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I am currently a GI fellow at OHSU in Portland, OR, and as a part of the American Neurogastroenterology and Motility Society's clinical training program at UNC, I was scheduled to spend several days in Dr. Drossman's functional GI clinic. Given the significant overlap between gastrointestinal motility and functional disorders, this was quite an important component of my month-long motility training, but prior to my first encounter with Dr. Drossman, it simply felt like a box that needed to be checked, a rite of passage per se. Little did I know, I was grossly underestimating the impact of this incredible experience.

Prior to my first encounter with Dr. Drossman, I had found these types of patients in my own fellows clinic to be incredibly difficult. They had problems to which I couldn't give an organic diagnosis – be it with labs, imaging, or endoscopic evaluation – and the treatments I was using were either poorly tolerated or just plain ineffective. So seeing a simple chief complaint of bloating would incite feelings of insecurity, and the patient encounter would leave me feeling somewhat worthless and unfulfilled as a physician. It was clearly frustrating for me, but I can only imagine how my patients felt.

It only took moments in Dr. Drossman's office for me to realize that he is going where no other physician has gone. He actively listens to his patients, not only hearing their GI concerns, but also taking into account the global aspects of their lives – both past and present – just listening, without a single interruption. Centuries after our forefathers in medicine sought to disconnect the mind and body, Dr. Drossman is finally bringing them back together and treating patients as a whole. He also surrenders the patriarchal physician-patient model and engages each patient in his or her care, allowing the patients to drive their own bus toward their well being, while providing them with the means and support to get there.

His knowledge of the pathophysiology of these functional GI disorders is insurmountable and he is able to communicate it in a language that is understood by all, so that after seeing dozens of doctors and undergoing testing ad nauseam, his patients finally have answers to why they feel the way they do. This understanding is just the beginning of their journey to wellness. He also provides options for novel therapies targeting the pathophysiologic pathway – fully understanding and explaining the mechanisms involved. And they work. Patients return having received great mental and physical benefit from this holistic approach. And many of them have a newfound quality of life that they never imagined was possible.

Thanks to Dr. Drossman, I have returned home with a new perspective and a much more fulfilling approach. I now see the bloating, the abdominal pain, the nausea, and other functional complaints with a sense of optimism. By using the skills that I have learned from Dr. Drossman (and perhaps an occasional 'phone a friend' call for advice), I truly believe I can help make them well. It was an opportunity that has shaped my career and for which I will forever be thankful.

And finally, a special thank you to Dr. Drossman's excellent PA, Kellie Bunn, as well, who knows more about treating functional GI disorders than I probably ever will!