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Swallowing the Camera: What Every Pediatrician Should Know About Video Capsule Endoscopy in Children

Chronic abdominal pain, obscure gastrointestinal (GI) bleeding, unexplained iron deficiency anemia, and growth faltering are among the most common reasons children are referred from primary care to pediatric gastroenterology, yet the small bowel — approximately six meters of jejunum and ileum — remains largely inaccessible to conventional endoscopy.

Video capsule endoscopy (VCE) has emerged as a safe, radiation-free, and minimally invasive tool for visualizing this "blind spot," with FDA approval for children aged ≥ 2 years and successful endoscopic placement reported in infants as young as 10 months. Despite its growing clinical impact, many general pediatricians remain unfamiliar with its indications, workflow, and the innovations reshaping its role. This lecture aims to bridge that knowledge gap through a practical, case-based overview tailored to the referring pediatrician. Using clinical vignettes, the presentation will review the primary indications for pediatric VCE — suspected Crohn disease, obscure GI bleeding, polyposis surveillance, and refractory abdominal pain — highlighting diagnostic yields of 51–77% depending on indication, with the highest yields in obscure bleeding and suspected inflammatory bowel disease. Practical concerns relevant to general pediatricians will be addressed, including capsule retention risk (<1%), bowel preparation, and capsule delivery in young children. A dedicated segment will cover emerging technologies: artificial intelligence (AI)-powered deep learning models now achieve >90% accuracy in classifying pediatric small bowel lesions and reduce reading time from nearly an hour to under ten minutes, while magnetically controlled capsule endoscopy enables real-time, sedation-free gastric evaluation in children. The lecture will conclude with a proposed referral framework to help general pediatricians identify the right patients at the right time, reinforcing that VCE is no longer a niche subspecialty tool but an accessible diagnostic modality that directly impacts children first seen in general pediatric practice.

Keywords: video capsule endoscopy, pediatrics, small bowel, artificial intelligence

Biography

Associate Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at UT Southwestern Medical Center. She serves as Associate Director for Clinical Affairs in the Division of Pediatric Gastroenterology and Director of the Polyposis Syndromes and Cancer-Related GI Disorders Program. Her clinical and research interests include polyposis syndromes, inherited GI cancer in children, and capsule endoscopy. She also has a special interest in acute liver failure and cholestasis.

Dr. Rojas earned her medical degree at the Universidad del Rosario in Bogota, Colombia, in 1994. She completed a residency in pediatrics at the University of Oklahoma and a pediatric gastroenterology fellowship at UT Southwestern.