



# GUT INSTINCT

MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL 2016 | Issue 3

A Newsletter of the Gastro-Intestinal Research Foundation and The University of Chicago Medicine Digestive Diseases Center

## OVER \$1.4 MILLION DOLLARS RAISED FOR GI RESEARCH AT 55<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BALL

Anna Gomberg  
Administrative Director, IBD Center

On Saturday, June 4th, over five hundred supporters of the GI Research Foundation gathered in the magnificent Rotunda Room of the Museum of Science and Industry to mark the occasion of the 55th annual gala fundraiser Ball, *A Magical Night at the Museum*. Those in attendance enjoyed magicians, an art demonstration, jazz, a live auction, a raffle drawing, and explored the exhibits at this sold out event.

Guests were welcomed by emcee Ben Bradley of Channel 7 ABC news, who also spoke of his personal struggles with Crohn's disease. Sy Taxman then offered a moving tribute to the University of Chicago, Joseph Kirsner, MD, and his physician, GI Research Foundation Medical Director David T. Rubin, MD. Rubin offered remarks highlighting the importance of support for GI research at the University of Chicago Medicine Digestive Diseases Center with stories of several discoveries made possible by the GI Research Foundation in just the past year [see pg. 2 for Dr. Rubin's prepared remarks].

Following dinner, a challenge grant offered by a generous anonymous



Sy Taxman delivered a moving tribute at the GI Research Foundation annual gala

donor piqued extra enthusiasm for the "paddle raise" portion of the event. Longtime supporter and Gold Angel Beatrice Crain started the giving with a generous contribution of \$10,000. In an act of incredible philanthropy, Platinum Angels Sy and Nancy Taxman made a special pledge of an additional \$100,000. Together, all the individual pledges easily met the anonymous donor's challenge, and brought the total amount raised to 1.4 million dollars.

At the close of the event, as a poignant reminder of the ultimate purpose of the festive occasion, Abra Alschar shared her family's emotional struggles with inflammatory bowel disease, in particular, the challenges faced by her daughter, diagnosed as a young child, finally on her path to remission thanks to the multidisciplinary care she received at the University of Chicago Medicine.



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# RESEARCH: THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

## The University of Chicago Medicine Difference

David T. Rubin, MD

Medical Director, GI Research Foundation, Co-Director, Digestive Diseases Center



David T. Rubin, MD, GI Research Foundation Medical Director, addressing attendees at the 55th Annual Ball.

When I interviewed for medical school at the University of Chicago, what most stood out to me as unique about this institution over all the others was what the Dean said to me. She said, “David, there is no doubt that many medical schools can provide you with an excellent education, so you can become an outstanding physician. What the University of Chicago provides is a framework to ask questions and to improve the way we do things.”

That description stayed with me, and made my decision for medical school an easy one. This distinction is what makes our institution unique. At the University of Chicago, we don’t settle for the status quo.

For the Section of Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition, and now the Digestive Diseases Center, the GI Research Foundation makes this possible. Every day, our faculty, fellows, residents, students, nurses, and allied health professionals work to provide outstanding care to our patients, all the while asking “Why? How can we do this better? Why does this happen? Why doesn’t this patient respond as expected? Why haven’t we cured this disease yet?”

Seeking answers to those hard questions is what drives us and is the inspiration and motivation for our ongoing missions of outstanding patient care, cutting edge research, and exemplary teaching and training.

Dr. Kirsner constantly asked the hard questions, reminding us

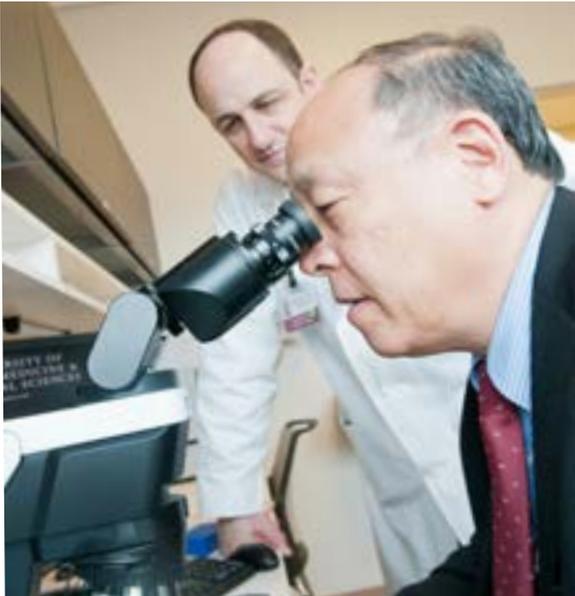
that “everything we do should come back to the patient who is suffering.” His friends Marty Sandler and Joe Valenti knew this

### A MAGICAL NIGHT

- » Over 500 GI Research Foundation supporters attended a sold out event.
- » 11.4 million dollars were raised to find cures for digestive diseases.
- » The challenge from anonymous donor was met, doubling contributions of supporters up to \$250,000.

when they co-founded the GI Research Foundation in 1963. I’m proud today that even in these challenging times, research at the University of Chicago in Digestive Diseases has never been stronger or more promising!

Many of you have attended fundraisers for “research” before, but you don’t often see the direct results of those efforts, leaving the return on your investments unclear. The great strength of the GI Research Foundation is the *direct* impact it has to foster real scientific advances that do come back to the patients who are suffering.



Eugene Chang, MD

Let me amaze you with some examples just from this past year, all of which the GI Research Foundation makes possible. Part of the Center’s work also entails helping the larger medical community understand the particular health needs of Asian-Americans, who constitute the fastest growing racial group in the United States.

First, colorectal cancer, the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States.

African Americans have the highest rates of colon cancer in the US, yet little was known about the genetics of colon cancer in African American families.

The director of our GI Cancer Risk and Prevention Clinic, Sonia Kupfer, MD, led a collaboration with 13 major cancer centers in the US which included over 900 family members and patients, and discovered previously unknown mutations that will directly affect future cancer screening in this population. Dr. Kupfer’s discovery was featured on the cover of our most prestigious GI Journal, *Gastroenterology*.

Our second example also addresses disparities. This one is related to hepatitis B, and the fact that Asian Americans are underserved when it comes to healthcare and access.

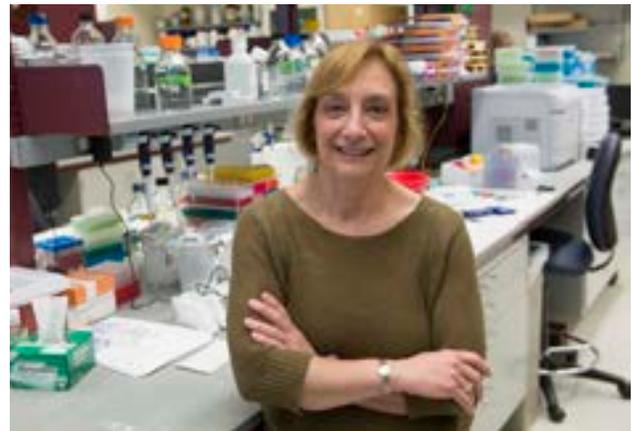
One of our other faculty, Karen Kim, MD, leads the Center for Asian Health Equity, which is now partnering with the University of Chicago. They are linking patients to healthcare resources in order to improve hepatitis B care for Asian immigrants. This is expected to reduce the incidence of hepatitis-associated liver cancer. It is hoped that this model program will lead to reduced health disparities among Asian Americans in the Chicagoland area, and ultimately, nationwide.

The cause of celiac disease, which is on the rise in the U.S. is unknown. People who suffer from celiac have injury to their small intestine due to an auto-immune process triggered by wheat proteins. The University of Chicago is one of the leading celiac

centers in the world. But until recently, there was no animal model for this condition, and no treatment other than strict avoidance of gluten, which unfortunately, didn’t work for everyone.

Under the research leadership of our internationally renowned immunologist and researcher Bana Jabri, MD pediatric chief Stefano Guandalini, MD and adult gastroenterologists Carol Semrad, MD and Sonia Kupfer, MD, our group has developed the first mouse model of celiac disease, identified some of the causes of tissue destruction, and now are leading the country in several first-of-their kind clinical trials to treat these conditions in humans with specific medications. They are now working on a way to teach the immune system to tolerate gluten, which would essentially be a cure!

Food allergies are an enigma. Many of us grew up at a time when the concept of peanut allergies was rare and there was no such thing as peanut-free classrooms. Now, food allergies have reached nearly epidemic proportions in the U.S. and around the globe. The University of Chicago launched a Food Allergy Center last year to augment the ongoing ground-breaking research of Cathy Nagler, who discovered an amazing thing- a specific group of bacteria



Cathy Nagler, MD, PhD

that lives in our guts and *prevents* food allergies! Based on this monumental discovery, her lab was the first to develop “humanized” mice that anaphylax to food allergens, a critical tool for pre-clinical studies. Now, with the partnership of the University of Chicago’s Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, she has launched a company to develop this work further. The concept of a targeted therapy for food allergies is just around the corner.

And of course, the microbiome. Our Associate Chief for Research, Eugene Chang, MD, with his lab runs one of the world’s preeminent microbiome laboratories, studying the billions of organisms that live on and in our bodies. This work has led to earth shattering discoveries, including an understanding of the role the microbiome plays in obesity and weight loss, defining that the microbiome in your gut has a circadian rhythm, and demonstrating that Western diets activate inflammation in colitis-susceptible mice.

And, in conjunction with our world renowned Inflammatory

JOSEPH B. KIRSNER, MD, PHD: “IF YOU THINK RESEARCH IS EXPENSIVE, TRY DISEASE.”

# 55TH ANNUAL BALL HIGHLIGHTS

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Frank and Erica Matagrano



Sy and Nancy Taxman.



GI Research Foundation Executive Director, Sabrina Bier and Susan Kalell



Volunteer Committee Members.



Scott Attar and family & friends



Russell D. Cohen, MD; wife Cheryl Cohen; and friends

# 55TH ANNUAL BALL HIGHLIGHTS

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Ball Co-Chair Chad Coe and David T. Rubin, MD, Medical Director, and guests



Ball Co-Chair Howard Grill and family.



Ball Committee member Bee Crain and guest.



Sue and Marty Solomon.



Guests enjoy sleight-of-hand during cocktail hour



Danny Rubin and Larry Block.



The GI Research Foundation 55th Annual Ball.



Magician Andrew Bennett.



Auctioneer Renee Jones

# RUBIN'S REMARKS

*continued from page 3*

Disease Center, and an unprecedented collaboration of scientists from the University of Chicago, Argonne National Labs and the Marine Biological Labs in Woods Hole Massachusetts, this group has identified strains of bacteria and genetic changes that provide insight into the cause of IBD. Thanks to the support of the GI Research Foundation, these incredible discoveries are being further explored while we await review of our \$10 million grant from the National Institutes of Health. Without the support of the GI Research Foundation, the progress gained would have halted.

None of these exciting scientific breakthroughs would be possible without our incredible team and clinical infrastructure. In the past year, our clinical programs have expanded and gained ongoing notoriety for their quality, accessibility, and as recognized for the 9th year in a row, for their outstanding



Supporters enjoyed jazz standards as part of the evening's entertainment.

safety performance, the best in Chicago and one of the best in the nation. Also, according to Crain's Chicago Business the University of Chicago Medical Center took the No. 1 spot on their list of the Chicago's busiest hospitals.

Our programs have grown so much, that the State of Illinois just granted us approval to renovate the 1980s era Mitchell Hospital to add a much needed 180 beds to our complement. In addition, we look forward to the opening of our new facilities in Orland Park and the South Loop, expansion of our Michigan Avenue location and our Northwest Indiana locations, and this August, opening of a state-of-the-art and completely renovated 3rd floor of the Center for Care and Discovery which will include 80 beds dedicated to digestive diseases, a surgical ICU, and be home to our expanding Liver Transplant Program.

With all this success, you might be thinking, "Why do you need more money?" The answer is found on a plaque which used to hang on the wall in Dr. Joe's office, and now hangs on the wall of my office, which says, "If you think research is expensive,

try disease." I feel privileged to lead such a dynamic group of creative physicians and scientists, who are limited only by their imagination and their funding.

So please, give generously to the people who will work magic to find the cures to our most difficult medical challenges.

I know we can do it tonight, and I know we can do it together. Let's keep our momentum going! Thank you.

## NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

### SAVE THE DATE:

2017 GI RESEARCH FOUNDATION ANNUAL BALL

**SATURDAY, MAY 20, 2017**

Don't miss next year's gala event at the Radisson Blu Chicago! Visit [giresearchfoundation.org](http://giresearchfoundation.org) for the latest information.

### EDUCATIONAL SEMINAR FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21**

An evening seminar featuring the multidisciplinary team from the Inflammatory Bowel Disease Center. *Free.* [ibcenter.uchicago.edu](http://ibcenter.uchicago.edu)

### ABOUT THE GASTRO-INTESTINAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION:

*A non-profit dedicated to raising funds to support the physicians and scientists at The University of Chicago Medicine Digestive Diseases Center in their efforts to provide outstanding care, train future leaders and perform innovative clinical and laboratory research in order to treat, cure and prevent digestive diseases.*

### THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO DIGESTIVE DISEASES CENTER

*is a collaborative, multidisciplinary network of physicians, researchers, and allied health professionals who share a legacy of innovation and a common purpose: to improve the lives of patients who suffer from digestive diseases.*

### CONTACT INFORMATION

The Gastro-Intestinal Research Foundation

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/UChicagoIBDCenter

@UChicagoIBD (IBD Center)

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*continued from page 3*

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