

CALENDAR

FOR ALUMNI & FRIENDS

Unless otherwise noted, for information:
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**MEDICAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BOARD MEETING**
MARCH 21, 6 P.M.
University Club

**THIRD-YEAR MEDICAL STUDENT
PINNING CEREMONY**
MAY 3, 3 P.M.
Scaife Hall, Lecture Rooms 5 & 6

**GRADUATING CLASS LUNCHEON &
AWARDS CEREMONY**
MAY 17, 11 A.M.
Twentieth Century Club

SCOPE AND SCALPEL
MAY 17, 7 P.M.
MAY 19, 2 P.M.
Central Catholic High School
McGonigle Theater
For information:
scopeandscalpelsociety@gmail.com
or engage.pitt.edu/project/15051

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE COMMENCEMENT
MAY 20, 3 P.M.
Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hall & Museum

WHITE COAT CEREMONY
AUGUST 11, 11 A.M.
Carnegie Music Hall

To find out what else is happening at the
medical school, visit health.pitt.edu and
maa.pitt.edu.

GETTY IMAGES



FOR REAL! TWEEN SCIENCE

Have you ever seen a dog bury its nose in a patch of grass and thought: *What could it possibly be sniffing?* It turns out, a lot.

Of the thousands of genes embedded in our DNA, about 400, when untangled and expressed, produce proteins that let us humans detect the scent of flowers and freshly cut grass when we go for a walk. And pups? They have 800 genes to help them smell. When they sniff the grass, they glean a lot more intel, like which poodle already marked that plot.

You've probably heard that canines, with their superior snouts, are trained to find victims in disasters, identify explosives, and hunt down drugs. But did you know they can also detect disease?

Dog owners with diabetes have noticed their dogs will lick, nudge, or jump up on them when their sugar levels dip low, reminding them to eat. And studies have shown dogs are also able to identify when samples of human blood, sweat, or clothing carry traces of other diseases, including ovarian cancer, lung cancer, and malaria.

Unlike Labradors or beagles, we can't rely on our noses to tell us when someone's sick. But what if we could build a better nose? Sounds like a project for Marvel tech genius Tony Stark (aka Iron Man), right? Well, Pitt researchers are on it.

Nathan Urban's lab is tracking how animals like mice (they have a whopping 1,200 genes for scent in their DNA!) identify where a smell, perhaps a waft of stale cheese, is coming from. And Christopher Wilmer's lab, just down the street, has been testing how spongy synthetic materials can filter gases and differentiate scents. Both labs' ultimate goal is to contribute toward nose-like technology that's better than the schnoz of *Homo sapiens* and more reliable than Rufus's. Until then, the next time a pooch wiggles its cold, wet nose in your face, we can only wonder what it's sniffing! —Prachi Patel

Is there a topic you'd like us to explore? Drop us a line at medmag@pitt.edu.