

In August 2023, Dr. Justin Brandler completed the Rome Foundation-DrossmanCare Visiting Scholar Program.

Dr. Brandler is a neurogastroenterologist at Virginia Mason Medical Center in Seattle, WA, and he specializes in Disorders of Gut-Brain Interaction (DGBI). His visit with Dr. Douglas Drossman President Emeritus and CEO of the Rome Foundation included advanced training in communication skills and neuromodulator treatment methods for patients with DGBI.



The Visiting Scholar Program is a great opportunity for researchers and clinicians to engage with key leaders, including Rome Foundation Board members and other international experts to learn not only about DGBI diagnosis and treatment, but also about advanced communication skills and targeted research methods.

This program is open to clinicians and scientists in gastroenterology, primary care, and selected subspecialties, as well as to mental health providers, advanced practice providers (NP/PA), and dietitians. The attendees usually spend two to three days on-site or longer by arrangement. This program is critical to help develop and inspire the next generation of providers to become skilled communicators and exceptional clinicians treating patients with DGBI.

When asked about his experience, Dr. Brandler said:

**What were your goals and objective in attending the program?**

My main goal in flying across the country from Seattle to North Carolina was to enter this space with openhanded curiosity. How did one gastroenterologist in one career transform the culture for some of the most challenging patients in medicine into the powerhouse we know today as the Rome Foundation?

The other global objective was to enter the sacred space of some of the most stigmatized and villainized patients in the healthcare system. Despite this challenge, I desired to learn how to validate their experience, educate, and empower them. It was inspiring to see how a team of just one physician, one stellar physician assistant, and one compassionate secretary could provide a sanctuary for these patients and quite literally change the world from a single exam room. As soon as I arrived, I became like a kid at the Disneyland of Functional GI, taking pictures of everything in the room, essentially becoming the “Drossman Care Groupie.”

**To what degree were these goals/objective met? Please describe.**

These goals and objectives were met in ways I didn't even see coming. From this experience, Dr. Drossman has graciously agreed to provide me with direct mentorship as I seek to grow in my ability to care for these patients at the end of the line of Neurogastroenterology.

I know I will never be Doug Drossman and will never try to. No one ever will be. But I

do believe that he has sparked a brain-gut renaissance that is inspiring younger neurogastroenterologists like myself to pick up the mantle from him and so many other giants in the field.

**What were the most meaningful aspects of your experience?**

The most meaningful aspect of the experience that his patients echoed was what I have experienced just in my first year of practice. The simple truth is that when provided the safe space to truly be heard, they can truly be their own healers. We as providers are simply guides by the side to help facilitate their healing.

For further information on the Visiting Scholars program, please contact Michelle Berry at [mberry@theromefoundation.org](mailto:mberry@theromefoundation.org).