Supporting Infant Movement Development in the NICU and Beyond:

Modifying Manual Therapy Interventions for the Medically Complex Infant

Holly Schifsky, OTR/L, CNT, NTMTC, CBIS

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Faculty

Holly Schifsky, OTR/L, CNT, NTMTC, CBIS, CLT has worked in pediatrics for the past 30 years with the past 19 years in a level IV NICU. She is a Certified Neonatal Therapist, Certified Neonatal Touch and Massage Therapist, Certified Brain Injury therapist, a member of National Association of Neonatal Therapists, and has completed 6-month mentorship in infant/child NDT.

She has worked within the NICU and NICU follow-up clinic to maximize patient and family outcomes for the most complex premature and medically-fragile term infants. Holly received her BS in OT from the University of North Dakota. She is a faculty member for the Neonatal Touch and Massage certification; and Manuel Edema Mobilization training. She is the recipient of the National Association of Neonatal Therapists Clinical Excellence award in 2018, due to her clinical expertise and dedication to advancing the therapeutic interventions for NICU infants with cardiopulmonary conditions.

Financial Disclosure: Holly Schifsky receives an honorarium from ERI.
Non-Financial Disclosure: Holly Schifsky has no non-financial relationships to disclose.

About this Live Webinar

Medically complex and extremely premature infants have a greater survivability rate with advances in maternal/fetal medicine and NICU medical technology. Effective developmental interventions require the therapist to understand embryological, maturation, and developmental impacts of these medical conditions with adaptations to manual therapy techniques to improve alignment and movement for the infants. This course will build on information from her course, Baby Beats and Breaths, but could be a stand-alone course for the seasoned clinician. Evidence-based literature will be provided on development of movement, manual therapy techniques to promote ribcage/abdominal, upper airway, and segmental trunk control as infants transition away from positioning devices and require activation of postural control muscles. Information will be shared on therapy interventions for the medically complex infant requiring ECMO, CRRT, PD, and early mobilization techniques.

Learning Objectives

- Identify the impact of prematurity on musculoskeletal development and maturation.
- Correlate the maturation of infant reflexes, synergies, and/or planes of movement to motor skill development in premature infants.
- Assess alignment of the infant spine during positioning and handling.
- Demonstrate handling techniques to support optimal alignment for segmental spinal positioning.
- Adapt the environment and/or handling interventions to reduce stress cues during motor interventions.
- Choose appropriate positioning or environmental adaptations to facilitate improved participation in daily tasks.

Audience

This course is recommended for neonatal therapists, PTs, PTAs, OTs, OTAs, and SLPs working with infants in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

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Schedule – Day 1 5:40 pm to 10:15 pm EST (US)

5:40-6:00 Webinar Registration/Zoom Course Opens

6:00-8:00 Impact of Prematurity on Musculoskeletal Development

- Gestational development: key systems
  - Neurological
  - Musculoskeletal
  - Orthopedic

Development of Movement

- Anti-gravity movement
- Synergies
- Reflexes
- Planes of movement
- Motor Learning in Infants
- Physiological flexion progression towards extension with active flexion

8:00-8:15 Break

8:15-10:15 Neonatal Therapy Interventions to Support Movement Development

- Positioning Key Concepts
- Handling
  - Layers of skin
  - Sensory/motor development
  - Impact of touch
  - Types of touch pressure
- Infant regulation
  - Behavioral signs
  - Parasympathetic/sympathetic signs

LAB: Handling

- Handling Small Babies: 22-28 weeks (30 minutes)
  - Weight shifting with controlled input
  - Intentional hand placement
- Handling Maturing Babies: 29-33 weeks
  - Reduce gravitational impact, but allowance for free movement

Types of Manual Therapy

- Types of touch and hand placement
- Direction of movement

Schedule – Day 2 5:40 pm to 10:15 pm EST (US)

5:40-6:00 Webinar Registration/Zoom Course Opens

6:00-8:00 Types of Manual Therapy

- Depth of pressure
- Rate/speed of movement
- Infant response

LAB: Motor Facilitation for Near-Term Babies: 33-40 Weeks

Core Control

- Upper Airway: Common Compensatory Patterns
  - Anatomy review, including gestation
  - Soft tissue release
    - Submandibular facilitation
    - Pharyngeal lift
    - Facial mobilization
    - Anterior/lateral neck release
  - Alignment with early mobilization
  - Joint mobilization: TMJ
  - Active movement facilitation

Day 2 Continued...

Oral Region: Common Compensatory Patterns

- Anatomy review, including gestation
- Soft tissue release
  - Intraoral cheek elongation
- Alignment with early mobilization
- Joint mobilization
- Active movement facilitation

Spine: Segmental Alignment and Control

- Cervical spine: Common compensatory patterns
  - Anatomy review, including gestation
  - Soft tissue release
    - C1-C2 release
  - Alignment with early mobilization
  - Joint mobilization
  - Active movement facilitation

8:00-8:15 Break

8:15-10:15 Thoracic Spine: Common Compensatory Patterns

- Anatomy review, including gestation
- Soft tissue release
- Alignment with early mobilization
- Joint mobilization
- Active movement facilitation

Lumbar Spine: Common Compensatory Patterns

- Anatomy review, including gestation
- Soft tissue release
- Alignment with early mobilization
- Joint mobilization
- Active movement facilitation

What Does the Evidence Say? – Literature Review

Schedule – Day 3 5:40 pm to 10:15 pm EST (US)

5:40-6:00 Webinar Registration/Zoom Course Opens

6:00-8:00 Abdominal/thoracic synchrony of movement and maturation

LAB: Abdominal/Pelvic Region: Common Compensatory Patterns

- Anatomy review, including gestation
- Soft tissue release
  - Pelvic Floor Release: lower abdominal elongation
  - Sacral region mobilization for fluid/gas release
  - Upper rectus abdominus release
  - Transverse thoracis release
  - Abdominal sweep
- Alignment with early mobilization
- Joint mobilization
- Active movement facilitation

Thoracic Region: Common Compensatory Patterns

- Anatomy review, including gestation
- Soft tissue release:
  - Pectoralis release then facilitation
  - Lateral neck and trunk elongation
  - Scapular mobilization with subscapularis release
  - Glenohumeral release
  - Upper, mid, lower rib release lateral cage
  - Posterior rib mobilization
- Alignment with early mobilization
- Joint mobilization
- Active movement facilitation

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Webinar Dates and Time

January 13, 18 and 20, 2027
5:40 pm EST • 4:40 pm CST • 3:40 pm MST • 2:40 pm PST (US)

Registration is for all three sessions. Log-in instructions and course materials will be emailed/added to your ERI account 5-7 days prior to the first date of the webinar.

Day 3 Continued...

8:00-8:15 **Break**

8:15-10:15 **Adjunct Interventions**
- Splinting and elastic taping
- Double diapering
- Active movement facilitation

Early Mobilization for Medically Complex Infants
- Goals for early mobilization:
  - Skin protections and sensory considerations
  - Musculoskeletal impact
  - Vascular impact
- NICU Delirium
  - Assessment
  - Intervention: sensory and motor
- Congenital diaphragmatic hernia
  - ECMO
  - Positioning and handling
- Nephrology: polycystic kidney disease/multi-cystic kidney disease
  - CRRT
  - Aquadex
  - Peritoneal dialysis

Course Summary
- Case study
- Goal writing
- Questions

Credits

This course meets the criteria for 12 contact hours (1.2) CEUs, Intermediate Level. To receive a certificate of completion all registered attendees are required to attend and participate fully in all applicable course activities (i.e., labs, discussions, group work, polls, post-tests with passing grade of 80% or greater etc.) and complete the evaluation form.

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12 hours of this course qualify towards the discipline-specific hours for the 20-hour requirement for NDTA re-certification. They do NOT qualify towards the 8-hour NDTA Instructor requirement for re-certification.
This course meets the criteria for 12 hours that can be applied toward the Neonatal Therapy National Certification. Education Resources, Inc. 266 Main St, Medfield, MA 02052. Please contact us with any special needs requests: info@educationresourcesinc.com or 800-487-6530.

Register at educationresourcesinc.com

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WEBINAR: Supporting Infant Movement Development in the NICU and Beyond: Modifying Manual Therapy Interventions for the Medically Complex Infant

Holly Schifsky

❑ January 13, 18 and 20, 2027

Course Registration Form

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