



FALL / WINTER 2022



face  
facts

# Turning the TiDe

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**A bold path for  
moving forward**

# Contents

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## WELCOME TO FACETS.

The University of Pittsburgh School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences (SHRS) is a leader in the field of health care education, with several of our programs ranked among the best in the country and with alumni representing SHRS around the world. Inside every issue of our alumni magazine, FACETS, you'll discover many sides of the SHRS legacy. You'll hear how our students and faculty continue to step out boldly and confidently in the classroom, in the lab and in the community. You'll learn how our bold moves lead to innovations and collaborations, groundbreaking research and meaningful connections. You'll get a sense of our past. And the vision that drives us to shape the future of health care.

- 1 From the Dean**  
Anthony Delitto
- 2 Perspective**  
Natalie Baney
- 3 New OT Chair Shares Bold Vision**
- 4 Turning the Tide:**  
A Bold Path for Moving Forward.
- 8 Diversity Fuels Innovative Research**
- 10 SHRS Connection Results in Life-Saving Gift**
- 12 The Future Is in Our Hands**
- 16 Walt Stoy: His Vision. His Legacy.**
- 18 Specialty Clinical Rotation Builds Special Skills**
- 20 The Pitt Center for Emergency Responder Wellness**  
Removing Barriers to Mental Health Services.
- 23 First of Its Kind Event Showcases Pitt's Data Resources**
- 24 CHAMPions of Collaboration**  
Leading the Nation in Interprofessional OTC Hearing Aid Education.
- 28 From Japan to Pittsburgh to California**  
PT Alumnus Carries the Pitt Torch.
- 30 Pittsburgh's Lost Chinatown**  
Where Yesterday Meets the Future.
- 32 Leading by Example**  
SHRS Faculty Prove It's Not Just About Teaching.
- 34 Data Acumen:**  
The Missing Link Between Mountains of Information and Effective Health Policies.
- 35 Their Journeys Continue**
- 36 New Names. New Faces.**

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**Pitt SHRS**  
School of Health and  
Rehabilitation Sciences



# Welcome to our reformatted ➤ FACETS magazine!



These changes reflect the transformation of our school as we enter a new era of higher education. We are launching exciting, all-encompassing schoolwide initiatives, all of which serve to remind the entire SHRS community that we continue to thrive!

This year, we have enrolled full classes in the hybrid formats of our Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) and Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies (PAS) programs, culminating a four-year effort to build and deploy a variety of online educational offerings. Both hybrid programs will more than double our capacity to bring SHRS' excellent educational experiences and hands-on training to DPT and PAS students across the country.

In addition to expanding our footprint, we are seeking to use online education as a vehicle to better reach underserved populations. Our online Master of Science in Health Informatics (MSHI) program clearly demonstrates that we can increase access through online education. For example, over its 2.5 years of existence, the online MSHI program admitted 15% Black or African American students, as compared to 4% in the residential program. With our online infrastructure now largely in place, we look to launch additional hybrid as well as residential programming.

We are excelling on many fronts. Last year, our research expenditures topped \$32 million—our most productive year ever! We've watched our Blue Ridge ranking of National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding rise from No. 21 to No. 13! Submissions of

large grants are up and we continue to have better than expected hit rates (the ratio of total funded proposals over submitted proposals).

This year we begin work on a unique program with a grant from the NIH. Our cover story describes how we're partnering across disciplines and several higher education institutions to recruit for our Training in Diversity Education program, or TiDe. The program will provide "training for the trainers," or current clinical scientists who are invested in elevating the diversity of future clinical scientists in rehabilitation research. These "trainers" will in turn support the next generation of underrepresented clinician scientists through didactic and hands-on research experiences to build capacity to advance rehabilitation research in an unprecedented manner.

**In this issue, you will read how we continue to serve in leadership roles across our fields and exemplify and embody both passion and compassion as we continue to tackle critical societal problems that impede access to and the delivery of quality care.**

Words cannot express how proud I am of our faculty, staff, students and the extended SHRS family for the way we have responded to the crises of the past couple years. Indeed, we are boldly moving forward!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony Delitto".

Anthony Delitto  
Professor and Dean

# perspective



FACETS has begun anew! We're telling the same great stories but through a different lens. In breaking down the silos of department and program pages, we're highlighting how our faculty, staff, students and alumni are making bold moves across multiple initiatives. The motivation and passion to create meaningful change knows no bounds at SHRS. It's a shared trait among our educators and researchers that extends beyond any distinct discipline. We hope you enjoy reading how bold drives us forward and moves others to follow.

One of my favorite stories in this issue is "SHRS connection results in life-saving gift." It demonstrates how small acts of kindness can lead to life-changing events. The selflessness of one of our current students is inspiring. The expansive reach of our network is impressive. The power of SHRS' community is undeniable. I hope you, too, are filled with a deep sense of pride as you read this story and all the articles in this latest edition of FACETS.

*"Perspective" is written by Natalie Baney, FACETS executive editor and SHRS executive director of Marketing and Communications. This column serves to address topics related to our students, faculty, staff, the school, and local and global communities.*





# New OT chair shares bold vision.

Throughout her career as an occupational therapist and educator, Department of Occupational Therapy (OT) Associate Professor Juleen Rodakowski has championed the use of evidence-based methods to support and promote the “aging in place” of vulnerable older adults.

This is no small task. In 2020, the U.S. Census Bureau released estimates showing the nation’s 65-and-older population has grown by more than one-third since 2010. And American spending on health care will rise from \$4 trillion a year to \$6 trillion—or nearly 20% of the country’s GDP by 2027.

As the newly appointed OT department chair, Rodakowski is determined to share her vision and advance her work for the betterment of her students, their clients and the field of occupational therapy.

“I aspire to promote equitable occupational therapy services that maximize wellness and community living for all people through meaningful activities,” states Rodakowski.

With more than \$4 million in federally funded research, Rodakowski seeks not only to slow the progression of disability attributed to early changes in cognition but also to optimize the health and wellness of caregivers. Her efforts have far-reaching implications, creating new, effective models of community-focused care and influencing federal policies.

“Juleen’s research was among the first to demonstrate that older adults with Mild Cognitive Impairment perform activities of daily living differently than older adults with normal cognitive aging,” notes SHRS Associate Dean of Research and previous Department Chair Elizabeth Skidmore. “Her research helped to redefine perspectives on Mild Cognitive Impairment and emerging disability among older adults and provided impetus for routine screening and early intervention in this growing population.”

Rodakowski’s leading-edge research has garnered national attention. She recently received The American Occupational Therapy Foundation (AOTF)’s Mid-Career Research Excellence Award and the Pennsylvania Occupational Therapy Association Research Award. In 2020, Rodakowski was inducted into the AOTA Roster of Fellows for Advancing Occupational Therapy for Aging in Place.

Rodakowski is excited about taking the helm of the No. 3 ranked OT program in the country. She says, “I am delighted to leverage my joy as an educator and passion as a researcher to create the occupational therapy of the future through our academic programs and scholarship.” ■



Juleen Rodakowski, Associate Professor and Chair  
Department of Occupational Therapy

# »»»» Turning



Gregory Hicks (PhD '02), Distinguished Professor, Department of Physical Therapy, and Associate Vice President for Clinical and Translational Research, University of Delaware with Elizabeth R. Skidmore, Associate Dean for Research, SHRS, and Professor, Department of Occupational Therapy and Laura F. Waterstram, Director of Research Operations, Department of Occupational Therapy, SHRS



# the TiDe.

## A bold path for moving forward.



For many decades, the medical community has been wrestling with ways to eliminate health inequities across different segments of our society by diversifying the health care workforce.

As far back as the 1960s, in the midst of the community health and civil rights movement, there was a call for responsiveness to cultural differences in health attitudes, beliefs, behavior and language.

In 2003, the Institute of Medicine published “Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care.” The study highlights the potential of cross-cultural education to improve provider-patient communication and offers a detailed look at how to integrate cross-cultural learning within the health professions.

While cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural curricula is helpful, there remained a need to increase the number of clinicians from underrepresented groups.

Progress has been slow, but there has been a gradual increase.

The same has not been true for the number of rehabilitation research scientists.

Until now.

### **TiDe BRINGS SEA CHANGE IN TRAINING REHABILITATION RESEARCHERS.**

Elizabeth Skidmore, associate dean for Research, SHRS, and professor, Department of Occupational Therapy (OT), and SHRS alumnus Gregory Hicks (PhD '02), distinguished professor, Department of Physical Therapy (PT), and associate vice president for Clinical and Translational Research, University of Delaware, are leading a national effort unlike any other.

Through a grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Training in Diversity Education program (TiDe) will train current clinician scientists in best practices so they can develop pathways for future researchers, create communities of diverse scientists, and reduce the barriers to diversity and inclusion in rehabilitation research.



Learn how the National Institutes of Health defines “underrepresented.”  
Visit <https://diversity.nih.gov/about-us/population-underrepresented>.



According to Skidmore, TiDe has the potential to revolutionize the field. It will transform the NIH research culture to one that invests in future generations of underrepresented clinical scientists who will enrich the breadth, depth and impact of rehabilitation research.

**TiDe is the first research education program solely devoted to creating a sustainable community of diverse clinician scientists with the capacity to advance rehabilitation research.**

“We need clinician scientists with a breadth of expertise in clinical theories, methods and practices, as well as a breadth of personal perspectives and life experiences, if we are to lead research that truly informs our practice,” explains Skidmore. She adds that it is vital that future rehabilitation scientists reflect the demographics, needs and perspectives of the nation’s population more accurately.

“TiDe will help us ensure that the next generation of scientists will represent this breadth of perspectives so that we may conduct research that informs the delivery of the right rehabilitation care to the right person at the right time.”

“When you explore the scientific literature on diversity, it is clear that diversity of thought, opinion and experience on a team consistently leads to better outcomes,” adds Hicks. “That’s exactly what we want for rehabilitation science.”



Simone Gill, Associate Professor  
Boston University



Kerri Morgan, Assistant Professor  
Washington University in St. Louis



Marcie Harris-Hayes, Professor  
Washington University in St. Louis



Natalie Leland, Associate Professor  
University of Pittsburgh

Skidmore and Hicks are working in close collaboration with Simone Gill, Boston University, Marcie Harris-Hayes and Kerri Morgan, Washington University in St. Louis, and Natalie Leland, University of Pittsburgh, as well as several additional faculty nationwide with a broad range of rehabilitation research expertise. Collectively, the leadership team represents three of the top five Occupational Therapy and the top three Physical Therapy programs in the country, as ranked by U.S. News & World Report.

The team will leverage their knowledge and strengths in OT and PT intervention and implementation research, and then expand the program to include additional rehabilitation disciplines.

“We recognize we need to reach young people at earlier stages in their career trajectory to expand the potential pool of candidates for these research training positions,” says Skidmore. “Graduate professional programs are currently the richest environment to recruit and train future rehabilitation clinician scientists.”





## RECRUITING UNDERGRADUATES WHO ASPIRE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Over the course of two years, TiDe will match clinician scientists who are committed to training and mentoring students with underrepresented graduate professional trainees who demonstrate strong potential for success in rehabilitation research.

Each team will complete four phases—connect, select, train and sustain—that will create a community of diverse clinician scientists with the potential to “turn the tide” in rehabilitation science research.

### THE NEED IS GREAT.

Skidmore says studies show that the top 10 of the 150 most costly health conditions can be managed with early detection and effective delivery of rehabilitation as an alternative to high-cost, low-impact medical interventions.

Both OT and PT professions have been moving in this direction over the past several decades, in large part because of the substantial, evidence-based research that has supported these disciplines.

“If we are able to reshape the rehabilitation science workforce and promote high-quality research that addresses health inequities through our TiDe program, we will put our OT and PT practitioners in a position to ensure that all of our patients are receiving optimal care, regardless of their demographic profile,” concludes Hicks. ■

During our initial conversations about TiDe, Dr. Skidmore and I both realized that if we do this right, we have the opportunity to make a huge impact on our professions.

— Gregory Hicks

The American Student Placements and Internships in Rehabilitation Engineering (ASPIRE) is a long-standing, interactive program at the Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL). Open to undergraduate students from across the United States, ASPIRE is designed to spark interest in a new generation of rehabilitation engineering scientists to transform the lives of older adults and people with disabilities.

During a 10-week summer internship, students participate in rehabilitation and engineering research projects, receive educational research training and collaborate with clinical engineering faculty, staff and graduate students.

The success rate is impressive.

Based on post-internship follow-up efforts, 65% of program participants went on to pursue or have graduated with advanced degrees, with 27% being from underrepresented groups.

“We need to open the eyes of undergraduate students to the rewarding career opportunities that exist in rehabilitation engineering,” states Rory Cooper, director and distinguished professor, HERL. “What’s more, we need to recruit diverse students to drive innovation as well as to solve more complex challenges.”

“Advances in science are limited if there is a paucity of diversity of thought, environment, lived experiences, culture, professional training and perspective,” he continues. “We need everyone’s talent to succeed and cause others to succeed.” ■



“I hope to strengthen the relationships I have created over this summer and work with HERL in some facet again, but until then I will return to my university with a new mindset of empowering others through the world of engineering.”

— Aaron Amanios, 2022 ASPIRE intern  
University of California, Merced



“The internship was an immersive experience into the world of rehabilitation engineering, a field I had yet to explore. During my time I learned technical and professional skills that would help to further my journey as an engineer. I am grateful for this experience, for the relationships formed and skills learned.”

— Angel Koshy, 2022 ASPIRE intern  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

# Diversity fuels >>> innovative research.

In keeping with its mission to remain a global leader in scientific discovery and innovation, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) recently awarded several diversity supplements to SHRS researchers. The supplements will support highly talented high school, undergraduate and graduate students from diverse backgrounds as they gain experience under the mentorship of SHRS faculty.

The goal is to identify and cultivate the next generation of rehabilitation researchers.

Karen Linares Mendoza, for example, is Hispanic and a newly enrolled undergraduate at Johns Hopkins University. Her unique interest in communication and speech drove her to volunteer in the lab of Bharath Chandrasekaran, professor and vice chair of Research, Department of Communication Science and Disorders (CSD), while she was still attending high school at Shady Side Academy in Pittsburgh.

Through a National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) diversity fellowship, she participated in an intensive summer internship in Chandrasekaran's lab, where she spearheaded an electroencephalography (EEG) experiment examining brain responses to continuous speech.

"Karen's research complements the goals of my own NIDCD five-year research award," explains Chandrasekaran.

"The focus of the research project is to uncover neural biomarkers of auditory health. Karen's work focuses on electroencephalography (EEG), a non-invasive marker of brain processing."

"With this mentorship opportunity, Karen was able to strike a balance between guidance and independent growth to leverage and build on her extensive strengths," continues Chandrasekaran. "In this unique research environment, she was able to build relationships with experienced scientists and other researchers in the field and set herself up for future research success."



Karen Linares Mendoza







Natalia Nuñez

In May, CSD Assistant Professor Mandy Hampton Wray welcomed Natalia Nuñez to her lab as a summer research intern, also funded by the NIDCD. Her research project aligns with Hampton Wray's NIDCD five-year research award focused on speech sound processing in children with typical development and with developmental stuttering. Natalia is an undergraduate student at Pitt majoring in Communication

Science. She is a bilingual speaker of Spanish and English, which drives her long-term career goals of attending graduate school for speech-language pathology and working as a bilingual speech-language pathologist to provide clinical services to bilingual children with communication disorders.

“Students bring rich experiences to the lab and teach us as much as they learn,” notes Hampton Wray. “Having students from diverse backgrounds improves our research by increasing our understanding of the needs of communities, the needs of individuals, and how we can best reach and serve populations that are often underrepresented in research.”

“The startling lack of diversity in the rehabilitation science workforce is troublesome,” adds Juleen Rodakowski, associate professor and chair, Department of Occupational Therapy (OT). “We know that the individual experiences and perspectives of scientists influence the scientific questions that they pursue, and that diversity in the scientific workforce is critical to ensuring optimal discovery and dissemination in each body of science.”

Through an NIH diversity supplement, OT graduate student Samara Sibblies has the opportunity to work under the guidance of Rodakowski in her Prosper in Participation research laboratory.

Sibblies is already interested in pursuing a career in rehabilitation research, so the focus of her projects will coalesce with the training she is receiving in her graduate occupational therapy program. Through her research, she is describing types and modes of daily activities in older adults in the early stages of cognitive decline and assessing the relationship between the types and modes of these activities and health outcomes.

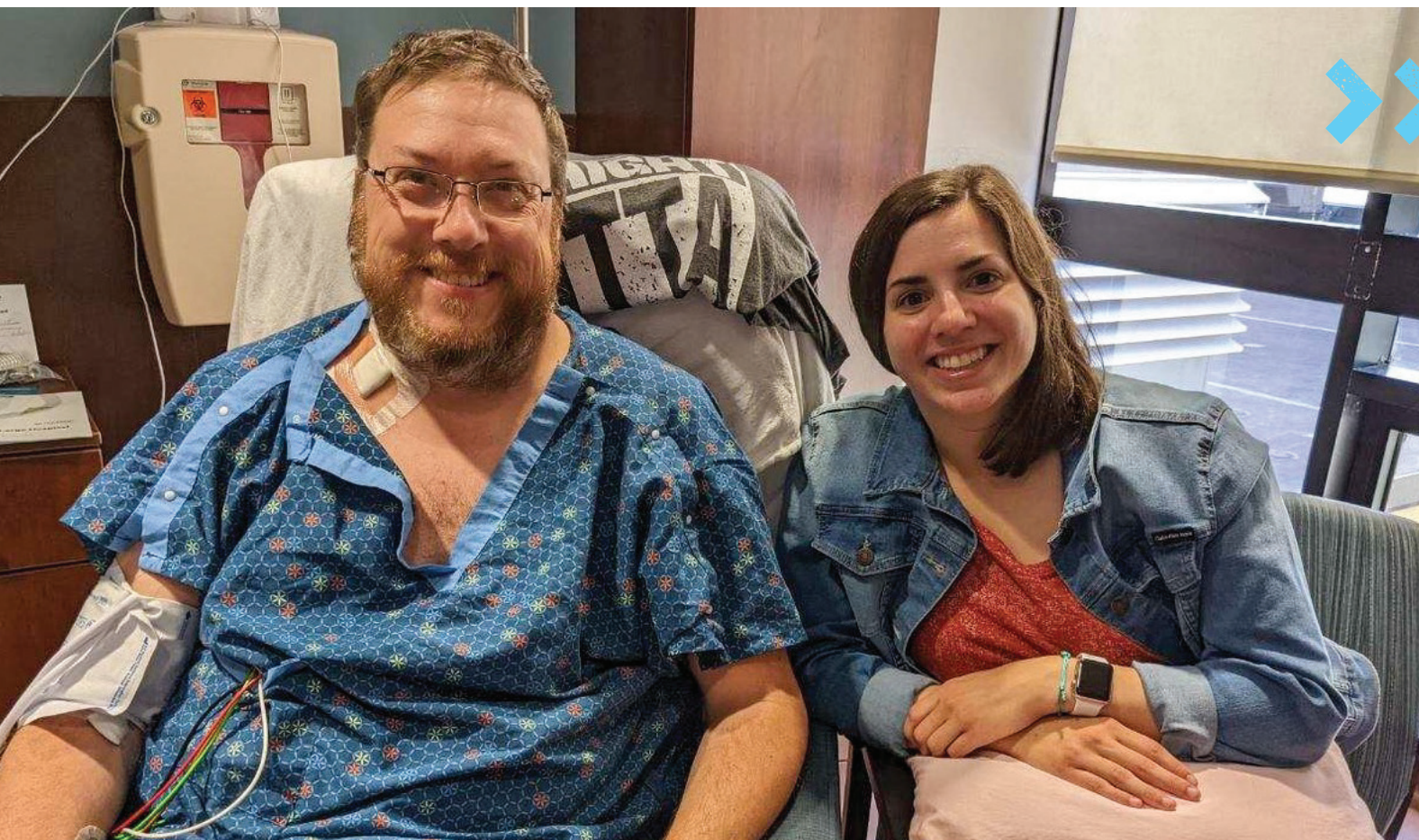


Samara Sibblies

Sibblies is learning to conceptualize, write and submit a data-based manuscript summarizing the design and results of this project for consideration in a peer-reviewed journal.

“We anticipate that at the end of this career development plan, Ms. Sibblies will have the necessary knowledge and skills to pursue the next phase of scientific training, a research doctorate in gerontology or rehabilitation science,” adds Rodakowski. ■

As Associate Dean for Research Skidmore states, “NIH diversity supplements provide rich, mentored opportunities for trainees at the high school, undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral levels to acquire exposure to and focused skills in research. We are hopeful that they will be useful in attracting more diverse scientists to rehabilitation research.”



Kidney recipient Guy Guimond and donor Madelyn Czekalski share a special bond.

## SHRS connection results in life-saving gift.

University of Pittsburgh alumni and students share a special bond. Those in the same academic program are connected in an even closer circle. But Florida resident, former SHRS Instructor and Physician Assistant Guy Guimond (BS '01, MS '05 and '13) and Madelyn Czekalski (BS '20), current student in the Physician Assistant Studies (PAS) program, are forever joined because of one life-saving gift.





## THE SELFLESS ACT OF A KIDNEY DONATION.

Two years ago, at the age of 44, Guimond was diagnosed with Stage 2 kidney failure. Although doctors tried to prolong his kidney function with medication, by November 2021, he and his wife Stephanie (BS '02) realized they needed to start looking for a donor.

"I received an email from SHRS administration on Feb. 9, 2022, stating an alumnus of SHRS was seeking support for a kidney donor," recalls Czekalski. "I signed myself up because it just felt like the right thing to do. Kidney donors can live normal, healthy lives while dramatically improving someone else's life."

Within three months of testing, she was approved as a healthy donor. On July 6, the day before the procedure at a Florida hospital, Czekalski met Guimond and his family for the first time. "It was really emotional," she says. "I knew immediately I had made the right decision."

"My experience didn't interrupt my education in any way," she continues. "The transplant center and my advisors were so helpful working around my clinical rotation to ensure I could do the donation. And thanks to the restricted COVID schedule, I never had to take any time away from class or clinicals. I felt well enough to return to rotations just two weeks later."

To say Guimond was grateful is an understatement. He credits Stephanie for reaching out to old friends in Pittsburgh, especially to members of their former church, Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in the North Hills, where Amy Aggelou, director and assistant professor, Athletic Training program, attends.

"Recently an alumni of the AT program donated a kidney to the son of a Pitt employee," explains Aggelou. "The knowledge of that life-saving gesture provided me with some knowledge of the process—and perhaps the internal push to see if a living donor match could be made for Guy through SHRS."

Aggelou drafted the email that was distributed to the SHRS community. "I actually had no idea until after the fact that Maddy saw the request and responded."

“Becoming a living donor is such a wonderful and selfless gift,” Aggelou continues. “Although Maddy is still a student in the PAS program, she seems to have already mastered the compassion and selflessness of a health care provider.”

Guimond says he is getting stronger every day. He plans to pursue genetic testing to determine if he has passed his condition on to his three children. ■



For more information on living kidney donation, Czekalski encourages people to check out [kidney.org/transplantation](https://www.kidney.org/transplantation).







# The future is in our hands.



How will the next generation of health care providers respond to the needs of their patients? What are students learning today that will impact their future practices? And what are we at SHRS doing to attract the best and the brightest and support them on their journeys to become leaders in their fields?

## ► PIQUE INTEREST AMONG TEENS.

According to Kathryn Reed, assistant professor and vice chair for Equity, Inclusion and Community Engagement, Department of Physician Assistant Studies (PAS), it all starts by identifying and mentoring the youngest students. “There is not only a great opportunity, but also a responsibility, to mentor youth in our communities and nurture future health care professionals,” notes Reed.

Current PA students had an idea. “They expressed a desire to work with residents of the community of Pittsburgh, specifically younger students, who may not be aware of the different School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences career opportunities available,” continues Reed.

Through the newly created Future Health Care Provider Outreach Program (FHCPOP), the PA students hoped to increase the proportion of underrepresented individuals in medicine and health sciences programs, which would lessen the impact of provider bias and ultimately improve health equity and reduce health disparities.

At the launch event in July, nine faculty members from six academic disciplines as well as current SHRS students met with 65 high school students from The Neighborhood Academy, an alternative school devoted to helping students achieve their unique goals.

Programming began in the fall of 2022. During weekly sessions at the SHRS Wellness Pavilion in Homewood, the teens gain insight into various health care professions, what steps they need to take now to prepare to enter those fields, and how different professions work together to provide optimal care for patients.

It’s not all talk. Interactive workshops give the teens hands-on experience learning real-world skills. Interdisciplinary teams of SHRS students and faculty demonstrate suturing, casting, cranial nerve testing, gait evaluations, vision exams and other medical procedures.

As an added incentive, the teens are given their own treatment bag. Each week they receive a piece of durable medical equipment, such as a blood pressure cuff, Taylor reflex hammer, Snellen eye charts and a stethoscope, and they learn how health care professionals use those devices to diagnose or assess a patient.

“The idea is to remove every barrier that prevents young people from thinking about their futures and the steps they need to take to achieve their goals,” says Reed.

Taniya Bottoms from The Neighborhood Academy receives instruction from Lauren Carey (BS '22), recent graduate of the Emergency Medicine program.

## ➤ PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIVERSE POPULATIONS.

Health care providers across the country agree there's a growing demand for more providers who come from backgrounds similar to the patients they serve. To that end, the Department of Physical Therapy (PT) initiated a program known as Advancing Diversity in Physical Therapy (ADaPT@Pitt) to engage and recruit diverse undergraduate students into graduate PT education.

Between January and June 2022, a series of 10 career exploration activities gave undergraduates the opportunity to engage with more than 350 professionals, current Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) students and other students interested in the field of physical therapy.

"The highlight of our first year—and undoubtedly a highlight of my professional career—was the Summer Scholar Experience," says ADaPT Program Director and Assistant Professor Tara Ridge-Hankin.

During the week-long immersive event, 12 undergraduate scholars had the opportunity to stay on campus and participate in hands-on workshops. It was a fully funded experience that included clinical observations, networking opportunities with 59 different PT professionals, didactic sessions and pre-admission support activities.

Scholars participated in interactive sessions to help them craft a personal statement, request letters of recommendation, and receive tips on completing a

quality application. They had one-on-one advising sessions with faculty and mentors to increase the overall competitiveness of their application to DPT programs.

"Coming into the program, I already knew I wanted to apply to PT school, but this experience solidified my decision even further," says Ann Iniguez (BS '22).

"Getting information on how to properly ask for letters of recommendation and knowing what traits the universities look for in applying to PT school was especially helpful.

“We are underrepresented in the health professions, so it was important to see that it is possible for me to achieve my goals,” Iniguez continues.”

Ridge-Hankin says the Summer Scholar Experience was developed after reviewing best practices and diversity pipeline models in graduate health programs such as medicine, dentistry and optometry. "Our goal with ADaPT@Pitt and the Summer Scholar Experience is to reduce systemic barriers that have prevented historically underrepresented populations from entering the physical therapy profession," she adds.



ADaPT@Pitt students learn about the brain in Summer Scholar Experience.



## ➤ ENCOURAGE ADVOCACY AND SERVICE.

In May, four students from the Prosthetics and Orthotics (P&O) program traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in the annual American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association (AOPA) Policy Forum. Along with more than 100 P&O providers, patients and stakeholders from 31 states, they met with members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to educate and urge support for the Medicare Orthotics and Prosthetics Patient-Centered Care Act.

The new legislation will ensure that those living with limb loss or limb difference will have access to custom-fit orthoses delivered by licensed, credentialed and trained professionals. It aims to reduce waste, fraud and abuse as well as the burdens P&O providers often experience when trying to provide safe and effective patient-centered care.

Second-year P&O student Allysa Meinburg says she wanted to attend the Policy Forum to gain a better understanding of how insurance coverage affects the P&O provider's ability to prescribe and administer devices and care to patients. "Under the new legislation, P&O care would no longer be viewed through the lens of durable medical equipment, but through a more appropriate, service-oriented regulation," says Meinburg. "I wanted to learn what is being done and what I can do to advocate for more equitable care for my patients."



**"Attending the Forum was a great way to learn about the crucial aspects of advocacy at the highest level," agrees fellow student Alex Simmons. "Observing interactions between policy makers and professionals in the field also provided insight as to what it takes in order to illicit change while maintaining and establishing new relationships."**



P&O students and Certified Prosthetists Orthotists meet with Pennsylvania Legislative Assistant CJ Mahler to discuss policy changes in the field of prosthetics and orthotics.

"While you are a student, it is easy to become so focused on what is in front of you that you don't really see the bigger picture," continues Helena Hall (BS '19). "I chose this field to be able to help patients in all the ways that I can. Learning how to advocate for them is one way that I can try to help improve not only the care that I provide, but the care that the profession provides as a whole."

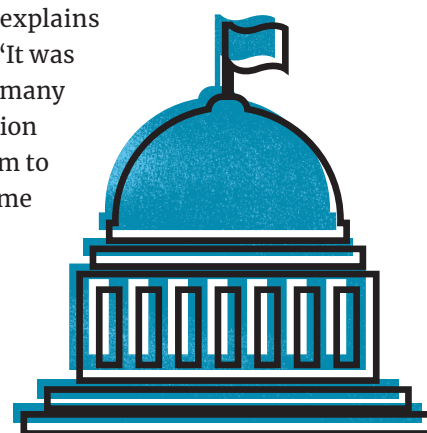
Program Director and Assistant Professor Helen Cochrane is proud of the efforts of her students. She admits that policy and advocacy have always been an important part of her career, and frequently uses examples from her own experiences in conversations with her students.

"I want them to be aware of how these activities relate directly to clinical practice," notes Cochrane.

"Advocacy, policy and politics are the most impactful ways we can ensure users of orthotic prosthetic services receive the highest quality of service," she continues. "Changes at the policy level enshrine protections for all users, not just those who can afford the best possible care."

"By instilling these values in our students, we can be sure they will continue to be advocates for their patients throughout their professional careers."

"At the Forum we met representatives from all over the country," explains student Nicholas Gardner. "It was fantastic to learn there are many more people in this profession who are as motivated as I am to make a difference. It made me all the more excited to get out into the field." ■



# Walt Stoy: >>>

How many individuals can one educator influence? How many lives can be made better, perhaps even saved, because of one person?

In the case of Walt Stoy, the numbers are exponential.

“I always had a love of medicine,” recalls recently retired Emergency Medicine (EM) Professor Stoy. He says this interest began around the age of 15 when he was a summer lifeguard. A few years later as a street medic with an associate’s degree, he got a clearer picture of what would become his life’s work.

After becoming a paramedic and earning his bachelor’s degree from what has since become the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences (SHRS) in 1980, he became the founding director of the Office of Education and Research at the Center for Emergency Medicine (CEM). By the next year, he had a paramedic education program in place there.

Clearly, paramedic education was his passion.

Stoy quickly went on to graduate school, earning his master’s degree in education and administration and his PhD in instructional design.

“Intuitively, I felt I knew how to teach—I loved teaching. But I wanted to get the proper credentials to teach at the highest level,” recalls Stoy.

At the same time, he was developing the first and only undergraduate degree in Emergency Medicine (EM), which was approved in 1997.



Stoy has always been quite a multi-tasker. While he was developing the undergraduate EM program at SHRS, he was recruited by the U.S. Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to serve as the principal investigator or project director over the EMT-B national standard curricula revision project, and then the First Responder, EMT-Intermediate and Paramedic curricular revision project.

One might say Stoy literally wrote the book on paramedic education.

“By my count, Walt’s paramedic program at CEM resulted in more than 3,000 providers becoming certified in Pittsburgh,” says EM Professor Tom Platt. “His work on the national standard curricula revisions helped to certify more than one-half million providers, impacting the lives of millions of patients.”

Over the decades, Stoy continued to work with various individuals and organizations to create more than 80 publications that include videos, textbooks, workbooks, textbook chapters and instructional materials to enhance EM education.

Never content to rest on his laurels and with his demonstrated success in the United States, Stoy started an international office at the Center for Emergency Medicine.



# His vision. His legacy.

Professor Emeritus Walt Stoy at  
his retirement celebration

“There are not many people who can say they have trained every paramedic in Iceland—Walt can,” says Platt. “And his efforts in Qatar led to the development of an American College of Surgeons Level 1 Trauma Center at Hamad Medical Center.”

Stoy says he’s fortunate in the flexibility he enjoyed during his career. “My role at Pitt and CEM allowed me to follow my dreams of developing EMS programs, of founding an association of EMS educators and developing EM education in areas of the world where it did not exist,” explains Stoy.

But in addition to all of his responsibilities, Stoy says his engagement with students was without a doubt the highlight of his 41-year career at Pitt.

He served as an educator, mentor and friend to former students and colleagues alike. “In my time with him, I have had the opportunity to ride his coat tails to learn from him, to travel the world with him, to make the world better, to make EMS better,” reflects Platt. “It was all possible because my friend and mentor ‘Wally’ had a vision.”

“Walt’s vision will carry on, in the students whom he put as his first priority and in his love of teaching,” Platt continues. “The lessons he taught us are ours now. We bear his legacy and vision.”

Stoy will continue to serve as a site visitor and reader for the Committee on Accreditation of Educational Programs for the Emergency Medical Services Professions (CoAEMSP). He will also be on campus, teaching a few courses and interacting with anyone who reaches out to him to make a difference in health care.

“I still have a lot to do,” announces Stoy. ■





# Specialty clinical rotation builds special skills.



Nutrition and dietetics play a major role in the treatment and recovery of cancer patients. In her role as clinical dietitian lead at the Allegheny Health Network (AHN) Cancer Institute, Rachel Harken (BS '95, MS '99) works as part of the Oncology Navigation team. She builds relationships with patients and utilizes different nutrition therapies to help alleviate some of the nutrition-related side effects that often accompany chemotherapy and other cancer treatments.



Alumna Rachel Harken, left, with Christy Bender, student

At the same time, she builds relationships with students in the Dietitian Nutritionist Oncology Nutrition specialty rotation, ensuring their clinical experience prepares them to be ready on day one to provide personalized nutrition support for patients in an outpatient oncology practice.

“Specialty rotations are quite unique,” says Harken. “So are the students who complete them.”

During a rigorous 12-week program, students spend more than 400 hours working under the supervision of a highly skilled preceptor like Harken.

According to Trisha A. Cousins, clinical coordinator and assistant professor, Department of Sports Medicine and Nutrition (SMN), students who choose the Oncology Nutrition specialty not only get hands-on experience on how to screen, assess and provide nutrition education and counseling, they also benefit from Harken’s innate ability to teach.

“Rachel has a passion for mentoring future dietitians,” observes Cousins. “She places a high value on teaching how and when to apply clinical judgment and skills. She has an admirable way of creating a positive yet inspiring environment in which students thrive and achieve their personal potential.”



**“During my specialty rotation in oncology, Rachel taught me that a clinical dietitian is able to make the biggest difference in patients’ lives by relating to them on a level that is deeper than their diagnosis and their current health issues,” notes Christy Bender (MS ’22).**

Now working alongside Harken in Oncology Navigation at the AHN Cancer Institute at Jefferson Hospital, Bender strives to emulate her mentor.

“Rachel possesses all of the soft skills that are required to make an impact in this field: empathy, patience and compassion,” continues Bender. “That’s what I strive to bring to my patients every single day.”

“Our most important role and responsibility is to help patients get through their treatment,” explains Harken. “We really get to know our patients, their families and caregivers. It’s a personal connection.”

She says students notice the effort that goes into relationship building.

“When patients trust you, they’re more likely to try the tips, recipe ideas or nutritional supplements that you present to them. When you can help them improve their nutrition and maintain their weight in spite of the various nutrition-related side effects they may experience, then they will be able to continue their treatment regimen as planned,” says Bender.

“It’s very rewarding to know you’re helping to improve their health outcomes down the road,” she adds.

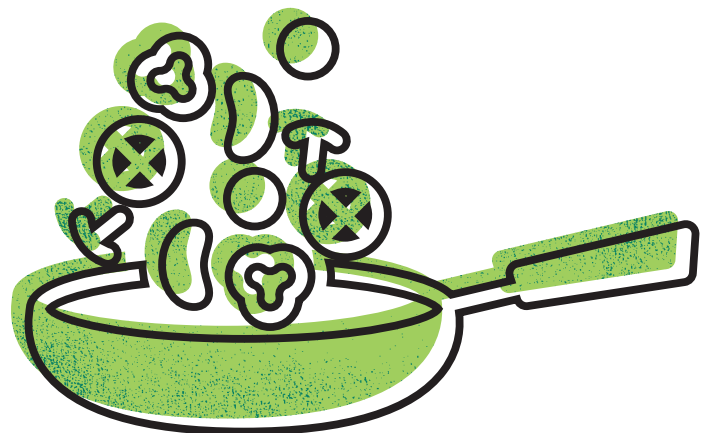
In addition to building rapport with patients, Harken emphasizes the importance of building relationships with other members of the health care team. “As part of the Oncology Navigation team, we work with nurses, doctors, the infusion staff and other medical professionals on a daily basis,” says Harken. “We come to rely on each other for important information about patients and how we can best address specific concerns we may have.”

“The specialty rotations at Pitt are what set this program apart from others,” declares Bender. She says it helps students hone in on areas of nutrition that they are passionate about, then gain experience in the field before they graduate.

“I believe my experience in the Oncology Nutrition specialty rotation gave me the confidence and experience I needed to be hired for the job that I love right after I earned my master’s degree,” she continues. “It also allowed me to build many connections within this career path, which is invaluable.”

“We are grateful to Rachel for her leadership, initiative and innovation,” adds Cousins. “She was instrumental in helping us develop our Oncology Nutrition specialty rotation and is an exceptional clinical instructor for our dietetics students.”

“We are proud to say we nominated Rachel—and she was awarded—the Outstanding Preceptor Award for the Pennsylvania Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (PAND) this year,” says Deborah Hutcheson, program director and assistant professor, Dietitian Nutritionist Program. “She is most worthy of the honor.” ■











# The Pitt Center for Emergency Responder Wellness:

## Removing barriers to mental health services.

They announce their arrival with flashing lights and screeching sirens. They assess the scene quickly and immediately go to work, providing both physical and emotional support under the worst possible conditions. Their mere presence often brings comfort, knowing that trained professionals are here to help.

But where do emergency responders such as firefighters, law enforcement, 911 dispatchers and emergency medical services (EMS) providers turn when they experience the mental health impacts of trauma and other job stressors?

The answer is complicated. A few seek peer support. Some deny they are in crisis. Many internalize their feelings, creating the potential for mental health problems to worsen.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, approximately 30% of first responders develop behavioral health conditions, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), alcohol and other substance abuse problems, sleep deprivation and thoughts of suicide. Moreover, many of these problems co-occur, creating more complex challenges.

While mental health treatment programs for first responders exist, one study found that 68% of emergency responders would not recommend these programs for a number of reasons. Emergency response personnel have concerns over privacy,

scheduling issues, lack of emergency response cultural awareness on the part of mental health professionals, and the stigma that surrounds mental health treatment in general.

Professor Eric Meyer, director, Clinical Mental Health Counseling, says that the new Pitt Center for Emergency Responder Wellness (PCERW) is a clinical innovation hub that removes many of these barriers to treatment.

Developed by Meyer in collaboration with Emergency Medicine Professor Thomas Platt and Adjunct Professor Sheila Roth, the Center employs evidence-based, cognitive-behavioral interventions that have been culturally adapted to meet the unique needs of first responders.

Built on a foundation of knowledge acquired from the scientific literature on evidence-based mental health treatment, the Western Pennsylvania Center for Emergency Medicine, the Pittsburgh Office of Community Health and Safety, several local peer support networks and the International Association of Fire Fighters, the new Pitt Center is a resource for first responders, developed by a team that includes first responders and culturally sensitive mental health professionals.





Eric Meyer brings his expertise to the Pitt Center for Emergency Responder Wellness.

“Studies show that few clinicians know and understand the emergency responder culture, and this limits the effectiveness of treatment,” notes Meyer. “We are providing comprehensive training so our Center clinicians fully understand the unique needs of this critical workforce.”

Roth and Platt contributed their expertise to the development of emergency responder cultural awareness training for graduate students and recent graduates of the Counseling program.

At the same time, they worked to adapt training previously used with firefighters and law enforcement to train peer support specialists who will serve as bridges to professional mental health services.

“Our team is partnering with local emergency responder departments to assess their peer support needs in order to provide tailored group trainings,” notes Meyer.

Since it received funding in July 2021, the Pitt Center has trained four students and professionals as clinicians, treated nine first responders and provided two peer support training groups. Meyer and colleagues have also applied for two larger grants to expand this work.

Nicole Fuhr (BS '19, MS '22) is a recent Pitt Counseling graduate and a National Certified Counselor, and currently works as a behavioral health therapist at UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital's Bellefield Clinic in addition to serving as a counselor at the new Center. She values the training she received to work with first responders. “The unique culture of first responders is often overlooked,” notes Fuhr.

“By learning more about the nature of their profession and the tremendous amount of stress they experience on every call, we are able to help provide a level of care that they might not otherwise receive.”

“It has been an amazing opportunity to learn more about the various types of emergency responders and learn more about what their day-to-day jobs entail,” agrees Center Counselor Emily Kirschner (BS '19, MS '22), another recent Pitt Counseling graduate.

“At the beginning of every session, I check in to see if there are any pressing issues that occurred between sessions,” explains Fuhr. “We cover mindfulness, the nature of emotions and why we have them, cognitive flexibility, emotional avoidance and other emotion-driven behaviors.”

“The therapy has been welcomed by my clients,” Fuhr continues. Meyer notes that, “Our preliminary data supports the success of our cultural awareness trainings in that our clinicians are building strong working therapeutic alliances with their clients.”

According to Platt, “The interprofessional collaboration between the Emergency Medicine and Counseling programs is a shining example of how we at SHRS can share our expertise to expand the knowledge of our current students and contribute to a better quality of life for our emergency responders and the people they serve.”

“As we expand our services, the Center will generate knowledge that enhances understanding of the impact of traumatic stress on health and well-being in emergency responder personnel and other trauma-exposed populations, greatly enhancing our overall impact,” adds Meyer. ■

# ➤ First of its kind event showcases Pitt's data resources.



This June, 65 faculty, staff and students came together, both in person and virtually, to find out how to make better use of the vast amounts of data that has been cultivated at Pitt thanks to one SHRS staff member.

Data@Pitt was a day filled with talks and workshops to help people get started using data and included demonstrations on how to use tools such as Tableau and Amazon Web Services.

It was the vision of Robin Leaf, director of Academic and Department Operations, Department of Occupational Therapy. She understood the importance of making data available to faculty and students at the University. With determination and grit, she approached Pitt's Year of Data and Society committee and obtained funding to sponsor the event.

"I think data scares some people," notes Leaf, who took on the role of event organizer. "This was an opportunity to bring data newcomers from across campus and across disciplines together to learn about technologies and tools, hear from experts in the field and network to build connections with each other."

Presentations were given by national experts from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) and Tableau analytics software, in addition to Pitt data users with multiple years of experience using data in higher education environments.

Specific sessions during the day represented a wide variety of topics including academic requirements tracking, research funding, financial expenditures and human

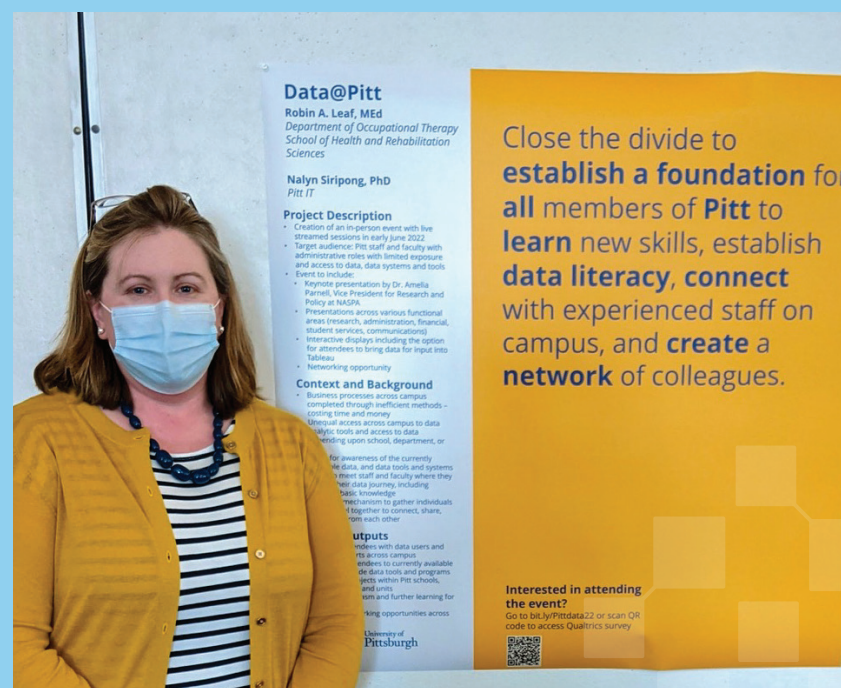
resources. There were both student and administration sessions entitled "How Tableau makes your life better."

Keynote speaker Amelia Parnell, vice president for Research and Policy at NASPA, discussed her book "You Are a Data Person," which aims to help university employees incorporate data into their work.

Data@Pitt was a collaborative effort by Pitt's Data Analytics team, staff from the School of Computing and Information and the Office of the Senior Vice Chancellor for Research.

"Data and using data to make decisions to effect and create better environments for students and their educational careers is something that I am passionate about," says Leaf. "This event helps push it forward so people can utilize it in the most meaningful way to make the largest impact." ■

Robin Leaf was the driving force  
behind the Data@Pitt event.





# CHAMPions of collaboration.

Leading the nation in interprofessional  
OTC hearing aid education.



It started with a phone call. A conversation to gauge interest in a collaborative project between Professor Elaine Mormer, Department of Communication Science and Disorders (CSD), and Associate Professor Lucas A. Berenbrok, Pitt School of Pharmacy.

The result: a world-class interprofessional education model that has garnered national attention. And promises to change the lives of individuals with perceived mild to moderate hearing loss who might benefit from over-the-counter (OTC) hearing devices.



Collaboration between CSD and the  
School of Pharmacy makes national news.



CSD Professor Elaine Mormer with School of Pharmacy Associate Professor Lucas A. Berenbrok

## RECOGNIZING THE NEED.

OTC hearing devices were a long time coming. Authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration Reauthorization Act back in 2017, people are beginning to purchase them at community pharmacies across the country.

“This is a huge change in the distribution channels for hearing aids,” says Mormer. “Instead of patients with mild to moderate hearing loss going to their primary care doctor, then being referred to an ear doctor or audiologist, they would have the opportunity to get immediate hearing help at their neighborhood pharmacy.”

➤ **Hearing loss is the third most chronic condition in older adults.**

“Although we knew it would take time before these products were on pharmacy shelves, we had an idea,” explains Mormer.

She and Berenbrok reasoned that pharmacists would consider OTC hearing aids similar to other OTC self-care health solutions routinely sold at pharmacies, such as reading glasses and certain durable medical equipment.

The only problem: Someone needed to educate pharmacists on how they could best provide safe and effective guidance on hearing devices to their customers.

Enter the CHAMP program.

With a modest grant from the Provost’s Innovation in Education Award, Mormer and Berenbrok went to work designing CHAMP (Championing Hearing using



Accessible Medication experts at the community Pharmacy). It's a 2.5-hour online continuing education program for pharmacists.

In addition to practitioner training, CHAMP offers the first OTC hearing aid microcredential for student pharmacists which teaches the core competencies needed for assisting patients with OTC hearing devices.

**“CHAMP is unique in that it is the first and only training program for pharmacists to learn about OTC hearing aids,” explains Berenbrok.**

“Our program was designed by Elaine, an audiologist, and me, a pharmacist, to specifically address hearing health care and the opportunity for interprofessional collaboration between our two fields.”

CHAMP is built on a competency framework developed by an expert panel of stakeholders.

“We were convinced this was a bold and much-needed strategy, but we wanted to combine our own expertise in audiology and pharmacy with key players in the industry and patient community,” notes Mormer.

The panel of diverse stakeholders was essential to the process. They included the American Pharmacists Association, National Association of Chain Drug Stores, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, American Academy of Audiology, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Hearing Loss Association of America and representatives from two hearing device manufacturers as well as patients with hearing loss.

Mormer says they used the Delphi method research approach to form a consensus on what pharmacists needed to know in order to help patients.

**Nearly 30 million adults in the United States could benefit from hearing aids.**

After a year of listening and analyzing, the team identified 26 competencies for pharmacists, including how to recognize signs of hearing loss and assist patients in the selection of hearing devices by considering the individual's needs and preferences. They saw the need to teach pharmacists how to effectively communicate with people with hearing loss and to make referrals to local audiologists when appropriate.

By 2019, the Pitt team had garnered additional funding from the Pitt Innovation Institute's First Gear program and were ready to develop the online education program.

### DOING WHAT NO ONE ELSE HAD DONE.

While much of the world was on pause for the global pandemic, Mormer and Berenbrok worked with an instructional designer to launch an engaging online course. Among other topics in the course, pharmacists learn about different types and degrees of hearing loss, and the differences between professionally fit and OTC hearing aid devices. Overall, the course is focused on integrating OTC hearing aids into the existing patient care process that pharmacists use to take care of their patients.



**90% of Americans live within close proximity to 60,000 community pharmacies.**

They continued to engage in partnerships that would help promote their online course.

For example, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) created a toolkit for audiologists to view OTC devices with an interprofessional lens. The CHAMP course is linked in the toolkit for audiologists to share with pharmacy colleagues.

They also received a grant from the American Academy of Audiology (AAA) to create EAR SCANS, a QR code magnet that sticks to the pharmacy refrigerator. The magnet acts as a visual resource for pharmacy personnel to review when assessing a patient's candidacy for OTC hearing aid devices.



When pharmacists scan the QR code, they immediately see red-flag conditions that contraindicate OTC hearing aid use as well as contact information for referrals to local audiologists.

Magnets were distributed in 2022 at the American Pharmacists Association Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas, the American Academy of Audiology convention in St. Louis and the Pennsylvania Speech-Language-Hearing Association annual meeting in Pittsburgh.

➤ **Currently, less than 20% of people who could benefit from hearing aids actually use them.**

The EAR SCANS magnets were a huge success. “They are a great way for audiologists to engage with pharmacists,” says Mormer. “We continue to receive delivery requests from audiologists, many of whom are asking to have their supply replenished after distribution to multiple pharmacies.”

Although OTC devices may not be seen in community pharmacies until late in 2022, pharmacists and audiologists are connecting with each other, and pharmacists are taking the CHAMP course online.

“Through our work, Elaine and I have been able to connect the professions of pharmacy and audiology in brand new ways,” reports Berenbrok. “We really take pride in showing pharmacists how important audiologists are to patients and to their health care teams, and vice versa. I feel immense pride every time a pharmacist and audiologist connect to talk about OTC hearing aids.” ■



## NOT THEIR FIRST COLLABORATION.

In 2017, Mormer and her AuD students joined Berenbrok and his PharmD students to learn more about SilverScripts, an award-winning program from Pitt Pharmacy to help seniors better manage their medications. The goal was to work together to address the medication and hearing-related needs of older adults at local community senior centers.

As a result, Mormer invited Assistant Professor Nicole Corbin to develop a parallel program in CSD as part of her clinical teaching responsibilities. In fall 2019, Corbin launched SilverSounds, a hearing health care service that includes hearing assessments, hearing assistance technology and basic checks of hearing device function. It is offered free of charge at community health centers, including the Pitt Community Engagement Center in Homewood, and serves as a clinical experience for first-year Doctor of Audiology students.

“Collaborations such as these between audiology and pharmacy break down our professional silos and meet the patient where they are in their communities,” observes Corbin. “By doing this, we increase accessibility to care for individuals from varied backgrounds.

“By modeling collaboration at this level, we show that interprofessional practice is both feasible and effective.” ■

## OTC Hearing Aid Criteria:

1. Age 18 and older
2. Perceived mild to moderate hearing loss



**SCAN ME**

For exclusions to self-care and to find local audiologists



# From Japan to Pittsburgh to California:

PT alumnus carries  
the Pitt torch.





“I always loved baseball and played the sport in high school. It only seemed natural that when I was in my third year of Physical Therapy (PT) school in Japan, I did an internship with a professional baseball team,” recalls Fumi Isshiki (MS ’11, Advanced Vestibular PT Certification ’22). “The athletic trainer for the team told me if I wanted to become the best physical therapist, I should study in the U.S.”

“After researching physical therapy programs in the States, I landed on Pitt,” he continues. “It was at Pitt where I learned how to use scientific evidence and apply it to my practice.”

Today, as the CEO of Global Doctor of Physical Therapy in Seal Beach, California, and the head physical therapist, Cypress College Athletics, in Cypress, California, Isshiki specializes in orthopedics and sports. His sub-specialties include concussion, baseball throwing analysis and general men’s and women’s health.

In all of his work, he continues to use what he learned at Pitt SHRS to treat his clients.

“Dr. Sue Whitney was my best resource for the vestibular and concussion physical therapy I now provide,” says Isshiki. “I was shocked to hear her lecture during my days at Pitt. I had never heard about concussion or vestibular rehabilitation when I was in Japan.”

“I quickly learned that there was more to helping athletes than just providing musculoskeletal treatment,” he continues.

“Dr. Isshiki was a dream student,” notes Professor Whitney, co-director, Physical Therapy Post-Professional Master of Science (MS) program. “He was always trying to learn more. He asked great questions and was driven to become an even more highly skilled physical therapist during his time in our MS PT program.”

“I am sure my standard of care is at an advanced level due to my studies at Pitt,” says Isshiki. “All my professors followed current evidence. They showed us the latest research and we discussed what would be the best course of treatment based on the articles we read.”

Isshiki credits Michael Timko, instructor and co-director, PT Post-Professional MS program, with mentoring and supporting him while he was in Pittsburgh. “His passion for educating us was unbelievable,” says Isshiki. “He

was also so kind. My English was not great at that time but Mike was able to modify the course of study so I could get the most out of the program.”

“I was so impressed by Fumi’s determination and desire to excel,” notes Timko. “I observed him in several clinical simulations and it was clear that he felt most comfortable when treating clients.”

“Fumi possesses very good clinical acumen,” he continues. “He also possesses an ambitious and entrepreneurial spirit. He wanted to create new opportunities for himself and others and was not afraid to explore these avenues and possibilities.”

When an opportunity arose to serve as a physical therapist at the 2021 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, Isshiki jumped on it. He treated athletes from around the world at the Poly Clinic and took on the role of managing and educating other physical therapists. He also helped with English, French and Japanese translations.

Over the past few years, he has set a goal to improve PT education in Japan, little by little. For starters, he translated and published the book he used in class at SHRS into Japanese in the hopes of reinforcing the importance of evidence-based practice in his home country.

“I feel there is a huge gap in physical therapy education in Japan,” says Isshiki. “We, as physical therapists, need to prove the effectiveness of what we are doing.”

In the future, he would like to work with some of his former Pitt SHRS PT professors to create an education system for use in Japan. “I highly respect them, and know that with their help, we could improve physical therapy education and create more practitioners who could bring best practices in physical therapy back to the people who need them.” ■



Isshiki at his physical therapy clinic in California







# Pittsburgh's Lost Chinatown:

Where yesterday meets the future.



OT student Lydia Ott and her grandmother, Lydia Ott

When Lee Git arrived in Pittsburgh from Toisan in the Guangdong Providence of China in 1912, he was much like other immigrants of the late 1800s and early 1900s. He was in search of a better future.

He settled in downtown Pittsburgh, in a tidy area on Second and Third Avenues, bounded by Grant and Ross Streets, where other Chinese immigrants from Toisan already lived, worked, worshiped and played. It was Pittsburgh's Chinatown—a safe, homogenous neighborhood that contributed to the culture and growth of Pittsburgh for several generations.

More than 100 years later, the neighborhood has vanished. Now the seat of city and county government and home to many Fortune 500 companies, area residents have disbursed to other parts of the city and other regions of the country. A few remnants of Chinatown remain, but its spirit lives on in Lydia Ott, a fourth-generation Chinese American Pittsburgher and student in the Doctor of Occupational Therapy program.

In her documentary “Pittsburgh’s Lost Chinatown,” Ott shares the story of her grandmother, also named Lydia Ott, who grew up at 510 Third Avenue in Pittsburgh’s Chinatown in the 1930s. She hopes it will open the eyes and hearts of others to the unique values, character and strengths that immigrant families bring to any community. And also the challenges they faced.

“The Chinese immigrants had to work in Chinatown because no one else would hire them,” the elder Ott tells her granddaughter in the film. Segregation was an issue and there was discrimination against the Asian immigrants.

Still, they thrived and contributed their culture to the fabric of Pittsburgh.



Scan to watch Lydia Ott's documentary, “Pittsburgh's Lost Chinatown.”

Ott's 10-minute film was produced in 2021 during the rise of hate crimes against Asian Americans. It was a result of a zoom session hosted by Dr. Anantha Shekhar, senior vice chancellor for the Health Sciences, who wanted to listen to Pitt students' experiences and fears.

"We all need to know about each other and engage in learning about populations that may not be as well known," explains Shekhar. "Our ambition was to create a product that would expose people to a powerful story, one highlighting student experience and how every person and every person's family has a journey that is important to how we treat each other.

"Knowing more about Lydia and her family's history gives us more connection with and understanding of everyone with whom we share a community," he continues.

"Celebrating the diversity of our students, faculty and staff is important to me because it influences the type of practitioners and people our students become,"

says Department of Occupational Therapy Chair Juleen Rodakowski.

"I seek to reinforce issues around diversity, equity and inclusion to help all people show up and be their true selves. I believe that fostering this type of environment will facilitate learning, engagement and innovation," she continues.

"By sharing my story—and my heart—I hope Pitt students grow into the kind of health care practitioners who are compelled to see different minority and refugee populations for the unique individuals that they are. And serve them with the respect and understanding they deserve," concludes Ott. ■

Archives & Special Collections,  
University of Pittsburgh  
Library System





# Leading by



“Your everyday activities tell a story about who you are and what you stand for,” says Shelly DiCesaro, associate professor, Athletic Training (AT) program. “It’s your personal advocacy and it impacts you, your university and your profession.”

These are words to live by for DiCesaro. And a philosophy she imparts to her students.

As a former competitive ice skater, athletic trainer for a nationally ranked women’s basketball team and educator for athletic training and health sciences students, DiCesaro understands the importance of leadership—both today and in the future.

It’s one reason she served as president of the Pennsylvania Athletic Trainers’ Society (PATS) from 2020 to 2022 and supported the recommendation to bring the PATS Student Symposium to the University of Pittsburgh.

In March 2022, more than 100 undergraduate and graduate athletic training students from 25 accredited AT programs across the state came together at Pitt to take a deep dive into some contemporary issues and network with AT professionals. It was the first time the event was held at Pitt, and the first time a career expo connected these students to potential employers.

“The opportunity to facilitate a large, in-person, academic and networking opportunity for athletic training students from across the Commonwealth brings a sense of forward motion to the future of health care,” notes William Ankrom, AT instructor and clinical education coordinator. “It really showcases what the University of Pittsburgh has to offer.”



Top: Athletic Trainer Shelly DiCesaro, right, poses with Emma Lis, physio for Team Canada, at the 2022 Egna Spring Trophy competition in Italy. Center: DiCesaro with Felicia Haining-Miller, Dr. Rebecca Breslow and Dr. Susan McInnes in Rouen, France at the French Cup. Bottom: DiCesaro with Kathleen Krieger in Egna, Italy.

# example.



## ➤ SHRS faculty prove it's not just about teaching.

"The Student Symposium really fulfilled the mission of PATS, to empower future athletic trainers to be leaders in transforming health care by advocating, educating and providing resources to deliver quality patient-centered care," says DiCesaro. "It allowed students to see how they can make a difference through their own practice."

As an AT educator, DiCesaro also stresses the importance of service to her students.

“We all need to volunteer for the greater good,” explains DiCesaro. “Whether it’s with a professional organization like PATS or in our community, we have a responsibility to be engaged, and to address any issues or concerns we might have.”

"You might not get the answer we want, but we gain a new perspective," she adds.

Since 2018 DiCesaro has been traveling as an athletic trainer with the U.S. Figure Skating team at various competitions in Italy and France. She says, "It's a great honor to serve—and to expose athletes not typically served by athletic trainers to our skill set and value." ■

## ➤➤➤ THE WORLD IS WATCHING.

Congratulations to Alyson Stover, associate professor, Department of Occupational Therapy (OT). Her appointment to president of the American Occupational Therapy Association demonstrates that Pitt OT is at the forefront of creating change agents and defining the future of the OT profession.

Stover says OT is "more of a calling than a profession." She is honored by the opportunity to represent the field in national and global arenas. During her tenure, she hopes to build more opportunities for occupational therapy intra-professional collaboration, and to use the "OT lens" to challenge others to design and implement processes and policies that are equitable and inclusive, across all environments.



"I have often said that I feel Occupational Therapy is the missing puzzle piece for many of the national, and even global, epidemics we face," explains Stover. "We must continue to be an agile and relevant profession, one that remains an excellent collaborator, but also begins to take on leadership in the collaborations. And we must then articulate this distinct value in a way that results in diverse revenue streams, increased grant funding and meaningful reimbursement for our invaluable contributions." ■





# Data acumen:

## The missing link between mountains of information and effective health policies.



Bambang Parmanto, Professor  
and Chair, Dept. of Health  
Information Management

The data revolution has taken over the world. Every day, new and greater volumes of information bombard us, creating challenges that never existed before.

How do we break down silos between people who collect data and those who create health policies and interventions? How do we use machine learning but

eliminate implicit biases? How can we use data for ethical and pragmatic decision making?

Bambang Parmanto, professor and chair, Department of Health Information Management (HIM), says there is a need to increase data acumen in employees across all industries, both private and public.

According to Parmanto, this work is funded through the CDC's Data Modernization Initiative, a multi-year, billion dollar effort to move away from siloed and antiquated public health data systems into a more streamlined and responsive one.

Over the course of the next year, a team of highly credentialed HIM scientists from Pitt SHRS will assess competencies of Pennsylvania Department of Health employees regarding data management, governance and analytics, communication and dissemination of information, and ethical decision making.


The HIM faculty will then develop a training program on data literacy and leveraging data to make evidence-based decisions which will be broadly applicable to a variety of positions, including program managers and directors. By breaking down the silos in the DOH's current system, data scientists and policy makers can "bridge the gap" and make better decisions.

"Not everyone is a data scientist," says Parmanto. "But through new technology and the right training, they can still be aware of how to use data-driven information to make more informed decisions."

### A FIRST FOR PITT. A WIN FOR PENNSYLVANIA.

The contract with the Department of Health is the first of its kind for HIM, but Parmanto says it aligns with their plan to build programs that meet the needs of health care institutions, private industry and government entities, such as other states.

"Our contract with the Pennsylvania Department of Health is a solid endorsement that the content being taught through SHRS' health informatics programs is relevant and applicable in today's data-dependent health care environment," adds SHRS Dean Anthony Delitto. ■



**Data acumen is the ability to make good judgments about the use of data to support evidence-based interventions and policies.**

### \$300,000 GRANT FROM THE PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH.

This summer, HIM entered into a contract with the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) to assess and identify the gap in data acumen among the state's Health Department employees and develop virtual training programs to improve data acumen across the DOH.

# ➤ Their Journeys Continue

## LYNN FITZGERALD: JOB WELL DONE!

When most people think of clinical education, they may think of students shadowing professionals for a few weeks at a time and getting some hands-on experience.

When Pitt's Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) students think of clinical education, they think of Lynn Fitzgerald.

For nearly 24 years, Fitzgerald served as director, then vice chair of Clinical Education. She is retiring, but not before completing her mission: to single-handedly ensure that every DPT graduate was not only ready for clinical practice, but for practicing at the top of their profession.

"Lynn has always been student centered in her approach," notes James

Irrgang, professor and chair, Department of Physical Therapy. "She established methods to ensure that all students received well-rounded clinical education experiences, while also mentoring and accommodating their clinical interests."

During her time at SHRS, Fitzgerald established a strong collaborative relationship with the UPMC Centers for Rehab Services and developed the Clinical Internship Evaluation Tool, which has been widely adopted by other PT programs.

Fitzgerald reorganized Pitt's clinical education program, eliminating part-time clinical education experiences and replacing them with two six-week, full-time placements. When combined with a 30-week terminal clinical education experience, SHRS students receive 42 weeks of full-time clinical education, more than most other DPT programs.

"Being able to watch the professional development of our DPT students from the time they started in the program, through their clinical education, and then watch them develop as clinicians was very rewarding," says Fitzgerald. "It has also been a joy to see many of them become clinical instructors in our program and even join the Pitt DPT faculty."

"I am confident in stating that Lynn's efforts to develop a strong clinical education program has contributed greatly to our reputation and No. 1 ranking among DPT programs," continues Irrgang. "We are grateful for her contributions." ■



## SUSAN SHAIMAN: "HAIL TO PITT!" HAS ALWAYS BEEN IN MY HEART."

Susan Shaiman may be stepping away from her role as associate professor, Department of Communication Science and Disorders (CSD), but Pitt—and her students—will always be in her heart.

During her 29 years at the University, four as an undergraduate and 25 as faculty, Shaiman has taken delight in working directly with students, both in teaching and research.

"Dr. Shaiman's dedication to education and student well-being is unparalleled," notes Professor Catherine Palmer, CSD interim chair. "She continually honed her skills as an educator and mentor. Her approach is always what is best for the student, with a focus on developing thoughtful, responsible, healthy learners."

Shaiman was instrumental in shaping the Speech-Language Pathology curriculum and designing educational laboratory spaces to support students. Over time, she demonstrated her commitment by serving on more than 20 dissertation and 18 masters theses committees.

"In retirement, I look forward to watching the professional development of former students as well as the continuing evolution of the CSD Department in preparing the clinicians and scientists of the future," notes Shaiman.

According to Palmer, Shaiman's thoughtful approach to all aspects of the CSD program has been essential to the department's success. She says, "As a professor emeritus, we are very hopeful that Dr. Shaiman will continue to be involved in education at the University of Pittsburgh."

"We are all better because of Sue." ■





# New Names. New Faces.

## ➤ NEW DEPARTMENT ELEVATES TWO IMPORTANT PROGRAMS.

The recently approved Department of Community Health Services and Rehabilitation Science is the new home for the undergraduate Emergency Medicine and Rehabilitation Science programs.

The core mission of the new department is to expand opportunities for education and entry-level employment and to increase access to health care while improving the health of our communities and the nation.

The change to departmental status reflects the productivity, achievement and potential of the programs' current faculty, staff, students and alumni. It creates a more defined academic unit and will serve to recruit high-caliber and productive personnel and students in the future.

Associate Dean for Academic Partnerships, SHRS, and Professor Tom Platt was recently named chair of the new department. Instructor Nicole Cecchini was appointed director of the Emergency Medicine program and Associate Professor Andrea Hergenroeder will lead the Rehabilitation Science program.

## ➤ COUNSELING PROGRAM NAME CHANGE.

The Clinical Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling program is now known as **Clinical Mental Health Counseling**. According to Professor and Program Director Eric Meyer, "This change will enable our program to more intensively focus on training in mental health counseling while still allowing students to pursue optional coursework and field placements in rehabilitation counseling."

## ➤ NEW FACES ON CAMPUS.

### COMMUNICATION SCIENCE AND DISORDERS

- Hari Bharadwaj, assistant professor
- Leah Fabiano-Smith, professor and director of PhD Program

### COUNSELING

- Michael Pramuka, associate professor

### EMERGENCY MEDICINE

- Sarah Johnson, instructor
- Christopher Matek, instructor
- Sheldon Williams, assistant professor

### HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

- Ahmad Pahlavan Tafti, professor

### OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

- Avital Isenberg, assistant professor
- Cara Lekovitch, assistant professor

### PHYSICAL THERAPY

- Peter Coyle, assistant professor
- Regan Harrell, assistant professor
- Valerie Shuman, assistant professor

### PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT STUDIES

- Amy Brown, assistant professor
- Julia Dubis, assistant professor
- Frances Mulligan, assistant professor
- Dipu Patel, professor and vice chair for Innovation

### REHABILITATION SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

- Ikenna Ebuonyi, assistant professor
- Paulina Villacreces, assistant professor

## KUDOS!

Awards, grants, commendations—it's hard to keep up with the many honors bestowed on members of our SHRS community. Every day, in every department, there is news of how they are breaking down barriers, opening up doors and providing innovative ways to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities. For up-to-the minute news on the bold moves of our community members, follow SHRS on social media.



## WELCOME, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR EBUENYI

Ikenna Ebuenyi brings a world of experience to his role as assistant professor in the Department of Rehabilitation Science and Technology (RST). He has spent his career working in mental health and disabilities in Nigeria, London, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Kenya, Malawi and Ireland.

“The inequity in education and employment for persons with disabilities is universal,” notes Ebuenyi. “Even here in the United States, there are opportunities to utilize research to engender policy and community support and socioeconomic empowerment for persons with psychosocial disabilities.”

He says his previous work demonstrates that persons with mental disabilities can work and desire to work but are often not hired because of cultural perceptions held by employers.

“My plan is to leverage my experiences to pursue research on equity in the use and provision of assistive technology especially for persons with psychosocial disabilities and psychosocial rehabilitation,” he continues.

Ebuenyi was hired as part of a \$2.8 million school-wide cluster-hire initiative to bring justice, equity, diversity and inclusion change agents into SHRS to train future generations of health care professionals, and to address social determinants of health and health disparities.



“We could not be more thrilled to have Ikenna as part of our team, and deeply appreciate the support from Dean Delitto and the senior vice chancellor for the Health Sciences, Dr. Anantha Shekhar, for their support in recruiting him,” says Associate Professor and RST Chair Jonathan Pearlman.

“Ikenna’s work focuses on one of the most critical areas in the disability community, which is to expand access to employment and education,” Pearlman continues. “Using his unique training and experience globally, Ikenna has already made impressive progress in understanding both the opportunities and barriers to expanding access to employment and education for individuals with psychosocial disabilities.” ■



Kevin Conley, Professor and Chair, Dept. of Sports Medicine and Nutrition, with alumni awardees Kysha Harriell (AT BS '96), David H. Perrin (PhD '85) and Larry Cooper (AT BS '83)

## SHRS CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY WITH DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS DURING INAUGURAL HEALTH SCIENCES ALUMNI WEEKEND

On Friday, Sept. 16, the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences (SHRS) was finally able to come together to celebrate its 50th anniversary of academic excellence at the University of Pittsburgh and to recognize distinguished SHRS alumni on their career achievements. After two years of postponement, faculty and alumni gathered at the University Club in Oakland to reminisce on their time at Pitt and toast to each other’s success.

If you missed the live event, you can read a full recap of the SHRS 50th Anniversary Award Celebration [here](#).





## ➤ Home sweet healthy home!



For some people, their home is their castle. For others, it's where their heart is. But what happens when home is no longer a comfortable—or safe—place to be? When there are many steep stairs from the street to the front door? When there's no bathroom on the first floor, or doorways and hallways are too narrow to accommodate a wheelchair or other medical equipment?

These and other questions will soon be answered in a unique living laboratory located in Oakland, close to the Pitt campus. Known as the Healthy Home Laboratory, this 105-year-old former family residence will soon be transformed into a world-class research and development facility staffed and supported by multiple departments at SHRS and other Pitt programs.

The goal is to develop technologies, real-world interventions and best practices that will allow individuals and their caregivers to live healthy and independent lives in their own homes and communities. ■



Stay tuned for more information about the Healthy Home Laboratory, coming in an upcoming issue of FACETS magazine.