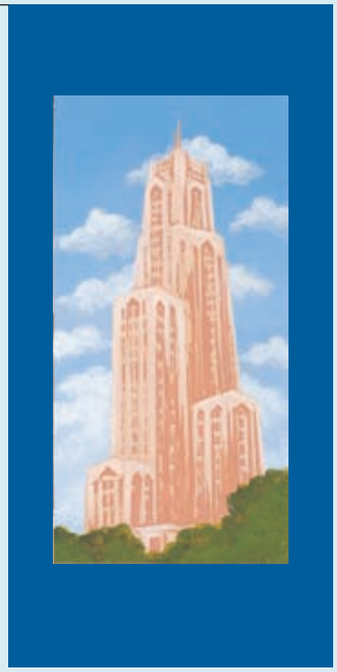

CLASS NOTES

'70s

George Magovern Jr. (MD '78) performed Allegheny General Hospital's first heart transplant in December 1987. "The patient had a lovely family, and he knew that he wasn't going to live otherwise, so it was a nice Christmas present," Magovern says.

Magovern is currently the surgical director of cardiac transplantation at Allegheny General Hospital, chair of the department of thoracic and cardiovascular surgery for the West Penn Allegheny Health System, and a Drexel University professor of surgery.

As a Pitt sophomore, **Mary Mancini** (MD '78) went behind her parents' backs and took the MCATs. "I was bored," she says. "I come from a very traditional Italian family where the women get married, have kids, and don't have a career, so it was an uphill battle."

Mancini interviewed with Pitt's former associate dean of student affairs, the late Rebecca Frances Drew Taylor, known to her colleagues as Penna Drew.

"I walked into her office for the interview, and she's sitting there, smoking a pipe," Mancini says. Drew asked her to interpret a journal article. Instead of panicking, she tried to make sense of it on the spot, earning Drew's respect, as well as an acceptance letter.

Mancini is a professor of surgery and chief of cardiothoracic surgery at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in Shreveport. She also makes use of her studies at the Conservatorio di Musica Benedetto Marcello di Venezia by singing with the Shreveport Opera.

Mancini in *Madame Butterfly*

'80s

Last year, **Susan Dunmire** (MD '85, Emergency Medicine Resident '88) made more than 60 attempts on the patient simulator SimMan's life. She shot him, stabbed him, and ran over his foot with a lawn mower; for this she received the 2008 Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award. Dunmire, an associate professor of emergency medicine at Pitt, is continually praised by students for the creativity and enthusiasm she brings to teaching—and the breakfast she serves on exam days. "I think students like me because I bake for them," Dunmire says, wryly. "They're easily bought." But accolades from Pitt's Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg and her appointment to the School of Medicine's Academy of Master Educators suggest Dunmire has more going for her than baked goods. "Get Ready for Residency"—her crash course in worst-case scenarios that mixes lectures with patient simulations, urgent phone calls, and confounding interruptions—prepares students for the chaos of life as an intern. With days like this, it's a good thing they're eating breakfast.

Andreas Tzakis (Transplant Surgery Fellow '85) recently performed an unusual series of organ transplants—removing six of a patient's organs in order to burn away a tumor tangled between them, then returning the organs to their proper places.

A professor of surgery and director of the Transplant Institute at the University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Medical Center, Tzakis is focused on promoting organ tolerance in transplant patients. His ambitions in transplant surgery include taking surrogate motherhood a step further by transplanting

Dunmire

RANDY BRUNO

TICKLING WHISKERS

On a typical day at the Max Planck Institute for Medical Research in Heidelberg, Germany, Randy Bruno (Neurobiology PhD '02) would squeeze into a workspace packed with monitors and affix electronic sensors to a sedated rat. One component of the equipment tickled the rodent's whiskers and another translated neuron activity into sound. Over the loudspeaker, Bruno could hear when a selected neuron fired, triggering the release of a neurotransmitter.

Bruno's Nobel Prize–winning mentor, Bert Sakmann, always reacted to the sound of data played aloud. "He would come running from his office whenever he heard it, because he knew there was an experiment going on," Bruno says. "He had almost a childlike enthusiasm."

Now an assistant professor of neuroscience at Columbia University, Bruno teases apart the workings of sensory perception. Bruno started this work with Daniel Simons, PhD professor of neurobiology, at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. He then did his postdoc under Sakmann at the Planck Institute. "I'm trying to take a little bit of both of them," Bruno says of mentors Sakmann and Simons. He credits the former with embracing new methods in the lab and the latter with innovative tweaks in the experimental structure.

At the Planck Institute, Bruno and Sakmann developed a way to measure the strength of a connection between a cell from the thalamus—which relays input from a sensory organ (be it a whisker or an eardrum)—and one from the cortex in a living animal.

COURTESY BRUNO

a human uterus. "We are trying to make the procedure as simple as possible for a human. Whether or not we do it here first, I just want it to be safe," he says.

As a self-proclaimed "matchmaker for scientists," **Renee Carder** (Neurobiology PhD '89) doesn't link researchers romantically. Instead, the deputy to the lab director at Argonne National Laboratory in Illinois integrates their scientific pursuits, particularly by fostering collaboration between Argonne and the University of Chicago. Carder served as assistant vice president for Strategic Research Initiatives at the University of Chicago before coming to Argonne.

"As science has moved forward, it's become much more collaborative ... so I started helping the University marry the biological and physical sciences," Carder says. Products of this collaboration include a regional biocontainment laboratory, where scientists study infectious diseases and design vaccines and therapeutics, and a joint threat anticipation center, which brings together social and computational scientists to better understand and anticipate terrorism.

'90s

Jean Kim's (MD/PhD '90) overarching research goal is to break the obstruction-inflammation cycle of sinus disease and nasal polyps, a problem affecting nearly 15 percent of adults in America.

"It's a huge problem in the United States," Kim says. "There are treatments, but they're not permanent."

Kim

One fifth of patients with chronic sinusitis will develop nasal polyps. Even when surgically removed, polyps often grow back, blocking the airway, causing facial pain and, in some cases, loss of the sense of smell. Kim studies the epithelial cells that line the nasal airway, focusing on the genetic basis of chronic sinusitis and immune response. She is an assistant professor of otolaryngology and of medicine as well as director of the sinusitis program at John Hopkins Medical Center.

"I jumped [into] the Grand Canyon without a parachute," says **Loretta Dandrea** (Pediatrics Resident '92) of quitting her pediatrics practice to pursue writing full-time. Because she didn't want underage patients thumbing through her adult-themed medical thrillers, Dandrea and the receptionist at her State College practice cooked up the pen name CJ Lyons—a tribute, sigh, to the Nittany Lions. Her debut novel, *Lifelines* (Berkley Books) blends a *CSI*-style crime thriller with *ER* medical drama and an all-female cast of characters that harkens back to *Sex and the City,* according to her publisher. Dandrea took dramatic license with the book, which is set in a fictional Pittsburgh hospital, but tried to keep it true to her own residency experience. "I mean, we never got to have sex in the linen closet," she says.

In his two years as a flight surgeon in the 1990s in Vilseck, Germany, **Charles Egbert** (MD '92) distinguished between pilots who were fit to fly and those who had to be grounded for health reasons. "This is what these guys do for a living, and their identity is wrapped up in it. So theoretically, you can do them no good," Egbert says. He is glad he never had to ground anyone permanently.

During the American deployment to Bosnia, Egbert also served as a U.S. Army commander, administering a clinic in Vilseck. He resigned from the military as a major and now works nights as a hospitalist in Springfield, Vt., a position he appreciates for the family time it affords him. A father of five, Egbert answered *Pitt Med'* s telephone call with a chuckle, saying, "I was just playing dress-up with my daughter."

'00s

During his first year in Pitt's molecular pharmacology PhD program, **Qing Zhang** (Pharmacology PhD '05) grew frustrated with his head and neck cancer research as discovery came slowly. Professor Jennifer Rubin Grandis (MD '87, Otolaryngology Resident '93) helped him change his perspective. "[Grandis] came to me and said, 'If you have an interest in cancer research, you should focus on a broader picture,'" Zhang says. He now looks at research as a means to a greater end—helping the patient population—and doesn't let setbacks deter him. Zhang is now at Harvard University and the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute investigating how tumor suppressors lose function in kidney cancer.

—Meaghan Dorff and Hayley Grgurich

SEE MORE CLASS NOTES ONLINE AT
http://www.medschool.pitt.edu/alumni/index.html

Randy Bruno (at right) finds himself in good company with a pair of Nobelists: his mentor, Bert Sakmann (left), and Columbia University colleague Eric Kandel.

Bruno studies the rodent whisker barrel system. It's a straightforward circuitry model, he says. Each whisker corresponds to a given pocket of tens of thousands of neurons in the brain.

He notes that rodents use whiskers the same way we use our fingertips for doing sensory tasks. "They sweep their whiskers across an object the same way we would sweep our fingers across an object," he says.

"We're coming to understand a lot about the circuitry that allows the brain to work. And a lot of mental disorders—whether it's epilepsy or schizophrenia or autism—are thought to be dysfunctions of the circuit," Bruno says.

He plans to develop a mouse model of autism "without abandoning" the basic science questions of sensory perception. Such questions may tell us more than you might think about how we perceive the world, he notes:

"Lots of different areas of the cortex are very similar in terms of their anatomical structures, their connectivity, and their function. It's almost as if the brain has reiterated the same unit across its whole surface for many different things—for vision, for touch, for thinking." *–Meaghan Dorff*

The 2008 Senior Class Luncheon included the presentation of the Medical Alumni Association's McEllroy Award and Hench Distinguished Alumnus Award. The McEllroy, given to a physician who trained at Pitt, went to Pitt professor of psychiatry Charles Reynolds (Res '77). Reynolds is a senior associate dean at the school and a much-quoted expert in geriatric depression. The Hench went to Randolph Miller (MD '76), professor of medicine at Vanderbilt University, known for his work in biomedical informatics.

Reynolds

Miller

THE WAY WE ARE
CLASS OF '87

Thanks to lifesaving armor, soldiers in Iraq are surviving blasts that routinely killed soldiers in past conflicts. At Walter Reed Army Medical Center, **Colonel Gregory Argyros** (MD '87), the chief of medicine, treats these soldiers for ailments few previously lived to suffer. Argyros is former chief of the blast overpressure division at Walter Reed and a specialist in pulmonary and critical care. He has been learning—and teaching—on the fly about how to treat patients with traumatic brain injuries and unusual wound infections from foreign soil contamination. It's a job he says he's honored to do for those who give so much to their country.


Argyros


Bozik


Petrakis


Fielding

As the director of the Brain Tumor Center at the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, **Michael Bozik** (MD '87) always felt the work he and his colleagues did to develop cancer vaccines in the laboratory would be invaluable to patients—that is, once they had access to the vaccines. Hoping to bridge the gap between petri dishes and pharmacies, Bozik traded his lab coat for a sport coat to work at Bristol-Myers Squibb and then Bayer. When he left to become president and CEO of the start-up company Knopp Neurosciences, he went from having 30,000 coworkers to 14, all of whom are now attempting to develop a treatment for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

Ismene Petrakis (MD '87), associate professor of psychiatry and director of the addiction psychiatry residency program at Yale University, feels that the best way to find treatments that work for patients with schizophrenia and a comorbid addiction like alcoholism is to allow a few variables from the clinic into her studies. Initially she tried to avoid it, stipulating in one study that participants could only take the antipsychotic drug haloperidol. "You know how many people we recruited? Like zero," Petrakis says, laughing. What her studies now forfeit in neatness, they make up for in results. Testing subjects with a whole host of disorders, Petrakis gets practical data by breaking the population down into subgroups to measure how patients with different disorder combinations and variables respond.

Julia Fielding (MD '87) jokes that she steps out of her cave to give first-year students a lecture titled "Radiology Urban Legends." She thinks med students may hear shady stories about her specialty, so she reassures them that radiologists aren't antisocial vampires who lurk in darkened exam rooms.

Fielding is an associate professor of radiology and section chief of abdominal imaging in the Department of Radiology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her work involves genitourinary tract disease, CT-based virtual reality imaging of the bladder for cancer screenings, and magnetic-resonance pelvic-floor imaging. She is a consultant to the National Institutes of Health's Pelvic Floor Disorders Network and the institute's chief radiologist for national studies.

Fielding got involved in the nonprofit dance company Boston Youth Moves while she was an assistant professor of radiology at Harvard University. She still dances. "Right now I'm learning hip-hop," she says.

—Hayley Grgurich and Meaghan Dorff

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THEODORE LIOU

FIRST DO NO HARM

BY REID R. FRAZIER

FRANK HARRIS

Liou sees hope in the daunting numbers facing patients with cystic fibrosis.

Ted Liou (Res '89) spent four years analyzing thousands of records to determine whether lung transplantation was a good idea for children with cystic fibrosis. When Liou and collaborators published their results in *The New England Journal of Medicine* (*NEJM*) on Thanksgiving Day 2007, it took only minutes for all hell to break loose.

The study made the front page in Amsterdam newspapers. (There are a lot of CF patients in the Netherlands.) Reuters called. Through the grapevine, Liou, an associate professor of internal medicine at the University of Utah, learned that some transplant surgeons were upset.

The cause of the trouble? The researchers found that less than 1 percent of pediatric patients showed significant likelihood of increased survival from transplant, yet 60 percent showed significant likelihood that transplant decreased their chances of survival. Liou was raising questions about whether the cure was worse than the illness.

There are about 26,000 patients with cystic fibrosis in the United States; about 60 percent of them are children. The median life expectancy of CF patients is between 25 and 40. (For teenagers or young adults with CF, life expectancy is 25. For those born today with CF, doctors project life expectancy to be 40.)

CF is a genetic condition that inhibits the ability to fight infection in the lungs. After protracted infections, most patients' lungs are so damaged they no longer function. Although only 50 children a year get lung transplants in this country (most of these are for CF), almost every family affected by CF thinks about transplantation, because it is often seen as the best way to extend and improve a sick patient's life. Yet a lung is one of the most difficult donor organs for the body to accept. About half of lung transplant patients die within five years. At UPMC, the nation's busiest lung transplant program, survival is better than average. However, fewer than 10 percent of lung transplants here are for CF patients.

When Liou was looking for a research topic for a statistics class he was taking a few years ago, colleagues at the University of Utah's Intermountain Cystic Fibrosis Center in Salt Lake City, where he was a fellow, suggested he look at survival rates of lung transplant patients with CF.

"Very few people had taken a look at this," says Liou, 47, who now codirects the Intermountain CF Center. "The instinct of people in the field was, they weren't quite sure about this."

Frank Kroboth (Res '80), the George H. Taber Professor of Medicine and director of Pitt's internal medicine residency program, is pleased to see that Liou is demanding evidence for what doctors practice, but he is not surprised. "It was obvious that Ted was very bright and inquisitive the day he stepped into the program," he wrote in an e-mail.

To make sense of the data, Liou asked Sir David Cox, a renowned statistician at the University of Oxford, England, to help shape the analysis. Cox, who has constructed statistical models for epidemiologists, sociologists, hydrologists, and physicists, agreed and became a coauthor.

The resulting study has been applauded by many CF doctors and transplant specialists for bringing statistical rigor to such an important question. Others have criticized it. In a letter to *NEJM* responding to the study, a group of doctors argued that because organs generally go to the sickest patients, you can't compare their outcomes with their healthier counterparts still on a waiting list.

Liou et al. acknowledge these difficulties in comparing the numbers but insist they took these potential biases into account. The best way to address the question, they say, is to conduct a prospective study to monitor patients throughout the next several years.

Liou hopes his study will be the start of a long dialogue on transplants and CF, not the last word. His group has found that for sick adult patients, transplant is a good option.

"I think there's a hidden message of hope there," Liou says. "When you look at CF now, the majority of deaths happen among adults. In Salt Lake City now, you almost never hear of a child dying. If nobody's dying, they don't need to be rescued by lung transplantation." ■