive. At the same time, they would be dismissive of other sports, telling those fans how great football is.¹¹

For most people, social identity in terms of age is not broken down by which generation they are a member, but by which general age bracket they fall into.⁷ The three age brackets, young, middle aged and old, each have their own associated positive and negative stereotypes.⁷ Although generations have differences in the way they communicate in terms of form and medium, the assessment of the communication as good or bad depends in part on how individual fits into another person's positive or negative age bracket stereotype.¹¹ The three age brackets are roughly defined by the young as late teens to late 30s



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or early 40s, middle aged being 40s to mid 60s, and old as beyond 60s.⁷ Although people can't change their age to align with a specific group, they can change their appearance and behaviors to be seen as a member of a different group (e.g., acting young, cosmetic surgery, acting older).⁷

Social identity characterized by age is important because it plays a role in communication accommodation theory (CAT), which determines satisfaction in communication.¹¹ CAT is based on the premise that individuals adjust their interactions through accommodation and nonaccommodation.¹¹ In accommodation, communicative partners, or interlocutors, move closer to each other by attending to their conversational needs in such ways as topic, pace, timing and body language.¹¹ Accommodating behavior is intended to show approval of the person and the message they are delivering.¹¹ During nonaccommodating behavior, interlocutors move farther apart in their conversational styles and may even accentuate differences.¹¹

Individuals may show nonaccommodating behavior if they have pride in their communication style, like a southern or British accent; however, it is often used to show disapproval of the current communication. Of the two behaviors, people generally prefer accommodating communication versus nonaccommodating.¹¹

People are often unaware that they are adjusting their communication in an accommodative fashion when they interact with other individuals. This accommodative behavior is based upon previous experiences and preconceived stereotypes. Examples of accommodation expected in society include talking gently with children, showing respect for the elderly, using slang with friends and being professional with a boss. Individuals ascribe stereotypes, both positive and negative, to their communication partner before they begin communicating. If they sense that their partner fits into a negative stereotype, they will often cease being accommodative and change their communication strategy to dominate the conversation based on their social identity.^{7,11}

As stated earlier with social identity theory, individuals want others to have a positive image about them during their communication; however, if they feel that their communication partner has judged them in a negative fashion, they may implement tactics to accentuate their strengths. Some of the tactics used include overaccommodation where communication is over adjusted, such as talking to a young or old person like a baby, and underaccommodation, like a pharmacist using medical jargon with a lay person.¹¹ With overaccommodation, a person is trying to gain power in the conversation by diminishing their interlocutor to a less powerful societal position, such as a child. In underaccommodation, an individual is trying to increase their power by improving their own stature such as trying to sound more knowledgeable by using complex words. These behaviors may also occur unintentionally in a conversation, but they can still give their communication partner a negative impression.¹¹

There is a large body of research that has examined how the young perceive communication with their elders. Young people reported satisfying conversations in which older people were accommodative to their needs and mutual understanding was achieved.¹² Accommodating behaviors were classified as being supportive, listening, being attentive, giving compliments and telling interesting stories.¹² Unaccommodating conversations were considered dissatisfying,¹¹

and young people characterized the old as inattentive, nonlistening, close-minded, out of touch and forcing unwanted attention.¹²

Young people were also dissatisfied with conversations that they felt were restricted by physical problems of the old who often complained in angry accusing fashions. In dissatisfying communication, young people also felt defensive and perceived that the older person had stereotyped them as irresponsible or naïve by using patronizing language. Even in dissatisfying communication, young people stated they were reluctantly accommodating to the elderly out of respect for age and often held back comments. One study found that overall, young people wish to be around older adults who defy negative age stereotypes (i.e., positive and friendly versus those who are bitter and unfriendly). The more an older individual fits the negative stereotype, the more likely young people use avoidance strategies to end conversations quickly.⁸

Overall, people want to be respected and treated as individuals when communicating between different age groups. People in each age group are mostly aware of the negative stereotypes associated with them and may adjust their communicative style in order to try and project an image of their social identity to control the interaction.⁷ By engaging in this fashion, they often become the negative stereotype that their interlocutor had imagined. For example, an elderly person communicating with a younger individual might use painful self disclosures like health problems in an attempt to show that they are resilient. To demonstrate their diverse experiences, elders may use positive self disclosures such as in-depth descriptions about their grandchildren's accomplishments, careers and locations. In doing so they hope to gain respect, but younger people may interpret this information as complaining and nonlistening. At the same time, the younger individual may feel that the older is accusing them of being inexperienced and seek to end the conversation quickly.¹²

The dynamics between young and old are also experienced between both groups



respectively, with the middle aged to a much lesser degree. Middle aged individuals are typically viewed as holding a higher power status in society, which encourages both the young and old to modify their social identity closer to the middle aged group, making accommodation more likely.⁷

Improving one's knowledge base to enhance effective communication within and between generations and age groups becomes a vital skill set to health care providers, particularly the pharmacist. Having a basic understanding of how age affects social identity constructs and the working theory of communication accommodation is the first step to crafting generation specific messages. Melding this information with consideration of the shared experiences, expectations and communication technologies within generations allows pharmacists to have more personal communication with their patients.

Pharmacists have traditionally communicated medication information with patients in person using a face-to-face model. In this scenario, effective communication can make the difference between a patient reaching their health outcome goals or having adverse events due to improper usage. The core principles of patient counseling using open ended questions should not change based upon generation and age, but the pharmacist may need to adjust their communication style to accommodate their patients. For example, when beginning a conversation with a person from the Veteran or Baby Boomer generations, the pharmacist may start off using more formal language and be respectful of their patient's beliefs. Veterans are

usually more reserved, so being friendly and establishing a good rapport is important for gathering private medical information from this group. Baby Boomers generally will want specific information about their medication, so health care providers should be prepared to spend more time providing many details to help develop a positive communication impression. Individuals from Generation X and Y will prefer more informal language with counseling sessions that are brief and to the point. Generation X has a history of questioning authority, so providing them with several different sources of information and possibly peer reviews so they can independently evaluate and compare to the message delivered by the pharmacist will be beneficial. Generation Y is much more visual, so the use of pictures or videos to supplement the information communicated will be appreciated by the patient.

Younger pharmacists may have a hard time counseling Veterans or Boomers because they may be viewed with a negative stereotype and possibly considered to be inexperienced. In this situation, the best way to open the lines of communication is to try to be accommodating without becoming patronizing. Young pharmacists should not assume that because a patient is older and may have a chronic illness that this will diminish the patient's ability to communicate. Older pharmacists may have the most difficulty communicating with their younger patients from Gen X and Y. To have a positive communication experience, avoid questioning patients' values and downplaying competencies, and resist the temptation to use phrases like, "in my day."

With the advancement of technology, new communication mediums have emerged that will play an important role in health care delivery. The new generation is already demanding instant responses to their communication, and society as a whole is moving to digital delivery mechanisms as the first point of entry into the health-system. Health care providers are being evaluated through research conducted on the Internet, and first appointments are being made online, through e-mail, text messages and/or automated phone trees without ever speaking to another individual. Some physician practices are even setting up online health portals like Hello Health. At Hello Health a patient can enroll for \$35 a month and IM or e-mail a doctor about their symptoms. If it's an uncomplicated problem, an e-mail response is free; however, longer "cyber-visits" can cost \$50-\$100. Patients can even make an appointment using the web, and a doctor

will come to their home within 24 hours. A Facebook-like site called Patientslikeme.com is harnessing the power of the web to try and help people be more informed about their diseases and possible treatment options. On this site, individuals post information about themselves, what medical problems they have, the medications they have and currently are taking and how well their disease is controlled.¹³

The use of new communications technology has the potential to revolutionize how health care is delivered, but it does not come without some concerns. The first is the digital divide. Although more people are using the Internet, one study suggests that access decreases with education level. This study found that 89 percent of college graduates had access to the Internet, compared to 61 percent of high school grads and 29 percent of people who did not complete high school. This study also found that about 31 percent of people have used the Internet for health information, while only 4.6 percent have e-mailed a physician or health care provider in the past year. This demonstrates how far behind health care is lagging compared to the rest of society in the implementation of information technology.¹⁴

Some of the other concerns pharmacists may have with new communication technology include staying up-to-date with the latest trends in software and hardware. There is concern that e-mail, IM and Internet-based services will just add to the current workflow instead of substituting for current information delivery. New communication styles and technology are favoring shorter and more frequent bursts of communication. Questions have arisen about whether or not patients will receive the same important information that they would receive in a face-to-face counseling session. Much of the online health information is complex and written at higher levels than the average individual can understand. The reliability and accuracy of online information is also questioned. Another barrier to implementing new communication technology is developing a profitable business model that can absorb significant startup costs.¹³

With the profession trying to move into more cognitive services like MTM, medication information and assessment of therapeutic outcomes delivered through new communication technologies need to be explored if it is to be a successful practice model. The Baby Boomers are quickly becoming the largest users of prescription medications and want to be informed. They have adopted some of the newer communication

technologies like cell phones and e-mail, and are beginning to using texting and Facebook. For simpler messages, such as refill alerts, e-mail or text messages may be considered more helpful and less intrusive than phone calls and voice mail for all generations except the Veterans. Pharmacies may be able to adapt instant messaging so that patients who need to talk with their pharmacist can get quick and to the point answers.

Adding groups to Facebook may be another way for patients to get their medication information. Groups could be set up for individual drugs or disease states, with diagrams and pictures. Patients may use it to form social networks with others who use the same medications or have the same conditions. Groups could be designed just for individual pharmacies and the patients they serve. Pharmacists could provide some information about themselves so patients feel like they have a more personal connection than just the person who fills their scripts.

These ideas will require further investigation and refinement before they can be

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Due to new guidelines established by Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), certain changes must be made to the process by which MPA accredits continuing education for pharmacy technicians. MPA may choose to designate programs or home study articles as PTCE-accredited, rather than ACPE-accredited.

However, even though MPA may accredit a program for technicians, it is the technician's responsibility to determine whether the subject matter is acceptable to the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB) for recertification. Programs designated by PTCB to be appropriate for technicians pertain to the following topics: medication distribution and inventory control systems, pharmacy administration and management calculations, programs specific to pharmacy technicians, interpersonal skills, organizational skills, pharmacy law and pharmacology/drug therapy. Programs relating to functions outside the scope of practice for pharmacy technicians will not be accepted by PTCB.

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implemented into new health care delivery models. Current pharmacy laws and regulations may need to be modified to deal with issues like patient privacy in order to maximize the potential of new communications technology. Pharmacists need to take the lead and learn how to adapt technology that may potentially replace current face-to-face and phone communication for the delivery of medication information in the future. Regardless of whatever direction new communications technologies take, pharmacists will always need to adapt it to provide the best medication information to patients across different generations.

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Continuing Education Self-Assessment Questions

- Intergenerational communication is quickly becoming an important issue in the profession of pharmacy because the average pharmacist is _____, while the number of individuals over 65 years old is increasing.
 - getting older
 - getting younger
 - retiring
 - a new graduate
- The most important psychological need for the Veterans generation during communication is _____.
 - respect
 - love
 - understanding
 - adulation
- Baby Boomers can be described as _____ new communications technology.
 - early adopters of
 - slow adopters of
 - rejecting
 - avoiding
- What generation values a work life balance as a result of watching their parents work long hours?
 - Veterans
 - Baby Boomers
 - Generation X
 - Generation Y
- According to social identity theory, people tend to align themselves with groups that they feel have _____ attributes.
 - positive
 - commonplace
 - negative
 - pessimistic
- What term is used to describe the process where communication partners adjust their topic, pace, timing and body language to more closely match each other?
 - Accommodation
 - Adaptation
 - Acclimatization
 - Modification
- If an individual senses that their communication partner fits into one of their negative stereotypes, they will become increasingly _____.
 - nonaccommodative
 - accommodative
 - defensive
 - respectful
- Younger pharmacists should assume that communication with older patients, who have illnesses, will be more difficult.
 - True
 - False
- For better counseling, pharmacists should provide Generation X patients with which of the following?
 - Visual aids
 - Objective information from independent sources
 - Lots of detail
 - Text messages
- When communicating between different age groups, how do people prefer to be treated?
 - As individuals
 - As members of their generation
 - As a positive stereotype
 - As a negative stereotype

Intergenerational Communication in Pharmacy

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- What is your evaluation of the article you read?
 Poor 1 2 3 4 5 Excellent
- The author's coverage of the subject material was:
 Incomplete 1 2 3 4 5 Complete
- How useful will the content of this article be in your practice?
 Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very
- To what degree did the article meet the stated objectives?
 Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Completely

It took me ____ hour(s) and ____ minute(s) to read this article and complete the questions.

What other topics would you like to see presented in MPA's home study articles? _____

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Please write the letter of the correct answer to each question in the space provided.

- _____ 6. _____
- _____ 7. _____
- _____ 8. _____
- _____ 9. _____
- _____ 10. _____