



CLASS NOTES

'70s

In a career that has spanned more than four decades, **Joseph Briggman** (Human Anatomy and Cell Biology PhD '78) has invented multiple patent-protected methods for the detection and treatment of cancer, especially carcinomas, urinary, bladder and prostate cancer. In his years of human anatomy and cell biology research, he's made numerous contributions to the discovery of novel cancer biomarkers. Among his honors, he was the Boehringer Ingelheim Visiting Professor at the University of Heidelberg and four other German universities in the 1990s. Today, he is a biotechnology commercialization consultant in the Boston area.

'80s

With clinical and research interests that focus on hand conditions (arthritis, tendinitis, nerve compression, tumors), hand injuries, congenital hand anomalies and complex hand and extremity reconstruction, **Gene Deune** (MD '89) says he finds particular enjoyment in working with children: "The reconstruction you do of their fingers/hands will change the quality of their life by making their hands more functional," he told a reporter at the University of North Carolina, where he was on the faculty before becoming a professor of surgery at Boston University. Deune is on the editorial board for the Journal of

Orthoplastic Surgery, which serves the needs of surgeons from around the world whose primary focus is on limb salvage and reconstruction.

'90s

Yolonda Colson (Immunology PhD '89, Surgery Resident '98) is already recognized for an outstanding body of research, having been the recipient of numerous grants from the National



Colson

Institutes of Health (NIH), notably the National Cancer Institute. And now Colson—chief of thoracic surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital and professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School—will become the first woman to be president of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery, an international organization whose members are renowned for their contributions to the care and treatment of cardiothoracic disease.

'00s

About 37 million U.S. adults have chronic kidney disease (CKD) and many of them spend

hours a week in medical settings, whether receiving dialysis, attending check-ups or recovering from surgery. Improving their quality of life is the focal point of the research by **Khaled Abdel-Kader** (Internal Medicine Resident '05, Nephrology Fellow '08, MS '09). Abdel-Kader, an assistant professor of medicine at Vanderbilt University, is one of two principal investigators leading the NIH-funded Kidney Coordinated Health Management Partnership study, which examines whether an electronic health record-based population health management approach can improve care for CKD patients—especially in primary care settings.

The career of **J. Nadine Gracia** (MD '02, Pediatrics Resident '05) has spanned the White House to the C-suite. She served in the Obama Administration as a White House fellow, the deputy assistant secretary for minority health and director of the Office of Minority Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—where she provided leadership on the Affordable Care Act and advised First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move initiative. Today, she is president and CEO of Trust for America's Health, a nonpartisan public health policy, research and advocacy organization. In her leadership role, Gracia works to advance policies that promote optimal health and advance health equity.



Gracia

"Believing in and advocating for my residents" is what **Julie B. McCausland**

(Outcomes Research Fellow '03) says is the heart of her educational career. With that approach, it's no surprise that McCausland—Pitt associate professor of emergency medicine and program director of the Transitional Year Residency—received the 2021 Parker J. Palmer Courage to Teach Award from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, which oversees the accreditation of residency and fellowship programs in the United States. "It has been my personal mission," says McCausland, "to offer a supportive first year where residents can become the best physician and person they can be."

Having specialized in bleeding disorders since 2005, **Adam Giermasz** (Internal Medicine Resident '08) stresses the importance of patients receiving routine care, following treatment plans, maintaining



McCausland

SPOTLIGHT

a healthy lifestyle and learning how to lower the risk of complications. Giermasz codirects the Hemophilia Treatment Center at the University of California Davis. Among his career honors is a Top 10 Clinical Research Achievement Award for his coauthored “Hemophilia B Gene Therapy,” published in 2019 in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

'10s **Cyrus Raji** (MD, PhD '10), an assistant professor of radiology at Washington University in St. Louis, has long been interested

in brain health. COVID-19 gave his work another level of complexity. He recently coauthored a study exploring how anosmia, stroke, paralysis, cranial nerve deficits, encephalopathy, delirium, meningitis and seizures are some of the neurological complications in COVID-19 patients. He proposes a “NeuroCovid” classification scheme for the virus’s short- and long-term neurological consequences. In 2021, he received an NIH grant to further his studies of brain health. For his earlier work, he was recognized with the 2016 Radiological Society of North America’s Roentgen Research Award and a 2017 American Society of Neuroradiology Boerger award.

Pitt Med first spoke with **Jean-Claude Rwigema**

(MD '11) when he was a first-year medical student and somewhat new to America; he and his family were survivors of the Rwandan genocide. Eleven years later, Rwigema is on the vanguard of cancer treatment research—specifically focusing on proton therapies and their applications for treating head, neck and genitourinary cancers—as a consultant and associate professor of radiation oncology at Mayo Clinic Arizona. In 2007, he said he had a “responsibility to serve.” That commitment appears to be steadfast as he pursues this vital line of research.

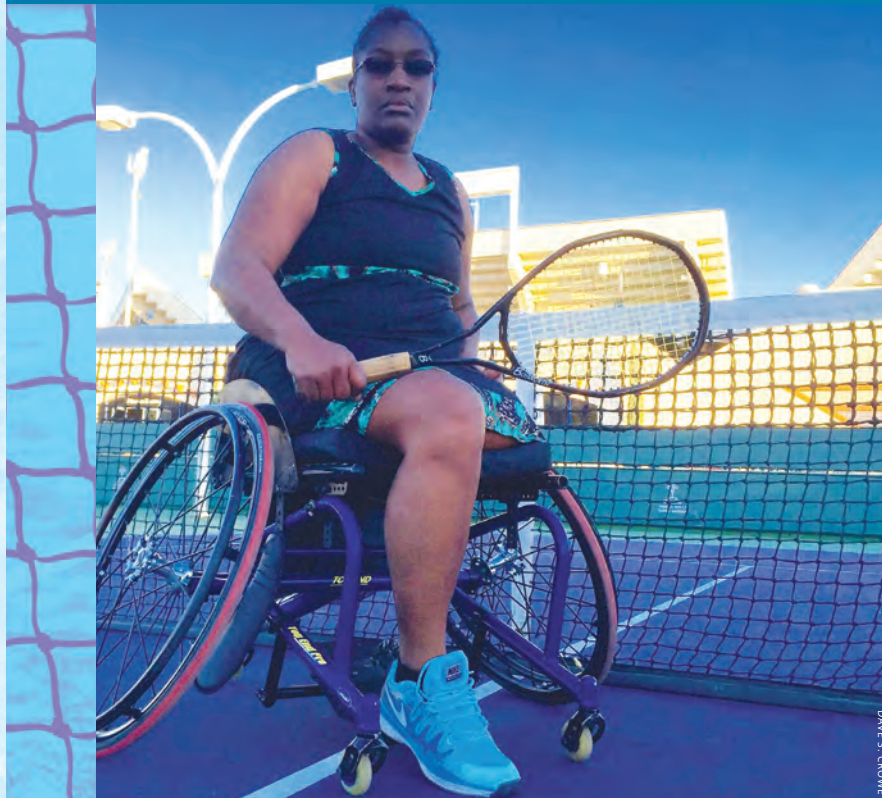
—Emily Liu and Rachel Mennies



Raji



Rwigema



DAVE S. CROWE

On Life and Practice: Lisa Maddox

When Lisa Maddox trained at the MedStar National Rehabilitation Hospital in Washington, D.C., they had a motto, “adding life to years,” she says. This is what her medical specialty—physical medicine and rehabilitation (or PM&R)—is all about. It’s not the injury, but how you live after it. “We make people’s quality of life better,” she says.

In 2006, Maddox (MD '95) came to know PM&R from the patient’s perspective, as well, when her leg was amputated after a years-long struggle with a condition known as complex regional pain syndrome.

“When your patients realize that you have something going on, too, it’s encouraging for them to see that their life isn’t gonna end,” she says.

Maddox herself is a lifelong athlete. She fell in love with wheelchair tennis—a few years ago, she was ranked first in a United States Tennis Association wheelchair tennis division.

Sometimes the way she talks about tennis sounds like instructions for living wisely: “We can’t move laterally in the chair.

“There are just some balls you’re not gonna get to. But that’s the same way in able-bodied tennis. And so you just practice; you practice, you play. Just like anybody else.”

Before med school, she attended the United States Military Academy West Point as part of the school’s ninth-ever class of women.

Maddox, former director of Augusta Polytrauma Network at the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center in her hometown of Augusta, Georgia, retired in 2019. As COVID restrictions have been lifting, she’s been thrilled to get back out there.

“I’m actually doing a lot of wheelchair curling now.” —Elaine Vitone