

Faculty Feature: Dr. Jenny Linnoila



After earning PhD and MD degrees from the University of Pittsburgh in 2007 and 2009, respectively, Dr. Jenny Linnoila felt motivated to return to Pittsburgh as a faculty member after completing a neurology residency, autoimmune neurology fellowship, and neurology research fellowship. As a clinician-scientist who specializes in autoimmune disorders of the central nervous system, she chose to join Pitt Neurology because of the size of her research specialty.

“My particular area of experience ... is presently not well represented at my institutions,” said Dr. Linnoila. “As a prior student of the [Pitt physician-scientist training program], I saw firsthand the tremendous investments that Pitt makes in raising and supporting clinician-scientists and promoting cutting-edge translational science. That made me want to bring my expertise back to Pitt and UPMC.”

Autoimmune neurological disorders can be rare, complex, and life-altering, and they often require specific skills to diagnose and treat. However, in many instances, the disorders are very treatable, and providers can have an immense impact in restoring patients’ and their families’ lives. According to Dr. Linnoila, because so many complex biologic interactions are poorly understood, autoimmune neurology is an exciting field of study that is both relatively young and rapidly expanding.

“As is true of many places post-pandemic, [Pitt and UPMC] had recently embarked on a number of institutional changes, and I felt that it was a good time to consider a change. Plus, I knew that Dr. Page B. Pennell, an epilepsy attending in my residency program, had recently become chair,” said Dr. Linnoila. “Returning to Pittsburgh, I felt like I was returning to my academic home.”

Beyond her role as assistant professor of neurology at Pitt Medicine, Dr. Linnoila founded the Autoimmune Neurology Interest Group, which serves as a monthly lecture series, and participated in outlining guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of autoimmune neurologic disorders. She has served nationally as an abstract reviewer, moderator, and speaker in autoimmune neurology for the American Academy of Neurology annual meeting. Internationally, she has served on the Autoimmune Task Force for the International League Against Epilepsy, which developed consensus guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of autoimmune epilepsy.

“Since autoimmune neurology is such a small and specialized field, it is essential to ‘get the word out’ by educating others,” said Dr. Linnoila. “I have lectured on the topic to audiences ranging from patients and families to medical students and to senior faculty members in a number of venues, both regional and national. I have mentored others in the field, helping them to find fellowship programs, faculty positions, and more. This has included mentoring other women who, like me, are trying to find a balance between work and family.”

In her personal life, Dr. Linnoila enjoys attending community events with her husband and two children, partaking in sports with her family and attending Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra concerts. In fact, since January, Dr. Linnoila and her family have attended nine concerts and even befriended the contrabassoon player!