

CHT exam prep 2016

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I graduated with a BS in Occupational Therapy from Towson State University in 1981. My 20 year career at St Mary's in Decatur Illinois has included working in acute care, advanced rehab, pediatrics, psych, outpatient, long term care and home health. For the past 6 years I have worked mostly in outpatient. Once this decision was made I started taking courses in hand therapy. One class was taught by a CHT on the subject of G codes. She suggested I belong to the ASHT as a start to taking the test. Another course in Chicago had mostly CHT's in the audience and I was encouraged by their discussions and clinical application to the topic.

I do not have the luxury of having CHT's to work with. I am the only OT/CHT in outpatient and I work closely with a COTA. We just got an upper extremity doctor to work with an orthopedic practice every other Tuesday. My reason for relaying this information is to point out that I do not have a close relationship with a Hand Surgeon. My referrals often list the diagnosis as hand pain or wrist injury. It was these types of injuries that also prompted me to explore the intricate areas of nerves, carpals, ligaments and tendons.

I finally decided to take the CHT exam in May 2015. Study began with the purchase of the black CHT book. From the ASHT site I learned about the Purple Book and devoured it in 4 months. I studied 20 hours a week. I utilized the Hand Therapy Now website to purchase two 200 question exams. These tests are great because they give you the clinical application and references to Rehab of the Hand. I also took notes and used index cards. I recorded questions onto DVD's for long car trips. I started a study group but it was not successful as the other participants were not fully committed. I went to an exam prep class in California, very intense and fast pace it was hard to keep up. The ASHT has a test your knowledge site for questions and a journal club I was active in during my studies. I planned to take the test one time, to study my best and give it my all. I was fully invested.

I knew when I took the test I did not pass and the failure was hard to accept. When the letter comes about how you did on the exam, those who do not pass are given a breakdown of each of the 5 domains tested and your percentage of correct answers. I got a scaled score of 64; a scaled score of 75 is passing. I waited 6 weeks to rest and contemplate what I was going to do. I spoke to other CHT's and visited a few in my area. They all told me to do it again. By July I decided to go for it I started with a calendar with PB, Rehab of the Hand, and the Black Book mapped out. I found an active study group through the ASHT website. I met with a CHT in my town once a week. I studied approximately 35 hours a week. The CHT told me she studied the gold standard to pass the test and I followed that path. I read Rehab of the Hand two times and went through the sections marked with tabs two more. Same with the Purple Book. My study group utilized YouTube videos for a better visual for most questions in the PB. We met once a week for Q&A.

I also went to the HTCC reference site and checked out most of the books from my hospital library to review. According to the HTCC review of my results I was weak in the area of prognosis and plan of care, so I worked multiple questions that required that application. I took the hand course in Philly and was sure I went to all courses offered by Judy Colditz. Two weeks prior to the exam I made sure I scheduled time off work to prepare well. Rehab of the Hand has excellent videos and supplemental material, I utilized especially after a long day of work and study. I recommend the surgeries, provocative tests and the dedication video by Evelyn Mackin, it will remind you why you want to be a

part of the CHT family and reveal the roots of ASHT, Rehab of the Hand and the Journal of Hand Therapy.

Resources and Materials used:

- Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity (6th edition) by Skirven
- Purple Book by Falkenstein, N. Weiss, S.2013
- ASHT test prep for the CHT Exam, 3rd edition (Black Book)
- Hand Therapy Now website practice exams
- Netter's Orthopedics
- Hand Pearls
- Hand Secrets
- Study Group used you tube videos as a supplement especially those by Dr Nabil Ebraheim

Key Points:

- Practice tests; time yourself for 200 questions learn to pace yourself
- Write out Brachial plexus, nerve innervations and Semmes Weinstein levels plus any other items you mix up.
- Use your coworkers to review or educate them on what you are studying, same with your patients.
- Know orthoses and application
- Utilize the HTCC website Appendix 2: Examination Preparation
- If I had to pick two resources it would be Rehab of the Hand and Purple Book.

Background:

I received my masters in Occupational Therapy from Winston-Salem State University in NC, graduating in December 2010. I knew, well before I began OT school, that I wanted to become a CHT. With that, I made it my mission to begin the process immediately, taking advantage of any opportunity along the way to become more involved in that side of the field. This wasn't an easy feat by any means. It often felt like the odds were against me. I remember when it was time to pick our level II fieldwork settings, and how upset I was to find out I was placed in a SNF and also a very small acute care setting, with virtually nothing related to the specialty of hand therapy. I refused to accept that, because I knew that my future depended on it. I set up a meeting with the school's fieldwork coordinator and somehow convinced her to allow me to change my FW to an outpatient orthopedic setting. Even when I began that adventure, I could see it wasn't enough, so I contacted a local CHT to see if I could shadow in the evenings after I left my original FW setting. Thankfully, he was open to this, and I learned so much from both settings.

When I graduated in December, I searched and searched for a hand therapy position that was open to the idea of a new graduate. This proved to be practically impossible and was quite disheartening. I was willing to do whatever it took, but just couldn't seem to get the position I was looking for. I settled on working for a large, level 1 trauma, hospital in the acute care setting. This was ok, because I was able to make splints and gain some experience in working with the same patients that would eventually go on to receive hand therapy in the outpatient setting. However, I was also spending much of my time working with other patient populations. In the meantime, I continued racking my brain to figure out how I could land that coveted hand therapy position. I decided to contact the hand therapy supervisor at the outpatient center, within the hospital I was working for. I offered my time and volunteered as soon as I would get off work from the main hospital. I wanted to learn as much as possible. Thankfully, they allowed me to do this and before I knew it, they asked me to start splitting my time between acute care and the outpatient hand therapy setting. I was splitting between the two about 50/50 for 6 months. It was around 6 months when I was offered a full time position at the hand therapy center.

My dreams were coming true, but I still had a huge hurdle ahead of me, the CHT exam. I knew that working in the setting wasn't enough. Although I still had 4 years before I could sit for the exam, I wanted to learn everything I could and grow as much as possible in those 4 years. I volunteered to speak at the local hand conferences for the hospital's surgeons and residents. I spoke on flexor tendon and extensor tendon rehab, burn rehab and multiple other topics. Nothing will help you understand the material more than presenting it in front of the very hand surgeons who you share patients with! I volunteered, often, to read the latest ASHT journal articles and revamp our protocols. I hosted a 2 day splinting course for my colleagues, and just did as much as I possibly could to grow. I absolutely did not study for the hand therapy exam those entire 5 years. I didn't even study for it until the final year. I did everything I could to better myself as a hand therapist, so that when it came time to study (only about 6 months before I took the exam), I had a strong foundation to return to.

I am happy to say that I passed the CHT exam in May, 2016, and I worked for 4 years at Wake Forest Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem, NC before moving to and working in Raleigh, NC at an outpatient private hand therapy practice since May, 2015. I work alongside 3 other highly experienced CHTs. I am currently in the process of developing contracts with the local OT schools so that I can host level II fieldwork students to give back and continue to grow as a hand therapist.

In summary, I believe what made me most successful on the exam was the fact that I had taken the initiative from the start to submerge myself into the realm of hand therapy. I did not settle for second best and I kept striving to learn and grow. My past experiences translated into knowledge and familiarity when finally sitting down to study for the exam and I was able to apply and relate those experiences to what I was learning.

Advice and what I did to study:

1. Notecards, notecards, notecards!
2. Make an outline that correlates with a timeline (and stick to it!)
3. Make a cheat sheet and memorize it so that you can write it down when you enter the exam room. (ie. Brachial plexus, nerve innervations, shoulder assessments, etc.)

4. Pick a few study materials and put your efforts into those. Don't try to study ALL the materials, books, etc. You will overwhelm yourself. You will see certain study materials recommended over and over again. Pick 2-3 of those and don't stray.
5. Do what works for you. I was given advice that I quickly recognized did not work for me. It scared me to go against what I was advised, but I am so thankful that I did.

Materials I Used:

- An anatomy coloring book
- Wheeless' Textbook of Orthopedics and eaton hand (good for referencing)
- The Purple Book: Hand & Upper Extremity Rehabilitation: A Quick Reference Guide and Review
- Rehabilitation of the Hand Vols I/II:
- ASHT Test Prep for the CHT Exam

I took this course in October 2015:

- ASHT Hand Therapy Review Course – they provide you with a wonderful outline/booklet that I made my notecards from and the instructors are amazing!

Other quick tips:

1. Find a great spot away from home to study. I really enjoyed going to my favorite coffee shop and rewarding my efforts with a latte and sometimes a muffin! It not only made the monotony of studying a little more fun, but it is so much easier to focus when you are outside of your home.
2. Study in short sessions. I never studied for more than 2 hours straight. My mind couldn't handle it. I studied often, but I made sure to have fun in between.
3. Take at least 2 days off of work before taking the exam. Consider taking the entire week off. You owe it to yourself. You have worked so hard leading up to it, give yourself that gift and allow yourself to focus on the one thing that will mean the most at that time.

Background:

I graduated from Eastern Kentucky University with a Bachelors in Occupational Science in 2008, and went straight into a graduate program in Occupational Therapy, finishing in 2010. I did an internship at Kentucky Hand and Physical Therapy, which lead straight into my first clinically relevant employment opportunity. In addition to seeing 100% hand and upper extremity patients, I was accepted into a PhD program at the University of Kentucky, and enrolled part-time in their Rehabilitation Sciences program. I was blessed early in my career to be surrounded by an elite group of highly experienced hand therapists and some regionally and nationally acclaimed hand surgeons. In my practice I worked with about 10-12 CHT's at the time, and was able to learn from hand surgeons that were trained in Louisville, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. I pushed myself to observe surgeries, attend conferences, and collaborate with a wide-variety early on in my career. I have additionally presented nationally, published research studies, and recently co-authored a book chapter.

I opted to take my CHT exam as soon as I achieved all of the qualifications, which was November of 2015. At that time, I had practiced for over 5 years, and had over 10,000 hours of hand and upper extremity experience. I studied and prepared primarily throughout the entire experience, and felt that I was ready and confident to sit for the exam as soon as I could.

Preparation and Recommendations:

- Know your weaknesses; Areas where you would score less than 80% on the material.
- Study more than you think you should; Even if you feel confident in an area, still refresh yourself on the topics, and the potential questions you might see
- Master your understanding of the question and answer format of the exam.
- Know approximately how much time you have per question
- Move on if you're struggling with finding an answer; mark it; and come back to it; don't get hung up; be efficient with your time management
- Consistently study – find a time and place that works well for you.
- Study one topic from multiple perspectives at a time (i.e. tendon repairs, fractures, cumulative trauma, etc.)
- Study the way that works best for you, not for other people
- Don't study for numerous hours at a time; Study long enough for your to master in the information, while additionally being able to retain for the test, as well as for practice

- Take an exam prep course. I took the one in St Louis at Washington University. Not only was it beneficial, but it re-iterated my knowledge and gave me confidence in my skill set and how I was preparing for the exam
- Get at least 2 amazing mentors that you can greatly rely on to challenge your clinical reasoning skills. It may be nice to have someone with the answers and is willing to give them to you at the drop of a hat, but having someone that challenges you to develop your own clinical reasoning skills and master techniques will serve you much better while you're taking the exam and treating your patients.
- Find time to observe surgeries with hand surgeons primarily. This can lead to great relationships and collaboration in the rehabilitation process
- See a wide variety of cases and pathologies to broaden your knowledge base in preparing for you exam. When I sat down and started preparing for different topic, I had cases for almost every question that I could think about personally.
- Take quizzes and exams to not only find your weaknesses, but to know how the questions will be asked.

Recommended Texts:

- ✓ Hand and Upper Extremity Rehabilitation; A Quick Reference, Guide, and Review (3rd Edition)
 - Over 500 pages of questions with rationale on the most pertinent topics on the exam
 - Practice Exam in the back
 - References on the rationale for the questions you may want to research more in-depth on.
- ✓ Test Prep for The CHT Exam (3rd Edition – ASHT)
 - Bullet points to review on various topics
 - About 10-12 questions at the end of each chapter to test your knowledge on topics
- ✓ Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity
 - I read this early in my career to familiarize myself with more in-depth reading and knowledge on topics
- ✓ Fundamentals of Hand Therapy: Clinical Reasoning and Treatment Guidelines For Common Diagnosis of The Upper Extremity (2nd Ed.)
 - Over-view and in-depth reading
- ✓ Netter's Clinical Anatomy
- ✓ The Wrist (Watson)
- ✓ Examination of The Hand Wrist (Tubiano)
- ✓ Clinical Mechanics of The Hand (Brand)