



Cystic Fibrosis Research News

Title:

Developing Innovative GastroEnterology Specialty Training: the DIGEST model for expanding cystic fibrosis gastroenterologic expertise

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What was your research question?

The Developing Innovative GastroEnterology Specialty Training (DIGEST) program was created by the Cystic Fibrosis (CF) Foundation to train gastroenterologists in CF care and research. The goals were to improve care for patients with CF, improve patients' access to CF-GI specialists, and increase knowledge about GI problems in the CF community.

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Why is this important?

Patients with CF often have problems with their digestive system and nutrition. These problems can affect their health and the way they feel every day. Patients with CF rely on their CF doctors and dieticians to help with these problems, but sometimes more expert advice is needed. The CF Foundation conducted a survey of Care Center Directors and found that Care Centers needed more gastroenterologists (digestive specialists) who understood CF to be part of the Care Team and help address these problems. The DIGEST program was created to teach gastroenterologists about CF and integrate them into the Care Teams.

What did you do?

Fifteen gastroenterologists from different CF Care Centers were chosen for the first DIGEST class (the awardees). Senior gastroenterologists and other physicians who are experts in CF care became the teachers for the program and created the curriculum. The awardees attended monthly live sessions and webinars for 3 years. They also saw patients at their CF Centers and worked with the Care Teams. They attended the North American CF Conference and worked on projects with the senior gastroenterologists. As they learned more about CF, they were able to work on research projects and they developed guidelines for GI care in CF.

What did you find?

After the program finished, the awardees were surveyed to learn about their experience and find out if they were still involved in CF. Almost all of them were still seeing CF patients and planned to continue. Most of them had given presentations at the North American CF Conference and many had published research about CF. Ten of them worked on a best-practice guideline for CF-GI care which was published in the Journal of Cystic Fibrosis in 2017. They all said the program was a valuable learning experience. CF Center Directors also said it was helpful to have CF-GI experts available.

What does this mean and reasons for caution?

The DIGEST program has been successful in providing greater access to CF-GI expertise to a larger portion of the CF community. DIGEST awardees were given opportunities to participate in research and speak at the North American CF Conference. As one of the major goals of DIGEST was for the awardees to serve as resources for CF Centers, intentionally involving them in CF care and research increased their visibility and supported collaboration. Some awardees have experienced pressure to spend less time in CF clinic and more time in higher revenue-generating activities, but research funding helps to offset this.

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What's next?

Since the first class of awardees finished DIGEST, two others have started. Also, the success of the DIGEST program led the CFF to create the Emerging Leaders in CF Endocrinology (ENVISION) program to train endocrinologists in the unique problems of people with CF, modelled after DIGEST.

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