



GUT INSTINCT

MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL 2016 | Issue 4

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



Medical Director David T. Rubin with Attendees at the 2016 GI Research Foundation Donor Appreciation Picnic

GI RESEARCH FOUNDATION DONOR APPRECIATION PICNIC

Donors, family, friends, physicians, and patients came together on Sunday, September 25th to enjoy the festivities of the GI Research Foundation Associates Board Donor Appreciation Picnic at the Vertiport helicopter hangar in Chicago. The first event of its kind, the afternoon included many wonderful amusements for children of all ages, including carnival games, a bounce house, face painting, balloon artistry, music, picnic fare, ice cream, and food trucks. All were provided free of charge, as a special thank you for the donors' ongoing commitment to the GI Research Foundation.

The venue offered guests a front row seat to parked helicopters in the hangar, providing photo opportunities for would-be pilots, as well as to helicopter takeoffs and landings from the adjacent helipad. Event organizers, Frank Matagrano and Katie Chudnovsky, worked tirelessly to put together a fantastic event. David T. Rubin, MD, offered a warm thank you to the event organizers and the GI Research Foundation Associates Board.

As an exciting conclusion to the day's fun, attendees participated in a raffle, trying their luck to win travel, art, sports memorabilia,

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DONOR APPRECIATION PICNIC HIGHLIGHTS



Event Co-Chairs Katie Chudnovsky and Frank Matagrano



Attendees enjoyed face painting, balloon art, carnival games and more



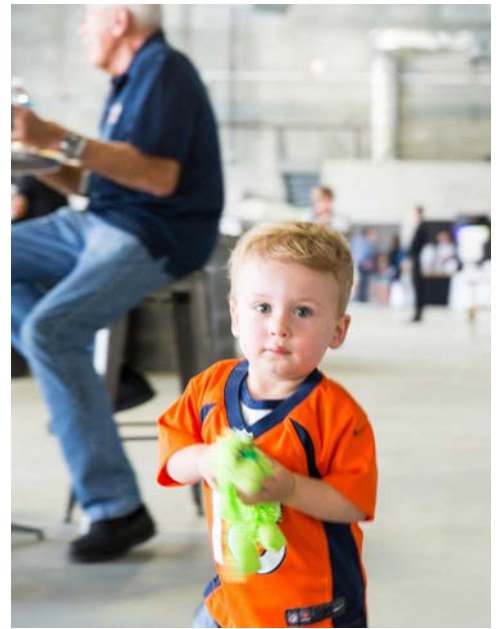
GI Research Foundation Board President Eric Berlin with Norm and Patty Hanson



Sushila Dalal, MD, with Sonali Paul, MD, and families



David T. Rubin, MD, and a young fan



The event was a first for the GI Research Foundation, and well attended by donors and their families.



Vanessa Leone, PhD (pg 5) and guest



Vertiport Chicago is a working heliport on Chicago's southwest side



Participants tried their luck to win raffle prizes.

ERIC BERLIN: LEADING WITH HOPE

President, GI Research Foundation Board of Directors

By: Anna Gomberg

Administrative Director, IBD Center



Eric Berlin, President, GI Research Foundation Board of Directors

Eric Berlin's early experiences as a Crohn's disease patient were not unique. Berlin endured years of trying different medical therapies, alternating periods of feeling relatively good with long bouts of illness—all too common for the digestive disease patient. But his story, and Berlin, got better thanks in part to his personal experiences at the University of Chicago Medicine. His path has led to the presidency of the GI Research Foundation's Board of Directors and his role as an engaged patient advocate and fundraiser during this exciting time for the GI Research Foundation.

Relates Berlin, "In 2007, I was very sick, and my local doctor decided to refer me to the University of Chicago, where she had been trained. I was sitting down to the dinner table with my family about a day or so later when the phone rang, and on the other end was David Rubin. I think he said, 'I hear you're not feeling so well.' That's when I realized that the University of Chicago was a very special place, and so began my very positive association with the hospital."

Dr. Rubin introduced Berlin to the GI Research Foundation Associates Board, where he was an active member.

"[Crohn's disease] is a tough disease," says Berlin, "Digestive diseases are tough. You can be fine for a while and then sick as a

dog. They impact not just the person living with the disease, but also their friends, family, and loved ones. Becoming part of the Associates Board was a radical shift for me from the days of staying quiet about Crohn's—I decided I wanted to try to raise money, to be an advocate to cure digestive diseases, because I believed in what the University of Chicago was doing."

Berlin's reasons for involvement with the GI Research Foundation are many. He is a committed advocate for a variety of patient concerns, including the legalization of medical marijuana for digestive disease patients, and deeply committed to the pursuit of new research for cures and treatments, particularly through exploring the microbiome.

He explains, "[The GI Research Foundation] gives a tremendous return on investment. I've been involved for almost ten years, and seen the remarkable things that have come from the money we have raised. It's amazing that the patients and others serving as GI Research Foundation directors get a really close look at what's going on—hearing firsthand is very exciting to us."

The greatest challenge and opportunity for the GI Research Foundation in the next five years? According to Berlin, the primary goal for the Foundation currently is to grow, both the Board of Directors and charitable giving. The Board plans to add five to ten additional members, and foster continued growth in fundraising, both keys to the Foundation's continued success. No easy feat, given the increased competition for charitable giving.

Says Berlin, "We are only as solid as our foundation, but we really have a solid foundation now—everyone on the board is committed to our mission, and pursuing the same goals. And of course, one of the organization's guiding principles is to foster hope—a valuable commodity when you have a chronic, incurable disease. And I think we do that very well."

THE GI RESEARCH FOUNDATION FAST FACTS

- » Current number of members on the GI Research Foundation Board of Directors: 21
- » Year the GI Research Foundation was founded: 1962
- » Estimated amount of money raised since 1962: \$50M

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT: MICROBES, DAY AND NIGHT

Featuring Vanessa Leone, PhD

By: Anne Ford

No one likes having their nighttime routine interrupted—not even microbes.

But whereas a bad night's sleep might do nothing but leave us a bit bleary-eyed the next morning, the consequences of our gut microbes having their schedule thrown off can be much more dire.

That's the discovery of Vanessa Leone, PhD, a postdoctoral researcher in the Dr. Eugene B. Chang Lab of the University's Knapp Center for Biomedical Discovery.

"Gut microbes do different things during the day versus the night," explains Dr. Leone.

In the daytime, gut microbes are generally busy acquiring and burning energy; at night, they're storing it.

As it happens, diet affects the regularity of this cycle. "When we take in a diet that's high in fiber and low in fat, that day-versus-night cycle is pretty normal and helps to maintain our circadian health," Dr. Leone says.

But if one's diet is high-fat and low-fiber instead, "now we have disruptions in the day-versus-night cycle that can disrupt our circadian rhythm, which leads to the development of obesity."

Dr. Leone's research is some of the only work on the topic to consider gut-microbe activity on this time scale. "A lot of the data that's out there now is looking at it on a month-to-month or year-to-year basis, but we're saying that things are happening even faster, like within a 24-hour time period," she says.

Her findings have implications not only for obesity, but for other disorders as well. "The work that I'm doing may also impact inflammatory bowel disease, because we know that a number of IBD patients have disrupted sleep patterns," she points out.

Looking at the livers of laboratory mice—specifically, mice raised in the absence of not just gut microbes but all microbes in general—allowed Dr. Leone and her team to make these discoveries. But during her student days, Dr. Leone found herself working with another animal entirely: the chicken.

"I did my undergrad and PhD at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and I was actually in the animal-science department, pretty heavily invested in studying poultry nutrition," she smiles.

That changed late in the course of obtaining her PhD, when she found herself helping develop a student seminar about the development of IBD. "It got me thinking about how nutrition in general can shape our gut microbes," she says. "Since then, as a



Vanessa Leone, PhD

postdoc, I've been able to do the research that piqued my interest in the field, so it's been kind of cool to see how I've grown."

That growth, she adds, wouldn't have been possible without the support of the GI Research Foundation.

"I don't think I'd be in the position that I am without the GI Research Foundation" she says. "It gave me some pilot funding when I first started at the University of Chicago, and it's been a big supporter of my work by giving me additional funding as well. It's really important to the research that we're doing. Ultimately what we're trying to do is come up with cures for the patient, and the GI Research Foundation is so invested in how it can help do that."

"I DON'T THINK I'D BE IN THE POSITION I AM WITHOUT THE GI RESEARCH FOUNDATION."

DONOR PICNIC

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photography, and the best prize of all, dinner with Medical Director David Rubin. As an especially generous contribution, the Chudnovsky family agreed to match all donations raised on the day up to \$10,000, making the fundraiser a great success.

“We have been looking for new ways to bring our donors together and invite new donors to join our organization, and spending this afternoon together was a wonderful way to begin. I hope it becomes a GI Research Foundation tradition,” said Sabrina Bier, outgoing GI Research Foundation Executive Director and longtime organization volunteer.

To become involved with the GI Research Foundation Associates Board, please email girf@uchicago.edu.



Lots to do for littles at the GI Research Foundation Donor Appreciation Picnic



NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

WELCOME

KIMBERLY COADY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The GI Research Foundation Board of Directors is pleased to welcome Kimberly Coady as the new Executive Director of the Foundation. Kim was previously the Associate Director of the University of Chicago Cancer Foundation for 7 years, and brings a wealth of experience in nonprofit administration, fundraising, and event planning. We look forward to her continued success at the GI Research Foundation.

EDUCATIONAL SEMINAR FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2017

An evening seminar featuring the multidisciplinary team from the Inflammatory Bowel Disease Center. *Free.*

ibcenter.uchicago.edu

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 for the latest information.

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.

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