



Miller School Faculty Front and Center at DDW '22

University of Miami Miller School of Medicine faculty were moderators, presenters, and speakers during more than 25 sessions and symposia at Digestive Disease Week (DDW) 2022, the largest global gathering of physicians, researchers, and academics in the fields of gastroenterology, hepatology, endoscopy, and gastrointestinal surgery.

“Our involvement at DDW reflects the breadth and depth of our division,” said Paul Martin, M.D., professor and chief of the Division of Digestive Health and Liver Diseases at the Miller School. “We had presentations on topics spanning basic science to management of chronic liver disease. Our studies looking at health disparities were featured. Our faculty were involved in presenting endoscopic management of obesity, which benefits diabetes management, hypertension, and more. We also had a presentation from our division looking at the knowledge gaps that exist in screening for depression in patients with chronic liver disease.”



Maria T. Abreu, M.D., professor of medicine, microbiology, and immunology, delivered the Morton I. Grossman Distinguished Lecture and moderated or spoke at several DDW sessions.

Highlights Include Distinguished Lecture

Among the highlights was Maria T. Abreu, M.D., professor of medicine, microbiology, and immunology at the Miller School, the invited speaker for the Morton I. Grossman Distinguished Lecture, sharing her journey of discovery in inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

“Morton Grossman, M.D., Ph.D., was a giant in the gastroenterology world, and it was an honor to speak at the



lecture named after him,” said Dr. Abreu, who is in line to be the 2024 president of the American Gastroenterology Association, one of DDW’s sponsors.

“This lecture was set up in his name by former trainees who are the ‘who’s who’ in GI and hepatology,” Dr. Abreu said. “Dr. Grossman had been at UCLA at the veteran’s hospital when I was a UCLA GI fellow from 1992 to ’95, so it was particularly important and meaningful to me to be asked to give this lecture.”

It was also noteworthy, according to Dr. Abreu, that she was able to select the person who would introduce her for the lecture.

“I asked my mentor Stephan Targan, M.D., who also was a product of UCLA and the culture that Dr. Grossman cultivated. I worked in Dr. Targan’s lab as a GI fellow, and he was my inspiration to become a physician-scientist in IBD,” Dr. Abreu said.

Exploring IBD Treatments and Therapies

Dr. Abreu spoke about her journey of discovery in IBD as chapters in a book, beginning with working in Dr. Targan’s laboratory and moving from the early days of biologic treatment to using translational approaches with human samples to determine these medications’ optimal use.

“I discussed my research from mice to humans, about why people with ulcerative colitis are more susceptible to develop colon cancer; then talked about the research that we do at the Miller School to understand why Hispanics are developing so much IBD, and how that has led us to study the genetics of IBD

in Hispanics, as well as the role of diet. Now we're doing diet intervention studies in all patients with IBD as a means of complementing the therapies we are using," said Dr. Abreu, who spoke at or moderated 12 DDW sessions and symposia.

The Miller School's collaborative work on the poster "Whole genome sequencing of a diverse Hispanic IBD population in the United States reveals differences in previously identified risk alleles" was presented, highlighting samples from Hispanic patients collected at the Miller School, Cedars-Sinai, and the University of Puerto Rico for about the last decade. The poster detailed findings that Hispanics with IBD share only about 30% of the approximately 240 different genes that have been implicated in susceptibility to IBD.



Cynthia Levy, M.D. (right), professor of medicine, Arthur H. Hertz Endowed Chair in Liver Diseases, and associate director of the Schiff Center for Liver Diseases, moderated and presented at an AGA



symposium focusing on autoimmune liver diseases.

Autoimmune Liver Diseases Symposium

Cynthia Levy, M.D., professor of medicine, the Arthur H. Hertz Endowed Chair in Liver Diseases, and associate director of the Schiff Center for Liver Diseases, moderated and presented at an AGA symposium focusing on autoimmune liver diseases.

“This was very well attended and highlighted current state-of-the-art recommendations for diagnosis and management of autoimmune liver diseases,” Dr. Levy said.

As vice chair of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases’ Practice Guidelines Committee, Dr. Levy moderated a session in which four writing group chairs presented summaries of recently or soon-to-be published innovative guidance and guidelines from the liver society.

Dr. Levy also presented two posters on the impact of pruritus on the quality of life of patients with primary biliary cholangitis and research that showed improvement in quality of sleep when Dr. Levy and colleagues addressed patients’ moderate to severe itching, as demonstrated by findings from the GLIMMER study. Dr. Levy leads the international GLIMMER study, evaluating the treatment of itching in primary biliary cholangitis with an ileal bile acid transport inhibitor called linerixibat.

Increasing Prominence of Miller School, UHealth in Digestive Diseases

The DDW press office featured Binu V. John, M.D., M.P.H., associate professor in the Division of Digestive Health and



Liver Diseases, for research on immunity against COVID-19 vs. infection in cirrhosis patients, which showed vaccine-induced immunity correlated with significantly greater protection against COVID-19 compared with infection-induced immunity in patients with cirrhosis.

Other speakers and presenters from the Miller School and UHealth – University of Miami Health System included Hajar Hazime, M.S.; Oriana Damas, M.D.; Glenda Quinones, D.N.P., APRN; Rahil Shah, M.D.; Shyam Vedantam, D.O.; Michelle Pearlman, M.D.; Shria Kumar, M.D.; Sunil Amin, M.D.; Sean Bhalla, M.D.; and Emaree C. Cobb, M.D.

“Our extensive involvement at DDW2022 reflects not only the activities of our well-established faculty here, but also some of our more recent recruits who are becoming increasingly prominent on the national stage,” Dr. Martin said.

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