

Meet our Chair: Page B. Pennell, MD

We briefly introduced our new department chair, Dr. Page B. Pennell, in the [July 2021 edition of Brainwaves](#). Now that she's had a few months to acclimate to the University of Pittsburgh, she's ready to share her vision for the future of our training program.

Joining us at the University of Pittsburgh after a 12-year stint at Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital, Dr. Page B. Pennell has big plans for the future of the neurology department. Since arriving in July 2021, she has already met with each faculty member one-on-one to familiarize herself with the department and learn more about any academic and career development needs.

"It's been a really great experience getting to know different faculty members, and I've been so impressed by how dedicated they are as clinicians," Dr. Pennell said. "Many of them put a lot of effort into being educators ... and it really forms that nice strong foundation to further develop the department."

Initially attracted to the University of Pittsburgh for its moderate size, Dr. Pennell is confident that there's plenty of room to grow the department. With so many clinical and research opportunities available in the city, her hope is to shift Pittsburgh to the forefront of neurological care by partnering with other School of Medicine departments and utilizing their resources to move discoveries into clinical trials and, ultimately, impact patient care.

"I have enjoyed getting back onto a campus where there is a strong integration between the University and the UPMC health system," Dr. Pennell said. "I really think we're poised to be a major player in the development of neurology clinical care in the next generation."

Dr. Pennell hopes to improve the training program through formalized facilitation of mentoring teams and by adding further structure to academic skills development for current Pitt trainees. During her time as a professor at Harvard and vice chair for academic affairs at Brigham and Women's Hospital, she emphasized the value of mentorship to develop trainee and junior faculty's clinical research skills. She created the Neuroscience Internal Brigham Study Section, which resulted in substantial increases in funded awards from foundation and federal sources.

Beyond the mentorship team, her vision for the department includes creating additional specialty tracks, bolstering the existing research and global health tracks and increasing awareness of University and UPMC resources such as the Institute for Clinical Research and Education, which offers a variety of courses, training and career development programs for those wanting to formally enhance their medical education or research skills. To increase access, she plans to start a philanthropic fund to support tuition expenses for the residents in this and other similar courses. She also intends to increase engagement with former trainees—through newsletters like *Brainwaves*—to cultivate a sense of pride in our prolific alumni community.

"Twenty years after training, I can say with pride where I trained, and I want all of our alumni to feel that way," Dr. Pennell said. "I hope they'll continue to build on the excellent reputation of the training program and increase our visibility."

For recruitment, she says she considers alumni for internal employment opportunities first—there's no one better to teach the next generation than former trainees who have had first-hand experiences in

the UPMC health system. By investing in current residents and trainees, she hopes to produce outstanding clinicians that excel in the academic, clinical and research settings.

“When people get done with this program, it’s known that they are incredible clinicians,” Dr. Pennell said. “They are definitely top contenders when looking to hire faculty members within UPMC, whether on the Pittsburgh campus or across the network.”

With the University and UPMC health systems working in tandem to improve health and wellness both in our community and globally, the future of health care looks bright. Both institutions continue to operate in recruiting mode, emphasizing a need for influential leaders to move discoveries from bench to bedside and impact patient care.

“I see a tighter, more coordinated alliance between the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and UPMC, which will allow us to advance our mission and the neurosciences and neurology across all domains,” Dr. Pennell said. “It’s such an exciting time of change.”

Keep an eye out for the spring edition of Brainwaves, where we’ll spotlight new neurology faculty members and learn more about large-scale changes across the department.