Justice Served

The rigors of med school are no barrier to Opeolu Adeoye’s (MD ’02) involvement in issues he cares about. Last year, the third-year student cooked meals at a homeless shelter with African-American male teenagers—as part of a mentoring program he cofounded at Westinghouse High School in Pittsburgh. He also cofounded Life Issues for Education at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, which examines issues of palliative and hospice care. The Association of American Medical Colleges has recognized Adeoye’s concern for justice in medical education and health care, awarding him the Herbert W. Nickens Scholarship. He was one of five students nationwide to receive the $5,000 award. Despite his wide-ranging involvement, don’t expect to pick up time-management tips from Adeoye. “I must have managed my time well somehow,” he says. “It never felt like it.” —DH

FOOTNOTE

For this next trick, he’ll need a plant.
“A volunteer from the audience?” asked Brad Sobolewski, MD ’04, ready to perform his act, Interpretive Hair Styling, during a med school talent show. A brave soul stepped onto the stage. Sobolewski took a few fake snips near his head, then flourished a razor. Tresses fell, and fell, yet the “volunteer” smiled. Soon, not a hair was left.

AFTER THE GOLD

How do you follow winning a gold medal, like the one Savio L-Y. Woo received when he won the 1998 Olympic Prize for Sports Science? For Woo, director of Pitt’s Musculoskeletal Research Center, the medal was just his first round of Olympian honors. He was recently appointed the first general secretary of the International Olympic Committee’s new Academy on Sports Science, which is made up of 28 physicians and scientists. The elite academy sponsors symposia and research to help everybody who participates in sports, not just the Jesse Owenses among us. Its guiding philosophy, not surprisingly, meshes with Woo’s. He sees the games as a way to inspire all of us to improve our health through physical activity. —DH
Faculty Snapshots

In Japan and other countries adopting a more Western lifestyle, the incidence of diabetes is on the rise, says Linda Siminerio, assistant professor of medicine, who was recently appointed vice president of the International Diabetes Federation. “The rates of obesity are increasing, and with obesity you get diabetes,” she says. Siminerio plans to enhance awareness of diabetes globally. “Diabetes care is poor throughout the world, so we need to do a lot of patient and provider education, too,” she says.

Women are more likely than men to report more disability after a traumatic brain injury, according to a study by Amy Wagner, instructor of physical medicine and rehabilitation. “We found that 70 percent of males consider themselves to be fully employable following the injury, while only 22 percent of women consider themselves fully employable,” says Wagner. She plans further studies to determine why.

Herceptin, a new drug used to treat metastatic breast cancer, is cardiotoxic, warns Arthur Feldman, professor of medicine, in a recent Circulation editorial. The editorial draws attention to statistics presented at the Food and Drug Administration hearings on Herceptin, including the following: 28 percent of women who received the combination therapy of Herceptin and Adriamycin developed heart failure. “Our major concern is that there are studies planned or about to start where they’re going to use Herceptin in women with much less severe disease,” he says. “We wanted to raise a flag of caution.” —DH

FLAShBACK

It was more than 40 years ago, but Bob Badwey’s (MD ’59) friends remember it as though it were the first game of the XFL. A neighbor played the trumpet, and that drove Badwey nuts: There was no way he could study with all that noise. One day, he announced he would put an end to it and stormed out. It wasn’t long before he came back looking sheepish. Turns out, Joe Walton—who weighed in at 215 pounds as an All-American end for the Panthers—was a pretty good horn player.

MIRACLES AREN’T ENOUGH, SO RAND AND PITT PARTNER

“Even today—when modern medicine offers an inexhaustible source of new miracles that create, prolong, and restore life—many people in our region fail to receive the most basic health care services,” Harold Pincus, director of the new RAND-University of Pittsburgh Health Institute, wrote recently. The institute plans to use western Pennsylvania as a testing ground for some of the most promising care-intervention strategies; it already has launched collaborations focusing on concerns such as breast cancer and perinatal mortality.

Pincus, who also serves as vice chair of psychiatry for the school, gives an example of how the institute might approach an issue of special interest to him. “In depression,” he says, “there’s an enormous array of research documenting effectiveness of medications and psychotherapy; and there are different care models for applying those treatments.” Yet, he notes that even those who conduct such research have trouble implementing their findings. “There are barriers at each level of delivery,” he says. Pincus likes to break down those levels into “the six Ps”—patient, provider, practice, plan, purchaser, and population: He explains that with depression, the disorder tends to make people think they are not worthy of treatment. Then, even if patients come in the door, providers might not be effective if they don’t approach the disorder as a chronic problem. Potential glitches continue at the population level—in Pittsburgh, for example, one needs to take into account the special needs of the elderly.

All those Ps spell a hopeful prognosis for the region’s health. —EL
BOYER LENDS HIS GENIUS TO PITT

Ever since Herbert Boyer and Stanley Cohen started thinking, Hey, maybe we could replicate DNA if we just snipped it out of the nucleus and... things haven’t been the same. By inventing gene-splicing, or recombinant DNA technology, they changed the parameters of potential treatments for innumerable disorders and gave rise to the biotechnology industry. Boyer, a founder of Genentech, in South San Francisco, California, has accepted an appointment to Pitt’s Board of Trustees, which can only be fortuitous for the University’s attempts to establish Pittsburgh as a biotech hub. With his wife, he also recently endowed a chair in molecular biology in the Department of Biological Sciences.

(Did we mention that Boyer is a Pitt PhD grad? Arts and Sciences ’63.) —EL

A BIG BOOST FOR GENE THERAPY

There are stamps of approval, then there are stamps of approval.

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) has awarded the School of Medicine $14.3 million to establish the Cardiovascular Gene Therapy Center, which will explore the therapy’s promise for treating cardiovascular disease, the number one cause of death in the United States. The grant will allow clinicians and scientists to train in the latest technologies and procedures. To top that off, the NHLBI has identified Pitt as the national source for producing the vectors, or gene-transport systems, to be used in clinical studies it funds. The grant’s principal investigators include department chairs Joseph Glorioso (molecular genetics and biochemistry) and Timothy Billiar (surgery). Among the many faculty funded by the grant is Edith Tzeng, of surgery; to learn how she is using gene therapy to stop blood vessel walls from narrowing, see page 17. —DH

@Home or Away: Falk Library

BY MARK JACOBS

Sunday morning at home, a physician pours a cup of coffee. It’s time to get her hands on that article in JAMA in preparation for tomorrow’s meeting. Gone are the days of braving the rain for a trip to the library. She goes online to the University of Pittsburgh Health Sciences Library System (HSLS) web page. Through her affiliation with Pitt, she is able to search for the article and print it out. All at home, all before the coffee gets cold. And home can be anywhere in the world.

The number of online journals has accelerated from a standstill of zero three years ago to 1,500, says Patricia Mickelson, HSLS director. Library patrons also have access to 80 online and searchable textbooks; these books never get stale because the latest editions are always available.

There’s more whiz and sparkle in digital transmission, yet the library is doing what it always has, notes Barbara Epstein, HSLS associate director: “But doing it with different containers and different technology.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION: http://www.hsls.pitt.edu
Appointments

An anonymous grateful patient has endowed a chair in recognition of Lawrence Ellis, MD ’58, professor of hematology/oncology. Ellis’s work on the diagnostic value and methodology of bone marrow biopsy is cited in probably every hematology textbook. He has personally performed more than 7,000 bone marrow biopsies. Donald Trump is the first to hold the chair. He is chief of the division of hematology/oncology and deputy director for clinical investigations at the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute (UPCI). Trump’s research focuses on new therapies for prostate cancer. “We’ve developed substantial evidence that administration of very high doses of vitamin D is safe and provides distinct antitumor effects in laboratory models as well as in patients with advanced androgen-independent prostate cancer,” says Trump.

As the new chair of the Department of Dermatology, Louis D. Falo Jr. (an MD/PhD) hopes to interweave more closely its clinical and research programs, so that they optimally contribute to each other as well as the department’s educational mission. His own research focuses on designing new vaccines that are injected into the skin to fight against melanoma and viruses such as human immunodeficiency and human papilloma.

Cells have a built-in defense against cancer—their ability to repair damaged DNA. The February 16 landmark issue of Science, devoted to the human genome, includes an article coauthored by Richard Wood, the Richard Cyert Professor of Molecular Oncology, describing the 130 known human DNA repair genes. Also in the issue is Craig Venter et al.’s analysis of the sequence of the genome. Wood came to Pitt in March to lead the molecular and cellular oncology program at UPCI. He will recruit other scientists to join the program, to be housed, eventually, in the new Hillman Cancer Center. —DH

THE STRENGTH OF NUMBERS

Huge research programs such as the Human Genome Project generate huge continents of data. That’s called for some serious number crunching, since new methods must be found to organize and interpret the results. Recognizing computation is now an essential tool for modern biology, the School of Medicine has created the new Center for Computational Biology and Bioinformatics. Computational biology simulates biological processes through three-dimensional modeling, and bioinformatics is the science of organizing and analyzing enormous quantities of biomedical data.

Ivet Bahar, newly arrived from Istanbul, Turkey, will direct the center. Formerly director of the Polymer Research Center in Istanbul and a visiting scientist at the National Cancer Institute, Bahar has been conducting research at the intersection of computational and structural biology (which studies the three-dimensional structures of large molecules, such as proteins, and their interactions). —MJ