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to shine!

## Massachusetts GI Practice Full of 'Top Docs'

By Hannah Kunze

With a team of excellent staff members and more than half their physicians recognized as 2021 "Top Docs" in Boston magazine's annual survey, Middlesex Digestive is one of the most acclaimed gastroenterology practices in the region.

Middlesex Digestive, in Acton, Massachusetts, was founded in 2006. The team specializes in the evaluation, diagnosis and management of digestive diseases including cancers; irritable bowel syndrome; gastroesophageal reflux; and diseases of the liver, gallbladder, and pancreas.

Dr. Raj Devarajan, the founder of Middlesex Digestive, partners with Press Ganey (an industry

leader in healthcare performance improvement) to measure and track patient experience and likelihood of patient referrals. Middlesex has exceeded national standards in both categories, scoring 88 percent in overall patient experience, and 90 percent in likelihood to recommend.

The center's eight physicians and the rest of the team works collaboratively to treat each patient most effectively. Physicians discuss cases "on a daily basis, sometimes on an hourly basis, to better serve the patient," Devarajan said. "I think it says a lot when you love to do your job. We all love coming to work every day. When you like being there and you like doing what you do, you'll do a better job."



The physician team of Middlesex Digestive.

## Organic Growth

Middlesex Digestive includes GI physicians from around the country. One of those is Dr. Arpan Patel, who trained at Chicago's Feinberg School of Medicine and the University of Michigan and transferred to Middlesex Digestive from a gastroenterology group in Maryland.

"When other physicians actually come and see what happens here, how happy patients and staff are, that clearly indicates more to what we offer than can be put on paper," Patel said. "The quality of employees at Middlesex Digestive encompass the entire staff as well as the team of physicians. We have over 50 staff with a ridiculously low call-out rate. We all feel good about our jobs."

The team's passion extends beyond the workplace, with several members serving on the boards of prestigious medical organizations. For instance, Devarajan is the current president of the Massachusetts Gastroenterology Association, (MGA), and four of Middlesex Digestive's physicians serve as board members.

Middlesex Digestive's Dr. Benjamin Hyatt is set to follow in Dr. Devarajan's path as the incoming MGA president. Besides the MGA, the practice's physicians can be found in leadership positions across the state. Dr. Mark Epstein is president-elect of the 350-person medical staff at Emerson Hospital, and Dr. Peter Krims is chief of gastroenterology at Emerson Hospital.

"The breadth of external programs in which our physicians participate, demonstrates Middlesex Digestive's commitment to quality and communication and collaboration with the rest of the state," Devarajan said.

The same team of managerial staff has served the center for 26 years, a testament to the positive work environment. Communication with the state is especially important for the practice, which has strong ties to area hospitals as one of its few ambulatory care centers in the state.

## New Services

Middlesex Digestive recently announced that endoscopic ultrasound system (EUS) is now offered.

"The entire EUS team is incredibly pleased to have the capabilities and benefits this technology brings," Dr. Devarajan said. EUS yields highly detailed imaging of the upper and lower gastrointestinal tracts and nearby organs.

The practice also introduced a weight-management program to their available services. Dr. Devarajan pioneered the idea after he recognized the need for obesity management as a major driver of healthcare costs and comorbidities in Massachusetts.

The Middlesex Weight Management (MWM) was established to combat this problem. The program harnesses the power of Plenity, an aid for weight management in adults who are overweight or obese. Plenity is made from cellulose and citric acid, and used in conjunction with proper nutrition and exercise, may assist weight management in overweight and obese adults.

The MWM team creates individualized meal plans and exercise programs and prescribes weight-loss pills for

weight management. In some cases, the team also explores surgical options.

## COVID-19 Considerations

Middlesex Digestive took immediate precautions against the COVID-19 in order to provide service safely throughout the past year. The practice required all patients to be tested for the virus 48 hours prior to procedures, and on top of the center's standard deep-cleaning protocol, the facility is disinfected weekly with a fog atomizer chemical dispersal system that kills 99 percent of bacteria and viruses.

"At one point we had to shut down because we wanted to re-engineer the rooms to have the ability to combat a pandemic, which we've never experienced," Devarajan said.

The installation of negative pressure rooms provides each patient with fresh, newly circulated air in their treatment space. Additionally, new ClearWave technology has been installed to ensure contactless check-in and check-out procedures.



Dr. Raj Devarajan, the founder of Middlesex Digestive.

## Proven Excellence

Dr. Devarajan believes that his team's high patient and employee satisfaction scores reflect their consistent effort to improve.

"We only get better by realizing what we can do better," Devarajan said. "We are constantly evaluating how to treat patients, how to communicate with them, how to respond to them in a timely manner, how to make the patient experience as safe, comfortable, and professional as possible."

The team uses advanced technology but their motto is down to earth: "Provide excellent care and don't worry about anything else."

"It seems a simple formula," Devarajan said. "But it works."

*Hannah Kunze is a student at Columbia University.*