

A TRANSFORMATIVE OPPORTUNITY: TRAINING IN ENDOSCOPIC MANAGEMENT OF IBD COMPLICATIONS AT AHN

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I am deeply grateful for the invaluable opportunity provided by the ACG International Training Award, enabling me to fulfill my dream experience at Allegheny Health Network (AHN) in Pittsburgh during the summer of 2024.

During my training under Dr. Gursimran Kochhar and esteemed interventional endoscopists at AHN's interventional endoscopy unit, I gained extensive experience in advanced techniques such as endoscopic stricturotomy, balloon dilation, and stenting for inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) strictures.

Under Dr. Kochhar's leadership, AHN handles a high volume of such cases, providing me with exposure across various locations, including the ileal pouch. Despite performing these procedures in India previously, I lacked formal training and expert feedback, which I received abundantly during my tenure at AHN. These insights significantly bolstered my confidence and skill set, allowing me to perform five endoscopic stricturotomies shortly after returning to India, compared to just six cases over the past two years. This underscores the pressing need for such interventions in resource-limited settings.

During my tenure, I systematically reviewed the literature on endoscopic management of strictures, which I submitted as an abstract for the ACG Annual Scientific Meeting.

My time at AHN also led to the publication of the inaugural Indian series on endoscopic stricturotomy in IBD in the *Indian Journal of Gastroenterology* (doi: 10.1007/s12664-024-01618-x), detailing techniques from standalone stricturotomy to hybrid approaches with balloon dilation and graded stricturotomy at intervals. These techniques were refined following my training at AHN.

Dr. Kochhar and his colleagues fostered a supportive environment where I felt at home and could freely seek guidance on various aspects of my training. The program was meticulously organized well before my arrival, ensuring a seamless learning experience.

In addition to managing IBD complications endoscopically, I benefitted from exposure to Dr. Kochhar's IBD clinic, where I learned about emerging therapies soon to be available in India. I also observed clinical trials in drug-eluting balloons for endoscopic balloon dilation being conducted at AHN under Dr. Kochhar's leadership.

Given my interest in advancing minimally invasive IBD therapies, I observed complex procedures such as endoscopic ultrasound-guided anastomosis, cholangioscopy, tissue acquisition, deep enteroscopy, and endoscopic suturing. These observations under expert guidance significantly enhanced my proficiency. I am indebted to advanced endoscopists, including Dr. Abhijit Kulkarni, Dr. Adam Kichler, Dr. Manish Dhawan, GI fellow Dr. Hardik Shah, and all the other faculty and support staff for making my journey a memorable one. I also experienced periodic masterclasses and multidisciplinary meetings at AHN.

Through ward rounds and interactions with Dr. Kochhar and his team, I deepened my





understanding and readiness to apply these advanced techniques. Dr. Kochhar's mentorship was instrumental in preparing me for my oral presentation at DDW 2024 on the CACTUS CD trial, comparing imaging techniques in Crohn's disease. I also gathered essential tips during Dr. Kochhar's and other experts' talks at DDW on endoscopic management of IBD complications.

Back in India, I have initiated interventional IBD procedures at one of the few dedicated centers in the country, thereby making a substantial impact on IBD management nationwide. In the future, I intend to form an interventional IBD training center in India to train fellow colleagues across the country, disseminating the knowledge I gained in Pittsburgh.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to ACG for this transformative opportunity, which has profoundly advanced my expertise in the field of endoscopic management of IBD complications.





Photo opposite page: Dr. Gursimran Kochhar and Dr. Pal. Photos this page clockwise from top left: Dr. Pal in front of AHN Allegheny General sign. Dr. Pal and Dr. Gursimran Kochhar. Dr. Hardik Shah and Dr. Pal. Dr. Pal