“All disease begins in the gut.” This quote from Hippocrates may not be a scientifically proven fact, but it does underscore the importance of the gastrointestinal system for overall health. The relationship between the brain and the gut has made its way into the English language through slang and phrases. People get “butterflies in their stomach” when they are nervous. One may “bust a gut” when they are laughing hard, “hate someone’s guts” when they are angry, and “go with their gut” when using their intuition. People are familiar with emotional situations triggering gastrointestinal symptoms. Yet, the reverse is also true: Gastrointestinal symptoms can also trigger anxiety, stress, or depression. Recently, I had a patient who suffered a diverticular bleed. He subsequently became so anxious about his bowel habits that he sent daily electronic messages for 2 months regarding the quantity, quality, and character of his bowel movements. Days without movements were even more anxiety-provoking, with the patient inquiring about medical intervention.

The importance of the gastrointestinal system in the development of other diseases is also undergoing extensive research. Alterations in the gut microbiome have been associated with diseases such as autism, Parkinson disease, multiple sclerosis, and schizophrenia. Although evidence to date is correlative and not causative, it is an exciting field of inquiry that it is hoped will allow for more holistic treatment of some disorders.

In this issue of Medical Clinics of North America, Dr Dunbar and her colleagues have not focused on the investigational but have chosen topics seen frequently in primary care practice. For example, gastroesophageal reflux disease affects nearly 60 million Americans, with about 15 million using proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) in some fashion. Dr Spechler delves into the controversies regarding PPIs in order to assist in developing the optimal treatment strategy for this common disorder. Dr Dunbar has also
chosen to focus two articles of this issue on diet, emphasizing the importance of another of Hippocrates’ beliefs: “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.”

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