

ISPAD Allan Drash Fellowship Report

Recipient: Dr. Maryam Haider

Institution: The Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi, Pakistan

Host Centre: Indiana University School of Medicine, Riley Hospital for Children, Indianapolis, USA

Supervisor: Dr. Linda DiMeglio

Fellowship Dates: June 1 – July 13, 2025

Introduction

I feel immensely honoured and privileged to have been selected as a recipient of the prestigious ISPAD Allan Drash Clinical Fellowship for 2025. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity allowed me to spend six transformational weeks at the Indiana University School of Medicine and Riley Hospital for Children under the generous mentorship of Dr. Linda DiMeglio—a global leader in Pediatric diabetes research and care.

Coming from Aga Khan University Hospital, a leading tertiary care centre in Pakistan, my goal was to gain hands-on experience in state-of-the-art diabetes management, deepen my understanding of advanced diabetes technologies, and bring back sustainable models for multidisciplinary care to implement in a resource-limited setting. What I received in return was not only academic enrichment but a deeply emotional and life-changing experience that reshaped my vision of compassionate, evidence-based diabetes care.

Clinical Exposure

During the fellowship, I was involved in both inpatient and outpatient Pediatric diabetes care across Riley Hospital for Children, IU Health North Hospital, Methodist Professional Centre, and IU Health University Hospital. I was able to closely observe and participate in the care of both new-onset and long-term follow-up patients living with Type 1 Diabetes. It was fascinating to witness how technology, empathy, and teamwork merged to provide personalized care that empowered families and children alike.

I received in-depth training in insulin titration for multiple daily injections and insulin pump therapy, interpretation of CGM data, and the practical aspects of transitioning patients to hybrid closed-loop systems. I was particularly inspired by how the care model emphasized not just glycemic targets but also emotional well-being, patient education, and family involvement.

Multidisciplinary Collaboration

A striking highlight of my time in Indiana was the robust and harmonious multidisciplinary team approach. Endocrinologists, nurse practitioners, certified diabetes educators, dietitians, psychologists, and social workers worked as a cohesive unit. Every patient encounter was a collaborative effort rooted in mutual respect and shared goals.

This holistic model of care deeply moved me. I realized that optimal diabetes management does not rest solely on medical expertise but thrives on collaboration, trust, and communication. I am committed to advocating for such a team-based approach in Pakistan, where often the physician bears the entire load of diabetes management.

American Diabetes Association Camp Experience

One of the most powerful and touching aspects of my fellowship was volunteering at the ADA's Camp John Warvel. Managing children with Type 1 Diabetes in a real-world camp setting gave me new perspectives on resilience, independence, and the strength of community. I helped manage insulin doses based on physical activity, addressed hypoglycemia and hyperglycemia, and collaborated with fellow healthcare volunteers in daily team huddles.

Watching children laugh, play, and thrive despite the challenges of diabetes reminded me of the human side of our work—something we sometimes forget in hospital corridors. That week at camp reawakened in me the passion that led me to Pediatric endocrinology in the first place.



Participation in the 85th American Diabetes Association Scientific Sessions

As part of the fellowship, I had the honour of attending the 85th American Diabetes Association (ADA) Scientific Sessions held from June 20 to 23, 2025. This world-class event brought together thousands of experts in the field of diabetes research, clinical care, and innovation.

The conference was intellectually exhilarating—featuring groundbreaking presentations on T1D prevention strategies, beta-cell preservation, and the evolving role of immunotherapy. I was particularly inspired by sessions that addressed the role of Teplizumab in delaying the onset of Type 1 Diabetes and those discussing future avenues in closed-loop insulin delivery systems. The exposure to such advanced topics, alongside poster presentations, clinical trial outcomes, and keynote lectures by global leaders, was invaluable.

Another standout element was the opportunity to interact with peers and experts across continents, which helped broaden my understanding of region-specific challenges and innovations in diabetes

care. The conference also sparked new ideas for collaborative research and advocacy tailored to the South Asian Pediatric population living with Type 1 Diabetes.



Friends for Life Conference – A Transformative Emotional Journey

From July 8 to 13, 2025, I had the extraordinary privilege of attending the Friends for Life (FFL) 2025 Conference in Orlando, Florida—held at the enchanting Disney Resort. Being accepted into the FFL Fellows Program was, without a doubt, one of the most emotionally resonant and professionally enriching experiences of my life.

The FFL Conference is unlike any other professional event. It is a celebration of resilience, community, and love, where children with Type 1 Diabetes, their siblings, parents, grandparents, and healthcare professionals come together not as patients and providers—but as a family. Every hallway, every breakout room, every coffee station was alive with shared stories, emotional support, and genuine human connection.

As an FFL Fellow, I was welcomed into a vibrant and compassionate cohort of professionals from different disciplines and regions. Together, we reflected deeply on our experiences, exchanged insights across healthcare systems, and learned from one another in a way that was personal, not just professional.

Indeed, saying goodbye to this magical community was not easy. I still remember sitting in the lobby on the final day, overcome with gratitude and a sense of shared purpose. The sense of friendship and unity built over just a few days is something I carry with me.

Witnessing children and teenagers openly wearing insulin pumps and CGMs while attending educational sessions or playing with their peers—without shame or fear—was deeply moving. The empowerment of families, the tireless work of the CWD (Children with Diabetes) team, and the authentic sense of inclusion left an indelible mark on my soul.

FFL was not just a conference. It was a community, a sanctuary, and a call to action. It reminded me why I chose this field. It reignited my resolve to bring more empathy, education, and support to the lives of children and families managing diabetes in Pakistan.



Personal Growth and Reflections

This fellowship has been transformative—both professionally and personally. I left Indiana with more than just knowledge; I left with a renewed spirit. I saw how dignity and compassion can be embedded into every layer of healthcare delivery. I witnessed how empowering families transforms clinical outcomes. I experienced what it feels like to be part of a team where every member matters.

The kindness of the Riley team, the excellence of their clinical care, the energy at the conferences, and the magic of camp life have all left an indelible mark on me. This journey has not only enhanced my clinical capabilities but also broadened my horizons and deepened my empathy.

Acknowledgments

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to ISPAD and the selection committee for believing in my vision. My deepest thanks to Dr. Linda DiMeglio for her exceptional mentorship, patience, and kindness. I also thank every member of the Riley Hospital diabetes team for welcoming me with warmth and generosity. Special thanks to the ADA Camp staff for the unforgettable experience and to the conference organizers for nurturing global exchange.

Lastly, I thank my family and colleagues at Section of Pediatric Endocrinology, Aga Khan University Hospital for their unwavering support.

This fellowship has given me hope that we can dream bigger, act bolder, and care better. I will carry these lessons with me always.

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