



Patrons Circle

A PUBLICATION FOR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE UCLA DIVISION OF DIGESTIVE DISEASES

Carrying Forward a Proud Family Tradition of Philanthropy



Gregory Annenberg Weingarten isn't kidding when he declares, "Giving is part of my DNA."

Mr. Weingarten is a vice president and director of the Annenberg Foundation (AF), the family foundation established in 1989 to advance the public good by Mr. Weingarten's grandfather – publisher, ambassador and philanthropist Walter H. Annenberg. "He viewed his philanthropy as repayment of an enormous debt owed to this land of opportunity, and he instilled that same sense of gratitude and appreciation in all of us," Mr. Weingarten says. "My mother, my siblings and I are enormously proud of his philanthropy and deeply value the opportunity that we have been given as the directors of the Annenberg Foundation to continue his legacy."

After working as a journalist at the Times of London, Mr. Weingarten embarked on a career as an artist. With his wife and philanthropic partner Regina, he is now helping to shape the next generation of philanthropy through the lives of their two children. Mr. Weingarten also heads GRoW Annenberg Foundation, an initiative of the AF that focuses on supporting humanitarian efforts across the globe, as well as innovative projects in education and the arts.

The Annenberg Foundation has donated tens of millions of dollars to support scientific research and patient care worldwide, including longtime support of the UCLA Division of Digestive

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UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases

SUMMER 2016

From the Division Chiefs



Gary Gitnick, M.D., F.A.C.G.

Fran and Ray Stark Foundation Chair
Professor of Medicine
David Geffen School of
Medicine at UCLA



Eric Esrailian, M.D., M.P.H.

Lincy Foundation Chair in
Clinical Gastroenterology
Associate Clinical Professor
of Medicine
David Geffen School of
Medicine at UCLA

As we welcome in the summer, we are pleased to invite you to learn about the latest news and activities of the Division through the pages of the Patrons Circle newsletter. We hope that you will enjoy the behind-the-scenes look into exciting initiatives, led by our distinguished faculty, that are changing the direction of discovery and healthcare as we know it.

As the Division strives to make advances that are transforming treatments to improve health and wellness, training the next generation of researchers and physicians, and moving the needle in scientific knowledge, we are grateful for friends who help to make these efforts possible. We are proud of this growing community of forward-looking philanthropic leaders who have chosen to invest in our programs. Gregory Annenberg Weingarten is one of those dedicated friends. He has supported efforts around the world to change the lives of countless people and better our society through excellence and innovation in medicine. We are grateful that he and

the Annenberg Foundation are partnering with us to help position the Division for the future.

In this issue, we will share with you how our core values of distinction in research, education and patient-care are working hand-in-hand to alter the course of science and clinical approaches. One example of this is the multidisciplinary UCLA team, through the Center for Obesity and METabolic Health (COMET), that is confronting metabolic syndrome – one of the most pressing health epidemics of our time. You will see that another group that has joined forces is the GI Quality Program and UCLA Center for Inflammatory Bowel Diseases teams with the aim to improve patient outcomes and reduce costs. Read about these exciting stories and more in this summer edition.

This is a remarkable time for us and this institution. As we move ahead, your commitment and enthusiasm is very important to us. Thank you again for your dedication and interest in the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases. 🍷



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New Minimally Invasive Strategies Help to Prevent Deadly, Fast-Rising Cancer

UCLA's Division of Digestive Diseases is leading the effort to better detect and treat Barrett's esophagus, a precursor to a deadly form of cancer that is rising rapidly in the United States.

Cancer of the esophagus – the tube that carries food and liquids from the mouth to the stomach – is increasing in the U.S. at a faster rate than any malignancy, according to the National Cancer Institute. The prognosis is generally poor, with an overall five-year survival rate of just 18 percent. A driving factor in the increase is the nation's high obesity rate: Adenocarcinoma, one of the two types of esophageal cancer, is most commonly caused by acid reflux, which is often associated with obesity.

Barrett's esophagus is a complication of reflux in which the lining of the esophagus begins to take on the appearance and characteristics of the lining of the stomach and small intestine. Once that occurs, individuals are at a significantly higher risk of developing esophageal cancer.

In the past, patients with Barrett's esophagus were monitored until their level of dysplasia (abnormal tissue) reached the point at which surgical removal of the esophagus was required to prevent cancer. Today, Barrett's esophagus can be successfully treated the majority of the time through radiofrequency ablation, a far less invasive endoscopic technique that burns off the abnormal tissue. This option makes it much more attractive to treat rather than monitor Barrett's esophagus, thus reducing the risk of progression to cancer, explains V. Raman Muthusamy, MD, director of interventional endoscopy for the Division and a leader in developing the radiofrequency ablation technique.

"The problem is that most people with Barrett's don't know they have it," says Dr. Muthusamy. "When patients go to see the doctor, it's often because they are having a hard time swallowing or are losing weight, and by that time, it's likely that their Barrett's has already progressed to cancer. So one of our major goals is to

try to identify patients earlier through improved screening tests."

Dr. Muthusamy and his UCLA colleagues are now participating in a multicenter clinical trial of one such diagnostic tool, a sponge capsule given in the form of a small pill attached to a string. Once the capsule is swallowed it dissolves within five minutes, then the string is pulled out, bringing up the sponge for analysis of the esophageal cells. "This appears to be a much less invasive and more cost-effective way of screening than the current endoscopic approach," Dr. Muthusamy explains.

Through the available techniques – including radiofrequency ablation, cryotherapy (freezing), and surgical removal – Barrett's can be successfully treated and cancer avoided in 80-90 percent of patients, Dr. Muthusamy says. "The question is which patients need to be treated and which ones can be simply observed closely because they are at low risk," he adds. Dr. Muthusamy's team is conducting research aiming to improve on the criteria that determines which Barrett's patients should be treated.

"Ten years ago, if you had Barrett's esophagus with high-grade dysplasia, you lost your esophagus," Dr. Muthusamy concludes. "Today, most of these patients never need to see a surgeon because of our ability to manage this condition so effectively. We are optimistic that our research will improve on treatment techniques to achieve even better results, prevent recurrences, and best identify patients who can benefit from these new techniques before they develop cancer." 🗣️



V. Raman Muthusamy, M.D., F.A.C.G., F.A.S.G.E.
Director, Interventional and General Endoscopy
Clinical Professor of Medicine,
Division of Digestive Diseases
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

Center Brings Comprehensive Approach to Obesity Research and Treatment



The most important health epidemic of the 21st century is also among the most difficult to solve. Metabolic syndrome – a set of interrelated conditions that includes obesity, high blood sugar, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and fatty liver – accounts for most of the death and disability in the United States through increased risk of diabetes, heart disease and stroke. “This is the only major chronic condition that is increasing worldwide,” says Simon Beaven, MD, PhD, an assistant professor in the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases. “Because it’s such a complex problem, we need to bring wide-ranging expertise and resources to provide the best available treatment and find more effective solutions.”

With that in mind, UCLA has established the Center for Obesity and METabolic Health (COMET). A partnership among UCLA’s digestive diseases, bariatric surgery and nutrition programs, COMET integrates all aspects of care, including the specialists who treat the liver, endocrine and cardiovascular complications of metabolic syndrome; bariatric surgery; clinical nutrition and dietary support; and psychological counseling. The center also maintains an active research and clinical trials program designed to gain insights into the national epidemic of obesity, and to develop more effective treatment strategies.

Dr. Beaven, who serves as COMET’s research and medical director, is an expert in fatty liver disease, the most common liver disorder in industrialized countries. Obesity and type 2 diabetes are major risk factors for fatty liver, which typically causes no symptoms and, in some individuals, can progress to chronic liver disease and liver failure. “We are doing more liver transplants than in the past from fatty liver, and many who progress to the point that they need one tend to be poor candidates because of their obesity,” says Dr. Beaven. His team is spearheading an effort to

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Carrying Forward a Proud Family Tradition of Philanthropy

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Diseases directed by Wallis Annenberg, Mr. Weingarten’s mother. After Gregory moved back to Los Angeles from Paris, he made a generous gift through the Annenberg Foundation to support the Division’s priorities, including research and patient-care efforts, as well as a fellowship program that is training the leaders of tomorrow.

In choosing where to direct philanthropic support, Mr. Weingarten says he looks at the impact an organization has on the recipients of its services, as well as on other organizations working in the same arena. “Good organizations are game changers – their impact extends as other organizations see their results and implement similar programs,” he says.

Mr. Weingarten views leadership as the most valued asset in determining his Foundation’s giving. After meeting with Dr. Eric Esrailian, co-chief of the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases, and learning first-hand about the Division’s clinical efforts, educational initiatives and novel research, Mr. Weingarten knew he wanted to support the Division’s core priorities. “I strive to make my work at the Foundation be as impactful as possible, particularly in the area of health and medical research, where no other sector has the potential to affect as many people on a global level,” he says. “The UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases is already a national leader. My hope is that our commitment helps their visionary team continue the Division’s innovative research and treatment to help patients in Los Angeles and worldwide.” 🍌

Leaving a Legacy to Nurture Young Physician Scientists

As director of the GI Fellowship Training Program within the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases, Lin Chang, MD, has heard firsthand the concerns of physician-scientists who worry about obtaining support in an era when research funding has become increasingly scarce.

“Today it takes much longer than in the past for young investigators to receive independent federal grant funding,” says Dr. Chang, a professor in the Division and co-director of the G. Oppenheimer Center for Neurobiology of Stress and Resilience. “As a result, some consider leaving research, or not pursuing a research career in the first place, at a time when we need *more* physician-scientists.”

Dr. Chang has decided to do her part to support these researchers. She recently made provisions in her estate plans to provide funding for early career physician-scientists in the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases who study gastrointestinal conditions. “We all know that research funding has become

much more competitive for everyone,” she explains. “For junior faculty, obtaining a mentored career development award is a very competitive process, but it is even harder to get an independent research grant after that. My goal is to provide young researchers in the Division with bridge funding that can lead to a mentored or independent research grant award, such as the National Institutes of Health RO1 grant award.”

Dr. Chang hopes her gift will help to encourage more physicians to become translational and clinician scientists – helping to bring laboratory findings to clinical fruition to improve patient care. Her gift will also provide salary support in a discipline that tends to be less compensated than other available options.

“UCLA has been very good to me,” says Dr. Chang, who has been at the university since she was an undergraduate. “I can see no better investment than giving back by supporting future physician-scientists at UCLA in their efforts to find new and improved treatments for patients with GI conditions.” 🍌



Lin Chang, M.D.

Director, UCLA GI Fellowship Training Program
Co-director, G. Oppenheimer Center for Neurobiology of Stress and Resilience
Director, Digestive Health and Nutrition Clinic
Professor of Medicine, Division of Digestive Diseases
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

Wisdom From Within



From L to R: Ronald Simms, Michael Flesch, Thomas Spiegel



From L to R: Gerald and Gail Oppenheimer



From L to R: Marion Anderson and Phyllis Easton



From L to R: Stanley and Patti Silver

This past year, the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases was proud to host our Patron Circle event at the Montage Beverly Hills. “Wisdom From Within: Revolutionary Insights into the Mind Body Connection and Better Health” featured Drs. Lin Chang, Kirsten Tillisch, Emeran Mayer, and Elaine Hsiao who took our guests on a journey through the latest research on the connection between the brain and gut. From learning about the newest alternative therapies for wellness to myths and realities about feeling good, our guests left with knowledge of the impact the microbiome has on the body as a whole.



From L to R: Drs. Lin Chang, Emeran Mayer, Kirsten Tillisch, Elaine Hsiao, and Gary Gitnick



From L to R: Drs. Lin Chang, Kirsten Tillisch, Elaine Hsiao, and Emeran Mayer

Quality Improvement Program Aims to Achieve Better Outcomes at Lower Costs

An innovative quality improvement (QI) program initiated by the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases in 2013 is serving as a model for the UCLA Health system in its efforts to ensure care that emphasizes patient-centered values, better coordination, and improved outcomes at lower costs.

Under the leadership of Daniel Hommes, MD, PhD, director of the UCLA Center for Inflammatory Bowel Diseases, the GI Quality Program has been developed and implemented for eight conditions commonly seen in the Division: celiac disease; colorectal health, including colorectal cancer screening and surveillance; endoscopy for gastrointestinal bleeding; Familial Mediterranean Fever; reflux disease and Barrett's esophagus; inflammatory bowel disease (IBD); irritable bowel syndrome; and liver disease, with an emphasis on liver cirrhosis.

Using a scientifically validated methodology, the program has defined a set of quality indicators for each disease area and has conducted measurements to determine how the division is faring and to identify targets for improvement. The program now has a clinical fellow dedicated to designing, implementing, and reporting on the quality improvement projects. Dr. Christine Yu was the inaugural GI Quality Improvement Scholar for 2014-15; Dr. Jitin Makker is the GI Quality Improvement Scholar for 2015-16.

In addition to focusing on improving coordination of services and providing more holistic, patient-centered care, the program has introduced technology – including apps to improve patients' self-care – and has looked at ways to optimize the electronic medical record system to enhance the programs. For every condition, research is being undertaken to learn more

about the impact of the quality initiatives. For example, a randomized controlled trial is examining whether providing liver cirrhosis patients with mobile devices to track their progress at home will reduce readmission rates. In conjunction with the UCLA Health system, the program has also sent approximately 5,000 fecal test kits to patients 50 and older who have chosen not to undergo recommended screening colonoscopy as a way of detecting early, curable colorectal cancers.



The quality improvement initiative in the Division began in the UCLA Center for Inflammatory Bowel Diseases, where a prototype program to improve patient value has yielded impressive results. “We have dramatically reduced hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and unnecessary use of services such as imaging,” says Dr. Hommes. “We have had nurse care coordinators who have taken much of the administrative and monitoring burden off of the medical specialists, and we have seen a substantial improvement in patient engagement.

All of that is leading to reduced overall costs and better outcomes.” 



Daniel Hommes, M.D., Ph.D.
Director, Clinical Care & Clinical Research,
UCLA Center for Inflammatory Bowel Diseases
Director, GI Quality Program
Professor of Medicine, Division of Digestive Diseases
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA



Meet UCLA's Division of Digestive Diseases New Faculty



Beverly Chen, M.D.

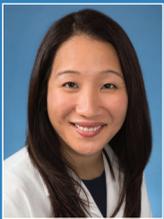
Clinical Instructor of Medicine, Division of Digestive Diseases
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

Dr. Chen graduated with Latin honors from the accelerated-combined BA-MD program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She completed her Internal Medicine residency and gastroenterology fellowship at University of Southern California/Los Angeles County Medical Center.

During residency and fellowship, she researched and trained with world renowned gastrointestinal specialists. She and her colleagues received the Inflammatory Bowel Disease Research Award at the American College of Gastroenterology Annual Conference in 2014.

Dr. Chen's clinical interests include gastrointestinal bleeding, colon cancer screening, gastroesophageal reflux disease, inflammatory bowel disease, irritable bowel syndrome, women's gastrointestinal health, and chronic constipation.

She is a member of the Gold Humanism Honor Society, American Gastroenterological Association, and American College of Gastroenterology.



Gina Choi, M.D.

Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine and Surgery
Division of Digestive Diseases
Pfleger Liver Institute
Department of Medicine
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

Dr. Choi specializes in the management of liver disease. She focuses on treating patients with the complications of cirrhosis, and manages their evaluation and care before and after liver transplant. She is well versed in the newest approaches to non-interferon based therapies for hepatitis C. Her research interests include hepatitis B and hepatocellular carcinoma. She is part of a multi-disciplinary team at UCLA employing the latest treatments for hepatocellular carcinoma.

Dr. Choi graduated from Stanford University and subsequently spent one year in Korea as a Fulbright Scholar. She speaks both English and Korean. She earned her medical degree at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) and completed her internal medicine residency at New York University (NYU). This was followed by a gastroenterology fellowship at UCLA, where Dr. Choi was the recipient of the Compassionate Care Award. She then pursued an additional year of advanced training in transplant hepatology at the University of Pennsylvania.



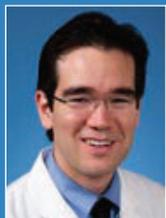
Arpana Gupta, Ph.D.

Adjunct Assistant Professor, Division of Digestive Diseases
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA
G. Oppenheimer Center for Neurobiology of Stress and Resilience

Dr. Gupta completed a Ph.D. degree in Psychology from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, followed by an APA accredited clinical internship at Massachusetts General Hospital/Harvard Medical Center. After coming to UCLA she joined the neuroimaging and psychophysiological cores at the Center for Neurobiology of Stress as a postdoctoral scholar in 2012.

Her research focuses on the investigation of the influence of environmental factors on shaping neurobiological phenotypes associated with stress and pain-based diseases such as functional gastroenterological disorders (FGIDs) [vulvodynia, irritable bowel syndrome] and obesity. Her programmatic line of research broadly defined focuses on the bidirectional interactions between the brain and peripheral factors (in particular immune factors and gut microbiota-related metabolites) and how these interactions are modified by vulnerability (early adversity, race, adult stress, socioeconomic status [SES], diet) and protective (resilience, exercise) factors in contributing to the underlying pathophysiology of obesity. She is dedicated to using advanced automated and mathematical analytic techniques, which allows her to integrate information from multiple data sources including multimodal neuroimaging data acquisition and analytic techniques, while accounting for sex and race differences. Her goal is to develop a comprehensive model that provides a powerful and sensitive biomarker that will increase biological readouts of these pain and stress-based disorders, thus bringing to the forefront those individuals who are at increased risk as a result of disadvantaged backgrounds.

Meet UCLA's Division of Digestive Diseases New Faculty



Jonathan Jacobs, M.D., Ph.D.

Clinical Instructor of Medicine, Division of Digestive Diseases
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

Dr. Jacobs graduated magna cum laude with highest honors from Harvard University with an A.B. in biochemistry. He subsequently received his M.D. from Harvard Medical School, graduating magna cum laude in a special field. During college and medical school, he trained in the laboratory of Diane Mathis and Christophe Benoist where he investigated the immunologic mechanisms of an autoantibody-mediated model of arthritis. This research was supported by a fellowship from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and resulted in three first-author publications, including one in Proceedings of the National Academy of Science. He completed a residency in internal medicine at Stanford University then joined UCLA as a gastroenterology fellow in 2010. He pursued additional research training at UCLA through the Specialty Training and Advanced Research (STAR) program under the mentorship of Jonathan Braun. He was awarded a Ph.D. in cellular and molecular pathology in 2015 and afterwards joined the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases faculty.

Dr. Jacobs' doctoral research explored the interaction of the intestinal microbiome and the mucosal immune system. He completed a translational study that found that healthy people in families with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) could be classified by their intestinal microbial and metabolomics profiles into "enterotypes" and "metabotypes" that may indicate their future risk for IBD. His work was awarded Best Overall Abstract at the UCLA Center for Ulcer Research and Education (CURE) Annual Research Meeting and the Fellow Abstract Prize from the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA). He also authored a review article, a commentary, and two textbook chapters on intestinal host-microbiome interactions. His ongoing projects as faculty employ in vivo models and multi'omics analysis of IBD cohorts to define the role of IBD-associated genes in shaping the intestinal microbiome and to identify microbial products that promote IBD.



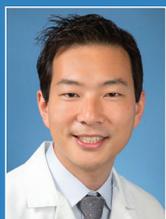
Marc Kaneshiro, M.D.

Clinical Instructor of Medicine, Division of Digestive Diseases
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

Dr. Kaneshiro received both his undergraduate Bachelor of Science degree in Biology and medical degree at the University of Hawaii. He completed his Internal Medicine residency at the combined Cedars-Sinai Medical Center/ West Los Angeles Veterans Affairs training program and also served an additional year as Chief Medical Resident. He completed his gastroenterology training at the UCLA digestive diseases fellowship program.

Dr. Kaneshiro has clinical interests in esophageal disorders, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), gastrointestinal motility disorders, inflammatory bowel disease (Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn's Disease), celiac disease, gastrointestinal bleeding and colon cancer screening.

He is a member of the American Gastroenterological Association, American College of Gastroenterology, Society for Surgery of the Alimentary Tract and Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America.



Stephen Kim, M.D.

Clinical Instructor of Medicine, Division of Digestive Diseases
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

Dr. Kim's clinical focus involves the application of advanced endoscopic procedures in the diagnosis, treatment and palliation of various gastrointestinal disorders. He is proficient in diagnostic and therapeutic endoscopic ultrasound (EUS), ERCP, endoluminal stenting, deep enteroscopy, ablation of dysplastic Barrett's esophagus, and endoscopic mucosal resection (EMR) of large colon polyps. His research and clinical interests lie in the endoscopic management of pancreatic diseases and gastric dysplasia.

Dr. Kim received his undergraduate education from Harvard University and earned his medical degree at Tufts University School of Medicine. He completed his residency in Internal Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania after which he spent an extra year as Chief Medical Resident. He then moved to UCLA for his Gastroenterology and advanced endoscopy fellowships. He is board-certified in Gastroenterology and Internal Medicine and is an active member of the American Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy, American College of Gastroenterology and American Gastroenterological Association.

Meet UCLA's Division of Digestive Diseases New Faculty



Folasade May, M.D., Ph.D., M.Phil.

Assistant Professor of Medicine, Division of Digestive Diseases
Co-Director, UCLA Global Health Education Program
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

Dr. May graduated cum laude from Yale University with a degree in molecular, cellular, and developmental biology. After college, she attended the University of Cambridge to study epidemiology and international health, earning a Masters of Philosophy before returning to the States to attend Harvard Medical School. She completed her internship and residency in internal medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital and remained at MGH for one year as a clinical educator in the Department of Medicine and manager of trainee affairs for the MGH Multicultural Affairs Office.

Dr. May came to UCLA in 2011 to begin her gastroenterology fellowship. As a fellow in the UCLA Specialty Training and Advanced Research (STAR) program, she earned a PhD in Health Policy and Management from the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health. Her doctoral dissertation addressed black-white disparities in colorectal cancer incidence, screening, and outcomes.

Dr. May joined the digestive diseases faculty at UCLA as a clinical instructor of medicine in 2015. She is a member of the UCLA Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center (JCCC) and research collaborator at the UCLA Center for Cancer Prevention Control Research (CPCR). She is also faculty at the UCLA Center for World Health as co-director for the Global Health Education Program in the David Geffen School of Medicine. She has participated in global health programs in Costa Rica, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Malawi, and Tanzania.



Melissa Munsell, M.D.

Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine
Division of Digestive Diseases
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

Dr. Munsell attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she received her bachelor of science in biology and psychology with a minor in chemistry. She earned her medical degree from the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine and completed internship and residency in internal medicine with the Osler Medical Service at Johns Hopkins. She continued at Johns Hopkins for gastroenterology fellowship. During fellowship she had an interest in inflammatory bowel diseases and was a visiting fellow at the Cedars-Sinai Inflammatory Bowel Disease Center.

Following her training, Dr. Munsell worked as an attending physician with the Southern California Permanente Medical Group where she practiced general gastroenterology with an interest in inflammatory bowel diseases and motility disorders. She was integral in beginning an inflammatory bowel disease subgroup. She was involved in the interpretation of esophageal motility studies and capsule endoscopy. She is board-certified in Internal Medicine and Gastroenterology.

Faculty Awards

Dr. Fola May was awarded a UCLA Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center Seed Grant which will help fund the project "A Community-Academic Partnership to Improve Colorectal Cancer Screening in South Los Angeles." She will be working with members of the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health to address colorectal cancer disparities in Latino and African-American communities, where screening rates are low.

Dr. Arpana "Annie" Gupta was awarded a Research Training Grant from the National Institutes of Health – National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases for her research "Role of Inflammatory Processes in Reward Network Alterations in Obesity." The aim of this project is to identify brain signatures and the role of inflammatory mediators linked to hedonic related eating behaviors as well as the feasibility of targeted intervention through Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.



Center Brings Comprehensive Approach to Obesity Research and Treatment

Continued from page four

better understand the metabolic pathways at play in fatty liver disease as a way to identify targets for new drugs that could enable the condition to be managed without the need for transplantation.

The best long-term option for treating obesity and fatty liver remains bariatric (weight loss) surgery, but for a variety of reasons, only about 1 percent of people who are obese undergo the operation. COMET is one of the few centers offering a minimally invasive endoscopic procedure as an alternative. “There is a huge unmet need for treatment of patients who are not able to lose weight through diet and exercise alone,” explains Rabindra Watson, MD, a gastroenterologist in the Division who performs the endoscopic procedures at COMET. “We are offering a middle ground that many patients find more palatable because it’s less invasive and lower-risk.”

The endoscopic technology continues to advance, Dr. Watson says. The COMET team now uses intragastric balloons, which are inserted into the stomach on a short-term basis to give patients

The best long-term option for treating obesity and fatty liver remains bariatric (weight loss) surgery, but for a variety of reasons, only about 1 percent of people who are obese undergo the operation.



Rabindra Watson, M.D.

Director, Faculty Career Development in Advanced Endoscopy
Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine,
Division of Digestive Diseases
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA



Simon Beaven, M.D., Ph.D.

Research and Medical Director, Center for Obesity and METabolic Health (COMET)
Assistant Professor, Division of Digestive Diseases
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

the sense of fullness after consuming smaller food portions. Meanwhile, the COMET team works with the patient on the lifestyle changes that can make the weight loss sustainable after the water-filled balloon has been removed.

“Very few centers are bringing the kind of a robust multidisciplinary, comprehensive effort to the treatment of obesity and metabolic syndrome that COMET is,” says Dr. Watson. “But we know that these are complex diseases that affect many organ systems. With all of us working together to develop and implement the best treatment plans for patients, as well as conducting research that helps us to better understand these conditions and develop more effective therapies, we can make inroads against this major epidemic.” 🍌

UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases

405 Hilgard Avenue
100 UCLA Medical Plaza, Suite 265
Los Angeles, CA 90095-7018



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The IRA Charitable Rollover: A Tax-Savvy Way to Support UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases

The IRA charitable rollover is now permanent, allowing donors age 70 ½ or older to make a philanthropic gift of up to \$100,000 (\$200,000 for a couple with separate IRAs) and avoid taxation of these amounts. And, this gift satisfies the annual Required Minimum Distribution (RMD).

Here's how it works:

- You should be 70 ½ or older at the time of the gift.
- Funds should be transferred *directly* from your financial institution to The UCLA Foundation.
- Transfers must be made from a traditional IRA or a Roth IRA.
- Gift satisfies the annual Required Minimum Distribution (RMD).
- Allows you to make an additional tax-free gift, even when you have maximized your charitable deductions for the year.
- Provides an alternative, tax-advantage asset to consider for philanthropic goals.

For more information, please contact Laurel Zeno, Senior Director of Development at (310) 825-1980 for a confidential conversation 

UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases

Gary Gitnick, M.D., F.A.C.G.
Co-Chief, Division of Digestive Diseases

Eric Esrailian, M.D., M.P.H.
Co-Chief, Division of Digestive Diseases

Laurel Zeno
Senior Director of Development

Trisha James, M.B.A.
Business Development

Tonishia Boyle
Finance and Operations

Dan Gordon
Writer/Editor

SD Graphics
Graphics/Production

Reed Hutchinson
Photography