Miller School Omnipresent at DDW, World’s Largest GI Meeting

Hailed as largest global meeting of gastroenterology, hepatology, endoscopy and gastrointestinal surgery professionals, Digestive Disease Week (DDW) 2023 was back to pre-pandemic in-person attendance as University of Miami Miller School of Medicine faculty, fellows, residents and medical students took center stage.

Maria Abreu, M.D. (center), at poster session.

National leadership was among the Miller School’s themes at this year’s DDW. By the end of the early May meeting in Chicago, Miller School gastroenterologist Maria T. Abreu, M.D., had assumed her role as president-elect of the 16,000-member American Gastroenterological Association (AGA), which is among the professional organizations to call DDW its annual meeting.

Dr. Abreu, the first woman to serve as chief of gastroenterology at the Miller School and who today directs the school’s Crohn’s and Colitis Center, not only helped to plan the meeting with 14,000 attendees but also participated in many other ways, including as a speaker at the Postgraduate Course, DDW’s flagship live educational offering and premier
continuing medical education activity.

“I spoke about various aspects of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) care at the Post Graduate course, which is a great honor because it is an event for which general gastroenterologists pay extra to get the latest intel in GI and hepatology,” Dr. Abreu said.

David Goldberg, M.D. (at right, with microphone), at an AGA panel discussion.

David Goldberg, M.D., associate professor of medicine in the Division of Digestive Health and Liver Diseases at the Miller School, also spoke at the Postgraduate Course on diseases of the liver.

The Miller School’s omnipresence at DDW illustrates the school’s leadership in GI specialties, as well as the quality of its research, said Paul Martin, M.D., professor, chief of the Division of Digestive Health and Liver Diseases.

“Our faculty and fellows were involved in a variety of activities at the meeting, which included presenting original research. In addition to participating in the Postgraduate Course, our faculty served in other formats, including at the Meet-the-Professor luncheons, which are popular networking events,” Dr. Martin said. “Many of our faculty are also involved behind the scenes, attending board meetings for the AGA and American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases, as well as participating in various committee activities for the societies.”
More Miller School Highlights

Oriana M. Damas, M.D., associate professor of medicine and director of translational studies for the Miller School’s Crohn's and Colitis Center, chaired and spoke during the “Unraveling the Link between Diet and IBD” session, presenting “A Hispanic diet high in vegetables is associated with lower clinical and biochemical disease activity in individuals with inflammatory bowel disease: a longitudinal study of disease activity and microbiome signatures.”

“Dr. Damas showcased our unique ability at the Miller School to study diet in Latin American immigrants and second-generation Hispanic Americans with IBD, which showed that native foods like malanga and yuca might be associated with IBD remission,” Dr. Abreu said.

Dr. Abreu noted the number and breadth of oral and poster presentations by Miller School graduate and medical students was particularly exciting.

“We shared research on everything from a novel diet intervention in Crohn’s disease to an in-depth analysis of proteins in the microbiome to help determine the effect of diet in Crohn’s,” Dr. Abreu said. “We had oral presentations on key aspects of inflammation causing colon cancer and on developing preclinical models to someday prevent colitis-associated cancer in our patients.”

An oral presentation by University of Miami undergraduate student Daniella Monatlvo, “The TLR4 antagonist resatorvird modulates inflammation induced DUOX2 activation,” describes work inhibiting an inflammatory pathway with a chemical inhibitor and seeing how it could be used to treat IBD in mini
colons grown in the lab and in mouse models.

“Daniella received the AGA’s Aman Armaan Ahmed Family Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship and Dr. Harvey Young Education and Development Foundation’s Young Guts Scholar, which made it possible for her to conduct her research in the lab,” Dr. Abreu said.

Jodie A. Barkin, M.D., associate professor of clinical medicine in gastroenterology and medical director of the Miller School’s Pancreas Center, presented the poster “Abdominal pain is common while depression and anxiety improve with treatment of exocrine pancreatic insufficiency in chronic pancreatitis: Updated findings from a patient-driven registry.” He reported on novel findings about how to improve anxiety and depression symptoms, which are common among chronic pancreatitis patients with exocrine pancreatic deficiency.

“Exocrine pancreatic deficiency in chronic pancreatitis can result in abdominal pain and can significantly impact morbidity and mortality,” Dr. Barkin said. “As leaders of a multisite patient registry to better understand this disease, we found that these patients’ anxiety, depression and satisfaction with treatment improved when they were treated with pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy.”

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medicine and gastroenterology and director of advanced endoscopy at UM/Jackson Memorial Hospital and The Lennar Foundation Medical Center at the Miller School, spoke about his research “G-POEM: Which patients to choose and the best approach.”

G-POEM (which stands for gastric peroral endoscopy myotomy) is an emerging endoscopic treatment for gastroparesis that has not responded to medical treatment. Gastroparesis affects the normal spontaneous movement of stomach muscles needed to propel food through the digestive tract.

“Data shows that G-POEM is effective about 70% of the time, but we are still trying to understand which patients stand to benefit the most from the procedure,” Dr. Amin said. “The goal of my talk was to make sense of the available data and provide some recommendations regarding what type of patient would be the ideal candidate for G-POEM in 2023.”

Binu John, M.D., at poster session.

Among the many other Miller School speakers at DDW were:

- Cynthia Levy, M.D., who presented research on liver disease, including an update on autoimmune liver disease;
- Binu V. John, M.D., M.P.H., who gave several presentations on liver disease research, including studies on primary biliary cholangitis, an autoimmune disease in which the body’s immune system attacks its own liver and bile ducts and causes liver damage; and
Hajar Hazime, M.S., who presented on IBD and metabolic syndrome.

The Miller School's GI team

“This year’s DDW was as exciting as my very first time as a GI fellow. There was a renewed energy in being together and seeing old friends,” Dr. Abreu said. “It wasn’t only the educational aspect of the meeting but also the networking that made this year incredible. Part of my role with AGA is to inspire aspiring gastroenterologists — mostly residents who want to do GI. DDW provided the perfect opportunity for that. I found them to be exuberant about the possibilities in GI research and clinical care.”

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