

Drossman Gastroenterology and the Rome Foundation welcomed Dr. Arnab Ray from the Gastroenterology Division of Ochsner Clinic in New Orleans, LA on October 12-13, 2021.

Dr. Ray spent two days in clinic with Dr. Drossman and his PA, Elizabeth Smith, and also spent time with Dr. Olafur Palsson at UNC discussing Rome Foundation related research.

What made you decide to go into the Visiting Scholar program?

I still remember attending an ACG conference years ago where Dr. Drossman presented videos on enhancing the patient physician interaction. It left a lasting impression on me because no one else was talking about this. Even though I pride myself on being an empathetic physician, I still felt that there were areas in the biopsychosocial sphere that I was uncomfortable addressing and listening to. I started reading more and more about Dr. Drossman and the work of the Rome Foundation, and when I realized there was a visiting scholar's program, it landed on my professional bucket list. Even though my initial plans to visit were delayed by the Covid pandemic, once an opportunity opened up, I took it. When my flight was canceled at the last moment, I rented a car and drove 12 hours so I would not miss the clinic and I am so glad that I did.



What were your goals and objectives in attending the program?

My main goal was to enhance my communication skills when it came to difficult conversations. Even though a physician can know that early life events and background stressors can play a large role in a patient's outcome, it can be difficult to unlock these conversations. As I observed Dr. Drossman, I found myself taking notes and writing down exactly how he got a patient to open up about a particularly sensitive topic. I called these "keys" and I find myself using them in my clinical practice now.

My other goal was to gain confidence in choosing and using neuromodulators. Although I am familiar with these and have read many of Dr. Drossman's articles, sometimes you just have to see it used in practice to see how they actually benefit specific patients and how to troubleshoot when adjustments need to be made. Dr. Drossman takes care of the most challenging patients with DGBIs, and it is encouraging to see that there are ways to help these patients get better.

To what degree were these goals/objectives met? Please describe?

I am already starting to use the “keys” to help unlock difficult conversations with patients and seeing that they appreciate when you can talk about these subjects with confidence and empathy.

I am also prescribing different neuromodulators beyond TCAs (tricyclic antidepressants) with more frequency and confidence.

What were the most meaningful aspects of your experience?

I read the Gut Feelings book prior to my visit and it certainly reinforced a lot of what I already believed about the patient physician interaction, but it was truly remarkable to see patients read it all the way through and take the lessons to heart. Sometimes just being heard and validated can go a long way to solidifying your bond with a patient. I look forward to the next volume with more patient stories and it was great to see some of these patients actively wanting to contribute their experiences to help others.

Do you have any further recommendations for us so that we may improve the program?

I greatly enjoyed my meeting with Dr. Palsson. We had a very nice discussion on variations of DGBI around the world and the impact of cultural differences on how we interpret the data of the incidence of these diseases. He is doing some very interesting work in this field.

We also talked about utilizing hypnosis and its role in treatment as well as contraindications to its use. I was familiar with some of his work through a previous Rome Foundation webinar, but for someone unfamiliar, perhaps a quick summary of the highlights of his research would be helpful prior to meeting.