

Xiaobei Zhang, PhD

### **Jan R. Cloyde Legacy Award – Reflection from Digestive Disease Week 2025, San Diego**

I had the privilege of attending Digestive Disease Week (DDW) 2025 in San Diego, where I delivered an oral presentation titled “*Dietary Patterns and Quality Influence Health Outcomes: Insights from Brain–Gut Microbiome Interactions.*” DDW is one of the most prestigious international conferences in gastroenterology, and it provided an invaluable opportunity to engage with cutting-edge research and global leaders in the field.

My presentation highlighted how specific dietary components—particularly added sugar and whole grains—are linked to changes in brain structure, gut microbiome composition, psychological health, and maladaptive eating behaviors in women. As someone deeply passionate about how everyday diet and targeted nutritional interventions influence both mental and physical health through the brain–gut–microbiome (BGM) system, presenting this work at DDW marked a meaningful milestone in my research career. It reinforced the translational potential of my work and helped position it within broader efforts to advance precision nutrition and preventive strategies, particularly in the context of women’s health. While my research also intersects with emerging areas such as nutritional psychiatry, this conference allowed me to ground those ideas within the well-established framework of digestive health and gut–brain science.

In addition to presenting, I attended sessions on microbiome therapeutics, nutritional interventions, and brain–gut axis modeling. These talks not only expanded my scientific knowledge but also introduced new methodologies and translational frameworks that I hope to integrate into my own projects. I also had valuable conversations with researchers whose work I greatly admire, which broadened my professional network and opened the door for potential collaborations. I also attended the UCLA Digestive Diseases Division reception, celebrating with faculty, trainees, alumni, and members of the Goodman-Luskin Microbiome Center—a research community I’m proud to be part of. It was a valuable opportunity to connect with the broader UCLA network.

I am sincerely grateful to the Jan R. Cloyde Legacy Award for supporting my participation in DDW. Their investment in women’s health research and early-career scholars is truly inspiring, and this opportunity has been deeply meaningful to me. I would also like to thank my mentor, Dr. Arpana Church, for her support and mentorship in preparing me to share our work on such a meaningful conference.

This conference experience strengthened my confidence as an early-career investigator and equipped me with new insights, tools, and connections that will directly support my research development, future grant applications, and long-term academic career.

Sincerely,

Xiaobei