

## **Position Statement on Wound Care Management in Hand Therapy**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to define the Hand Therapy Certification Commission's (HTCC) position regarding the use of wound care management interventions by hand therapists.

### **Overview**

The HTCC credentials occupational therapists and physical therapists as Certified Hand Therapists (CHT). The designation reflects expertise in the advanced clinical specialty of rehabilitation of the upper limb, including the hand, wrist, elbow, and shoulder girdle. Direct care of wounds is an essential and critical part of this expertise.

Hand therapists are certified or licensed occupational therapists or physical therapists who, through advanced education, clinical experience, and independent study, have become proficient in treating pathological upper limb conditions resulting from medical conditions, repetitive or direct trauma, disease or congenital or acquired deformity. A Certified Hand Therapist (CHT) is an occupational therapist or physical therapist who has passed the Hand Therapy Certification Examination and met the standards for initial eligibility and recertification established by the HTCC. There are over 7,000 CHTs practicing throughout the world.

### **Mission & Vision Statement**

The mission of the Hand Therapy Certification Commission is to support a high level of competence in hand therapy practice and to advance the specialty through a formal credentialing process. HTCC envisions a time when every qualified therapist who treats hand and upper extremity patients will become a Certified Hand Therapist.

### **Background – Position Statements**

Occupational therapists and physical therapists in hand therapy practice report that the direct care of the wounds encountered during patient care is highly critical to hand therapy practice. HTCC strongly agrees with this and bases its position on HTCC's ongoing and in-depth statistical analysis of hand therapy practice since 1985<sup>1-7</sup>. These formal studies of the hand therapy scope of practice affirm that hand therapists have consistently and traditionally performed wound care as part of daily practice. Additionally, HTCC performed targeted surveys in 2009 and 2011<sup>2</sup> and included items in the 2014 and 2019 hand therapy practice analysis studies to document and analyze specific interventions used in wound care management, including sharp debridement, which were not explicitly included in earlier surveys.

Wound care is well-documented in these studies as being routinely performed by a majority of hand therapists. The results reflect that hand therapists encounter clean, infected, chronic, and traumatic wounds while caring for patients who are referred for hand therapy. Wound care interventions are commonly used in hand therapy by both occupational therapists and physical therapists, and these professionals believe these interventions to be critical to the care of their patients.

The ability of hand therapists to provide needed wound care management interventions can be affected by a variety of factors; their individual education, experience level, and training, as well as external factors such as regulatory systems, state or provincial practice acts, licensure laws, and facility and payer policies. There is inconsistency and a lack of specific information regarding state, provincial, facility-based, or other requirements for the training and education of occupational therapists and physical therapists performing wound care. Although these treatments are not consistently listed explicitly in occupational therapy and physical therapy regulatory language, the results of our studies support their inclusion in regulatory language.

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### Position of the Hand Therapy Certification Commission

*Wound care management is a vital intervention for hand therapists to provide high-quality, cost-effective, efficient care.*

1. Interventions for wound care management, including sharp debridement, are commonly performed as a component of hand therapy by occupational therapists and physical therapists.
2. Wound care management is provided in coordination with other health care practitioners who also care for the patient.
3. As with all interventions, each therapist must have appropriate education and training in providing selected wound care interventions in the course of patient care.
4. Specific advanced wound care certifications should not be required to provide wound care management in hand therapy. However, they may be one avenue for therapists to advance their training in this area.
5. The Certified Hand Therapist (CHT) credential should not be required prior to a therapist providing wound care services within their education and training level. It may be used as a proxy to represent the achievement of knowledge in this area for the purposes of policy development.
6. Some interventions, such as sharp debridement, may require education and training beyond the entry-level education provided in occupational therapy and physical therapy programs.
7. Occupational therapists and physical therapists should not be restricted from providing wound care management services consistent with their education and training by regulatory language, state or provincial practice acts, licensure laws, or facility and payer policies.

Disclaimer: The Hand Therapy Certification Commission assumes no responsibility for the practices or recommendations of any candidate, certificant, or other therapist or the policies and procedures of any practice setting. Therapists function within the limitations of licensure, occupational therapy regulations, physical therapy regulations, and institutional policy.

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### References

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