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THIRTY YEARS OF LEADING THE WAY IN HAND THERAPY EDUCATION

PHOENIX, AZ, October 4, 2007 - The American Society of Hand Therapists' (ASHT) 30th Annual Meeting began today in Phoenix, celebrating *30 Years of Leading the Way in Hand Therapy Education*. The meeting is the premier hand therapy education event and features instructional courses, special presentations, case studies and scientific paper and poster presentations.

"Ongoing education is important to all of our members to keep us updated on the latest advances in hand therapy treatment and surgeries," says ASHT President Stacey Doyon, OTR/L, CHT. "This ensures that we continue to provide the most efficient and effective treatment to our patients."

The following are excerpts from two highlighted abstracts presented at this year's meeting: "The Effect of Asymmetric Positioning in Student Violinists Result in Focal Upper Quadrant Pain and Weakness," by Beth Coon, PT, CHT, and "Therapy Functional Outcomes Post Carpal Tunnel Release Surgery," by Denise Kenny Claiborne, MS, OTR, CHT and Gerri E. Conti, BS, MS.

Hand Therapists Provide a Soothing Sound for Musicians' Ears

Imagine a musician who entertains and soothes the nerves of the audience, living in constant agony and pain. This is a common condition especially in aspiring musicians. The problem may lie in their lack of endurance to hold and play an instrument or in their poor instrument handling technique. This troublesome condition can occur due to imbalanced and prolonged positioning, especially in violinists, causing them pain and weakness in their necks, backs, arms and hands.

In a recent study, violinists were evaluated using a comprehensive hand and upper extremity assessment tool. Each violinist's history of playing, extracurricular activities, musculoskeletal measurements and pain assessments were recorded. DVD recordings were later reviewed to further assess positioning while playing.

Certified Hand Therapist Beth Coon concluded the research on the note that two to three hours of asymmetrical playing resulted in pain in the muscles of the neck and upper back. Weakness was also present in the neck and upper arm due to overuse.

The key to effectively treating this condition is properly identifying the problem. Once the problem is identified correctly by the Certified Hand Therapist, the resolution of the symptoms is usually simple. The healing process begins by implementing an exercise program. This exercise program should include stretching and strengthening of the involved muscle groups. Treatment focuses on slowly building up endurance to play the instrument without developing symptoms,

while maintaining correct technique, posture and instrument position. Through this specialized treatment, the therapist enables the musician to continue to provide the pleasures of music leaving behind the pain and suffering.

Hand Therapists Aid in Faster Return to Work after Carpal Tunnel Surgery

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a common neurological disorder involving the compression and irritation of the median nerve at the level of the wrist. A higher prevalence has been observed in certain occupational populations such as keyboard users and cashiers due to the repetitive nature of the work with a resulting loss of productivity and wages at the work place.¹ Surgery is frequently the treatment of choice and is often followed up with referral to hand therapy. The focus of therapy is on scar management, night splinting, range of motion exercises, strengthening, desensitization techniques and modalities for symptom management.

A recent study conducted at the Michigan Hand and Sports Rehabilitation Center demonstrated the effectiveness of specialized hand therapy after surgical intervention. Participants included 59 adults who had recently undergone carpal tunnel surgery. Physical function and symptoms were measured using an upper extremity assessment tool known as the DASH (Disabilities of the Arm, Shoulder and Hand). Denise Kenny Claiborne, MS, OTR, CHT, the primary author of the study, highlighted the benefits of hand therapy in improving overall function and reducing symptoms. The results of the study demonstrated that patients attending hand therapy improved significantly in terms of sensation, pain and ability to perform daily activities. These results suggest that hand therapy following carpal tunnel surgery can assist with faster return to work and reduction in loss of productivity and wages.

ASHT's 30th Annual Meeting takes place Oct. 4-7 at the Phoenix Convention Center in Phoenix. For more information about ASHT or the Annual Meeting, visit **www.asht.org**.

1. Andersen J., Thonsem J., Overgaard E., et al. Computer use and carpal tunnel syndrome: 1 year follow up study. *JAMA* 2003; 289:2963.

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*The American Society of Hand Therapists is a not-for-profit organization seeking to advance the specialty of hand therapy through communication, education, research and the establishment of clinical standards. ASHT's 3,000 members in the United States, Canada and around the world strive to be recognized leaders in the hand therapy profession. Visit **www.asht.org** to find a hand therapist near you.*