

## Nurses' perception of criteria for promotion to head nurse position in selected hospitals

Fatma Essam Herzallah<sup>1</sup>, and Laila Mohamed Abdo<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> B.Sc Nursing, Faculty of Nursing, Cairo University, <sup>2</sup> Nursing Administration Department, Faculty of Nursing, Cairo University.

### Abstract

**Background:** Promotion in nurses' positions considers one of the important targets for the nurses' professional life, it's the source of motivation, inspiration for nurses', and it's positively associated with increased job satisfaction, efficacy, effectiveness, and positive outcomes for health care agencies. **Aim:** The study is aimed to identify staff nurses' perception of the criteria for promotion to head nurse position. **Subjects and Methods:** Data were collected from three hospitals' affiliated with different health organizations. The total sample size was 300 nurses, randomly selected and equally distributed among the selected hospitals. A questionnaire was developed by the investigator and utilized for the data collection, it contains two parts; the first part was related to respondents' socio- demographic data, & the second part was related to the perceived criteria for promotion to head nurse position. A descriptive analytical design was used to achieve the aim of the study. **Results:** the study showed that the respondents' support with high mean scores the four dimensions and statistically there were significant difference between age, qualification, employing hospital and respondents' perception to the criteria for promotion to head nurse position, while the position in hospitals has insignificant effect on the respondents' perception to head nurse position. **Conclusion:** The study findings indicated four main dimensions' for the promotion to head nurse, each dimension consists list of criteria for promotion. Technical; Personal; Leadership; then administrative qualities; using this criteria as a base for selection of head nurses shall assure staff loyalty, retention and maintain quality of nursing management. **Recommendations:** hospitals shall develop a clear job description for the head nurse position, also shall maintain setting appropriate criteria based performance appraisal for promotion to head nurse position.

**Key words:** Nurses, perception, criteria, promotion

### Introduction

The nursing services are provided through administrative structure composed of director of nursing at the top level responsible for the total nursing activities in the hospital, nursing supervisor as a middle level manager responsible for more than one clinical unit in the hospital, then the head

nurse is the first line manager responsible for one clinical unit in the hospital. In the literature the term head nurse could reflect; ward sister, ward manager, nursing unit manager, ward leader. (Finkelmann, 2006 & Firth, 2002).

The process of career advancement in nursing means promotion from a clinical position to administrative position; however that negatively influenced the patient care by taking the best nurses' from the bedside to the leadership level (ward & Goodrich, 2007).

Nurses are targeting the promotion because of its expected outcomes which include recognition of expertise, differentiation of competency, reinforcement of accountability and responsibility, professional growth, job satisfaction, retention, and motivation which enhances higher level of practice (Riley, Rolband, James & Norton, 2009)

The head nurse position considered the most hardest and complicated position in the nursing hierarchy (Carney, 2006; Firth, 2002), nowadays the head nurses have three main areas that constitute their role, these are: patient care management to ensure that the patient total needs are met, staff management to utilize, guide, evaluate, and correct staff nurses in their nursing practice, as well as unit management to ensure its smooth running to fulfill hospital goals (Baddar et al, 2003).

Rouse (2009) lists some qualities that required for promotion of staff to head nurse position, as: clear communication; availability for meetings; ability to face problems seeking staff input; avoid being source of fear to others, the setting of ground rules is to decrease bias; being available; listening to staff concerns; and creating a positive atmosphere. Rouse (2009) also cited Rosengren et al. (2007), who stated that subordinates need present and available leaders express their opinions on the situation

The literature shows that exemplary leaders understand and act in same manner with the specific situation that they are facing. Effective head nurses have the ability to motivate and engage the staff nurses they lead. The head nurse who is engaged and passionate about work will communicate this

to the staff who will then feel the contagion and the excitement' (Kerfoot 2008).

According to White and Dudley-Brown (2012), "Leaders help organizations cope with change", to maintain the continuous process of improvements within the clinical setting the nominated staff for head nurse position should be well prepare to execute the hospital mission, motivate, supervise, coach, and mentor the staff.

In general, some nurses are promoted into frontline leadership positions without formal training or education to manage day-to-day operations, including human resource management. Rather than experiencing formal training or mentorship, nurse leaders informally learn from each other and adopt leadership practices based on situational circumstances, which can potentially lead to conflict which may correlated to leadership styles and practices. (Fennimore L, Wolf G. 2011, Wolf G et. al, 2006 & Conley SB et. al. 2007)

Finally According to Huseman (2009), head nurses have direct influence in the development and retention of staff, as well as overall unit productivity so this position requires special personal and professional characteristics which may not be available at any regular staff nurse, but it should be available as a standard base for selection and/or promotion to head nurse position, so a clear cut promotional policy is essential for any hospital, the leadership and even the employee should be fully understanding the criteria for promotion to any position from the time of recruitment (Vati. J, 2013)

### **Significance of the study**

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Head nurses' are providing not only administrative and clinical leadership, but also have 24- hour accountability for all patient care activities on the unit (Thrall, 2006).

In Egypt promotion to head nurse position is based on the years of experience regardless of the personal and professional qualification (Osman.2004).

From the investigator experience in the private as well as the university hospitals' in Egypt, little efforts' were done to prepare head nurses' for their role , however many health care organizations tried to set policies and training programs for staff nurses' but still many of the head nurses are not well prepared for the role, Heller et al (2004).

So there are no criteria for selection and/or promotion to head nurses' position which may lead to improper selection, then in turn leads to poor quality nursing management, poor communication, dissatisfied staff, low motivation to work, finally it may be reflected on the quality of nursing care provided to the patients and families. Thus having criteria for promotion to head nurse position is very important specially when identified by the nurses themselves, based on their own expectation and experiences at the work situation.

### **Aim of the study**

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This study aimed to identify the criteria for promotion to head nurse position as perceived by nursing staff.

### **Research Objectives**

- To identify the criteria for promoting staff nurses to head nurse position as perceived by nurses.
- To find out the effect of the hospital affiliation on the nurses perception.
- To find out effect of demographic data on nurses' perception.
- To find out difference in perception by nurses' position..

### **Subject and Methods**

#### **Research design:**

A descriptive analytical design was used in this study

#### **Setting:**

The study was conducted at randomly selected hospitals, affiliated with

- Cairo University
- Private sector
- Health Insurance Organizations.

#### **Subjects:**

The study sample size was calculated based on 33.3 % of the total number of nurses over the three selected hospitals, when each hospital contain 300 nurses, so the total number of nurses equal 900 nurse over the three hospitals, and the sample size equal 300 distributed equally between the hospitals (100 staff nurse from each one) selected randomly from a list of names using the simple random table.

#### **Tools of data collection:**

After reviewing the related literatures the questionnaire was developed by the researcher. The developed questionnaire consisted two parts the first were related to the socio demographic data, such as " gender, age, qualification, marital status, and years of experience" the second part were related to the qualities of the head nurses' as perceived by the respondents (the qualities shall be considered as the criteria for promotion to head nurse position

**The first part:** socio demographic data of the respondents' such as gender, age, marital status .....etc.

**Second part:** Is related to the perceived qualities of the head nurses: This part consists of 4 dimensions or qualities of the head nurses as perceived by the staff nurses.

1. Technical qualities consist of (9) criteria.
2. Personal qualities consist of (22) criteria.
3. Leadership qualities consist of (18) criteria.
4. Administrative qualities consist of (11) criteria. "The responses were rated on five points likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

**Methods of data collection:**

- Consent to conduct the study was taken from the vice dean of graduate studies at the faculty of nursing – Cairo university, and hospital administrator.
- The tool was designed by the investigator in Arabic language and reviewed by jury consisted of three professors in nursing administration to be tested for its content validity.
- Internal consistency and reliability of the items of tool was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. It was 0.81.
- A pilot study was carried out on 10% (n=30 ) of studied sample in order to test organization and clarity of the tool, also to estimate the needed time to fill it, and to make sure that items are fully understood by respondents'.
- The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents' after explanation of the study purpose and full agreement.
- Data collection was completed over a nine months period.

**Ethical Considerations**

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An official permission to conduct this study was obtained from the vice dean of graduate studies and research at the faculty of nursing Cairo university. Approval of the ethical committee was carried out for the study, after explaining the nature of the study. An official permission was obtained from the administrators of the selected hospitals. Participation in the study was voluntary based on the participant's agreement and informed consent, which was signed by each participant upon reading and understanding all the details including the full explanation of the purpose and nature of the study, stating the possibility to withdraw at any time, with no risk and full data confidentiality was maintained.

**Statistical analysis:-**

The data collected from the participants were coded and entered into the statistical package for the social science (SPSS), version 16.0 for analysis. Percentage, mean, standard deviation and frequency were used for the description of data. ANOVA test was used to test correlation between demographic variables and qualities, Mean and standard deviation for each dimension were calculated. The significance level for all statistical tests was set at the p value  $\leq 0.05$ .

**Results:**

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**Table (1)** Shows that 87% of the respondents" were female nurses while the male nurses constituted 13%. Fifty one percent of the respondents' age was between 20 to less than 30 years. The mean age of the respondents' was  $31.77 \pm 7.93$ . Regarding marital status 66.3% of the respondents' were married while the singles was 31.7%.

**Table (2)** shows that 52% of the respondents' had 3 years diploma, 21% BSNs, and 19.3% had technical institute. As regard the respondents' position 71.3% was

staff nurses while 20% was in head nurse position

**Table (3):** Shows that the mean years of experience in nursing were  $12.52 \pm 7.78$ . As regard the experience in same hospital the mean years of experience in the same hospital was  $11.81 \pm 7.79$ . And the mean years of experience in same position  $8.99 \pm 6.12$ .

**Table (4):** Indicates that the respondents' mean score was  $3.6 \pm 1.16$ , to above BSN degree, and  $3.59 \pm 1.16$  to BSN degree representing the highly required qualification for promotion to head nurse position, while the mean score  $3.01 \pm 1.48$  support 3 years nursing diploma. As regard to the post basic training all respondents' were highly supporting it, as evident by the high mean score  $4.37 \pm 0.74$  of post basic training in administration, followed by  $4.27 \pm 0.86$  post basic training in health care and  $4.17 \pm 0.91$  for at least two years experience .

**Table (5):** Shows that the respondents' mean score for all the perceived personal

criteria for promotion to head nurse position were high, while the highest mean scores 4.52

$\pm 0.51$  was for fairness,  $4.47 \pm 0.51$  for being cooperative and tactful personality,  $4.47 \pm 0.50$  for elegant appearance,  $4.46 \pm 0.50$  for role model and finally  $4.45 \pm 0.50$  for commitment with working hours. However all the items mean scores were occasionally high but the former items representing the highest scores.

**Table (6):** Indicates that the respondents' perceived a high agreement on the leadership criteria for promotion to head nurse position. The items with the highest mean score was  $4.46 \pm 0.51$  for encouragement & motivating the staff nurse ,  $4.45 \pm 0.50$  for training and directing,  $4.44 \pm 0.54$  for harmonization between nurse's competence and patient's acuity in nurses' schedule,  $4.43 \pm 0.50$  for both " being knowledgeable and oriented by the unit specialty & conducting daily round on the patients' , however all the items mean scores were almost high.

**Table (1): Distribution of the respondents by demographic data: (N=300).**

Variable	No.	%
<b>Gender:</b>		
Male	39	13.0
Female	261	87.0
<b>Age:</b>		
<b>Mean <math>\pm</math> SD</b>	$31.77 \pm 7.93$	
<b>Marital status :</b>		
Single	95	31.7
Married	199	66.3
Divorced	6	2.0

**Table (2): Distribution of respondents' by qualification and position in the hospitals (N=300).**

Variables	No.	%
<b>Qualification :</b>		
Diploma 3 years	156	52.0
Diploma 5 years	21	7.0
Technical institute	58	19.3
BSN	63	21.0
Master degree	2	.7
<b>Position :</b>		
Staff nurse	214	71.3
Head nurse	60	20.0
Nursing supervisor	18	6.0
Director of nursing	6	2.0
Clinical instructor	2	.7

**Table (3): Distribution of the respondents' by years of experience (N=300)**

Variables	Mean ± SD
Experience in nursing :	12.52 ± 7.78
Experience in same hospital :	11.81 ± 7.79
Experience in same position	8.99 ± 6.12

Table (4): Personal qualities of the head nurses as perceived by respondents'. (N=300).

No.	Personal qualities	Strongly disagree (1)		Disagree (2)		Neutral (3)		Agree(4)		Strongly agree (5)	
		No	%	No	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Being responsible	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	185	61.7	115	38.3
2	Diplomatic	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	1.7	209	69.7	86	28.7
3	Confronting problems	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	191	63.7	109	36.3
4	Creativity and Innovation	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	1.7	185	61.7	110	36.7
5	Prompt work on time	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.3	188	62.7	111	37.0
6	Planning and organization ability	0	0.0	2	0.7	0	0.0	195	65.0	103	34.3
7	Coping with change	0	0.0	3	1.0	4	1.3	204	68.0	89	29.7
8	Negotiations skills	1	0.3	0	0.0	15	5.0	181	60.3	103	34.3
9	Admit mistakes	0	0.0	2	0.7	8	2.7	186	62.0	104	34.7
10	Accepting criticism	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	3.0	198	66.0	93	31.0
11	Ability to gather relevant data	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.3	192	64.0	107	35.7
12	Ability to analysis and interpret data	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	195	65.0	105	35.0
13	Ability to Make decision	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.3	176	58.7	123	41.0
14	Cooperative	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.3	157	52.3	142	47.3
15	Fair	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	1.0	139	46.3	158	52.7
16	Persuasion and influence( Tactful)	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.3	157	52.3	142	47.3
17	Ability to Communicating using updated media	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.7	173	57.7	125	41.7
18	Good Listener	0	0.0	2	0.7	2	0.7	160	53.3	136	45.3
19	Able to set future vision	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	2.3	170	56.7	123	41.0
20	Has Elegant appearance	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	160	53.3	140	46.7
21	Commitment of working hours	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	164	54.7	136	45.3
22	Be Role model	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	163	54.3	137	45.7
<b>Total</b>		<b>Mean = 4.3</b>				<b>SD=0.29</b>					

Table (5): Leadership qualities of the head nurses as perceived by respondents'. (N=300).

No.	Leadership qualities	Strongly disagree (1)		Disagree(2)		Neutral(3)		Agree(4)		Strongly agree (5)	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Knowledgeable and oriented by the unit specialty	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.3	169	56.3	130	43.3
2	Able to Set unit objectives which derived from the hospital objective	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.7	175	58.3	123	41.0
3	Oriented by the rules and regulation of the hospital	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	3.0	171	57.0	120	40.0
4	Following the hospital policies in solving problems and decision making	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	1.0	180	60.0	117	39.0
5	Understand and able to deal with staff different cultural and social attributes.	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	1.0	176	58.7	121	40.3
6	Engaging the nurses in the decisions concerning them	0	0.0	4	1.3	2	0.7	181	60.3	113	37.7
7	Enhance the spirit of cooperation and teamwork between nurses	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	169	56.3	131	43.7
8	Able to plan nurses schedule	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	182	60.7	118	39.3
9	Harmonization in distribution of nurses between nurse's competence and patient's acuity	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	2.0	155	51.7	139	46.3
10	Delegation abilities	0	0.0	2	0.7	2	0.7	173	57.7	123	41.0
11	Training and directing	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	164	54.7	136	45.3
12	Participation in researches and evidence based practices	0	0.0	18	6.0	2	0.7	165	55.0	115	38.3
13	Encouragement and motivation	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.7	158	52.7	140	46.7
14	Daily patient's round to all patients in the unit	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	170	56.7	130	43.3
15	Coordination between the unit and other units in the hospital	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.3	184	61.3	115	38.3
16	Sharing in all hospital activities	0	0.0	1	0.3	0	0.0	17	5.7	282	94.0
17	Familiarity of all the unit data and information.	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	191	63.7	109	36.3
18	Liaison between top management and nurses	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	1.3	174	58.0	122	40.7
<b>Total</b>		<b>Mean = 4.4</b>				<b>SD=0.39</b>					



**Figure:** The figure shows the highly supported criteria for promotion to head nurse position as perceived by nurses' and evident by the highest mean score and slandered deviation.



## Discussion

The current study was conducted to identify the nurses' perception of the criteria for promotion to head nurse position, nurses assume promotion to administrative position is the reward that enhance self actualization and improve their ambitious in the health care systems.

Nurses' promotion in positions helps in retention which is considered essential to maintain the quality of health care and patient satisfaction as well. The head nurses' role is considered the most challenging nursing role that needs a detailed description of the tasks involved in the job (Walsh, and Kent, 2005).

In Egypt the concept of promotion for long decades was based on the years of experience regardless the qualification or any other criteria, however bias may affects the promotion decision (Osman.N, 2004). There are many changes have been made to the nursing profession in Egypt regarding to the promotion, as using carrier ladders in some

organization and promotion interview in other organizations.

The finding of the current study indicates that the most of respondents' were married female nurses and male nurses constitute a small portion, this may due to the fact that male enrollment in the nursing programs is considerably recent in Egypt, (Mohamed, 2013) also may because of long decade nursing was perceived as a female profession, however the situation is now changing because of the limited job opportunities in the market, shortage of the female nurses motivated male to engage in the nursing programs, additionally the recently positive public image to nurses.

The respondents' of the current study considerably young, and that explained the major expansion of health care services which have been occurred recently, and the high number of nurses join the nursing profession seeking fast employment, also it may reflect the fact that older nurses are attracted by the Arab Countries, so the young

nurses are the available in health organizations.

A number of studies reported advancing age is deterrent to nursing education, so promotion of nurses was reported as irrelevant to some nurses nearing to end of their careers (**Maguire& Patricia,2010**)

The respondents' position has effect only on the perceived personal and administrative criteria for promotion to head nurse position, and that's because of the staff nurses and the supervisors significant different, the supervisor level focus on the admin qualities of the promoted staff more, and the staff nurses focus on the personal qualities of the head nurse which directly affects their job engagement and satisfaction.

The study findings indicates that the qualification of the respondents' directly affects their perception of the criteria for promotion to the head nurse position, with significant difference in the percentage of respondents' to the basic qualifications , the highest percentage support associate degree nurses get the promotion to head nurse position , and that because they has both the technical abilities by experience in nursing and also the knowledge base , beside their ability to handle both the diploma and baccalaureate nurses .

Diploma 5 years and associate degree exceeds the percentage of baccalaureate degree and that reflect the respondents' feeling of fear and insecurity with the baccalaureate head nurses, the respondents' explained that " the diploma or even the associate degree nurses are able to understand and feel them more than baccalaureate nurse" that matches the study which confirmed that the " Emotional inelegance" of the head nurses affect the staff acceptance, satisfaction and productivity (**Gatson-Grindel; Kouzes & Posner, 2012**) also the baccalaureate only showing knowledge without actual experiences.

There was a consensus that the high percentage of the respondents' agreed on the post basic training programs in health care and administration regardless the basic qualification for promotion to head nurse position, at least two years of experience in nursing was one of the most required and fully agreed criteria for promotion to head nurse position. According to **Anglada, (2014)** the advancement in health care is depend on training and learning from experience and apply that to practices , which is highly recommended for the nominated staff for promotion.

The respondents' of the current study has major agreement on the personal qualities of the selected staff for promotion to head nurse position as being Diplomatic, to avoid conflicts and not to lose the staff, Coping with change, the respondents' think that to be head nurse its difficult position, a lot of changed frequently happen, the excellent head nurse is the one usually able to cope with changes as perceived by the respondents. Has fair personality as supported by (**Dries et .al 2012**), being role model, the respondents young age usually search for the best role model to imitate the traits, head nurse must set her unit future vision . All this criteria reflects the importance of the personal qualities and its great effect on the decision of promotion. Gopee & Galloway,( 2009) supports all this personal qualities as required for the head nurses personality as a leader of the unit.

Current study reports a high percentage of agreement to all the criteria with almost high mean score to most of the items, they admit the priority of " Familiarity of all the unit data and information, to enhance the ability of leading head nurses have to absorb all the unit details to be reference for all the staff nurses. Ability to plan nurses' schedule, which considered very important to the staff retention and satisfaction, **Stewart et.al (2004)**, conclude that the nurses are more likely to leave hospitals because of dissatisfactory schedule.

Engaging the nurses in the decisions concerning them, The nursing staff expects the head nurses are able to make intelligent decisions when conflicts and problems arise , but involving them in solving the issues and taking the decisions give them more trust **Peter et.al.(2013)** highly recommend staff participation in decision . Understand and deal with staff different cultural and social attributes, nursing staff in Egypt commonly from the rural areas as they are seeking the fast employment and also the high salaries' at young age, so head nurses have to be able to deal with this multiple cultures and social difference.

Set the unit objectives which derived from the hospital objective the respondents' trusting the talented head nurses who able to set the unit objectives specially when they share in setting this objectives, and

Liaison between top management and nurses", respondents' usually feel involved when understand the views of top management and accepts the ideas more easy, small portion of the respondents' disagreed on head nurses participation in researches and evidence based practices, and that may because of the hospital cultures difference which may or may not support the research concepts , Leadership abilities constitute a very important part of the selected staff to be promoted to head nurse position as supported by, (**Mckenna, et. al. 2004**).The administrative qualities also supported as follows, Discover and Reporting all technical malfunctions in the unit and surrounding it, that reflects the high value of being responsible as the head nurses should be the most responsible one for any part of the unit. Enhance performance modification if necessary as feedback and modification of performance help in behavior change and provide path for career development,

The punishment or disciplinary actions got some disagreement of the respondents' and that indicates that some hospitals are affecting the respondents' perception in form

of disrespect the hospital policy and roles if against them. **Hsing-Chu,b.et.al(2006)** confirm earlier finding related to the relation between turnover , job satisfaction, intent to stay and the fairness as being fair enhances the retention of the staff.

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### Recommendations

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**In the light of the findings of the present study, the following are recommended:**

**For the hospitals:**

1. Develop clear job description for the head nurse position.
2. Set and maintain appropriate criteria for promotion to head nurse position such as the years of experience in the unit specialty and the post basic training programs in administration and health care.
3. Assure that criteria for promotion are explained as part of the staff induction / orientation program.
4. Designing clear performance appraisal that assure the objectivity and transparency of promotion process.
5. Engage staff nurses in selection of the promoted staff to head nurse position.

**For nursing Education:**

- Integrate the finding of the current study in the clinical services to clarify the role of head nurses and the qualities required by the position, to prevent the gabs between nursing education and nursing clinical services due to different expectation of the head nurse role.

**For the nursing syndicate and ministry of health:**

- Nursing syndicate has to set standardized criteria for the head nurse position
- Assure all the rules and policies for nursing workforce are supporting the promotion process, and add the criteria based promotion.

**For other researcher:**

- Redesign the questioner and include more or different qualities of the head nurses from other perspectives.
- Repeat the study for different hospitals in Egypt for more comprehensiveness.
- Repeating the study at different intervals to adjust the base head nurse promotion criteria with frequent advancement in nursing and management updates

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