



REACH-IBD

Newsletter

Spring 2025

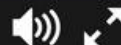


Shaping the Future of LGBTQ+ IBD Care

Sonny's Spotlight



- LGBTQ+ Care
- Congress Recaps
- New REACH-IBD Steering Committee Members
- And more!



Shaping the Future of LGBTQ+ IBD Care

LGBTQ+ IBD patients often face unique challenges. Drs. Courtney Hanlon, Audrey Bennett, and Justin Field share how they're breaking barriers—through research, advocacy, and dedicated care—to improve outcomes for sexual and gender minorities with IBD.

Audrey Bennett

How the Journey Began

I first became interested in IBD during my pediatric rotation in medical school when I helped take care of a teenager admitted with acute severe UC. I started internal medicine residency at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and had a great experience on GI rotations, which further solidified my decision to pursue a career in gastroenterology with a focus on IBD. I stayed at Vanderbilt to complete both my gastroenterology and advanced inflammatory bowel disease fellowships. After 7 years of training and working closely with the IBD team, I decided to stay at VUMC and started as faculty in 2023.



Focusing on LGBTQ+ Care

While on the GI consult service during fellowship I helped take care of a transgender woman who had severely active IBD and had required hospital admissions for IV steroids. I wondered how gender-affirming hormone therapy might impact the disease course of IBD, but when I did a review of the literature, I only found studies focusing on cisgender individuals. This patient experience motivated me to create a retrospective study to evaluate the

impact of gender-affirming hormone therapy, and after meeting colleagues around the country with similar research interests, we turned this into a multi-center study.

The Role of Mentors & The Foundation

The mentorship I've received has had a profound impact on my career. My primary mentors, Dr. Sara Horst and Dr. David Schwartz have both helped support, encourage, and shape my career from trainee to early faculty member. Through the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation, I've been able to network and meet other gastroenterologists with similar research interests which has helped create and nurture growth and opportunity.

Next Steps

Currently I'm working on a multicenter project started by Dr. Kira Newman at the University of Michigan to study IBD outcomes in LGBTQ+ individuals. **I'm also interested in continuing to study how estrogen and testosterone hormone therapy impact IBD.**

Outside of Medicine

I love traveling, working on house projects, Peloton classes, going to concerts and sporting events, and traveling back to Minnesota to spend time with my family.

Justin Field

The Journey to LGBTQ+ IBD Care

My journey towards IBD care began when a family member was diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis when I was a child. **My path to IBD care solidified during Gastroenterology fellowship, where I saw how impactful expert IBD care could be in the disease and life trajectory for so many patients.** I decided to pursue an Advanced IBD Fellowship at UCSF and stayed on afterwards as faculty. I became interested in bridging care gaps for LGBTQ+ patients with IBD, as well as improving care for patients at risk for anal squamous cell cancer in IBD. I pursued additional training in High Resolution Anoscopy, and now provide that for my patients. I opened the UCSF Rainbow IBD Clinic to provide specialized and culturally aware care for LGBTQ+ individuals with IBD.



Professional Catalysts

It was an accumulation of events during residency and fellowship that led me to my pursuit of improving the care landscape for LGBTQ+ patients with IBD. I met multiple LGBTQ+ patients with and without IBD who expressed concerns about feeling unseen or misunderstood in healthcare settings. I witnessed transgender patients being misgendered in the healthcare setting. I noticed the lack of conversations around sexual health, worsened by stigma around talking about things like anal receptive

intercourse. **As I tried to find the answers to patient questions, I noticed gaps in the research and clinical guidelines addressing the unique needs of LGBTQ+ individuals with IBD, from quality-of-life issues to the impact of gender-affirming therapies.** This led me to pursue my current clinical and research path.

The Role of Mentors & The Foundation

Mentorship has been absolutely essential in shaping my career. I've been fortunate to have incredible mentors in the IBD field who have guided me through research projects, clinical decision-making, and leadership opportunities. Their support has not only helped me develop as a clinician but has also reinforced the importance of advocating for underrepresented patient populations. My involvement with the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation has been equally impactful—it has provided a platform for research collaborations, patient education initiatives, and networking with others dedicated to advancing IBD care.

Expanding Research and Access

Moving forward, I am focused on expanding research into LGBTQ+ health in IBD as well as understanding the risk factors and best screening practices for anal squamous cell cancer (SCC) in IBD. I aim to broaden access to anal cancer screening for high-risk IBD patients, particularly those living with HIV, perianal disease, or on long-term immunosuppressive therapy.

Downtime

Outside of medicine, I love traveling, especially exploring new cities and cultures with my husband. I also stay active through cycling and am training to participate in the AIDS LifeCycle ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles, fundraising for LGBTQ+ and HIV focused charities. I enjoy unwinding with a great book or podcast. And, of course, spending time with our loveable Cockapoo named Napoleon.

Courtney Hanlon

Starting an IBD Career

I'm currently a third year GI fellow at USC and am starting my IBD advanced fellowship this coming July at Johns Hopkins. My road to IBD is rooted in my desire for longitudinal



patient-physician relationships—IBD represents an opportunity to affect meaningful change in patients' quality of life. I'm thrilled to be pursuing a career in IBD.

Creating Community

I care deeply about delivery of clinical care. Working at the largest safety net hospital in Los Angeles County for the past 6 years, I have witnessed how social determinants of health affect the IBD care patients are eligible to receive, and how providers' biases can affect care.

In particular as a queer woman, I'm personally driven to make sure sexual and gender minorities are getting asked the right questions in clinic and building partnership with their providers. I want to help generate more comprehensive care for queer patients and create community in LGBTQIA+ IBD care.

The Crohn's & Colitis Foundation & Fellows

I highly encourage anyone in training to get involved with the Foundation. REACH-IBD has provided a supportive environment to learn

from the experts and hone my clinical skills. I'm inspired by how the Foundation and other groups improve visibility of queer providers.

What the Future Holds

Improving quality IBD care must include improving care for all patients; I would love to get more involved in legislative advocacy for advanced therapy coverage. **I hope to start a queer IBD center in my future practice and look forward to increasing LGBTQIA+ visibility at professional conferences.**

Off the Clock and On the Ice

I played ice hockey in college and I still love to play - I'm excited to get back to the east coast and start coaching again! While in Los Angeles my partner and I love having friends over for vegan food and supporting local queer-owned establishments.



Back from Congress! Exclusive Scoop from our Patient Reporters!

You met Natalie Hayden and Kaylaa' White in our last issue. Now, they're here to share about their experience at Crohn's & Colitis Congress 2025.

Natalie Hayden

How was your experience at Crohn's & Colitis Congress?

My experience at Congress 2025 was unforgettable! I loved learning about the latest and greatest research in IBD space while finally meeting longtime friends and medical providers I've collaborated with online for YEARS! The sessions and poster presentations addressed key issues that are top of mind for patients and caregivers. Congress was certainly an opportunity to remember and having patients in the crowd to hear the discussions firsthand and share them directly to the community is important.

What are your key takeaways from this experience?

Between guidelines for family



Behind the scenes with
Natalie & Kaylaa'



planning,
pregnancy and
postpartum--to
nutrition and
complementary
practices--to the
future of AI, the
benefits of non-
invasive
monitoring,
and the impact
obesity has on our
community-

there were so many important takeaways and pearls of knowledge shared. As someone diagnosed with Crohn's nearly 20 years ago, it's inspiring and empowering to know all the work going on behind the scenes to provide patients with the best possible quality of life.

Key Insights from Crohn's & Colitis Congress® 2025: Revolutionary Research, Pregnancy Considerations, AI Innovations, and More

February 18, 2025

Natalie Hayden

Crohn's & Colitis Congress 2025 is in the books—and the revolutionary research, pregnancy considerations, and AI innovations are the scenes for the IBD community. Having lived with IBD for nearly 20 years ago, I had the opportunity to serve as a patient advocate.

[Read more...](#)



[Natalie's post on IBDVisible](#)

What advice do you have for young IBD professionals wanting to advocate for their patients?

Treat us as you would a loved one living with IBD. We are so appreciative of your efforts to do the research and improve the IBD landscape. Please continue to stand up for us to insurance. Just as IBD manifests uniquely in each of us, please know by making us feel like more than a number, and like an actual person, it makes our patient journey much more manageable. Being accessible and responding to messages promptly does not go unnoticed. A simple 2-minute phone call to check in after we share concerns over the portal means more than you realize.

Kaylaa' White

How was your experience at Crohn's & Colitis Congress?

So great! Initially, I was a bit intimidated when it fully sank in who I'd be in attendance with (super successful doctors, researchers, future medical professionals, etc.) but overall I'm extremely grateful to be in a position in life and my health that I'm able to be a voice for the IBD community. The IBD community raises thousands of dollars every year to support the Foundation's efforts, and going to various sessions at Congress made all the work we're doing on the ground feel so much more rewarding.

What are your key takeaways?

Gosh, so much! I'd highly recommend watching all the recap & highlight videos on my socials (@wildflouwir), or reading my blog post on the Foundation's website. My favorite sessions detailed treating pediatric patients from disenfranchised communities, how doctors present new medications, and how AI will contribute to the future of IBD research!

What advice do you have for young IBD professionals wanting to advocate for their patients?

I'll drop a few of my favorite quotes from the sessions: **"A doctor's goal is to earn their patient's trust", "Surgery is not a failure", and "Treat the whole person, not just the symptoms."** As an IBD patient, I have the best relationships with my doctors that lead with me knowing my body the best. I also think attending health conferences like Crohn's & Colitis Congress is a great asset to keep you up to date with new IBD advancements that you can use to guide your patients. ♦

We're Going There: My Crohn's & Colitis Congress® Recap: Social Disparities in Pediatric Treatment, AI, and Considering New Medications

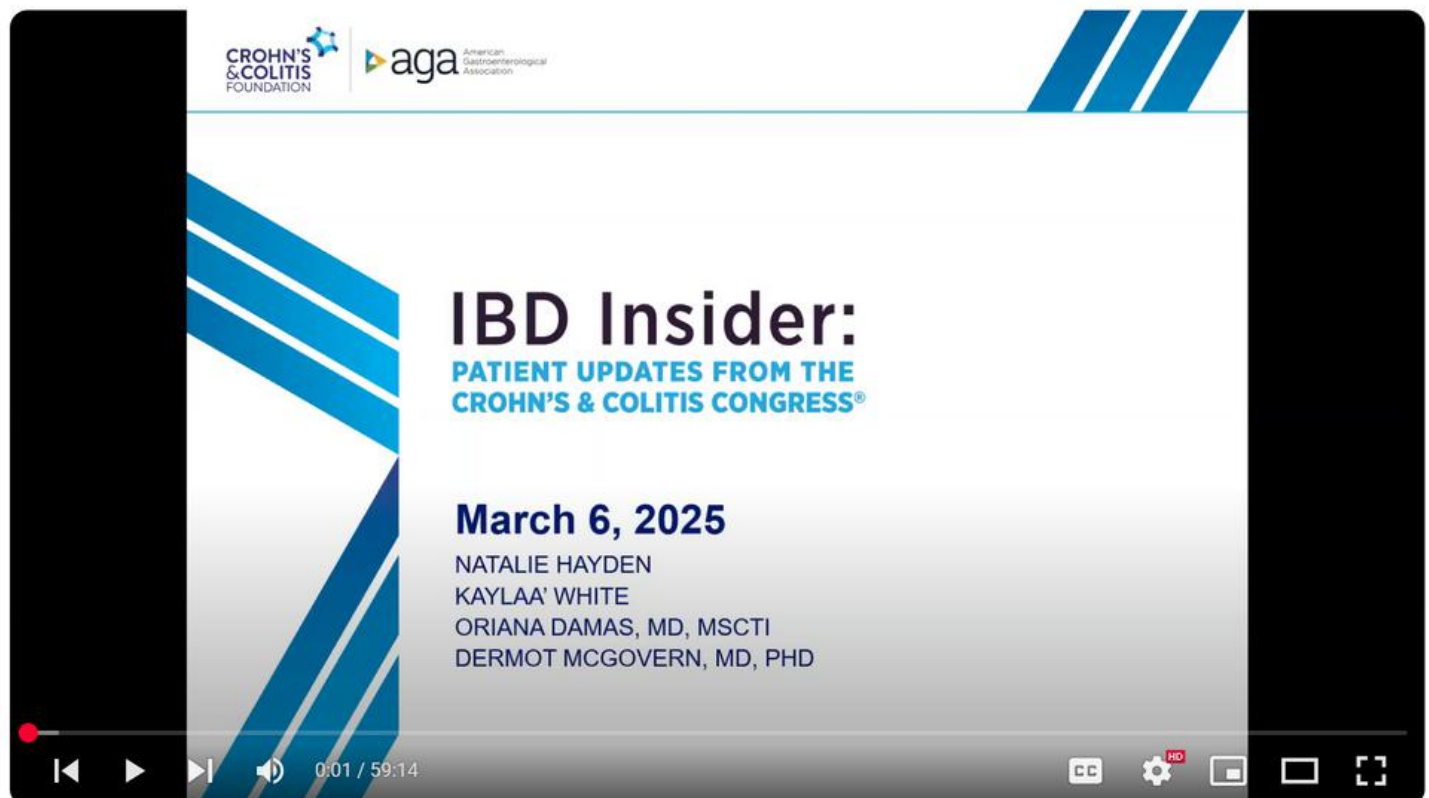
February 27, 2025

Kaylaa' White

The weather in San Francisco was gloomy, but I was buzzing with nervous, yet excited energy as I entered the Moscone Center, prepared to be one of this year's IBD Patient Reporters. Reflecting on my time at the Congress, I keep circling back to

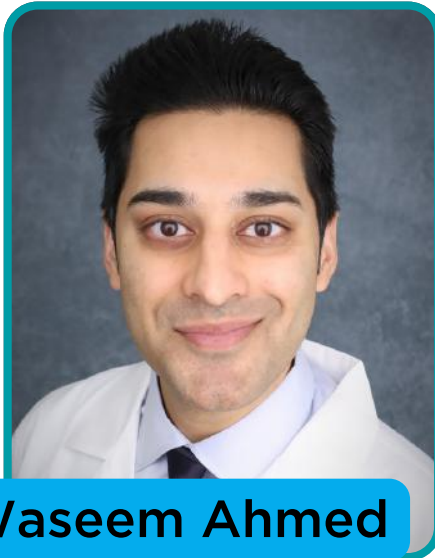
[Read more...](#)

Kaylaa's post on IBDVisible



IBD Insider 2025: Patient Updates from the Crohn's & Colitis Congress®

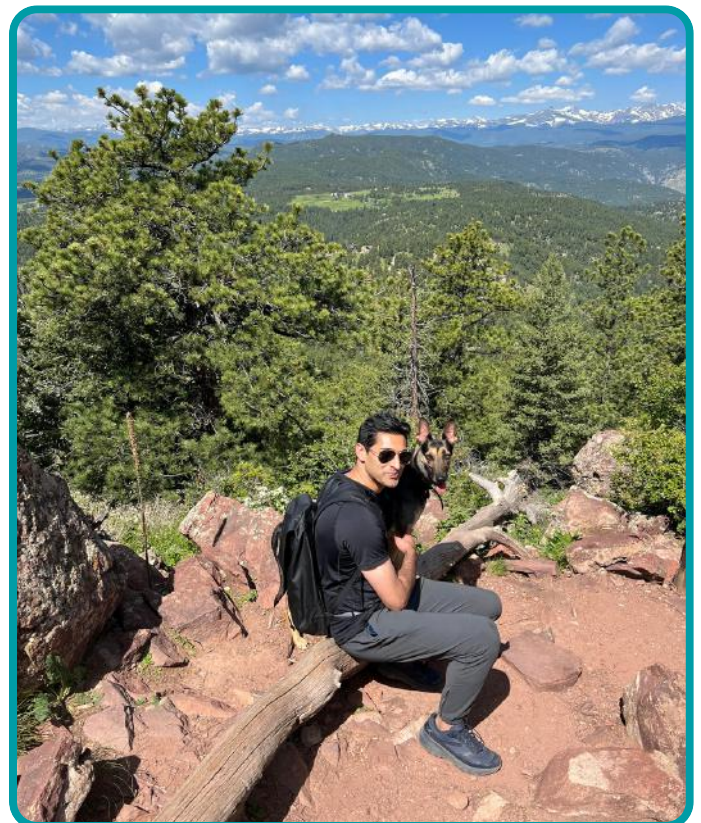
Meet your NEW REACH-IBD Steering Committee Members: Waseem Ahmed, Elie Al Kazzi, Amir Ghaffari, and Kajali Mishra!



My priority as a REACH-IBD committee member is to develop and promote innovative educational

programs for clinicians, trainees, patients, and caregivers. In particular, I hope to advance educational programs in areas lacking providers with subspecialty IBD training. **The management of IBD is increasingly complex, so it is vital that an evidence-based approach remains the standard, incorporating shared decision-making and considering individual contexts.** Providers need access to educational resources that may not be readily available in their communities, and so it is integral to streamline appropriate content which prioritizes outreach.

Outside of work, I unwind by consuming myself with the professional tennis tour. I am an avid fan of both Men's and Women's tennis and can often be caught listening to podcasts in my office, perusing the latest live rankings, or planning a vacation centered around attending a tournament. Locally, I unwind by spending a day at the beach with my wife and our dog or by attending live shows in LA's fantastic music scene.



Elie Al Kazzi

My goal within the REACH-IBD committee is to advocate for more inclusive and equitable care for diverse patient populations, particularly LGBTQIA+ individuals with IBD. By amplifying underrepresented voices, I hope to drive meaningful policy changes and improve the future of IBD care through a more inclusive and holistic approach. **Our care is truly just and equitable only when our most vulnerable patients receive the highest quality of care.**

For fun, outside of work, I enjoy reading and alternating between fiction and non-fiction books in different languages. I also love traveling, whether revisiting familiar places to deepen my connection with them or discovering new destinations.



A Request from Elie:

We are looking to survey **current GI fellows (years 1-3)** and **GI Program Directors** about the state of **LGBTQ+ topics** in **GI fellowship training**.

If you are GI fellow or a GI program director, please complete our short, ~5-minute survey so we can better understand your thoughts.

TAKE THE SURVEY



Finally, my greatest passion is cooking—it is my love language, allowing me to connect with family and good friends. For me, the common thread is sharing meaningful experiences and creating lasting memories with loved ones.

quality education and resources for healthcare providers continues to grow. **I hope to support REACH-IBD in facilitating networking and career development, establishing an open-access education platform for trainees and those interested in IBD.**



As a new father, I prioritize spending most of my free time with my son and wife. I have always found joy in art in all its forms as well as traveling and spending time outdoors.



With the rapidly evolving landscape of IBD treatment and management, the need for high-





Kajali Mishra

As a REACH-IBD committee member, my focus is on strengthening professional development and leadership opportunities for early-career IBD

specialists — especially female physicians. I aim to address barriers women face in academic medicine, including leadership representation, career advancement, and work-life balance.

I also hope to engage community gastroenterologists in **regional IBD education**, such as workshops and case-based discussions.

Another key priority is **expanding access to IBD care for underserved populations**. I will advocate for programs that improve screening, early diagnosis, and multidisciplinary care while working to increase clinical trial accessibility for diverse patient populations.

By championing leadership for women, education, and health equity, I aim to create lasting systemic change through my role in REACH-

IBD—ensuring diversity in leadership, broader access to cutting-edge treatments, and a more inclusive, patient-centered future.



When I'm not immersed in IBD research and patient care, I find joy in movement, creativity, and hands-on activities. I am a trained classical Kathak dancer, and dance has always been a way for me to express myself and unwind.

Staying active by working out, jogging, and swimming helps me recharge.

I've discovered a passion for DIY projects with my toddler, which has awakened my creative side in ways I never expected.

As a mom of two, life is constantly on the go, and finding time for myself can be challenging. **That's why I try to blend my passions with family time**—whether it's dancing around the living room with my little one, taking them along for a jog, or getting lost in a fun DIY project together. These moments not only help me stay connected to my interests but also create meaningful experiences with my kids.

Balancing an academic career, patient care, research, and family life isn't easy, but these small joys keep me grounded. **Whether through movement or creativity, I've learned that unwinding doesn't always mean stepping away—it can also mean sharing what I love with the people who matter most.**

IMPACTReport



REACH-IBD @Congress: Innovations in IBD

Key Takeaways

by Suha Abushamma


The IBD field is rapidly evolving. At REACH-IBD during the Crohn's and Colitis Congress 2025, Dr. Noa Cleveland and Dr. Shrivinas Bishu shared groundbreaking insights into IBD management and program development.


Incorporating Intestinal Ultrasound into an IBD Practice

Noa Cleveland, MD
University of Chicago




Dr. Cleveland, a founding member of iUSCAN, an organization with over 230 members dedicated to advancing IUS in IBD practice in North America, highlighted key benefits of incorporating IUS:

 **Real-Time Insights** - Point-of-care assessment for immediate evaluation of disease activity


 **Comparable to Endoscopy** - Strong correlation with endoscopic indices, outperforming conventional markers like HBI, CRP, and fecal calprotectin

Superior Outcome Measure -

Sonographic transmural healing is now considered a superior measure in Crohn's disease compared to traditional mucosal healing

 **Patient-Preferred** - Non-invasive, improving patient experience, trust, and long-term adherence

 **Therapy-Responsive** - Highly responsive to treatment, especially in acute severe UC

 **Revenue-Generating** - Sustainable and cost-effective

Getting Trained in IUS **International Bowel Ultrasound Group (IBUS) Certification**

- Module 1 - 2-3 days
- Module 2 - 4 weeks
- Module 3 - During ECCO, DDW
- E-learning platform in development
- Webinars

iUSCAN Educational Activities

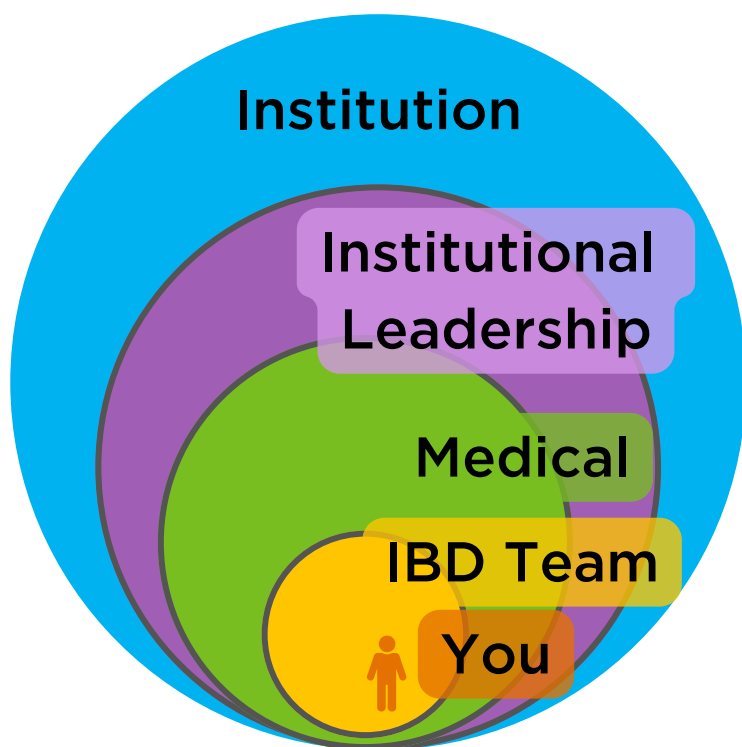
- Module 1 in the USA (*Oct 2025)
- Case studies*
- iUSMonthly teleconference*
- Annual Hands-On Workshop for Advanced IBD Fellows at DDW

**iUSCAN member-only*

Building an Innovative Clinical IBD Program

Shrivas Bishu, MD
University of Michigan

Dr. Bishu, Director of IBD Education and Clinical Director of IBD at the University of Michigan, emphasized that physicians often lack direct control over crucial resources, making strategic alignment of goals critical.



A (Vast) Power Dis-equilibrium

Dr. Bishu outlined four essential players in building a successful IBD program: the institution, your team, collaborators, and you.

4 Essential Players in Building a Successful IBD Program



Institution



Your Team



Collaborators



YOU!

Use a Structured Approach with the 4 W's

- **What do you want?** Set specific, clear, and attainable targets.
- **With whom?** Identify key stakeholders, understand their perspectives, and anticipate challenges.
- **How are you getting there?** Secure the necessary resources and develop a roadmap.
- **When do you want to get there?** Establish a realistic timeline for implementation.

Leverage Access

One of the most underutilized strengths physicians have is access—to patients, data, and clinical

expertise. By using this leverage, IBD specialists can negotiate for resources, shape institutional priorities, and drive meaningful improvements in care.

Conclusion

The REACH-IBD event at Congress 2025 showcased IUS and how it can be incorporated into clinical practice to transform IBD care. Goal alignment and leveraging physician influence to obtain resources are key factors for IBD center success. ♦

REACH-IBD member Jalpa Devi invites you to participate in a global survey on IBD preparedness. Conducted on behalf of the Lancet G&H Commission on Global IBD, this survey aims to identify gaps in diagnostic tools, therapeutic access, healthcare infrastructure, and training to improve IBD care worldwide.

- **Who can participate?** Healthcare professionals involved in IBD care
- **Estimated time to complete:** ~20 minutes
- **Confidentiality:** All responses will remain confidential and used solely for research purposes
- **Languages available:** English, Arabic, Spanish, Chinese (Simplified & Traditional), French, and Japanese

[Click here to take the survey.](#)

Please note: This survey is independently conducted and not affiliated with the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation.

