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A consult from 5,000 miles away

X RAY: COURTESY CHANG. OMOTADE: JEN URICH

Pitt Faculty Join Air Force

A doctor at an airbase near the Persian Gulf is reviewing an x ray, but she's not comfortable making a diagnosis. She can't tell if what she's seeing is a benign cyst or a malignant mass, and the nearest radiologist who can give her a consult is a continent away. A system that Paul Chang developed in Pittsburgh will shorten the distance between that x ray and the expert radiologist.

Chang, associate professor of radiology informatics at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, developed Dynamic Transfer Syntax, which transfers large medical images over the Internet and is of great interest to the US Air Force, which doesn't have a radiologist at every base. Similarly, the air force doesn't have enough pathologists in its ranks. Pitt pathologists are about to abate that problem. Yukako Yagi, John Gilbertson, and Michael Becich designed a program (whole slide image technology) that enables the transfer of dense pathologic slides over the Web. With the help of an $8.5 million appropriation to the medical center from the US Air Force Medical Service, the radiologists and pathologists are refining their systems for the military. ***—MH***

FOOTNOTE

If only Mayor Murphy had thought of this.

LE LAVANDOU, France (Reuters), August 22—Gil Bernardi, mayor of this French Mediterranean town, faced with a cemetery "full to bursting," has banned residents from dying until he can find somewhere else to bury them.

"Initially, the decree has been remarkably well followed," the mayor said.

OMOTADE LEADS NATIONAL ORG

When Paula Davis, assistant dean for student affairs and director of minority programs for the School of Medicine, first met Aderonke Omotade, she knew there was something different about her: "I remember thinking she was one of those people I'd love to be when I grow up."

It's easy to admire Omotade (Class of '03), who rushes from place to place with barely five minutes between tasks. Maybe she's heading to a tae kwon do session; she's close to getting her black belt. Maybe she's organizing a program to mentor kids. Or in the library practicing Spanish or Yoruba, a West African language her parents speak. And now, Omotade is the second Pitt student in recent years to head the Student National Medical Association, an organization for minority medical students. Not surprisingly, she's eagerly diving into her new role. ***—MH***



Omotade



TOM ALTANY



Cancer Center Opens

One might say the new Hillman Cancer Center consists of two wings separated by a five-story atrium, but that would miss the point entirely. The atrium does not divide so much as it joins the complementary wings. One is dedicated to patient care, with state-of-the-art diagnostic facilities, such as CT and PET scanners. Bridges span the atrium to link those suites with ultramodern research areas, connecting the dual role—clinician and researcher—of many who work here.

The labs are bright, spacious, and loaded with data, telecommunications, and wet bench facilities. Fitted with a system of modular walls, the labs are configured to fit the needs of each research team. On every floor, a conference room, kitchen, and lounge surround a monumental open stairway, encouraging informal interactions among researchers, not to mention stair climbing. *—CS*

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
http://www.upmccancercenters.com

KANTER'S INFLUENCE LAUDED

Steve Kanter remembers when his dad moved his family to the border town of Laredo, Texas, in the late '60s. The elder Kanter, an education professor, was enlisted to help start a branch of what is now Texas A&M University to offer teacher education to the community, which, until then, relied almost solely on high school grads with "emergency certificates" to teach Laredo high school students. "That program really made a difference," Kanter says looking back. Today, the admiring son is Pitt med's senior associate dean. "I've always been interested in education and teaching, and in the kinds of innovative things that you can do to help people think better about what they're doing," he says. Pitt has certainly reaped the benefits of those meditations. Kanter has shepherded the school's curriculum reform efforts for the past decade and trained hundreds of faculty as facilitators. At the annual spring Curriculum Colloquium, he was recognized with the Distinguished Service in Medical Education Award, which the school has presented only one other time in its history (to Sheldon Adler and Carol Coffee in 1998).

The colloquium was also witness to two new award presentations: Ross Musgrave (MD '43), executive director of the Medical Alumni Association and role model for generations of Pitt students, was handed the first Donald Fraley Award for Medical Student Mentoring. Jack Schumann, associate professor of neurobiology, received the inaugural Sheldon Adler Innovation in Medical Education Award. *—EL*

A Lift for Faculty, Postdocs

By Chuck Staresinic

At the last annual meeting of the Association of American Medical Colleges, Associate Vice President Janet Bickel received a welcome surprise. She had convened a panel of leaders in medical education to discuss a frequently overlooked issue—many schools seemed to be putting less emphasis on faculty development, failing to invest in their greatest resource. When the discussion was opened to include the approximately 200 in the audience, Dean and Senior Vice Chancellor Arthur Levine stood up to announce that the schools of the health sciences at Pitt were creating a new Office of Academic Career Development to address this very issue.



PATTY NAGLE

Lakoski

"I think he was trying to inspire his colleagues," Bickel recalls. "I was delighted."

One year later, Joan M. Lakoski heads that new office as the founding assistant vice chancellor for academic career development. Lakoski believes that by helping postdocs and junior faculty members focus on what they need to accomplish at each career stage, through leadership and mentoring programs for instance, Pitt will become the premier place to develop a career in biomedical research.

"There are so many adjustments you have to make in a very short period of time." Lakoski says regarding junior faculty members. "It's probably the first time in your career that you have to manage people, you have to equip a laboratory, you have to develop a line of research expertise, you have to write grant proposals, and you have to teach." That's also when many would like to start families or already have young families at home.

Lakoski, a mother of two herself, is continuing her own National Institutes of Health-funded serotonin receptor research at Pitt as a professor of pharmacology. At Penn State, she was the interim chair of the Department of Pharmacology and professor of pharmacology and anesthesiology. As cochair of that school's Committee on Postdoctoral Fellows, she successfully pushed for a more formal system to support career development.

"Dean Levine has taken what I consider a visionary step of putting forward the resources to support his faculty and postdocs," Lakoski says. "Most places will give lip service to this . . . but when it comes down to it, many will say, 'Well, we can't afford that right now.'"

TO CONTACT DR. LAKOSKI: jlakoski@hs.pitt.edu



GETTY IMAGES

ONBOARD: KLAUSNER, SCOLNICK, AND OTHER LEADERS

Three national leaders joined the School of Medicine's Board of Visitors this year. The board advises the school on a broad range of issues, from education to clinical and research priorities.

Edward M. Scolnick is president of Merck Research Laboratories. Under his leadership, Merck developed the drug Mectizan, which prevents river blindness, a disease endemic to Africa. In 1987, Merck announced it would donate Mectizan wherever it was needed and for as long as necessary. Scolnick says that joining the Board of Visitors is an opportunity to stay on top of the cutting-edge work conducted at Pitt.

In 1995, President Clinton appointed Richard Klausner director of the National Cancer Institute, a post he held until stepping down last year. He's now executive director of the Global Health program at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Known for his contributions to genetics and cell and molecular biology, Klausner was awarded the University of Pittsburgh Dickson Prize in Medicine in 1998.

Arthur H. Rubenstein is a prominent diabetes researcher and the current dean of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. He is remembered at Mount Sinai School of Medicine as the dean who shook things up, successfully challenging the faculty to integrate basic science courses with clinical training and bring electronic media into the classroom, among other innovations.

The school netted two other great catches for its board late last year: Catherine DeAngelis (MD '69) is editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association.* In 2001, she received the Marion Spencer Fay Award, given annually to a pioneering woman by the National Board for Women in Medicine. In addition to joining the Board of Visitors, G. Nicholas Beckwith III, president and chief executive officer of Beckwith Machinery Company, was elected chair of UPMC Health System Board of Directors this year. —*CS*



CRAIG THOMPSON

A HEALING CAVE

You stand on a platform the size of a bathroom scale. The floor around the platform is actually a projection screen, as are the walls on either side and directly in front of you, though they may appear to be a supermarket aisle, a tunnel, or even a cliff edge. You might mistake this virtual contraption for an enormous video game, if it weren't in an academic medical center. Even its name is playful: Eye and Ear Institute's Medical Virtual Reality Center faculty call their creation "the cave." Their intentions are serious, however. Pitt doctors hope to use the cave to rehabilitate patients with balance disorders and to answer basic questions about why certain visual environments cause people to lose balance. ***–CS***

Appointments

As the school's new division chief of plastic surgery, **W. P. Andrew Lee** plans to collaborate with Pitt experts in transplantation and tissue engineering. Lee conducts research on transplantation of whole body parts, such as hands and limbs. His goal is to reach a transplantation watershed—to eliminate the need for immunosuppressive agents taken chronically or indefinitely, like cyclosporine. "If that can be achieved, it will really open up the horizon in reconstructive surgery," he says. Lee was previously associate professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School and director of the Hand Surgery Service and Plastic Surgery Research Laboratory at Massachusetts General Hospital.



Lee



Williams

Try telling **John P. Williams**, the new chair of anesthesiology, that something can't be done, and you're guaranteed to have that view challenged. Two years ago, his research helped Pitt professors of surgery and anesthesiology perform the country's first cardiac procedure on an awake patient, something long considered impossible. The switch from general anesthesia to a thoracic epidural reduces postoperative pain and eliminates some risks associated with general anesthesia.

Williams expects researchers in his department to play leading roles in another milestone, discovering the basis of anesthetic mechanisms. "We're very close," he says. "I think we're going to find it at the subcellular level." Williams also plans to encourage the development of new ways to use artificial intelligence systems in the management of anesthesia; he envisions using machines that respond automatically to designated deleterious events during surgery. It's one more way to challenge the status quo. *–CS*

SURE STEPS



A year ago, Amanda Malina (Class of '03) became a certified step aerobics instructor—this, after recovering from a broken hip and being diagnosed with osteoporosis. The 25-year-old former figure skater, dancer, and runner also overcame an eating disorder as a teenager. Malina has been interested in women's health issues for years, and, needless to say, that interest has been more than academic. And now, after observing doctors during her rotations at Magee-Womens Hospital, she has decided ob/gyn is the career path for her.

Malina is a recipient of a 2002 Howard Hughes Fellowship for research training. The national fellowship supports her work with mentor James Roberts, director of the Magee-Womens Research Institute and a vice chair of obstetrics, gynecology, and reproductive sciences at Pitt. The two are investigating the relationship between leptin (a protein that regulates fat) and preeclampsia, a condition from which an estimated 5–10 percent of pregnant women suffer.

Malina and Roberts speculate that leptin is one of the signals increasing fatty acid and amino acid transporter levels between the fetus and placenta. Her work will help determine if high levels of leptin increase nutrient delivery during preeclampsia. ***—KM***

ALUMNI CHECKUP: ADAM GORDON

BY CHUCK STARESINIC



Street smart Adam Gordon (left) with colleague Paul Freyder at Harbor Light Center

JIM JUDKIS

If you're interested in crack cocaine and heroin, Adam Gordon is your man. He knows what's available in Pittsburgh, its potency, and its price. He even knows how to snap off a section of car antenna and fashion it into a 3-inch crack pipe. (Simply insert a scrap of pot scrubber as a filter and wrap the shaft in a rubber band so it won't burn your fingers. The pipe is straight as the barrel of a pen.)

These street smart tidbits aren't the sort of things discussed at, say, a Grand Rounds, but this sort of knowledge helps Adam Gordon (Fel '00, Res '98, MD '95) be the kind of doctor he has always wanted to be. As the volunteer medical director for two Salvation Army programs, Gordon works with drug addicts who have decided to change their lives for the better, but who otherwise might not get adequate health care. He interacts with patients in their communities, far from hospital settings that many people find intimidating.

It's the sort of work that often escapes notice, but last year Gordon, assistant professor of medicine at Pitt and staff physician for the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, won a national Community Service Award from the American Medical Association. The award recognizes his work at Harbor Light Center, a 90-day drug and alcohol rehabilitation program on Pittsburgh's North Side, and the Public Inebriate Program, an inpatient detoxification center on the South Side. (He points out that Pitt students as well as other faculty also volunteer in these settings.)

On a typical Friday evening, as the city's nine-to-fivers head home, Gordon enters the lobby of Harbor Light to friendly greetings of "Hey, doc!" and "Nice shirt, doc!" (The checkered magenta button-down Gordon wears resembles festive graph paper.) The lobby is more an intersection of hallways than a room. Swinging double doors lead to a cafeteria and communal living space beyond. Directly opposite, a set of glass doors opens to the front sidewalk on West North Avenue, where residents take in a mixture of fresh air and cigarette smoke.

While Gordon talks in the next room with a new patient, one of the regulars, Joe Carter (not his real name), waits his turn. He's a broad, talkative guy with a New York accent. The longest hair on his head runs from his lower lip to his chin, like a caterpillar escaping from his mouth. Through a window, Carter can see Gordon and the new guy in the sort of doctor-patient interaction that Carter has only experienced at Harbor Light. There's no chart and no white coat. The tall, youthful, and soft-spoken Gordon plops down next to his patient, then slouches. He rests his hand on the guy's shoulder as if they were two old friends shooting the breeze. They talk for half an hour.

Carter recalls his first exam with Gordon: "I said, 'This is a regular guy.' He's not standing or sitting at a desk looking over at me, talking in terminology junk. He's being a real person, with his arm around me saying, 'Hey, what's the problem here today? How long did you use dope?'" Carter liked the ease and knowledge with which Gordon talked about drugs and addiction. Carter said he'd used heroin for 14 of his 34 years, but he'd been clean for a couple months. "And y'know, I wasn't ashamed. He made me not feel ashamed."

Gordon is comfortable here at Harbor Light, and there is really no other place the doctor would rather be on a Friday evening: "You can talk to people for hours on end. . . . You're really impacting their lives, and they realize that you're there to help them, not just to go on to the next patient. That's really gratifying after a long day of work when you're seeing people on a schedule."

FLASHBACK

In 1971, when Watergate was just a hotel, radical mastectomy was SOP—until Bernard Fisher began his landmark trials of breast cancer treatment. Again, his studies confirm what has become common wisdom: More sparing procedures such as lumpectomies are just as successful. In publishing 25 years of study conclusions this August, *The New England Journal of Medicine* notes Fisher's "historic trial set the management of breast cancer on a new course."