



The Pitt Men's Study

news and notes

winter 2007

A MESSAGE FROM BILL BUCHANAN

Today is the first significant snow of the winter, but already my thoughts turn to spring. However, spring is more than just the return of warm weather – it's the time when the earth renews itself.

We are going through a period of renewal as we welcome two new employees to our clinic (see page 4). This is a good time to reflect on what we do and why we do it and then use that knowledge to renew, reinvigorate and even reinvent ourselves. We are doing that as we reorganize in the light of staff changes, but this process applies to why the Pitt Men's Study is here in the first place and why it is vital that it continue.

Think back to the 1980s, a time of fear, mistrust, frustration and puzzlement, a time when people were being diagnosed with very unusual illnesses, when something was going seriously wrong and we had no idea what it was let alone how to stop it.

By the 1990s we knew what was happening, but there wasn't much we could do. Although it was a time of much illness and death, it also was a time when new drugs and combination therapies began to change the course of HIV disease and John Mellors, a University of Pittsburgh physician using Pitt Men's Study data and stored blood samples, developed the concept of viral load that improved how doctors diagnosed and treated people living with HIV.

In this new century, with people living longer and healthier lives, we continue to study HIV so that we can provide better therapies and preventative and therapeutic vaccines. We monitor how the course of the disease is changing as people live longer with HIV. We worry about the virus mutating in ways that may undermine current therapies. We try to understand why some are lax about safer sex and what we can do about that. We struggle with the misinformation that many still have about HIV and AIDS.

We've come a long way, but there is still much to do. We got where we are through the efforts of researchers, yes, but mostly because for the twenty-three years since the Pitt Men's Study's inception *you cared*. And you will further help others, as well as yourself, by continuing to contribute to research.

At this time of reflection and renewal, **your regular participation is still crucial**. Our research is strongest when we see all of our participants who, individually and as a group, provide answers to critical questions. You are the key to unlocking the secrets of the human body and leading to the better understanding and treatment of many illnesses, not just HIV.

If you have not been keeping regular appointments, please think about all the good you can do and recommit yourself to this research by calling **412-624-2008 or 1-800-987-1963**. If you have been keeping regular appointments, think about all the good you have done and will continue to do. In either case, we need you now just as much as we ever did. Reflect and renew - realize that **you** can and do make a difference.

Charles R. Rinaldo, PhD, *Principal Investigator*
Nathaniel J. Soltesz, BS, *Research Assistant, Editor*
William G. Buchanan, MM, *Clinic Coordinator, Contributing Editor*
Mack Friedman, MPH, *Contributing Editor*
Marcy Holloway, MPAS, PA-C, *Contributing Editor*
Ashley G. Woodson, *Production Assistant*

PITT MEN'S STUDY
PO Box 7319, Pittsburgh, PA 15213
(412) 624-2008 (800) 987-1963
www.stophiv.com/pms

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all about kidney functions

THE IMPORTANCE OF URINE SAMPLES



You come into the waiting room, you hand us your pink sheet, and before long we're asking you to pee in a cup. Most of you know we are collecting urine samples from many of our study volunteers. The reason we are doing it is to assess your kidney functions. But why is it important to measure your kidney function? Read on to find out!

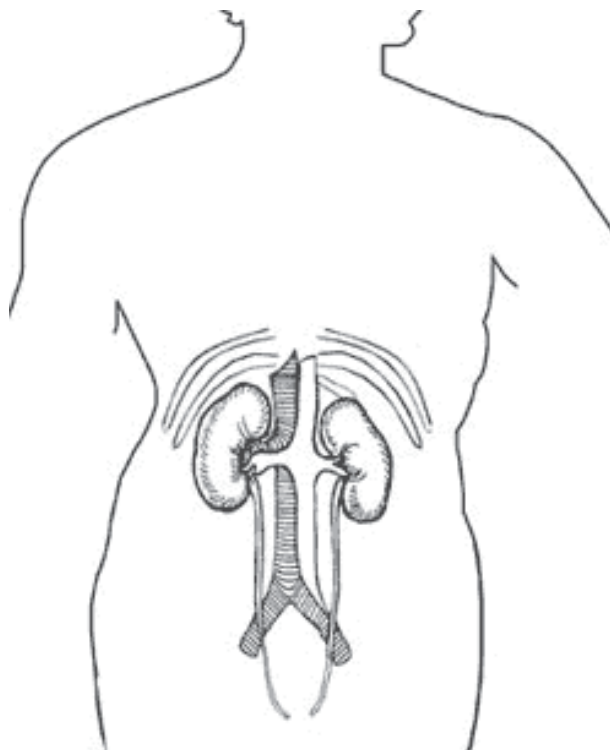
Your kidneys are important and complex organs that serve as filtration devices. In about one day it is the job of your kidneys to process about 200 quarts of blood and screen out about 2 quarts of waste products and unneeded water. In turn, the waste and extra water is converted into urine, and ultimately stored in your bladder and removed from your body when you urinate. Now, if your kidneys failed to remove the waste, the waste could build up in your blood and cause problems.

There are tiny structures in your kidneys that mainly work to assist in the filtering process. These structures are known as nephrons. With most types of kidney disease the nephrons are the structures that are damaged, which in turn causes the kidney to decrease or completely lose its filtering function. This destruction can occur quickly, but more often than not the damage to the nephrons is silent and slow. It could be years or decades before damage occurs and is noticed.

The two most common causes of kidney disease are uncontrolled diabetes and uncontrolled high blood pressure. However, there are many other types of illnesses and conditions that can cause kidney damage. They include (but are not limited to) autoimmune diseases, infection-related diseases (including HIV infection), and sclerotic diseases. In addition, some kidney diseases result from hereditary factors. Lastly, some medications can lead to kidney disease as well as poisons or direct trauma.

There is an increasing concern of kidney-related disease that is linked to complications with HIV infection. In fact, some studies show that kidney function testing is

abnormal in up to 30% of HIV infected patients. There are many risk factors associated with HIV that may make one more likely to develop kidney disease. They include those that also deal with diabetes, high blood pressure, or hepatitis C infection, African Americans, CD4+ cell (T-cell) counts < 200 cells/ul, and HIV viral load > 4000 copies/ml.



Kidney abnormalities can be detected through protein levels, which can be assessed in both blood tests and in urine tests. However, studies show that the urine test is often a much earlier predictor of kidney problems. This is why we started to collect urine samples here at the Pitt Men's Study.

So at your next visit don't be surprised when we ask you to give us a urine sample. You will receive the results of this test with the rest of your labwork. If your results are abnormal please see your PCP for adequate assessment and possible treatment, and a referral to a kidney specialist may be necessary.

DEPRESSION: KNOW THE SIGNS, GET HELP

Depression affects 19 million people in the United States every year. Aside from the usual costs associated with it (loss of productivity, increased alcohol and drug addiction, disturbances to personal and family life, etc.) depression is a significant risk factor for exposure to HIV. When one becomes depressed, one begins to not care what happens, which could lead one doing things that are risky, such as not using protection during sex. We want to make sure you understand this risk and know how to protect yourself, because depression can be treated. As a matter of fact, 80% of those who are treated get some relief.



The symptoms of depression are:

- A sad mood that continues
- Loss of pleasure or interest in activities (including sex)
- Sleep disturbances
- Appetite changes
- Feelings of guilt, low self-esteem, or worthlessness
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- Decreased energy
- Increased irritability
- Problems with concentration or forgetfulness
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts

Should you recognize some of these symptoms in your life, you should consider discussing them with your doctor as soon as possible. Some people can be helped through therapy or medication alone, and some need a combination of drugs and therapy. The sooner one addresses depression, the more quickly one can recover. In addition to Persad (412-441-9786), we have several therapists on our referral list - just call and we'll send you a copy.

Don't wait - if you think you are depressed, get help. If you think someone you know is depressed, get him to seek help for himself. And stay safe.

CLINIC NOTES: THE MEDICAL RELEASE

What's the importance of the medical release, and why do we ask you to sign a new one every frickin' time you come in?

There are two kinds of medical releases that we need at the Pitt Men's Study. The first one is used to obtain your medical records from your doctor. If you've had any new significant conditions since we last saw you - anything from heart disease to cancer or AIDS-related illnesses - we're going to want to know more about it, and we need a release to get that info.

The other release is used to send the results we get from your blood draw to your physician. This is a great way to keep your doctor informed of any new

conditions that we might find from your blood work.

Because of rules stated in the Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA), we need a recently signed release each time we send out or acquire your medical records. This helps to protect you: Due to the sensitive nature of your records, it's important that we have your permission each time we seek or send your medical information.

We also need your doctor's name, address, and/or contact number on the release, so be sure to bring that with you to the clinic if you're interested in having your results sent out, and especially if you've been diagnosed with any new conditions or problems.

clinic notes

HOW CAN DRINKING WATER HELP YOUR BLOOD DRAW?



When you visit the Pitt Men's Study clinic, it is a safe bet that you are going to have your blood drawn. Success of the blood draw depends on both the skill of the clinician as well as the condition of your veins. The condition of your peripheral veins, the veins in your arms and legs, is dependent on several factors.

Some of the limitations are beyond our control, while others can be managed. Health conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure affect the integrity of the blood vessels, causing the veins to feel thick and hard and making the blood draw more difficult. In addition, with age the skin and blood vessels change, and again this increases the difficulty of the blood draw. These conditions are difficult to regulate. However there is one factor you can control - your water intake.

Proper hydration allows your peripheral veins to fill appropriately with blood when the tourniquet is applied to the arm, making it easier for the clinician to find a vein. Drinking at least 48 ounces of water prior to your visit can be an excellent means by which to ease the blood draw. If you have any questions prior to your visit, please contact the staff at the clinic.

MEET THE NEW GUYS

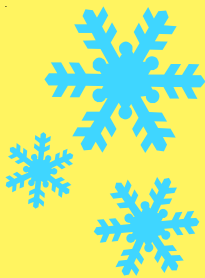
It's a new year, and there are some new faces around the clinic. Assuming the positions left open after Scott and Mack's departures are new medical technicians Brian Golgan and Nathaniel Soltesz.

Brian Golgan is from Natrona Heights. From 1999 to 2006 he worked as the manager of North Hills Water Gardens. On his days off from the Pitt Men's Study he works part-time at Home Depot in the North Hills. He has a degree in Residential Design and Construction. He spends most of his spare time doing home remodeling and landscaping, and he also enjoys biking.

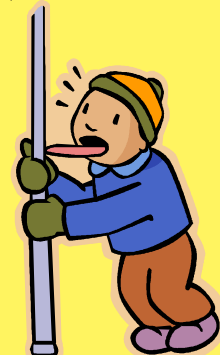
Nathaniel Soltesz graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 2003. He is originally from Blairsville, though he's lived in Pittsburgh since 1998. Previously Nat worked as a communications specialist in the Department of Computer Science. He's also written for *Out* and various local publications. Nat is excited to work for the Pitt Men's Study and looks forward to meeting all of you.

Brian and Nat both started in December, and they are still learning the ropes. With your help, we'll be able to whip them into shape in no time at all. Just be gentle!

PITT MEN'S STUDY WINTER WEATHER POLICY



When bad winter weather threatens, the Pitt Men's Study will closely monitor the situation in order to decide if we should keep the clinic open or close it for the safety of our volunteers and staff. When winter storms are approaching, please call 412-624-2008 or 1-800-987-1963 before leaving for your appointment.



If we have decided to close, our outgoing messages will be changed to reflect this; this change will usually go into effect at least 2 hours prior to the first appointment of the day. If we are going to be open, you will hear the usual outgoing messages. Even if we are open, if you feel it would be unsafe for you to travel, please stay home - just call to let us know that you are not coming, and we will reschedule the appointment.