

# Duquesne PT Student Takes the Stage at National Conference



Duquesne PT Student, Melanie Tommer, presents findings on infant motor control at the 2023 APTA Pediatric Annual Conference,

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**Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA** – An exciting research project funded by the National Science Foundation is shedding new light on the early motor control of infants, impacting the field of pediatric physical therapy. Some important findings from the project were presented by first-year Duquesne Physical Therapy student, Melanie Tommer. Melanie presented the findings in a Platform Presentation entitled *Infants' Early Motor Control Of Reaching, Sitting, And Looking During The A-Not-B Task Contributes To Errors* at the American Physical Therapy Association Pediatric Annual Conference, held in Omaha, NE October 27-29, 2023.

The audience included national and international experts in the field of Pediatric Physical Therapy. The findings are part of the research initiative led by Duquesne Professor Emeritus, Dr. Regina Harbourne, Fellow of the American Physical Therapy Association and world renowned Pediatric Physical Therapist and Researcher. The presentation by Melanie explores the critical role of reaching, sitting, and looking in infant development and how it contributes to errors.

The research led by Dr. Harbourne was carried out in collaboration with fellow PT students, Katrina Bucher, Melanie Schultz and Chloe Warham sought to understand how infants make choices when learning to sit. Ms. Tommer has an interest in following in her mother's footsteps to one day become a Pediatric Physical Therapist. While students have been encouraged to present their research at the Duquesne Research Symposium, Melanie pursued a new challenge by submitting the abstract to the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Pediatric Physical Therapy of the APTA.

“What makes Melanie's achievement remarkable is that she successfully secured a platform presentation, a significant accomplishment for someone just beginning her professional education. This accomplishment, often elusive for many practicing clinicians, highlights her dedication and the project's importance”.

– Regina Harbourne, PhD, FAPTA, PT, Professor Emeritus, Duquesne University.

The research project revealed that typically developing infants in the study made balance and movement errors when transitioning from one practiced side to the other. These findings have significant implications for pediatric physical therapists who frequently introduce new devices to young children for play or mobility. Understanding the challenges infants face in managing early postural control, visually targeting locations, and accurately reaching is crucial for the development of effective interventions for children with movement disorders.

This important work from Dr. Harbourne and her team offers valuable insights into the complexities of infant motor control and the importance of considering both motor and cognitive factors in pediatric physical therapy. The study, supported by the National Science Foundation grant, is a testament to the commitment of the Duquesne University community in promoting research and advancing the field of pediatric physical therapy.



Citation:

Title: INFANTS' EARLY MOTOR CONTROL OF REACHING, SITTING, AND LOOKING DURING THE A-NOT-B TASK CONTRIBUTES TO ERRORS

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