

HAVE YOU HEARD OF IT?

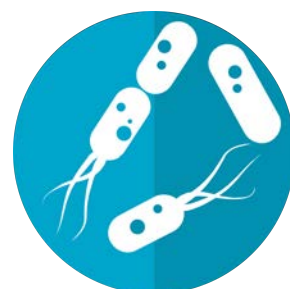
Taking a whole person approach to tackling emerging issues in medicine

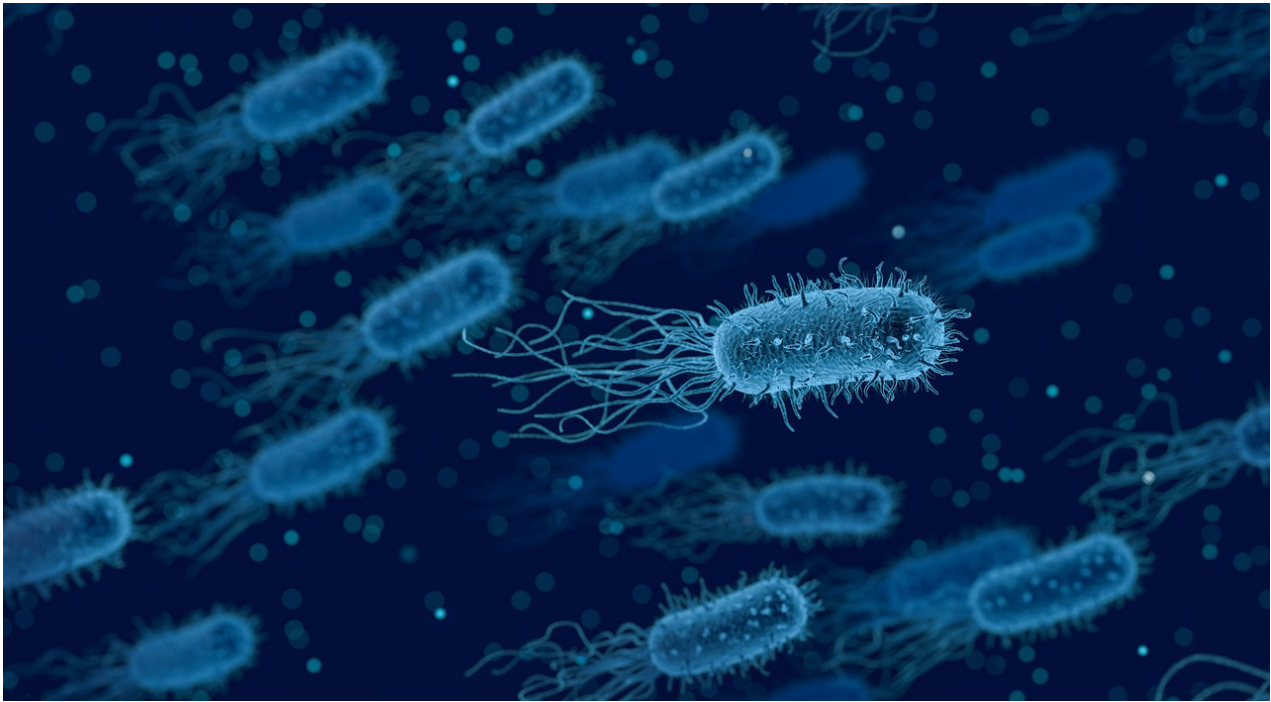


Welcome to the WiseGP newsletter, highlighting how research can help Wise General Practices address the top challenges facing primary care...

Every year, vast amounts of new medical evidence is published- far more than we could possibly keep up to date with. Often, we first hear about an interesting piece of research from our patients or colleagues, who've been attracted to a headline, or read a discussion on social media.

One topic currently trending, driven by new evidence and celebrity endorsement, is the gut microbiota. The microbiota refers to the trillions of bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms, living in our gut.^{1,2} Specialist medicine has long championed our need to pay attention to some of these organisms. For instance, when patients present with dyspepsia we consider testing for *Helicobacter Pylori*, while we send stool cultures to rule out *Clostridium Difficile* in people with diarrhoea who've recently had antibiotics. Lately, far more evidence has emerged about the microorganisms in our gut and the wider influence they may have on our health.





It sounds like science fiction, but there's early evidence from animal experiments that gut bacteria can influence a host's behaviour! For instance, rats and mice raised in sterile conditions are more anxious³ and not as sociable,⁴ while zebrafish treated with antibiotics are less likely to swim together in shoals,⁴ suggesting the presence of an intact microbiota could encourage more social behaviour. It sounds logical that bacteria would want us to be more sociable to aid their spread... and evidence suggests our microbiota could be influencing far more than how sociable we feel!

A WiseGP blog on the gut microbiome, introduces some of the emerging scientific findings. Essentially, early evidence suggests changes to our microbiota could impact on our metabolic and immune pathways, potentially influencing the development of a range of diseases, from neurological conditions to type 2 diabetes.

So, as whole person-centred clinicians, should we be thinking even more carefully when we medicalise problems and prescribe antibiotics?



What could be the impact on our patients' gut microbiota and their future health?



The **WiseGP** Approach

These new findings raise interesting and important questions for us as consultants in advanced generalist medicine. They also raise questions for our patients and communities. You may have noticed the microbiome is featuring on the tabloids and social media... Some social influencers are now even encouraging people with a range of conditions to perform [DIY faecal transplants](#) at home!

So, how would you respond if a 25-year-old woman with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) presented to you for advice about a video on TikTok recommending microbiome testing and faecal transplants for bowel problems?



Clearly there is no black and white answer. In situations like this, our [WiseGP 3Es \(explore, explain, evaluate\)](#), can be really helpful.⁵

The 3Es remind us to...

EXPLORE with our patients why they are considering this. *What symptoms have caused them to be concerned about their gut health?*

Create an **EXPLANATION** with our patients on what is happening. *Why have their IBS symptoms potentially changed, if/how their microbiome could be a part of that and whether alternative treatments could be appropriate for them.*

EVALUATE the approach. *Review their response at a planned follow-up appointment and revise the plan if necessary.*



Continued...

The 3Es approach allows us to use our **GATEKEEPER** role (the decision to medicalise or not), to achieve a **WHOLE PERSON** outcome (focusing on enabling daily living rather than using a 'find and fix' approach that scientific evidence doesn't support as being possible in this scenario). [Within the WiseGP blog on the microbiome the practical options of how we could do this are explored in more depth.](#)

Enhancing (health for) daily living

Many of the health concerns patients present with lead to no clear diagnosis or curative treatment. By taking the focus away from finding an absolute fix for a 'problem', to helping our patient understand how they can live their daily life with and in control of their health issues, we can change the focus of consultations.

Accepting this everyday uncertainty we encounter and building it into the way we make sense of health issues can be both exhausting and anxiety-inducing! In our WiseGP newsletter, "[Have I missed something?](#)", we discuss how we can use the concept of creative capacity to help patients draw on their own resources to co-develop personalised management plans. *Perhaps this is something you could test in your everyday practice?*

Helping patients to build coping strategies and self-manage their symptoms when there isn't a definitive cure, can be challenging- it requires the skillset of an expert generalist- but when successful it can be hugely rewarding. As well as reducing treatment burdens on the patient, this approach can also reduce pressures on your future workload and the wider NHS.



Consider the famous proverb...

“Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

The microbiota is just one example of a new emerging area of medicine we may encounter in our everyday consultations. WiseGP is working towards a new model of general practice in which GPs are given the time and headspace to manage these complex presentations, supported by access to the collective wisdom of a supportive team.

Achieving this culture shift will be a focus of our WiseGP action group - of which there will be more details to follow in our February newsletter!

Dr Annabelle Machin and Professor Joanne Reeve



In our February newsletter will be sharing more about the WiseGP Action group and how you could help to inform our manifesto...

References

1. Thursby E, Juge N. Introduction to the human gut microbiota. *Biochem J.* 2017;474(11):1823-1836. doi: 10.1042/BCJ20160510
2. Frankel M, Warren M. *Are you thinking clearly?* London: Hachette UK; 2022.
3. Crumeyrolle-Arias M, Jaglin M, Bruneau A et al. Absence of the gut microbiota enhances anxiety-like behavior and neuroendocrine response to acute stress in rats. *Psychoneuroendocrinology.* 2014;42:207-217. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psyneuen.2014.01.014>
4. Sherwin E, Bordenstein SR, Quinn JL, Dinan TG, Cryan JF. Microbiota and the social brain. *Science.* 2019;366(6465). doi:10.1126/science.aar2016
5. Reeve J. *Medical Generalism, Now! Reclaiming the Knowledge Work of Modern Practice.* Boca Raton: CRC Press; 2023.