

My Personal Story



My gastrointestinal problems started when I was in middle school. Bowel habits weren't a topic you discussed, and I thought I was normal – didn't everyone have issues going to the bathroom? It took almost two decades for me to realize that I should talk to someone about it. I was diagnosed with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). I underwent extensive testing and workups for many years in costly and fruitless efforts to discover what was causing my symptoms and how to treat them. Eventually, I ended up self-treating as best as I could and spent years trying to teach myself to just live with my illness.



In 2007, I began working for the Rome Foundation, an international nonprofit organization responsible for developing the Rome Criteria, a set of symptom-based criteria used by physicians to diagnose functional gastrointestinal (GI) disorders like IBS. As a patient myself, this opportunity allowed me to assist this organization in improving understanding of these GI disorders. I was able to help develop and manage various projects that have furthered education for physicians in this field. I found the opportunity to increase awareness and education very fulfilling. Far beyond being a job, working for the Rome Foundation provided me an opportunity to help others like myself.



There are over two-dozen functional GI disorders that can occur throughout the digestive tract. These are chronic conditions that cause life-altering and sometimes debilitating symptoms. The lack of specific markers that can be seen on clinical or lab tests to make a diagnosis has led to much misunderstanding about the conditions, and unnecessary suffering among patients and families. The conditions strike people of all ages, most commonly occurring during what should be a person's most productive years of life.

While awareness and understanding of the functional GI disorders has markedly increased over the past few decades, I know there is much more to do. I have three children, two of which have gastrointestinal illness as well. I know first-hand that many patient needs remain unmet.

In 2017, I became the Executive Director of the International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD). I am hopeful that by working together we can continue to improve medical care by conveying the patient perspective while engaging with various stakeholders, including clinicians, regulators, and the research community.



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