



Hand Therapy Certification in Europe

an overview of the process in different countries

Introduction

Hand therapy is a specialty practice area for occupational and physical therapists. Therapists that wish to be recognised as a specialist in hand therapy may choose to pursue specialty certification. Currently, specialty certification is obtained at the national level with each country having developed their own certification criteria and processes. In 2005 the European Federation of Societies for Hand Therapy recognised the need for a European certification system and the education committee was tasked with developing the process leading to the title of European Certified Hand Therapist, ECHT. More information is available about the ECHT on the EFSHT website¹. Currently the ECHT process is open to therapists that have obtained certification at a national level. As the path to national certification is different in each country, this paper aims to briefly outline how certification can be obtained at the national level in the different countries that currently have a certification process in place. Hopefully other countries will be able to use this document as a reference when developing their own national certification process for Hand Therapists.

In most countries it is the national hand therapy society that has established the certification process. As the certification is above and beyond the core qualification as a physical or occupational therapist, it is voluntary. Occupational and physical therapists who are not certified as hand therapists will continue to work in the area of hand therapy. Certification as it has been developed thus far by the national societies is aimed at recognising competence and experience in this specialty practice area. The ECHT is a further certification that aims to recognise highly qualified hand therapy specialists in Europe. It is important to differentiate hand therapy certification, which is voluntary and administered by national hand therapy societies

from educational programs that train occupational and physical therapists. The entry-level education of occupational and physical therapists may be influenced by the societies of the respective professions but are also subject to various national government regulations that regulate and support the education of health care professionals. The overview that follows is arranged alphabetically by country.

Germany

[Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Handtherapie \(DAHTH\) certification process](#)

Certification program as of: 2005

Certification Process description

The certification process was developed in cooperation with representatives of the German Society for Hand Surgery. The curriculum takes into account both the situation in the German health care system and the entry-level training programmes for physio- and occupational therapists which are almost exclusively at schools providing vocational and not academic education.

The certification process is based on a decentralised, modular system. It is open to all qualified physio- and occupational therapists. The program consists of 12 modules which cover 450 hours (contact hours and self-study), with a total of 15 ECTS points. The modules include the following areas of practice: theoretical knowledge, specialist knowledge, as well as clinical and therapeutic skills. The courses are run by hand therapy teams in various hospitals and at institutes of further education throughout Germany. Each course is DAHTH validated.

The successful completion of a written or practical assignment is required at the end of each module. Candidates who have successfully completed all 12 modules, have a total of 4 years professional

¹ www.eurohandtherapy.org.

experience, with at least 2 of these in hand therapy, can then apply to sit the final oral exam. The successful graduate is awarded certification as a Hand Therapist.

Title awarded

"Hand Therapist DAHTH"

Approximate number of Therapists certified to date: 40

Renewal Process

A process of re-certification is currently under discussion but details are not yet available for publication.

Website

An overview of the 12 modules and further details can be found on the DAHTH website: www.daht.de/Handtherapeut (language: German).

Recognition of the credential

The credential is recognised by: the German Hand Therapy and Hand Surgery societies, the German Society for Accident Surgery, German Society for Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons. The German OT Society supports the process. Talks are underway with health care insurers to recognise this qualification.

Greece

[Hellenic Scientific Society of Physiotherapy - Hand Therapy Association certification process](#)

Certification program as of: 1992

Certification Process description

The hand therapy association of Hellenic Scientific Society of Physiotherapy was founded in 1992 by a group of people who have common interests in dealing with disorders of the upper limb. This group has been active in creating an instructional program in Greece to train Hand Therapists.

The program is on-going. The participants are licensed physiotherapists and occupational Therapists. The instructional team consists of the most notable practitioners from Greece and abroad to meet specialised knowledge needs in theory and practice. The course of theoretical instruction and clinical application lasts two years and is divided into 5 sections. The modules are as follows:

- Module 1: 20 hours of instruction that includes: structure and function of the upper limb, the functional kinetic chain in rehabilitation
- Module 2: 20 hours of instruction that focuses on the analysis of mechanical properties of the

collagen tissue and its particularities in health and disease

- Module 3: 20 hours of instruction on the following topics: trauma and pathology of the upper limb: trauma of the zones, disease and trauma to the nervous system, fractures, RA, the brachial plexus injuries, adverse mechanical tension, skin transplantation, burns, CRPS, functional limitations, etc.
- Module 4: 40 hours of instruction focusing on rehabilitation of the upper extremity and including: early mobilisation, progressive and functional rehabilitation, mobilising techniques, orthotics, physical agent modalities, pain and swelling control, as well as other topics.
- Module 5: 40 hours of instruction that includes: SOAP patient assessment, follow up, research methods, how to set up a hand clinic, thesis preparation and presentation.

General description of the program: theoretical lessons and clinical workshops are organised by the Executive Committee of PT and OT association and are compulsory. The number of therapists attending the course is no more than 20 every two years. Participants are required to attend surgery to observe surgical techniques for the upper extremity. The thesis has to be a clinical case study and not a literature review.

The criteria to become a hand therapist:

- Licensed as a physical or occupational therapist
- Member of the PT or OT association
- Certificate of completion of the two year Hand Therapy course
- 500 hours of clinical practice in a rehabilitation centre for hand therapy
- Completion of a thesis.

Title awarded

Certificate of attendance of the 2 year hand therapy program.

Approximate number of Therapists certified to date: 30

Renewal Process

None.

Website

Currently not available

Recognition of the credential

The Hellenic Scientific Society of Physiotherapy-Hand Therapy Association administers and issues certification.

The Netherlands

Nederlands Gezelschap voor Handtherapie (NGHT) certification process

Certification program as of: 2010

Certification Process description

The Dutch Society of Hand Therapists (NGHT) has developed a system of accreditation of hand therapists' learning and experience, leading to the award of a 'Certificate Hand Therapist' (CHT-NL). The "Hand Therapist Profile" is used as a basis for the development of this certificate.

To apply, applicants need to fill out an online application form. Besides the general CV and working experience, points need to be achieved in various areas of Hand Therapy. These areas are: "working experience", "knowledge, skills and education in the field of hand therapy" and "contribution to the field of hand therapy (presentations, publications, active role within the Dutch society)". At least 100 points must be achieved to meet the criteria.

The criteria to become a CHT-NL are:

- Licensed as a physical or occupation therapist.
- Member of the Dutch Association of Hand Therapists for at least one year.
- Working experience as a general physical or occupational therapist for at least 5 years.
- Working experience in the field of hand therapy for at least 1500 hours during the last 5 years.
- Specialised knowledge, skills and education in the field of hand therapy. Hand therapists may develop their knowledge and skills via NGHT recognised courses. These courses are given by independent hand therapy education companies and universities. More experienced therapists may gain educator points through lecturing at validated courses. At least 60 points must be achieved in this field. If a Dutch therapist has passed the American HTCC exam all 60 points are assigned.
- Contribution to the field of Hand Therapy. For this component at least 20 out of the required 100 points should be obtained. Points can be achieved with: national and international presentations, publications in the Dutch hand therapy journal or in an international journal and with playing an active role within the Dutch society (being a member of the board or of committees for at least 3 years). All activities should be done during the past 5 years.

Once the therapist has collected at least 100 points and meets the general and working criteria they can apply to become a CHT-NL (NGHT). They must be

able to provide proof of all evidence, clinical log and CV.

The Dutch Hand Therapist Certificate is an initial certificate. It serves as a basis for further certification on the European level, the European Certificate Hand Therapy (ECHT).

Title awarded

'Certificaat Handtherapeut' (CHT-NL)

Approximate number of Therapists certified to date: 43

Renewal Process

The title is valid for 5 years; a renewal process is in place with continuing education and professional activity criteria that must be met in order to renew certification for another 5 years.

Website

www.handtherapie.com/certificering
(language: Dutch)

Recognition of the credential

The CHT-NL title is recognised by the Dutch Hand Therapy and Hand Surgery societies. Unfortunately, it is not a protected title recognised by the Dutch government yet. The Dutch Occupational and Physical Therapy societies are aware of the credential. We are still working on having them recognise Hand Therapy as a specialty area with a separate fee schedule for billing. Until that time, Occupational and Physical therapists that are certified as Hand Therapists must bill their services at the same pre-defined government regulated rate as all other therapists.

Switzerland

Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Handrehabilitation (SGHR) / Société Suisse de Rééducation de la Main / Società Svizzera per la Rieducazione della Mano certification process

Certification program as of: 2002

Certification Process description

The first Swiss Certified Hand Therapists were certified by exam in 2002. A comprehensive exam was designed and developed over a 7 year period and therapists wishing to certify applied to take the exam and provided proof of sufficient experience and continuing education courses. Upon meeting the qualification criteria they were provided with a curriculum and a comprehensive reading list for self-preparation and were permitted to take the four hour exam. Upon passing the exam they were

awarded the title of 'Zertifizierte Handtherapeuten/ in SGHR'. Thirty-three therapists were certified in this manner.

In 2005 the Swiss Hand Therapy society decided to end the exam certification process and collaborate with a university to create a hand therapy education program. This program was implemented in 2011 at the Zürich University of Applied Sciences. Occupational and physical therapists meeting the experience criteria may apply to participate in a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Hand Therapy programme. The following criteria must be met: professional experience as an occupational or physical therapist, current employment in a Hand Therapy setting, have completed a bachelor or equivalent course of study, occupational therapists must provide evidence of training in manual therapy techniques and physical therapists must provide proof of training in static and dynamic splinting fabrication. The program consists of three modules with a total 23 days of instruction and additional assignments. In total students invest approximately 450 hours in classroom and self-study instruction. At the close of each module a project must be successfully completed to pass the module. A total of 15 European Credit Transfer System points (ECTS) is awarded upon successful completion of the program. Students who complete the program earn a "CAS in Handtherapie" certificate. The first cohort of participants completed this program in 2012. The Swiss Hand Therapy Society, awards graduates of this program certification as Hand Therapists.

Title awarded

'Zertifizierte Handtherapeuten/in SGHR'

Approximate number of Therapists

certified to date: 48

Renewal Process

For hand therapists certified by exam between 2002-2005 the title is valid for 7 years, a renewal process is in place with continuing education and professional activity criteria that must be met in order to renew certification for another 7 years. For therapists certified by recognition of the "Certificate of Advanced Studies in Handtherapie", recertification guidelines have not yet been established.

Website

www.sghr.ch and www.zhaw.ch
(language: German and French)

Recognition of the credential

The title is recognised by the Swiss Hand Therapy and Hand Surgery societies. The Swiss Occupational and Physical Therapy societies are aware of the credential. Re-imburement for therapy services is not impacted by the credential. Occupational and Physical therapists that are certified as Hand Therapists must bill their services at the same pre-defined government regulated rate as all other therapists.

United Kingdom

[The British Association of Hand Therapists \(BAHT\) certification process](#)

Certification program as of: 2000

Certification Process description

The British Association of Hand Therapists (BAHT) has developed a system of accreditation of hand therapists' learning and experience, leading to the award of 'Accredited Hand Therapist' (AHT BAHT). Hand therapists may develop their knowledge and skills via BAHT validated courses at different levels, which are run by hand therapy teams, independent hand therapy education companies and universities. BAHT validated courses qualify for points towards becoming an accredited hand therapist. More experienced therapists may choose to submit evidence of prior learning (APL) to gain BAHT points, or gain educator points through lecturing on validated courses. There are many other learning opportunities, conferences and courses that are valuable learning opportunities but at present don't form part of the BAHT education process. Please see BAHT website for validated courses to gain points towards accreditation and more information on the process.

BAHT Postgraduate Education

The structure in place for hand therapists to further their education involves:

- Level I: A three-day basic hand therapy course with a one-hour written examination gives 1 BAHT point. This is for therapists with less than two years clinical experience within Hand Therapy.
- Level II: A three day course on a specific aspect of hand therapy. Completion of the course, a one-hour written or practical examination and an assignment will give you 2 BAHT points. 6 points (i.e. three Level II courses in different subjects) are required for accreditation.

- Level III: A new piece of work in the area of hand therapy, this can include a work-based project, a literature search or a small piece of research. Assessment is by two independent assessors. Successful completion gives 5 BAHT points. There are Universities within the UK for example Brunel and Ulster University which now run independent MSc modules which equate to these 5 BAHT Points.

The guidelines relating to BAHT postgraduate education and information about courses can be downloaded from the website.

Once the therapist has collected all 12 BAHT points via this route or a university route and they have a clinical log of 4000 hours of clinical practice within Hand Therapy they can apply to become a AHT (BAHT). In their application they must include their proof of evidence, clinical log, CV and appropriate testimonies.

The AHT (BAHT) award is based on a working knowledge of hand therapy practice in the United Kingdom. To ensure parity, overseas applicants with less than 50% of their clinical experience gained in the United Kingdom will be awarded an associate accreditation which will be known as Associate AHT (BAHT) and will recognise where they have completed the majority of their clinical hours.

Title awarded

Accredited Hand Therapist (BAHT)
Approximate number of Therapists
certified to date: 70

Renewal Process

Renewal every 5 years. Application process can be

found on BAHT website www.hand-therapy.co.uk

Website

All details and documents can be found on BAHT website: www.hand-therapy.co.uk

Recognition of the credential

The AHT (BAHT) title is recognised by British Hand Therapists and Hand Surgeons and many experienced therapy jobs require therapists to have been working towards this qualification. Unfortunately, it is not a protected title recognised by the British HPC committee. At the present time the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy do not recognise BAHT as a specialty group as it is a mixed professional group. BAHT is working on recognition of this multi professional specialism and the Accreditation.

Conclusion

National certification has developed differently from country to country. The aim of certification regardless of the process is to further the development of the specialty practice area of hand therapy. Certification does this by encouraging therapists to continue to grow and develop their knowledge base and recognizing their accomplishments and competency in this area. The European Certified Hand Therapist, is a credential above and beyond national certification and aims to recognize and encourage national specialty practitioners across Europe, thus building a network of specialists that can not only be contacted for patient care needs but can network with one another to advance the practice of hand therapy.

Note: if your country is a member of EFSHT and has a national certification process for Hand Therapists, that is not included in this document, please contact the EFSHT education committee for inclusion in future updates of this document.

Compiled by the EFSHT Educational Committee
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