

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

SECTION OF GASTROENTEROLOGY AND HEPATOLOGY



SECTION CHIEF

*Fasiha Kanwal, MD,
MSHS, AGAF, FAASLD*

Chief's Message:

Our mission is to improve digestive health through excellence in clinical care, teaching, discovery, and leadership. We ranked among the top 10 Gastroenterology and Hepatology divisions nationally in 2022 according to [U.S News & World Report – Best Universities for Gastroenterology and Hepatology](#). We are **#1 in Texas**. These rankings are based on performance across a set of widely accepted indicators measuring excellence in research, publications, and scientific reputation overall.

The Section includes 60 outstanding, nationally and internationally recognized faculty members who continue to bring innovation to clinical practices covering the full spectrum of digestive health from general gastroenterology to specialized care in inflammatory bowel disease, neurogastroenterology, pancreatic conditions, GI cancers and transplant hepatology. Members of the Section have published national guidelines in nearly every therapeutic area.

We provide outstanding care to patients and their families, using state-of-the-art services to enhance their digestive and liver health. Our affiliate hospitals include McNair Hospital, Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Ben Taub Hospital, and Baylor St. Luke's Medical Center. We continue to expand clinical footprint locally and regionally, including new services at the Texas Children's Hospital and St. Luke's Health Sugarland Hospital.

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We also train and educate the next generation of gastroenterologists and hepatologists who will assume leadership roles as clinician scientists, clinicians and educators within and outside the United States. The Section includes a comprehensive, highly sought-after fellowship training program that offers a clinical and a NIH T-32-funded research training track. Ours is the only adult GI research-training program that is supported by a [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\) training grant in Texas](#) as well as neighboring states. We also support ACGME accredited transplant hepatology fellowship and a competitive advanced endoscopy fellowship.

With over \$15 million in research grant funding, the Section remains as one of leaders in research in gastroenterology and hepatology. These achievements are a testament to the caliber of intellectual work and study that our Section members produced. I am grateful to all our faculty, fellows, and our world-class staff who support the Section across all mission areas.

Key Achievements:

- We had another great year. We ranked among the top 10 Gastroenterology and Hepatology divisions nationally in 2022 according to [U.S News & World Report – Best Universities for Gastroenterology and Hepatology](#). We are **#1 in Texas**. These rankings are based on performance across a set of widely accepted indicators measuring excellence in research, publications, and scientific reputation overall. This recognition is a testimonial to the quality of scientific research and scholarly contributions from our Section members.
- The Section remains a leader in research in gastrointestinal and liver diseases. Our members published over **201** papers in scientific journals. We had over **\$15 million** in research funding (\$7 million from NIH).
- The Section continues to be the clinical home for the NIH funded Digestive Disease Center, one of 17 federally funded centers focusing on research in GI diseases. We also serve as the coordinating center for the Texas Collaborative Center for Hepatocellular Cancer, which serves as a platform to promote collaboration among scientists, clinicians, community leaders, and policymakers to reduce liver cancer mortality in Texas. We also house an NCI-funded Translational Research Center and a Program Project focused on improving mortality from liver cancer.
- Our top-notch faculty provide high-quality, compassionate healthcare at Baylor St. Luke's Medical Center (BSLMC), Ben Taub General Hospital and the Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center.
- We have continued to expand our footprint outside of the Texas Medical Center by growing general GI practice at St. Luke's Hospital, Sugarland. We introduced several innovations in our practices, including cutting edge advanced endoscopic procedures and multidisciplinary treatment of complex GI disorders. We play an important role in training future clinicians and researchers.
- Several new faculty members joined the Section last year. Section members also received special accolades for their contributions, including a best scientist award, top cited physicians, a lifetime

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achievement award, outstanding mentor award, 2 excellence in clinical care, 2 teaching awards, 4 career development awards, and several NIH, VA, and PCORI funded grants.

- We hosted two successful Baylor College of Medicine GI and Hepatology Courses in September 2022 and March 2023.



New Faculty:

- Fares Ayoub, MD – Baylor Medicine
- Jared Sninsky, MD – Baylor Medicine and Michael E DeBakey VA Medical Center
- Stalin Subramanian, MD - Baylor Medicine
- Rawan Dayah, MD – Ben Taub
- Deepika Satish, MD – Ben Taub
- Kavish Patidar, MD - Michael E DeBakey VA Medical Center
- Wasseem Skef, MD - Michael E DeBakey VA Medical Center
- Shifa Umar, MD - Michael E DeBakey VA Medical Center
- Madad Ali, MD – Ben Taub
- Thom Taylor, PhD
- Tammy Dodds, PA – Baylor Medicine

Notable Projects:

Clinical Projects:

GI Clinic at St. Lukes Hospital in Sugarland: The Section was the first to establish clinical practice at St. Lukes Hospital in Sugarland. We started the Sugarland practice with two gastroenterologists. During the first complete fiscal year, the clinic had ~350 encounters. In short 3 years (which

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includes COVID-19 years), the program has grown to include 5 physicians, with over 1800 encounters (for outpatient clinics and endoscopy) in FY2023.

AI aided Endoscopy: AI is changing clinical practice of gastroenterology. We are among the first endoscopy units to install multiple AI programs to aid in endoscopic evaluation at the BSLMC and Ben Taub Hospital. These units will also allow us to generate real-world data on comparative effectiveness of the available AI programs.

Innovations in Liver Health: We expanded our offering in liver health with the new FibroScan at McNair site. This test offered a non-invasive assessment of liver fibrosis for patients with disparate liver diseases. We are also implementing a guideline based Clinical Care Pathway that screens patients with certain risk factors using electronic medical records with a trigger for ordering FibroScan in individuals deemed at high risk based on a combination of clinical features.

Innovations in Advanced Endoscopy: Several new innovations were introduced by our advanced endoscopy faculty, including endoscopic appendectomy, C-TIF (TIF combined with surgical Hiatal hernia repair), antireflux mucosal ablation, and direct biliary drainage (cholecystoduodenostomy, choledochoduodenostomy, hepaticogastrostomy).

Other Innovations. At Ben Taub, we started offering H. pylori susceptibility testing using stool next generation sequencing as well as high-resolution microendoscopy for Barrett's esophagus imaging.

Education Projects:

ACGME Accredited Transplant Hepatology Fellowship: The Section started its ACGME accredited transplant hepatology fellowship program and matched its first PGY7 fellow to the program. Dr. Avegail Flores serves as the program director and she is supported by Dr Rise Stribling as the associate program director. The team has done a remarkable job with revising the training curriculum and integrating this program with our highly successful GI fellowship training program.

Growth in GI Fellowship Training Program. Under the leadership of Dr. Milena Suarez, the GI fellowship program grew to 21 fellows.

BCM Advanced Endoscopy International Trainees Program. Dr. Mohamad Othman worked with the USAID/Egyptian educational Bureau to host gastroenterology trainees for a 4-month research training with his research team at BCM. The trainee costs are covered by the USAID program. This will allow for our advanced endoscopy program to be an international destination for endoscopic research.

22nd Annual GI and Hepatology Course. Ove 180 participants attended our 22nd annual course in March 2023. The talks were outstanding and extremely well received by the attendees. The fact that almost all registrants joined the Course in person is a testimony to the quality of the Course. Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Abidi, and Shelina Velani were also recognized by Dr. Fordis from BCM Continuing Medical Education Office: "I am writing to extend my warmest congratulations on your outstanding course offered on Saturday and Sunday. The guest faculty were impressive

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and the Baylor faculty terrific! The logistics and support were superbly orchestrated. Kudos to you and your team!”



4th Annual GI and Hepatology Board Review Course. We hosted our annual Board Review Course in September 2022. Over 100 participants joined the course, underscoring the value this Course brings to our trainees as well as practicing gastroenterologists in and around Houston.

BCM Women in GI Regional Workshop. This Workshop was hosted in collaboration with the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA). We had over 55+ attendees which surpassed our target. The workshops occurred at four separate locations across the US providing women with effective and accessible career development and networking to support professional success and work/life balance. Our workshop had the largest attendance from all the AGA Regional conferences.



2nd Annual Anorectal Disease Workshop. Dr. Waqar Qureshi directed the second annual Anorectal Disease Workshop that has turned out to be popular statewide. The faculty also included Drs. Jessica Bernica, Yesenia Rojas-Khalil and Rehman Sheikh.

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Research Projects:

Research Grants: In the last year, the Section members held (1) **17** NIH funded grants including 17 R01/R37, 1 P01, 2 U01, and 2 NIH K grants, (2) **3** VA Merit Review grants and 1 VA Career Development Award, (3) **1** PCORI grant, and (3) **4** grants from Cancer Prevention Research Institute of Texas and the Department of Defense. In addition, Section members oversaw 65 active clinical trials.

BCM Learning Health System: Dr. Hashem El-Serag launched the BCM Learning Health System. Although still in an early phase, this initiative has the potential to transform how we deliver care, generate evidence, and educate learners.

Baylor College of Medicine and University of Houston CTSA Grant: Dr. Fasiha Kanwal spearheaded the CTSA grant application with Dr. Chris Amos (BCM) and Dr. Bettina Beech (University of Houston). If funded, the CTSA will serve as a new regional and national hub for infrastructure, services, community engagement, and workforce development to advance research across the translational spectrum and drive innovation in clinical and translational science.

Leadership Development Projects:

Peer Mentoring Program: Dr. Ruben Hernaez launched the faculty peer mentoring program which focused on educating junior faculty about the pathways to promotion at BCM.

DoM Executive Leadership Training Series: Dr Fasiha Kanwal partnered with Dr Joselyn Fisher (General Internal Medicine) to develop the new DoM Leadership Series that will be offered to Section Chiefs and other leaders in fall of 2023 (monthly seminars, Sept 2023– April 2024).

Research and Publications:

Research Grants:



Hashem El-Serag, MD, MPH was awarded a NIH P01 grant for his project, "Prevention of Hepatocellular Carcinoma Related to Metabolic Syndrome," funded with annual direct budget of \$1,098,254 for five years

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Fasiha Kanwal, MD, MSHS was awarded a 5-year Early Detection Research Network (EDRN) National Cancer Institute award entitled “Clinical Validation Center for Hepatocellular Carcinoma (CVC-HCC).” Dr. Kanwal is collaborating with Amit Singal, MD (MPI, UTSW), Jorge Marrero, MD (MPI, UTSW) and Neehar Parikh, MD (MPI, U of Michigan).



Prasun K Jalal, MD was awarded a NIH R21 grant for his project titled “Evaluation of oral administration of PRIM-DJ2727 capsule containing microbiota suspension in patients with severe alcoholic hepatitis.” (Funding Amount: \$420,000. Funding period: 2 years)



Maya Balakrishnan, MD, MPH received a NIH K23 award from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities for her project entitled, “Improving Outcomes among Mexican and Central American Patients with Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease.” (Funding amount: \$863,705. Funding period: 5 years).

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Frederick Peng, MD first year GI fellow, and his colleagues through the Chief Resident in Quality and Patient Safety program and IQuEST received funding from the DxQI Seed Grant Program for the project titled “Identifying current clinical care processes to reduce delays in colorectal cancer diagnosis.” (Funding amount: \$50,000, funding period: 1 year).



Theresa Nguyen, MD, MPH received the ACG 2023 Junior Faculty Development Award for her project titled, “A Health Informatics Approach to Reduce Missed Opportunities for Barrett’s Esophagus Screening.” (Funding amount: \$450,000; Funding period: 3 year). She also received funding from the DDC 2023 Pilot Feasibility Award for her project titled, “Barrett’s Esophagus Screening Electronic Trigger Tool.” (Funding amount: \$50,000, funding period: 1 year).



Ru Chen, MD received funding from the National Institutes of Health for her project titled, “Elucidating the role of gut microbiota in colitis-associated colorectal cancer.” The major goal of this project is to investigate the mechanistic and functional roles of gut microbiome in neoplastic progression of colorectal cancer. (Funding amount: \$649,138, funding period: 4 years).

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Ruben Hernaez, MD, PhD, Prasun Jalal, MD and Fasiha Kanwal, MD, MSHS received an Investigator Initiated Research Grant from the Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals for their project titled, "Quality of care for patients with cirrhosis and acute kidney injury." (Funding amount: \$250,000; Funding period: 2 years).



Jason Mills, MD, PhD received funding from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) of the National Institute of Health for his study entitled, "Regulation of atrophy-induced progenitor cells in the gastric corpus". The grant award proposes to study how the stem cells of the stomach lining regenerate after injury. (Funding Amount: \$2,664,266; Funding Period: 5 years).

Awards:

- Suneal Agarwal, MD was rated Top Doctors 2022.
- Maya Balakrishnan, MD, MPH was rated as the top 0.26% by Experscape's PubMed-based algorithm.
- Andrea Bradford, PhD was promoted to Associate Professor.
- Reena Chokshi, MD was promoted to Associate Professor.
- George Cholankeril, MD, MSc received the Professional Education appreciation and Recognition Award (PEAR), he won the Power of Professionalism Award, he joined the Clinical Research Committee for Governing Board of the American Association and was listed on the Hall of Fame for Best Liver.
- Hashem El-Serag, MD, MPH was the most cited researchers at Baylor, was rated Top Scientists in Medicine, was winner of the 2022 Texas Super Doctors Award, and was appointed as Vice President for the Learning Health System (LHS) Initiative at Baylor.
- Avegail Flores, MD was rated Top Doctors 2022 and received department of Medicine's Colleague of the Quarter Award.

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- Courtney Ford received the WISH Grand Award.
- David Y Graham, MD was ranked 336 in the world and 215 in United States by Research.com, received the 2022 Best Scientist Award, and was listed as Top Scientist in Medicine.
- Milena Gould Suarez, MD received the Women of Excellence Award and was recognized by the Internal Medicine Residency Program at BCM for her leadership as a Subspecialty Education Coordinator (SEC).
- Clark Hair, MD received the outstanding Educator Award.
- Ruben Hernaez, MD, PhD was promoted to Associate Professor, was appointed as Internal Medicine Residency Program Core Faculty, was appointed as Admission Interviewing Subcommittee Member, received the Best Research Mentor Award, and serves on American Gastroenterological Association Board.
- Prasun Jalal, MD was rated as the top 0.26% by Expertscape's PubMed-based algorithm, he is a part of the clinical research committee for Governing Board of the American Association, and was elected to the fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians.
- Salmaan Jawaid, MD, MPH received the Department of Medicine Scholarly Time Award. Of the 7 applications, 2 of them were from Gastroenterology and Hepatology.
- Fasiha Kanwal, MD was selected to Chair the AGA Women Leadership Council, ranked in the top 5 percent for citations by Doximity, and was named as a Top Scientist of Medicine.
- Saira Khaderi, MD received the Power of Professionalism Award, is a member of the Women's Initiative Committee for American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases, and Honorary mention for the Hall of Fame for Best Liver.
- Natalia Khalaf, MD, MPH was appointed lead for GI and Hepatology Research Conference and was listed on the Hall of Fame for Best Miscellaneous.
- Howard Lee, MD was selected by the Governing Board of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) and is a Member-at-large in Liver and Intestinal Transplant Community of Practice (LICOP) in American Society of Transplant (AST)
- Nabil Mansour, MD received the Early Career Faculty Award
- Jason Mills, MD, PhD received the Outstanding Mentor Award, was inducted in the American Physicians Association, received the 2022 AGA Research Mentor Award, and joined the Gastroenterology Editorial Board.
- Ayse Mindikoglu, MD, MPH received the Star Faculty Award for Excellence in Patient Care, Member of the Maintenance of Certification Committee of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases and received the Women of Excellence Award.
- Mohamed Othman, MD was selected as senior associate editor by American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy for *Gastrointestinal Endoscopy* and was rated in the Top Doctors 2022
- Kalpesh Patel, MD was rated the Top Doctors 2022, received a TSGE Nomination, and was listed on the Hall of Fame for Best Lectures for Best Esophagus and Pancreas/Biliary
- Waqar Qureshi, MD was selected as associate editor by American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy for *Gastrointestinal Endoscopy*.
- Richa Shukla, MD received the Norton Rose Fulbright Award, was selected to join the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) Academy of Educators Advisory Board, and was listed on the Hall of Fame for best IBD
- RJ Sealock, MD was promoted to Associate Professor
- Gagan Sood, MD was promoted to Professor
- Mimi Tan, MD was listed on the Hall of Fame for Best Stomach

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Publications:

- Advances in Nutrition (IF **11.567**): 1
- Alimentary Pharmacology & Therapeutics (IF **9.524**): 2
- American Journal of Gastroenterology (IF **12.045**): 9
- American Journal of Transplantation (IF **8.086**): 2
- Arthritis & Rheumatology (IF **15.483**): 1
- Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention (IF **5.057**): 2
- Cancer Letters (IF **9.756**): 1
- Cancer Research Communications (IF **11.2**): 1
- Cancer (IF **18.4**): 1
- Cancers (Basel) (IF **6.575**): 2
- Cell Metabolism (IF **31.37**): 1
- Cellular and Molecular Gastroenterology and Hepatology (IF **8.797**): 1
- Cells (IF **66.85**): 1
- Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology (IF **13.37**): 32
- Clinical Infectious Diseases (IF **20.888**): 2
- Digestive and Liver Disease (IF **5.165**): 1
- eBioMedicine (IF **11.2**): 1
- EMBO Journal (IF **13.783**): 1
- Endoscopy (IF **7.341**): 1
- The FASEB Journal (IF **5.834**): 1
- Frontiers in Cell and developmental Biology (IF **6.081**): 1
- Frontiers in Immunology (IF **8.787**): 1
- Frontiers in Oncology (IF **6.244**): 1
- Gastroenterology (IF **33.883**): 5
- Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (IF **10.396**): 6
- Gut (IF **31.795**): 7
- Helicobacter (IF **5.182**): 1
- Hepatology Communications (IF **5.09**): 2
- Hepatology (IF **17.42**): 6
- Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IF **7.29**): 1
- International Journal of Molecular Sciences (IF **6.208**): 1
- iScience (IF **5.8**):
- JAMA Health Forum (IF **11.5**): 1
- JAMA Network Open (IF **13.8**): 2
- Journal of Affective Disorders (IF **6.533**): 1
- Journal of Biological Chemistry (IF **5.485**): 1
- Journal of Experimental & Clinical Cancer Research (IF **12.658**): 1
- Journal of Gastroenterology (IF **6.772**): 1
- Journal of Hepatology (IF **30.083**): 5
- Journal of Infection (IF **15.8**): 1
- JCI Insight (IF **8.00**): 1

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- Journal of the National Cancer Institute (IF **11.816**): 1
- The Lancet Gastroenterology and Hepatolog (IF **45.042**): 2
- Liver International (IF **8.754**): 2
- Liver Transplantation (IF **6.112**): 4
- Mayo Clinic Proceedings: Innovations, Quality & Outcomes (IF **12.213**): 1
- Metabolism Open (IF **13.934**): 1
- Molecular Aspects of Medicine (IF **16.337**): 1
- Nature Communications (IF **17.694**): 1
- Nature Medicine (IF **87.244**): 1
- Nature Reviews Clinical Oncology (IF **66.675**): 1
- Nature Review Gastroenterology & Hepatology (IF **73.082**): 1
- Neuropharmacology (IF **5.273**): 1
- Nutrients (IF **5.717**): 1
- Pancreas (IF **19.45**): 1
- Reviews in Medical Virology (IF **11.1**): 1
- Seminars in Liver Disease (IF **6.115**): 2
- Social Science & Medicine (IF **5.379**): 1
- Transplantation (IF **5.385**): 1

New Leadership:

- Kalpesh Patel, MD was appointed as Medical Director of Baylor Medicine in the Department of Medicine. In this role, he will oversee and coordinate the clinical operations across all 13 DoM Baylor Medicine practices and collaborate with Baylor Medicine, BCM, and BSLMC leadership.
- Robert J Sealock, MD was appointed as Medical Director at Ben Taub Hospital
- Suneal Agarwal, MD was appointed as GI Section Chief for Baylor St. Luke's Hospital
- Ru Chen, MD was appointed as a member of the Graduate Faculty of the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (GSBS) for the Cancer and Cell Biology program. Dr. Chen will serve as a major advisor to graduate students (PhD or MS) at Baylor College of Medicine.

Closing Thoughts:

The Section of Gastroenterology and Hepatology had another successful year. These achievements are a testament to the caliber of intellectual work and study that our Section members produced. I am grateful to all our faculty, fellows, and our world-class staff who support the Section across all mission areas.