CHAPTER 2

Professional Values In Nursing

2.1 Values

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Introduction to Professional Values Nursing

Professional values in nursing are the foundational beliefs and principles that guide nurses' behaviour, decision-making, and interactions with patients, families, and colleagues. These values shape the identity of the nursing profession and ensure that care is delivered with integrity, compassion, respect, and accountability.

Nursing is not just a skill-based profession; it is deeply rooted in ethical and moral commitments that promote the well-being, dignity, and rights of individuals and communities. Professional values provide a framework for nurses to respond appropriately to complex clinical situations, ethical dilemmas, and diverse patient needs.

The development of professional values begins during nursing education and continues throughout a nurse's career through experience, reflection, and engagement with ethical standards and professional codes of conduct.

2.1 Values

Values are deeply held beliefs and ideals that guide an individual's behaviour and decision-making. They influence personal actions, attitudes, and professional conduct.

Characteristics of Values

Values are deeply held beliefs and principles that influence a person's behaviour, choices, and priorities. In the context of nursing, **professional values** shape how nurses interact with patients, make decisions, and uphold ethical standards in practice. Understanding the characteristics of values is essential for developing self-awareness, ethical competence, and professional integrity.

Below are the **key characteristics** of values:

1. **Relatively Stable and Enduring**
   - Values do not change frequently; they remain consistent over time.
   - Once internalised, they provide a **stable framework** for behaviour and decision-making.
   - While values are enduring, they are not rigid and may be re-evaluated through life experiences.

Example: A nurse who values compassion will consistently show empathy in patient care, even under stress.

2. **Guide Behaviour and Decision-Making**
   - Values serve as an **internal compass** that directs how individuals act in various situations.
   - In nursing, professional values help prioritize patient needs, respect autonomy, and choose ethically appropriate actions.

Example: A nurse guided by the value of integrity will report a medication error honestly, despite potential consequences.

3. **Can Be Personal, Cultural, or Professional**
   - Family, upbringing, religion, and life experiences shape personal values.
   - Cultural values reflect the beliefs and norms of a specific society or group.
   - Professional values are shared within a profession and are often defined by codes of ethics and professional standards.

Example: A nurse may value punctuality personally, while professionally upholding values like accountability and patient advocacy.

4. **Are Learned Through Experiences, Education, and Socialization**
   - Values are not innate; they are developed over time through:
   - Life experiences (e.g., witnessing injustice)
     - Education and training (e.g., nursing school)
     - Role modeling by mentors, peers, and leaders
   - Socialization into the profession reinforces shared values and ethical expectations.

Example: Nursing students internalize professional values through classroom learning, clinical practice, and observing experienced nurses.

5. **May Evolve Over Time**
   - Values are not static; they can change or develop in response to new experiences, personal growth, or shifts in social and professional environments.
   - Reflection and exposure to diverse situations may lead individuals to re-examine or reprioritize their values.

Example: A nurse may develop a stronger value for advocacy after working in underserved communities.

Value Clarification

Value clarification is the process of self-exploration to understand one's own values and how they influence personal and professional decisions. It is a reflective process through which individuals identify, examine, and understand their personal beliefs, principles, and values. It helps people recognise what is truly important to them and how these values influence their attitudes, behaviours, and decision-making. In nursing and other professional fields, value clarification is essential because it promotes ethical practice, personal growth, and professional integrity.

The process of value clarification involves self-exploration, critical thinking, and reflection on experiences. By understanding their own values, individuals can prioritise goals and make decisions consistent with their beliefs. It also helps in recognising differences between personal values and professional responsibilities, thereby reducing bias and improving objectivity in practice.

One of the major benefits of value clarification is its ability to resolve value conflicts. Conflicts may arise when personal beliefs differ from those of patients, colleagues, or organisational policies. Through value clarification, individuals learn to respect diverse perspectives while maintaining professional standards.

Furthermore, value clarification enhances self-awareness, which is a key component of emotional intelligence and ethical decision-making. It enables healthcare professionals to provide patient-centred care, communicate effectively, and respond appropriately to challenging situations. Overall, value clarification supports personal development, strengthens professional relationships, and contributes to ethical and responsible decision-making in both personal and professional life.

Personal and Professional Values

- **Personal values** stem from individual experiences, culture, religion, and family background.
- **Professional values** are adopted during professional education and are based on ethical standards and expectations of the profession.

In nursing, both **personal** and **professional values** play a vital role in shaping behaviour, ethical decision-making, and the quality of patient care. While an individual's upbringing and experiences influence personal values, professional values are guided by the ethical principles and standards of the nursing profession.

A clear understanding and balance between the two helps nurses maintain ethical integrity, patient-centred care, and professional accountability.

1. Personal Values

Definition: Personal values are individual beliefs and principles that guide one's behaviour and choices in life. These values are shaped by personal experiences, family background, religion, culture, and society.

Examples of Personal Values:

- Honesty
- Kindness
- Hard work
- Loyalty
- Faith or spirituality
- Tolerance
- Respect for elders

Influence in Nursing:

- Personal values affect how nurses relate to patients and handle ethical dilemmas.
- For example, a nurse who values empathy may go the extra mile to comfort a distressed patient.
- However, personal values must not conflict with professional responsibilities (e.g., personal beliefs must not interfere with respecting patient autonomy or informed choice).

2. Professional Values

Definition: Professional values are the principles and ethical standards shared by members of a profession. In nursing, these values are taught through education, promoted by professional organisations, and reinforced through practice.

Key Professional Values in Nursing:

- **Altruism** – Selfless concern for the well-being of others
- **Accountability** – Accepting responsibility for one's actions
- **Integrity** – Honesty and consistency in actions
- **Respect for human dignity** – Valuing each person's worth and uniqueness

- **Social justice** – Fair treatment and equal access to care
- **Compassion and care** – Being sensitive to patients' suffering
- **Confidentiality** – Protecting patients' private information

Sources of Professional Values:

- Nursing education and training
- Professional codes of ethics (e.g., **Code of Ethics by NNMC or ICN**)
- Institutional policies
- Mentorship and clinical role models

3. Relationship Between Personal and Professional Values

Aspect	Personal Values	Professional Values
Origin	Family, culture, religion, life experience	Education, nursing ethics, legal standards
Nature	IndivWZidual and subjective	Shared across the profession
Guidance	Personal life decisions	Patient care and professional conduct
May Conflict With	Organizational policies or patient needs	Personal beliefs or preferences

Example of Conflict: A nurse personally opposes certain medical procedures (e.g., abortion) but must still provide nonjudgmental, respectful care to a patient choosing that option.

Resolution: Nurses must reflect on their values and uphold professional ethics and patient rights in practice.

Examples in nursing:

- Personal value: Honesty
- Professional value: Confidentiality, patient advocacy

2.2. Professional Socialization

Professional socialization is the process by which individuals internalize the values, norms, and behaviors of a professional role.

Professional Socialization in Nursing

Professional socialization is the process through which individuals internalize the values, norms, roles, and behaviors expected of a professional within a specific field. In nursing, it is the journey by which nursing students and novice nurses develop a professional identity, adopt ethical standards, and learn the culture and responsibilities of the nursing profession.

Purpose of Professional Socialization:

- To develop a professional identity as a nurse.
- To instill the core values of nursing (e.g., compassion, integrity, accountability).
- To promote ethical and evidence-based practice.
- To prepare individuals to navigate real-world healthcare environments confidently and competently.
- To support lifelong learning and adaptability within a dynamic profession.

Stages of Professional Socialization:

1. **Anticipatory Stage (Pre-entry)**
   - Begins before formal education.
   - Influenced by media, personal experiences, and perceptions of nursing.

2. Formal Stage (Educational Phase)

- Occurs during nursing education.
- Students learn nursing theories, ethics, and professional expectations through curricula, faculty, and clinical experiences.

3. Informal Stage (Clinical and Workplace Learning)

- Involves learning from peers, mentors, and real-life practice situations.
- Students observe and model professional behaviors in clinical settings.

4. Personal Integration Stage

- Values and professional identity become internalized.
- Nurses confidently apply professional standards in independent practice.

Agents of Professional Socialization

Professional development in nursing is shaped by a wide range of influences that extend beyond formal education. It includes acquiring new knowledge, refining clinical skills, adopting professional values, and growing into leadership roles. The following are key internal and external factors that influence a nurse's ongoing professional growth:

1. Nursing Educators and Mentors

Nursing educators play a foundational role in shaping the attitudes, knowledge, and critical thinking skills of nursing students.

- Educators instil professional values, ethical reasoning, and lifelong learning habits.
- Mentors offer personalized guidance, share clinical insights, and model professional behaviour.
- Positive mentorship fosters confidence, accountability, and reflective practice in nurses at all stages of their careers.

2. Clinical Instructors and Preceptors

In the clinical setting, instructors and preceptors provide hands-on training and real-world context for applying theoretical knowledge.

- They demonstrate safe, competent care and supervise clinical procedures, decision-making, and communication.
- Serve as role models in areas such as time management, patient interaction, interdisciplinary collaboration, and problem-solving.
- Constructive feedback from clinical guides supports skill mastery and professional confidence.

3. Peers and Fellow Students

Peer interaction plays an important role in social learning and team-based professionalism.

- Fellow students and colleagues contribute to collaborative learning, emotional support, and constructive competition.
- Working in student groups or clinical teams develops teamwork, conflict resolution, and communication skills.
- Observing peer behavior (positive or negative) also shapes one's ethical awareness and professional identity.

4. Role Models in the Healthcare Team

Nurses are influenced by observing senior healthcare professionals such as staff nurses, doctors, therapists, and administrators.

- Strong role models demonstrate professionalism under pressure, ethical decision-making, and compassionate care.
- Interacting with multidisciplinary team members promotes respect, accountability, and interprofessional collaboration.
- Witnessing leadership and advocacy inspires nurses to grow into advanced or specialized roles.

5. Professional Organizations

Membership in nursing organizations supports continuous learning and connects nurses to resources, leadership, and ethical standards.

- These bodies provide access to conferences, research, certifications, and advocacy platforms.
- Promote networking, mentorship, and career advancement opportunities.
- Help nurses stay aligned with national and international standards of practice.

6. Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice

Professional codes (such as those by ICN, ANA, or NNMC) define the ethical, legal, and professional expectations of nursing.

- Guide behavior in complex clinical situations, ensuring patient rights, confidentiality, and dignity.
- Serve as a reference for ethical dilemmas and decision-making.
- Reinforce a commitment to safe, respectful, and culturally competent care.

7. Institutional Policies and Organizational Culture

The values and structure of a nurse's workplace significantly shape professional behavior and development.

- Hospital policies, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and code of conduct influence clinical decision-making and accountability.
- Supportive environments with ongoing training, teamwork, and open communication foster professional growth.
- Institutions that recognize excellence and provide opportunities for leadership, research, and innovation drive motivation and career satisfaction.

Factors Influencing Professional Socialization:

Positive Influences	Barriers or Challenges
Supportive faculty and mentors	Lack of guidance or role confusion
Clear ethical frameworks	Conflicts between personal and professional values
Opportunities for hands-on learning	Inadequate clinical exposure
Participation in professional organizations	Negative work environments or burnout

Outcomes of Effective Professional Socialization:

Professional socialization is the process through which nursing students and practicing nurses internalize the values, norms, behaviors, and expectations of the nursing profession. It plays a critical role in shaping a nurse's identity, ethics, and clinical competence. When professional socialization is effective, it leads to the development of a well-rounded, confident, and responsible nursing professional. Below are the key outcomes:

1. Strong Professional Identity

- Nurses with a strong professional identity clearly understand their role, responsibilities, and value within the healthcare system.
- They act with pride and purpose, promoting the dignity of the nursing profession.
- This identity fosters a sense of belonging, accountability, and alignment with nursing ethics and values.

2. High Ethical Standards

- Ongoing professional development reinforces the nurse's commitment to moral responsibility and ethical decision-making.
- Nurses learn to respond to ethical dilemmas with integrity, balancing patient autonomy, confidentiality, and justice.
- Ethical awareness ensures safe, respectful, and patient-centered care, especially in complex clinical situations.

3. Effective Clinical Judgment

- Through experience and continued learning, nurses enhance their ability to analyze clinical situations, prioritize care, and make informed decisions.
- Improved judgment results in accurate assessments, timely interventions, and reduced clinical errors.
- This competency is critical in emergencies, complex cases, and high-pressure environments.

4. Improved Communication and Collaboration

- Professional growth enhances a nurse's ability to communicate clearly with patients, families, and healthcare teams.
- Development of interpersonal and therapeutic communication skills improves trust, patient satisfaction, and teamwork.
- Collaborative practice reduces misunderstandings and supports better patient outcomes.

5. Commitment to Lifelong Learning

- A hallmark of professional development is a nurse's desire to continually update their knowledge and skills.
- Nurses engage in continuing education, certifications, research, and reflective practice to stay current with medical advances.
- This mindset prepares them to adapt to new technologies, evolving diseases, and global healthcare changes.

6. Confidence in Assuming Professional Responsibilities

- With education, experience, and mentorship, nurses gain self-assurance in clinical, ethical, and leadership roles.
- They are more prepared to advocate for patients, delegate tasks, supervise junior staff, and participate in policy-making.
- This confidence enhances autonomy, leadership, and the ability to influence positive change in healthcare.

7. Increased Job Satisfaction and Retention

- Nurses who are well-socialized into the profession feel more connected, supported, and valued, leading to higher job satisfaction.
- They are more likely to stay in the profession, reducing burnout and improving retention in the workforce.

8. Greater Professional Accountability

- Nurses learn to take responsibility for their actions, maintain confidentiality, and comply with institutional and legal standards.
- This sense of accountability enhances professional credibility and trustworthiness among patients and peers.

9. Readiness for Leadership and Advanced Roles

- Socialization encourages nurses to engage in lifelong learning, advocacy, and leadership development.

- They are better prepared to take on supervisory roles, participate in policy-making, or pursue advanced practice or academic careers.

Integration of personal and professional values:

- Aligning personal integrity with professional ethics
- Adapting to the ethical expectations of the nursing profession
- Developing professional identity through mentoring, role modeling, and clinical experiences

2.3. Professional Values in Nursing

Professional values in nursing are the fundamental principles, beliefs, and standards that guide nurses' behaviour, decision-making, and interactions with patients, families, colleagues, and society. These values form the foundation of professional nursing practice and help ensure the delivery of safe, ethical, compassionate, and high-quality care. Professional values are developed through education, clinical experience, professional socialization, and adherence to nursing codes of ethics. Key professional values in nursing include caring, compassion, respect, integrity, accountability, altruism, excellence, and social justice.

Professional values guide nurses in resolving ethical dilemmas, maintaining professional relationships, and upholding public trust in the nursing profession. By integrating these values into daily practice, nurses contribute to a positive healthcare environment and ensure the provision of safe, competent, and compassionate care. These values are essential for professional growth and the advancement of nursing as a respected and trusted profession.

Importance of Professional Values in Nursing and Healthcare

1. Ensures Ethical and Quality Care

Professional values provide a moral and ethical framework that guides nurses in delivering safe, effective, and patient-centred care. Values such as integrity, honesty, compassion, and respect help nurses make appropriate decisions, especially in complex clinical situations and ethical dilemmas. By adhering to professional standards and ethical principles, nurses ensure that patient rights, confidentiality, dignity, and autonomy are protected. Professional values also encourage evidence-based practice, continuous learning, and adherence to clinical guidelines, which improve the quality of healthcare services. When nurses consistently apply ethical principles in their practice, patient safety is enhanced, medical errors are reduced, and healthcare outcomes improve. Thus, professional values serve as the foundation for maintaining high standards of nursing care and promoting the well-being of patients.

2. Builds Trust Between Nurse and Patient

Trust is a fundamental component of the nurse-patient relationship. Professional values such as empathy, respect, honesty, and confidentiality help nurses establish strong therapeutic relationships with patients and their families. Patients often share personal, emotional, and sensitive information with nurses, expecting that it will be treated with care and confidentiality. When nurses demonstrate compassion, actively listen to patients, and respect their preferences and beliefs, patients feel valued and understood. This trust encourages patients to communicate openly about their concerns, symptoms, and treatment needs, leading to more accurate assessments and better care planning. A trusting relationship

also improves patient satisfaction, cooperation, treatment adherence, and overall healthcare experiences.

3. Promotes Collaboration and Respect Within the Healthcare Team

Healthcare delivery requires effective teamwork among nurses, physicians, therapists, pharmacists, and other healthcare professionals. Professional values foster mutual respect, cooperation, and open communication within interdisciplinary teams. Nurses who demonstrate professionalism and respect for colleagues contribute to a positive work environment where ideas, knowledge, and responsibilities are shared effectively. Collaboration enhances problem-solving, improves decision-making, and reduces misunderstandings that could compromise patient safety. Respectful professional relationships also minimize workplace conflicts and create an atmosphere of trust and support. As a result, healthcare teams can work more efficiently toward common goals, ultimately improving patient outcomes and organizational performance.

4. Enhances Professional Accountability and Satisfaction

Professional values encourage nurses to take responsibility for their actions, decisions, and professional conduct. Accountability ensures that nurses practice within their scope of competence, follow established standards, and continuously evaluate the quality of care they provide. Nurses who uphold professional values are more committed to lifelong learning, self-improvement, and maintaining competence in their field. This sense of responsibility strengthens professional identity and promotes public confidence in the nursing profession. Furthermore, practicing in accordance with personal and professional values provides a sense of purpose, achievement, and job satisfaction. Nurses who experience professional fulfillment are more motivated, resilient, and committed to delivering high-quality care, which benefits both patients and healthcare organizations.

Core Professional Values in Nursing

1. Caring

Definition: Caring is the essence and foundation of nursing practice. It refers to the provision of compassionate, competent, and patient-centred care that promotes health, comfort, healing, and overall well-being. Caring goes beyond performing clinical tasks; it involves developing meaningful relationships with patients and responding to their physical, emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual needs.

Process of Caring

The caring process includes:

Attention: Nurses carefully observe patients, identify their needs, and respond appropriately. Attention helps in early recognition of health problems and timely intervention.

Empathy: Understanding the patient's feelings, concerns, and experiences from their perspective. Empathy strengthens the therapeutic relationship and promotes emotional support.

Presence: Being physically and emotionally available for patients. Presence demonstrates commitment and provides comfort, especially during times of fear, anxiety, or illness.

Appropriate Interventions: Implementing evidence-based nursing actions to relieve suffering, promote healing, and improve quality of life.

Importance in Nursing

Caring fosters trust, enhances patient satisfaction, promotes healing, and improves healthcare outcomes. It reflects the humanitarian nature of nursing and forms the basis of professional nursing practice.

2. Compassion

Definition: Compassion is the ability to recognise another person's suffering and take action to alleviate it. It is expressed through kindness, concern, understanding, and a genuine desire to help others during times of need.

Expression of Compassion

Compassion is demonstrated by:

- Listening attentively to patients
- Showing kindness and patience
- Providing emotional support
- Offering comfort during pain, illness, or distress
- Respecting patients' feelings and concerns

Sympathy vs. Empathy

Sympathy

Sympathy involves feeling pity or sorrow for another person's difficulties.

Example: Feeling sorry for a patient who has been diagnosed with cancer.

Empathy

Empathy involves understanding and sharing another person's feelings while maintaining professional objectivity.

Example: Understanding the fear and anxiety experienced by a patient with cancer and providing emotional support accordingly.

Altruism

Altruism refers to selfless concern for the welfare of others without expecting recognition or reward. Nurses often demonstrate altruism by placing patients' needs above their own interests and working tirelessly to ensure quality care.

Importance in Nursing

Compassion promotes patient comfort, reduces anxiety, strengthens therapeutic relationships, and contributes to holistic care.

3. Conscientiousness

Definition: Conscientiousness is the commitment to doing what is right, responsibly, and ethically. It involves being diligent, careful, dependable, and attentive to details in all aspects of nursing practice.

Characteristics

- Following policies and procedures
- Maintaining professional standards
- Being punctual and reliable
- Documenting accurately
- Taking responsibility for actions
- Continuously improving knowledge and skills

Importance in Nursing

Conscientious nurses provide safe and high-quality care, minimise errors, and demonstrate accountability. This value contributes significantly to patient safety and professional excellence.

4. Dedication and Devotion to Work

Definition: Dedication and devotion refer to a nurse's commitment and loyalty to the profession, patients, and the healthcare organisation. It involves performing duties with sincerity, enthusiasm, and perseverance, even under difficult circumstances.

Characteristics

- Commitment to patient welfare
- Willingness to work during emergencies
- Consistent professional performance
- Pursuit of lifelong learning
- Positive attitude toward work

Importance in Nursing

Dedicated nurses contribute to better patient outcomes, increased workplace efficiency, and the advancement of the nursing profession. Their commitment inspires confidence among patients and colleagues.

5. Respect for the Person – Human Dignity

Definition: Human dignity refers to the inherent worth and value of every individual. Respect for human dignity requires nurses to treat all patients with courtesy, fairness, and compassion, regardless of age, gender, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, health condition, or personal beliefs.

Principles

- Respecting patient autonomy
- Honouring cultural and religious beliefs
- Providing non-discriminatory care
- Preserving patient dignity during procedures
- Encouraging patient participation in decision-making

Importance in Nursing

Respect for human dignity promotes equality, patient satisfaction, trust, and ethical nursing practice. It ensures that every patient receives compassionate and respectful care.

6. Privacy and Confidentiality

Definition: Privacy refers to an individual's right to control access to personal information, body, and personal space. Confidentiality is the ethical and legal obligation to protect patient information from unauthorised disclosure.

Importance of Privacy and Confidentiality

Nurses must:

- Protect medical records
- Discuss patient information only with authorised individuals
- Maintain confidentiality during communication
- Secure electronic health information
- Follow institutional and legal guidelines

Incidental Disclosure

Incidental disclosure occurs when patient information is unintentionally revealed.

Examples

- Discussing patient information in public areas
- Leaving medical records unattended
- Conversations overheard by visitors

Prevention

- Speak quietly in clinical areas
- Use private spaces for discussions
- Secure patient documents and electronic records
- Follow confidentiality protocols

Importance in Nursing

Maintaining privacy and confidentiality protects patient rights, promotes trust, and fulfils ethical and legal responsibilities.

7. Honesty and Integrity

Definition: Honesty means being truthful, sincere, and transparent in professional interactions. Integrity refers to consistently adhering to ethical principles and professional standards.

Truth-Telling: Nurses must provide accurate and truthful information regarding:

- Diagnosis
- Treatment plans
- Procedures
- Risks and benefits
- Prognosis

Truth-telling should be balanced with sensitivity, compassion, and respect for patient preferences.

Characteristics of Integrity

- Ethical decision-making
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Reliability
- Consistency between words and actions

Importance in Nursing

Honesty and integrity strengthen professional credibility, promote ethical practice, and enhance patient trust and confidence.

8. Trust and Credibility

Definition: Trust is the confidence patients place in nurses to provide competent, ethical, and compassionate care. Credibility is earned through consistent professional behaviour, competence, and honesty.

Fidelity

Fidelity refers to faithfulness to commitments and promises made to patients and the nursing profession.

Examples

- Following through on promised care
- Maintaining confidentiality
- Advocating for patient interests

Loyalty

Loyalty involves commitment and support toward:

- Patients
- Colleagues
- Healthcare institutions
- The nursing profession

However, loyalty should always remain consistent with ethical principles and patient welfare.

Importance in Nursing

Trust and credibility enhance therapeutic relationships, improve patient cooperation, and strengthen public confidence in the nursing profession.

9. Advocacy

Definition: Advocacy is the act of supporting, protecting, and promoting the rights, interests, and well-being of patients and the nursing profession. Nurses serve as advocates whenever they speak or act on behalf of those who may be vulnerable or unable to represent themselves.

Areas of Advocacy

A. Patient Advocacy

- Nurses advocate for patients by:
- Protecting patient rights
- Ensuring informed consent
- Promoting patient autonomy
- Preventing harm and abuse
- Facilitating access to healthcare services

B. Advocacy for the Work Environment

Nurses promote:

- Safe staffing levels
- Healthy workplace conditions
- Respectful communication
- Occupational safety
- Prevention of workplace violence

C. Advocacy for Nursing Education and Practice

Nurses support:

- Evidence-based practice
- Continuing professional development
- Competency enhancement
- High educational standards

D. Advocacy for Advancing the Profession

Nurses contribute through:

- Research activities
- Leadership roles
- Professional organizations
- Health policy development
- Community health initiatives

Importance in Nursing: Advocacy empowers patients, improves healthcare quality, strengthens professional practice, and contributes to positive changes in healthcare systems and policies.

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