

November 1, 2020

Dear Sir or Madam:

Over the past 10 months, as a fellow in the Virtual Hand to Shoulder Institute, I have had the great fortune to get to know and learn from Mirella Deisher. Drawing on over 2 decades of experience in the field of hand and upper extremity therapy, Mirella developed the Virtual Hand to Shoulder Institute to bring mentorship opportunity to therapists around the world.

When I decided to make the leap from pediatric occupational therapy to hand and upper extremity therapy, I knew I was taking on a great endeavor. The sheer volume of knowledge I needed to assimilate felt like an ocean. As I initially studied on my own, I felt as if I was drowning in that ocean. I decided I needed an organized program to guide me through it. Due to time, family, and travel constraints, I was unable to take part in a traditional hand therapy fellowship. VHSI was a unique opportunity to learn in a comprehensive, organized manner in the convenience of my own home. It is a 12-month program of weekly, live, online learning with Mirella, a CHT mentor who is an expert in the field of hand therapy. The program offers remote learning with comprehensive didactic lectures on all topics related to hand and upper extremity rehabilitation and a live, on-site, weekend session for hands-on training. Other features include interdisciplinary guest speakers, weekly journal article reviews and group study sessions, monthly blogging, coaching for resume building, interview skills, and job search, and network opportunities. While this was still a significant time commitment, it allowed me to be with my family when I needed to be and find balance between work and family life that I sought.

From our first zoom meeting, Mirella has been a warm, open, and professional mentor. As a teacher, she is organized, efficient, and comprehensive. She focuses on anatomy and fundamentals that help hand therapy fellows to develop clinical reasoning to make informed decisions, rather than simply memorize and follow protocols. She actively seeks feedback, constantly striving to improve and evolve the program. She listens intently and always responds to questions. She has been available and responsive throughout the week via text and email, and provides 1:1 zoom meetings for individualized attention and coaching. I have a tendency toward precision and I am detail oriented, especially when learning new topics. Mirella is never impatient and responds to all of my incessant questions.

Mirella is passionate about both hand therapy and teaching. She is compassionate and reflective. Over the course of the fellowship she has pushed me to develop not just my knowledge base, but also essential clinical reasoning skills and passion for evidence-based practice. I am forever grateful that she has been my mentor. I will sit for the CHT exam this coming May with full confidence that I will not only pass the exam, but also be a great therapist because of my experience in Mirella's program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vanessa Truxal, MS, OTR/L". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Vanessa Truxal, MS, OTR/L