

**Background:**

I completed my undergrad and masters at the University of Scranton and completed my masters in Occupational Therapy in 2009. I initially was studying Nursing and made the change to Occupational Therapy in 2005 (my junior year second semester). While attending the University of Scranton I was also enrolled in the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corp) and commissioned as a second lieutenant in May 2008 as a Medical Service Corp Officer. I proceeded to join the Pennsylvania National Guard, which I was a member of from May 2008 until Oct 2013.

During my college years I always was drawn to hands and loved all the course work and labs where I had the opportunity to make a lot of orthoses. Since I had such a passion for the material in college I knew that at some point I was going to sit for my CHT.

When I started looking for my first job, I always knew I wanted to be at Walter Reed. I started my first job in acute care at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in April 2010 and was there until May 2013. I had two awesome mentors who were both CHTs and I had the opportunity to learn a lot from them and really grow to love hands. I transitioned to outpatient hand clinic in May 2013 where I was employed by Baptist Hospital and Health system and worked in Andrew's Institute outpatient clinics. I currently work at Parkland Hospital and Health System in Dallas, TX in the outpatient clinic. I have been in the hand clinic since June 2014. Parkland is a community based hospital and trauma level hospital. The variety of injuries I see are vast to include tendon lacerations, crush injuries, amputations, complex fractures, etc. I am constantly challenged and am always learning new things on a daily basis. There are 4 clinicians in the clinic I work in and all but 1 are CHTs.

I continue to serve in the National Guard as a Medical Operations Officer and currently serve in Oklahoma.

**Materials Used:**

- Rehabilitation of the Hand Vol I/II: very comprehensive and well written chapters. I used the anatomy chapters out of this book and then further concentration on the therapist management sections in diagnoses that I was not familiar with and wanted to learn more in depth. If you do not have this book yet I highly suggest you invest! I actually purchased this on my kindle and so I could have the book easily accessible and not be carrying around large text books.
- The Purple Book: Hand & Upper Extremity Rehabilitation: A Quick Reference Guide and Review (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). This book is a must have. Fantastic information is provided. I took the practice test in the back initially so that I knew where my strengths/weaknesses were and then took it again 2-3 additional times. This books was extremely helpful and really was comprehensive.

- Hand Secrets (third edition) by Jebson and Kasdan: I found this book to be very helpful and easy to transport. A quick book that you can throw in a purse or bag and open up and read while waiting in a doctor's office or have 20-30 min to look some information over. I really enjoyed having this reference.
- Online tests: I purchased 3 practice exams from <http://www.liveconferences.com/> and these were very helpful. I also had some practice tests that were passed down from a friend who is already a CHT. I cannot express enough that doing practice tests are essential
- [www.handtherapy.com](http://www.handtherapy.com): I did the practice test questions (pretty sure I did all 65-70 of them)

### **Preparation for the Exam:**

I decided that I would sit for the exam in July-September 2014 and was going to attempt to sit for the exam in May 2015, but wanted to give myself more time to get more hands on experience in the hand clinic and learn as much as I could before sitting for the exam. I decided to sit for the exam in Nov 2015. My co-worker and I and one other person got together consistently 2x/week for 2-3 months prior to the exam and did practice questions from the purple book together, questions from practice tests, and also educated each other on helpful tips or easy ways to remember essential information. During this time we also studied from other materials (materials I did not purchase) to learn more. We did not have a specific outline or guidance, but I did find this very helpful because if you can talk about it and explain it then you retain the information better.

I also did some study time on my own, which included a mix of practice tests, reading Rehab of the Hand, and making a few flash cards. I also did a lot of drawing and writing out of information over and over again, as this is how I study and learn. My co-worker and I also attended early morning indications conferences with the hand surgeons and residents to discuss surgical options for patients. I also attended weekly education meetings that were presented by orthopedic/plastic surgeon attending physicians and hand fellows that discuss diagnoses, common practice and also included an article review.

During my college years I was diagnosed with a learning disability (ADHD-inattentive). Through college and also my NBCOT exam I had special accommodations for all testing. I knew that in order for me to be successful in taking this exam that I needed to have those same accommodations. HTCC was really great and I was able to get the accommodations that I needed with the appropriate documentation. I do not think I would have been able to be relaxed and calm during the exam if I did not have the extended time. If you have a learning disability or need accommodations get the paperwork and get the request in early.

### **Key tips:**

- Know your anatomy (muscle origin/insertion, nerve innervation, order of innervation)
- Be able to draw the brachial plexus- I would randomly stop while studying and make myself draw it out and also list the order of innervation for the peripheral nerves

(median, radial, ulnar). I watched a video on you tube: How to draw the brachial plexus in 37.6 seconds or better by Dr. Michael Dauzvardis

- Work in a hand clinic or do a hand fellow ship- this is essential
- Observe hand surgeries if possible
- Give yourself a day off before the exam and do something you enjoy or go get a massage
- Do a dry run to the testing center (if reasonable) so that you know where to go
- Utilize the comment block on the exam- I can remember commenting on more than 2 questions as to why I selected that answer and also referred to Rehab of the Hand on one question.
- If you don't know the answer mark it and go back (a future question may trigger a memory and help you with another question)

**My Story:**

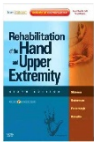
I attended OT school at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in New Orleans, LA (my hometown) I graduated with my Masters in OT in 2007 and began my career in inpatient rehab and acute care. I had always had an interest in hand therapy but was a little intimidated by it. After 7 years of learning a ton and loving my job I decided I wanted something different. I always thought that hands was a niche I would fit right in. I decided to conquer my fears so I contacted a friend and CHT and started observing him in the afternoons after work 3 days a week. I took a lateral transfer to the outpatient clinic at Baylor to be closer to my CHT friend, but I was working with neuro patients. Something I knew well, but I wanted more. I heard that Parkland Hospital's OT department had a unique program that allows rotation through different areas in the hospital including a hand therapy rotation. I applied for a position and soon began the next phase of my career that has brought me to be here standing in front of you. I now work 40+ hours a week in a dedicated hand clinic. We see everything from hand replants to carpal tunnel.

When I started this new journey, getting my CHT was always a goal but it seemed distant. Given where I was starting, knowing the challenges I would face to obtain it, and after trying to read the first few chapters of rehab of the hand, quite frankly, I questioned the reality of achieving it.

After attending this symposium last year and sitting in this room listening to the success stories; I was committed to achieving this goal and learning everything necessary to be a great hand therapist. I did not study to pass, I studied to be a great skilled clinician. I had several people tell me along the way to just study the purple book. For me, while definitely a great study tool, I didn't feel like this would be beneficial for my goal of gaining the knowledge necessary to be a great clinician. I decided that if I didn't pass the first time I would be ok with it because my goal was not only to pass but to give great care to my patients.

**Materials:**

My budget was small so I tried to get the most bang for my buck. I borrowed or shared many resources. I splurged on the ASHT review course.



Rehab of the Hand & UE 6<sup>th</sup> edition- Purchased

This book was completely worth every penny. While I prefer to have an actual book to read and highlight, I love that I can access it from any device, anywhere. I used this benefit frequently.

Anytime I had a question pop up in my head when my books weren't handy I would look it up on my phone.



Purple Book- Borrowed

This was a huge help to get my brain thinking more in a test taking way. I loved the explanations given after the questions.



ASHT CHT exam prep book- Purchased with ASHT membership

I really liked this book. It does have perhaps an excess of information but I appreciated the way it outlines different protocols and shows the evolution of these protocols. This helped me to gain a better understanding of how they came to be and added more knowledge to my bank.

Online flashcards- Hand therapy source, Quizlet

I used the hand therapy source flashcards on my phone when I was sitting somewhere waiting for something...like the doctor or at the park while my kids played.

Study packet prepared by a CHT who spoke here last year- this was amazing resource with great visuals for anatomy and several other great charts. I am happy to share! (she gave me permission)

ASHT webinars and CHT exam prep forum – inexpensive/free with ASHT membership

I took advantage of the webinars and picked topics that I needed to gain a better understanding of. The CHT exam prep forum was not that helpful but the weekly test questions always made me feel smart 😊



Hand Secrets- purchased

This was a good resource for a quick reference and easily totable.

Practice tests (shared a 3 pack with my 2 study buddies)

After taking each test I sat down and reviewed the questions I got wrong and looked up the concepts. I printed off the tests with the answers so I could go back through them when I had downtime. They are time consuming- but a great way to test your knowledge and pin point your weak areas and I feel a must in exam prep.

ASHT Review course-

I found this to be very helpful. I found that this course touched on most of the issues that I needed to review and helped me to iron out details that I was confused about.

Online Resources: completely free and wonderful

-orthobullets.com

-wheelessonline.com

-Youtube.com

### **Study Methods:**

Independent study—about 75%

I studied on my own 2 days per week (1 week night after work for about 4.5 hrs, and 1 weekend day all day) from April through about September

I have 2 young children (ages 4 and 6) and a husband who is also studying for a very intense certification exam for his profession. My husband and I were splitting time: 3 study days each per week and 1 family night.

In the 2 months before the test I began studying every week night after work and weekend days.

I took off work the week before the test- although I didn't study this week as much as planned.

I read Rehab of the Hand- I read the first volume cover to cover and most of the second volume

- I made detailed outlines for the first 9 chapters
- I made summaries of the other chapters on sticky notes for a quick summary of the info when reviewing

I immersed myself in everything hands:

I printed operative reports (without pt info) and would read and look up the things that I did not know or wanted to understand better.

- With this info I would refer to protocols (Indiana, Rehab of the Hand) and outline POCs and apply knowledge of tissue healing

I took time to schedule a day with the surgeons in surgery to get eyes on experience—this was really helpful for me as I am a very visual learner

My colleague and I started attending morning meetings with MDs where they discussed surgical procedures and options available with various patients. In addition to this we would attend information sessions in the mornings with the orthopedic and hand residents.

I read most of the ASHT CHT exam prep book

- I made flashcards from this book so I would have something quick to grab and go when I had downtime in my work day or at the park with my kiddos.

I would make up silly stories to teach my kiddos that would help me remember factoids.

- My favorite that I remember was the super hero "Double V" (carpal ligaments) who had one great weakness...- they loved my terrible stories and I got a great way to remember details. A win win.

### Study buddy/ Study group 25%

I met with a friend 1 x per week starting in April. We would read the chapters in Rehab of the Hand on our own and then get together to review them. We would always set goals on how many chapters we would try to get through that week.

My co-worker (Jacqui Long) joined us occasionally during this early time. We all started to study together about 2x per week in September and then more frequently in October. When we were all together we would quiz each other on questions from the Purple book or test questions from the practice tests. We would teach each other concepts, which helped us to define what we knew and what we were shaky on.

The study group was very helpful to help my ADD stay in check. It gave me a sort of schedule and a goal for each week which helped keep me focused. I feel it is important to find someone who studies similar to you or who compliments your style.

### **Study Tips and Exam Tips:**

-Everyone says it (there must be a reason for that): KNOW YOUR ANATOMY

-Know thyself- I knew, when I started studying, that I study best on my own but I also get easily distracted and found it very helpful to have an accountability partner.

-Know research terms and concepts

-Write down your brachial plexus and anything else you may find helpful first thing.

-Know your tissue healing- this will help you with protocols