



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.



Deeper Dive: Reach Out and Read



Intended Outcomes and Core Components of Primary Care-Based Literacy Promotion as Defined by Experts

Objective

Primary care-based literacy promotion enhances caregiver-child shared reading and child language outcomes, yet variation in implementation may dilute its impact. This study examines expert perspectives on intended outcomes of literacy promotion, as well as its core components, those necessary to achieve intended outcomes, and components that are recommended but adaptable to context.

Methods

We purposively sampled health care and policy experts in primary care-based literacy promotion from the United States and Canada for online, in-depth interviews. Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed iteratively, engaging emergent and a priori codes based on the Components and Rationales for Effectiveness fidelity method and the team's prior work to identify themes.

Results

We achieved saturation after 22 interviews with 24 participants (16 US participants, 8 Canadian). We identified 4 themes: 1) Traditionally, literacy promotion focused on enhancing preliteracy skills and school readiness. Over time, this outcome has evolved to include fostering early relational health as a foundational goal; 2) core components include a trusted clinician delivering a strength-based, family-centered message, while modeling developmentally-informed shared reading; 3) components that are adaptable to setting and context include literacy-rich clinical environments and community resource referrals; 4) experts diverged on whether providing a children's book during literacy promotion is essential, but there was congruence that book provision alone is insufficient.

Conclusions

Experts identified strength-based, family-centered guidance from a trusted clinician with developmentally-focused modeling as core to support intended outcomes of early relational health and school readiness. This understanding can inform training and health care improvement activities aimed at optimizing primary care-based literacy promotion.

Dr. Mekhail, CSH's most recent Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics fellowship graduate, was the first author of this study. Congratulations!



Read the full article [here](#).



Community Scientist Program

Congratulations to our Graduates!



Ivania Chimbo
Kim Rappolt
Diana Lai
Isabel Whitenack



The New Jersey Alliance for Clinical and Translational Science (NJ ACTS) has been successfully training Community Scientist partners to engage in research over the past 3 years. Building on this success, the NJ ACTS team worked with Elizabeth Marcketta and Deepa Srinivasavaradan, two dedicated caregiver advocates and Community Scientist alumni, to co-design the Community Scientist - Patient and Advocate Program. This innovative program empowers caregivers and self-advocates by providing them with the necessary tools and knowledge to actively participate in the research process to further integrate patient and family perspectives into research.

Children's Specialized Hospital partnered with NJ ACTS to pilot the inaugural cohort of this new program from October-December 2025. Four patient partner advocates, all family faculty members at Children's Specialized Hospital participated in the program. Prior to starting the program, participants each completed CIRTification human subjects training online making them eligible to fully participate in research as co-investigators. The program consisted of six-sessions with participants engaging with researchers and experienced patient partners and caregiver advocates. Session discussions included research ethics, patient-centered research, clinical trials, special populations and cultural diversity, translational science, ways patients and stakeholders engage in research. Upon completion of the program (CIRTification training and the six sessions), participants earned a Community Scientist - Patient and Advocate Digital Badge. All four of the pilot program participants successfully completed the program and earned their Community Scientist-Patient and Advocate Digital Badge.



Recent Publication



In collaboration with colleagues at Rady Children's Hospital in San Diego, Drs. Mayank Seth, Katherine Bentley, Kathryn Hottinger and Kate Vieni, published, "Health related quality of life and factors predicting impairment following intensive interdisciplinary pain treatment among children with chronic pain" in Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

Objective: To examine changes in health-related quality of life (HRQoL) in children with chronic pain following intensive interdisciplinary pain treatment (IIPT), and to identify risk factors for impaired HRQoL at discharge. **Design:** Multi-center (2) secondary analysis study. **Setting:** Inpatient acute rehabilitation. **Participants:** Children with chronic pain (N=269, age=16±3years, 79% females) admitted to one of two 4-week inpatient IIPT programs between November 2017 and February 2025. **Intervention:** All patients participated in a 4-week IIPT program (average length of stay). The program aimed to improve physical function, reduce catastrophic thinking, and promote healthy habits through an interdisciplinary approach. Treatment included individual and group sessions in physical and occupational therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, aqua therapy, and mindfulness, with a focus on endurance, strength, desensitization, and coping strategies. **Main outcome measures:** At admission and discharge from IIPT, patients completed the Pediatric Quality of Life Inventory Short Form (PedsQL-SF) and rated their pain intensity using a numerical pain rating scale. **Results:** Patients reported significant improvements in mean PedsQL-SF scores ($p<0.001$), with an average increase of 21-points from admission to discharge. Additionally, significant gains were also observed across all sub-domains: physical, emotional, social, and school functioning. Impaired HRQoL at discharge was significantly associated with lower PedsQL-SF scores at admission and number of pain diagnosis. **Conclusions:** Participation in IIPT may lead to meaningful improvements in HRQoL for children with chronic pain. Moreover, factors associated with impaired HRQoL may help tailor treatment and identify children who may benefit from continued support post-IIPT.

Read the full article [here](#). See all CSH publications [here](#).



RECRUITING NOW!

FEATURED STUDY

SPARK is an autism research study and a growing community of autistic individuals, their families, and researchers on a mission to advance the understanding of autism. SPARK's mission is to improve the lives of people with autism by identifying the causes of autism and informing more effective therapies, treatments, services, and supports.

To understand the complexity of autism – what makes us the same and what makes us different – we need large numbers of people to participate. SPARK is open to all individuals living in the U.S. with a professional diagnosis of autism and their family members.

SPARK has more than 380,000 participants including 157,000 people with ASD and their first-degree family members. Over 31,500 participants are autistic adults. Autistic adults and their families are not only participants in the study, but are also serve on our advisory boards, on our staff, and as community partners.

Over 400 genes have been linked to autism. We hope that by understanding the genetic basis of autism, we will better understand what makes autistic individuals special and how to best support them.

SPARK is making important progress possible. We are committed to supporting autism research for decades to come. There are exciting things on the horizon.



Autism research needs YOU!

Bring your unique experiences to expand our understanding of autism and inform treatment and services.

Use your voice and join the SPARK community of families and researchers.



VISIT: www.SPARKforAutism.org/togetherwecan
CALL toll-free: 1-844-54-SPARK

Congrats to our Fall 2025 Interns!

SAANVI NARAVA



Saanvi worked on projects related to research engagement and worked with the Psychiatry team this semester.

She will be a part-time student at Rutgers next semester, as she prepares to apply to medical school next year. She will also continue her research in Dr. Yu's and Dr. James's lab at Rutgers.

JULIA TRAVIS



Julia worked with the Autism/Behavioral research team this semester.

She is graduating this semester from Rutgers and will be working full-time as a Residential Counselor at SERV Behavioral Health in Highland Park. She will continue her education with a Master of Social Work (MSW) in New Jersey, with a clinical specialization.

AMEYA PATEL



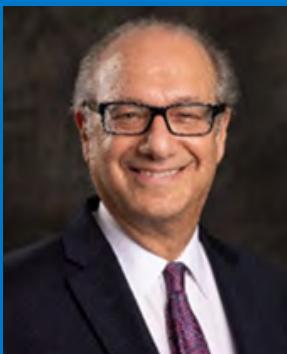
Ameya worked with the Psychiatry research team this semester.

He is graduating this semester from Rutgers and plans to apply to medical school. He will continue his psychiatry research at CSH and remain active in leadership through his roles on the Rutgers Board of Trustees and Edison EMS' Board of Trustees.

We thank them for all their hard work this semester and wish them the best of luck in the future!

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 neurodevelopmental 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, Psychiatry

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, Psychiatry

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.



DID YOU
KNOW?

Upcoming Events/Conferences/Grants

- Association for Behavior Analysis International Annual Autism Conference (ABAI).
January 15-17, 2026. New York City, NY
- American Physical Therapy Association Combined Sections Meeting (APTA).
February 12-14, 2026. Anaheim, CA
- Rehabilitation Psychology Mid-Winter Conference (APA).
February 19-22, 2026. Charlotte, NC
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners Conference (NAPNAP).
March 18-21, 2026. Pittsburgh, PA
- Children's Hospital Association Quality Conference (CHA).
March 23-25, 2026. Arlington, Texas
- Neuro Developmental Treatment Association Annual Conference (NDTA).
April 17-19, 2026. Virtual



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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