



Western Pennsylvania

Guide to Good Health

Health News You and Your Family Can Use to Achieve Optimal Health

Dr. Michael Pezzone, *Pezzone Gastroenterology Associates*

Building a Practice Based on Passion, Research and Treating the Whole Person

By Laurie Bailey

Internationally recognized and a regional expert in gastroenterology, Dr. Michael Pezzone opened his new practice, Pezzone Gastroenterology Associates, with The Washington Hospital in the Manifold Professional Office Buildings in November after practicing for twelve years at UPMC Presbyterian.

With a special interest in irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and other functional bowel and motility disorders, Dr. Pezzone is also an expert in celiac disease and other allergic and inflammatory disorders of the gastrointestinal tract. He is currently accepting patients, ages 12 and older.

Dr. Pezzone is passionate about his research and work.

“Fortunately, most of the conditions I see can be easily treated or at least detected early,” he admits.

While at the University of Pittsburgh, where he currently holds an adjunct associate professor position in the Department of Pharmacology and Chemical Biology, Dr. Pezzone developed an international reputation in the study of pelvic pain by showing that irritation of one pelvic organ (the bowel, for example) can lead to symptoms in another, non-irritated organ (the bladder) and vice versa.

“The overlap of IBS, painful bladder syndrome/interstitial cystitis (PBS/IC), and chronic prostatitis can be quite high, even as high as 60%. Because these patients often see different doctors and are treated independently, no one has made the clinical connection,” he explains.

Dr. Pezzone has shown in his studies that the nerve inputs to these pelvic organs overlap and that irritation of one component of the circuit can have dramatic effects on other components. This “sensitization” of pain nerves (afferents) can be seen throughout the gastrointestinal tract and is often described as “visceral afferent sensitization.”

“Moreover, even after the irritating or infectious agent has since disappeared, patients are often left with abnormal sensations such as pain, excessive belching, bloating, spasms, or urgency. Recognizing the development of visceral afferent sensitization then requires the appropriate therapy,” he says.

He credits Dr. Bruce Rabin, director of the Healthy Lifestyle Program at UPMC who has also done programs as the Cameron Wellness Center, as having the largest influence on his career.

“He was influential in starting my research career and in the study of mind-body interactions and the role of stress on immune function,” says Dr. Pezzone.

Dr. Pezzone continues to teach and conduct his basic research at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine (during his “free” time) and is involved with clinical trials for new and promising medications



Dr. Michael Pezzone

for IBS and constipation at his Washington office.

One such promising agent is Linaclotide, which has shown dramatic results for chronic constipation and constipation-predominant IBS in Phase II studies. Dr. Pezzone is currently accepting patients with IBS and constipation for enrollment into Phase III trials where patients would receive Linaclotide at no cost for six months. “We have also done some animal studies with this drug which supports the clinical trials thus far. Once Linaclotide reaches the market, the treatment for constipation and IBS will be revolutionized,” he believes.

Dr. Pezzone considers continuing to make strides in the scientific community a personal long-term goal.

Over the last several years, Dr. Pezzone has treated many pediatric patients. (His wife, Kim, is a pediatrician with the Pediatric Alliance, St. Clair Division).

Like IBS and reflux in adults, many children also experience chronic abdominal pain and reflux-related symptoms. Celiac sprue, or gluten sensitivity, is one common cause of abdominal pain that is often overlooked.

“As we test more patients with IBS or recurrent abdominal pain, we are finding that a good portion actually have celiac disease (an allergy to gluten, a component of wheat, barley and rye). By simply removing these agents from the diet, patients often improve dramatically. Of course, eating healthy, getting enough sleep and exercise, and minimizing stress at school and at home can also go a long way in preventing or minimizing abdominal symptoms in children,” he says.

“My short-term goal is to build a busy practice by introducing a healthcare expertise and quality to the region,” says Dr. Pezzone. He adds that he believes that healthcare and quality of life are superb in Western Pennsylvania and people are appreciative of good care.

Dr. Pezzone has received numerous awards, including the honor of being a *Pittsburgh Magazine* “Top Doctor” in Gastroenterology in 2008 and 2009. He also received the prestigious International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders Junior Investigator – Basic Science Award in 2005 and the Audrey Love Charitable Foundation Award for Research in IBS in 2007.

“You need to treat the whole person, not just the ailment. The mind, body and spirit are all intermingled,” Dr. Pezzone believes.

When he isn’t in his office or research lab, Dr. Pezzone enjoys coaching baseball and keeping up with his son’s activities – Michael, 12th grade; Dominic, 10th grade; Anthony, 8th grade; and Gino, 6th grade.



Dr. Michael Pezzone can be reached by calling **Pezzone Gastroenterology Associates** at (724) 503-4637.