



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: 78

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.dahth.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

Nederlandse Vereniging voor Handtherapie (NVHT) certification process

Certification program as of: 2010

Certification Process description

The Dutch Society of Hand Therapists (NVHT) 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 Society 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 NVHT 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 (NVHT). 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: 117

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 both societies 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 (SSRM) / Società Svizzera per la Rieducazione della Mano certification process (SSRM)

Certification program as of: 2015

Certification Process description

The first Swiss Certified Hand Therapists were certified by exam in 2002. A comprehensive four-hour-exam was to be passed to be awarded the title of 'Zertifizierte/r Handtherapeut/in SGHR'. Thirty-three therapists were certified in this manner. In 2005 the Swiss Hand Therapy society SGHR decided to end the exam certification program. The completion of the educational program allows

Swiss physical or occupational therapists who have at least 3 years of patient-related work experience in hand therapy to apply directly for the certification. The Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS) in Hand Therapy programme (worth 15 ECTS-points) of the Zürich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) has been set up in collaboration with the SGHR. The program consists of three modules with a total of 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. The course is open to occupational and physical therapists with a current employment in a Hand Therapy setting, who have completed a bachelor or equivalent course of study. In addition, occupational therapists must provide evidence of training in manual therapy techniques and physical therapists must provide proof of training in static and dynamic splinting.

The Swedish course "Rehabilitation in Hand Surgery" from the Lund University (also worth 15 ECTS-points) and the "Diplôme Inter-Universitaire de rééducation et d'appareillage de la main" in Grenoble, France, are also recognised by the SGHR and lead to a direct certification.

There is also the possibility to get the Swiss certification without an academic title. For that, a minimum of 10 years of experience in Hand Therapy is required, and a list of criteria must be met (for example an average of at least 40% of patient-related work in Hand Therapy over 10 years, participation in Hand Therapy courses for a minimum of 2 days a year, or the teaching in courses or congresses). The applicants have to collect a total of 100 points in 3 different areas (A: patient work, B: continuing education and dedication to the vocational field, C: transfer of knowledge and research activities) according to the chart to apply for the title "Zertifizierte/r Handtherapeut/in Schweiz". The criteria are the same that have to be achieved in order to renew the certification.

The Swiss certification can only be awarded to Swiss therapists or therapists from other countries who are working in Switzerland at the time of the certification.

Title awarded

'Zertifizierte/r Handtherapeut/in Schweiz' or 'Thérapeute de la main certifié/e Suisse'.

Approximate number of Therapists

certified to date: 80

Renewal Process

For hand therapists certified by exam between 2002 and 2005 the title is valid for 7 years. For therapists certified by the new system, the title is valid 10 years. Re-certification guidelines have been established for both groups with continuing education and professional activity criteria that must be met according to the certification chart, where a total of 100 points must be collected in 10 years in 3 different areas (A: patient work, B: continuing education and dedication to the vocational field, C: transfer of knowledge and research activities). The chart and the explanations can be downloaded on the website (German: <http://sghr.ch/content/47/re-zertifizierung-beantragen/> ; French: <http://ssrm.ch/content/47/demande-de-re-certification/>)

Website

www.sghr.ch (German) or www.ssrm.ch (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. Reimbursement 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.

Belgium

[Belgian Hand Therapists \(BHT\) certification process](#)
Certification program as of: 2015

Certification Process description

The Belgian hand therapists have created a three level certification procedure. The foundation of this certification process is inspired by our neighbours the Dutch Society for Hand Therapy. However the BHT has formulated a three level certification process. Each level has different criteria to be fulfilled and different amounts of accreditation points needed.

Generally all applicants need to be a member of the BHT and submit a CV together with a list with contains information about working experience, education and contribution to the field of hand therapy (presentations, publications, active role within the BHT). According to the level applied for, a different amount of points need to be gathered.

The criteria to become a "Starting" BHT are:

- Licensed as a physical or occupation therapist with 1 full year of experience
- Member of the BHT for 365 days.
- Working experience in the field of hand therapy for at least 300 hours in the last 3 years.
- Achieve 30 point of specific hand related education and attend at least 2 BHT meetings.



The criteria to become a “Experienced” BHT are:

- Licensed as a physical or occupation therapist with 5 full years of experience
- Member of the BHT for 3 consecutive years.
- Working experience in the field of hand therapy for at least 1500 hours in the last 5 years.
- Achieve 50 points of specific hand related education and attend at least 5 BHT meetings.

The criteria to become a “Certified” BHT are:

- Be an ‘Experienced’ BHT
- Active contribution to hand therapy (teaching activities, presentations, publications, active contribution within BHT/EFSHT/IFSHT) with a minimum of 20 points is needed.
- The system for allocation of points is on the BHT website

Being a Certified BHT one can apply to become an ECHT

Title awarded

‘Beginnend-BHT’, ‘Ervaren-BHT’, ‘Gecertificeerd-BHT’. Approximate number of Therapists certified to date: none as it is in the starting phase.

Renewal Process

The title of ‘starting-BHT’ is valid for 3 years, ‘experienced –and certified-BHT’ for 5 years. A renewal for the same level or one higher is necessary. This process is still in development but will be based on continuing education and professional activity criteria that must be met in order to renew certification for another 3 or 5 years.

Website

<http://www.bht.be/members/recognition/>

Recognition of the credential

The Belgian Hand Therapists (BHT) administers and issues certification.

Portugal

[Portuguese Association of Hand Therapists \(APTM\) certification process](#)

Certification program as of: 2015

Certification Process description

The Portuguese Association of Hand Therapists (APTM) has developed a system of accreditation of hand therapists’ learning and experience, leading to the award of a ‘Certificate Hand Therapist’ (CHT - APTM). The ‘Hand Therapist Profile’ has been used as a basis for the development of this certificate.

Hand therapists may develop their knowledge and skills via APTM validated courses at two levels (post-graduate or master), which are run by polytechnic institutes or universities. Therapists who have previous training, may submit the request for crediting the courses in higher education crediting system, in educational institutions that teach this training.

To apply, 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 Portuguese association)’. At least 60 points in 100 points must be achieved to meet the criteria.

The criteria to become a CHT-APTM are:

- Licensed as a physical or occupational therapist.
- Member of the Portuguese Association of Hand Therapists for at least one year.
- Working experience as a general physical or occupational therapist for at least 3 years. – 10 points
- Working experience in the field of hand therapy for at least 1500 hours during the last 2 years. – max 15 points (2 points for every 1500 hours)
- Hand therapists may develop their knowledge and skills via APTM validated courses at two levels (post-graduate or master), which are run by polytechnic institutes or universities. Therapists who have previous training, may submit the request for crediting the courses in higher education crediting system, in educational institutions that teach this training. – 50 points
- Contribution to the field of Hand Therapy. Points can be achieved with: national and international presentations, publications in national or in an international journal and with playing an active role within the Portuguese association. All activities should be done during the past 5 years. – max 25 points (5 points each item)

Once the therapist has collected at least 60 points and meets the general and working criteria they can apply to become a CHT-APTM. They must be able to provide proof of all evidence, clinical log and CV.

The Portuguese 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

'Certificate Hand Therapist' (CHT-APTM).
Approximate number of Therapists certified to date:
0 (22 expected in 2016)

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

<http://aptm.pt/aptm/ao/>

Recognition of the credential

APTM title is recognized by the Portuguese Hand Therapy Association. Unfortunately, it is not a protected title recognized by the Portuguese government yet.

France

[French Society \(SFRM-GEMMSOR\) certification process](#)

Certification program as of: 2016

Certification Process description

The French Society of Hand Therapy has chosen an evaluation system for their members to achieve national certification and enable them subsequently to submit an application for the ECHT.

It was decided that the first requirement is that the candidate be a member of the French Society, SFRM – GEMMSOR, which is a member of the EFSHT.

Our discussion then concerned how to recognize the candidates' expertise. According to our society's by-laws a full member has to have published at least two scientific articles or have made an oral presentation, or had a poster accepted, at a national or international hand rehabilitation congress within the past five years.

To be nationally certified the candidate must also have sound experience in the practice of hand rehabilitation and also orthoses, and be recognized as an expert in the field of the rehabilitation of hand by a peer group.

Therefore, in the French evaluation table, the points are shared between the categories: scientific knowledge, the recognition of professional expertise and good practice.

For example regarding the knowledge-base, graduates of the DIU of hand rehabilitation at the

University of Grenoble obtain 10 points for the successful completion of this course, and the recognition in Hand Therapy expertise by the permanent members of the French Society of Hand Therapists and the French Society of Hand Surgeons will also have 10 points.

To achieve the accreditation the candidate must obtain at least 50 out of 100 points.

At the beginning of the process the candidate has to send an application form with a CV, giving his/her experience in hand therapy, and a self-attestation to the President of the SFRM-GEMMSOR.

The certification committee assesses the candidate's portfolio and, if necessary, contacts the candidate and / or the peers to obtain confirmation of expertise.

Title awarded

No title is awarded, however, achieving the French accreditation allows the candidate to submit an application for the ECHT.

Approximate number of Therapists certified to date:
0

Renewal Process

The French accreditation can only be achieved with one submission. It is valid for a period of 5 years, following which the member of the French Society has to request a renewal of his/her national certification.

Website

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Recognition of the credential

We hope to obtain the recognition from the SFCM-GEM (French Society of Hand Surgery) in the near future.

Italy

[Associazione Italiana Riabilitazione della Mano \(A.I.R.M.\) certification process](#)

Certification program as of: June 2015

Certification Process description

The Italian Hand Therapy Society was founded on September 19, 2007 in Florence Italy by a group of therapists who were interested in promoting hand therapy in Italy. Following the requests of several members of the Italian Hand Therapy Association in obtaining the European Hand Therapy Certification

(ECHT), committee members of the Italian society gathered and created a process for obtaining hand therapy certification in Italy that is also recognized by the Italian Society of Hand Surgeons.

The certified hand therapist in Italy is a physical or occupational therapist who has been a member of the Italian Association of Hand Rehabilitation (AIRM) for 5 consecutive years and submits an application to become an ORDINARY MEMBER in AIRM.

Requirements to become a certified hand therapist in Italy:

- Member of the National Association of Physical (Associazione Italiana Fisioterapisti AIFI) or Occupational Therapists (Associazione Italiana Terapisti Occupazionale-AITO).
- Adherent member of AIRM for at least 5 years consecutively.
- 5 years experience of working in hand therapy or have a minimum of 2000 hours of experience in hand therapy supported by recommendations letters from 2 ordinary members of the AIRM or members of the Italian Society of hand Surgeons (SICM).

In the last 5 years:

- Attendance to 4 national conferences and/or continuing education courses organized by or supported by AIRM.
- Attendance to 1 international conference or fellowship of at least 5 days in a hand therapy center outside of Italy.
- Completion of 1 or more courses approved by AIRM in splinting with theory and practice.
- Contribution of 1 or more of the following: development of hand and upper extremity rehabilitation through presentations at national and international conferences as well as teaching and publications in hand therapy.

The interested candidate downloads the application for Ordinary Member of AIRM and sends a

curriculum vitae highlighting courses, international and national meetings related to hand therapy in the last 5 years.

The documents supporting the application for certification will be reviewed by the executive committee and committee members of AIRM and approval of the application will be communicated to the applicant.

Title awarded

'Terapista della Mano'. Approximate number of Therapists certified to date: 0

Renewal Process

Recertification is required every 3 years and is contingent on: proof of publication, teaching, presenting, moderating or participation in the organization of courses, workshops or conferences in rehabilitation of the hand and upper extremity approved by AIRM.

Website

www.riabilitazionemano.org

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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