With a five-year, $12.5 million grant from the National Institute on Aging, Benjamin Handen, PhD professor of psychiatry, will lead a new multicenter effort exploring biomarkers of Alzheimer’s disease in adults with Down syndrome. This population tends to show Alzheimer’s symptoms in their 40s. People with Down syndrome are also likely to have a copy, in each of their three chromosome 21s, of a gene that has been associated with the precursor for beta-amyloid, a substance found in excess in the brains of patients with Alzheimer’s.

When and how some key players—like long-lived plasma and memory B cells—develop as part of the secondary immune response has long been up for debate. Earlier this year, Mark Shlomchik, MD/PhD and Pitt’s chair of immunology; Florian Weisel, a PhD research assistant professor; and colleagues elucidated the process in an Immunity paper that was later highlighted in Nature Reviews Immunology. The scientific “tour de force” (as cited by one Faculty of 1000 commentator) has implications for vaccine development as well as for understanding autoimmunity. Shlomchik is one of Pitt’s latest to receive a MERIT Award from the National Institutes of Health; the $3.8 million grant will allow him to continue long-term studies on autoimmunity. (Nine other Pitt med faculty also have MERIT Awards.)

Supported by a Research Project Grant from the National Institutes of Health, Yael Schenker, an MD, is embarking on trials of the palliative care intervention she designed for patients with advanced cancer. For this and other projects, Schenker, an assistant professor of medicine, received an Early Career Investigator Award from the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine. —Kristin Bundy, Elizabeth Hoover, and Erica Lloyd