

FALL 2026

The Right Combination

New combined-degree programs give students the opportunity to seamlessly combine PharmD training with a research master's or PhD with help from world-class mentorship. *P. 12*

Leveraging AI

At Pitt Pharmacy, artificial intelligence is helping to transform the ways pharmacists work and perform research—all while centering the immutable power of human interactions and decision-making. *P. 25*

PITT PHARMACY



HELPING HANDS

Celebrating Pitt Pharmacy's commitment
to transformative community service

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
COLLEGES OF PHARMACY

2026 AACP TRANSFORMATIVE
COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
SCHOOL OF PHARMACY



'26

11
07
26

Rx

RxTravaganza Gala
In the Mix in '26

Nov. 7, 2026 | 6 to 10 p.m.
Cathedral of Learning Commons Room

Reconnect with alumni, faculty and students as we celebrate class reunions and honor our impressive award honorees. Special recognition will be given to alumni with graduation years ending in 0,1,5 and 6.

Register at this website: pi.tt/pharmrxtra26. Contact Halle Angelo, associate director of alumni relations, at halleangelo@pitt.edu for more information about becoming an event sponsor or connecting with your classmates regarding your reunion year.



University of
Pittsburgh®

Health Sciences
School of Pharmacy



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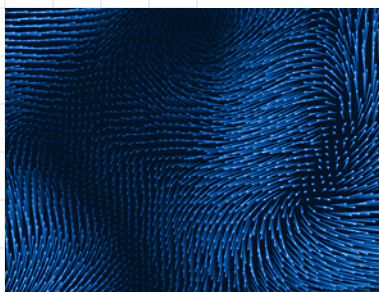
Savor the good vibes and great accomplishments of the newest class of Pitt pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists.



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SCHOOL OF PHARMACY LEADERSHIP

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Mission: Pitt Pharmacy magazine is your window into school updates and standout accomplishments from faculty, staff, trainees and alumni who continue advancing the profession.

Cover: Image courtesy of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP)

Where Change Begins.

Welcome to the fall 2026 edition of Pitt Pharmacy magazine!

As we find ourselves at the start of another academic year, I can't help but notice the changes happening all around us. Our campus has been transformed; the stillness of summer is replaced by the bustling excitement of a new school year. Our classrooms are once again filled with thriving and engaged students. And the crisp air of fall is sure to reappear and bring more noticeable changes soon.

In this issue, you will also see signs of change, but not the kind that comes with the weather. This edition of the magazine is dedicated to our changemakers, those in our Pitt Pharmacy family who are changing the world with their innovations and new discoveries and leading the way in the profession.

You will also read about our selection as this year's winner of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy's Transformative Community Service Award, another testament to our dedication to making a positive impact—starting right here with our local community. We are forever grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the University, the community and the profession in meaningful ways.

Our gratitude also extends to you, the Pitt Pharmacy community, for supporting us and for standing beside us as we shape the future of pharmacy. Together, we are changemakers, as we continue to lead, innovate, inspire and serve. Please know that your presence, your dedication and your contributions are greatly appreciated.

I hope that you stay in touch and continue to share your professional accomplishments with us. As our biennial gala RxTravaganza approaches this fall, we look forward to welcoming alumni and friends back to campus to reconnect with you in person.

Hail to Pitt!

Dean Amy L. Seybert

Dr. Gordon J. Vanscoy Endowed Chair of Pharmacy

NEWS *and* NOTES



New Network

Our annual Student Industry Organization (SIO) Symposium brought together nearly 100 PharmD students, more than 30 MS and PhD students, and more than 30 dedicated alumni representing the pharmaceutical and biotech industries.

The SIO Symposium plays an important role in sparking early interest in industry career pathways, while helping students build the knowledge, confidence and professional networks that support a successful transition into industry roles.



Science Symposium

Eighteen Pitt Pharmacy graduate students presented scientific posters at the annual Pharmaceutical Sciences Research Symposium in West Virginia. Of these, 15 were also selected to give oral presentations.

Three of the six awards given at the symposium went to our students, with Sheida Dabiri winning first place for oral presentations, Elliot Reed placing as a runner-up for oral presentations and Shambhavi Parab earning the position of runner-up for poster awards.



On Demand

With help from up to \$1.4 million in funding from the Gates Foundation, two University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy faculty members are working on a film-based, on-demand nonhormonal contraceptive.

Researchers **Shravan Patel**, associate professor of pharmaceutical sciences, and **Lisa Rohan**, professor of pharmaceutical sciences, are developing a vaginal film that would deliver a nonhormonal contraceptive candidate developed by Yaso Therapeutics called polyphenylene carboxymethylene (PPCM). In preclinical studies, PPCM has shown contraceptive properties.

An estimated 214 million women worldwide have an unmet need for contraception. "This product has the potential to offer women a new contraceptive option that is nonhormonal, affordable and woman-controlled," Patel says.

The development will be conducted at Pitt.

92.6%

First-time Pass Rate
on 2025 **NAPLEX** Exam!

Exam Excellence

Pitt Pharmacy graduates had a 92.6% North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination (NAPLEX) first-time pass rate for the PharmD Class of 2025. This rate ranks first among the seven schools of pharmacy in Pennsylvania and compares favorably to a national average of 86.8%. Our new graduates' scores rank in the top 26% nationwide for both NAPLEX and Multistate Pharmacy Jurisprudence Examination.



Research in the Ranks

The University of Pittsburgh ranked seventh nationwide in National Institutes of Health funding in 2025 according to the latest rankings released by the Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research. All six of Pitt's schools of the health sciences placed in the top 20 for funding—a powerful testament to the impact and excellence of the University's research community.



Top Ranked

Once again, the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy is one of the top schools in the nation. We're proud to share that we've risen again in the U.S. News & World Report rankings for Best Pharmacy Schools and are now eighth in the country!



Book Smart

Wen Xie, Joseph Koslow Professor and chair, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, published a new book, "Drug Metabolism in Diseases: Leveraging Drug Metabolism and Disposition in Precision Medicine and Therapeutic Development." Originally published in 2016, this second edition of the book is a comprehensive reference devoted to the current state of research and conceptual development on the impact of various disease states and physiological conditions on drug metabolism and disposition.

The book also contains valuable insight into the mechanistic effects and examples of how to accurately predict drug metabolism and disposition during these different pathophysiological states. Understanding the disease effect on drug metabolism and disposition is essential to personalized medicine and precision medicine.

The book is expected to benefit all those involved in drug discovery and development, as well as clinicians and researchers in drug metabolism, pharmacology and clinical pharmacology.

Multiple current and former Pitt Pharmacy faculty members are listed as contributing authors, including Raman Venkataramanan, Tom Nolin, Jim Coons, Phil Empey, Xiaochao Ma and Samuel Poloyac.



Perfect Match

Upon completion of phase one of the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) Residency Matching Program, 94% of Pitt Pharmacy's PGY2 candidates matched to a residency program, and 84.9% of our PGY1 candidates placed—earning the highest PGY1 match rate in the state.

Pitt Pharmacy graduates were also successful later in the process, with a 92.7% PGY1 match rate and a 94.1% PGY2 match rate after phase two of the ASHP match.



Lisa Cencia Rohan

High Honors

Several School of Pharmacy faculty members were celebrated for their outstanding achievements at Pitt's 2026 Faculty Honors Convocation this spring. At this special ceremony, the University recognized the excellence, leadership and impact that define our academic community.

The following colleagues were honored for their work in advancing discovery, mentorship and service:

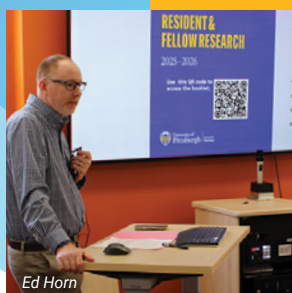
Wen Xie, Joseph Koslow Professor and chair, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, earned a 2026 Chancellor's Distinguished Award, which recognizes excellence in research, among other things. Xie was recognized for "paradigm-shifting work in defining the xenobiotic receptor's role in mediating the environmental effects on human disease and morbidity."

Lisa Cencia Rohan, professor of pharmaceutical sciences, was awarded the 2026 Provost's Award for Excellence in Doctoral Mentoring. Read more about Lisa and her impact on students on page 12.

Other faculty members honored include Simone Brixius-Anderko, assistant professor of pharmaceutical sciences, for her 2025 Bench Research Excellence Award from the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy; Edward Horn, associate professor of pharmacy and therapeutics, for being named an American College of Clinical Pharmacy Fellow; and Dean Amy L. Seybert for being named a Distinguished Fellow of the National Academies of Practice.



Wen Xie



Ed Horn

Study Showcase

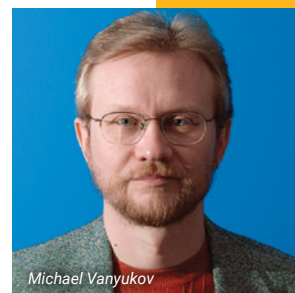
The School of Pharmacy's annual Resident and Fellow Research Day concluded this year with great success. Featuring 48 research presentations, the event showcased the vibrant culture of scientific inquiry across Pitt Pharmacy's programs.



Award of Distinction

Sandra Kane-Gill, professor of pharmacy and therapeutics and associate dean of faculty affairs and programmatic innovation, received the American College of Critical Care Medicine Distinguished Investigator Award at the Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM) annual Critical Care Congress this spring.

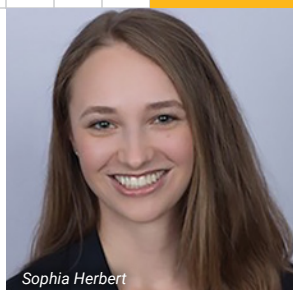
The award recognizes established and active SCCM clinical investigators whose meritorious and pioneering research has significantly advanced the understanding of disease or treatment of patients. Kane-Gill's contributions to critical care research continue to make an impact across the field and beyond.



Michael Vanyukov

Better Together

Pitt researchers collaborated with hundreds of authors to study shared genetics in psychiatric disorders. Published in December 2025 in *Nature*, the study was the first of its kind to use multiple large genetic databases and statistical methods to analyze data from approximately 1 million people across 14 childhood- and adult-onset psychiatric disorders. The study featured more than 500 authors, including three Pitt researchers—two of whom are from the School of Pharmacy: **Ralph Tarter**, professor emeritus, and **Michael Vanyukov**, professor.



Sophia Herbert



Kim Coley



Catherine Rebitch

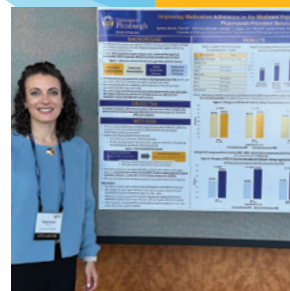


Joni Carroll

Joint Endeavor

The Joint Commission of Pharmacy Practitioners (jcpp.net/patient-care-process) released a publication as a companion piece to the "Pharmacists' Patient Care Process" titled "Key Elements of a Pharmacist Practice Management Ecosystem." The document was developed to answer the long-standing question "What is needed for pharmacists to build a patient care practice as a business?" It describes eight key elements of a practice management ecosystem, in any practice environment, with the intent to facilitate a common language and understanding across the profession.

School of Pharmacy faculty contributors included **Joni Carroll**, **Sophia Herbert**, **Kim Coley**, **Catherine Rebitch** and **Melissa McGivney (PHARM '98)**, who all worked within different groups to be a part of this foundational publication.



Poster Perfection

Stephanie McGrath (PHARM '07) presented an award-winning poster at the Pharmacy Quality Alliance Annual Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, titled "Improving Medication Adherence in the Medicaid Population Through Community Pharmacist-Provided Services." Coauthors include Sydney Salvati (PHARM '24), Kelsey Linn, Levent Kirisci, Monali Bhosle and Kim Coley.

SHARE YOUR NEWS!

Don't keep good news to yourself. We love to hear and circulate updates from Pitt Pharmacy faculty, staff, students and alumni. Spread the word at **pharmacy.pitt.edu/news/request**.



Pharmacology for All

Written by Maggie Lindenberg

Courses for nursing and dental students are setting the stage for informed, interprofessional collaborations.

Head to toe, medications are a key part of patient care.

The University of Pittsburgh's School of Pharmacy is helping future health care professionals better understand how those medications work.

A pharmacology course, led by Pitt Pharmacy, introduces Pitt nursing and dental students to the basics of how medications interact with the body. The course was created in response to the growing recognition that all members of the health care team need a stronger understanding of medications and their impacts, including the side effects they should anticipate.

"The basics of pharmacology are important for everyone to understand, even though as a nurse, for example, you're not necessarily expected to be an expert on every medication," says Karen Pater, associate professor of pharmacy and therapeutics and coordinator of the course. "We stress that this is only the beginning of learning, not the end."

In spring 2026, Pater led the course for 276 Pitt School of Nursing students, while another course was tailored for students in the School of Dental Medicine. To give her nursing students a

well-rounded overview, Pater brought into the classroom 12 other faculty members from across the School of Pharmacy to cover topics spanning the entire body and lifespan.

For example, Jim Coons, professor of pharmacy and therapeutics, lectured about cardiology, including information on drugs for blood pressure, cholesterol and clotting disorders. Tanya Fabian, associate professor of pharmacy and therapeutics, introduced students to psychiatric medications. Robert Gibbs, professor and then vice chair for education in the School of Pharmacy, gave an overview of the nervous system and neurotransmitters. Other lectures covered pharmacokinetics, medication administration, and how drugs are used for respiratory disorders, pain management and infectious disease.

The course is designed to give students the skills to find credible answers to medication questions that will come up regularly in clinical practice. However, as clinicians who actively practice every day, faculty members also shared their expertise in handling unique clinical experiences—showcasing the importance of collaboration in patient care.

"The concept of an interprofessional team is important to model for students because you're not always able to have all the answers as a health care professional," says Pater. "That's why you're on a team, so you can rely on each other when you need to."

London Claridy, a junior in Pitt Nursing's Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing program, took the pharmacology course this spring. Currently working as a lead pharmacy technician at CVS, Claridy came into the class with some familiarity with the medications, but she was excited to dive deeper.

"I would feel uncomfortable and out of the loop if I didn't know what kind of medications my patients are taking," she says. "The class enlightened me further to the amount of knowledge that pharmacists need to master to be a keeper of checks and balances for the patient and their care team, with the goal of keeping the patient safe. [The course showed me that,] just as the doctor of medicine is an integral part in the patient's care decisions, so are the doctors of pharmacy."

That realization will serve Claridy well in her future nursing practice, where collaboration with pharmacists will be an essential part of providing safe and effective patient care. ■



Legacy of Service

Reflecting on Suzanne Mannino's generational impact at Pitt Pharmacy

Written by Rhea E. Bowman

For nearly 15 years, those entering John P. and Constance A. Curran Student Center in Salk Hall at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Pharmacy have been greeted by a warm smile from Suzanne Mannino (A&S '83). Few knew how much pride and joy it brought Mannino to be the first person they encountered there.

As the professional student engagement coordinator, the opportunity to welcome students and provide guidance has been a highlight of Mannino's career.

"I feel like I get to be their mom away from home," she says.

The warm feelings are mutual. Many students refer to Mannino as their "Pharmacy Mom" and seek her out frequently for advice and assistance.

Mannino has been an integral part of the student experience behind the scenes—coordinating travel expenses, providing education regarding University resources, and even helping to make sure students had rooms booked and pizzas ordered ahead of their events.

Now, as she prepares to retire, Mannino reflects on what she says has been a deeply fulfilling career.

Mannino earned a Pitt undergraduate degree before returning to the University more than 30 years ago to take a position in the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid (OAFA). After many years in that office, she took some time off to be with her young daughters—but she found that her heart was still at the University.

"Even when I was away, Pitt always remained part of my life," she recalled in 2024 for a University Times article. "Whether it was staying connected with my 'BFF' from OAFA or attending football and basketball games, I always had a voice in the back of my mind telling me that I wanted to be a part of the University again. I missed my second home."

So, in 2012, when she saw an opportunity to work at Pitt Pharmacy's Curran Student Center, she gladly took it.

One of her greatest joys was regularly attending two of the annual milestone events for pharmacy students: the Dr. Gordon J. Vanscoy Annual White Coat Ceremony and commencement. She has fond memories of seeing proud families come in holding their cameras and watching students officially become pharmacists.

"Even when I was away, Pitt always remained part of my life."

She also loved to visit high schools alongside Pitt Pharmacy faculty and staff with SimMan, an advanced patient simulator that helps illustrate the work of pharmacists.

Perhaps the happiest Pitt Pharmacy-related memory, however, was visiting Italy with her family while her "very special student"—daughter Alexandra (then a Pitt Pharmacy student)—completed an advanced practice pharmacy experiential rotation there.

"To watch her journey in becoming a pharmacist was amazing," Mannino says.

Mannino's husband, Joe (A&S '83, SCI '94G), and other daughter, Isabella (ENGR '24), a successful civil engineer, are Pitt graduates, too. Saying goodbye to an institution that has meant so much to her and her family is a bittersweet prospect, but Mannino says she is ready for the new adventures retirement will bring. She says that she is most looking forward to spending time with family and friends and traveling more. Her potential next stop? Ireland, to help cheer on Pitt's football team at their 2027 season opener there.

Even the thought of such a trip is a good reminder to Mannino of how Pitt will remain a part of her life long after she leaves Salk Hall. She leaves a legacy there of kindness and support that will not soon be forgotten. ■





MEDICATION SUPERHEROES

How fourth-year student Jaiden Mazefsky defines the role of a pharmacist

Written by Megumi Barclay

"We are the medication superheroes of the health care world. We save lives," says Jaiden Mazefsky, a fourth-year student at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Pharmacy.

Mazefsky describes pharmacy as an inherently interprofessional discipline—one that collaborates with myriad roles within health care, including physicians, nurses and insurance companies, across clinical, community and rural settings. Above all, she emphasizes pharmacy as one of the most accessible health care professions, building trust through each prescription.

Despite her passion for the field, she acknowledges that pharmacy is often misunderstood. "We are not just behind the counter counting pills; we do so much more," she says. And they do.

Mazefsky credits her perspective and love of pharmacy not only to the classroom but also to hands-on experience across diverse practice settings. As a second-year student pharmacist, she counseled patients in grocery store pharmacies on common medications and side effects. In her third year, she rotated through inpatient hospital units and outpatient cancer infusion centers—each experience reinforcing the breadth of pharmacists' responsibilities within the broader health care team.

"We are the final step before a medication reaches the patient," she explains. "We catch discrepancies, adjust dosages and make sure medications are safe for that specific person. We save lives."

That patient-centered mindset became especially meaningful while working with

individuals whose medications required adjustments based on kidney or liver function, genetics, body composition or comorbidities. "You want the drug to work," she says, "but you don't want it to cause harm." For Mazefsky, these moments underscore pharmacists' dual role as both scientists and safety nets within the health care system.

Equally impactful has been the trust and rapport she's fostered in community settings. She enjoys forming genuine relationships with patients—learning their names, histories and concerns. "They trust me, and I trust them," she says warmly.

That aspect of accessibility first drew her to the profession. Pharmacists, as she describes, are often the most reachable health care providers—no appointment required, embedded in neighborhoods and able to offer immediate support. "You don't have to wait a month to get help," she notes. "We're always there, and that matters."

Mazefsky has also seen pharmacy's evolution firsthand. Through the increasing use of telemedicine and artificial intelligence in medication therapy management, she has worked remotely to help patients navigate insurance barriers, arrange free medication delivery and access adherence tools like pill organizers.

"Sometimes patients tell me, 'You just fixed my problem in five seconds,' she says. 'And that's powerful.'"

Her leadership extends well beyond rotations. Mazefsky is the Immediate Past President of Pitt's chapter of the American Pharmacists Association Academy of Student Pharmacists (APhA-

ASP)—the school's largest professional organization. She has transitioned into a national position as a member on the APhA-ASP National Member Engagement Committee. APhA-ASP spans all areas of pharmacy and hosts educational and service initiatives—from naloxone training to Operation Diabetes and Operation Pediatrics, that give students opportunities to educate their peers and community members while improving health literacy and reducing stigma surrounding pharmacy.

"APhA shows how many spaces pharmacists can exist in," she says. "People may not think of pharmacists in administration, policy or public health—but we're everywhere."

Mentorship is another cornerstone of her involvement. As a mentor in a program called RxPrep, Mazefsky advises high school and undergraduate students interested in pharmacy, guiding them through applications, interviews and the realities of the profession. Having benefited from RxAmbassadors herself during her time as a Pitt undergraduate, she views this work as deeply personal. "My mentors became my family," she says. "I knew I wanted to be that person for someone else."

Now in her final year at Pitt Pharmacy, she is fully absorbed in clinical training and building a career centered on patient care and advocacy. Pharmacy, to her, is not confined to a counter—it is a dynamic, trusted and essential pillar of health care. ■



Q&A: MAKING RESEARCH WORK

The University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy is known for being a research powerhouse, but few may realize that behind that reputation is an entire office dedicated to administrative support, allowing scholars to focus on what's most important—the research.

That's where Lori Pickel comes in. As the director of the School of Pharmacy Research Administration Office, she handles the vital details that ensure success for our investigators. Learn more below about Pickel and the essential role of the research office.

Pitt Pharmacy magazine: *Tell me about your role and what a typical day looks like.*

Lori Pickel: In research administration, no two days look the same. As director of the School of Pharmacy Research Administration Office, I guide the pre- and postaward processes that keep our research programs thriving. I often describe our work as a carefully choreographed dance—many steps, many partners and a rhythm that changes with every funding cycle.

Our busiest times rise and fall with National Institutes of Health deadlines, but surprises are part of the job. Everything can be running smoothly and then—bam—a new grant opportunity appears with only days to prepare. That's when coordination, communication and teamwork matter most.

I'm fortunate to lead a team of four exceptional professionals whose responsibilities span the full research administration life cycle. They are skilled, dedicated and collaborative.

PPM: *What's the primary mission of your office, and why is it important to the school?*

LP: Our primary mission is to support the school's research program by guiding faculty through the full life cycle of grant development and submission to both federal and nonfederal sponsors. The decisions we make and the actions we take have a direct impact on the operational and strategic outcomes of the department—and in many cases, influence a responsibility center or even the broader University. We currently manage more than \$20 million in active research funding, and we are committed to seeing that number grow as we continue to strengthen our processes, partnerships and support systems.

PPM: *What are some services or resources others may not realize your office provides?*

LP: Our office serves as the primary point of contact for faculty and staff on all grant and contract-related matters, including interpretation of University and sponsor guidelines. We provide guidance on administrative requirements during proposal development, submission and award setup to ensure compliance and smooth processing.

We coordinate the review and completion of the annual American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy report and manage effort certification for the school throughout the year. In addition, we prepare and distribute special reports to senior leadership as well as monthly financial reports to all faculty members who serve as principal investigators on sponsored projects.

PPM: *What's a common misconception about your office?*

LP: That our office manages and issues scholarships to students. While we typically do not have direct, day-to-day contact with students in the school, we do play an important role in supporting emerging researchers. Over the years, we've successfully partnered with mentors and their students as well as with early career investigators to secure federal fellowships and career development awards. Our work may be behind the scenes, but it directly contributes to helping the next generation of scientists launch their careers.

PPM: *Share a success story that illustrates the impact of your team's work.*

LP: Every deadline we meet and every time a faculty member tells us they've been awarded a grant—those moments are our success stories. They're the payoff for the long hours, the careful reviews, the coordination, the troubleshooting and the behind-the-scenes work that makes research possible. We may not be the ones in the lab or writing the proposals, but we take pride in knowing that our efforts help make those achievements happen.

PPM: *What accomplishment or project are you most proud of in your time here?*

LP: In 2024, I was honored to receive the Outstanding Career Achievement Award, joining six of my colleagues in celebrating this recognition. The award is presented to a staff member with more than ten years of exceptional service in a research or research administration role—someone whose contributions have strengthened their department and the University. By December 2026, I will celebrate 30 years at Pitt and 40 years in research overall.

PPM: *What's a fun fact about yourself?*

LP: I'm a lifelong Star Trek fan and an all around sci fi enthusiast. One of my favorite hobbies is building LEGO sets. My office shelves are lined with completed sets, and I've even carved out a dedicated space for my growing Marvel Universe collection.

PPM: *What's one thing you would like alumni to know about the school today?*

LP: That the spirit of the School of Pharmacy—the collaboration, the dedication, the genuine care people have for one another—is not only still here, it's thriving. The school has grown, evolved and modernized in countless ways, but the heart of the place remains the same. The people continue to make this an exceptional community, and the commitment to supporting research, education and innovation is stronger than ever. Alumni can be proud of the legacy they helped build because it's alive and well today. ■



COM

Lisa Cencia Rohan

THE RIGHT BINATION

New combined-degree programs give students the opportunity to seamlessly combine PharmD training with a research master's or PhD with help from world-class mentorship.

Written by Erin Kello

Melissa Diamint was a high school student touring the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy when she first met one of the mentors who would help shape her professional journey.

Diamint was 16 and nurturing a growing interest in pharmacology studies and research. When she was offered the opportunity to visit Pitt Pharmacy's facilities, the eager student took it. As two PharmD students showed her the school, they came across Professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences Lisa Cencia Rohan, who generously offered Diamint a tour of her laboratory, where research focuses on women's and global health innovations.

Rohan took the time to talk to the young woman and connected her to a graduate student who spent nearly an hour answering Diamint's questions. The visit left a lasting impression. "I remember thinking, 'This is a school that wants me here,'" she recalls.

Two years later, as a newly admitted Pitt undergraduate, Diamint obtained a volunteer position in a lab. "I realized quickly that it was Professor Rohan's lab—the professor who made me want to come to Pitt."

Thanks in part to the mentorship received in Rohan's lab at the Magee-Womens Research Institute, Diamint honed a passion for studying women's health and infectious diseases, as well as drug formulations and delivery.

She earned a Pitt undergraduate degree, then prepared to pursue graduate work—but her dual interest in pharmaceuticals and research meant that she wanted to obtain a PharmD and a PhD.

Fortunately, the school that had long been paving Diamint's path to success had developed a new offering for students like her: combined-degree programs. She became Pitt Pharmacy's first combined PharmD/PhD candidate, working closely with Rohan and her lab.

For most dual-degree programs, students must pause their PharmD, complete a separate research-focused PhD and then resume their professional training. That can be difficult for students, says Associate Dean for Graduate and Postdoctoral Programs Kerry Empey.

"They don't graduate with the class they started with, their earning potential is delayed and they don't get licensed right away," Empey explains. "Our program is unique because our students don't have to step out. It is sequential, and they don't have to confer degrees at the same time."

The combined degree is an asset for students like Diamint, who aims to work in industry and in academic research. The clinical training a PharmD provides is exactly what employers want layered onto a research degree, according to Empey. "Industry loves a clinical background," she says. "With employers increasingly seeking PhD-trained researchers, a clinically grounded PharmD/PhD stands out."

"In academia, that grounding helps you ask better research questions that are clinically translatable," Empey adds.

For Diamint, the combined-degree program gave her the space to explore her clinical and research interests. "Having the time to pursue a PharmD while still working in the lab really helped me think about the problems people are actually facing," she says.

"What are the questions that patients really have? Are there solutions that'll make it easier for patients to live and easier for caregivers to help?"

Mentors are the cornerstone of the combined-degree program, helping students answer these kinds of tough questions and gain real-world experience. Through a course called Mentored Research (PHARM 1097), Pitt PharmD students can work one on one with a faculty member, rotating through labs until they find one that fits their interests, and then they can get to work on a research project. When students apply to the graduate program, they have already identified a research area and a faculty mentor and have started earning credits toward a PhD or MS, trimming roughly a year from their graduate training.

Diamint's mentor, Rohan, is one of those instrumental faculty mentors.

Rohan's passion is translational research, and her lab's mission is to ensure that pharmaceutical innovation has a positive impact on global and women's health.

"We can make the best products in the world, but if women can't integrate those into their daily lives, they'll never use them," she says.

Her lab has developed more than 50 products, and more than a dozen of those have advanced to clinical testing. These range from a discreet vaginal film that can prevent HIV transmission to a cervical cancer mapping technique now considered standard of care. Today, with support from the Gates Foundation, the lab is addressing fundamental gaps in the anatomy and physiology of the female reproductive tract to design better products for women, including nonhormonal contraceptives.

Rohan, who was recently given the Provost's Award for Excellence in Doctoral Mentoring, offers her mentees a unique research experience—one that has influenced Diamint.

"In the lab, we've developed a kind of mini-pharmaceutical company," Rohan says. "We have the capability to take things from the medicinal chemist's handoff all the way through to the clinic. Our trainees also have the opportunity to learn not only about the design and development of pharmaceutical products but also about their scale-up, manufacturing and the regulatory factors that go into their advancement and implementation. This provides a clear understanding of the entire drug development process."

Her mentorship philosophy is centered on what she calls "the gentle push."

"I really enjoy working with students, but I don't want to give them the answers. I think it's very important that they find the answers on their own."



"I love to see that excitement in their eyes, that light go on when they really understand something and find their own scientific voice."

Diamint says that this high level of mentorship is present throughout the School of Pharmacy. "The faculty really deeply care about my well-being, my growth as a scientist, my growth as a pharmacist, my growth as a student, my growth as a human," she says.

And that's exactly what the combined-degree program is all about, says Empey.

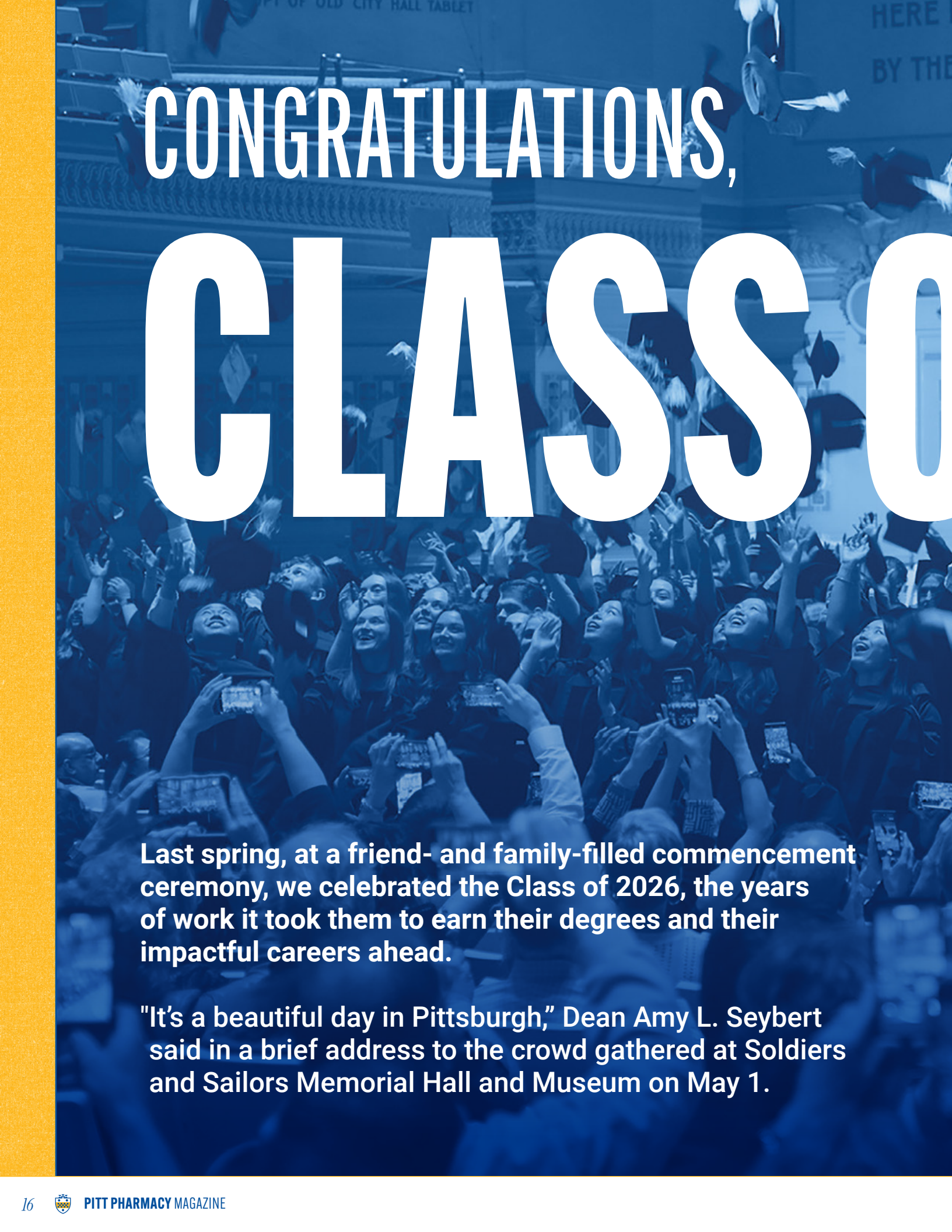
The program is only beginning to expand. Another PharmD/PhD student and three combined master's students enrolled this year, with others in the pipeline. Diamint now finds herself an ambassador for the program.

"It's just a huge honor to get to share what I love and help other people get involved in the same way," she says, harkening back to the very connections that brought her to Pitt Pharmacy in the first place. ■

"It's just a huge honor to get to share what I love and help other people get involved in the same way."

—Melissa Diamint





CONGRATULATIONS, CLASS OF 2026

Last spring, at a friend- and family-filled commencement ceremony, we celebrated the Class of 2026, the years of work it took them to earn their degrees and their impactful careers ahead.

"It's a beautiful day in Pittsburgh," Dean Amy L. Seybert said in a brief address to the crowd gathered at Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall and Museum on May 1.

HIGHLY RESOLVE THAT THE
PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE, SHALL NOT PERISH FROM THE EARTH
GETTYSBURG, NOVEMBER 19, 1863.

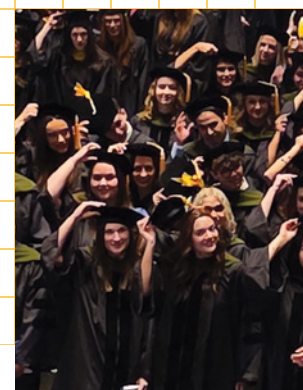
FEATURE: GRADUATION

Written by Laura Clark Rohrer

OF 2026!

**“Enjoy every
second because
you earned it,
and we are so
proud of you.”**

—Dean Amy L. Seybert



DEAR PITT PHARMACY ALUMNI AND FRIENDS,



It is both an honor and a privilege to serve as president of the Pitt Pharmacy Alumni Society and to connect with you. Whether you graduated recently or decades ago, you remain an integral part of a community grounded in excellence, innovation and shared commitment to improving patient care.

Recently, I had the opportunity to address the Class of 2026 and imparted three key pieces of advice: Learning does not end when you earn your PharmD, never underestimate the power of connection and lead with purpose.

My time at the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy was instrumental in shaping my clinical expertise and my passion for advancing health literacy, empowering patients and giving back through meaningful volunteer work.

As a clinical pharmacist today, I can see firsthand how the values instilled at Pitt—integrity, teamwork and mutual respect—translate into meaningful impact in the communities we serve.

Pitt Pharmacy provided me with more than an education; it gave me a network, a purpose and a professional home that I continue to rely on.

The strength of our alumni community lies in its diversity of experiences and continued engagement. Across the country and around the world, Pitt Pharmacy graduates are leading in clinical practice, research, industry, academia and beyond. Our collective voice is powerful, and together we can continue to elevate the profession while supporting the next generation of pharmacists.

I know you join me in taking immense pride in U.S. News & World Report ranking Pitt Pharmacy No. 8 nationally. This distinction underscores the excellence of our school, curriculum and faculty in consistently preparing pharmacists who make a meaningful impact.

I encourage each of you to stay connected and actively engage in ways that inspire you and align with what matters most to you. This could include mentoring current students, participating in alumni events, donating to support scholarship initiatives or simply sharing your professional journey. Your involvement not only strengthens our network but also reinforces the legacy of excellence that defines Pitt Pharmacy.

As we look ahead, I am excited about the opportunities to expand our outreach, deepen alumni engagement and celebrate the achievements of our community. Thank you for the role you play in sustaining and advancing the Pitt Pharmacy tradition.

Hail to Pitt!

Jovonne H. Williams, PharmD, BCACP

Class of 2009

Lead Clinical Pharmacist, Optum

*President of the
Pitt Pharmacy Alumni Society*



LONG STORY SHORT

"My favorite Pitt memory is meeting my closest friends throughout my years at Pitt. Those relationships—built through classes, late nights and everyday college life—are what I'll remember most long after graduation." —Makenna Cartwright

"Working with patients, mentoring students in the lab and giving back to the Pittsburgh community." —Melissa Diamint

"Going to Harrisburg to advocate for the profession of pharmacy." —Isaac May

"The people I met and learned from during my rotations." —Lucy Chen

"Traveling abroad to complete an APPE rotation at UPMC Aut Even in Kilkenny, Ireland." —Alyson Coddington

"Formals and late-night Hillman study sessions with friends!" —Pranjal Das

We asked members of the Class of 2026 to share their favorite Pitt memory. As Neil Diamond once wrote, "Good times never seemed so good. ..."

"One of my favorite Pitt memories was organizing and leading Pitt's 2025 local P&T Competition as AMCP vice president and then getting to compete alongside my friends. It was truly rewarding to see the event succeed and the winning Pitt team advance to nationals!" —Shawn Carroll

"Completing an advanced practice pharmacy experience in the remote town of Nome, Alaska." —Evan Fink

"Studying and having lunch outside of Salk on a sunny day with my classmates." —Elizabeth Iwasyk

"Every moment was memorable and valuable. I especially enjoyed the time I spent with my friends and my professors." —Na Yoon Kang

"Traveling with a fellow classmate to Italy for an APPE rotation and getting our paper published that we completed while there!" —Brinn Mancuso

"One of my most cherished Pitt memories is sitting in Schenley Park with friends after long days of class. I'll always look back fondly on the laughter, conversations and moments of connection we shared there." —Kiran Barik

"The inspiring and supportive individuals I have met along the way." —Autumn McConnell

"Running after class to lie on the Cathedral lawn on any day it was sunny and above 50 degrees." —Grace Nolder

"Encouraging each other every step of the way with my friends." —Qiaochu You

Celebrating Pitt
Pharmacy's
commitment to
transformative
community service

Written by Lindy Kravec



HELPING HANDS

They look into the eyes of a daughter whose mother struggles with addiction. They explain how naloxone can help reverse an overdose. They hold the hands of a man who is unhoused and hasn't yet learned how to manage his diabetes. They patiently teach him. They see the person who smokes and who can't manage to quit. They offer strategies and support. They see household chemicals that can poison children. They make parents and caregivers aware of the dangers. They see young people in need of vaccines and encourage them to take advantage of the free services in the area.

They are the students, faculty and staff of the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy. They do all these things—and more—not because they have to but because the spirit of community service is deeply embedded in the school and its mission “to improve the health and well-being of the world around us.”

This summer, the school's dedication to the community was recognized with a prestigious national accolade: the Transformative Community Service Award granted by the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) to one college or school of pharmacy annually.

In selecting Pitt Pharmacy as the 2026 recipient, AACP noted they were “impressed with the school's ability to initiate, implement, evaluate and revise programs to meet and sustain the needs of the communities that it serves.”

Dean Amy L. Seybert says the community service award embodies the spirit of Pitt Pharmacy and reflects an extraordinary team whose commitment reaches far beyond the walls of Salk Hall.

“Through powerful collaborations in education, research and service, alongside invaluable partners within and beyond Pitt, this team is making a real, lasting difference,” says Seybert.



That difference is made possible through six exceptional programs within the School of Pharmacy that were cited by the AACP award committee for their long, impactful records of expanding the traditional service roles of academic pharmacy.

The Grace Lamsam Pharmacy Program for the Underserved (GLPP), founded in 1995, and the Community Leadership and Innovation in Practice (CLIP) Center, established in 2016, are school-based initiatives that bring students into the community and research, training and education to community pharmacies.

The Vaccination and Health Connection Hub, which began in 2021, and the Medication Education and Wellness Center at the University of Pittsburgh Homewood Community Engagement Center, opened in 2020, are collaborations with other Pitt health care professionals to meet specific needs of students and other members of the local community.

Pitt Pharmacy's partnership with the Allegheny County Health Department, which began in 2019, and its leadership at the Pittsburgh Poison Center, which has existed for more than 50 years, serve as other strong examples of the school's dedication to meeting the needs of the underserved in the greater Pittsburgh area.

Yet, these efforts aren't just for the greater good. There are significant academic and professional development goals at work, too. "One of the reasons Pitt Pharmacy was selected as the winner of this award is that we not only provide transformative community service, but we also get students involved," says

Lucas Berenbrok, associate professor of pharmacy and therapeutics and director of the CLIP Center. "Because we have embedded community service into our curriculum, we are able to offer students a pathway—and a powerful example—for them to follow throughout their careers."

That pathway starts in a student's first year at Pitt Pharmacy.

A PIONEER IN SERVICE-BASED EDUCATION

Although service-learning programs are standard in universities today, Pitt was one of the first schools of pharmacy to integrate this concept into its curriculum.

Today, every first-year Pitt Pharmacy student participates in field experiences sponsored by community agencies that provide essential services to underserved populations.

Through these efforts, students hone their communication skills and learn how to improve outcomes for people in various circumstances. This experiential learning continues throughout their academic career.

The school's commitment to community engagement and service accelerated in the mid-1990s when Grace Lamsam, a pharmacist and faculty with Pitt Pharmacy, invited faculty from the Schools of Pharmacy and Nursing to build a service-learning program along with its community partner, the Salvation Army.

The goal was to open a clinic in Pittsburgh's South Side neighborhood to assist individuals in need of care for substance use disorders.

Today, GLPP is a beacon of compassion, delivering pharmacy services to the most vulnerable populations in the Pittsburgh region—the people who are unhoused, working poor, underinsured and uninsured. Rooted in the belief that every person deserves quality health care and medications delivered with dignity, GLPP remains the only residency program in the country specifically designed to train pharmacists to work in limited resource settings, both locally and globally.

Associate Professor of Pharmacy and Therapeutics Sharon E. Connor completed her residency program at UPMC under the direction of Lamsam, who now serves as a cloistered nun. Watching GLPP grow from the ground up over the past 30 years has uniquely qualified Connor to serve as the program director today.

In this role, she oversees the work of faculty and students as they collaborate with long-standing partners, such as the Health Care for the Homeless Project, the North Side Christian Health Center, the UPMC Matilda H. Theiss Health Center, the Salvation Army Harbor Light Center and the Program for Health Care to Underserved Populations (PHCUP). "Although our partners have changed over the years, GLPP remains one of the strongest and most impactful programs in the area," says Connor. "Nowhere is that more obvious than in our involvement with PHCUP and its continued expansion of services in organizations, such as the

Birmingham Free Clinic and the Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh."

Since 1995, the Birmingham Free Clinic has been Pitt Pharmacy's premier partner for serving uninsured and vulnerable community members. Through this program, pharmacy students and residents work alongside physicians, nurses, physical therapists and other health care professionals to provide medical care, medication access, and medical and social services to those in need, at no cost to the patient. It's work that often makes a lasting impression on those involved.

"The Birmingham clinic was definitely an eye-opening experience for me," one student wrote in an anonymous survey after completing their service work. "Having one man tell me he has not seen a doctor in more than 30 years because he cannot afford it was a conversation that I will never forget. I came to realize that there are so many things that I take for granted far too often, like my health, education or the safety I feel."

The student intends to apply this change of perspective to providing more nuanced and understanding care once in the field.

Panagiota (Pola) Katsanos (BSPS '26), current PharmD student, says her involvement at the Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh has been similarly eye-opening. She recalls one woman who came into the clinic seeking medication refills but also refuge from her current situation.

"Our 'typical' patients are usually in their mid-teens to early 30s," says Katsanos of the people who most often seek assistance from the center. "I was not expecting to help a woman who was well into her 60s. This experience changed my perspective on the population of women experiencing domestic violence. This woman had been enduring it for years, but just now had the resources, courage and strength to leave her abusive partner.

"We cannot control what happened to these women before arriving at clinic, but we can transform their lives afterwards with our thoughtful services and gentle care," Katsanos continues. "Experiences like these not only strengthen our academic knowledge as future providers but allow us to see our direct impact on patients."

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY-BASED PHARMACY CARE

The impact of Pitt's School of Pharmacy can also be felt in its efforts to shape the future of community-based pharmacy care. Through the (CLIP) Center, faculty and staff work with local partners to build and share essential tools, processes and evaluations that reflect best practices and support the implementation of pharmacist-delivered patient care.

With a focus on innovation, discovery, training and education, the center strives to make a difference in the way people achieve better health.

Berenbrok, director of the CLIP Center, says its work pushes the boundaries of the traditional service roles of academic pharmacy and brings students as well as faculty into the community.

"Research shows that community pharmacies are the most accessible health care locations for patients," explains Berenbrok. "Since our initial collaboration with Rite Aid Pharmacy in 2004, we have gone on to become a national leader in establishing replicable, viable and sustainable patient care services in community pharmacies."

The CLIP Center supports faculty who pursue meaningful, practice-based research that covers the gamut of pharmaceutical topics, including large epidemiologic studies, applications of systems engineering principles to pharmacy and broader health services.

It inspires change and contributes to it as invited experts for policy and advocacy.

The center also develops and delivers training programs for community pharmacists as well as pharmacy students.

Over the years, the CLIP Center has been responsible for developing many initiatives, including medication management programs and pharmacist point-of-care testing in order to improve patient outcomes and reduce health care costs. It modernized the introductory pharmacy practice experience and established the first-in-the-nation community pharmacy research fellowship.

Annual Impact of the Grace Lamsam Pharmacy Program for the Underserved

- Dispenses more than 6,000 prescriptions to patients in need
- Provides medication free of charge approximately valued near \$750,000
- Provides more than 3,000 volunteer hours through pharmacists and pharmacy students
- Serves approximately 3,000 patients at clinics, shelters and drop-in centers
- Engages more than 250 pharmacy students and residents



A History of Success

- Participated in more than 360 invited presentations
- Published more than 160 research papers
- Graduated more than 35 residents in community, ambulatory and underserved practices who are now leaders nationwide—including 16 faculty
- Received 25 national recognition awards for its faculty in the areas of community pharmacy practice, health care innovation, transitions of care, community-based research and teaching
- Coordinated 22 courses
- Established the first Community Pharmacy Research Fellowship in the U.S.

The CLIP Center has identified two distinct training pathways for students to pursue in-depth study in an area of personal interest. These areas of concentration (ARCO) are in CLIP and global health (GH-ARCO).

Assistant Professor of Pharmacy and Therapeutics Martha Ndung'u is passionate about closing health disparity gaps in underserved communities. As part of her work, every year she prepares students in the GH-ARCO for a service-learning trip to a clinic in the rural village of San José del Negrito, Honduras. They join other health care students from Pitt and other health care professionals in a medical brigade sponsored by a local nonprofit organization, Shoulder Pittsburgh.

The pharmacy students work directly with patients in the clinic in San José del Negrito, collecting data about medication access and assessing inventory management at the clinic.

"These experiences provide students with skills to be empathetic, creative and culturally sensitive when trying to solve problems for people of all ages and in all circumstances—in all places," adds Ndung'u. "They also help them develop research that is focused on addressing the health needs for vulnerable populations wherever they may live."



Setting the Precedent for Impactful Care

"Programs like these at the CLIP Center and the Grace Lamsam Pharmacy Program for the Underserved are excellent examples of why Pitt Pharmacy is deserving of the AACP's Transformative Community Service Award," says Seybert. "While we are truly honored by this recognition, we are also excited to continue to innovate, educate and lead as we advance patient care."



The award provides \$5,000, which Seybert says will go to the support of new efforts addressing unmet community needs and underresourced areas in greater Western Pennsylvania. Receiving such an accolade is an honor, she says, but the impact of the work it salutes was already reward enough.

"Our goal at Pitt Pharmacy is to create spaces where our faculty, staff and students can continue to work with and among communities to strengthen our partnerships and progress," Seybert says. "When we all work together, everyone wins." ■

LEVERAGING

AI

AT PITT PHARMACY, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WAYS PHARMACISTS WORK AND PERFORM RESEARCH—ALL WHILE CENTERING THE IMMUTABLE POWER OF HUMAN INTERACTIONS AND DECISION-MAKING.

Written by Maggie Lindenberg

This is the first article in a series about artificial intelligence use and research at Pitt Pharmacy.

It's the phrase on people's lips the world over: artificial intelligence (AI). Describing computer systems that can do complex work at a scale and speed not easily performed by humans, AI has already transformed the way we live, from intuitive search engines and personalized media to adaptive navigation tools.

At the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy, where innovation is an institutional core value, AI is helping to pave the way to new metamorphic discoveries that promise to improve pharmacology and patient outcomes alike.

But make no mistake: AI isn't being positioned to replace pharmacists. Rather, AI is becoming a valuable collaborator, one that can process millions of data points, identify patterns humans might miss and accelerate discoveries.

From designing drug molecules to personalizing cancer treatments and even monitoring critically ill patients, Pitt Pharmacy faculty are exploring how humans and algorithms can work together to improve health care.

Translating the Language of the Human Body

The human genome is the language that writes the story of our health, and Da Yang, professor of pharmaceutical sciences, is working to translate it.

"We can only really make sense of about 2% of our genome," he says. "We get all the letters, but we are still only very elementary in terms of the grammar."

In pursuit of an accurate genomic translator, Yang has turned to generative AI, which is a kind of artificial intelligence that can find patterns and relationships in data and use that information to create original content or better understand user requests.

"We know that generative AI is very good at language, so we hope that by applying AI into this ultimate language [challenge] will help us to decipher the human genome model," says Yang.

Better deciphering the human genome opens the door to new medical treatments, especially when it comes to cancer. No two tumors are exactly alike, so patients with the same type of cancer may respond differently to the same treatments.

Yang's research has suggested that the noncoding RNAs that may regulate how tumors evade the immune system are hidden in a sea of genomic data.



Min Zhang



With a better understanding of noncoding RNA, which is found in the 98% of the genome we're less able to comprehend, doctors may eventually be able to use an excised tumor's genome to pinpoint its most effective treatment.

"I think, ultimately, the goal is to be able to personalize the treatment for every patient. We would take the cancer genome, including coding regions and noncoding regions, and feed them into an AI or machine-learning algorithm to know what this tumor is about," he says, noting researchers are already getting close to that capability. "In the two or three weeks between surgery and starting chemotherapy or immunotherapy, we will be able to personalize the treatments and give the best treatment for that patient."

Predicting Harm Before It Happens

While Yang uses AI to identify the best cancer treatment, Min Zhang, assistant professor of pharmaceutical sciences, asks a parallel question: How will that treatment affect the patient?

Zhang is using AI to help predict how a patient will respond to a treatment, aiming to improve effectiveness and reduce potential toxicity risk, especially to the liver.

Toxicogenomics, Zhang's specialty, studies how genes and molecular pathways respond to drugs and other potentially harmful substances. Using deep learning, a form of AI that figures out how to make better predictions over time, can accelerate the process significantly.

"When we were using the traditional machine-learning methods and building the prediction models in most of the work, we've seen some challenges there," says Zhang. "But deep-learning methods can study more complicated patterns in those large-scale data, especially integrating different layers of the data."

One key focus of Zhang's work is understanding and preventing drug-induced liver injury (DILI), a rare and difficult-to-detect adverse reaction of some medications.

"DILI could be the result of complex interactions between multiple factors, including genetic background, the immune response, environmental factors and the drug itself," says Zhang. "At the same time, DILI is rare, and usually it's idiosyncratic, which means it happens in a small group of patients and isn't dose dependent."

DILI occurs in fewer than 1 in 10,000 patients in clinical trials. Because of its rarity, physicians must rule out other, more likely causes before linking liver injury to a drug, making it especially difficult to detect early.

That's where AI-powered toxicogenomics may help.

"Toxicogenomics provides an opportunity to identify the early-phase molecular changes of the cells responding to the drug, which may help us identify early biomarkers for drug-induced liver injury, before overt injury develops," says Zhang. "Deep-learning methods can detect complex patterns of thousands of genes at the same time, which can be very challenging to detect with conventional methods."

AI helps Zhang connect biological signals that would otherwise remain invisible. In the future, she hopes her work can help a pharmacist or physician identify whether a patient will likely benefit from a specific treatment and whether they are at a higher risk for drug-induced toxicity.

From the pharmaceutical side, Zhang believes this work could also help lead to better clinical trial designs, fewer failed drug trials and early identification of compounds that have high potential for toxicity.

"AI can play a significant role in almost all stages of drug discovery and development," says Zhang.



Sandra Kane-Gill

Exploring and Expanding the Chemical Space

Discovering new drugs is a significant investment of time and money because the chemical space—the estimated size of potential drug-like chemicals that can form the basis of medications—is enormous.

“People estimated that the chemical space is about 1,060—that is a really big number,” says Junmei Wang, professor of pharmaceutical sciences. “But a real drug space is much, much smaller and narrower because we want a drug to adequately target and bind to a receptor, and it must be safe and selective.”

In Wang’s lab, AI is helping to explore more chemical possibilities than scientists could research alone. His drug generative adversarial network (Drug-GAN) model, developed in a National Institutes of Health-funded project, can design entirely new drug molecules from scratch. The program captures patterns of existing compounds efficiently and then uses that learned pattern to explore the chemical space, looking for similar structures. This method saves time and money, narrowing in on new, promising candidates for drug development that can be tested and validated in the lab.

“We have developed several generative models using the GAN architecture, and we applied the model to three drug targets. We came out with several promising candidates,” says Wang. “We did experimental validation with those compounds, and for two of them, we identified a very promising drug lead. Those compounds were beyond normal human intuition. That’s the power of generative AI.”

AI isn't being positioned to replace pharmacists. Rather, AI is becoming a valuable collaborator.

Ensuring Safety in the ICU

One of AI’s key benefits is speed, and there are few places where speed matters more than in the intensive care unit (ICU).

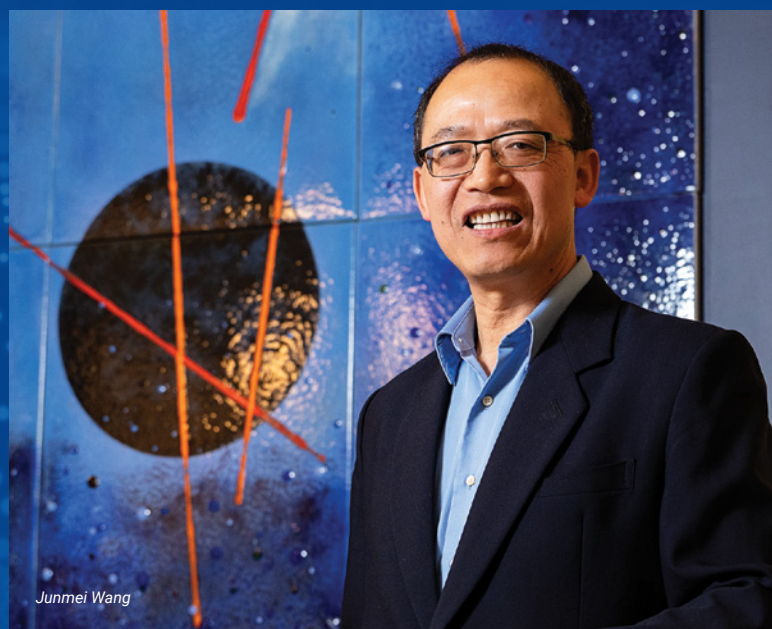
Sandra Kane-Gill, professor of pharmacy and therapeutics at Pitt Pharmacy and critical care medication safety pharmacist at UPMC, knows this firsthand.

She says that working in the ICU is an exercise in focus and flow, with constant beeping from monitors, health care professionals rushing between rooms, and patients dependent on life-supporting machinery and medications.

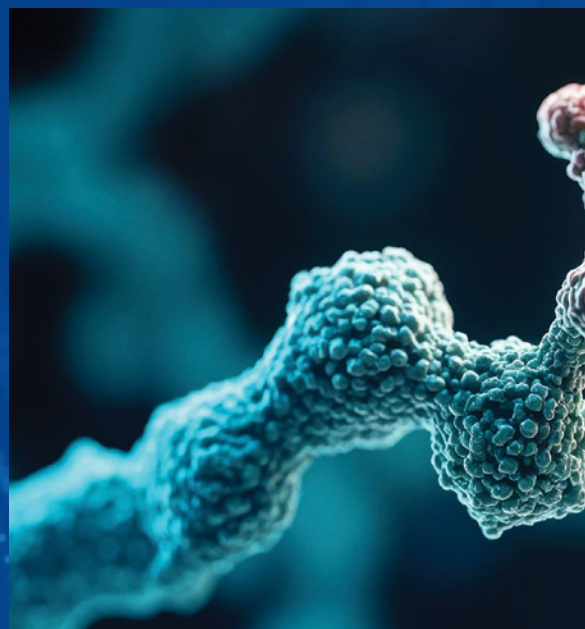
“This just feels like an intense environment, and that’s why I describe it as this place in the hospital where everything is at its maximum. The patients are more severely ill, and the treatment is more aggressive,” says Kane-Gill.

“Patients receive maybe 20 medications a day, so you can see why an error in the ICU can also result in consequences that are harder and faster than other areas in the hospital.”

Kane-Gill develops AI tools that can provide an extra layer of monitoring in the ICU and general wards, rapidly analyzing patient data to detect issues like sepsis or kidney damage more quickly.



Junmei Wang



"Patients in the ICU, individual patients, generate around 1,500 to 2,000 new data points per day," she explains. "So, if a clinician is caring for a 24-bed intensive care unit, you can imagine that's about 50,000 new data points. AI can be used to help process this information, to look for trends in data from different tests the patient undergoes, information from laboratory results and drugs, and combine all this together to point to a signal or point to an issue that may be arising for the clinician to evaluate."

Kane-Gill puts these data to use in one National Institutes of Health-funded project called Multi-hospital Electronic Decision Support for Drug-associated Acute Kidney Injury (MEnD-AKI), an AI-based early warning system designed to detect D-AKI risk in ICU patients so health care providers can intervene. The system assesses more than 200 variables to identify patients at risk of developing AKI in the next 48 hours. When it determines a risk, an alert is sent to a pharmacist who reviews the alert for accuracy and makes relevant recommendations to the health care team.

The innovation falls short of perfection, however—something Kane-Gill thoroughly understands.

"Our machine-learning algorithm is very good at identifying someone who's at risk for developing acute kidney injury," says Kane-Gill. "I thought we were just

going to put it in place, into this perfect clinical decision support system and identify patients, and it wasn't going to be a problem. Then the reality set in."

The way that data are organized can change how an algorithm interprets the information, leading to unexpected—and sometimes inaccurate—results. Even though the model worked well, in a clinical environment, the data it uses get a bit less clean and consistent. For example, patient medical histories may not all follow the same format, so the data are not exactly where the AI anticipates them to be.

As a result, even though the MEnD-AKI alert outperformed other passive alert systems, around 75% of the alerts MEnD-AKI produced in a clinical setting weren't actionable. That gap could make clinicians more likely to disregard the alerts over time.

"How do we close that gap and make that 75% smaller? We worked on that quite a bit during the MEnD-AKI project, but it required a deep investigation into why they were nonactionable," says Kane-Gill. "How do we develop a system around it? It's really about appreciating why those alerts occur that aren't actionable to find a solution, and we did, so by the end of the study there was a significant reduction in nonactionable alerts."

Future versions may narrow the focus to medication recommendations and fine-tune alerts through Bayesian modeling—a

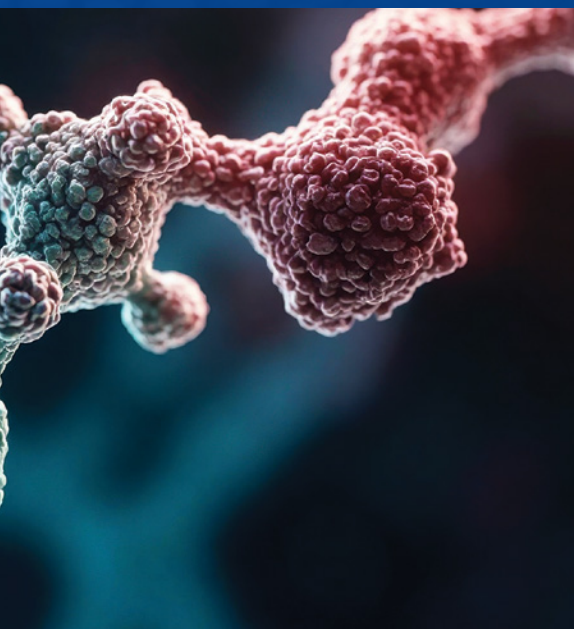
statistical model that weighs probability—to hopefully produce more actionable alerts. The work reminds Kane-Gill of the current limitations of AI, and the importance of its careful application.

"Trust is probably the number one reason why people are not using AI in clinical practice, and it makes sense," she says. "A relationship between two humans is built around trust, transparency and consistency, and you expect the same between a human and technology. If you're going to put an AI system into a workflow, it needs to be seamless. You need to engage those end users about what the AI is doing, about how to put it into the workflow that's advantageous to them. Explainability is not just nice; it's really necessary."

Kane-Gill says that for these tools to be effectively adopted, clinicians must be able to easily see and understand what triggered the alert. While they provide an extra layer of monitoring in a high-stakes environment, clinical tools, Kane-Gill believes, will always require good clinical judgment.

"We shouldn't be afraid of technology, but we should learn about how it can help us, and its limitations."

— Christine Ruby-Scelsi



Da Yang

Teaching Future Pharmacists to Question the Algorithm

As the next generation of clinicians get familiar with AI being a part of the team, there's a concern about "de-skilling," or a loss of fundamental skills in clinicians who come to rely more on AI partners. At Pitt, responses to this concern are part of students' pharmaceutical education.

Wang emphasizes to the students in his lab that AI-based models are just a starting place, and intensive validation is required before a new drug candidate can be proposed for clinical trials.

"I encourage my students to efficiently use AI; they must know how to use it, but this is only the first step," he says. "The second step is knowing how it works and knowing the limitations of the tools."

These uses—and limitations—of AI are being demonstrated in the classroom. Christine Ruby-Scelsi, assistant professor of pharmacy and therapeutics, introduced an assignment in her neuropsychiatry course that asks third-year pharmacy students to review a complex patient case and make a recommendation. The second part of the assignment, however, made some students a bit squeamish. They had to repeat the assignment using the generative AI tool of their choice, like ChatGPT, Claude or Google Gemini. They then compared the two, identifying what they had missed and what the AI missed.

"I think the discussion ended up being very rich, especially in this first examination of it, because the students were surprised at some of the differences that were elucidated from the tool and the differences between the tools," says Ruby-Scelsi. "Interestingly, all six members of one group got different responses, even though they were working simultaneously and using the same tool. They were able to bring that to light in the classroom discussion."

Kane-Gill gives her students a similar assignment. Going a step further, she has developed some cases that are designed to trick the AI into providing a wrong assessment. For example, the case may include a very low vitamin D level as a red herring for the AI when the actual issue is an underlying infection that would become clear upon closer reading.

"That comparison allows us to see some of the deficits, but also some of the benefits," she says. "As much as we're teaching students how to use it responsibly, we also want to point out that this overreliance can result in bad decisions as well."

Ruby-Scelsi and Kane-Gill both hope they can show students that while these tools can be helpful, good clinical judgment, foundational skills and human empathy are still essential.

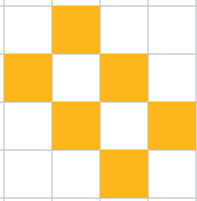
"My advice is to make sure you have that foundational skill set because if you're using AI as a tool, you can see when the AI is pointing you in the wrong direction," says Kane-Gill. "There's a lot to be said for an experienced clinician who has a gut feeling that something else is going on with the patient, even when all data is pointing them down a different path. That comes from experience and skill."

For pharmacists, providing good patient care is about more than recommending or dispensing a medication; it's also about considering drug availability and affordability, ensuring a patient knows how to take a medication, and counseling patients about side effect risks and other concerns.

That human connection, Ruby-Scelsi tells her students, isn't going anywhere. Ideally, AI can make those relationships more possible than ever by freeing up time and resources.

"Especially with very complex diagnoses or delicate situations, the pharmacist's empathy and emotional intelligence when speaking to patients about their medications could never be replaced by an artificial intelligence," says Ruby-Scelsi. "We shouldn't be afraid of technology, but we should learn about how it can help us, and its limitations. And we should be confident that it's not going to replace that human touch that's still so key in patient care." ■





CARE CONNECTIONS

For alumna and Assistant Professor of Pharmacy and Therapeutics Maria Felton Lowry, palliative care isn't about the end of life; it's about helping her patients live and her students make an impact.

Written by Maggie Lindenberg

When Maria Felton Lowry was a student at the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy, a friend told her she was interested in pursuing palliative care. Lowry was aware of the medical specialty focused on easing the symptoms and stress of serious illness, but it wasn't an area in which she ever imagined herself working.

"I literally said to my friend, 'Oh, absolutely not,'" Lowry recalls. "That has to be so sad."

Sadness wasn't at all what Lowry had in mind when she came to pharmacy school. She was looking for a career through which she could build meaningful relationships, earn trust and show up for people in need. As a young girl, she had watched her best friend's father behind the counter of his pharmacy, which served most of their small town in Somerset County, Pennsylvania.

"I really looked up to him," says Lowry. "When I would go into the pharmacy, I saw the relationships that he had formed with everyone in the community.

"It seemed like everyone knew who he was, and he knew who everyone else was. And I thought, 'Wow, how awesome is that, to be someone who the community leans on and trusts for medical information and to build those relationships?'"

When it came time to go to college, Lowry was drawn to Pitt Pharmacy for its prestige and for the experiential learning and community involvement opportunities central to the school. What she ultimately found at Pitt, however, was more than a top-tier education. She also found a path toward her calling.

Today, Lowry is helping her students find their own paths while forging transformative connections with patients when they need it most.

Whole-Person Care

As a Pitt Pharmacy student, Lowry dove into her advanced full-time rotations and other hands-on experiences. As she became more familiar with pharmaceutical work, she discovered that she felt most at home working with older adults in a clinical setting.

"I loved hearing their stories; I liked getting to know them as people, not just as a list of meds that they were taking," she says.

After graduation, Lowry completed a residency in geriatrics at UPMC St. Margaret. The combination of relationship-building, an older adult patient population and direct patient-facing opportunities made her reconsider her first impressions of palliative care.

"I was able to see the impact firsthand that pharmacists can make in the palliative care space, and my horizons were broadened," she says. "I thought it would all be death and dying, but it's really not. It's really about how patients live that we talk about most."

Fifteen years later, Lowry is a palliative care clinical pharmacist, an assistant professor of pharmacy and therapeutics at Pitt Pharmacy, and the clinical director of pharmacy services for UPMC Palliative and Supportive Institute. She hopes to help change the common misconceptions that deter early-career pharmacists from discovering palliative care.

"Palliative care is a philosophy of care that focuses on prioritizing comfort and goal-concordant care for patients with serious illness, and that's any serious illness, from cancer to kidney disease to dementia, and at any stage," says Lowry. "We can walk alongside the patient and the rest of the health care team to make sure that the patient's goals are heard and valued throughout their treatment plan."



The specialty turned out to be a perfect blend for Lowry—clinical care combined with the opportunity to be a person patients can count on. After all, it was the desire to show up for her patients that drew Lowry to pharmacy in the first place.

Working alongside physicians, nurses, social workers and other specialists, palliative care pharmacists review medications, deprescribe unnecessary or redundant drugs, and manage symptoms like pain and nausea that accompany serious illness and its treatment. But they do more than manage medications; they also help patients navigate some of the hardest decisions of their lives. That may look like making sure a patient with cancer receives pain medications that enable them to get through their next cancer treatment. It also may mean managing symptoms for patients who decide they want to stop treatment, so they can continue to do things that are important to them.

One of Lowry's more memorable patients, an older gentleman with end-stage cancer, spent more than 40 years working in a mill and was used to being the one others could depend on. During his illness, however, he needed to depend on others instead.

"This loss of identity was something he was grieving in addition to his physical symptoms, so while I helped adjust his pain medication, I also advocated for our social worker to spend time with him, to allow him to process his grief of what he is no longer able to do," recalls

Lowry. "Alongside our social worker, we provided support to not only address his physical symptoms but his psychological well-being, too."

For Lowry, this work offered something she had been looking for: the chance to show up, listen to the patient, make a recommendation and see the impact by the next morning.

"I was so happy to see that her pain had improved, but she noted that my impact reached far beyond the medication. Even as a pharmacist, it's not just about medication—it's truly about getting to know your patients, what they value and what is important to them to take care of the whole person."

"Having that impact was groundbreaking for me," she says.

Lowry recalls another patient, a young woman with cancer at UPMC Shadyside, who was in the fetal position with her eyes closed from pain when they first met.

She was already using IV medications to manage the pain, but even high doses were not providing relief.

"I crouched next to her to hold her hand and asked where her favorite place was. She told me it was at the beach with her son," Lowry says. "We did some guided imagery to take her to her 'happiest' place. Once I left the room, I recommended that we start a ketamine infusion to assist with her physical and existential pain."

In the following days, when Lowry saw her again, the patient was up and walking around the room.

"I was so happy to see that her pain had improved, but she noted that my impact reached far beyond the medication," she says. "Even as a pharmacist, it's not just about medication—it's truly about getting to know your patients, what they value and what is important to them to take care of the whole person."



Direct Impacts

After her residency, Lowry took a position at a hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, as a palliative care clinical pharmacist on an inpatient consult service. The role put her at patients' bedsides—day after day, conversation after conversation—where she could build relationships, make medication recommendations and see the results.

Yet, after a few years, she felt a pull toward something more.

"I think the piece that was missing was teaching. I always loved teaching, and so I knew that at some point I would love to pursue a faculty role," she says. "That's what brought me back to Pittsburgh: the ability to have a faculty appointment and teach pharmacy students and other interprofessional learners while practicing as a palliative care pharmacist."

Returning to Pitt wasn't just the right move for Lowry. Her students benefited, too. Within the first three years of her Pitt Pharmacy teaching career, she won two separate awards for her work with her students: the Tara E. Cook Memorial Teaching Award, presented by UPMC Section of Palliative Care and Medical Ethics, and a Scott R. Drab Faculty APPE Preceptor of the Year Award, given in honor of the late Pitt Pharmacy faculty member Scott Drab.

"Those awards made me realize the things you say really do matter, and how you show up for not only our patients but also our learners really does matter. I keep that at the forefront of my mind when I teach in the classroom, and whenever I have students on rotation or I'm in the clinical space—showing up matters," says Lowry.

"It's humbling. It makes me feel like I'm in the right place."

Today, Lowry balances her clinical work with teaching and mentorship. As a palliative care clinical pharmacist with UPMC, she continues building relationships with patients and has a frontline role in helping them navigate their treatment plan. As an assistant professor, Lowry initiated a course on palliative care pharmacotherapy and codirects a geriatrics and palliative care area of concentration that shows students firsthand how palliative care has the potential to change lives.

"That's what brought me back to Pittsburgh: the ability to have a faculty appointment and teach pharmacy students and other interprofessional learners while practicing as a palliative care pharmacist."

She also brings her students into her research, which focuses on this philosophy of care.

One of her investigations, for example, looks at the role pharmacists can play in the transition from hospital to home care. Published in the *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, Lowry's research suggests that contact with the pharmacist led to decreased short-term hospital readmissions. Another, published in the *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, quantified the reduction of opioid use through a pharmacist-led opioid tapering program for patients whose cancer was in remission to reduce the risks of long-term opioid therapy in this population.

Both have direct impacts on patient care and showcase the pharmacist's crucial role on the team.

Lowry says that clinical care will always be her central focus, but she suspects that teaching may be where her impact lasts the longest.

"Would I love it if every learner came to me saying, 'I want to be a palliative care pharmacist'? Well, yeah, of course," she laughs. "I know that's not the reality, though, and so I hope my legacy in terms of how students view me is open, welcoming and supportive to help them reach their goals, whatever they are."

"I hope I'm viewed as a collaborator and someone helping to drive education about palliative care forward so that others—pharmacists and beyond—have a better understanding of what palliative care is and how they can utilize the related knowledge and skills in whatever they end up doing to best serve our patients across the continuum of care." ■

ALUMNI UPDATES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PITT PHARMACY ALUMNI COMMUNITY



Congratulations to alumni **Martha Ndung'u** (PHARM '17) and **Joseph Napora** (PHARM '14) on being named among this year's Scott R. Drab Faculty APPE Preceptor of the Year award.

The awards are nominated and presented by student pharmacists to recognize outstanding teaching contributions during the introductory and advanced experiential learning portions of the professional curriculum.



Zhangyi Luo (PHARM '24) was invited to speak at the Office of the Senior Vice Chancellor for the Health Sciences' inaugural lightning talk presentations of high-impact health sciences

papers of 2024. His presentation, "Inhibition of iRhomb1 by CD44-Targeting Nanocarrier for Improved Cancer Immunotherapy," represented research he completed at Pitt under the guidance of Song Li, the David and Betty Brennenman Professor.



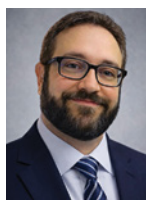
Margie Snyder (PHARM '06) published an article titled "Research and Scholarly Methods: Mixed Methods Studies" in the Journal of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy.

She is a professor of pharmacy practice and codirector of Community Pharmacy Programs at Purdue University.



The National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) promoted **Kayla McFeely** (PHARM '15) to senior vice president, health and wellness

strategy and policy—a recognition of nine years of work that has taken her from executive fellow at the NACDS Foundation to senior leadership at NACDS. She will lead NACDS' health and wellness strategy and policy agenda, with a focus on expanding access to care and building the systems and technologies needed to sustainably scale pharmacy-based health care services across communities.



Alfred Adam L'Altrelle (PHARM '06) was recently named the inaugural chief pharmacy officer for Memorial Medical Center in Las Cruces,

New Mexico. He brings a wealth of experience in clinical pharmacy, operations, regulatory compliance and innovative practice models, with specialized expertise in sterile compounding oversight, antimicrobial stewardship, pharmacoeconomics, investigational drug services, and pharmacy technology and informatics.



Welcome to the family! Alumna **Zoe Vaughn** (PHARM '23) and her husband welcomed their first child in September 2025.



Alumna and Pitt Pharmacy Assistant Professor **Sophia Herbert** (PHARM '19) and her husband also welcomed their first child, born in December 2025.

Congratulations to all!

SPREAD THE WORD

Changed jobs? New baby?
Recent publication?
We want to hear all about it!

Share your latest news—
professional and personal—
with the alumni community
via Pitt Pharmacy magazine at
pharmacy.pitt.edu/news/request.

IN MEMORIAM

MICHAEL ALAN ZEMAITIS, 1946-2026

In 2013, as the nation's opioid crisis worsened and overdose deaths continued to rise, Michael Zemaitis was hard at work. A researcher and professor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy, he focused on ways pharmacists could make a positive impact. By 2015, he had helped establish a prescription drug monitoring program in Pennsylvania designed to reduce drug abuse and became instrumental in efforts to ensure that community pharmacies and other locations had access to the narcotic antidote naloxone. More than a decade later, these programs continue to save lives.

His work to reduce the human toll of drug abuse was just one example of an unerring commitment to others Zemaitis demonstrated throughout his 50-year career at Pitt Pharmacy.

The professor emeritus died peacefully at home on March 28, 2026. He is remembered as a curious researcher, dedicated mentor and teacher, and beloved colleague and friend.

Michael Zemaitis ('68) was born in York, Pennsylvania, and received a BS in pharmacy from Pitt before earning a PhD in pharmacology from Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine. He returned to Pitt, where he would remain, serving in several influential roles, including vice chair for education in the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences from 1996 to 2002 and interim chair for two years. Over the decades, he developed new courses and teaching methods across Pitt Health Sciences and served as an active member of several scientific societies.

"His research focused on the genetic and environmental factors influencing hepatic drug metabolism, with significant contributions to analytical methodologies, including the development of assays for drugs, metabolites and endogenous compounds," Kellie Mitchell, Zemaitis' longtime colleague and Pitt Pharmacy's executive director of strategic initiatives, recently told the University Times. "He established a mass spectrometry laboratory within the school, advancing drug analysis and the study of medicinal plant constituents."

He was also involved in several pharmacy-related policy issues. In addition to his responses to the opioid epidemic, Zemaitis worked closely with Chancellor Emeritus Mark Nordenberg and others on the



Michael Zemaitis

"Continuum of Care" publication and program that addresses the many needs of those experiencing homelessness.

Perhaps his biggest impact area was in the classroom, however. He taught generations of pharmacists with his signature wit. He was known as an engaging instructor and a supportive colleague, happy to work across disciplines and eager to integrate novel technologies and teaching techniques for the benefit of his students.

"Dr. Zemaitis made an impact on every student and colleague that he interacted with, especially for those of us lucky to have been both," says Pitt Pharmacy Dean Amy L. Seybert. "I remember sitting in his class, impressed with his intelligence, worried about what would be on the test and still laughing at his witty comments. As his colleague, we attended a national workshop where several faculty members served as a team to enhance our educational programs. He always brought great, practical ideas while bringing the humor that only he could provide."

"He made a difference every day," she continues, "and his legacy will continue at Pitt Pharmacy, where he will be greatly missed."

Zemaitis is survived by his wife, Ginny, four children, 10 grandchildren, and countless friends and colleagues. ■

The following members of the Pitt Pharmacy community have recently passed away:

John L. Letizia (PHARM '56) • **Laurence D Sykes** (PHARM '59) • **Paul Q. Herwick** (PHARM '60)

Ray E. Burhenn (PHARM '63) • **James P. Mastrian** (PHARM '65) • **Clyde L. Cressler** (PHARM '69)

SAY IT IN SIX

LAST SPRING, WE ASKED THE CLASS OF 2026 TO DESCRIBE THEIR PITT EXPERIENCE IN SIX WORDS OR LESS. THOUGH BRIEF, THEIR ANSWERS SPEAK VOLUMES ABOUT PITT PHARMACY.

**"Surrounded by friends,
fueled by espresso."**

—Antonia Canciello

**"Most rewarding
learning experience."**

—Jacob Shaji

**"Great memories with
better people!"**

—Collin Brown

**"Meaningful friendships;
endless opportunities to
grow."**

—Makenna Cartwright

**"Learning, growing and
forever grateful. H2P!"**

—Mira Farah

**"Challenging, transformative
and worth every moment!"**

—Elizabeth Iwasyk

**"Use as needed:
stress, coffee, smiles."**

—Shree Kambhampati

**"Six years of opportunities
and memories."**

—Ann Kozak

**"Hard work, heart
and community."**

—Kiran Barik

**"Learned fast, struggled,
grew, succeeded."**

—Mason Laudermilch

**"Learning, growing and
realizing new dreams."**

—Katherine Lowell

**"Where I discovered
my purpose."**

—Anna Mathias

**"Future pharmacist, Pittsburgh
trained, leader developed."**

—Larbi Gyampoh

**"Fast-paced, collaborative,
patient-focused learning."**

—Isaac May

**"Transformative growth,
lifelong friendships,
relentless pursuit."**

—Mai McWilliams

"Found a second home."

—Krishi Akenapalli

**"Built friendships, career
and confidence."**

—Abigail Bakus

**"A well-rounded,
life-changing whirlwind."**

—Colin Schurek

"Eat, sleep, study, H2P, repeat."

—Erin Austin

**"Quiet growth, steady
steps, becoming myself."**

—LinXinTian (Susan) Zhang

**"The start of
something bigger."**

—Gabby Sommers

How would you describe your Pitt
experience in 6 words or less?

Share yours with us by emailing Associate
Director of Alumni Relations Halle Angelo at
halleangelo@pitt.edu.



**The Pitt Pharmacy family
wants to hear about
your achievements and
promotions. We want to
share with alumni, faculty,
staff, and students. Send us
your news and keep in touch.**

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The Class of 2027 celebrates at the "P3 Send-Off Celebration" on the last day of class before a year of advanced pharmacy practice experiences (a.k.a. "rotations") started.