

Background:

- TTUHSC for MOT degree
- Level II fieldwork experience in Hand Therapy
- First job: UMC HS
 - Part-time acute, part-time hand therapy
 - Transition to full-time hand therapy
- About UMC, current work setting, types of cases
- Pursuing CHT

Approach:

- Studied for about 5 months leading up to the exam
- Studied 6 days out of the week
 - A few hours in the evening after work
 - Several hours on Weekends
- Rest and exercise
 - I was advised to remember to rest during study
 - I would intentionally take 1 24-hour period off each week to rest from work and study
 - Usually Saturday evening to Sunday evening
 - Running was a form of stress relief for me
- Primarily used the ASHT Review book and Hand Rehabilitation: A Quick Reference Guide and Review (purple book)
 - Grouped and reviewed the corresponding material from each book (e.g. anatomy, tendon injuries, hand fractures, nerve injuries, etc.)
 - Created electronic decks of flash cards for each topic on important information
 - Study Blue – free flash card website/app
 - Can make as many decks/cards as you want
 - Allows you to review the material in order, randomly, or take a “test” over the cards
 - Keeps track of how many you get right/wrong
 - Reviewed each deck until I felt comfortable with the material on that topic before moving forward
 - As I created additional decks, I continued to review the material I had already covered by going back through each deck (usually 1x/day)
 - The Study Blue app allowed me to easily review the cards wherever I was
 - Used Rehab of the Hand books to fill in gaps or help with comprehension
 - E.g. nerve injuries, testing, and rehabilitation
- Other study methods/recommendations
 - What is Important Information?
 - If you see something in multiple places (practice exams, prep books, etc.) it is probably important
 - Focus on what is common
 - Be familiar with protocols but not necessarily exact details
 - Knowing timelines for healing is helpful
 - Learn to draw brachial plexus quickly

- Watch videos on YouTube
- Think clinically not just to memorize
 - E.g. know nerve innervations from brachial plexus in order of innervation
 - Helpful for thinking about nerve injuries
- Used small dry erase board to write on over and over
 - Useful for drawing brachial plexus hundreds of times
- Use the information on HTCC website
 - Handbook
 - Blueprint
 - Terms/abbreviations
- Do a timed practice test
- Get help from other therapists but remember it matters what you know.
 - You don't have to work closely with another CHT to be able to pass.

I graduated from UC Davis in 2011 with a BS in Exercise Biology and from the University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences with both my Masters of Occupational Therapy in 2014 and Doctorate of Physical Therapy in 2015 (I was in their dual degree program). I knew since observing in college that I wanted to go into hand therapy, so I looked ahead and saw what requirements were for the CHT and what most clinics wanted in order to hire. When I was completing my Masters in OT first, I applied for a special hand therapy fieldwork assignment in Napa, CA. After completing my masters and being licensed as an OT, I completed my doctorate in Physical Therapy where I again sought out a special hand therapy internship in San Luis Obispo. So before entering the workforce, I was lucky enough to have 5 months of excellent experience with both OT and PT mentors. I worked at a worker's comp clinic in the Bay Area in CA for my first year of practice and then transitioned to an outpatient clinic where I was able to complete the requirements to qualify for the exam. I took the exam November 2018 and passed on the first try.

I started studying by going through Rehab of the Hand and taking my own quick notes. It helped me to correlate it with cases that I was seeing early on in my career, but for the last 6 months, I just reviewed the notes that I had created. 9 months before my exam, I attended the ASHT hand therapy review course in Irvine, CA and reviewed the test blueprint and HTCC self-assessment. This helped me identify my weak areas to refocus my studying. In the three months before the test, I started practicing my cheat sheet and reviewing the brachial plexus weekly. I took 2-3 practice tests in this period. And then in the final month before the exam, I did a dry run to the test site and reviewed. I found it best to get all that knowledge into my long term memory so having a year or more to study worked best for me. I took my exam on Monday so I had the whole weekend to relax before and then promptly left on vacation the next day. It was terrible waiting for the results, but I was glad I had told friends, family, and coworkers about me taking the exam because they were extremely supportive but I know some people don't like the added stress of others asking them how studying, etc. were going.

Recommended Study Materials:

- The Purple Book aka Hand Rehabilitation a Quick Reference Guide, 4th edition now.
 - This was my #1 study aide. It was fantastic to get practice questions and explanations/photos/tables etc. to give you information on the correct or incorrect answers. It was useful to study, especially those areas in which you aren't familiar or you don't see in your clinic. And I thought the questions were realistic and just as hard as or actually harder than the exam questions.
- Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity, 2 volume, 6th edition.
 - Since I knew I wanted to be a hand therapist from day 1, I started reading the chapters in Rehab of the Hand as the correlated with my patient population. If I was seeing a nerve repair next week, I'd try to read up on nerve repairs. When I had my first tendon repair, I was looking there and the journal of hand therapy, and at protocols. When I was about 1.5 years out from the test, I was going over the chapters and writing out my own notes that I could review or study later.
- Anatomy Text of your Choice
 - I used my graduate school notes and Netter to review anatomy, origin, insertion and innervation. In my second year, I even gave a staff meeting presentation and a presentation to the PT residents in my company on upper extremity anatomy and diagnoses. It really helps you to study if you have to be able to teach it to others.
- ASHT Review Course

- I thought the ASHT review course was excellent. I attended in Early 2018 (about 9 months before my exam) in Irvine and I thought it really helped me focus in on my strengths and weakness before I really delved into studying.
- HTCC Exam Blueprint
 - I found it helpful to look at this to remind myself what would be the bulk of the exam versus what I was hung up on studying. It helped me to keep things in perspective a bit when I had an unavoidable freak out about not knowing a particular topic 100%.

My Study Methods:

1. Independent Study – I am a pretty self-motivated person so I was able to make myself a timeline of things I needed to get done by certain points and then for the final 3 months, I had practice tests, reviewing my notes, drawing out the brachial plexus and writing out my mnemonics. I practiced these at different times (for example, every morning at my job we have a printed schedule. First thing in the morning I'd draw the brachial plexus and label the branches until I had it down).
2. Practice Exams - I used the practice exam in the 3rd edition of the purple book early on in my studying to find where I was deficient or uncomfortable. Then, I purchased exams from Exploring Hand Therapy. I purchased exams 2, 5 and 6. I honestly can't remember which was the most helpful or useful, but it was great to sit and practice going through a full exam.
3. Online Study Group – I am a member of a few hand therapy groups on facebook and was a part of a shared google drive site that was dedicated to studying for the CHT. I didn't find this as useful, but a lot of resources that individuals shared helped me get through. Plus, it was a little bit of a CHT support group for others going through the same stressful situation.
4. Asking questions at work/of mentors – My first job I had no hand therapy coworkers, no one else in my building even wanted to touch anything below the elbow, so that was really hard. Once I changed jobs to a place with a hand therapy 'team' it was great to be able to ask for help from an experienced therapist and get their take on things. That way, I was better able to integrate the knowledge for the exam.

Advice for the Test Preparation:

- Make yourself a study schedule. Some people have 1 year or more, some people want to take the test within 3 months. I would say that if you've been practicing full time in hands, a shorter prep period is fine. If you're a new grad looking to get into hands quickly, make a long term plan. It will help with the exam, but ultimately it will also help you be a better clinician.
- Know the brachial plexus, order of innervation, muscle origins and insertions. Get the basics down first and build from there.
- Study tissue healing timelines. That way, you can really work through any problem instead of relying on rote memorization.
- Find where and how YOU study best. Be consistent and schedule the time.
- Make note cards/cheat sheets and study them during free time. For the month or so before the test, I'd practice my cheat sheet over and over multiple times a week. Mnemonics are great. My sheet included the brachial plexus, order of innervation, nerve compression sites, extensor compartments, flexor and extensor zones, and special diagnoses or things I would often confuse (Galleazi v. Monteggia, Keinbock v. Preisser).

Background

I graduated from Touro University Nevada with a MS in OT in 2015. I had always been interested in hand therapy and completed a Level II Fieldwork in hands. Under the direction of a fantastic therapist (who shortly thereafter became a CHT) we saw a solely worker's compensation population under the care of the city's best hand surgeons. After graduating, I secured a position within the company. I was then offered a position in a therapist-owned clinic with two seasoned OTs. This is the period where I grew the most as a hand therapist. When HTCC announced the change in licensure to 3 years minimum, I set my focus on the November 2018 test. Neither of the OTs I worked with had taken the exam. From other OTs I networked with at conferences I encountered a perceived barrier that the exam was "too difficult," was vastly beyond the scope of typical outpatient practice, or required formal mentorship or fellowship. Since passing, I have encouraged many therapists to change their mindset about the process and commit to taking the test. Increasing the number of CHTs strengthens us as a community and promotes higher standards in the profession.

Preparation for the Exam

I planned to begin in November 2017, then earlier in 2018, then in earnest August 2018 for November 2018 test. My plan was to jump right into shoulder, my weakest area. I ended up struggling the first 2-3 weeks getting organized and setting up a system. I began with anatomy, which I believe everyone should do as all topics will build off this. I am a visual learner and made a large chart of nerve pathways with innervations and associated pathology. The process of creating this was educational, as well as having it for reference. I eventually condensed it to ½ a page and wrote it out on my scratch paper at the beginning of the exam.

After this I went through the Purple Book by chapter. I initially thought the question-based format would be inefficient, but I found it much easier and more motivating to learn this way. I made lists of terms to remember by topic and later typed these up. I would search for pictures or reference other books for more information. I took six practice tests and repeated three of them. I found this more motivating as I could compete with myself on my scores rather than just studying. Reviewing the tests gave me direction on areas for further focus.

During this time I was working Monday-Thursday. I could usually study 1-2 hours during the work day. I would take Friday off to exercise and do things I enjoy. Saturday and Sunday I would study 3-5 hours each. I took frequent breaks and would stop if I didn't feel I was focused. I attended a wedding out of town halfway through, and found it hard to refocus the following week. I had also moved and begun a new job at the onset of studying. In hindsight, it was a lot of changes at once and studying on the weekends was socially isolating, which made the adjustment more difficult.

Materials Used

- ASHT Hand Therapy Review Course 2016 & Book

- ASHT Annual Meeting 2015 & 2017
- Hand Therapy Society of Greater Los Angeles- various
- Doctor's Demystify- various
- Anatomy Glove Learning System
- **Rehab of the Hand and Upper Extremity (recommended)**
- Orthotic Intervention for the Hand and Upper Extremity
- **Hand and Upper Extremity Rehab (Purple Book) (recommended)**
- **Exploring Hand Therapy- Practice Exams 1-3 (recommended)**
- Hand Therapy Now- Practice Exam 1 & 2
- Online: Eaton Hand, Orthobullets, Wikipedia, YouTube, google
- HTCC Study Groups- no contacts

Taking the Exam

- Application process: fast & easy
- Test center: easy to schedule, all times available, friendly, able to begin earlier, cold, loud
- Took Thursday off, was off Friday, and tested Saturday; 1 day prep would have been adequate
- Timing plan: take 10 min to write notes, take a break after 1 hour
- Took notes afterwards in case of retest

Background:

I graduated from Ithaca College with a masters in occupational therapy in 2010. I started my career as an occupational therapist at Magee Rehabilitation Hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. During my time there, I rotated between the inpatient units (spinal cord injury, stroke/brain injury, general rehabilitation). As my passion for the upper extremity grew, I sought out advanced studies and in 2015 received a Certificate in Advanced Practice in Hand and Upper Quarter Rehabilitation. Using my enhanced knowledge from the program, I transitioned to an outpatient clinic within the Magee Rehabilitation Hospital system. In 2017, I relocated to Minneapolis, Minnesota where I focused my attention solely on outpatient orthopedics. I started working in an outpatient hand therapy department embedded within an orthopedic clinic with five other certified hand therapists. My new colleagues provided guidance and supervision as well as encouragement as I began my journey of preparing for, sitting for and passing the exam in November 2018.

Courses:

- **Certificate in Advanced Practice in Hand and Upper Quarter Rehabilitation**
<https://www.jefferson.edu/university/rehabilitation-sciences/departments/hand-upper-limb-rehabilitation.html>
 This year long certificate program is predominately web-based with quarterly onsite weekend sessions. The course addressed foundations of hand therapy, nerve injuries, joint pathology, and diseases that affect the hand and upper limb. Weekly posts, assignments, and quizzes were required.
- **ASHT CHT Exam Review Prep Course**
<https://www.asht.org/education/courses/hand-therapy-review-course>
 This weekend course presented by advanced clinicians within the industry reviewed anatomy and kinesiology and provided an overview of therapeutic evaluation and intervention of common diagnoses seen within hand therapy. The course provided a booklet of the lectures presented throughout the weekend. A practice test is offered at the end of the booklet. The course gave me with the confidence to register for the exam.

Materials:

- **Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity, 6th Edition**
 Primary book used for the certificate program. Used as a reference throughout exam preparation.
- **Hand and Upper Extremity Rehabilitation: A Quick Reference Guide and Review, 3rd edition**
 (purple book)
 Read cover to cover, twice. Read through it slowly one time which guided an outline I created. The second time, I covered the answers and explanations with Post-It Notes and used it as a practice exam, going chapter by chapter.
- **ASHT's Test Prep for the CHT Exam, 3rd Edition**
 Read cover to cover. Read through it slowly, added to my outline as needed.
- **HTCC Certification Handbook/Blue Print**
 Used as a guideline for application process, studying preparation, and questions about the exam.
- **ASHT E-Community CHT Exam Prep Group**
 Read through the posted comments about people's questions and suggestions about the exam. From time to time, quiz questions were posted with answers.
- **Practice Questions/Exams:** *handtherapy.com (quiz corner), liveconferences.com*
 Completed all the free quizzes from quiz corner, completed the exam at the end of the purple book (twice), completed and submitted the exam at the end of the ASHT Test Prep (pass/fail, do not get the correct answers), completed 1 test from live conferences (twice), completed the exam at the end of the booklet in the ASHT exam review prep course.

Approach to Study:

- **Know your anatomy.** I started my studies with an anatomy review. I reviewed the brachial plexus, muscles (origin, insertion, innervation), ligaments, zones, peripheral nerves, etc. I reviewed the shoulder, elbow, wrist, hand, etc in sections related to the upper extremity.
- **Know your learning style.** As I was reading and studying, I made a master outline organized by topics (anatomy, diagnoses, intervention, protocols, etc). I ended up taking my study guide with me wherever I went and read through it when I was free. Several weeks before the exam, I made flash cards for any topics/areas I wanted to strengthen (common tendon transfers).
- **Take practice tests.** Practice your clinical reasoning and decision making skills. Time yourself to practice pacing. Practice taking a computer based test as this is the format of the exam. Practice writing down what you plan to use your scrap piece of paper for during the exam (brachial plexus, etc).
- **Study a little bit each day.** Do not try to cram. I studied a few hours each evening after work and several hours combined on the weekend. I started structured studying about 6 months prior to the exam. As the exam got closer, I took a day off here and there as a personal day to study and destress.
- **Teach your patients or colleagues.** I picked a topic that I was focusing on or relevant to specific patient care and shared my knowledge.
- **Find a study partner.** Most of my study was independent. At the review course (1 month prior to the exam), I connected with a few people who were also preparing for the exam. We consulted each other about topics or practice questions we were unsure of leading up to the exam.

Taking the Test:

- **Do a test drive.** Prior to the exam, do a test run to your testing center so you know where to go and park. This will help with time management and decrease additional anxiety/stress the day of.
- **Get a good night's rest.** Do not stay up too late the night before trying to study.
- **Eat prior to the exam.** No food or drinks are allowed in the exam room. You are not able to access your locker during the exam if you were planning to bring water or a snack. I left snacks in the car so I had something eat when I was done.
- **Use the bathroom prior to going into the exam.** You are able to use the bathroom during the exam but the exam clock does not stop.
- **Take your time using your scrap piece of paper.** You get a pencil and blank piece of paper (front and back). When you sit down, take your time to write down things like the brachial plexus, order of muscle return related to nerve injuries, Semmes-Weinstein monofilament levels, zones, compartments, etc. Time does not start until you log onto the computer.
- **Take your time reading each question.** Read each question thoroughly and generate an answer before looking at the multiple choice answers.
- You have the option to view or hide the time clock. I chose to hide the clock to prevent additional stress/distraction. I periodically checked the timer to stay on track.
- **Do not leave any questions blank.** You are able to mark questions for review later. I recommend answering all questions (not leaving any blank) in case you do not have time to return to the question.
- **Trust your gut.** Do not change your answer unless you have a strong reason to do so.
- **Remember the questions are not meant to trick you.** Do not over think the questions.
- **Use your clinical reasoning or past experiences.** I thought "what would the doctor want me to do" or "what did I do with that patient."

- **Breathe and celebrate your accomplishment.** It takes time to get your results, do something for yourself after all your hard work studying and preparing.

I graduated from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in 2013 with a BS in Rehabilitation Science. After that, I continued my education at Tennessee State University in Nashville and obtained a Master's Degree in Occupational Therapy. I was exposed to hand therapy in school and I immediately knew it was something I was strongly interested in. My first level I fieldwork was at a hand clinic. From there I knew I would have to complete my level II fieldwork in that setting in order to gain entry level understanding necessary to pursue this path. After graduation, my career began in skilled nursing, as these jobs were readily available. Nonetheless, I continued to look for postings for hand therapy positions. It took about 18 months to find a company that was willing to hire a hand therapist with minimal experience and no certification. I was extremely lucky because the clinic had been established for 20 years and had only hired CHTs in the past!

The clinic that hired me is where I currently work. It is a small private practice with three in house surgeons, none of which are hand surgeons. I knew that I would pursue my certification and hoped that it would increase outside referral sources in order to have more variety with my caseload. However, with the five year rule in place, I put the idea in the back of my head as a long term goal. It wasn't until another therapist mentioned that the rule changed to 3 years; I was ecstatic! When I looked up the qualifications, it offered approximately 8 months until I would be eligible to sit for the next test. Several therapists told me it wasn't enough time as I was still in my nascent stages for developing my knowledge base and skill set. I was uncertain. but knew that if I put my mind to it I could achieve anything I wanted, so I went to work.

Preparing for the CHT was challenging because I work in a rural area with no mentor. So where to start? I began ensuring I had adequate resources from which to study. I used the "purple book", "black book", and the two volume Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity text. I then laid out a plan and goaled myself to study 10-15 hours per week. I made notes, flash cards, and utilized every bit of my time, even studying and rehearsing information in my car. I was very lucky because during this period we were slow at work and most days I was able to get several hours of studying in. I did all this while also working PRN on the weekend. All I can say is that if there's a will there's a way! I was dedicated and sacrificed much of my personal time in order to accomplish this.

I passed my exam on the first try in November of 2018 and I'm currently working with the same company that supported me along the way. This experience has significantly increased my knowledge and competence; even our nurse practitioners and surgeons rely on me for guidance and recommendations.

I wanted to speak to you all because during this process I felt alone and struggled to find the answers to all my questions. However, it doesn't have to be that way for you! You have resources that I didn't know about and more people than you realize are willing to help and support you. I've already met with three people to help guide then in their venture to achieve those wonderful letters behind their name: CHT. Reach out to other hand clinics and see if anyone is pursuing their CHT or if they are able to mentor you, join the study group that ASHT organizes, and if you have a hand surgeon reach out to him/her for guidance. Finally, take the review course ASHT provides!

Resources

1. ASHT's Test prep for the CHT "black book"
2. Attend ASHT's the yearly Hand Therapy Review Course
3. Hand & Upper Extremity Rehabilitation "purple book"
4. Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity (2 volume)

Advice

1. Make a decision that this is what you are going to do for the next 6-12 months. It takes real
2. discipline and dedication.
3. Tentatively plan how many hours you want to study each week and stick to your goal.
4. Bring study material EVERYWHERE! You can always find extra unused time during the day.
5. Join a study group.
6. Reach out to your hand surgeon if you have one.
7. Take the practice tests in an environment that will closely simulate the real test.
8. Take the ASHT pre course 1-2 months out from the test so you exactly what your strong and weak points are.

Other Tips for test material

1. Know your anatomy!!
2. PIP anatomy (volar vs dorsal dislocation, imbalances that occur when certain structures are damaged)
3. Muscle reinnervation post nerve damage (Radial, median, ulnar)
4. Presentation of hand with nerve lesions and the difference b/t high and low lesions.
5. Brachial nerve plexus (draw it out and place it where you see it often)
6. Orthotics recommended for certain diagnoses (Dupuytren's, nerve lesions, MCL/UCL etc.)
7. Positioning of orthotics think about what structures are placed on slack or stretch or what motion is being prevented. TFCC peripheral repair; what orthotic and why?
8. Muscles responsible for shoulder movement. RC depression/deltoid elevates. Understand impingement and reasons responsible. Frozen shoulder.
9. Understand Gayle Groth's tendon paradigm. No need to memorize the protocols.