

# Digestive Digest

Summer 2019

Issue 3

**Emory University**  
**Division of Digestive Diseases**



**Shanthi Srinivasan, MD**  
**Division Director**

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## Shanthi Srinivasan, MD named director of the Division of Digestive Diseases

We are excited to share that **Shanthi Srinivasan, MD**, professor of medicine, has been appointed director for the Division of Digestive Diseases and has been named the R. Bruce Logue Endowed Chair in Digestive Diseases. Dr. Srinivasan has served as the division's interim director since February 2018, and we are thrilled to have her continue in this leadership capacity.

Dr. Srinivasan received her MD from Wayne State University's School of Medicine and completed her residency and digestive diseases fellowship at the University of Michigan. She continued her digestive diseases training at Washington University, where she also served on the faculty. She joined the Emory School of Medicine faculty in 2003, where she has been a leader in the Division of Digestive Disease's academic programs.

Dr. Srinivasan is engaged in laboratory-based research at Emory and the Atlanta VA Medical Center. She has built a strong research program upon her interest in gastrointestinal motility disorders. She has received both NIH and VA Merit Funding for her research which is focused on gastrointestinal neurobiology and changes in gut microbiota. She examines the key factors regulating gastrointestinal motility in diabetes, obesity, and inflammation. A major focus of Dr. Srinivasan's research has been the role of Glial Derived Neurotrophic Factor (GDNF) in the enteric nervous system as it relates to diabetes and intestinal inflammation. She was the first to recognize that GDNF can reduce hyperglycemia-induced enteric neuronal loss and prevent gastrointestinal motility changes in an animal model of diabetes. She extended these findings to humans in a study of colectomy specimens from healthy patients and patients with diabetes. Her work is widely regarded as unique and pioneering, and it has consequently opened up new fields of investigation for other researchers.

Dr. Srinivasan has served as the chief of gastroenterology at the Atlanta VA. In this role, she has led day-to-day operations and physician and staff recruitment. In addition, she helped open the new GI endoscopy lab at the Atlanta VA in 2018.

Dr. Srinivasan has made excellent contributions to the Department of Medicine's education mission. She teaches medical students and residents in the department's internal medicine residency program and undergraduate students in Emory's neuroscience program. She directed the M1-GI section of the School of Medicine's curriculum for three years, which led to the gastroenterology module being commended as one of the best modules in the school's curriculum.

We recognize and thank Dr. Srinivasan's outstanding leadership during the division's interim period, and we look forward to seeing her continue to guide the Division of Digestive Diseases and the Department of Medicine's mission to advance health through discovery, education, and care.

# Digestive Digest

## Summer 2019

## Digestive Diseases Week (DDW) 2019 Highlights

This year, the Digestive Diseases Week celebrated its 50th anniversary as the premier national and international conference in gastroenterology and hepatology. Emory's Division of Digestive Diseases was well represented with 18 poster presentations, four oral presentations, and four clinical symposium sessions. The division's faculty and trainees presented innovative research findings and recent advances in endoscopic and gastrointestinal motility procedures. This year, the division also hosted a reception that was well attended by alumni, faculty, and fellows. Overall, it was a great meeting with many opportunities for Emory fellows and faculty members to network and to be exposed to the latest research, endoscopic techniques, and novel treatment strategies for gastrointestinal diseases.



## Basic Science Research Highlights

The division's overall research mission is to conduct original scientific investigations in diseases and disorders of the digestive system, including the gastrointestinal tract, liver, and pancreas. Major research interests include: the regulation of enteric neuronal function and gastrointestinal motility; the mechanisms of micronutrient and electrolyte absorption; and defining the risk factors and signaling transduction in the pathogenesis/progression of inflammatory bowel diseases, colorectal cancer, and liver diseases.



**Shanthi Srinivasan, MD**, professor of medicine and director of the Division of Digestive Diseases, focuses her research on the enteric nervous system and how it is affected in different disease states such as diabetes, obesity, and inflammatory bowel disease, as well as the effect of the enteric nervous system on beta cell development and obesity.



**C. Chris Yun, MD**, professor of medicine, studies the roles of a natural, bioactive lipid called lysophosphatidic acids (LPA), its receptors, and LPA-producing autotaxin in the initiation and progression of colorectal cancer and colitis. His lab also studies the roles of Na<sup>+</sup>/H<sup>+</sup> exchanger NHE3 in diarrheal diseases, diabetes, and hypertension, as well as the underlying mechanisms that regulate trafficking and subcellular localization of NHE3.



**Mark J. Czaja, MD**, professor of medicine, studies the mechanisms of liver injury and hepatocyte death in order to develop new therapeutic approaches to prevent human liver failure. His team attempts to define signal transduction pathways that mediate liver injury from inflammatory factors, and regulate the development of steatosis and the progression to steatohepatitis in fatty liver disease.



**Peijian He, PhD**, assistant professor of medicine, studies intestinal iron transport and its contribution in systemic iron overload through post-translational activation of iron transporters. He is also interested in understanding the pathogenic role of iron in gastrointestinal diseases and the underlying mechanisms in order to develop therapeutic strategies to prevent iron toxicity.

## Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) Research Highlights



The Emory IBD clinic provides a multi-disciplinary approach to the treatment of IBD. Emory gastroenterologists work closely with surgeons, pathologists, and radiologists to provide the most comprehensive care for Georgia's IBD population. The clinic participates in several clinical trials studying novel therapies such as stem cells for treatment of fistulizing Crohn's disease, as well as microbial therapeutics for treatment of Ulcerative Colitis. The division's faculty members also participate in multi-institutional conferences discussing complicated IBD cases with other experts.

Tanvi Dhere, MD serves as the director of IBD at the Emory Clinic and is also the chair of the Georgia Crohn's & Colitis Foundation medical advisory committee. Meena Prasad, MD is the director of IBD at the Atlanta VA Medical Center. Heba Iskandar, MD is the director of IBD research at the Emory Clinic. Additional IBD clinical faculty members include David Eskreis, MD, Ed LeVert, MD, Harini Naidu, MD, and Mohammed Razvi, MD.

### CLINICAL TRIALS

- A phase 3, randomized, double blind, placebo controlled, multi-center study to evaluate the efficacy and safety of etrolizumab as an induction and maintenance treatment for patients with moderately to severely active crohn's disease.
- An open label, randomized, multi-center, comparative effectiveness trial of specific carbohydrate and Mediterranean diets to induce remission in patients with crohn's disease.
- A phase 2/3, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled, multi-center study to evaluate the safety and efficacy of BI 655130 induction therapy in patients with moderate-to-severely active ulcerative colitis who have failed previous biologics therapy.
- An open label, long term safety trial of BI 655130 treatment in patients with moderate to severely active ulcerative colitis who have completed previous BI 655130 trials.
- A phase 3, multi-center, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study of oral ozanimod as induction/maintenance therapy for moderately to severely active crohn's disease.
- A multi-center, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled induction study to evaluate the efficacy and safety of risankizumab in subjects with moderately to severely active ulcerative colitis who have failed prior biologic therapy.
- A phase 3b, multi-center, randomized, blinded, active-controlled study to compare the efficacy and safety of ustekinumab to that of adalimumab in the treatment of biologic naïve subjects with moderatelyto-severely active crohn's disease.
- Adult allogeneic expanded adipose-derived stem cells for the treatment of complex perianal fistula(s) in patients with crohn's disease.
- Study to evaluate the efficacy, safety, and microbiome dynamics of ser-287 in subjects with mild-moderate UC.
- A phase 2a, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study to evaluate the efficacy, safety, tolerability, and pharmacokinetics of PF-06687234 as add-on therapy to infliximab in active ulcerative colitis subjects who are not in remission.

## Motility Research Highlights



**Jennifer Christie, MD**, professor of medicine, focuses on understanding the impact that functional bowel disorders have on men and women and identifying treatment for these disorders. She conducts research on the prevalence of the gastroparesis in subpopulations, as well as its treatments and clinical outcomes.



**Shreya Raja, MD**, assistant professor of medicine, performs high-resolution esophageal manometry, high-resolution anorectal manometry, wireless motility capsule studies, and video capsule endoscopy studies. Raja specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of pan-gastrointestinal motility disorders, functional disorders, and pelvic floor disorders.



**Emad Qayed, MD**, associate professor of medicine, performs high-resolution esophageal manometry to help diagnose and treat patients with esophageal motility disorders at Grady Memorial Hospital. He is passionate about educating GI fellows and recently published a review article on esophagogastric outflow obstruction in the World Journal of Gastroenterology with second-year GI fellow, Salih Samo, MD.



**Emad Qayed, MD**, assistant professor of medicine, serves as the esophageal specialist at Clifton campus. He completed gastroenterology fellowship training at the University of Michigan and esophageal fellowship training at Northwestern University. His expertise is in diagnosing and treating non-surgical esophageal conditions, which oftentimes are related to esophageal motility disorders. His overall goal is to provide precision-based, personalized medicine to the esophageal patients.



**Nikrad Shahnava, MD**, assistant professor of medicine, performs GI motility studies including high-resolution esophageal manometry and anorectal manometry at Emory Saint Joseph's Hospital. He also performs endoscopic bariatric therapy at Emory Ambulatory Surgery Center at Dunwoody. In the GI motility clinic, Shahnava accepts referrals for patients with complex GI motility disorders from multiple gastroenterology and surgery practices across Georgia and neighboring states. He is also a member of the multi-disciplinary amyloidosis clinic at Winship Cancer Institute.

## Emory GPOEM and Submucosal Endoscopy Course

The Division of Digestive Diseases recently hosted the Emory Spring GPOEM and Submucosal Endoscopy Course. Per-oral endoscopic myotomy (POEM) and gastric per-oral endoscopic pyloromyotomy (GPOEM) are emerging treatment options for achalasia, esophageal motility disorders, gastroparesis, and other gastric disorders. The one-day, hands-on course introduced submucosal endoscopy to gastroenterologists and provided an opportunity for them to perform POEM and GPOEM procedures under the instruction of Emory experts, including Qiang Cai, MD, PhD and Steven Keilin, MD, and international guest faculty members.



**Qiang Cai, MD, PhD**  
Professor of Medicine



**Steven Keilin, MD**  
Associate Professor of Medicine

## Faculty Achievements and Awards



**Steven Keilin, MD**

Associate Professor of Medicine

Participated in the ASGE inaugural GOLD Leadership Program



**Giorgio Roccaro, MD**

Assistant Professor of Medicine

2019 recipient of Emory School of Medicine Doctors Day recognition award



**Jason Brown, MD**

Assistant Professor of Medicine

2019 recipient of Emory School of Medicine Educator Appreciation Day recognition award



**Ram Subramanian, MD**

Associate Professor of Medicine

Awarded with the AASLD designation for being part of the 2019 class of AASLD fellows



**Anand Jain, MD**

Assistant Professor of Medicine

Awarded the 2019 Department of Medicine FAME Grant for "Diagnosis of esophagogastric junction outflow obstruction in proton-pump inhibitor non responders using the functional lumen imaging probe"

## Faculty Achievements and Awards



**Chris Yun, PhD**

Professor of Medicine

Reappointed as Professor of Medicine by the Department of Medicine



**Steven Keilin, MD**

Professor of Medicine

Promoted to Professor of Medicine by the Department of Medicine



**Emad Qayed, MD**

Associate Professor of Medicine

Promoted to Associate Professor of Medicine by the Department of Medicine



**Tanvi Dhere, MD**

Associate Professor of Medicine

Awarded the title of Distinguished Physician by the Department of Medicine



**Lisa Cassani, MD**

Assistant Professor of Medicine

Awarded the title of Senior Physician by the Department of Medicine

## Faculty Achievements and Awards



**Meena Prasad, MD**

Assistant Professor of Medicine

Awarded the title of Senior Physician by the Department of Medicine



**Heba Iskandar, MD**

Assistant Professor of Medicine

Awarded the title of Senior Physician by the Department of Medicine



**Shreya Raja, MD**

Assistant Professor of Medicine

Awarded the title of Senior Physician by the Department of Medicine



**Nikrad Shahnava, MD**

Assistant Professor of Medicine

Awarded the title of Senior Physician by the Department of Medicine



**Joel Wedd, MD**

Assistant Professor of Medicine

Awarded the title of Senior Physician by the Department of Medicine

## Fellows Corner

### GI Fellowship Wellness Initiatives

The GI fellowship program leadership, in collaboration with the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), is committed to promoting physician wellness in the clinical learning environment for GI fellows. The leadership team is consistently looking for new ways to address burnout and educate fellows on the importance of self-care. Residency and fellowship can be stressful, so it is important that trainees remain physically, emotionally, and mentally healthy while completing their training. One of the ways that the GI fellowship promotes wellness is through the implementation of quarterly activities.

The first 2019 wellness activity took place January 14. Emory GI fellows gathered at Comet Pub & Lanes, where they enjoyed bowling and quality time with one another.



**Julia Massaad, MD**  
GI Fellowship Program  
Director



**Tania Davis, MBA**  
GI Fellowship Program  
Coordinator



**Ahmed Messallam, MD**  
Co-Chief Fellow  
2019 - 2020



**Ramzi Mulki, MD**  
Co-Chief Fellow  
2019 - 2020

## Fellows Corner

### The 8th Annual Department of Medicine Fellows Teaching Competition Winner

The Division of Digestive Diseases is excited to announce that GI fellow **Ahmed Messallam, MD** won the 8th Annual Department of Medicine Fellows Teaching Competition. The division has set the bar high by taking home this award two years in a row! This year's theme was "Thank You for Your Consult." Messallam's presentation was regarding a consult for percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) tube. He addressed the factors that should be considered when a GI physician decides to perform PEG.



## Fellows Corner

### 2019 - 2020 First-Year Fellows



**Chaitanya Allamneni, MD**  
University of Alabama



**Tina Pham Hang, MD**  
Emory University



**Amneet Hans, MD**  
University of Colorado

### Transplant Hepatology Fellow



**Angel B. Morales Santiago, MD**  
Department of Veteran Affairs Medical Center  
San Juan, Puerto Rico

### Transitions to Other Fellowship Training Programs



**Rushikesh Shah, MD**  
Matched with the advanced endoscopy fellowship program at  
Emory University for the 2019-2020 training year.



**Muhammad Amir, MD**  
Matched with the transplant hepatology fellowship program at  
Emory University for the 2019-2020 training year.