

Background:

Kathy Mattson OTR/L, CHT

I graduated from Colorado State University (go Rams!) with a Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy in 1987. My early interest in hand therapy began in college while under the instruction of Louise Wendt-White, who introduced me to the specialty as a student, first with very precise ROM measurement tests one on one in her office. In fact, as a student, I suspected early on that this was the only area in which I wanted to practice, and this was confirmed once I was in the field. In 1992, Tracy, my first mentor in hand therapy, gave me the golden opportunity to work in an orthopedic office in which she was the only hand therapist. The expectation was that I would assume my own caseload in short order. Her confidence in me built my own. I continued working in hand therapy on a modified schedule as I began to have kids and desired to be at home as much as possible. This overlapped the introduction of the CHT exam; however, the timing for me and having small children was not conducive to sitting for the exam. I continued to practice over the next 10 years on an on-call and part-time basis. Then, in 2005, I pursued an unexpected opportunity to work as a music educator and substitute teacher, which worked well with my kids' schedule. However, I was never as satisfied working in other arenas as I was in hand therapy. Another influential person in my hand therapy pursuit, Brenda, reminded me at that time to ask myself what my passion was and to consider the value of pursuing it. This was a relatively easy decision: hand therapy. In 2012, I returned full time to hand therapy and began to consider the possibility of finally becoming a CHT. As a member of the "sandwich generation," with 3 kids locally in college and aging parents, it was a bit bumpy when I began formally preparing for the exam, and flexibility was key: changing my exam date from November, 2014 to the following Spring to accommodate family challenges helped keep me sane and ultimately allowed for better preparation.

In summary, remember what you love (hand therapy) and why you love it. My passion for hand therapy motivated me to pursue the goal of becoming a CHT despite an indirect and unpredictable path getting there. And indirect paths are ok! Fit your lifestyle and life's demands rather than up-end your life to meet your goal. I was supported in pursuing my goal by my passion for it; I really like what I do. And what a motivation it is to reach our goals not just out of a certain career or employer requirement, but because we enjoy it!

Methods and Materials:

- ***Plan in advance:*** Create a "loose" timeline identifying which subjects to cover on a month-to-month (or week-to-week) basis. My primary reference, the ASHT CHT Prep Manual, allowed me to divide subjects for study based on chapters (there were 33 chapters, including online material, so I committed to 6 month's preparation). For me, planning on 1 hour each workday, 4 hours on Saturday on average, and taking Sunday off worked well.
- ***Find a consistent spot*** in which to study that offers comfort, quiet, and support of your process.
- ***Flashcards:*** This is a very fruitful investment of time, allowing one to benefit from both writing down information and reading it for review conveniently at any time. I divided them into topics and carried 1-3 subgroups with me wherever I went.
- I joined the ***HTCC Hand Therapy Resource Center*** for a 6-month period specifically for study preparation. I also went through the flashcards others contributed to the website. This was

very useful, in that people write cards differently, which required me to think differently than just sticking with my own cards.

- I was not able to find a local study group, and frankly I tend to like to move through information at my own pace. I would say just ***be aware of your own learning style*** and go with it.
- ***Specific to the exam***, I, too, emphasize knowing your ***anatomy and neurology***—I drew the brachial plexus on the provided scratch paper immediately. But beyond memorization, ***refine your problem solving skills***—not “just the facts” but how to apply what you know to case scenarios, including proposed interventions, treatment timelines; for example, be able to apply the phases of tissue healing to case scenarios. Use ***critical thinking*** in your places of employment, taking note of other therapists’ interventions, suggestions, protocol applications and modifications, etc (and ***answer all questions***—no penalty for wrong answer).
- ***Surround yourself with encouraging people!*** There were times when I felt perhaps I was older than most other candidates for the exam and questioned my timing and my ability. Positive people helped me keep a sense of humor and see value in pursuing the pinnacle in my career. So, when you pass the CHT, become one of the encouragers— you never know how influential your words and acts of encouragement may be!

Helpful Resources:

ASHT CHT Exam Prep Book and Practice Test (do not expect this practice test to mirror the CHT exam in style or format. Therefore, it would be helpful to also obtain different available practice tests, i.e. handtherapynow.com).

Netter’s [Atlas of Human Anatomy](#)

HTCC website reference materials and Hand Therapy Resource Center (www.handtherapyresources.com— requires a fee)

ASHT website online seminars (example: Evidence-Based Practice and application of the PICO method helped reinforce this chapter in the ASHT prep book).

[Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity](#) (Skirven, Osterman et al) as a *cross reference* (if budget allows)

Background

I received my Master of Occupational Therapy from UTHSCSA in 2009. My Masters program had a CHT on staff that taught our physical disabilities/splinting curriculum and this was where my interest in hand therapy started. I was fortunate to be able to do a level 2 fieldwork at a hand clinic with 3 amazing CHTs. I left that experience knowing that I wanted to be a CHT as well.

As a military wife I didn't have the luxury of just taking any job I wanted right out of school so my first job was with a hospital in Rapid City, SD with only one PT/CHT on staff. Thankfully, I was still able to gain valuable hours/experience towards my CHT in acute, inpatient, and outpatient care while I was there for 4 years before we were moved back to Texas. For the next 2 years I worked in an outpatient hand clinic before having the opportunity to return back to the same clinic where I fell in love with hand therapy as a level 2 student and is where I still work to this date.

I currently work about 25 hours a week at Hendrick Center for Rehabilitation in Abilene, Texas. My caseload is 100% upper extremity, mostly post operative in nature, followed by cumulative trauma, wrist instabilities, and I also take the bulk of postoperative shoulder injuries.

While working in South Dakota I knew I needed to gain more hand knowledge outside of the clinic. While pursuing my OTD at the University of Utah I focused my capstone thesis project on peripheral nerve injuries of the upper extremity creating both a continuing education course and a book prospectus through this project. I also focused continuing education during that time to upper extremity courses.

Once I returned to working full time with a 100% caseload of hands I knew it was time to start preparing for the exam.

I had to take the CHT exam twice. The first time I was 8 1/2 months pregnant, had a 3 year old at home and a husband deployed. I also had to travel 3 hours to take my exam. I limited myself to just studying the "purple book" and ended up not passing by 4 points. Therefore, I recommend NOT doing what I did the first time!

I was encouraged by the CHTS that I work with to take it again and take it again a.s.a.p. This time I knew I had to change my focus. The second time around I still went through the purple book but I also got into Rehab of the hand and other anatomy/hand books. I used a few smart phone aps to quiz myself, watched you tube videos, and took practice tests.

For both exams I registered as soon as I was able to and began studying as soon as I was registered.

BOOKS

- The Purple Book: Hand & Upper Extremity Rehabilitation: A Quick Reference Guide and Review (Vol 3) I used this book to both test my knowledge and as a study guide. I made goals of reading 1-2 chapters a day and highlighted/marked pages I wanted to go back to later on.
- Rehabilitation of the Hand (vol 1 & 2) I used these to expand my knowledge from the Purple Book. If something was unclear or unfamiliar to me I used these to read more. I also read chapters that were not covered in the purple book.

- Illustrated Essentials of Musculoskeletal Anatomy- I used this as a simplified version for studying upper extremity anatomy. It shows one muscle at a time with its origin, insertion and action.
- The Hand 4th Edition Anatomy, Exam and Diagnosis- This is a pocket reference that I found with a simplified overview of common hand diagnosis.

APPS

- Hand Bones Review-carpal bone quizzes
- Muscles-Realbodywork.com Includes quizzes
- Hand Therapy Whiz- great overview of anatomy, diagnosis, protocols and interventions
- Human Anatomy- quizzes

I used apps when I was traveling or at lunch at work as a way to fit in extra quizzes and information.

PRACTICE TESTS

- HandTherapyNow.com- you can purchase 1 or 2 full length practice exams to complete and then print out a study guide after you complete an exam. You can take them as many times as you want in a given time frame and I found the study guides to be very helpful.

YOUTUBE VIDEOS

- Brachial Plexus Made Insanely Easy by Shan Nanji- I watched this to relearn how to quickly and easily draw the brachial plexus. He gives some great pneumonics.

Helpful Hints

- Give yourself plenty of time to study, do a little each day over the course of several months.
- Make a study "game plan".
- Don't rely only on your clinical skills/knowledge set
- Use a variety of learning techniques that work for you
- Know your anatomy inside and out. This is essential to being successful on this exam.
- If you have to retake the exam, take the next available exam. You'll still have all that studying "fresh" and won't feel like you have to start from scratch.

Preparing to take the exam

- Take time off of work if able the day before to mentally prepare
- Cut off your studying at a reasonable time the night before to get a good night sleep-this isn't a college exam!
- Eat a good breakfast and dress comfortably-you'll be there the whole 4 hours
- Arrive at the testing center early so you're not stressed
- Make sure the exam proctor knows that you're going to be moving your arm/hand around and looking at your hand during the exam!

Taking the exam

- Mark ANY question you're not 110% sure of the answer so you can go back to it
- Don't be afraid to leave a comment if you disagree with something
- Before you start, draw the brachial plexus, draw carpal bones, draw/write any other mnemonic or ideas that you want to quickly reference/need to remember
- Take your time! It's long and it's daunting but you can get through it and review in the 4 hours.

Background:

Julie To OTR/L, CHT

My first volunteer experience was in a hand therapy clinic in Upstate New York and I immediately fell in love with it. I knew I wanted to work in a hand therapy setting once I graduated from OT school so I purposely chose to work in a hand clinic for my last fieldwork placement. I still remember my first day of my last fieldwork at an outpatient upper extremity rehab clinic in San Diego. I was so intimidated by everything I did not know about. Even though I did very well in my classes back in OT school, it was a whole different ball game with real patients. Gradually, I realized the key to becoming an effective hand therapist was critical thinking based on knowledge I learned in school, which is the key to success in becoming a CHT. I worked as an outpatient therapist with a caseload of 50% neuro 50% hands for the first 5 years before I switched over to UCLA and worked as a hand therapist with 100% caseload in hands. I applied for the Mary Kasch Hand Therapy Certification Scholarship in March 2014 and received the official notification from the Hand Therapy Tri-alliance informing me that I was the 2014 scholarship recipient around May 2014. Shortly after the ASHT conference I sat for the November exam. After 5 long weeks of waiting I received my exam result and I can now proudly sign my name with CHT behind it.

This is what I believe in:

- Know the anatomy. Not just “name the part”. Being able to identify the possible involved structure is critical.
- Look at a bigger picture. Don’t just look at the body part/structure the patient is having trouble with.
- Find a good mentor. This is extremely important. I have a few mentors and they all taught me different things. But there is one common thing I learned from all of them – critical thinking.
- Find a hand surgeon you can work closely with. I find this to be the most beneficial.
- Know the reason to take the exam. Do not ever take the exam if you only want to pass and get the CHT credential.
- Challenge yourself every time you evaluate and treat your patient, such as different provocative tests, difference between 2 point vs monofilaments during sensory testing, stages of wound healing, etc.

Materials I used to prepare for my exam:

- The Hand Therapy Review course offered by ASHT - a must for all CHT exam candidates as it helps to identify the area to focus on.
- Hand Therapy Resource Center – I installed the flash cards on my phone for quick review. I also took quite a few mock questions to challenge myself.
- The Purple Book: Hand & Upper Extremity Rehabilitation: A Quick Reference Guide and Review (Vol 2) - my main study guide.
- Test Prep for the CHT Exam, (Third Edition) - my secondary study guide.
- Rehab of the Hand - my hand "bible".
- OCS study group with the PTs focusing on shoulder, elbow and hand.
- Various Apple and Android anatomy apps. Such as shoulder decide.