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THE TRANSITION OF GRADUATES OF THE MASTER OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY TO PRACTICE

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Background: The transition from classroom to clinical practice is a necessary and challenging journey for occupational therapy students (Tryssenaar & Perkins, 2001). In recent years, worldwide trends in occupational therapy education are moving towards graduate entry in professional preparation courses (Nihill & Gallagher, 2007). Little is known about the journey these graduates experience when they enter practice. Along with the importance of producing competent graduate-entry master's practitioners, there is thus an urgent need to address the knowledge gap with regards to the transition to practice experience for graduate-entry master's occupational therapy graduates.

Aim: This qualitative study aimed to explore the lived experience of graduate-entry master's occupational therapy graduates in their transitions from students to practitioners, within their first year of practice.

Methods: A phenomenological approach was adopted in this study. Using purposeful criterion sampling, eight participants from a recent cohort of the Master of Occupational Therapy graduates from the University of Sydney were recruited. Data was collected via in-depth, face-to-face interviews. The focus of inquiry was on the experience of transition itself. Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and analysed thematically. Member checking and consensus coding were conducted to increase the trustworthiness of the study.

Results: Themes derived from interview data provided understanding of the experience and meaning of the graduates' transitions to practice. Preliminary analysis of themes included valuing maturity, being new, needing skills and pursuing satisfaction.

Conclusions: This presentation will provide valuable information on the experience of transition from student to practitioner. Recognising the experience has potential to assist university staff in the development of educational curriculum. Understanding the transition also has capacity to aid therapists and employers in providing adequate clinical support and supervision for new graduates. Furthermore, this presentation on the transition experience allows future students to better prepare themselves for the process.