

Division of Digestive Diseases

David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

Spring 2012 Newsletter

Paula Kent Meehan

Partnering with Talented People



Paula Kent Meehan

As a business executive who co-founded the Redken Laboratories hair-care products company in 1960 in her late 20s, Paula Kent Meehan had a sign on her desk that read, "Form your opinion before you ask mine."

"I had great staff," Mrs. Kent Meehan recalls. "I would let them develop their concepts and most of the time would tell them that if you believe in this project and think it's right, I believe in it."

It was a philosophy that helped her become one of the nation's most respected and successful businesswomen. An actress and model in the 1950s, she started Redken with a \$3,000 fee she earned doing a Hamm's Beer commercial. When she sold the company to Cosmair, Inc., the U.S. licensee of L'Oreal, in 1993, Redken had more than

1,000 employees and was producing more than \$100 million in annual revenues.

That same approach – relying on the opinions of people she trusts – is what guides Mrs. Kent Meehan's philanthropic endeavors and has made her one of the Division of Digestive Diseases' most loyal donors. More than 20 years ago, having suffered from peptic ulcers for much of her adult life, she was referred to Gary Gitnick, M.D., chief of the division. Mrs. Kent Meehan was so impressed with him as a physician and a person, that she started a donor-advised fund within The UCLA Foundation, through which she began making gifts to support the division's work.

"My motivation for contributing to the Division, as well as for my greater involvement with UCLA, is always Dr. Gitnick," Mrs. Kent Meehan says. "He is so knowledgeable in so many areas, that I know whatever my health situation is, he will refer me to the perfect doctor. On top of that, he is an outstanding human being who cares so much."

Rather than trying to determine what to support, Mrs. Kent Meehan says, she relies on Dr. Gitnick to identify important priorities. "I attend meetings, hear more about what's important, and am often motivated to contribute," she says. Recently, she hosted a fundraising event for the division in the Japanese garden of her Beverly Hills home. "I hold many events in my garden, and that was one of the best," she says. "I met some of the most impressive, most wonderful people. It was an incredible day."

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A Cost-conscious Approach to Treating Digestive Diseases

After completing doctoral studies (Epidemiology and Health Economics) at Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Center in the Netherlands, Martijn van Oijen, Ph.D., studied medicine; however, he decided that rather than seeing patients, he would pursue his passion for research with the potential to improve the quality of care for the many patients with gastrointestinal conditions. After a stint at University Medical Center Utrecht, Dr. van Oijen moved overseas in January to join UCLA's Division of Digestive Diseases, where his studies of gastrointestinal health services could reach an even larger population.

Already, his work has made a major impact in the Netherlands. He was part of the nation's first study to determine the most efficient and cost-effective way to conduct mass colorectal cancer screenings for those aged 50-75. Dr. van Oijen and his group found that of two stool tests, the newer immunological one was significantly better because it was more effective and patients preferred it, resulting in higher participation rates. In addition to publishing the findings, Dr. van Oijen and his colleagues shared them with the Dutch government, which will follow the recommendations with its first national program for colorectal-cancer screenings this year.

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From the Division Chief

UCLA Division of
Digestive Diseases
David Geffen School of
Medicine at UCLA
Gary Gitnick, M.D.

The Division's programmatic quality continues to set the standard for patient care, research, and the training of future clinicians in this field. The most recent rankings by *U.S. News & World Report* placed the Division among the top six in the country and "Best in the West."

In our last issue, we began to introduce some of the new faculty members who are helping propel the Division in this success. They include Lynn Connolly, M.D., Gregory Harmon, M.D., Maria Hatzia Apostolou,

Ph.D., Daniel Hommes, M.D., Ph.D., Raman Muthusamy, M.D., Bruce Runyon, M.D., Christos Polytarchou, Ph.D., Martijn van Oijen, Ph.D., and Rabindra Watson, M.D. Drs. Harmon, Muthusamy, and Watson were featured in our last newsletter.

With this spring issue, I am pleased to provide more information on Drs. van Oijen and Hommes. Dr. van Oijen brings an enormous depth of experience and proven success in the area of cost-conscious strategies for treating digestive disorders, while Dr. Hommes's new therapeutic approaches for inflammatory bowel disease hold much promise.

In order to continue the Division's tradition of success and to meet the challenges of the coming years, I wish to announce the establishment of the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases Esophageal Center. Dr. Bennett Roth will serve as its Medical Director, Dr. Raman Muthusamy as its Director of Endoscopy, Dr. Kevin Ghassemi as its Director of Clinical Programs, and Dr. Thomas Kovacs will serve as Director

of the Esophageal Physiology Program.

Also, in a move to better meet the healthcare challenges of the future, Dr. Lin Chang has agreed to serve as Director of the Intestinal Disorders Clinical Center. This new facility will ultimately allow our division to have a centralized, coordinated effort to manage and study functional gastrointestinal disorders and neuroenteric diseases.

As we read about the work of these faculty members, and that of a few others, I am reminded of what it takes for the Division to have achieved this level of success. While governmental entities provide a small and ever-decreasing portion of the funds needed, the philanthropic support of our friends in the community continues to be essential. So it is within these pages that we give thanks to Paula Kent Meehan, one of the Division's closest friends and staunchest supporters. Like you, she understands the value of research, education, and training, and we are grateful for her partnership.

Many thanks to all of you. ■

Novel Approaches to IBD Hold Promise

Daniel Hommes, M.D., Ph.D., has one overriding professional goal: to improve the quality of life for patients suffering from inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

As a gastroenterologist in the Netherlands for the last two decades, Dr. Hommes has conducted laboratory studies shedding light on the immunological processes involved in IBD, as well as large clinical trials of new IBD drugs. He has pioneered research on stem-cell transplantation for patients who do not benefit from conventional therapies. To improve the national research infrastructure, he initiated a "biobank" that pools patient samples for eight diseases, including IBD, among the eight Dutch university medical centers, with funding from the Dutch government. Through his leadership as president of the European Crohn's and Colitis Organization (ECCO), Dr. Hommes has spearheaded the

effort to establish guidelines for IBD care and research among 31 European countries.

Dr. Hommes has now brought his research, clinical, and leadership talents to UCLA's Division of Digestive Diseases.

IBD is a group of chronic diseases of the colon and small intestine, generally falling into the categories of ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. In people who are genetically susceptible, antigens in the gut lumen drive the immune system to a hyperactive state, causing symptoms that can include abdominal pain and cramping, diarrhea, rectal bleeding, vomiting, and weight loss. The incidence of IBD has been on the rise in the Western world for reasons that are not clear.

"It [IBD] can affect careers and relationships," notes Dr. Hommes. "The drugs that are available come with side effects and are ineffective in about 20 percent of patients, who end up needing experimental therapy or



Daniel Hommes, M.D., Ph.D.

surgery." There remains a pressing need for more effective medications for IBD patients, he adds.

After completing medical school at the University of Amsterdam in 1990, Dr. Hommes began working as a researcher and clinician at Academic Medical Center

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in Amsterdam. His Ph.D. thesis dealt with novel drug targets for IBD; in 2001 he was appointed head of the medical center's IBD department. Two years later, he was one of the founders of the Dutch Academic IBD Society, which he chaired from 2003 to 2007.

In 2006, Dr. Hommes became chair of the Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology at the Leiden University Medical Center in the Netherlands. There, he established a clinical-trials center, as well as a basic-science research laboratory with 12 Ph.D. students and four postdoctoral fellows. He designed CuraRata, a platform for personalized medicine that was successfully piloted in IBD patients and officially launched by the Dutch Minister of Health.

Dr. Hommes chaired the scientific committee of ECCO from 2004 to 2008 and was elected president in 2010. ECCO, a nonprofit organization involved in research, education, and training and the development of guidelines for the diagnosis and management of the diseases, counts more than 1,200 IBD experts among its membership. "We have been able to advance the field under one central umbrella," Dr. Hommes says.

He also became active in building so-called intelligent databases as a way to develop better patient profiles, leading to more individually tailored therapy. Dr. Hommes intends to develop similar systems at UCLA. "It's an integration of IBD research and care pathways that empowers patients by giving them a voice in the process," he explains.

At UCLA, Dr. Hommes continues to study the immunology of the gut, looking, for example, at the response to various drugs, with the ultimate goal of learning how to optimize the immune system. He also plans to continue to lead large clinical trials of new IBD medications. "For the 20 percent of patients who require other therapies, we need to expand the options."

In the Netherlands, Dr. Hommes's group offered autologous hematopoietic stem-cell transplantation (using patients' own stem cells, drawn from blood) to those who are not responsive to medication. "It can be a less-invasive treatment, as opposed to major surgery," he explains.

He is also pursuing another track – a therapy involving not hematopoietic stem cells, but mesenchymal stem cells, those with the capability of differentiating into a variety of different cell types. "There is the potential to open a clinic with stem-cell transplantation protocols tailored for IBD, which are less toxic than for cancer treatment, but effective at controlling inflammation," adds Dr. Hommes.

He intends to assemble a team to develop a program for offering hematopoietic stem-cell transplantation as a "last-resort" treatment, while continuing to pursue research on the more ambitious mesenchymal stem-cell approach. It's part of his larger strategy of exploring every route possible to make the lives of IBD patients better. "My hope is that our team will provide the best, most innovative care," he says, "so that UCLA is the national center of excellence for IBD." ■

Faculty Member Receives Prestigious Grant from NIH

As many as one in six people in the United States experiences symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), a chronic condition characterized by abdominal pain and discomfort in association with changes in bowel movements. Medications provide relief for some IBS sufferers, but for many, the problems persist.

Kirsten Tillisch, M.D., assistant professor in the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases who specializes in IBS and other functional gastrointestinal disorders, has conducted studies suggesting that certain people's persistent abdominal discomfort has to do with their brain's response to the symptoms. She has found differences in the brains of people with and without the disorder. In recent years, mind-body approaches, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, yoga, hypnosis and meditation, have been shown to reduce subjective symptoms in several persistent pain disorders, including IBS.

Now, Dr. Tillisch has received a five-year RO1 grant from the National Institutes of Health to learn more about the biological basis for these improvements. Researchers would be able to better assess and compare the impact of various mind-body therapies, while assisting clinicians in fine-tuning the approaches and targeting specific treatments to the patients most likely to benefit.

Expanding on their previous research, Dr. Tillisch and her colleagues will develop "biomarkers" – structural and



Kirsten Tillisch, M.D.

functional brain alterations that can serve as objective and reliable measures of response to treatment. Once validated, these biomarkers will be used in a clinical trial with regard to Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), an eight-week intensive training program that incorporates ancient healing practices, including meditation and yoga.

"We think that intervening in a way that changes how the brain reacts to pain – either through hypnosis, cognitive behavioral therapy, or, in this case, a meditation practice – can return brain circuitry to normal after it has been changed by chronic pain," explains Dr. Tillisch. "It's important to understand what is happening in the brain in response to these therapies. By developing objective measures, we will be able to see which patients are most likely to benefit from which approaches. We will learn if these treatments change brain circuitry in a lasting way, as opposed to most drug treatments, in which symptoms typically return once patients stop using the medicine." ■



Martijn van Oijen, Ph.D.

Twitter and Crohn's Disease Break New Ground

Identifying ways to improve care for patients with chronic diseases requires learning more about the outcomes of their treatment and their everyday symptoms and needs. For researchers, such information has come largely from patient questionnaires. But Martijn van Oijen, Ph.D., who joined the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases in January, has seized on a potentially rich new data source: social media. He is using Twitter to identify patients with Crohn's disease – a young population that fits well within the Twitter demographic – and use their tweets to study self-reported patterns of disease activity and needs.

A Cost-conscious Approach, continued from page 1

In studies that also involve the treatment of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) and the gastrointestinal side effects of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and low-dose aspirin, Dr. van Oijen has explored how to provide optimal, cost-effective care. "In both the Netherlands and the United States, cost is a major concern," he says. "What's intriguing is that in some cases, starting treatment with a more expensive drug can save money in the long run, perhaps preventing a patient from being hospitalized later."

As a postdoctoral fellow in the Netherlands, Dr. van Oijen used a large database of IBD patients to study the cost-effectiveness of treatment with two biological drugs, infliximab (Remicade) and adalimumab (Humira). "These newest IBD therapies are expensive," he says. Among the concerns: Patients with certain underlying infections can't be put on the drugs, and those who do not take the medicine correctly will not benefit. On the other hand, for the appropriate patients, these biological therapies, which target proteins that play a role in inflammation, can be cost-effective. Dr. van Oijen's study looked at how best to screen IBD patients to determine if they should be started on one of the two drugs.

Dr. van Oijen also has examined how patients balance therapeutic benefits with side-effect risks. "Many IBD patients who are more severely ill are willing to take bigger risks with their treatment," he explains. "They would take drugs that could reduce their IBD symptoms, even though they might be at higher risk for getting cancer."

Finding the balance between therapeutic benefits and side-effect risks was a major part of Dr. van Oijen's Ph.D. thesis, which focused on gastrointestinal and cardiovascular outcomes for low-dose aspirin users. "It is the most commonly used drug because of its potential for preventing heart attacks and strokes, but it can cause gastrointestinal bleeding and peptic ulcer disease," he says. He determined optimal strategies, in part by identifying genetic factors that predispose individuals to

a higher risk of either a heart attack or gastrointestinal bleeding.

During that work, Dr. van Oijen traveled to San Francisco to attend a professional conference on outcomes research, where he met Brennan Spiegel, M.D., M.P.H., associate professor in UCLA's Division of Digestive Diseases. Their interaction led to a collaboration that continues to this day.

Subsequently, the two conducted a cost-effectiveness analysis of six strategies for using or not using low-dose aspirin, both with and without gastro-protective measures such as proton pump inhibitors (drugs that reduce gastric acid production). They found that for patients at increased heart attack risk, taking low-dose aspirin alone was the best option; for patients also at increased risk for gastrointestinal bleeding, adding a proton pump inhibitor was cost-effective.

After having spent time at UCLA as a visiting faculty member, Dr. van Oijen is happy to join the division full time. Among his projects will be to establish a database for all endoscopic procedures performed at UCLA, which can then be used to study quality of care to identify areas where services can be improved. In addition, he will be continuing research he recently began in the Netherlands on the use of social media as a potential tool for improving treatment outcomes. Beginning next fall, Dr. van Oijen will teach cost-effectiveness in the UCLA School of Public Health, where he hopes to serve as a bridge between public health students and the division, since methods developed in the school for studying quality of care can be implemented in digestive-disease-related research.

"There are so many more opportunities at UCLA than I had in the Netherlands," Dr. van Oijen says. "It's nearly 10 times bigger than my previous institution, creating more chances to team with experts in the field. The research here is at such a high level – I have always been very impressed by the work done by this division. And if our efforts change the way care is delivered here, many more people will benefit." ■

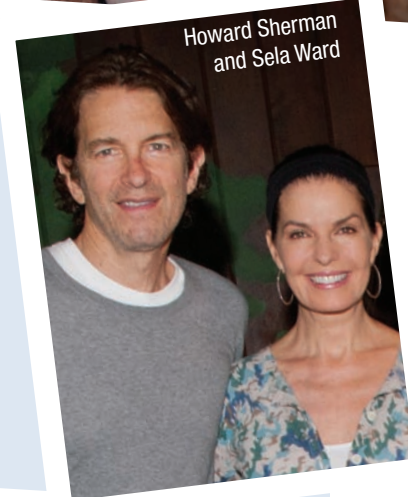
Barbara Davis, Paula Kent Meehan, Candy Spelling



Elizabeth Pitcairn



Howard Sherman
and Sela Ward



Famous "Red Violin" Performance Supports Division

Paula Kent Meehan, Candy Spelling, and
Barbara Davis Co-Host Event

Celebrated violinist Elizabeth Pitcairn performed with the legendary "Red Violin" during an intimate gathering held last September to reach out to new friends in support of the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases. The afternoon affair was held in the Japanese garden at the Beverly Hills residence of entrepreneur and philanthropist Mrs. Paula Kent Meehan, who co-founded the Redken hair products company. The event was co-hosted by philanthropists Mrs. Barbara Davis and Mrs. Candy Spelling. Guests enjoyed the musical performance, wine, and hors d'oeuvres in a tranquil setting, featuring a traditional Japanese tea house, pavilion, koi pond, and Noh theatre. ■

Steffi Graf and
Andre Agassi



Dr. Eric Esrailian, Janelle and
Brian Werdesheim



H. Tony and
Marti Oppenheimer



Julie Opperman and
Kimberly Miletta



Dr. Keith and Kathy Liberman,
Cherna Gitnick



Courtesy of Curtis Dahl Photography

NIH Renews Five-Year Gastroenterology Training Grant

Over nearly four decades, numerous academic leaders in gastroenterology have gotten their start through the Gastroenterology Training Grant administered by the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases with affiliated laboratories and mentors at UCLA, West Los Angeles VA Medical Center, CURE: Digestive Diseases Research Center, and Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. The program, funded by the National Institutes of Health, was recently competitively renewed for another five years, ensuring that six annual slots will continue to be filled by talented young trainees through at least 2016.

Originally devoted to the postdoctoral training of fellows in gastrointestinal (GI) physiology, the program has evolved to include laboratory studies, clinical and outcomes research, as well as translational science to bring basic findings to clinical settings. The program's leadership reflects that continuum: The training grant has been directed since 2000 by Dennis Jensen, M.D., professor in the Division and associate director of CURE, who is a clinical investigator and outcomes researcher. Co-directors are Peter Anton, M.D., also professor in the Division and a translational researcher, and Stephen Pandol, M.D., gastroenterologist at the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center who is a basic scientist.

Trainees on the grant include Ph.D.s and M.D.s who have completed their residency and are in GI fellowship programs, postdoctoral programs, or UCLA's Specialty Training & Advanced Research (STAR) program, which is dedicated to training physician-scientists. Individuals apply during their first year of fellowship and, if selected, receive salary support beginning in their second year to devote time to research and career development. The current group includes a pediatric gastroenterologist and,

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Dennis Jensen, M.D.



Peter Anton, M.D.



Stephen J. Pandol, M.D.

Division of Digestive Diseases Donor Luncheon

F. Charles Brunicaudi, M.D., F.A.C.S., spoke at a recent luncheon sponsored by the UCLA Division of Digestive Diseases. Dr. Brunicaudi is professor and chief of the Santa Monica-UCLA General Surgery Group and vice chair of the Department of Surgery for Surgical Services at UCLA Medical Center, Santa Monica. Attendees had an opportunity to listen to a lecture on Dr. Brunicaudi's research in personalized medicine and promising breakthroughs in cancer treatment.



Carol and Dr. Harry Green



Mary Anne Dolan and Brandon Stoddard



Agi Hirshberg



Alyce Woodward



Dr. Kevin Ghassemi



Gerald and Gail Oppenheimer



Dr. F. Charles Brunicaudi



Dr. Eunok Im and John Zaylor

Mrs. Paula Kent Meehan, continued from page 1

Paula Kent Meehan (born Paula Jane Baer) grew up in Burbank and began young adulthood working as a gas-station attendant and a secretary while pursuing acting jobs. Through the 1950s, she appeared in commercials and had parts in a few television series, as well as on the stage at a theater in Hollywood.

The constant need to apply shampoos and sprays was typical for aspiring actresses, but for Mrs. Kent Meehan, the existing off-the-shelf products often dried her hair and triggered allergic reactions in her scalp. Because there was no information about product ingredients, there was no way to explain the reactions, so she decided to address the issue herself.

Her hairdresser at the time, Jeri Rhedding, was familiar with the research of Linus Pauling, who wrote on the natural pH levels of hair. Mrs. Kent Meehan and Mr. Rhedding followed up on the scientific aspects of hair and skin and developed products with ingredients that not only matched natural pH levels, but also added others for specific problem areas. Using this “scientific approach to beauty,” they started Redken (a blend of their names) in 1960. Mrs. Kent Meehan bought Mr. Rhedding’s interest in the company in 1965.

As a female executive in the male-dominated business world, she wasn’t always treated with the same respect as her male counterparts. Her insistence that only licensed, educated salon professionals should offer the right product for each client’s specific need often kept her in litigation to control the distribution of Redken products through salons. But as Redken rose to prominence through decisions she made, Mrs. Kent Meehan was soon the envy of the beauty industry and one of the most revered businesswomen in corporate America. She also emphasized the importance of educating hairdressers about the products, so they could successfully market them in the salon.

From the start, Mrs. Kent Meehan sought to empower talented people to help her company succeed. She recalls flying to Tulsa, OK, to meet her first Redken distributor. “I was completely honest with

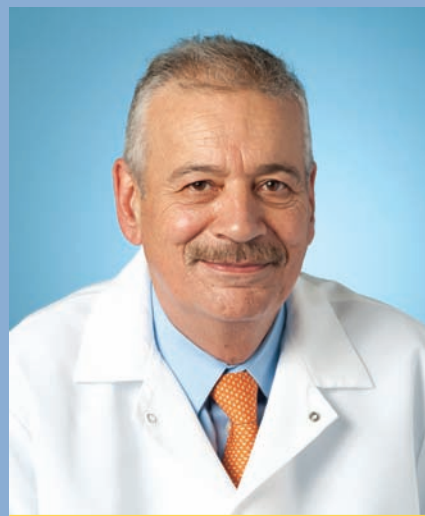
him. I said, ‘You are the expert in the beauty business, and I’m learning, so you tell me what I should do.’” The man went on to become Redken’s first million-dollar distributor.

While she liked to give her employees wide latitude regarding marketing ideas, on financial issues, Mrs. Kent Meehan – whose father was an accountant – was strict. “We had budget meetings all the time, and every department dreaded the day it was their turn,” she says, laughing. “When I started Redken, the only way to survive was to be financially very tight, and I always remained tough-minded, which helped us to stay secure.”

After selling Redken, Mrs. Kent Meehan continued to be a business leader. Her Global Salon Business Awards helped to motivate salons in 18 countries to focus not only on creativity, but also on making a profit. She started an investment company as well as a marketing services company, Kenquest, Inc. Her love of animals – she has three dogs and three cats, all rescued from troubled circumstances – led her to found the company Pets 90210, which undertakes pet adoptions and is a financial supporter of groups working to promote animal welfare.

In all of her charitable giving, Mrs. Kent Meehan looks not just at whether the cause is something in which she believes, but whether the organization on the receiving end of her philanthropy is well-run. “There have been situations in which I questioned the management of the group,” she says. “They may have been doing wonderful work, but if they couldn’t manage a penny, I would rather send my support elsewhere. There are many good causes, but I am looking for those that have clear objectives, the ability to achieve those objectives, and good financial control. UCLA and the Division of Digestive Diseases are perfect examples.” ■

New Way to Treat Common Hospital-acquired Infection



Charalabos Pothoulakis, M.D.

Dr. Charalabos Pothoulakis, Director of UCLA's Inflammatory Bowel Disease Basic Science Center and Professor of Medicine in the Division of Digestive Diseases, is collaborating with researchers at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. They have discovered a molecular process by which the body can defend against the effects of *Clostridium difficile* infection (CDI). Causing diarrhea and more serious intestinal conditions, it is commonly acquired by hospitalized patients taking antibiotics for another infection.

The study findings were published in the August 21 online edition of *Nature Medicine*, and the scientists are preparing to launch clinical trials. “We already know through gene-sequencing analysis that hundreds of microbial proteins can be regulated,” said Dr. Pothoulakis. “If we are successful with this approach, we may be able to treat other bacterial

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UCLA Medical Group ranks as one of California's top-performing physician organizations.

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for the first time, a GI surgeon.

The program holds great appeal, Dr. Jensen says. "There is such a broad spectrum of coursework at UCLA graduate schools and mentors at several affiliated institutions and hospitals from which to choose, whether in laboratory, translational, or outcomes research," he explains. "We are very selective in making sure that mentors are not only experts in their field, but also individuals with a track record of success in mentoring and the time and

energy to dedicate to training the next generation of GI leaders."

Most participants over the program's long history have remained in academics, publishing scientific papers and teaching clinicians and researchers. "Many academic leaders in gastroenterology across the United States started here on this grant," says Dr. Jensen. "They're now heads of departments and divisions and, in some cases, deans of medical schools. This program has had a huge impact." ■

Welcome to the *Patrons Circle!*

You may have noticed a new title head on our newsletter's front-page banner. It is our way of recognizing you for your generous philanthropic support. Your involvement helps make the Division a leader in this field. Again, thank you for being part of our Patrons Circle, and we look forward to seeing you again!

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