



Dear Patients, Friends and Colleagues,

I hope that this holiday season finds you well. It was another busy and productive year in the world of IBD research and the advancement of IBD care within our group. Some of the highlights are summarized below.

Clinical team updates: This year we expanded our IBD clinical group. We are delighted to welcome **Erin Fletcher** and **LaWanda Witherspoon (formerly Shears)** to our clinical staff. With the departure of one of our colleagues, Dr. Themis Dassopoulos, we had the opportunity to recruit two experienced IBD support staff. Erin has worked with my colleague Dr. Chien-Huan Chen as well as Dr. Dassopoulos for several years. Erin has now joined our group and will likely be the first friendly voice you find when you call. LaWanda, who was the medical assistant for Dr. Dassopoulos and Dr. Christian Stone, has joined our group to assist **Joanna Gilbertsen BSN, RN** in addressing your medical needs. Finally, we've added a new nurse practitioner **Deb Hiatt-Jensen**, who will be working predominately at Barnes West County Hospital seeing both inpatient and outpatient return visit appointments. As many of you have noted, we're now expanding our presence at Barnes West County Hospital. Look for a continuation of this over the course of the next year.

Clinical Advances in IBD: The last decade has seen many advances in our therapeutic approach to both Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. This year a new IBD medication was approved named [Vedolizumab](#) (Entyvio is the trade name). This is the first in a new class of medications, approved by the FDA for treatment of both forms of IBD, which targets how immune cells traffic out of blood vessels into the gastrointestinal organs. Like all medications in IBD, this is not yet a cure, but offers a new and effective option for many patients. In the Washington University IBD Center we are carefully examining the efficacy of this medication and to date have generally seen a favorable rate of response. We will have more information on our experience soon.

Research team updates: This year we've welcomed to our team David Alvarado PhD, postdoctoral training. David recently completed his PhD training at Johns Hopkins University and joined our group in May to focus on studies related to amino acid metabolism in colitis and colon cancer. We've also extended our collaborations with [Dr. Bishnupuri](#), an Instructor of Medicine, who is working with our lab in an enhanced capacity this year to further our studies in colon cancer signaling. We offer congratulations this year to undergraduates Emily Vivio and Alec Khoury and Medical Student Aaron Zuckerman who received summer research project awards via competitive grants from the AGA, CCFA and the Dean of Research.

Research Updates: The Ciorba IBD research group has along with collaborators continued to make significant strides in advancing IBD understanding and IBD patient care paradigms. A highlight of the year was the publication of an original research manuscript in Gut, a premier Journal in our field. This work, in collaboration with the [Stappenbeck lab](#) identified a new method to isolate and grow human gut epithelial cells. This work has particular importance given our prediction that future novel IBD therapies will focus on GI epithelial cells, the cells which form the barrier between ourselves and the environment. This system may ultimately allow a personalized care approach where rational selection of a therapy can be made based on an individual's predicted response. Several [media outlets](#) as well as [scientific journals](#) covered this advance. This work and

other research from our group was also presented at meetings throughout the year including Digestive Diseases Week, the American College of Gastroenterology meeting, and the CCFA's Advances in IBD meeting.

Another important highlight was the initiation of a clinical trial examining the efficacy of a probiotic supplement to reduce gastrointestinal toxicity during cancer therapy. This work is in collaboration with radiation oncologist [Parag Parikh MD](#) of the Siteman Cancer Center and [William Stenson MD](#). This phase 1 clinical trial was approved by the FDA, and if successful will be expanded into a multi-centered, randomized phase 2 trial. If successful, this new preventative strategy may benefit hundreds of thousands of patients annually by eliminating the short, and potentially long-term, GI side effects associated with certain cancer therapies.

Recognitions and honors: We were honored this year to have our research supported by the efforts of the newly formed Givin' It All for Gut's Foundation. This foundation was started by a wonderful group of inspired individuals with the mission to find a cure for Crohn's disease and its complications through the support of research. Thus far their support enabled us to identify a new genetic risk factor predictive of a more complicated Crohn's disease course. Look for the coming publication in PLOS ONE and visit the foundation's website (<http://givinitallforguts.weebly.com/>) to learn more. The Board's visit to the lab was a lot of fun. Please let me know if your or others are interested in visiting our research programs here at WUSM.

It's also been my pleasure to continue service as a Board Member of the [Mid America Chapter of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America](#) and head of the Chapter's Medical Advisory Committee. This year it was my distinct honor to be recognized with the CCFA's Distinguished Gastroenterologist Award at the second-annual Cashing out for Crohn's and Colitis Casino Night gala.

Finally, my team and I want to extend our deepest gratitude to you, our patients, for entrusting us with your health. It is truly our honor and privilege.

Happy Holidays and Best Wishes for 2015!



Left: Ciorba IBD Group and family members at Summer BBQ: Members from Left- Katie Ciorba, Caroline Vemulapali, David Alvarado PhD, Srikanth Santhanam PhD, Kumar Bishnupuri PhD, Joanna Gilbertsen RN, Aaron Zuckerman, Emily Vivio and Matthew Ciorba (not pictured: Mark Shabsovich, Alec, Erin and LaWanda).
Right: At CCFA Cashing Out for Crohn's and Colitis Event.