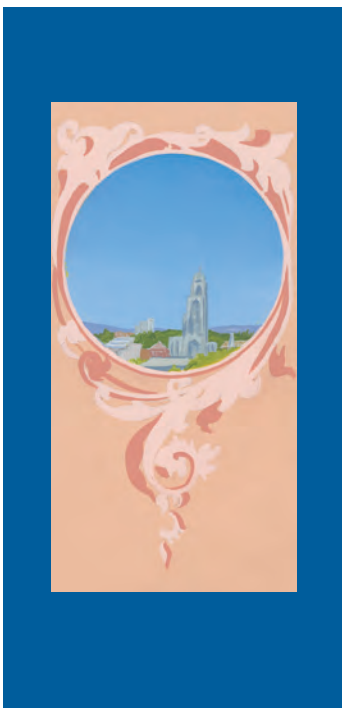


## OF NOTE

*Devoted to noteworthy happenings  
at the medical school*



GETTY IMAGES

## Placebos Shed Light on Parkinson's

In a memorable video, a man with the stooped posture, shuffling gait and hand tremors characteristic of Parkinson's gets on a bicycle. Somehow, he effortlessly pedals around a parking lot. As soon as he hops off the bike, however, the man's movement challenges reappear.

"This is an example of paradoxical kinesia," says Peter Strick, "or the remarkable return of apparently normal motor function that can occur for some Parkinson's patients under special circumstances, such as the ability to quickly respond to a fire alarm."

Strick is chair of neurobiology and scientific director of the Brain Institute at the University of Pittsburgh. He and his collaborators believe they may know why paradoxical kinesia happens.

"For some patients, placebos can be surprisingly effective in treating the movement disorders associated with the disease," says Strick, a PhD.

"We think there is brain circuitry that makes this possible, so we plan to define it and explore its potential impact on Parkinson's."

Strick is leading an expedition to explore this little-known brain region, which may point the way toward new therapies for Parkinson's disease. The inter-institutional team is funded over three years by a \$12 million Aligning Science Across Parkinson's (ASAP) initiative. ASAP's implementation partner, the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research, issued the grant.

Other Pitt PhD investigators include Robert Turner and William Stauffer, of neurobiology, and Helen Schwerdt, of bioengineering. They are joined by Scott Grafton, an MD, of the University of California Santa Barbara. —Anita Srikameswaran

## FOOTNOTE

**National Institutes of Health funding for faculty of Pitt's School of Medicine totaled more than \$476 million during federal fiscal year 2021. The entire University faculty garnered more than \$596 million from NIH. (That total does not include \$44 million in NIH WARP Speed funding subawarded to Pitt.)**