



Children's Specialized Hospital 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 also features CSH research news and upcoming events and activities. Please reach out with any suggestions or questions.

About the Research Center at CSH

The Research Center at Children's Specialized Hospital strives to advance pediatric rehabilitation by initiating and supporting evidence-based studies that explore innovative interventions, technologies and approaches to specialized care for children and adolescents.

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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 our [autism](#), [brain injury](#), [chronic health conditions](#), [cognition](#), and [mobility](#) studies.

Distinguished Lecture Series

On December 10th, Dr. Stacy Suskauer (Kennedy Krieger, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine) presented “From Concussion to Coma: Recent Research Informing Evaluation and Rehabilitation of Children with Acquired Brain Injury.” To see the recording, please click [this link](#).



Next speaker:

Be on the lookout for more information about upcoming speakers and events



Deeper Dive: Laura Higgins, PT, DPT, PCS Clinical Lead, Physical Therapy

Torticollis is a condition characterized by an asymmetrical head and neck position affecting the muscles of the neck. While torticollis can occur at any age, due to a number of reasons, it is most commonly seen in infants. The incidence of torticollis in typical, healthy newborns is 16%, although it is felt this condition is vastly underreported. Of those infants, between 6-20% are found to have both torticollis and another musculoskeletal disorder. The American Physical Therapy Association developed clinical practice guidelines to standardize the screening, evaluation and treatment practices for patients with congenital muscular torticollis. The physical therapy department at Children’s Specialized Hospital has committed to implementing standardized care aligned with these evidenced-based, best practice standards. The physical therapy department has been collecting data on patients receiving physical therapy services for torticollis for over six years. Recently, Laura Higgins, Physical Therapy Clinical Lead, has collaborated with other pediatric organizations throughout the nation to determine the frequency that clinicians are screening their torticollis patients for other impairments and the process they are following if additional concerns are noted. With the knowledge gained from this research, practice standards can be established for all clinicians within the profession to ensure that patients are receiving comprehensive care.



Featured Researcher:

Dr. Jasleen Ahuja

Fellow in Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics

Jasleen Ahuja, MD is a second-year Fellow in Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics at Children's Specialized Hospital. Jasleen was born and raised in New York, and received her medical degree from SUNY Downstate College of Medicine. She completed her residency in pediatrics at Cohen Children's Medical Center in Queens, NY. During residency, Jasleen was first introduced to Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics, and after completing rotations and working with mentors within the field, she grew to love this area of pediatrics. She decided to pursue additional fellowship training, which led her to move to New Jersey and join Children's Specialized Hospital for a 3-year fellowship program. Jasleen is passionate about working in Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics because this field allows her to care for patients from a holistic perspective, be an advocate for children, and establish meaningful connections with children and their families. In her first year of the fellowship, Jasleen completed the NJLEND (New Jersey Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities) program through the Rutgers University Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities. Outside of medicine, Jasleen enjoys spending her free time with her family, traveling, cooking, and crocheting.



The research project that Jasleen is co-leading is a multi-site DBPNet study with Dr. Jimenez and the CSH team, investigators at NYU and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and the DBPNet Health Equity Node leadership team. Their goal is to assess caregiver perspectives on early relational health among children newly diagnosed with autism and their families and understand how developmental-behavioral pediatric clinicians can help support early relational health. They will be conducting qualitative interviews with families in order to better understand their thoughts about stable, nurturing relationships with their child, and how to best support early relational health in the context of a new autism diagnosis. Additionally, the study will have a quantitative component, in which they will use surveys to learn about topics like parental quality of life and parental self-efficacy.

Jasleen is interested in research because it offers the potential to contribute to the field in a meaningful way. She believes that research is important to the advancement of any field in medicine, and engaging in research allows us to challenge ourselves. Learning new information will allow us to evolve and grow, become better advocates for patients and families, and provide the best care to our patients.

A huge thank you for Dr. Ahuja for this wonderful write-up! We are so grateful to be able to learn and share more about her with our readers.



Exciting Updates from the Physiatry Research Team at Children's Specialized Hospital:

The Physiatry research team at Children's Specialized Hospital has been actively advancing research in Physiatry to improve patient outcomes and drive innovation in care. We are thrilled to share that one of our first publications from the Chronic Pain Program, titled "Physical function and perceived pain following inpatient intensive inter-disciplinary pain treatment for children and adolescents", has been accepted by the internationally renowned journal *Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation*. This paper highlights patient outcomes from the inpatient Intensive Interdisciplinary Pain Treatment (IIP) program at CSH, demonstrating the program's efficacy in improving patient physical function.

In other notable achievements, Dr. Seth recently presented findings on Health-Related Quality of Life (HRQoL) outcomes in children treated through the IIP program at the American Academy of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (AAPMR) annual conference. At the same event, Drs. Katherine Bentley, and Kathryn Hottinger, in collaboration with Rady Children's Hospital (RCH), conducted a workshop on treating and managing children with Functional Neurological Disorder (FND). They also unveiled preliminary research findings on FND outcomes for children receiving inpatient care at CSH and RCH.

Looking ahead, Dr. Seth and his team are working towards launching a research study to assess long-term outcomes in children with chronic pain treated at CSH. This study aims to deepen the understanding of pain treatments' efficacy and generate evidence to enhance future interventions. To support this initiative, Dr. Seth has applied for competitive grant funding from an international pain foundation. Additionally, the team is working on several manuscripts, including those focused on outcomes and predictors for chronic pain and FND, as well as a literature review of functional interventions for children with Cerebral Palsy.

We are also excited to welcome two new members to our team: Ms. Savannah Dziepak, our new Research Coordinator, and Mr. Ian Joshua Origenes, our new Research Assistant. Both bring exceptional research experience and a shared dedication to improving patient care.

Stay tuned for more updates as we continue to push the boundaries of research and innovation in Physiatry!

Developmental and Behavioral Pediatric Research Team Update: New Team Members!

Eman Al-Jayeh, M.S., CCC-SLP

Speech Therapy Consultant for the Echolalia Study &
Assistant Research Coordinator



Eman is a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist with extensive experience across diverse clinical settings, specializing in dysphagia management. She is passionate about interdisciplinary care, patient advocacy, mentoring future clinicians, and advancing evidence-based practices. Eman has contributed to research on bilingualism and executive function, presenting her work at national conferences and collaborating on multidisciplinary projects. She is excited to join Children's Specialized Hospital as a Volunteer Assistant Research Coordinator, where she looks forward to leveraging her clinical and research experience to advance pediatric care and impactful research initiatives.

Shannon Desbiens

Developmental and Behavioral Pediatric
Research Intern

Shannon is a post-baccalaureate researcher who joined the team in September 2024. Shannon plans to pursue her Ph.D. in clinical psychology and wants to study how health behaviors can impact psychopathology in youth populations. Shannon has extensive experience in working with youth populations as a Registered Behavioral Technician and Cognitive Development Researcher. Shannon also enjoyed her time as a researcher at Rutgers University and at Montclair State University. Shannon believes that her accumulation of experiences allows her to address each domain from a well-rounded perspective and has also assisted her in finding her niche in the field of psychology. Overall, Shannon enjoys helping others improve their quality of life through scientific findings and direct therapy.





RECRUITING NOW FEATURED STUDY

RWJBarnabas
HEALTH

**Children's
Specialized
Hospital**



Children's Specialized Hospital
seeks participants to study

20242025
#40593350.1

IRB Approved at the
Protocol Level
Oct 31, 2024

**Validating an Assessment Tool for
Echolalia in Autism Spectrum Disorder**

This research study aims to understand repetitive speech in children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. It involves completing online assessments by the parent/guardian.

Who's eligible?

Children Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Participants Requirements:

- ✓ The child should have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder
- ✓ Age between 2 and 21 years old
- ✓ Participant should be verbal or have some productive language
- ✓ Parent/guardian should be fluent in English

Participation in this study will be via email communication. It includes two sessions that will be scheduled 3 months apart. Each session will last for approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. Children who complete the study will receive a completion certificate.

For more information, please contact:

- ✓ Dr. Joman Y. Natsheh, Principal Investigator, at 973-391-7858.
Email: jnatsheh@childrens-specialized.org
- ✓ Amira Herstic, Research Coordinator, at 908-705-1764.
Email: aherstic@childrens-specialized.org



Meet our current Research Center interns!



Sarah Elmer

Sarah is a junior at Rutgers-New Brunswick and is majoring in Psychology.

She is working with the Neurodevelopmental research team. Her other research interests include psychotherapy and program evaluation. In her free time, she enjoys reading and working on craft projects.



Lisbet Garcia-Ortiz

Lisbet is a Master of Public Health student at TCNJ and is specializing in Epidemiology and Health Analytics.

She is working with the Brain Injury research team. Her other research interests include chronic illnesses, environmental health, and neurodevelopmental conditions. In her free time, she enjoys hiking, reading, and spending time with family.



Shalini Gossain

Shalini is a recent graduate from Rutgers-New Brunswick and majored in Cell Biology & Neuroscience.

She is working with the Chronic Illness Management Program research team. Her other research interests include pediatric oncology and scientific communication. In her free time, Shalini enjoys baking, biking, and yoga.



Ameya Patel

Ameya is a sophomore at Rutgers-New Brunswick and is majoring in Cell Biology & Neuroscience.

He is working with the Psychiatry research team. His other research interests include neurodegenerative diseases and neurodevelopmental disorders. In his free time, he enjoys playing cricket, basketball, and watching movies.



CSH Recent Publications

Dr. Manuel Jimenez and colleagues at Rutgers and other organizations across the country recently published "Toward More Equitable Care: A Closer Look at Autism Clinic Intake Practices and Paperwork" in *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*.

From the abstract:

"This was a survey of 126 autism clinics in the Children's Hospital Association, assessing intake processes and intake paperwork readability conducted between November 2021 and August 2022. Of the invited clinics, 73% completed the survey. Among the participating clinics, 55% required intake paperwork before scheduling appointments, 34% offered English forms only, and 89% had no plain language forms. Clinic patient demographics were not associated with intake paperwork requirements. Analyzed intake packets (n = 67) averaged 11 pages long, and most were written above the fifth-grade reading level. Most packets solicited medical, developmental, and educational/therapy history. Many also requested psychoeducational evaluations and teacher rating forms. Reported intake support strategies for families with language or literacy needs included making ad hoc exceptions to the usual process, task shifting to outside organizations, providing support at family's request, and delegating to support staff. Many autism clinics nationwide require intake paperwork before diagnostic evaluation. Many clinics offer intake paperwork in English only, and paperwork often does not meet health literacy standards. Reducing paperwork requirements and providing more routine and robust intake support may facilitate equitable access to autism diagnostic evaluations.

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

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.

Claire Marchetta, MPH

Interim Director of Research

Research Focus: Epidemiological factors for developmental disabilities and birth defects

Claire enjoys travel, outdoor recreation, and spending time with family and friends.



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 neuro-developmental disorders

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

Mayank Seth, Ph.D.

Research Lead, Physiatry

Research focus: identification of factors underlying poor clinical outcomes, with an eye towards developing more efficacious rehab interventions

Mayank enjoys spending time with family & friends, reading, and listening to music. He also enjoys going on hikes and biking.



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 spending time with family.

Savannah Dziepak, MPH

Research Coordinator, Physiatry

Research Focus: Improving population health outcomes for chronic illnesses, pediatric chronic pain

Savannah enjoys spending time in nature, exercising, photography, listening to audiobooks and playing video games on PC.



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.

Ian Origenes, MPH

Research Assistant, Physiatry

Research Focus: Improving clinical and chronic health outcomes in pediatric populations

Ian enjoys playing piano, coaching and playing soccer, longboarding, and reading comics and manga.



DID YOU
KNOW?

Upcoming Events/Conferences/Grants

- American Physical Therapy Association Combined Sections Meeting
February 13-15, 2025. Houston, TX
- Rehabilitation Psychology Mid-Year Conference
February 20-23, 2025. Louisville, KY
- NAPNAP National Conference on Pediatric Health Care
March 10-13, 2025. Chicago, IL
- NJ Speech-Language-Hearing Annual Convention
March 27-28, 2025. Atlantic City, NJ
- NJ Association for Behavior Analysis Annual Conference
April 24-25, 2025. New Jersey--location TBD
- Society of Pediatric Nurses Annual Conference
April 30-May 2, 2025. Anaheim, CA





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:

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