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**A phenomenological study exploring the professional identity development of the first cohort of occupational therapists trained in Ghana: participants' perceptions in their final year**

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**Introduction:** This study explores the lived experiences of the first cohort of occupational therapy (OT) students from Ghana in relation to their professional identity development as they progressed through their four-year pre-registration program. The presentation focuses on findings based on participants' narratives in the third /final year.

**Method:** A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used with a purposive sampled group who were followed through the four years of their course program. Nine participants were recruited from a maiden cohort of eighteen students.

**Findings:** Three overarching master themes emerged from cross-case analysis of this four-year longitudinal study. These master themes are firstly, '*Formulating a sense of becoming an occupational therapist through identity transformation*'. The second master theme was '*Aligning oneself with professional knowledge to redefine occupational therapy profession*' and, the third master theme, '*Transition and transformation into the occupational therapy professional in the Ghanaian context*', was formulated during students' final year of study and entry into practice.

**Conclusion:** The study articulates students' experiences and their professional identity development as occupational therapists from their initial entry onto the programme as novice OTs to their exit points as graduate professionals. Furthermore, the findings offer new insights for practitioners and programme developers to identify key constructs faced by learners in their journey of professional development.