

I received an associates in applied science in occupational therapy from Maria College in Albany NY in 2000. While I worked as a COTA per diem at nursing homes and inpatient psychiatric unit I pursued my bachelors and master's degree at American International College in Springfield Ma. I graduated in 2003 with my masters in science in occupational therapy. I took a job at a long term/ acute care hospital working with pulmonary compromised patients, most weaning from mechanical ventilators. I left there to work at St. Francis Hospital in Hartford CT, doing acute care rehabilitation and also supplemented with home care. My acute care setting is what sparked my interest in orthopedics and hand therapy. I was attracted to the kinesiology and anatomy of the hand. I was fortunate enough to get a job at Novacare Hand and Upper Extremity Rehabilitation outpatient in 2005. This is where I am still employed. I work with a population that is a 100% upper extremity injuries and a large portion are traumatic injuries: tendon injuries, fractures, crush injuries, and complex injuries. I have had the opportunity to shadow multiple surgeons in surgery and during office hours. I have a mentor with over 30 years' experience. I participate in local hand study group, a group of local hand therapists that get together on a monthly basis and a surgeon and therapist present a lecture on a chosen topic. I have access to multiple professional journals through my company and professional organizations.

I decided prematurely after 3 years of experience that I would sit for the CHT exam and I did not pass. I say that it was premature because it was not really the right moment for me. My mentor gave me the encouragement and support needed, telling me that she thought I was ready, but my time did not allow for the dedication needed to study. I had a newborn at home, enough said! I also did not study in a way that fit me the best. I was fortunate to have a study buddy but we both had different learning styles. I learn by studying in a short time frame and narrowing down the information I don't know. We started studying a year in advance and covered a lot of ground. I also was part of a CHT study group, which is not the best format for me, but my company offered to compensate me for my test as long as I participated. I used the purple book, hand and upper extremity rehabilitation, Rehabilitation of the hand and upper extremity volumes 1 and 2, and made flash cards. I did not feel like the questions asked in the purple book were written in the same format as the exam. It was devastating not to pass; this was the first thing I have never passed. I was embarrassed that I was working full time in hand therapy and could not pass this test, I thought of it as a direct reflection on my clinical skills. Plus the embarrassment of having to tell coworkers and surgeons who had been routing me on that I did not pass. It was through talking with others who have sat for the test multiple times, who were great clinicians and with the support of my coworkers that I began to feel better; it wasn't the "end". In 2013 I decided that it was my time, I had gotten over the fear of failure. This time I was doing it "my way", I did not tell anyone that I was sitting for it again. I did participate in the study group again because of the reimbursement factor, plus any exposure to learning information and having mentors is helpful. It just could not be my only method. I started really studying 3 months out. I purchased the ASHT test prep for CHT which I found incredibly helpful. I made flash cards on the information I was not secure on. I would study these cards any chance I could get (gym, waiting for an appointment, ect). I drew the brachial plexus ALL the time. I explained to my patients the anatomy, kinesiology, and surgical procedures, I learn best with doing. I took the week off before the test to devote to studying. My kids were at school so I had no distractions. I

made sure that I really understood the information and not rely on remote memorization or mnemonics. I did not study the day before the test and used that as a rest day. When I got to the exam room I drew out the brachial plexus and some other concepts that I wanted to make sure I did not mix up. I read each question twice making sure that I read it the right way. I breathed and took my time between questions. I finally passed this time! The best advice I can give through my journey is pick a time that is right for you and study in a method that is best for you. There are 7 different learning styles: visual, aural, verbal, physical, logic, social and solitary. Think about what is the best way for you to learn and then set up your studying to compliment it.

Visual (spatial): You prefer using pictures, images, and spatial understanding.

- Aural (auditory-musical): You prefer using sound and music.
- Verbal (linguistic): You prefer using words, both in speech and writing.
- Physical (kinesthetic): You prefer using your body, hands and sense of touch.
- Logical (mathematical): You prefer using logic, reasoning and systems.
- Social (interpersonal): You prefer to learn in groups or with other people.
- Solitary (intrapersonal): You prefer to work alone and use self-study

Materials used:

Purple book: Hand and Upper Extremity Rehabilitation, A quick Reference Guide and Review

ASHT test prep for the CHT exam

Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity, volumes 1 and 2

HTCC online website

CHT study group provided through work

CHT Exam Preparation

Cara Smith PT, CHT

I graduated from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in 2007 with my masters in physical therapy. Before I started PT school I knew I was interested in becoming a hand therapist, so I had my sights set on that for quite awhile. After graduating, I took a job at a pediatric orthopedic hospital in Dallas, Texas. There I was able to work 50% in general pediatric orthopedics and 50% in hand therapy.

Knowing that the majority of the CHT exam is focused on adults, I knew that I needed more experience treating adults. I began looking at fellowships as a way to learn in a more structured environment. I was accepted to the Evelyn J. Mackin Hand Therapy Fellowship and began in June of 2010. This was a 6-month fellowship at the Philadelphia Hand Center. During the fellowship, we had a weekly lecture that centered on readings from Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity and other selected articles. We also had a weekly orthosis lab where we learned how to fabricate over 40 different orthoses. The majority of our time was spent in the clinic treating patients, but we also had the opportunity to observe the physicians in clinic and in the operating room.

After completing the fellowship, I returned to Dallas and continued working in pediatrics. While many of the diagnoses that I see in pediatrics are quite different that when treating adults, I found that I was able to apply many of the concepts that I learned during my fellowship to my current practice. What I am the most grateful for are the mentors that I gained through the fellowship. I regularly call/text/email them when I am stumped.

I decided to take the CHT exam in November of 2013. After graduating from PT school, I stayed in the learning mode and would read articles or review anatomy, but I began my focused study in the fall of 2012. I wanted to be able to devote an entire year to studying for the exam.

I purchased the ASHT Test Prep Manual and devoted a certain amount of time for each chapter over the course of 10 months. This book helped to focus my studying. It is set up in an outline format and has review questions at the end of each section. Many of the chapters in the test prep manual are similar to the chapters of the “purple book”. After reading the manual I would then go through the questions in the purple book.

In September prior to taking the test in November, I attended the ASHT Hand Therapy Review Course. The first day focused on anatomy of the upper extremity, breaking down the shoulder, elbow, wrist, and hand. The other two days were focused on diagnoses and treatment options. This was a valuable experience for me in that I was truly able to use it as review. Having devoted so many months to studying and taking my time with each topic, I wasn't scrambling to learn the information that was presented at this course. I would highly recommend this course to anyone sitting for the CHT exam. I walked away from the course confident in my preparation for the exam.

The next six weeks I devoted my study time to reviewing concepts and clearing up anything I wasn't sure of. The day before the exam, I took the day off from work. I spent the day reviewing, but not cramming. I was able to relax a little and get a good night sleep before taking the exam the next morning.

Materials Used

Atlas of Human Anatomy (Netter)

Muscles: Testing and Function (Kendall)

I created a booklet of all of the upper extremity muscles, origin, insertion, action, and innervation. I put the picture on the same page as a reference. I put the book together so that the muscles were in order of innervation.

ASHT Test Prep Manual

Hand Rehabilitation: A Quick Reference Guide and Review (Weiss and Falkentein)

Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity (Skirven, et al.)

Concepts in Hand Rehabilitation (Stanley and Tribuzi)

General Tips/Recommendations

Find a mentor. It might be someone you work with every day, or just someone to bounce questions off of on occasion. They can be a huge encouragement to you throughout this process.

If able, spend some time with a hand surgeon in clinic and the operating room.

Make a practice run to the testing site around the same time that you will be taking the test to ensure you know where it is, as well as whether or not you will have traffic.

Draw the brachial plexus and any other tools you use on the scratch paper that is given to you before you start the test.

After the test, enjoy yourself a little and don't open your books to analyze the test! I went to the beach for a few days to relax and decompress.

Background,

I received my Masters in Occupational therapy from University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences in St Augustine, FL in 2007. While attending the University of St Augustine, I was able to get an introduction into hand therapy through our Orthotics/Prosthetics and OT Biomechanics courses. I then went on to complete a level II Fieldwork in Opelousas, Louisiana. I was able to gain a basic understanding of hand therapy. After working in inpatient rehabilitation for a year, I was able to obtain a position as a hand therapist with ATI Physical Therapy in the Chicagoland area in 2009. I was able to expand my clinical skills exponentially due to close mentorship from two certified hand therapists that encouraged me, but also treatment as an equally knowledgeable therapist. During this time, I was also able to gain an apprenticeship with a hand surgeon that went on to be my main referral source. I also obtained a certification in Kinesiotaping, Workman's Compensation, and Ergonomics Assessment during this time period.

I later returned to my hometown of Cincinnati, where I made my first attempt at passing the CHT exam in November of 2012. Unfortunately, I missed the passing score by 4 points. I can attribute this to being unable to completely commit to the exam preparation process due to other personal endeavors. I then made the decision to regroup, and prepare to sit for the exam in November 2014.

I am employed full time as the only hand therapist with the Daniel Drake Center for Post-Acute care, which is a subsidiary of the UC Health system. With my current position, I support two Hand Plastic Surgeons two days a week during their clinic hours. The rest of my week is spent treating patients referred throughout our health system. This position has allowed me to gain valuable experience with traumatic hand diagnoses.

Materials Used:

- Clinical Experience: I used my close proximity to the hand surgeons to gain experience. I am fortunate enough to work in an urban setting where I see flexor/extensor tendon injuries, amputations, crush injuries, and GSW on a daily basis
- Exploring Hand Therapy Basics and Beyond Part 1 & 2: Everything you need to know from Shoulder to Finger software. I reviewed each chapter of this software and completed the exam at the end of the course for CEU credits. This software is nice because it contains "brain quizzes" to test information
- Rehabilitation of the Hand Volume I/II: I used this as a good reference for in depth knowledge of diagnoses
- The Purple Book: I used Google Docs to input every question into a question and answer file. I was then able to input my google doc into an app called gWhiz, which generated flash cards from my google document. This was a great resource since I could quiz myself on my iPhone and iPad while on the go. I also took the exam at the end of the Purple book twice. The first time was to discover my weak areas that needed further attention. Then, as a retest.
- YouTube: I am a YouTube aficionado, so it was nice to be able to use it for knowledge. I found several videos breaking down anatomy and wound healing into simple terms. My favorites were:
 - <http://youtu.be/iDXUwErttJA>

- <http://youtu.be/qomVodg-5SM>
- <http://youtu.be/CEGveIWYT8E>
- Orthobullets.com: Although this site is designed for surgeons, it has a lot of great material for hand therapists
- Brigham and Women's Protocols: I found these Extensor and Flexor Tendon protocols extremely helpful.
 - Extensor:
[http://www.brighamandwomens.org/Patients_Visitors/pcs/rehabilitationservices/Physical%20Therapy%20Standards%20of%20Care%20and%20Protocols/Hand%20-%20Extensor%20Tendon%20Repair%20Protocol%20PT%20\(All\).pdf](http://www.brighamandwomens.org/Patients_Visitors/pcs/rehabilitationservices/Physical%20Therapy%20Standards%20of%20Care%20and%20Protocols/Hand%20-%20Extensor%20Tendon%20Repair%20Protocol%20PT%20(All).pdf)
 - Flexor Zone 1:
http://www.brighamandwomens.org/Patients_Visitors/pcs/rehabilitationservices/Physical%20Therapy%20Standards%20of%20Care%20and%20Protocols/Hand%20-%20Flexor%20Tendon%20Repair%20PT%20Protocol%20Zone%201.pdf
 - Flexor Zone 2-5:
http://www.brighamandwomens.org/Patients_Visitors/pcs/rehabilitationservices/Physical%20Therapy%20Standards%20of%20Care%20and%20Protocols/Hand%20-%20Flexor%20Tendon%20Repair%20PT%20Protocol%20Zone%202-5.pdf
 - FPL:
http://www.brighamandwomens.org/Patients_Visitors/pcs/rehabilitationservices/Physical%20Therapy%20Standards%20of%20Care%20and%20Protocols/Hand%20-%20FPL%20Repair%20PT%20Protocol.pdf
- ASHT Review Course: I attended this course in October 2014. It was a great way to review and put all of the information together. Additionally, it was great for networking with other therapists preparing to sit for the exam.

Tips:

- Allow yourself enough time to prepare!
- Study groups are great, as long as you stay on task and focus on studying
- Properly manage all other stressors occurring during the preparation process
- Keep your exam intentions a secret. In order to reduce outside pressure. Be very selective in who knows that you are preparing for the exam. I recommend only informing family, close friends, and close colleagues/mentors
- Teaching your patients. Since I spend more time with my patients than their referring physician, I usually get most of the questions regarding their diagnosis. Educating patients in layman's terms was a great way for me to recite the information that I was studying.

Take home message

You can still pass the CHT exam if you rarely see a complex surgical patient, never observe a surgeon, work in a rural setting, lack other CHTs at your clinic and have seemingly little to no network.

Who Am I?

My path as a Hand Therapist started when I left a PhD program at UC Davis in 2005 to transition to the OT program at Boston University's, Sargent College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. I graduated from there with my Master of Science in Occupational Therapy in May 2008. At that point my only introduction to Hand Therapy was a Level One experience as I chose to write a thesis instead of doing a hand therapy elective.

My clinicals were varied, sub acute rehabilitation, outpatient pediatrics, and work hardening. I settled in Burlington VT after my third clinical and started working for a small regional hospital north of there. At that time the OT department consisted of 4 OTs and a COTA, within 3 years this had been reduced to two OTs due to a reduction in contracts. As one of two OTs I was required to be versatile, which meant that for one year 50% of my work load consisted primarily of shoulder diagnoses due to a need to cover an overflow of physical therapy referrals. This, the subsequent hiring of a hand surgeon at the hospital, and retirement of one of our experienced therapists enabled me to pursue the CHT with the support of my employer.

I worked treating UE diagnoses for a good 3 years before sitting for the exam. My training occurred initially from shadowing a coworker that eventually retired and became my part time mentor. I also shadowed at a larger hand therapy clinic on my free time and took advantage of any continuing education that came to my region at large. I practice in a rural area and am the only CHT within 25 miles, which can be very isolating at times. My patients come from far and wide, a factor that needs to be considered during development of their plan of care. Though I have earned my CHT I recognize the need to be a constant student so I keep in touch with other CHTs I have met via email, maintain a good relationship with the hand surgeon at my hospital, read my Journal of Hand Therapy, attend the Philadelphia Symposium annually and exhaust my continuing education funds each year.

Path to the Exam

Studying:

- gathered resources based on recommendations from other CHTs,
- created study space that allowed me to close the door on the world
- I took a practice exam (see resources) to determine my areas of strength and weakness
- started by studying my weaker areas first
- took copious notes
- wrote out tons of flashcards
- reviewed material by instructing new coworker to enable her to cover my patients
- kept track of words I didn't know as I studied, looked them up and made more flashcards
- took another test and started again

Courses:

- Attended 'All You Ever Wanted to Know About Physical Examination of the Major Joints of the Upper Extremity' through Rehab Ed and taught by Ken Flowers and Phil McClure, I stayed with relatives in NJ to attend
- Attended Judy Colditz's splinting course in NC- family vacation
- Attended the Philadelphia Symposium- learned about more complex diagnoses, talked with CHTs, built confidence

Shadowing:

- shadowed an experienced OT prior to her retirement then found time to review charts with her for a good year afterwards
- drove to larger hand clinic on off days to observe treatments, brought a list of questions with me, they were very generous

My Library

- Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity (6th edition, Skirven, et al). Great resource, I can access it from my ipad
- Netter's Clinical Anatomy – book and flashcards
- Illustrated Essentials of Musculoskeletal Anatomy handy for those origins and insertions and function
- Hand Rehabilitation: A Quick Reference Guide and Review (2nd ed.) the 'purple book'
- Diagnosis and Treatment Manual for Physicians and Therapists, The Hand Rehabilitation Center of Indiana
- Hand Secrets (Peter Jebsen and Morton Kasdan)
- Hand Therapy Tutor (Corianne van Velze) interactive CD, fun and informative, use when your eyes start to cross from reading, plus it makes you feel like you know something
- Purchased Practice Exams (ExploringHandTherapy.com)
- HTCC Handbook- I found it helpful as it broke down the topics of the exam

What I did right

Studying:

-know my learning style, I am visual and learn from doing, writing it down and teaching it, *know how you learn best*

- used flash cards
- drew complex anatomy (like the brachial plexus) out on paper by hand repeatedly
- taught anyone that would listen, patients, new coworkers, friends and family, helps to build confidence

-utilized practice exams, when it comes to taking the test the questions are less daunting

-set aside a quiet spot designated to study

-got out of the house to study at least one time a week

-used a timer to help me stick to my schedule which helped me avoid watching the clock, I am easily distracted

- I asked that my spouse respect my study time and help me keep to it

- observed as much as I could even though it required driving a distance

Testing:

-took the weekend before the exam off

-drove to the exam center the day before to determine time and location

-wore comfortable clothing

-took the first time in the morning on a Monday

-ate a light breakfast, hydrated

-took the time during the test to step away to use the bathroom and decompress

-answered all, wrote down those to revisit

-read each question slowly and, when the exam room emptied, some out loud

What I could have done better

- know someone else taking the exam, early on I made one contact through HTCC however they ended up passing the exam shortly after we made contact- take down names today!

- have a study group, helps to keep you on track and share the burden

- stick to my schedule, would have gotten through more material, could have used that study group!

- not be distracted by a lot of resources, stick to the best (I would say Rehabilitation of the Hand) and use the others as needed to flush it out, then return and don't get distracted by pretty pictures

- I kept the upcoming test quiet, tell everyone, knowing they know will keep you motivated

Disclaimer: this is my learning style, know your own, *step one* is always determine how you learn best