College of
HEALTH AND CARE
PROFESSIONALS OF BC

WOUND CARE BELOW THE DERMIS

Certification Program

The *Health Professions and Occupations Act*'s **Health and Care Professionals Regulation** authorizes certified occupational therapists to perform a procedure on tissue below the dermis for the purpose of wound care.

CHCPBC acknowledges that the full breadth of wound care below the dermis may not be addressed within one course.

Scope of the Certified Practice

Certification ensures public protection by providing a consistent, risk-based approach for occupational therapists performing higher-risk invasive wound procedures, such as conservative sharp wound debridement (CSWD), deep wound cleansing or packing, and negative pressure wound therapy. Common risks associated with procedures below the dermis for wound care include infection, severe bleeding, and nerve damage.

The certification program was developed through research and consultation with subject matter experts in the professions of occupational and physical therapy, nursing, and in consultation with the Provincial Allied Health Practice and Education Committee who provided feedback from Health Authorities.

For clarity, "*below the dermis*" functions as an anatomical reference point. Whether a particular intervention acts on tissue at or above the dermal level, or below it, is a clinical determination that rests with the occupational therapist based on their observation of the clinical context, the patient's presentation, and the assessment of the specific treatment modality needed.

The College cannot assess and advise on patient-specific modalities of treatment and whether the modality involved constitutes the practice of a restricted activity. This determination is made by the occupational therapist based on the definition of legal scope of practice and authorized restricted activities for occupational therapy. [1,2] For example, suture and staple removal are procedures that are generally not considered to occur below the dermis, however, there may be exceptions depending on the complexity of a patient's wound.

Procedures below the dermis for wound care in occupational therapy do not include the application of electricity and laser to cut or destroy tissue, as these are separate restricted activities that are not within the legal scope of practice for occupational therapists in BC.

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[1] Health Professions and Occupations Act's Regulated Health Practitioners Regulation. https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/129_2025

[2] Health Professions and Occupations Act's Health and Care Professionals Regulation. https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/131_2025

Certification Program Requirements

The following course requirement informs the minimum knowledge and skills needed for providing wound care below the dermis ethically, competently, and safely.

To apply for certification with wound care below the dermis, a Full licensee in good standing must start and complete the certification program within the 3 years immediately before applying for the certified practice.

Licensees who require longer than 3 years to complete certification program requirements may request an extension by emailing **certification@chcpbc.org**. Extension requests are reviewed and approved by the Licence Committee.

1. **Course Requirement**

   The course work must include a minimum of 15 hours of education on the assessment and treatment of wound care, including procedures below the dermis.

   The course requirement may be met through one or more courses that include evaluated theory and practical learning. For example, a course that covers evaluated wound care theory only may be complemented by another course that includes evaluated practical learning.

   The courses selected must cover the following content and criteria:

   - Course designed for health professionals authorized to practice wound care below the dermis (e.g., medical and nursing professionals, occupational and physical therapists)
   - Course content includes:
     - Skin and soft tissue anatomy, physiology and wound healing
     - Prevention and management of wounds, including acute stages:
       - Assessment
       - Goal setting
       - Team approach
       - Care planning and implementation
       - Cleansing
       - Moisture control
       - Packing and dressing
       - Pain management
       - Healing
     - Prevention and management of pressure Injuries
     - Prevention and management of skin tears
     - Conservative Sharp Wound Debridement (CSWD)
     - Infection prevention and control, including signs and symptoms of wound infection and interventions for treating infection
     - Emergency and adverse event management
   - Instructors must be health professionals authorized to practice wound care below the dermis.
   - Includes information on evaluation of theoretical knowledge and practical learning.
   - Course provider issues proof of successful course completion (certificate, letter, confirmation email, etc.)

Examples of course providers:

- Canadian College of Health Care and Pharmaceutics[3]
- University of Victoria, BC, Continuing Studies[4]
- Wounds Canada Institute[5]
- Wound, Ostomy, and Continence Institute (NSWOCC)[6]
- International Interprofessional Wound Care Course (IIWCC)[7]

Course Selection

CHCPBC does not approve, endorse, or accredit courses for certified practices. It is the occupational therapist's responsibility to reflect on their individual learning needs, the needs of the patient population they serve, and review the content of available courses relative to CHCPBC certification program requirements before selecting a course.

Licensees are expected to apply the **Ethics and Practice Standards** in determining their learning needs and seeking additional education and practical experience throughout their career to support competent and safe provision of wound care below the dermis (hand therapy, pressure wounds, burns, diabetic foot, ostomy, continence, etc.)

Occupational therapists should carefully review the syllabus of potential course offerings to determine if it will provide the necessary knowledge and skills to practice wound care below the dermis competently and safely to the patient population they serve.

Occupational therapists must understand that their individual competence may be limited, either by the nature of the education completed or due to limited clinical experience. In such cases, the occupational therapist has a professional obligation to limit their practice to the areas in which they are competent and to refer patients to other authorized health professionals who are qualified to address a patient's needs.

Health Authority Self-study

BC Health Authorities may administer their own course content through the Connecting Learners With Knowledge (CLWK) network and other intranet resources.

CHCPBC will accept a **Supervision Declaration form** from a health professional authorized to perform wound care below the dermis confirming that a licensee completed a minimum of 15 hours of education on the course content included above.

2. **Supervision Requirement**

If the course work completed in section 1 does not include evaluated practical learning, the following supervised practice is required:

- Observation of at least 2 different treatment modalities below the dermis on live patients, and/or synthetic models by a health professional authorized to perform wound

[3] Wound Care Management - Canadian College of Healthcare and Pharmaceutics
[4] Wound Management for Health Professionals | Continuing Studies at UVic
[5] Individual Programs for Regulated Health-Care Providers - Wounds Canada
[6] Wound Care Collaborator Course | WOC Institute
[7] IIWCC-CAN Registration 2026-2027 | Woundpedia | IIWCC

care below the dermis. For example, 1 observation of wound packing below the dermis, and 1 observation of deep wound debridement.
- Completion of a minimum of 5 supervised treatment modalities below the dermis on different patients.

A **Supervision Declaration form** must be completed and signed by the supervisor as part of the application process.

Licensees are responsible for identifying an appropriate supervisor and informing them of the certification program requirements. Licensees can refer to the Supervision information on the **Certified Practices** page for more information on supervision expectations.

Supervision level should decrease gradually to enable the licensee to attain autonomous practice.

Licensees are responsible for documenting learning interactions with patients and patient consent in accordance with the CHCPBC Ethics and Practice Standards.

Certified Hand Therapists

The College recognizes that the Certified Hand Therapist (CHT) designation requires experience as a Full licensee for at least 3 years, 4,000 hours of clinical experience and a comprehensive examination covering advanced upper-extremity anatomy, wound healing, and surgical interventions.

Occupational therapists who currently hold a Certified Hand Therapist (CHT) designation with the Hand Therapy Certification Commission (HTCC)[8] and practice wound care below the dermis in their workplace are deemed to have met this certification program's requirements.

Attestation of Competence and Safety to Practice

Licensees must provide evidence to CHCPBC that they have successfully completed all certification program requirements, and that they practice wound care below the dermis in their workplace.

Licensees who completed the course requirements more than 3 years before applying may be considered eligible if they can demonstrate that they have been practising wound care below the dermis in another jurisdiction and provide proof of recent, active practice of wound care below the dermis within the 3 years immediately before their application.

Mentorship

Licensees who are newly certified to practise wound care below the dermis are strongly recommended to seek mentorship with an experienced authorized health professional soon after obtaining their certified practice.

Mentorship is based on a supportive relationship between an experienced healthcare professional and a less experienced one. It is collaborative and includes reciprocal learning and

[8] Hand Therapy Certification Commission and Definition of Hand Therapy and Scope of Practice

long-term professional development. Common learning approaches include observation of experienced clinicians, case-based discussions, reflective practice, and peer consultation, and are supportive of ethical, competent, and safe practice.

Licensees may refer to the **Certified Practices** web page for information on mentorship. Licensees are responsible for identifying a suitable mentor. The College does not review and approve mentorships.

References

CHCPBC Bylaws, section 7
CHCPBC Ethics and Practice Standards
Competencies for Occupational Therapists in Canada
Best Practice Recommendations for Skin Health and Wound Management 2025

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<tr><td>Date Approved
2026-09-24</td><td colspan="3">Approved By
☒ Board</td></tr>
<tr><td>Date Effective
2026-09-24</td><td>Revision history</td><td colspan="2">Last Updated:
Previous Update:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Next Review
2029-09-24</td><td></td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Drafted by: Melanie Journoud</td><td colspan="2">Regulatory Transformation Advisor, Licensure</td></tr>
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