



COURTESY DROPLET BIOSCIENCES

SURGICAL FLUID MAY BE KEY TO FUTURE CARE

After a tumor is removed, surgical drains clear fluid from the healing area. That fluid usually ends up in the trash—but Pitt’s José Zevallos believes that it could be lifesaving.

A new company called Droplet Biosciences, which is co-led by Zevallos, has been developing kits to test the lymphatic fluid from surgical drains and characterize cancer to direct precise post-surgery treatments for patients.

“It was a simple idea,” says Zevallos, an MD, the Eugene N. Myers Professor of Otolaryngology and chair of that department at Pitt since August 2022. The lymph from these draining surgical sites provides “a window into the body’s physiology that had never been looked through before, and [the lymph] has the tumor’s

immunology,” he says, including what’s “contributing to treatment response and tumor aggressivity.”

These insights launched Zevallos into the entrepreneurial world, where he met Stan Lapidus, founder of Exact Sciences and inventor of Cologuard, a kit that uses DNA in stool to screen for colon cancer. Weekly meetings between Zevallos and Lapidus expanded to include Adel Chaudhuri of Washington University in St. Louis and business expert Theresa Tribble. The four founded Droplet in 2021.

This year the company received an \$8 million investment led by the Engine, an MIT-backed capital incubator, to establish proof of concept for the technology. —*Phoebe Ingraham Renda*

Top honors



Königshoff

Melanie Königshoff, an MD, PhD, and Matthew Neal, an MD, are newly elected members of the American Society for Clinical Investigation (ASCI). They are among 100 members elected in 2023 to one of the most esteemed honor societies of physician-scientists.

Königshoff, professor of medicine, focuses her research on deciphering the mechanisms involved in lung repair and regeneration to identify novel therapeutic targets for age-related chronic lung diseases, such as idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

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Congratulations also go to these ASCI Young Physician-Scientist Awardees, who are assistant professors of medicine: **Cary Boyd-Shiwarski**, an MD, PhD, and **Mark E. Snyder**, an MD. **Utibe R. Essien**, an MD, MPH who recently moved from Pitt to UCLA, also received the award. **Richard P. Ramonell**, an MD assistant professor of medicine, was named an **ASCI Emerging-Generation Awardee.**

Four Pitt Med faculty members have been inducted into the Association of American Physicians (AAP), an honorary society for physicians with outstanding credentials in basic or translational biomedical research.

Stephen Chan, an MD, PhD and Vitalant Professor of Vascular Medicine, is director of the Vascular Medicine Institute. Chan’s research uses bioinformatics and experimental reagents to accelerate translational discovery in pulmonary hypertension. He is also leading a research team exploring cardiovascular links to dementia and a treatment for jet lag.

Pamela Moalli, an MD, PhD professor of obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive sciences and of bioengineering, is director of the Division of Urogynecology and Reconstructive Pelvic Surgery. She leads a team that won the

\$1 million Magee Prize sponsored by the Richard King Mellon Foundation. Moalli’s group focuses on the development of biomimetic biomaterials to improve outcomes of gynecologic surgery for girls and women.

Page Pennell, an MD, the Henry B. Higman Professor of Neurology and chair of that department, came to Pitt from Harvard University in 2021. She researches maternal health and fetal outcomes of women with epilepsy, anti-seizure medication use during pregnancy and the effects of neuroactive steroids on seizure provocation.

Mary Phillips is an MD/MD (Cantab), the Pittsburgh Foundation-Emmerling Professor in Psychotic Disorders, Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry, and a professor of clinical and translational science and bioengineering. She directs the Center for Research on Translational and Developmental Affective Neuroscience. Her research uses neuroimaging techniques to explain abnormalities in circuits of the human brain associated with major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder. —*Michael Aubele*



Chan



Moalli



Pennell



Phillips