



## CLASS NOTES

### '90s

**Aaron C. Mason** (MD '94, Res '98, Res '05) was recently recruited by the University of Arizona as clinical associate professor and chief of the plastic surgery section in the division of surgical oncology. Previously, he had served as chief of pediatric plastic surgery at the Children's Hospital Colorado, the top-ranked, largest tertiary pediatric hospital for the eight states Mountain Region. He was honored as a 2020 inductee into the American Association of Plastic Surgeons. Prior to moving to Colorado, he established the first plastic surgery residency program in the state of West Virginia, which, at the time, had only around 20 operating plastic surgeons. "About 30% of residents will stay in the state where they trained," Mason explains. "So the best way to build a group of physician providers that will stay is to train them locally."



Mason

### '00s

**Gregory Bump** (MD '00) was recently promoted to professor of medicine at Pitt Med's Division of General Internal Medicine. In 2019, he became associate dean for Graduate Medical Education as well as the designated institutional official for all of UPMC's residency and fellowship training programs—overseeing more than

150 programs educating roughly 2,000 residents and fellows. "We have a lot to be proud of," Bump says. "Every year we graduate several hundred well rounded, outstanding doctors who provide great care to our patients." Bump has many fond memories of med school at Pitt, where he met his wife, **Marion Hughes** (MD '00), during a problem-based learning session early in their first year. Hughes is Pitt Med associate professor of radiology and otolaryngology as well as program director for the diagnostic radiology residency program.



Bump

**Frederick Anderson** (MD '01) took an interest in human rights advocacy early on in his medical career. He pursued this passion at Pitt Med, where he completed the Global Health and Underserved Populations area of concentration. He now serves as associate professor and medical director for the Department of Humanities, Health and Society at Florida International University's Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine. There, he oversees the clinical services of both his department and the NeighborhoodHELP program, which "focuses as a service learning program for inter-professional students," he says. Students from various disciplines come together to research and discuss social determinants of health while also providing medical care to underserved communities in the Miami area.



Anderson

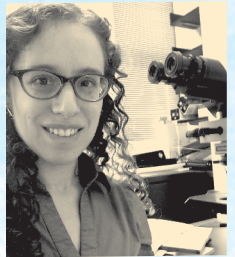
**Joshua Snyder** (PhD '09) is associate professor of surgery and of cell biology at Duke University. As a grad student at Pitt, he was drawn to understand "how cells communicate to the outside world." Today, Snyder's lab works with his cancer rainbow mice, or "crairbow mice," to understand the cellular behaviors of malignant tumors. The "rainbow" comes from fluorescent proteins found in ocean-floor-dwelling creatures engineered to light up mutations in mice; Snyder and his team retrieve the colors to trace "how mutations cause cells to mis-behave," he says. Findings from this research, Snyder hopes, will illuminate "which tumors are going to cause trouble" in patients; the approach could help cancer screening and treatments.



Snyder

### '10s

**Rebecca Leeman-Neill** (MD '10, PhD '10) is assistant professor of pathology and cell biology at Columbia University, where she researches molecular mechanisms of lymphomagenesis. Recently, she published on post-transplant plasmablastic lymphomas, rare tumors that can appear in patients who've recently received a donor organ. She has also been investigating how the B-cell genome changes throughout lymphomagenesis. "My hope," she says, "is that we will be able to prevent the transformation of low-grade lymphomas by understanding the changes that occur that allow them to transform into something more aggressive."



Leeman-Neill

As a Black woman and pediatric surgeon who is both an MD and PhD, **Natasha Corbitt** (PhD '11, MD '13), assistant professor of surgery at UT Southwestern Medical Center, is considered a pioneer. "When I learned that I was the first one, I really felt like it's important for young girls to know that, so then they can feel like they can do it too," Corbitt says. When she's not teaching, she splits her time between operations at Children's Medical Center Dallas and research on the causes of biliary atresia, a condition that is the number one reason that children require liver transplantations.



Corbitt



Primack

**Brian Primack** (PhD '11) founded Pitt's Center for Research on Media, Technology and Health in 2014. Last summer, Primack released "You Are What You Click: How Being Selective, Positive, and Creative Can Transform Your Social Media Experience" (Chronicle Prism 2021), a book largely based on work he conducted at Pitt

with Kar-Hai Chu (MS '19), Jason Colditz, César Escobar-Viera, Beth Hoffman, Ariel Shensa, Jaime Sidani and Michelle Woods. In 2019, he made a move to the University of Arkansas, where he is now dean of the College of Education and Health Professions. He was recently named dean of Oregon State University's College of Public Health and Human Sciences. He will start June 30, 2022.



Njoku

**Ihuoma Njoku** (MD '19), a third-year psychiatry resident at the University of Virginia's psychiatry and neurobehavioral sciences department, received the Leonard Tow Humanism and Excellence in Teaching Award from the Gold Foundation. She is serving as a Leadership Fellow for the American Psychiatric Association and a member of the AAMC's Organization of Resident Representatives. Njoku volunteers for the Charlottesville Free Clinic. "I like [having] the ability to give people the space to tell their stories," she says, "and I appreciate the ability to help them get closer to living their fullest life." Looking back on her fond Pitt memories, she's especially grateful to Chenits Pettigrew and Laura Jeannerette for their lessons in "resilience and self-compassion"; Allison Dekosky, Maria Guyette and Diego Gnecco-Chaves for "using the physician's voice for advocacy"; and Hader Mansour for "rolling with resistance when caring for patients."

—Rachel Mennies, Hope Reveche, Kari Villanueva and Elaine Vitone

## HISTORY MAKERS, GAME CHANGERS

### Black Surgeon Leaders

**Robert S.D. Higgins** (Res '90) blazed a trail at Johns Hopkins in 2017 when he was appointed the institution's first African American director of the Department of Surgery. He says achieving that success only made him work harder: "It challenged me to elevate my game and prove I belonged in an environment like this."

Higgins calls Pitt foundational for his success as a transplant surgeon.

Recently, he made a move to Boston. Higgins is the new president of Brigham and Women's Hospital and executive vice president of Mass General Brigham.

In September, **KMarie King**, (Res '05) became the first Black woman to chair a department of surgery at an academic U.S. health sciences center; she's at Albany Medical Center.

King, who was born in Jamaica and grew up in Brooklyn, says she knew at age 8 the career path she would follow. "I looked up at the sky and imagined myself as an astronomer." But the universe, she says, told her otherwise—that she would become a doctor.

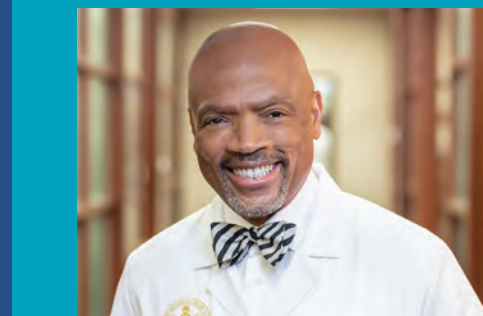
At Pitt Med, says King, "What I really learned was what teamwork really looked like in medicine. That became a key to my success."

**Henri Ford** (Fel '89, '93), dean of the University of Miami Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine, says the most significant moment in his career came in 2015, when he led a team that successfully separated conjoined twin girls in Ford's native Haiti. He still keeps in touch with the family. The girls "are doing dance, ballet and they sing," Ford says. "They are just a delight."

Ford calls his Pitt training with Richard Simmons "nothing short of phenomenal," adding, "Not only was he a role model, mentor and sponsor, he taught me how to think critically. The training I had in pediatric surgery was second to none."

Barbadian-born **Velma Scantlebury** (Fel '88), former associate director of Pitt's kidney transplant program, became the nation's first Black female transplant surgeon in 1989. After more than 2,000 transplant operations, she hung up her scrubs this year, retiring as director of the kidney transplant program at Christiana Care Transplant Program in Newark, Delaware.

**Ala Stanford** (Res '04), who trained in UPMC's general surgery residency, made a splash in June as a CNN Hero for founding the Black Doctors COVID-19 Consortium, a mobile COVID-19 testing and vaccination service committed to combatting the pandemic in the hardest-hit areas of Southeastern Pennsylvania. —Michael Aubele



It was an exciting year for surgeons who got their start at Pitt. Shown here—Higgins (top), King and Ford.