Hello, everyone!

Spring has arrived to Pittsburgh, and the Pitt Men's Study Spring Newsletter is here! We want to say thank you to everyone who was able to attend our 40th anniversary event. If you were not able to make it, we still have special 40th anniversary tote bags available in our office. A couple photos from the event are featured below.





Left, in order: Dr. Charles Rinaldo, Marc Wagner, and Ricardo Williams (representing Mayor Ed Gainey) presenting a proclamation honoring the 40th anniversary of the Pitt Men's Study. Right: Dr. Charles Rinaldo speaking at the 40th anniversary event.

Along with the event, our clinic coordinator Nat Soltesz and our principal investigator Dr. Charles Rinaldo were featured on an episode of the Microbe Matters podcast hosted by Tony Morrison. This podcast is a project of the Division of Infectious Diseases here at the University. In the episode, Nat and Dr. Rinaldo discuss the origins, history, and evolution of the Pitt Men's Study over the past 40 years. You can listen here: https://idpittstop.com/podcast/pittmensstudy

Inside this Edition:

Scientific updates from our partner investigators, information on visits and sub-studies, a letter from the clinic coordinator, and more!

Keep an eye out for our table at 2025 Pride events!

Reach Out!







This Newsletter is published by the Pitt Men's Study. All information and opinions are the sole responsibility of the study and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of the University of Pittsburgh or the National Institutes of Health.

This edition of the Pitt Men's Study Newsletter was edited by Evee Bak



To Our Participants

As many of you may know, the Pitt Men's Study, part of the MACS/WIHS Combined Cohort Study (MWCCS), is funded through federal grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Though recent federal government reforms have targeted NIH funding and staff, the MWCCS has not been affected by these changes.

Your participation continues to be of vital importance for us as our mission to study the natural history of HIV and AIDS continues. Please reach out to us if you have any questions or concerns.

We Need Your Participation, Especially if You're "Boring!"

Nathaniel Soltesz Clinic Coordinator, Pitt Men's Study

Recently we've heard from several participants who think that they aren't useful to the study anymore because they are older or because they are no longer sexually active. But nothing could be further from the truth!

The focus of the Pitt Men's Study (and by extension our parent study, the MACS/WIHS Combined Cohort Study) has shifted since the early days. A cure for HIV is still an important focus (see principal investigator Dr. Charles Rinaldo's article from the 40th anniversary newsletter for how we are currently researching a cure for HIV: http://bit.ly/4hsRmoF). But as our participants age, the study has increasingly explored the relationship between aging and HIV.



Research has shown that HIV-infected people bear the burden of aging-related diseases at a significantly higher proportion than non-infected individuals. That means conditions like heart disease, frailty, and neurocognitive decline are more pronounced in HIV-infected people than in the general population.

There are many aspects of your participation in PMS that provide researchers with useful data that may help in improving the quality of life for HIV-infected persons as they age. This is why we ask you to sit and stand up from a chair, grill you about how many times you've fallen in the last six months, and do those endless neurocognitive tests.

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We understand that it can get harder to drive into Oakland or walk to the clinic as you age. However, this is exactly when your participation becomes even more valuable! If you are physically unable to come into Oakland, or just need a break, we are happy to switch your appointments to phone calls. These remote interviews will still provide us with crucial information, even if we aren't getting your blood or doing a physical exam anymore.

So no, you don't become less valuable to the study as you get older, less sexually active, or more "boring." That's actually the time when, for us, you become more interesting! So please reach out if you don't currently have an appointment scheduled with us. We are always happy to listen to your concerns and do what we can to maintain your contributions to this important research.





Adam and Kelley in the PMS lab

A Look Inside the Lab!

Located on the 8th floor of Scaife Hall, the PMS Processing Lab is an essential link between the Pitt Men's Study and researchers around the country. The lab is run by Adam, the new lab manager, and Kelley, a lab technician, who consider themselves to be the librarians of the PMS research samples.

Their main responsibility is to take the samples we receive at the clinic (blood, saliva, urine) and turn them into something that researchers can work with. A portion of the samples received from each participant go into local and national bio-specimen repositories.

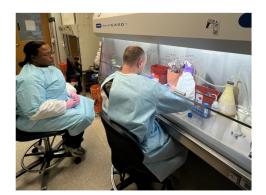
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These repositories are essentially freezers full of stored samples that can then be used in different research projects studying the effects of HIV. The local repository is housed just across the hall from the processing lab. It is home to blood samples from our participants dating back to when the Pitt Men's Study first began in the 1980's.

Adam recently took over as lab manager for Susan McQuiston, who retired after working in the lab for almost 30 years. They are all a part of a long line of scientists working to unravel the mysteries of HIV.

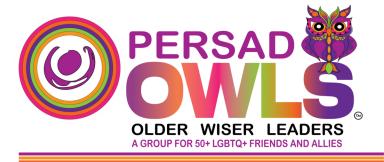






Left and center: Adam and Kelley in the PMS lab Right: The local repository for the PMS lab

Some Groups for LGBTQ+ Elders



JOIN US EVERY THURSDAY FROM 10AM - NOON FOR COFFEE AND CONVERSATION FOR MORE INFO CONTACT JBLATZ@PERSADCENTER.ORG

Persad OWLS is a SAGE Collab Partner group for LGBTQ+ persons ages 50+. The OWLS gather weekly on Thursdays from 10am-12pm at Persad Center, 5301 Butler Street. This COFFEE & CONVERSATION time offers free coffee and donuts in a casual, comfortable, and safe atmosphere. Open conversation is the usual format with occasional lunches and special presentations on relevant topics. Visits to local points of interest are sometimes offered as a group event.

For more info, email jblatz@persadcenter.org

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Pittsburgh PrimeTimers®

Fraternal organization for mature gay men to gather as a social community in a supportive environment

A chapter of PrimeTimers® Worldwide Email: pittsburgh_pt@yahoo.com



Website: https://pittsburghprimetimers.com

Pittsburgh PrimeTimers® (PPT) is a social group for gay and bisexual men. They provide opportunities to come together in a supportive atmosphere for social, educational, and recreational activities. They invite you to join them in a comfortable, non-political environment in which your identity is respected (you don't have to be "out"). PPT is a friendly alternative to the bar scene.

Meet New Members of the PMS Team



A Pitt alum, John recently returned to the city to work with PMS. After graduating from Pitt in 2021, he completed his MPH in Epidemiology from Ohio State University and served as an Opioid Safety Coordinator with AmeriCorps in San Francisco. John can usually be found running through Pittsburgh's parks, exploring local restaurants, or doing yoga.



Tauseef studied drug use (academically, he swears) at Duke, mashing up neuroscience and literature in a self-designed major. He recently wrapped up a Master of Philosophy in Anthropology at Cambridge, researching psychedelic churches in San Francisco. Committed to being in service to queer communities, he studies how people cultivate solidarity in social and political margins, where care often takes surprising forms in unexpected places. He enjoys horror films, Frank Ocean, short walks far from large bodies of water, and medium-spicy food.



Lillie is currently a Master's of Public Health student at the University of Pittsburgh, focusing on Microbiology and Infectious Disease. Originally from Indiana, she most recently lived in Knoxville, TN, where she served with AmeriCorps VISTA before relocating to Pittsburgh. In her free time, she enjoys bowling, playing video games, and spending time with her cat, Callie.

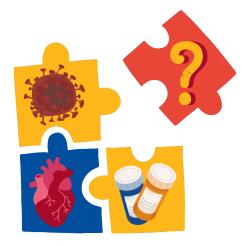


Studying The Link Between Heart Disease and HIV

Dr. Jared Magnani, MD
Associate Professor of Cardiology
University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine

Investigators in the Pitt Men's Study and others have shown that people with HIV are more likely to develop heart disease than those who do not have HIV. Many participants in the study have asked us why this is the case. We are learning that this is a big puzzle with several possible reasons. One possible reason reason may be that people with HIV live longer, and so "age into" having a diagnosis of a heart issue. Another reason may be that the inflammation triggered by HIV in the body may cause damage to the blood vessels, so that plaque builds up or there is damage to the vessel wall. Yet a third explanation is the side effects of medications that people take to suppress the virus.



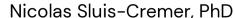


Investigators in the Pitt Men's Study recently participated in an investigation that may help us understand how HIV is associated with the immune system and with aging. We know that HIV affects the immune system by lowering the body's defense system. This recent study may tell us a little more about how HIV is associated with the aging of the immune system itself. Investigators used blood samples provided by Pitt Men's Study participants at multiple visits. The study team examined parts of the immune system, specifically the part that is responsible for the long-term response to illness that help the body fight infection and disease. These parts of the blood are called immunoglobulin, and immunoglobulin G (which we also call IgG) is the part that responds to long-term infections like HIV. The study team looked at the parts of the IgG in people with and without HIV. The findings are intriguing because we know that in older people the IgG tends to get less effective, and investigators used their knowledge of what happens to the IgG as people age. They determined that multiple parts of the IgG are altered in the setting of HIV. It is like HIV speeds up the clock, so that the IgG looks like what we see when people get older. What is interesting as well is that the study found that the alterations in IgG accumulate over time. That is, the longer we live with HIV, the more changes to the IgG that we may see happening.

Can this study help us understand as well the increased risk of heart disease in people with HIV? The investigators did not look at how IgG can affect the heart, but the information learned here may provide another piece of the puzzle.



How the Pitt Men's Study has Facilitated Understanding Immune Control and Disease Progression in People with HIV

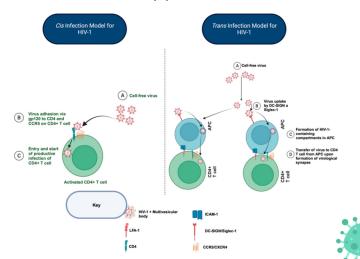


Professor of Medicine, Division of Infectious Diseases University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine



Some people living with HIV are able to control HIV disease progression for many years without antiretroviral therapy. These individuals, known as Non-Progressors (NPs), have properties within their immune systems that control the virus. NPs can help researchers understand how their immune systems control HIV disease. This knowledge is critical for developing new treatments and vaccines.

HIV can proliferate through both the release of cell-free virus particles (cis-infection) and by cell-to-cell transmission (trans-infection). There are many important advantages to trans-infection, including: (i) cell-to-cell transmission may protect HIV particles from the innate and adaptive immune defenses; (ii) HIV trans-infection is significantly more efficient than cell-free transmission; (iii) HIV trans-infection efficiently infects resting CD4+ T cells, which are inherently resistant to cis-infection; and (iv) HIV trans-infection largely insensitive inhibition to antiretroviral therapy.



HIV-1 Consequently, trans-infection to play thought а key role in pathogenesis of HIV infection. samples from the Pitt Men's Study, we reported that antigen presenting cells from NPs lack the capacity to HIV trans-infect CD4+ T cells, and that this phenotype is driven by altered cholesterol metabolism and decreased cellular and lipid rafting in the membranes of antigen presenting cells. We recently demonstrated lymphocytes are highly efficient at trans infecting naïve CD4+ T cells, an important reservoir of persistent HIV infection. In line with this finding, CD4+ TN cells from NPs do not harbor latent replication-competent HIV, likely due to inefficient APC-mediated trans infection which is linked to their altered cell cholesterol metabolism.



In broad terms, we propose that specific alterations to the expression of levels of genes within cholesterol distinct the metabolism pathway within presenting cells of NPs hold the key to addressing the problem of controlling HIV persistence and disease progression. Ongoing studies, that benefit tremendously from participants of the Pitt Men's Study, are focused on understanding how the cholesterol pathway functions in relation to immune signaling, effector function, and inflammation with a view to understanding how that pathway enables NPs to limit disease progression.

Types of Pitt Men's Study Visits

Everyone has 1 core and 1 short visit per year

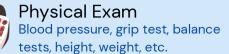
CORE VISIT

SHORT VISIT



Larger draw, around 200 ml







Blood Draw

Smaller draw, around 70 ml



Interview

Shorter interview: 20-30 min Self-administered survey done on the computer



Neuropsych Testing

Optional, done on the iPad Mental health survey: 15 min Cognitive tests (shorter version alternates every other year with longer version): 30 min - 1 hour



Payment

Interview + Blood Draw: \$80 Mental health survey: \$10 Longer neuropsych: \$30 Total: \$80-120

Travel: \$10 or more

Sub-Study Visits

Most sub-studies are only done once. If you are interested in participating in a sub-study, give us a call or send us an email!

PULMONARY FUNCTION TEST







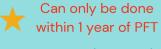
ECHOCARDIOGRAM



Ultrasound

Non-invasive evaluation of heart function and structure

DENTAL





Dental exam, plaque, saliva, and nasal strips collected

CIDI



Interview

In-depth interview focused on mental health and trauma Can take 2-3 hours

COMPENSATION



PFT, CIDI: \$60 ECHO: \$70 Dental: \$50 Travel: \$10 or more