



Annual Report

2022

Letter from the Director

Three years ago, a small group of us sat around a table and brainstormed the beginnings of a palliative research center at Pitt. We sought to tackle the most pressing problems in serious illness care while supporting, expanding and diversifying the palliative care research workforce. We recognized that to do so required collaboration between faculty, students, and staff from multiple different divisions, departments, and schools of the health sciences.

Thus, PaRC was founded in 2019, with the mission of promoting the field of palliative care by building the scientific evidence base, exploring ethical dilemmas, fostering transdisciplinary collaborations, and mentoring a diverse generation of emerging palliative care research scientists.

Reflecting today on our accomplishments and growth, I am most struck by the collaborations that PaRC has created and nurtured, several of which are highlighted in this report. Our works-in-progress sessions, Innovations in Palliative Care Science seminar series, annual retreats, and Junior Faculty Visiting Professor Program provide critically important opportunities for feedback and inspiration. During a time when many researchers have felt isolated or overwhelmed by repercussions of the Covid pandemic, PaRC offers a supportive and scientifically rigorous community whose positive impact is clear not just in our success with publications and grant funding, but also from the responses of numerous faculty and mentees who have reached out to join us.

A primary focus of PaRC over the past year has been to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in palliative care research. We have a long way to go, but I am hopeful that initiatives like the Gleitsman Student Research in Palliative Care Program and the ExPERT project described in this report are steps in the right direction. Through collaborations with partnering institutions and sponsorship of medical students from minority backgrounds, PaRC is working to ensure that our workforce reflects the diversity of patients we care for and that our research projects address persistent disparities in serious illness care.

Research is a team sport. I am beyond thankful to everyone who has pushed PaRC to expand the playing field and catapulted the University of Pittsburgh to national leadership in palliative care research and practice.



With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yael Schenker'.

Yael Schenker
PaRC Director



PaRC by the Numbers

FY 2022 Research Impact & Funding



10 grants submitted



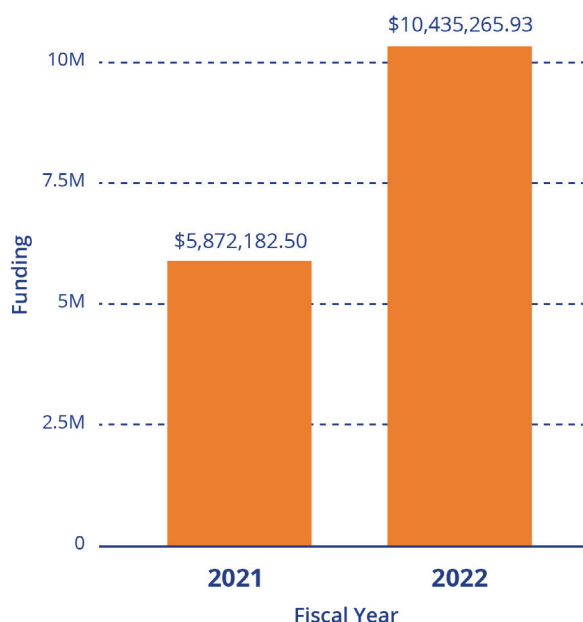
9 grants funded

34

As of June 2022, PaRC core faculty lead **34 active grants.**



Total Active Grant Funding from PaRC Core Faculty (PIs)*



* Measured as funding per year. Includes direct & indirect costs.
PI = Principal Investigator

112
mentees



PaRC supported 112 mentees, including medical students, residents, fellows, post-doctoral fellows, and junior faculty.

94

PaRC core faculty authored **94 publications.**



Impact at a Glance

- **We welcomed 3** University of Pittsburgh faculty to our PaRC Core Faculty team.
- **We hosted** an in-person annual retreat in September 2021 that drew **44** participants from across the University of Pittsburgh and UPMC.
- **We presented 17** posters and workshops at the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine's 2022 Annual Assembly and State of the Science meetings in February 2022.
- **We hosted 9** PERCOLATE works-in-progress sessions, providing opportunities for faculty and mentees to receive feedback on their research.
- **We hosted 2** Innovations in Palliative Care Science seminars, bringing together researchers from across the University of Pittsburgh together to discuss novel methods and resources that are applicable to palliative care research.
- **We matched 10** visiting assistant professors to **12** institutions as part of our Junior Faculty Visiting Professor Program.
- **We awarded 13** Gleitsman summer scholarships to medical students from minority backgrounds and/or schools without a palliative care program who completed mentored palliative care research projects with University of Pittsburgh investigators.
- **We partnered** with **3** minority-serving institutions to advance our goal of diversifying the palliative care workforce, providing palliative care training materials and distance-mentoring to over **450** medical students, residents, fellows, and faculty.
- **We expanded** our *Twitter* presence and have over **1,000** followers.



Program & Project Highlights



Awards & Recognitions

Douglas White

Douglas White was elected a **Hastings Center Fellow**. Fellows are recognized for advancing scholarship and public understanding of complex ethical issues in health, health care, life science research, technology, and the environment.

Teresa Hagan Thomas

Teresa Hagan Thomas received the 2021 **Hillman Cancer Center Junior Scholar Award** in Population Science.

Hailey Bulls

Hailey Bulls received the 2021 **Hillman Cancer Center Junior Scholar Award** in Clinical/Translational Cancer Research and was selected as Chair for the United States Association for the Study of Pain's Scientific Program Committee, 2022-2023.

Jane Schell

Jane Schell was inducted into the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine **Academy of Master Educators**.

Jessica Merlin

Jessica Merlin was selected for Society of General Internal Medicine's 2022 Mid-Career Research Mentorship Award.

Yael Schenker

Yael Schenker was selected as an **Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine (ELAM) Fellow**. Drexel University College of Medicine's ELAM program is dedicated to supporting qualified women candidates for leadership in academic health centers.

Sarah Belcher Hailey Bulls

These two faculty members were selected as **Mothers Leading Science (MLS) Program** scholars, with support from Pitt's Clinical & Translational Science Institute and Institute for Clinical Research Education.

Margaret Rosenzweig

Margaret Rosenzweig received the University of Pittsburgh's 2021 **Chancellor's Distinguished Public Service Award**. Dr. Rosenzweig was also inducted into the Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing's 2022 Nurse Researcher Hall of Fame.

Sarah Belcher Hailey Bulls Teresa Hagan Thomas

These three faculty members were selected for a **Supporting our Scientists Award** from the University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Clinical Research Education.



Recruitment & Growth

PaRC has grown to a team of 15 core faculty members.

Three core faculty members have joined since our last report:



Sarah Belcher
PhD, RN,
OCN®



Carissa Low
PhD



Risa Wong
MD

**Doris Rubio and
Liliana Viera-
Ortiz joined our
Advisory Board:**



Doris Rubio
PhD



Liliana Viera-Ortiz
MD

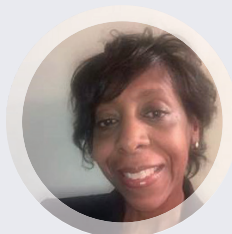
PaRC faculty welcomed many new staff members:



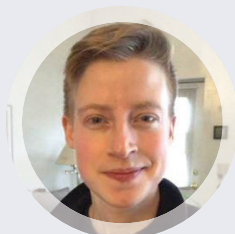
Perpetua Buadoo



Eric Chiu
BS



Yvette Dudley-Morrissey
MS



Julian Hall
BA



Andrew Kopco
BS, MA



Lydia McLachlan
BS



Annual Retreat

PaRC hosted its 3rd Annual Retreat in September 2021.



PaRC's 2021 Annual Retreat

The in-person event drew 44 attendees from across the University of Pittsburgh, including the Schools of Medicine, Nursing, and Public Health.

Features included a [keynote address](#) by R. Sean Morrison, Professor and System Chair of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai; a "Research Showcase" with brief presentations from Pitt investigators; and an "Ask the Expert" series, highlighting a range of innovative research methods and available resources from across Pitt.

Attendees were able to network during a lively poster session, and people came away with new ideas and connections. Event feedback was overwhelmingly positive: attendees enjoyed the short presentations, ample time for networking and discussion, and the ability to experience an in-person event in a carefully planned, COVID-safe environment.



Ask the Expert Panel: Collaborative Filmmaking

Retreat attendee Sara Baumann, PhD, MPH, presented as one of our “Ask the Expert” panelists to discuss *Collaborative Filmmaking*, a visual, participatory research method she co-developed with Jessica Burke, PhD, MHS, Vice Dean at the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health.

One of Dr. Baumann’s current projects centers around bereaved parents and their grief experiences. “Visualizing Loss: A Collaborative Filmmaking Study” is the first project that she and Dr. Burke are working on related to palliative care, with funding support from the McElhattan Foundation.

Dr. Baumann notes that the event provided a helpful space to talk with experts and researchers in palliative care. “We were able to share details about our proposed study with so many experts in the field and were able to gather ideas and feedback before starting recruitment,” she says. “The retreat helped us to refine our approach and engage in meaningful conversations about the latest in the palliative care field.”

“The retreat helped us to refine our approach and engage in meaningful conversations about the latest in the palliative care field.”



Justin Yu and Sara Baumann at PaRC's 2021 Annual Retreat

Select PaRC Research Collaborations

- **Douglas White** and **Yael Schenker** co-lead **“Randomized Trial of Specialty Palliative Care Integrated with Critical Care for Critically Ill Older Adults at High Risk of Death or Severe Disability (PRoPACC),”** a randomized efficacy trial comparing integrated specialty palliative care vs usual care for 500 high-risk ICU patients over age 60 and their surrogate decision makers. The ProPACC study represents a collaboration between multiple palliative care and critical care investigators, including PaRC faculty members Jennifer Seaman and Robert Arnold. The *ProPACC protocol manuscript* was published in a special edition of the Journal of Pain and Symptom Management dedicated to *J. Randall Curtis*, a revered leader in the field of palliative care research and an original member of PaRC’s Advisory Board.
- **Teresa Hagan Thomas** received R37 funding for **“Efficacy of a Self-Advocacy Serious Game Intervention for Women with Advanced Cancer (Strong Together),”** a randomized trial evaluating the effects of a self-advocacy serious game for women with advanced breast or gynecologic cancer. Building on Dr. Thomas’s *groundbreaking self-advocacy work*, and in collaboration with PaRC faculty members Margaret Rosenzweig and Yael Schenker, the trial tests the first theoretically based self-advocacy intervention for adult women with cancer.
- **Justin Yu**, PaRC’s Assistant Director, received funding through the National Palliative Care Research Center (NPCRC) Kornfeld Scholars Program for **“Developing a Behavioral Intervention to Improve Coping Among Family Caregivers of Children with Medical Complexity (CMC).”** With a multidisciplinary team, including PaRC director and mentor Yael Schenker, Dr. Yu is using qualitative and human-centered design methodology to develop a psychological intervention that aims to improve CMC caregivers’ ability to cope with the unique stressors they experience.
- **Yael Schenker** led **“A Cluster Randomized Trial of a Primary Palliative Care Intervention (CONNECT) for Patients with Advanced Cancer,”** with collaboration from PaRC faculty members Margaret Rosenzweig, Douglas White, and Robert Arnold. Primary trial outcomes were *published in JAMA Internal Medicine*. To date, 11 manuscripts have been published from CONNECT data, representing opportunities for collaboration between multiple PaRC faculty and mentees.

PaRC Special Programs

► Junior Faculty Visiting Professor Program

Goal:

To advance the careers of junior palliative care researchers and create opportunities for cross-institutional collaborations that advance palliative care science. This program, coordinated by PaRC faculty member Jennifer Seaman, supports visiting professorships for early-career palliative care researchers (< 5 years in a faculty position) from a range of disciplines at partner institutions with robust palliative care research programs.

Impact:

A total of 12 institutions are participating (nominating or hosting), and ten junior faculty were matched to a hosting institution based on interests and areas of focus:

Participating Institution	Nominee	Matched at
Duke University	Monica Lemmon, MD	University of Pittsburgh
Emory University	Ali John Zarrabi, MD	Massachusetts General Hospital
Massachusetts General Hospital	Laura Petrillo, MD	Duke University
Mount Sinai	Julia Frydman, MD	University of Pennsylvania
Ohio State University	Erin Stevens, DO	Mount Sinai
University of Alabama Birmingham	Rachel Wells, PhD	University of Rochester Medical Center
University of California, San Francisco	Lauren Hunt, PhD	University of North Carolina
University of North Carolina	(Hosting only)	--
University of Utah College of Nursing	Djin Tay, PhD	Emory University
University of Pennsylvania	Katherine Courtright, MD	University of California, San Francisco
University of Pittsburgh	Teresa Hagan Thomas, PhD	University of Alabama
University of Rochester Medical Center	(Hosting only)	--

2022 Matching

PaRC faculty member **Teresa Hagan Thomas** visited the University of Alabama Birmingham's Center for Palliative and Supportive Care in May 2022. Dr. Thomas reported that her visit led to plans for new papers, grant submissions, and the opportunity to share career development advice. "Being able to sit alongside researchers and trainees at UAB gave me fresh insights into how to expand my work and consider different avenues to expand my team's research program," Dr. Thomas said. "After these meetings and conversations, we are excited to begin partnering with each other on projects that bridge our areas of interest in palliative care."

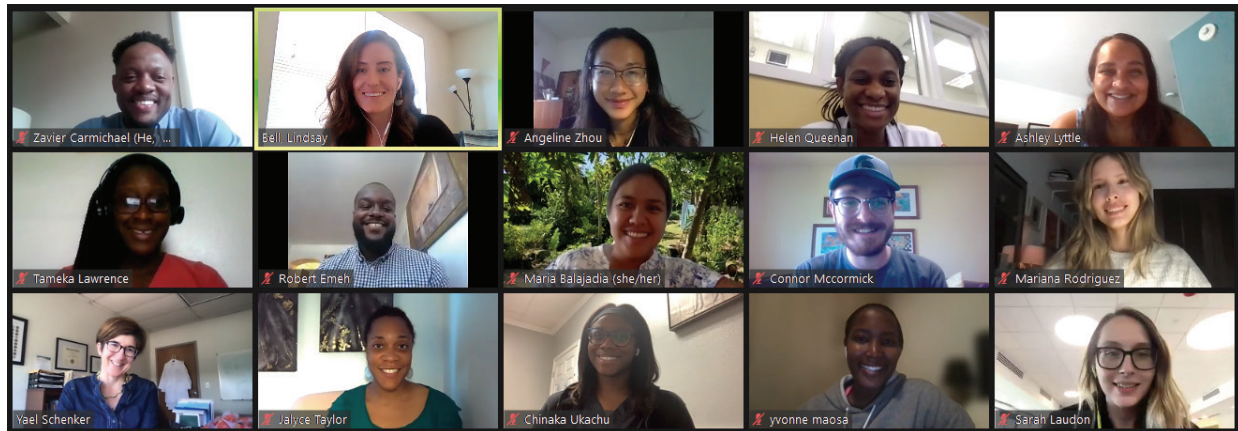
PaRC hosted **Monica Lemmon** from Duke University's Department of Pediatrics in June 2022. In addition to meeting with numerous faculty and fellows in palliative care, pediatrics, and surgery, Dr. Lemmon gave Pitt's Palliative Care Grand Rounds and led a well-attended hybrid case conference for NICU and neurology trainees at Children's Hospital. The case conference drew many attendees across specialties and led to several discussions about future collaborations. "I came away with a notebook full of new ideas, hard questions, and potential collaborators," Dr. Lemmon noted after her visit.

"I came away with a notebook full of new ideas, hard questions, and potential collaborators."

► Gleitsman Student Research in Palliative Care Program

Goal:

To support students from minority backgrounds and/or from schools without a palliative care program to complete a mentored research project with University of Pittsburgh palliative care investigators.



Gleitsman meeting screenshot

Impact:

In 2021, a partnership between PaRC and Pitt's Institute for Clinical Research Education (ICRE) supported 13 medical students from minority backgrounds and/or from schools without a palliative care program with a mentored summer research experience. Five scholars from our 2021 Gleitsman cohort went on to have posters and presentations accepted to the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine's 2021 Annual Assembly. In 2022, we are supporting four first-year medical students.

► ExPERT Project: A collaboration with Morehouse School of Medicine, Howard University, and the University of Puerto Rico

Goal:

To diversify the hospice and palliative medicine workforce by enhancing palliative care training opportunities at minority-serving institutions.

Impact:

We provided weekly palliative care training materials and access to distance-mentoring for over 450 medical students, residents, fellows, and faculty at 3 partnering minority-serving institutions. We presented over 30 educational sessions on various palliative care topics and published 3 project-related papers, including a [brief report](#) describing the lack of palliative care training for Black residents in the U.S., a [paper](#) describing palliative care attitudes and experiences among residents at HBCUs, and PaRC advisory board member **Dr. Kimberly Johnson's** [piece](#) about her decision to practice palliative care as a Black physician.

► Lay Minister “Hospice Ambassador” Training with Destiny of Faith Church

Goal:

To develop durable relationships between Pittsburgh’s Black faith-based communities and the University of Pittsburgh’s Section of Hospice and Palliative Care Medicine, with the long-term goal of increasing access to, quality of, and utilization of hospice and palliative care services among Pittsburgh’s Black community.

Impact:

PaRC assistant director **Justin Yu** is leading this initiative in collaboration with Destiny of Faith Church’s (DOFC) Health and Wellness Ministry. DOFC is a traditionally Black church located in Pittsburgh’s Northside neighborhood and led by Rev. Dr. Brenda Gregg, a retired administrator who previously worked at the Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh. With DOFC’s leadership and lay ministers, Dr. Yu has co-designed a hospice-focused educational program to provide DOFC’s lay ministers with the knowledge and skills they need to serve as “hospice ambassadors” between fellow congregants and community hospice organizations.



Reverend Ruth Walker, Reverend Shirley Williams, Minister Paulette Aston, and Postdoctoral Fellow Kelly Harris attend an in-person session.

Lydia McLachlan

Mentee Spotlight

Lydia Maria McLachlan was recently hired as a Research Coordinator to work with PaRC Assistant Director Justin Yu. Lydia supports Dr. Yu's study "Developing a Behavioral Intervention to Improve Coping Among Family Caregivers of Children with Medical Complexity (CMC)." The study focuses on the emotional well-being of family caregivers of children with medical complexity and children with special health care needs.

Lydia holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Neuroscience and Psychology from the University of Pittsburgh. As an undergraduate at Pitt, Lydia attended a pre-medical conference and heard a talk by hospice and palliative medicine physician Dr. BJ Miller. This experience sparked her interest in palliative care and resulted in her joining PaRC as a mentee of Dr. Yu, shadowing the supportive care team at UPMC Children's Hospital, and volunteering with the palliative care team at Presbyterian and Montefiore Hospitals.

Lydia has been amazingly accomplished as an early palliative care researcher, with 3 abstracts accepted for poster presentations in 2022 (see below). Dr. Yu and Lydia are working toward submitting manuscripts based on these presentations.

- **McLachlan L, Yu JA & Engster S.** Family Caregivers of Children with Medical Complexity Report Elevated Levels of Emotional Distress. Poster presentation at Pediatric Academic Societies 2022 Meeting.
- **Yu JA, McLachlan L & Engster S.** Self-Reported Mental Health of Family Caregivers of Children with Medical Complexity. Poster presentation at Pediatric Academic Societies 2022 Meeting.
- **McLachlan L & Yu JA.** Family Caregivers of Children with Medical Complexity Report Elevated Levels of Emotional Distress. Poster presentation at American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine's 2022 State of the Science Meeting.



Lydia plans to begin medical school in the next two years, likely pursuing a career in palliative care. She hopes to work primarily with Hispanic/Latino and other underserved and underrepresented populations.

Outside of research, Lydia enjoys hiking and traveling. After graduating from Pitt in May, she traveled around Spain for two weeks with her brother, and they hope to go backpacking around Europe in the next few years. She welcomes hiking or travel recommendations!

What's Next

**Join us for the 2022 PaRC Annual Retreat (in person)
October 13th, 2022, 8am-12pm!**

This year's retreat will include a panel discussion, a poster session, networking, and keynote address by [Betty Ferrell](#), PhD, RN, MA, CHPN, FAAN, FPCN. Dr. Ferrell is an internationally recognized pioneer in the field of palliative oncology nursing research. [Register here.](#)



**2022 Annual
PaRC Retreat**

**Reimagining the ABCs of
Serious Illness Research:
Access, Bridge, Connect**

**Thursday, October 13th
8 AM - 12 PM EST**
**University Club
Ballroom B
Pittsburgh, PA**

**With Keynote Speaker
Betty Ferrell**

PhD, RN, MA, CHPN, FAAN, FPCN
Director and Professor, Division of
Nursing Research and Education,
Department of Population Sciences
City of Hope



Palliative Research **PaRC**
CENTER

PaRC People

PaRC Core Faculty and Fellows

Yael Schenker, MD, MAS, FAAHPM (Director)
Justin Yu, MD (Assistant Director – Community Outreach & Collaboration)
Robert Arnold, MD, FAAHPM
Amar Bansal, MD, FASN
Sarah Belcher, PhD, RN, OCN
Hailey Bulls, PhD, MA
Kelly Wolenberg Harris, MD
Carissa Low, PhD
Jennifer Seaman, PhD, RN
Jessica Merlin, MD, PhD, MBA
Margaret Rosenzweig, PhD, CRNP
Jane Schell, MD, FNKE, FAAHPM
Jennifer Pruskowski, PharmD
Teresa Hagan Thomas, PhD, RN
Douglas White, MD, MAS
Risa Wong, MD

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Kathryn Pollak, PhD	<i>Duke University</i>
Doris Rubio, PhD	<i>University of Pittsburgh</i>
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University of Pittsburgh Central Research Development Fund
University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing Women's Health Research Hub
UPMC Hillman Cancer Center





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