

Preparing for the CHT Exam Brenda Bodine, MS OT, CHT

Background

I received a Bachelor's degree in Kinesiology from the University of Maryland in 1981. I was not able to find a job, without a Master's degree, in that field so I took a job at Bancroft School, teaching living skills to men who were intellectually disabled, and transitioning into group homes in the community. I left after 2 years and went to work for the federal government, a job that evolved into the installation and testing of computer systems, computer networking, software training, and troubleshooting of computer and network issues. I left after working 15 years in that field to stay home with my 2 boys. Once the boys went to school, I started thinking about going back to work but did not want to go back to the computer field, as it no longer interested me. My step daughter, who is a physical therapist, commented that she thought I would be great as an occupational therapist. I went back to school, and graduated with my masters degree in OT in 2008 from Philadelphia University. During the program, I did a Level I and a Level II at different NovaCare Outpatient Rehab locations, then was hired by NovaCare right after I finished my fieldwork. I then began a fellowship program in hand therapy while waiting for my OT licensure. This fellowship program lasts for about 8 months and involves travelling to different clinics in the area, on a set schedule, to meet with individual practitioners to discuss specific injuries and conditions. Research articles and readings are assigned for each topic, to be completed prior to each meeting. This allows the OT to focus on one specific area at a time, and to meet other clinicians in the area, who then become a support and resource group that can be contacted with questions, or help with challenging patients. After working for about 4 years in hand therapy, I began shadowing 2 doctors once or twice a month which involves making orthoses and issuing home exercise programs, and following the doctor around, when time allows;; I now shadow 4 doctors. This exposure was, and still is, extremely helpful in developing advanced clinical reasoning skills, as the doctor explains his thought process in diagnosis and treatment. All the area OT's, who are employed by NovaCare, get together about once every 6 weeks for a "Journal Club" which involves reading assigned research articles and discussing them, or to try out new products and techniques.

Preparation for the exam

I applied to sit for the CHT exam as soon as I was eligible, which was November 2013. Beginning in February 2013, I was part of CHT study group that met via conference call and chat room once a month. This group was made up of OT's from across the country who were employed by Select Medical, and were planning on sitting for the CHT exam at some point in the next 2 years. I didn't really start studying seriously until July, and studied every day up until the day of the exam. I wrote out index cards for everything because, for me, I retain information the best by writing it. I found that I retained information better when I had 1-3 uninterrupted hours rather than in studying in small increments of time. I blocked out time several days a week to go to the local library to study, as well as studying at home. I was fortunate enough to be able to take some time off prior to the exam and also took off the week of the exam, which greatly reduced my stress level. I started studying the

area that I thought I was weakest in first, which was the shoulder. I talked to the PT's in my clinic about shoulder diagnoses and went through the different shoulder tests. I also talked to the OT who had taken the test the previous year. She helped me figure out what areas to focus on, and was an excellent all around resource. I went through both the purple and black books, most sections, at least 2-3 times. When I wasn't going to the library, I left my study materials out on the end of my kitchen table so I could just sit down and go through them, whenever I had time. I also found it helpful to think of different patients that I have seen and relate them to the material I was studying.

Materials Used

Purple Book: Hand and Upper Extremity Rehabilitation, A Quick Reference Guide and Review
Black Book: ASHT Test Prep for the CHT Exam
Trail Guide to the Body, 3rd ed, Andrew Biel
The Hand, Examination and Diagnosis, American Society for Surgery of the Hand
Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity, Volumes 1 and 2
Diagnosis and Treatment Manual for Physicians and Therapists, The Hand Rehabilitation Center of Indiana, Wheelless Textbook of Orthopedics online, www.wheelessonline.com .

Tips

Identify what your best learning/retention method is. If you are a visual learner, look at pictures, diagrams, make note cards. If you are an auditory learner, consider making CD's that you can play in the car or while exercising.

Look it up: While studying, if I didn't know or understand a term or concept, I looked it up immediately. That way I felt I had a complete understanding of what I was studying.

Know your anatomy: Everyone says this, but it's importance can't stressed enough. If you know your anatomy, including bones, muscles, nerves, innervations, you will be able to reason out many of the answers.

Wound and Bone Healing: Be sure to memorize the stages of wound and bone healing and the time frames that they occur in.

Schedule to take the test in the afternoon: Even though I feel that I am sharper in the morning, I scheduled the exam in the afternoon because I knew I would be stressed about getting up on time, getting the boys off to school, traffic, and any number of other things that can come up unexpectedly. I was more relaxed and therefore able to sleep the night before.

Information Dump: Before you even begin the exam, draw out the Brachial Plexus, list the extensor compartments, list the muscles that the ulnar, median and radial nerves pass through at the elbow, write any other information that may help you later while it is fresh in your mind. You can refer to that throughout the exam and not be stressed about remembering it. Keep in mind that you only get one piece of paper to use as scratch paper, and if you need another one you have to turn in the one that you have, so draw or write things so that they will fit on one piece of paper.

Background

I graduated with my Master of Occupational Therapy from the University of Missouri in 2008. My interest was in hand rehab from very early on in college and the primary reason I majored in OT. I did a short 1 week observational clinical with a CHT and a 12 week clinical in an outpatient orthopedic clinic with partial hand rehab and a therapist planning on sitting for the exam. My first job out of college (and my current job) was with a hospital based rehab department in a rural community. Our community had never had a CHT or even a full time outpatient OT. I was always told how difficult it was to become a CHT and that it was nearly impossible without the mentorship of other CHTs so I was very committed early in my career to seek out the best ways to make myself a better therapist and to prepare for the exam. I've been very fortunate to have a very supportive and generous rehab manager and administration.

Exam Preparation

- Drexel University Hand and Upper Quarter Rehabilitation certificate program. This was invaluable and the best career move I have ever made. My organization was very supportive and assisted with the costs in exchange for a contract. With this program I had the opportunity to learn from Jane Fedorczyk, Mark Walsh, many others, and classmates who had the same goals. This first and foremost made me a much better therapist and the preparation for the exam was just an added bonus.
- Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity (6th Edition). This was required reading in the Drexel program and was a great foundation for my learning and studying. The 6th edition has very helpful and informative illustrations and videos.
- Hand Rehabilitation: A Quick Reference Guide and Review (Purple Book). I went through both editions of the book and made flash cards from the questions I missed. I also did this with an older edition of the ASHT test prep book.
- ANATOMY ANATOMY ANATOMY! If you have a good knowledge of anatomy then you will be able to problem solve and critically think much more efficiently. I used Netter flash cards that I bought in college to get a better understanding of the anatomy.
- Again, more flash cards. I also made flash cards that contained information that I thought was important. Examples would be: nerve entrapment sites, types of fractures, order of nerve innervations, order of sensory return, tendon zones, any kind of categorization, etc.. I looked over these for probably 6 months. Any time we drove any distance at all I had my wife quiz me.
- Have a plan for your scratch paper during the exam. As soon as I sat down I drew the brachial plexus and wrote out the distribution of muscle innervations from high to low. After you write it down you don't have to think about it and you can just refer back to your chart.

- Look at this as an opportunity to become a better therapist. Any time you have a client with a particular diagnosis - hit the books and learn as much as you can. This helped my recall during the exam if I could put a face to the condition.
- I put a year of studying and learning into the Drexel program and took the exam a little over a year later. I studied pretty consistently for 6 months prior to the test. I studied a little everyday instead of marathon sessions on the weekends.
- I did not use a study group. I did not have a mentor or a surgeon to help. I had a 2 year old little boy and another on the way at the time I took the exam. I passed the exam and really believe that any therapist can if they put the time and work in. When you pass, remember the learning does not stop and now you can serve as a resource to someone else who wants to take the exam.

Preparing for the CHT exam MS, OTR/L, CHT

Linda Maiers,

Background

I graduated in 1988 with a Bachelor's degree in Occupational Therapy from the University of St. Catherine. I worked for a couple years in Minneapolis in pediatrics at Courage Center. I was accepted in the Peace Corps and worked for a little over two years in Costa Rica as an OT working with adults and children. After Peace Corps I worked in New Mexico for a little over two years with adults and children. I moved to Iowa and graduated in 1999 with a Master's degree of Science in Exercise Science with an emphasis in Exercise Physiology. That year I also passed the certification exam by the American College of Sports Medicine to be a Health Fitness Instructor. I continued to work in Iowa as an OT with adults and children and also began to fill in at times for a CHT. In 2003 I moved to Mississippi and started working at a hospital with adults and children and a lot of UE orthopedic patients. I started studying to provide good care and I was hooked - I was so excited about all the advancements in orthopedic care since I graduated! I started thinking about taking the CHT exam in 2009. I started talking to my CHT friend in Iowa and another in Minnesota to get advice and ideas about how to study. Initially I was very overwhelmed because I was by myself- there are no CHTs within 50 miles.

Preparation for the exam

I studied on my own, mainly studying hundreds of flashcards everywhere I went and reading the Rehab of the Hand books from cover to cover. I began observing UE and especially hand surgeries with a couple of orthopedic surgeons. I went to Nashville for the CHT conference in fall 2011 and attended a meeting like this. I went to Baltimore in the fall of 2012 for the ASHT Review Course. At home, I had the dining room filled with books and papers. I studied a little every day with flashcards and four to six hours on most Saturdays and Sundays. I left all my books and papers out and ready to study whenever I had a chance. I talked with all my patients about anything that was relevant to them to hear the information out loud. I listened to downloaded anatomy lectures as I drove. I continued this until May 2013 when I passed the CHT exam.

Every day for a few weeks before the exam I wrote out the reference information I wanted to write on the piece of paper available during the exam. I found the test site after I registered for the test, long before the day of the test. I took practice tests for four hours with only one break a couple times before the test to get used to testing for a four hour period. I took the test on a Tuesday in the morning even though I had to travel a couple hours to the test site because I think best in the morning. The Monday before the test I relaxed and reviewed the chapter summaries in the Rehab of the Hand books.

Suggestions

1. Have a mentor, e.g., a CHT or an MD. I live in a rural area with no other hand therapists. I studied alone and took some courses. Having a mentor helped keep me accountable and allowed me to talk through difficult topics.
2. Know everything several layers deep - especially anatomy. I cannot stress enough how important knowledge of anatomy is, but it is also necessary to understand how various factors will influence what is necessary for a patient.
3. Read each question twice before attempting to answer it - don't rush. Answer the question and move on marking it so you can go back to it later.
4. Don't give up! It was often overwhelming and very life consuming but I think the CHT credential was worth the time and effort.

Materials

Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity, Volumes 1 and 2 - most accurate source of information

Netter anatomy books

Black Book: ASHT Test Prep for the CHT Exam

HTCC online flash cards

Purple Book: Hand and Upper Extremity Rehabilitation, A Quick Reference Guide and Review

The Hand, Examination and Diagnosis, American Society for Surgery of the Hand

Diagnosis and Treatment Manual for Physicians and Therapists, The Hand Rehabilitation Center of Indiana

Hand Pearls