

ERIC BERLIN: LEADING WITH HOPE

President, GI Research Foundation Board of Directors

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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