

Background and Motivation

How did you get into IBD research?

I began studying the gut immune system during my Ph.D. at UCD under Professor Alan Baird, before moving to the U.S. to gain real-world experience. There, I joined the lab of Dr. Jesus Rivera-Nieves, a gastroenterologist whose passion for finding treatments for his patients was infectious. That experience hooked me on IBD research.

What was your “aha” moment?

Initially, I was reluctant to attend patient events because so much of what we do in the lab doesn't make it to the clinic. But at my first Crohn's & Colitis Foundation “Take Steps” event, I was blown away by the positivity of people living with IBD. Their resilience and enthusiasm motivated me to keep pushing forward.

Has your journey shaped your approach?

Absolutely. My clinical training focused on tangible results and improving patient care, which continues to influence how I conduct research.

Research Focus

What area of IBD research excites you most?

Cannabis and its impact on Crohn's disease. While working in Colorado, I saw many patients using cannabis without clinical evidence of benefit. Long-term use increases surgical risk fivefold in Crohn's patients, and I wanted to understand why.

Current project:

We're exploring whether blocking the body's endocannabinoid system can improve disease outcomes. We've identified a promising new drug target and are collaborating with Dr. David O'Connell at UCD to develop a treatment. Early results in animal models are encouraging.

Future advancements:

The shift toward oral medications to replace IV drugs will be a game-changer for accessibility and convenience.

Approach to complexity:

We use long-term animal models and work closely with clinical teams to validate findings in real-world patient samples, ensuring our research translates into meaningful care improvements.

Impact and Collaboration

How will your research help patients?

We're partnering with Selektx to accelerate the development of new treatments for patients who have had limited success with current therapies.

Best collaboration experience:

Working with Professor Charles Dinarello at the University of Colorado was transformative. His collaborative approach and global network accelerated research on alpha-1 antitrypsin as a potential therapy for IBD.

Staying connected:

I remain active with the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation in the U.S., attend ECCO meetings, and hope to help establish an IBD-specific research meeting in Ireland.

Fun and Personal

Surprising fact: I love woodworking - it's a refreshing break from the precision of research.

Alternate career: My wife says I should have been an engineer. I enjoy designing and troubleshooting, but biology's complexity drew me to research.

Dream dinner guest: William Brooke O'Shaughnessy, the father of modern cannabis medicine and inventor of the telegraph system in India. His life was full of fascinating stories.