



Your Impact in Action

INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE

2025 Activity Report

Advancing care, discovery and training in IBD

The Centre for Inflammatory Bowel Disease at Sinai Health is making exciting progress toward its vision: to become a one-stop centre for patients with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Thanks to your support, we are delivering more integrated, collaborative care — where patients can see all their providers in one visit — and expanding our capacity for discovery and training.

This momentum comes at a critical time. A recent global study published in *Nature Portfolio*, co-led by researchers at the University of Calgary, warns that Canada could see a sharp rise in IBD over the next two decades. With donor support, Sinai Health is prepared to lead the response.

Your report features key updates, including:

- Dr. Williams Turpin, Sinai Health's first dedicated IBD research scientist, is exploring how environmental factors — like growing up with a dog — can shape gut health and reduce Crohn's disease risk.
- The Advanced IBD Fellowship welcomed its largest-ever cohort of fellows this year, providing specialized training in clinical care and research to top international talent.
- New members of our clinical team are bringing enhanced skill, compassion and innovation to patient care, improving access and outcomes across the Centre.

Thank you for helping to accelerate progress when it's needed most.

Growing our IBD team, thanks to you

With donor support, Sinai Health has welcomed exceptional new team members to the Centre for Inflammatory Bowel Disease — enhancing care at every step. “These additions are game-changing,” says Dr. Adam Weizman, Medical Director of the Centre. “They bring skill, empathy and innovation to the frontlines, dramatically improving the patient experience across the board.”



Andrea Zwolinski, Nurse Practitioner

Since joining Sinai Health in June 2023, Andrea Zwolinski has been a vital support for patients living with IBD. As one of four new nurse practitioners, she leads an urgent care clinic that provides timely assessment and treatment — often within a week of referral. Andrea diagnoses, prescribes and initiates care plans, helping patients manage their disease with confidence and continuity. She collaborates with emergency physicians, gastroenterologists and the broader care team to ensure seamless transitions. “When you’re living with a chronic disease,” she says, “what do you want most? Compassionate, whole-person care that sees you beyond the diagnosis.”



Priya Narula, Physician Assistant

With more than two decades of experience as a Physician Assistant, Priya Narula brings both professional expertise and a deeply personal connection to her work. After starting her career in cardiology in New York, teaching in Manitoba, and working in endocrinology, she joined Mount Sinai in 2024 — driven by a calling sparked by her own family’s experience with IBD. Today, she plays a critical role in bridging inpatient gastroenterology and colorectal surgery, offering patients not just continuity of care, but a constant, compassionate presence during what can be a daunting journey. Priya sees patients from admission to discharge, helping coordinate care, advocate for their needs and ensure they’re never lost in transition. For her, the best part of the job is the connection — being that familiar face patients remember, providing education and reassurance, and watching them walk out feeling seen, supported and on the path to healing.



Sabine Finkenauer, Social Worker

Navigating the leap from paediatric to adult care can be overwhelming — especially for young people managing a chronic condition like IBD. That’s where Sabine Finkenauer comes in. As Sinai Health’s new IBD Transition Navigator, Sabine helps bridge the gap for youth transferring from paediatric hospitals, such as SickKids, to adult care at Mount Sinai Hospital. She helps ensure their transition is seamless and their care remains consistent and supportive. A registered social worker with over 10 years of hospital-based experience, Sabine works closely with patients and families to provide one-on-one guidance, offering tools and support to help patients manage the medical and emotional complexities of IBD. Her work is shaping new systems — from streamlined referrals to orientation programming — to ease the transition and empower patients early in their journey.

More than a flare: Taylor's journey with IBD

For years, Taylor Belford kept her Crohn's disease diagnosis quiet, afraid of judgment from employers and even friends. But after more than a decade of living with IBD, she's found her voice and is speaking out to reduce the stigma of chronic illness. "It's a full body experience that's 24-7," says Taylor. "There are down days where you are actually in a flare, where you're just the weakest you can possibly imagine and it's hard work to get your body to do anything."

Watch Taylor's powerful video to learn how Sinai Health's Centre for Inflammatory Bowel Disease — and expert care from Dr. Vivian Huang — is supporting her journey with a chronic illness and inspiring hope for a future cure.



A new Ambulatory Care Centre

Sinai Health's new Ambulatory Care Centre, opened in March 2025, will vastly improve outpatient care with a streamlined check-in process and thoughtfully designed clinical spaces. This state-of-the-art facility will bring together lab testing, doctor visits and follow-ups in one space — improving continuity across many specialties, including the Centre for Inflammatory Bowel Disease. The shared clinic model supports greater collaboration among providers, reducing delays and enhancing patient comfort. "These new ambulatory pod clinic spaces will benefit our GI and IBD patients significantly," says Dr. Vivian Huang, who is a gastroenterologist and clinical researcher, specializing in supporting individuals navigating preconception and pregnancy while living with IBD. "We now have a space that's common for all our gastroenterologists, surgeons, nurse practitioners and trainees — so patients can have a one-stop shop."

Revolutionizing surgery: Three years with the da Vinci Xi Robot

Since its debut at Mount Sinai Hospital in fall 2021, the donor-funded da Vinci Xi robot has revolutionized the way surgeries are performed. All three of Sinai Health's colorectal surgeons now use the robot to perform complex, minimally invasive procedures on patients with IBD and other serious conditions. Over the past year alone, 30 robotic-assisted surgeries were completed, with a goal to double that in the year ahead. "We're seeing faster recovery, shorter hospital stays and improved precision during surgery," says Dr. Erin Kennedy, Surgical Director of the Centre for Inflammatory Bowel Disease. The future of surgical care is here — and it's changing lives.



Meet Dr. Williams Turpin

Dr. Williams Turpin is the first dedicated research scientist within Sinai Health's IBD program — a milestone made possible by philanthropy, and one that's accelerating discovery for patients.

Originally from France and trained in food science and microbiome research, Dr. Turpin came to Canada as a postdoctoral fellow and joined Sinai Health's Genetic, Environmental, Microbial (GEM) Project, a landmark international study following healthy relatives of people with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis to uncover the earliest predictors of IBD. He remains a core investigator on GEM, helping to decode how the gut microbiome and immune system change before disease develops.

Now leading his own research team within the Andlauer Family IBD Translational Research Program, Dr. Turpin is also branching out to explore how personalized nutrition and environmental factors — like food additives and dietary exposures — can influence inflammation and disease risk. Using big data, stool samples and machine learning, he's modeling how individual responses to food may shape the onset of IBD, with the long-term goal of predicting and even preventing disease.

As a full-time researcher — not a clinician — Dr. Turpin brings deep scientific focus to the IBD team, translating clinical data into lab-based discoveries. He's also building international collaborations to study microbiome responses and biomarkers of risk, advancing a more personalized approach to care.

Latest research discovery: Growing up with a dog boosts gut health

New findings from Sinai Health reveal that early exposure to dogs may lower the risk of developing Crohn's disease. The study, led by Drs. Kenneth Croitoru and Williams Turpin, highlights how environmental factors — like pets — can shape gut health and disease risk. Part of the GEM Project, their research found that dog ownership in childhood is linked to beneficial changes in gut bacteria and immune markers. These insights could help pave the way for prevention strategies for Crohn's, a disease that continues to rise — especially among children.

[Click here to read the full story.](#)

Training tomorrow's leaders: Inside the world's largest IBD fellowship program

The Advanced IBD Fellowship at Sinai Health is the largest program of its kind in the world. This donor funded position offers specialized training in both clinical care and research, drawing top talent from around the globe. "We are currently hosting our largest cohort to date — a testament to Sinai Health's global leadership in IBD and the power of philanthropy to fuel excellence in training and care," says Dr. Zane Gallinger, Director of the Fellowship. "None of this would be possible without the generous support that makes this fellowship a reality."

“This fellowship is truly
a once-in-a-lifetime
opportunity to grow as
a clinician and researcher
in the field of IBD.”

Dr. Jeongseok Kim
Advanced IBD Fellow

Trained in Ireland, **Dr. Cathy McShane** brings both clinical expertise and a research background focused on emerging IBD therapies. At Sinai Health, she is investigating how diet may trigger Crohn's disease and assessing the real-world effectiveness of new IBD treatments — work that bridges scientific insight with practical patient impact.

Dr. Fares Almeshal completed medical training in Saudi Arabia and specialized in Gastroenterology at the University of Toronto. Now at Sinai Health, his research centers on quality improvement in IBD care, aiming to optimize health outcomes and system efficiency for patients navigating this complex, chronic disease.

With a background in lower GI diseases and IBD care in South Korea, **Dr. Jeongseok Kim** joined Sinai Health for advanced training. He is studying dietary emulsifiers, spatial neoplasia patterns in ulcerative colitis and therapeutic drug monitoring, while continuing his PhD on the microbiome in IBD patients on biologics.

Dr. Kristina Candido trained in Gastroenterology at McGill University and has a special interest in women's health and IBD. She's known for her empathetic, evidence-based approach and is passionate about empowering women to confidently manage their health throughout their IBD journey.

Dr. Pablo Olivera is a published leader in IBD research with training in Argentina and advanced academic work in Toronto. His research focuses on treatment safety and outcomes, particularly in older adults. He aims to answer real-world questions that improve decision-making in IBD treatment strategies.

A University of Toronto graduate, **Dr. Rishi Jairath** is advancing research on treatment efficacy in ulcerative colitis (UC) after failure of anti-tumour necrosis factor (TNF) therapies, which are biologic drugs designed to reduce inflammation by blocking TNF, a key driver of inflammation in UC. Dr. Jairath recently presented at the European Crohn's and Colitis Organisation (ECCO) in Berlin and Digestive Disease Week in San Diego.

A world-class surgical training experience

Dr. Amarvir Bilkhu recently completed the prestigious Colorectal Surgical Fellowship Program at Sinai Health, supervised by Dr. Mantaj Brar and the surgical team. Offered in collaboration with the University of Toronto, this highly competitive program accepts just two to three fellows annually. Thanks to donor support, international fellows like Dr. Bilkhu are able to take part in this transformative training experience.

On the right, Dr. Bilkhu shares how the fellowship shaped his surgical practice, broadened his perspective and deepened his commitment to advancing colorectal care worldwide.

Thank you.

For more information, please contact:

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Reflections from Dr. Amarvir Bilkhu

After completing colorectal surgery training in the United Kingdom, I pursued fellowships in oncology and advanced rectal cancer. I joined Sinai Health's Colorectal Surgical Fellowship in July 2024 with my wife and two children, eager to deepen my expertise in IBD and oncology and gain global perspective through this prestigious international opportunity.

During my year, I was honoured to learn and participate in a high volume of complex cases and do abdominal surgery, including an exposure to J-pouch reconstructive surgery, for which Mount Sinai Hospital has an unparalleled reputation.

The volume and workload also meant I was able to gain a very mature exposure to the management of IBD patients, anticipating against adverse events, managing complications and also learning further procedures such as pouch excisions.

The program also allowed for excellent academic opportunities and attendance at the recent American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons (ASCRS) Conference in San Diego.

With the support of the excellent trainers and mentors, and of course the generous philanthropy that supports this program, I have been appointed as an Assistant Professor and colorectal surgeon at The Ottawa Hospital and I look forward to a successful career in my chosen subspecialty and happy family life in Canada.

— Dr. Amarvir Bilkhu



See what care can do.