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Message from the Chair

As we continue to make our way through the summer months, I'm pleased to see that our department faculty, trainees and staff continue to fulfill the department mission of improving neurologic health through clinical practice, education and research at an exceptionally high level. Our clinical team continues to do an outstanding job seeing patients in person and virtually as the situation requires, and I commend their efforts.



I am particularly excited to announce that our recruiting efforts have been successful, and this month we welcome seven new faculty members to our ranks. Joseph Malone, MD, Division of Cognitive Disorders; Holly C. Appleberry, DO, MBA, Division of Neuroimmunology/MS; Jigyasa Tewari, MD, Division of Comprehensive Neurology; Ali Fadhil, MD, Meghana Gaekwad, MD, Aaron Ravelo, MD, and Sarah Wondisford, MD, Division of Cerebrovascular Medicine. Dr. Tewari will be providing a new model of care for us, with telemedicine outpatient comprehensive neurology visits from the west coast, allowing evening visits for our patients. We look forward to all our new faculty colleagues bringing fabulous additions to University of Pittsburgh Neurology.

In this edition of *Neurology News & Notes*, we continue the tradition of highlighting news around the department. Reach out to your colleagues to congratulate them on their successes. Wishing everyone a fruitful month of August.

Page B. Pennell, MD, FAES

Chair and Henry B. Higman Professor of Neurology

Biostatistician Joins the Department

The Department of Neurology is pleased to welcome Rishabh Jain as the official statistical data analyst for neurology faculty members, fellows and residents. Rishabh recently graduated from the prestigious Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy at Carnegie Mellon University, where he earned a Master of Science in Public Policy & Management, with a concentration in Data Analytics; he also has a Bachelor of Engineering in Computer Science.



The department is providing Rishabh's skills as a biostatistician for three reasons:

1. He can assist in analyzing existing research data to test investigator's hypothesis.
2. He can help provide statistical guidance when investigators designs new studies.
3. He can assist in writing the statistical method section in grant applications and manuscripts for publications.

Rishabh excels in solving challenging problems and finding solutions using quantitative methods; he is competent in statistical methodologies, visualizations, data mining, machine learning, handling large data sets and programming using R and Python. In academia, a large portion of his research efforts lay in the medical and political sciences.

If you wish to work with Rishabh, please contact him at RIJ36@pitt.edu and complete the appropriate intake form. Intake forms can be found on his bio page on the University of Pittsburgh Neurology website.

Epilepsy Division Participates in EAWCP Annual Fun Run/Walk



Employees in the epilepsy division took part in the Epilepsy Association of Western and Central Pennsylvania’s Annual Walk/Run for Epilepsy at PNC Park. While the entire division is passionate about advocating for seizure freedom and control, Anto Bagic, MD, PhD, is the strongest advocate for this event. While many team members make donations through the team portal, Dr. Bagic makes a separate, specific donation in memory of Dr. Autumn Klein, a division neurologist who was killed in 2013. Additionally, he renamed the team to “Your Best Chance” in 2019 as encouragement for those with epilepsy to seek a proper evaluation at the University of Pittsburgh Epilepsy Center for the best chance at seizure freedom or best possible seizure control.

Team Your Best Chance is comprised of the epilepsy division physicians (Drs. Alkawadri, Bagic, Barot, Castellano, Fong, Urban, Rajasekaran, Aung), advanced practice providers (Alexus Sieger, PA-C [team captain], Hallie Williams, PA-C and Alexandra Zyznewsky, CRNP) nurses (Linda Trdina, Kim Fleischer and Lindsay Ibrahim) and medical assistants (Charmelle Glover and Ashley Strong); their family members were also in attendance.

“We aspire to help every patient get their BEST CHANCE for seizure freedom or best seizure control possible that they all deserve. Misdiagnosis and undertreatment of epilepsies and vast neglect of their comorbidities is unacceptable. But, everyone’s Best Chance is possible only if the patients and families engage proactively with any

Epilepsy Center that offers the best CARE: Compassion, Attention, Resources and Expertise.”

Steinberg Named Award Recipient in CTSI W2P Pilot Competition

Alexis Steinberg, MD, is the recipient of a \$25,000 award for her project “Surrogates Reasoning to Decline Trial Consent” that she submitted to the University of Pittsburgh Clinical and Translational Science Institute’s Willingness 2 Participate Pilot competition. The award period will last for twelve months from the date of award initiation.



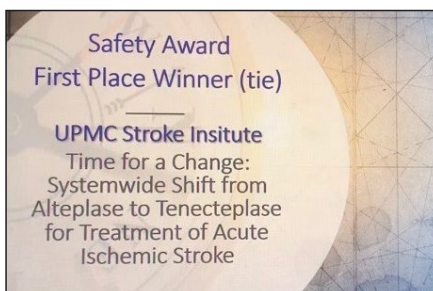
The Willingness to Participate (W2P) Pilot Awards support studies on how people choose to participate in research. All projects that have received awards help to understand how people perceive research studies, the engagement rate of specific populations and test solutions to increase interest and engagement. Proposed research in this competition is meant to understand the prevalence of barriers and how to avoid them in potential participant populations.

Dr. Steinberg’s abstract is stated below:

“Obtaining informed consent in trials of acute catastrophic illness is challenging. Barriers include limited time, emotional distress, and uncertainty of a patient’s wishes regarding research. We focus on the specific example of cardiac arrest. UPMC Presbyterian participates in the Influence of Cooling duration on Efficacy in Cardiac Arrest Patients (ICECAP) study. ICECAP randomizes comatose post-arrest patients to one of several durations of temperature control. Consent for ICECAP occurs within six hours of active cooling and may be obtained face-to-face or remotely. We will explore barriers and facilitators to consent for ICECAP. We will use purposive sampling of surrogates to recruit pilot participants who both consented to and declined ICECAP after in-person or remote discussion. We will perform semi-structured interviews of 40 surrogate-provider dyads and use inductive and deductive coding methods for thematic analysis. We will compare results between surrogates who consented and those who declined ICECAP participation (Aim 1) and between surrogates approached in-person or remotely (Aim 2). Our research team has clinical expertise in neurocritical care, experience obtaining emergency informed consent and in rigorous qualitative methods. Our pilot findings will support design and development of a competitive NIH award to expand our research across a multicenter cohort of Strategies to Innovate Emergency Care Clinical Trials Network (SIREN) trial sites including studies of adult and pediatric cardiac arrest and traumatic brain injury. Ultimately, our goal is to develop and refine strategies to improve volume and equity of recruitment for other future neurological emergency trials.”

Stroke Institute Receives 1st Place at UPMC 2022 Quality and Safety Fair

Congratulations to the UPMC Stroke Institute for winning the First Place Safety Award at the UPMC 2022 Quality and Safety Fair! This award recognizes the promotion of safe and effective care for our patients, associates and the environment. Thanks to Brad Molyneaux and Matthew T. Starr, MD, who built and championed the program, as well as all involved faculty, nurses and related professionals.





Pu Awarded 2022-23 Winters Foundation Award

Hongjian Pu, MD, PhD, has been granted the 2022-2023 Winters Foundation Award from the Samuel and Emma Winters Foundation. Dr. Pu was granted over \$12,000 for his grant proposal entitled “Adiponectin ameliorates chronic hypoperfusion induced vascular cognitive impairment and dementia”.

Each year The Samuel and Emma Winters Foundation awards five to six grants for biomedical research to investigators in the Pittsburgh area. These awards are intended to support junior faculty members and average around \$10,000, while new research by senior investigators is eligible to be considered.

Dr. Pu’s grant award will be in effect from July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023.

Melanie Mielo Wins UPMC Quarter 2 “The Extra Mile” Award



Melanie Mielo, practice coordinator for the University of Pittsburgh Department of Neurology, has been awarded “The Extra Mile” Quarter 2 Award within UPMC Physician Services. The award is designed to recognize a staff member or physician who goes above and beyond their required duty to maintain a high office morale and actively displays UPMC values.

Mielo was nominated by Pat Conway, who is the executive administrator for the department. His nomination stated, “On a daily basis; Melanie goes above and beyond for both patients and staff. We have been short staffed for some time, and she has w/o hesitation taken on additional duties. I stopped by to see her a few weeks ago; however, she was off escorting a patient to their next visit. Last Friday; for example; Melanie went and bought the staff Rita’s Italian Ice !!! When i asked her why; she simply said - “they needed something fun”. Melanie does this all the time and never asks for anything in return. UPMC needs more Melanie Mielo’s”.

Mielo has been with the department for thirty-one years and started as an epilepsy secretary. In that time, she has worked her way up to the title of practice coordinator and says that working with amazing physicians, APP’s, residents, staff and coworkers is one of the best parts of her job. “I love helping and interacting with my patients,” says Mielo. “Everyday brings something new and challenging to the table, and that’s the most rewarding thing.”

New Faculty Members



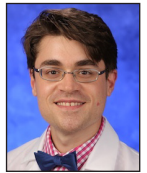
Holly Appleberry, DO, MBA
Assistant Professor
MS/Neuroimmunology



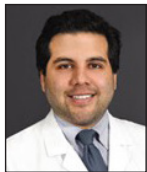
Ali Fadhil, MD
Assistant Professor
Cerebrovascular Medicine



Megana Gaekwad, MD
Assistant Professor
Cerebrovascular Medicine



Joseph Malone, MD
Assistant Professor
Behavioral Neurology



Aaron Ravelo, MD
Clinical Assistant Professor
Cerebrovascular Medicine



Jigyasa Tewari, MD
Clinical Assistant Professor
Comprehensive Neurology



Sarah Wondisford, MD
Assistant Professor
Cerebrovascular Medicine