**APPROACH TO CHRONIC DIARRHEA**


**Take home points:**
1. Use a systematic approach to the diagnosis of chronic diarrhea.
2. Remember the stool osmotic gap in the diagnosis of osmotic diarrhea.
3. Chronic diarrhea comes in six main varieties: osmotic, secretory, inflammatory, malabsorptive, motility, and chronic infections.

**Stool osmotic gap:**
- Stool osmotic gap = measured stool osmolality – estimated stool osmolality
- Estimated stool osmolality = 2 (Na_{stool} + K_{stool})
- An increased stool osmotic gap is > 50 mosm/kg. **Differential diagnosis of increased stool osmotic gap:** ingestion or malabsorption of an osmotically active substance (lactase deficiency, laxative abuse, and malabsorption syndromes).
- Note: with fasting, osmotic diarrhea gets better and secretory diarrhea persists.