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HTCC Exam Prep Panel 2019

I graduated from the University of Southern California with an M.A. in Occupational Therapy in 2013. I knew that I was interested in specializing in hand therapy by the end of my first year in the program. The OT program at USC offered two hand therapy electives, Introduction to Hand Therapy, and Introduction to Physical Agent Modalities which filled the education requirement for me to obtain my Advanced Practice in Hand Therapy and Advanced Practice in Physical Agent Modalities, both of which are required by the California Board of Occupational Therapy to practice hand therapy and to utilize PAMs.

I was hired at a local community hospital upon passing my OT board exam as an inpatient acute care therapist. I expressed during the interview that my five-year goal was to be close to attaining my CHT credentials, as part of the eligibility to take the CHT exam at that time specified that an applicant needed a minimum of five years of practice. It is now three years. Though I was initially informed during the interview that they did not anticipate an opportunity for me to transition to becoming an outpatient therapist, through a stroke of luck on my part, I got to start carrying some patients with hand diagnoses when one therapist went on vacation and the other therapist who was supposed to cover for her fell, sprained her wrist and could not work. The two therapists were generous with sharing their time and knowledge, and they both mentored me as I first started practicing.

After two years of working, I realized that as my caseload consisted of neuro patients, acute care medical patients, and lymphedema patients in addition to hand therapy patients, I was not accumulating enough hours for the 4000 hours required to sit for the exam. I also realized that I did not have the knowledge required to pass the exam. Though I had taken numerous continuing education classes, when I took the Hand Therapy Review Course offered through ASHT it was evident that I was nowhere close to being ready to take the exam.

I remembered that one of my classmates from USC had completed a hand therapy fellowship and passed the CHT exam shortly after finishing her fellowship. I reached out to her, and she encouraged me to look into a fellowship program. When I started researching fellowship programs, I found out that there were some fellowships that were approved by AOTA. At the time that I applied, there were only three that had been AOTA approved. Now there are 8 approved and even more in the approval process! Of the three that existed at the time, I had already missed the deadline to apply for one of them, and of the other two, one was in Houston and the other was in northern California. I resolved that if I were to do a fellowship, I would be 100% committed to it. Since many of my college friends were in northern California, I intentionally decided not to apply to the fellowship in northern California. Instead, I applied to the Houston fellowship to minimize distractions.

The fellowship turned out to be the best decision for my career. As the only fellow, I was mentored by 6 CHT's, as well as 4 other off-site CHT's who would conference-call in for lectures and journal clubs. The fellowship consisted of two hours of lectures a week, one hour of lab,

and an additional three hours of mentoring weekly. The lectures were based off of the Rehabilitation of the Hand, and in the course of the year, both volumes were covered. The hand surgeons were also supportive of the program, and I had many opportunities to observe surgeries and clinic time.

After finishing the fellowship in July, I started studying for the November exam. As I had already gone through all the materials in ROH in the lectures, I focused my attention on studying from 3 main resources: The Purple Book, the ASHT CHT Exam Prep book, and the ASHT Review Course materials. I made a schedule to divide up all the chapters so that I would finish reading all the materials in time, which was very helpful to keep me on track. I took notes as I read to help me consolidate the information, and I made flashcards for the materials that I needed to make sure to memorize, such as the order of innervation or the order of sensory return. I kept a stack of flashcards in my purse so that I could review them if I had down time. In addition to reading the assigned chapters every day after work, I also reviewed all the flash cards. I also had audio files of upper extremity anatomy that I would play as I drove.

It helped to have support from my family and friends. They knew that I was studying, and would send encouraging messages, or keep me accountable by going to coffee shops with me. They would keep themselves occupied while I studied. One friend even sat for hours with me and folded origami. Having the support was especially helpful in the last month of studying.

Closer to the exam date, I also bought two additional practice exams online to familiarize myself with the exam format. The practice exams also helped to identify areas which needed further studying. In the week before the exam, I reviewed from the notebook where I had taken my notes, as it essentially became a summary of the materials from the study books. The day before the exam, I took a day off from work to be able to review my flash cards and any last minute information I needed to brush up on. I also drove to the exam site so I would be familiar with the area such as parking, which was something one of my mentors had recommended to me. I booked a massage appointment for after the CHT exam and met up with some friends for dinner, which I would highly recommend to unwind and take your mind off of the exam!

Overview of Study Strategies:

1. Apply your OT/PT knowledge surrounding approaches to learning
2. Draft a schedule
3. Stick to a systematic approach
4. Keep perspective, maintain balance

1. Multimodal Approach to Learning:

Utilize different processes involved in memory to increase your odds of retrieval

- Motor memory: cerebellum
 - Listen to recording of webinars while exercising
 - Listen to recordings made via a phone app of yourself reading from your texts out loud while getting ready in the morning, while cooking, while cleaning, while exercising
- Visual, spatial memory: right temporal lobe
 - Highlighting
 - Drawing
 - Draw the brachial plexus
 - Draw peripheral nerves and order of motor innervations
 - Draw course of major vessels
 - Draw/mark muscle attachments
 - Anatomy glove
 - Flashcards
 - Watch videos of special testing being performed
- Verbal, Auditory memory: left temporal lobe
 - Watch live/recorded webinars on topics that you are currently reviewing from ASHT, Medbridge, etc.
 - Watch course recordings through ASHT UE institute online study group
- Short term memory: hippocampus
 - Make use of small chunks of time:
 - Flashcard app while in line at a grocery store or post office
 - Listening to recordings during your commute to work or while driving to meet friends for dinner
 - Take a short, 10 question quiz from Handtherapy.com while “waiting for water to boil”
 - Save topics that relate to a small subset of your treatment population for closer to the exam date

2. Draft a study Schedule:

- Get a sense of how much time you need to read and process a chapter
 - I found that in order to read and record OR outline OR write flashcards, I averaged 10 pages an hour.
 - Because of this I found that my study schedule, which I initially made based on topic not breadth of material, was at times too ambitious for my pace
- Identify your preferred resources (narrow it down, pick 2) and dovetail the like chapters for simultaneous review. You can then determine how many pages are dedicated to a topic to set an appropriate time frame on your study schedule to review all the material
- Start with the topics you are most familiar with and treat often
 - Boost your confidence with immediate clinical application of what you are studying
 - Utilize short term memory by saving less commonly encountered topics for the end of your study schedule

- Don't feel the need to study the chapters in order. Instead, organize complimentary topics back to back to reinforce content
 - This allows you to use memory strategies such as chunking, associations, repetition/rehearsal, and categorization. For example:
 - Common thread: peripheral nerves
 - Elbow anatomy → shoulder anatomy → cumulative trauma disorders, peripheral nerve conditions
 - Common thread: tendon transfers:
 - tendon transfers → arthritis → congenital/ pediatric upper extremity disorders
 - Common thread: wrist stability
 - Wrist fractures → carpal fractures → sprains of the wrist/hand → wrist instabilities
 - Common thread: principles of tissue healing
 - Wound care → Burns → flexor tendon → extensor tendon → complex traumatic injuries
 - Common thread: intervention techniques
 - Modalities → therapy techniques → joint mobilizations
- 3. Be organized and remain systematic; a cool, calm, and collected approach
 - Identify your preferred texts (narrow it down, pick 2) and consistently refer to these.
 - Avoid over researching a topic and confusing yourself with conflicting information or spending too much time on any one particular topic
 - Group like content from your preferred texts to be reviewed during the same timeframe on your study schedule
 - Avoid getting stuck on details. See the forest for the trees. Allot a limited amount of time for each topic, keep moving forward and stick to your schedule
 - Schedule time for a comprehensive review as part of your study schedule. I allowed myself the last two weeks leading up to the exam for review.
 - Recognize what type of content is best matched with which particular study strategy
 - Special tests → flashcards
 - Muscle/ muscle action → flashcards
 - Protocols are often too variable and detailed for flashcards. Instead, outline, highlight (early, mid, late phases), listen to recordings
 - Schedule time for self-assessment and practice tests.
 - I took two, full length practice exams. One halfway through my studies and one two weeks prior to the exam to identify areas of focus during my review
 - Make good study habits/rituals:
 - Every night before bed, review 10 flashcards on special tests.
 - Every morning while drinking your coffee, draw the brachial plexus.
 - Every day during lunch, write out the order of muscle innervation for the median, ulnar, radial nerves
 - Know the exam procedure and use your time prior to “hitting that start button” to ground yourself and draw the brachial plexus and write out order of innervations so that you are not repeatedly recalling this information and using your exam time
- 4. Keep perspective, maintain a balance:
 - Avoid study marathons; retention is not as strong over long durations of time as it is with short, manageable chunks of time
 - Schedule breaks; time for rest and leisure activities

- Allow time for life events; you can listen to your recordings while driving to a gathering with friends and family, but definitely take that time to connect with others and maintain balance
 - Avoid letting studying restrict you from enjoying the moment and having a life
 - You want to sit down to study energized not depleted
 - Before you decline an invitation with the phrase “I can’t, I have to study” try to think of a way you can both say “yes” and sneak some studying in
 - Remember, the exam is to test your knowledge of offering safe/appropriate patient care as an entry level hand therapist. You have many years ahead of continued professional development. Don’t burn out and lose your enthusiasm for the material studying for this discrete period of time.
 - Link your studies to patient cases to reinforce and apply your knowledge and to bolster your motivation to become a better therapist
5. Summary of Materials Used to Support a Multimodal Learning Approach
- ASHT Comprehensive Review Course
 - ASHT Test Prep for the CHT Exam
 - Purple book 4th edition
 - ASHT UE Institute online webinars
 - ASHT webinars
 - Anatomy Glove Learning System
 - HandTherapy.com Quiz Corner
 - HTCC Digital Flashcards <https://www.htcc.org/mentoring/flashcards>
 - YouTube Videos (physiotutors) of the performance of special testing
 - Voice Recorder App (free)

Intro/ Background:

- I graduated from Touro College in Manhattan with an M.A. in Occupational Therapy in 2014. I knew that I wanted to work in hand therapy from the beginning but “breaking in” to the field as a new grad was difficult.
- I cold called all CHTs in the area off the HTCC website and eventually ended up in a hand therapy job that was just Monday’s and Friday’s and I filled in the other days in Outpatient hospital setting.
- Working in 2 different jobs wasn’t ideal but eventually that hand therapy experience led me to a full time hand therapy position (elsewhere).
- I did not have a CHT mentor in the positions I worked at so I found one through ASHT mentor program and would bounce ideas off of her and I would refer to text books.

Setting a Test Date:

- When I first started working you needed 5 years experience to take the CHT exam so studying was kind of on the back burner.
- Then about 3 years into working it switched to 3 years experience so the pressure was on. I signed up for the May 2018 exam.
- I also applied for (and eventually received) the Mary Kasch Scholarship through the HTCC website, which helped financially with the cost of studying materials and the actual test.

Studying Materials:

The first step was gathering the study materials. I used:

- Exploring Hand Therapy Package
 - The purple book (Informational book in question form)
 - Online topic specific courses
 - Practice tests
- ASHT Review Book (Outlines topics)
- Occupationaltherapy.com for Audio hand lectures.

Identify Personal Study Techniques:

Take a moment to think about the strategies that work for you. I used techniques to study that worked for me in school:

- Procrastination (unfortunately)
 - Setting that test date gave me that immediate push to study.
- Studying Solo- Studying in groups is more distracting than helpful for me.
- Visual/tactile learning- I need to read the information and type outlines as a go to really process it.
- Mnemonics- My go to for memorization.
- Highlighting as I review my final outlines.

CHT Test specific strategies:

I incorporated those techniques in my studying process.

- I began with reading a chapter at a time of the ASHT book, then go to the purple book and did questions on that topic.
 - Good balance- ASHT outlines are kind of dry but a good place to start and purple book more engaging but not as straight forward so it's good to have that outlined background before jumping into questions.
- I had a google doc running the whole time divided by topic as I came across topics/information that I knew I needed to go back to review.
- Practice Tests
 - Towards beginning of studying I took my first practice test and then more throughout.
 - I reviewed the practice tests thoroughly

Fitting studying into busy schedule:

- I was working full time with a 1+ hour each way commute to DC and had 2 young girls at home.
- I had to think of strategies to squeeze into a busy schedule.
- I realized that I needed to utilize every spare moment for studying and not just think of studying as a specific hour set aside.
- Think of commutes, waiting online in the grocery store, waiting at appointments etc as times to study, not times to scroll through Instagram or fb.
 - I actually deleted those distracting apps from my phone. I always had something readily available to study.
 - For example when I was memorizing the brachial plexus, I always had a picture up on my phone, I had an audio version for my drive/ shopping in grocery store.
 - I had my ongoing google doc handy to review on my phone
- The bottom line is it's "never a good time" just set a date and start the studying process and you'll be surprised how much studying you can fit throughout the day.

Conclusion:

- TG I passed the exam in May 2018.
- It can be frustrating if you don't pass in the beginning but you learn so much during the study process.
- For me, it helped connect the dots and gain a deeper understanding of the field. So it's really a win-win.