



RESEARCH CENTER NEWSLETTER

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Welcome!

The Children's Specialized Hospital (CSH) Research Center Newsletter provides an overview of research conducted at CSH. We regularly share information about CSH studies, lectures, and resources. Each issue features a CSH researcher, a CSH patient/family participating in our studies, and upcoming events and activities. Please reach out with any suggestions or questions.

About the Research Center at CSH

Children's Specialized Hospital has five research areas:

[Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)

[Brain Injury](#)

[Chronic Health Conditions](#)

[Cognition](#)

[Mobility](#)

Join Our Studies

Several research studies are actively recruiting participants. To see which studies you may be eligible to join, and to learn more about how to participate, see [autism](#), [brain injury](#), [chronic health conditions](#), [cognition](#), and [mobility](#) studies.

Researcher Highlight

Meet Dr. Joanne Hunt

Joanne Hunt, OTD, OTR/L is the Clinical Lead for Occupational Therapy at Children's Specialized Hospital. She has over 30 years of experience working as a pediatric occupational therapist and she has specialty training in the areas of sensory integration and autism. Joanne and her colleagues in the OT department have been involved in autism research focusing on the effectiveness of occupational therapy utilizing Ayres Sensory Integration framework to improve functional outcomes in children with autism who have difficulty integrating sensory information. The OT department at CSH has been involved in this research through collaborative projects of CSH and Thomas Jefferson University, which contributed to evidence-based practice and the translation of research to clinical practice. This research has led to creation of an intervention manual which fosters replicability and fidelity in research and clinical practice. CSH is currently a second study site for a randomized control trial examining the effectiveness of OT sensory integration and behavioral interventions with autistic children ages 6 years to 9.5 years of age.

Dr. Hunt is the principal investigator in another collaborative project between CSH and Thomas Jefferson University, and funded through the NJ Governor's Council autism research. The aim of this study is to test occupational therapy intervention focused on sensory features for younger children, 2-5 years of age.

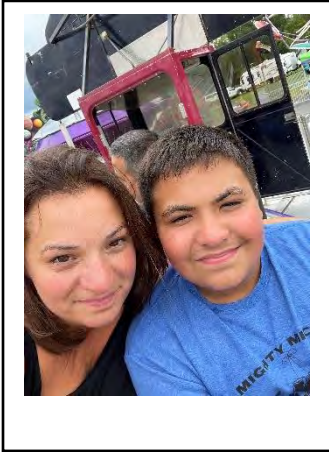
The importance of this research is to understand the sensory differences in autism that impact a child's ability to participate in every-day activities, and whether occupational therapy intervention tailored to treat the underlying sensory motor problems, result in long-lasting changes in the functional skills needed for participation in life for these children.

[View](#) Dr. Hunt's publications

Watch this [video](#) to learn more about what drives Dr. Hunt to pursue research and her multiple collaborations.



Joanne Hunt



Featured CSH Patient/Family

At CSH, our focus is on research that expands understanding and explores new treatments and therapies for our patients. In each issue, we feature a patient/family involved in CSH research.

Meet the Marcketta family!

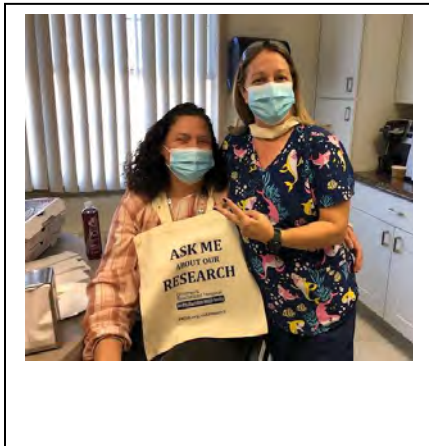
[Listen](#) to why the Marcketta family is involved in research.

CSH Research Engagement

The CSH Research Center staff enjoyed visiting many of the CSH sites and meeting with staff during December, Research Engagement month.

On January 20, 2022, Dr. Amanda Botticello of Kessler Foundation [presented](#) to CSH staff on the Return to School research conducted in collaboration with CSH.

If you are a CSH staff member and have been involved in a research project, poster, or presentation, or have referred patients to a research study, please let us know. We would love to recognize you!



Distinguished Lecture Series

[Watch](#) our recent Distinguished Lecture Series webinar on “Child and Adolescent Mental Health Before and in the Time of COVID-19”.

Please stay tuned for our next lecture coming this spring.

Deeper Dive: Effectiveness of sensory integration therapy in autism for improving functional skills

This study compares the effects of SI and ABA on sensory processing & multisensory integration functions

This month's focus is on a National Institute of Health funded study comparing two treatments for autistic children. The primary study site is at Albert Einstein Medical Center, with CSH serving as a second study site. The aim of the study is to compare the effectiveness of occupational therapy intervention using Ayres Sensory Integration and behavioral interventions. Eligible participants are randomized into 30, 1-hour sessions of OT-Sensory Integration (OT-SI), Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) or no treatment.

Study location is Toms River-Stevens Rd.

Criteria for study participants:

- Between 6 and 9.5 years of age
- Have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder
- Has a non-verbal cognitive level of 70 or above
- Demonstrated difficulty processing and integrating sensory information

Contact information:

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Please share study [brochure](#) with families who may be interested.

CSH Recent Publications

Clinical implications when working with families of diverse backgrounds include importance of respect and validation of parent concerns

A research study at CSH, "Exploring the experiences of families of Latino children newly diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder", was highlighted in a recent issue of the Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics. CSH experts Drs. Manny Jimenez (Developmental Pediatrician) and Jill Harris (AVP Research Center) partnered with Dr. Deborah Spitalnik (Principal Investigator) and Dr. Carrie Coffield from The Boggs Center, RWJMS. Latino parents of young children recently diagnosed with ASD at CSH participated in a semi-structured interview approximately 3 months after their child's diagnosis. Common themes were (1) When parents first shared their concerns about their child's development with professionals, they felt unheard. (2) Parents were surprised that the diagnostic process for ASD relied on parental description of child development and behavior and observation of the child, not on medical tests. (3) Receiving an ASD diagnosis was a life-altering event for parents, and how that diagnosis was communicated by clinicians had a significant impact on families. Findings have important clinical implications.

Read the study [here](#). See the full list of CSH research publications [here](#).

Upcoming Events and Conferences

[Annual Disability Statistics Conference 2022](#)

March 10-11, 2022 (virtual)

[Autism Science Foundation Day of Learning 2022](#)

March 30, 2022. New York City (hybrid)

[International Society of Autism Research annual meeting 2022](#)

May 11-14, 2022. Austin, TX (hybrid)

[Flux: Society for Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience Congress](#)

September 7-9, 2022. Paris, France

[Joint Conference on Brain Injury 2022](#)

September 21-24, 2022. New York City

Meet the CSH Research Center Team



Michael Dribbon, Ph.D.
Vice President of Business Development and Chief Innovation & Research Officer

Research Focus: Intervention outcomes, Social Determinants of Health

Michael likes music, travel, and time with family.

Jill Harris, Ph.D.
Associate Vice President, The Research Center, Coordinator of The Autism Program, Spark Site Coordinator

Research Focus: ASD screening for under-resourced young children, transition to adulthood for youth with disabilities.

Jill likes going for walks, listening to books on tape, and vacationing in Maine.



Claire Marchetta, MPH
 Research Liaison & Education Director

Research Focus: Epidemiological factors for developmental disabilities and birth defects.

Claire enjoys outdoor recreation in all forms – especially hiking, camping, skiing and running.



Myriam Casseus, Ph.D., MPH, MA
 Research Development Specialist

Research Focus: Environmental risk factors for health complications

In her spare time, Myriam likes to travel, read and tend to her garden.

Joman Y. Natsheh, M.D., Ph.D.
 Research Lead, Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics

Research Focus: Neural and behavioral correlates of action-control in children with neurodevelopmental disorders.

Joman enjoys reading; especially Arabic literature. She loves to travel and explore, and she can spend hours immersed in graphic design.



Amira Herstic, MS
 Research Coordinator, Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics

Research Focus: Neuroscience of language and motor development in children with ASD and ADHD

Amira enjoys reading, crocheting, traveling, and playing with her baby.

Uriel Richman, MA
 Research Assistant, Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics

Research Focus: Cognition and child development

Uriel enjoys hiking, camping, visual arts and playing tabletop games.



Contact Us

To learn more about our research, if you are interested in discussing potential collaborations, or if you have questions or comments, please contact us at:

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