St Mark’s Hospital Foundation

October Newsletter

Newsletter Contents

- Looking Back with Gratitude: Jalpa's Story
- Get Ready for Christmas with St Mark's Hospital Foundation
- St Mark's Award-Winning Research on Fistulising Perianal Crohn’s Disease
- Fundraising Feature: Ben's Meaningful Marathon
- Building Nursing Expertise in Colorectal Genomics

Looking Back with Gratitude: Jalpa's Story



As a young adult in 2018, Jalpa was diagnosed with bowel cancer, becoming one of the increasing number of people under the age of 50 to be affected by the disease. She was one of the first patients to undergo robotic surgery for bowel cancer at St Mark’s Hospital under the care of experienced robotic surgeon, Mr Danilo Miskovic.

This revolutionary technology, which was acquired with support from the Foundation’s donors, combined with the expertise of St Mark’s clinicians, allowed her to recover quickly after surgery and return to normal life after only eight weeks. She has remained cancer free for the last five years.

To mark the occasion of her five-year post-surgery screening and to celebrate her continued health, Jalpa and her husband, Ron, gave a generous donation to St Mark's Hospital Foundation.

"The speed from diagnosis to treatment made a huge difference to my recovery, allowing me to focus on getting better while still being there for my family. Most importantly, because of the care and support I received, I have been able to continue watching my children grow and flourish; something I will always be deeply grateful for.



Reaching my five-year milestone was incredibly emotional for us as a family. Making a donation to St Mark's Hospital Foundation felt like one of the ways to say thank you and contribute to the vital ongoing research, ultimately helping other patients receive the same outstanding care, love, and support." **- Jalpa**

We were honoured to be able to share Jalpa's story in our recent campaign, titled 'Celebrate Life, Celebrate *A* Life'.

This campaign brought together inspiring accounts from St Mark's patients, their family members, and communities who have chosen to celebrate their important moments and the people they cherish while supporting St Mark's Hospital Foundation.

Read the Full Celebrate Life, Celebrate A Life Campaign

Get Ready for Christmas with St Mark's Hospital Foundation



There are officially 9 weeks until Christmas, and our team is starting to feel the holiday spirit! As the weather gets colder, we're bundling up in our cozy fleeces and drinking hot cocoa out of St Mark's mugs.

Whether you too are counting down the days, or you think October is

far too early to start thinking about Christmas, we have a range of products in our online shop to put you in a festive mood while making a difference for individuals with complex, and rare, bowel diseases.

NEW Christmas cards are now in stock! Send your festive wishes to everyone on your list with a range of holiday card designs.



Our Senior Fundraising Development Manager and resident cat lover, Riyah, thinks you can't go wrong with the 'Christmas Kittens' cards.



Emma, our Community Fundraising and Communications Officer, likes the snowy scenery and tranquil beauty of the 'Village Dove' cards.



The festive humour of the 'Robin and Donkeys' cards makes them the favourite of Jason, our Chief Executive.

Every purchase from the St Mark's Shop helps support vital research, education, and innovation at the National Bowel Hospital.

Check Out Our Full Range of Products

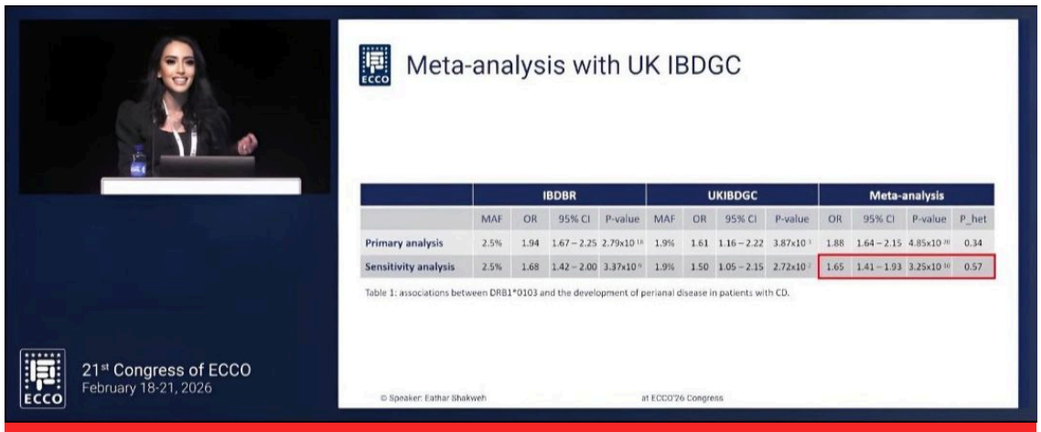
St Mark's Award-Winning Research on Fistulising Perianal Crohn's Disease



Dr Eathar Shakweh is an Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) Clinical Research Fellow at St Mark's Hospital under the supervision of Consultant Gastroenterologists, Dr James Alexander and Professor Ailsa Hart. Over the last two years, her research has focused on increasing clinical understanding of Fistulising perianal Crohn's disease (pCD) in order to develop more precise and effective treatments for patients living with this condition.

Fistulising perianal Crohn's disease is a severe and debilitating form of

IBD that results in the development of painful, slow-healing anal fistulas, abnormal tunnels between the anal canal and the skin. Despite affecting 1 in 3 individuals with Crohn's, pCD remains a critical unmet need in IBD.



Dr Shakweh presenting her research at the 2026 European Crohn's and Colitis Organisation Congress which was recognised in the Top 16 Digital Oral Presentation Awards.

Dr Shakweh's ground-breaking work is looking to determine why fistulas form and persist in pCD. She has recently become the first to identify a significant gene variant associated with the development and severity of perianal Crohn's disease. This research was awarded a prize at the European Crohn's and Colitis Organisation (ECCO) 2026 Congress and could revolutionise pCD treatment in the future.

Earlier this month, Dr Shakweh was invited to the United European Gastroenterology Congress where she presented research on a new, less-invasive way to study the chemicals produced within fistula tracts.

By using brushings—samples obtained by gently scraping the surface of the fistula tract—instead of biopsies, clinicians can sample a larger area with significantly less risk to patients.

This work has the potential to improve understanding of perianal fistulae and help personalise treatment of pCD.



Tissue samples collected with consent from patients with perianal fistulising Crohn's disease

"People living with IBD are my greatest motivation to undertake research. During my specialist training at St Mark's, I cared for many people with complex Crohn's disease, including perianal Crohn's disease, who had active disease despite multiple lines of treatment.

Their experiences highlighted urgent unanswered questions; why do treatments work for some people but not others, and how can we improve care for those with the greatest unmet need? These questions underpin my doctoral research into the mechanisms underlying perianal Crohn's disease.

By deepening our understanding of disease biology, I aim to help lay the foundations for more efficacious treatments." **- Dr Eathar Shakweh**

Learn More About The Research We Support

Fundraising Feature: Ben's Meaningful Marathon



A huge congratulations to community fundraiser, Ben, for completing the Yorkshire Marathon this month!

In 2023, Ben began experiencing persistent symptoms of blood in his stool and a painful lump in the perianal area. He was diagnosed with a transsphincteric perianal fistula and underwent 10 surgeries before being referred to St Mark's Hospital. There he was diagnosed with isolated perianal Crohn's disease and started biological infusion therapy for IBD.



Over the last two years, Ben's health has improved significantly, allowing him to get back to the things he loves.

With another surgery planned for the end of the year, he decided to take on the Yorkshire Marathon to celebrate his progress and express his gratitude to the clinical team at St Mark's. He smashed the marathon with a time of 4 hours 52 minutes and raised an incredible £2,805 for St Mark's Hospital Foundation.

"My journey has included some very difficult times during my recovery. After each surgery I endured periods of not being able to stand, sit or walk without excruciating pain. I can't thank the staff at St Marks and the wider NHS staff in North Devon enough. Their care, expertise and encouragement have helped me to get to a point that I did not think was possible. For me the marathon is a chance to celebrate how far I have come, while also giving back to the people that have helped me get there." **- Ben**

We are incredibly grateful for Ben's dedication to supporting research, education, and innovation at St Mark's Hospital and for making a difference in the lives of other individuals affected by complex, and rare, bowel diseases.

You too can help us fight back against bowel disease. Make a donation, take on a physical challenge, or organise your own fundraiser for St Mark's Hospital Foundation.

Take On Your Own Challenge to Support St Mark's

Building Nursing Expertise in Colorectal Genomics



The St Mark's Academic Institute—the education arm of St Mark's Hospital Foundation—supports the planning and delivery of an annual programme of education for gastroenterology and colorectal healthcare professionals.

This autumn, we were proud to support our nursing colleagues to put on the first Colorectal Genomics Masterclass for Nursing at St Mark's. The course brought together nurses and healthcare professionals working in colorectal cancer or genomics-related services to teach the essentials of

colorectal genomic testing, with a strong emphasis on translating genomic knowledge into everyday clinical practice and supporting nurses to feel confident having conversations about these topics with patients and families.



Across the programme, delegates attended talks by St Mark's nurses that explored the genomic nursing landscape, types of genetic testing, family history assessment, Lynch syndrome, bowel cancer screening, polyposis, and some of the more complex or "grey" areas encountered in clinical practice. Delegates also learned from one another by participating in interactive case discussions.

At the heart of the Masterclass was a focus on creating a space for nurses and other healthcare professionals to come together, ask questions, share experiences and learn from each other.



"As nurses, we don't often have the chance to showcase the breadth of our knowledge and skills, so delivering a course for nurses, by nurses, was incredibly important to us. It gave us the opportunity to demonstrate our professionalism, expertise and passion for what we do. We thoroughly enjoyed it and are already planning another event next year." - Menna Hawkins, St Mark's Regional Lynch Syndrome Nursing Lead



"For us, providing excellent care to our own patients is only part of the picture. Sharing our knowledge and supporting the education of colorectal nurses beyond St Mark's is fundamental to ensuring that nurses have a strong baseline understanding of this rapidly expanding area of practice." - Vicky Cuthill, Consultant Nurse & Manager of the Polyposis Registry and Family Cancer Clinic

---

Through education and collaboration, St Mark's continues to support the wider colorectal community to develop the knowledge and confidence needed to deliver high-quality, genomically informed care for patients and their families.

By supporting this work and helping disseminate the clinical best practice and ground-breaking research developed at St Mark’s, we help ensure that even more patients and communities have access to the best possible standards of care and see the benefit of our specialist hospital.

Learn More About the St Mark's Academic Institute

Thank you for supporting research, education and innovation at St Mark's, the UK's national bowel hospital.

Donate to St Mark's Hospital Foundation

Copyright © 2026 St Mark's Hospital Foundation, All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is:
St Mark's Hospital Foundation, St Mark's at Central Middlesex, Acton Lane, London, NW10 7NS

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can update your preferences or unsubscribe from this list.