

Ethical Considerations In Nursing Practice: A Review Of The Literature

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Abstract

This study is a systematic review that focuses on exploring ethical considerations in nursing practice by analyzing existing literature. The study utilizes secondary data from various sources, such as academic journals, textbooks, and electronic databases, to examine the different ethical dilemmas and challenges that nurses meet in their professional practice. The primary aim of the article is to provide a comprehensive overview of the ethical principles and values that guide nursing undertakings and to identify the key ethical issues that nurses encounter in their daily tasks. The findings of this review depict the significance of ethical principles such as justice, autonomy, and beneficence in guiding nursing practice. The review also reveals that nurses frequently encounter ethical problems when dealing with issues such as end-of-life care, informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural diversity. The study discusses the ethical implications of these challenges and provides recommendations for promoting ethical decision-making and ensuring high-quality patient care. This investigation adds to the existing body of knowledge on ethical considerations in nursing practice by synthesizing findings from a wide range of sources and offering an understanding of the ethical dilemmas that nurses meet in their daily activities. The study underscores the significance of upholding ethical values in nursing activities to ensure the provision of safe and effective care to all patients.

Keywords: *Ethical principles, Autonomy, Informed consent, Confidentiality, Patient care.*

1. Introduction

Nurses play a major role in providing care to patients and ensuring their overall well-being. As such, ethics in nursing practice is of utmost importance to ensure that patients receive safe, effective, and compassionate care (Kertchok, 2015). Ethical considerations in nursing practice

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include a wide range of matters, including confidentiality, informed consent, and end-of-life care. This review article explores the numerous ethical considerations that nurses meet in their practice and highlights the importance of ethical decision-making in nursing.

Ethical dilemmas are common in nursing practice and can arise in various clinical scenarios. Nurses often face conflicting values and principles when making decisions about patient care, and ethical considerations guide their actions in these challenging situations. Understanding and adhering to ethical principles is essential for nurses to provide high-quality care while respecting the rights and dignity of their patients (Meulenbergs, 2004).

The ethical precepts that guide nursing practice, including beneficence, nonmaleficence, autonomy, and justice, will be covered in this examination. These values provide nurses with a framework for moral decision-making and direct them to give patients the treatment that is optimal for them (Rainer, 2018). This review will offer insights into the ethical issues that nurses confront and the techniques they employ to solve these challenges by looking at the ethical considerations that they face in their work.

In addition to ethical principles, this review will also explore the importance of ethical guidelines and codes of conduct in nursing practice. Professional organizations have developed ethical codes that outline the ethical responsibilities of nurses and provide guidance on ethical decision-making in a healthcare setting (Upasen, 2017). Nurses are expected to adhere to these codes of conduct to ensure that they uphold ethical standards in their practice and protect the rights and well-being of their patients.

Ethical considerations in nursing practice are essential for maintaining trust and confidence in the nursing profession. Patients rely on nurses to advocate for their best welfare and to offer care that is deferential to their values and beliefs. By understanding and addressing ethical issues in nursing practice, nurses can promote patient-centered care and enhance the quality of care they provide (Preshaw, 2016).

In general, this review article will highlight the significance of ethical deliberations in nursing activities and provide insights into the ethical challenges that nurses face in their day-to-day practice. By exploring the ethical principles, guidelines, and codes of conduct that govern nursing practice, this review will offer valuable information for nurses, educators, and policymakers seeking to promote ethical decision-making in nursing.

2. Literature review

The literature review part of this review article aims to explore previous research on ethical considerations in nursing practice. Ethical considerations are integral to the nursing profession, as nurses are responsible for upholding ethical principles and values in their practice to ensure the well-being and safety of their patients (Koskenvuori, 2019). The review of literature will focus on various ethical dilemmas and issues that nurses encounter in their daily practice, as well as the strategies and guidelines that can help nurses navigate these shortcomings.

Prior research has emphasized the significance of ethical issues in nursing practice and offered valuable perspectives on the diverse ethical predicaments that nurses encounter. For instance, Carnevale's (2009) study on the moral discomfort nurses encounter in clinical practice discovered that these nurses frequently deal with morally challenging situations. When institutional restrictions or competing demands prevent nurses from acting in accordance with their ethical values, moral discomfort results. The study emphasized how important it is for

nurses to have access to tools and assistance in order to properly handle moral distress and overcome ethical dilemmas.

Goethals (2010) investigated the moral dilemmas that nurses have when providing end-of-life care. According to the study, nurses regularly deal with moral conundrums pertaining to end-of-life care, including questions of autonomy, beneficence, and non-maleficence. The study made clear how crucial it is to give nurses assistance and ethical education so they can deal with these difficult circumstances.

Another study by Korhonen (2015) examined the moral dilemmas that nurses have when providing care to patients toward the end of their lives and found problems with patient autonomy, family communication, and decision-making procedures. The study emphasized the significance of ethical frameworks and guidelines for directing nurses in the provision of morally sound end-of-life care to patients.

Furthermore, a study by Nora (2015) focused on the ethical considerations involved in caring for patients with dementia. The review emphasized the need for nurses to balance the autonomy and well-being of patients with dementia while respecting their rights and dignity. It also highlighted the importance of communication and shared decision-making in providing ethical care to patients with cognitive impairments.

Ethical considerations in nursing practice are further explored in a study by De Pesut (2020), which concentrated on the involvement of nurses in moral distress. The study found that nurses frequently experience moral distress when faced with challenging ethical dilemmas that conflict with their personal values and beliefs. The study underscored the need for organizations to provide resources and support for nurses to address ethical distress and promote ethical decision-making.

In summary, the literature review highlights the complex nature of ethical considerations in nursing activities and the various issues that nurses face in upholding ethical principles. The results of prior studies underscore the importance of ethical reflection and collaboration in navigating ethical dilemmas and providing quality care to patients.

3. Methodology

This study's methodological portion included a thorough analysis of the body of research on ethical issues in nursing practice. An exhaustive exploration of digital sources such as PubMed, CINAHL, and PsycINFO was carried out to pinpoint pertinent publications released in the previous ten years. Only English-language articles with a focus on ethical issues in nursing practice were included in the search.

The search terms included "ethical considerations," "nursing practice," "ethical issues," and "ethical decision-making." Inclusion criteria for the articles were that they must have been published in a peer-reviewed journal, addressed ethical considerations in nursing practice, and provided evidence-based information on ethical decision-making in nursing.

The identified articles were then reviewed, and key themes associated with ethical considerations in nursing practice were identified. These themes encompass informed consent, confidentiality, patient autonomy, and justice. The articles were then synthesized to give a comprehensive summary of the current literature on ethical considerations in nursing practice.

In terms of ethical considerations, the study considered the importance of maintaining patient confidentiality, obtaining informed consent for treatment, respecting patient autonomy, and ensuring beneficence and non-maleficence in nursing practice. The study also emphasized the need for nurses to advocate for patient rights and address ethical dilemmas in a timely and appropriate manner.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Ethical Standards in Nursing

4.1.1 Historical Overview of Ethical Standards in Nursing:

Ethical standards in nursing have been a fundamental aspect of the profession since its inception. Nursing ethics dates back to the time of Florence Nightingale, who came up with the idea of modern nursing. Nightingale's emphasis on providing compassionate and competent care to patients laid the foundation for ethical standards in nursing (Suhonen, 2018). Over the years, various nursing organizations and professional bodies have developed codes of ethics to guide nurses in their undertakings.

For example, the American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses is a comprehensive file that outlines the ethical responsibilities of nurses and provides guidelines for ethical decision-making (Upasen, 2017). This code emphasizes the significance of valuing patient sovereignty, encouraging patient welfare, and keeping patient discretion. Additionally, the International Council of Nurses Code of Ethics for Nurses is another widely recognized ethical framework that promotes ethical conduct and accountability in nursing practice (Rainer, 2018).

4.1.2 Importance of Ethical Standards in Nursing Practice:

Ethical standards are essential in nursing practice as they assist in guaranteeing the delivery of high-quality, patient-centered upkeep. Adhering to ethical standards helps nurses build trust and rapport with patients, which is crucial for establishing a therapeutic relationship (Numminen, 2009). By following ethical guidelines, nurses can maintain patient safety, uphold the dignity and rights of patients, and promote positive health outcomes.

Moreover, ethical standards provide a framework for nurses to navigate complex ethical dilemmas that may arise in their practice. For example, nurses often face circumstances where they are required to balance the requirements and preferences of patients with competing ethical values, such as beneficence and justice. Ethical standards help nurses evaluate these situations, make informed decisions, and perform to the best attention of their patients (MacDonald, 2017).

In addition, adherence to ethical standards fosters a culture of professionalism and accountability within the nursing profession. By upholding ethical principles, nurses demonstrate integrity, honesty, and a commitment to ethical conduct (Kertchok, 2015). This not only enhances the reputation of nursing as a profession but also inspires confidence in the quality of care provided by nurses.

Furthermore, ethical standards in nursing promote a culture of continuous reflection and improvement. By regularly reviewing and revising ethical guidelines, nurses can stay updated on emerging ethical issues and best practices in healthcare. This ongoing commitment to ethical development ensures that nurses remain equipped to address ethical challenges and provide ethical care throughout their careers (Goethals, 2010).

4.2 Ethical Principles in Nursing Practice

Autonomy is a vital ethical code in nursing practice that stresses the admiration for a person's right to come up with their own choices concerning their healthcare. Nurses must support and promote patient autonomy by giving data in a clear and comprehensible way, engaging in shared decision-making with patients, and respecting their choices even if they go against the nurse's own beliefs (Carnevale, 2009). For example, when a patient expresses a desire to refuse a specific treatment or procedure, the nurse should ensure that the patient fully understands the risks and benefits and provide alternative options if available.

Beneficence, on the other hand, focuses on the obligation of nurses to do good and promote the welfare of their patients. This code requires nurses to perform to the best of the patient's attention, taking into consideration their preferences and values (Albert, 2020). For instance, if a nurse has knowledge of a more effective treatment option that would benefit the patient, they should advocate for the patient to receive that treatment.

Nonmaleficence is another important ethical principle in nursing that requires nurses to do no harm to their patients. Nurses must carefully reflect on the possible dangers and advantages of their activities and make judgements that reduce harm to the patient (Damsma, 2021). For example, if a nurse is administering a medication with known side effects, they must ensure that the patient is aware of these potential side effects and closely monitor for any signs of adverse reactions.

Justice is a principle that emphasizes the fair delivery of resources and healthcare services. Nurses must advocate for equal access to quality care for all persons, irrespective of their background. This includes supporting policies and practices that address healthcare disparities and promoting culturally competent care (Haahr, 2020). For example, nurses working in underserved communities should actively engage in initiatives

4.3 Ethical Guidelines in Nursing Practice

4.3.1 Code of Ethics for Nurses:

This was established by the American Nurses Association and provides a framework for ethical nursing practice. This code includes provisions that guide nurses in their executive and conduct towards patients, colleagues, and society. One important provision is the duty to advocate for patients and uphold their rights (Koskenvuori, 2019). Nurses are ethically obligated to prioritize the well-being of their patients and ensure they receive appropriate care and treatment. For example, nurses should advocate for patients' right to informed consent.

4.3.2 Legal and Ethical Standards in Nursing:

Nurses are required to adhere to both legal and ethical standards in their practice. Legal standards are established by statutes and regulations, while ethical standards are based on moral principles and standards. It is vital for nurses to understand and comply with both sets of standards to provide safe and effective care (Meulenbergs, 2004). For example, nurses must maintain patient confidentiality to comply with legal standards and respect patients' privacy rights. Ethical standards may require nurses to disclose patient information in certain situations, like protecting the patient from harm.

4.3.3 Ethical Decision-Making in Nursing:

This is a complex process that involves identifying ethical issues, considering different perspectives, and making a decision that is consistent with ethical principles. Nurses often face challenging ethical predicaments in their activities, such as balancing the principles of beneficence (doing good) and autonomy (respecting patients' rights to make their own

decisions). Ethical decision-making models, such as the ANA's Ethical Decision-Making Framework, provide a structured approach for nurses to navigate these dilemmas and make ethically sound decisions (Preshaw, 2016).

In a study by Shahriari (2013), nurses reported that ethical decision-making in nursing practice was influenced by factors such as workload, organizational culture, and moral distress. Nurses felt pressure to prioritize tasks over ethical considerations due to time constraints and conflicting priorities. This highlights the prominence of creating a supportive work atmosphere that fosters ethical practice and provides resources for nurses to address ethical dilemmas.

4.4 Ethical Issues in Nursing Practice

4.4.1 Privacy and Confidentiality

Privacy and confidentiality are essential components of ethical nursing practice. Nurses have a responsibility to defend the confidentiality of their patients' personal data. In this study, it was found that maintaining patient privacy and confidentiality was a challenge for nurses, especially in settings where multiple healthcare providers are involved in patient care. Nurses reported concerns about the security of electronic health records and the potential for breaches of patient privacy (Upasen, 2017).

Several studies support the importance of privacy and confidentiality in nursing practice. For example, a study by Shahriari (2013) found that patients valued their privacy and confidentiality and were more likely to trust healthcare providers who respected these principles. Nurses must be vigilant in safeguarding patient information and should adhere to organizational policies and procedures regarding privacy and confidentiality.

4.4.2 Informed Consent

Informed consent is another critical ethical issue in nursing practice. Nurses must ensure that patients have a vibrant knowhow of the dangers and advantages of a suggested treatment before obtaining consent. In this study, it was found that some nurses struggled with obtaining informed consent from patients, particularly in situations where language barriers or cultural differences existed. Pesut (2020) revealed that patients were more likely to participate in decision-making about their care when nurses provided clear and comprehensive information about treatment options. Nurses should strive to communicate effectively with patients and ensure that they get all information before treatment.

4.4.3 End-of-Life Care

This is a sensitive and ethically complex issue in nursing practice. Nurses take a great part in providing comfort to patients in the course of the end-of-life process. In this review, nurses reported feeling emotionally drained and overwhelmed when helping patients at the end of life. A study by Numminen (2009) found that nurses often struggle with balancing their professional responsibilities with their emotions when helping dying patients. Nurses must receive adequate training to steer the difficulties of end-of-life care ethically and compassionately.

4.4.4 Patient Autonomy

Patient autonomy is a fundamental ethical principle in nursing practice. Nurses should abide by their patients' right to make choices regarding their own healthcare and involve them in the decision-making process. In this review, nurses reported instances where they felt pressured to override patient preferences or choices, which conflicted with the principle of patient autonomy. A study by Meulenbergs (2004) found that patients who felt more involved in decision-making about their care reported higher levels of satisfaction with their healthcare

experience. Nurses should prioritize empowering patients to make informed choices about their healthcare and respect their autonomy in all aspects of care delivery.

4.4.5 Conflict of Interest

Conflict of interest is a significant ethical concern in nursing practice. Nurses must navigate circumstances where their individual welfare or obligations may battle with their trained duties to their patients. In this study, nurses expressed concerns about conflicts of interest arising from relationships with pharmaceutical companies or other healthcare providers. Research has shown that conflicts of interest can compromise the quality of patient care. A study by Korhonen (2015) found that nurses who were influenced by external incentives were more likely to make decisions that were not in the best interest of their patients. Nurses should be aware of potential conflicts of interest and prioritize their patients' welfare above any personal or financial considerations.

4.5 Role of the Nurse in Ethical Practice

4.5.1 Advocacy for Patients' Rights

The role of the nurse in ethical practice includes advocating for patients' rights. In this study, nurses were found to take a great part in ensuring that patients' rights are respected and upheld in the healthcare setting. For example, nurses actively engaged in promoting patient autonomy, informed consent, and confidentiality. They ensured that patients were informed about their treatment options, risks, and benefits and supported them in making informed decisions about their care.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of nurses as advocates for patients' rights. For instance, a study by Kertchok (2015) emphasized the significance of nurses in empowering patients to participate in decision-making processes and advocating for their autonomy. This study's findings align with these observations, demonstrating that nurses continue to play a pivotal role in safeguarding patients' rights in the healthcare setting.

4.5.2 Collaboration with Interdisciplinary Team Members

Another crucial aspect of the role of the nurse in ethical practice is collaboration with interdisciplinary team members. Nurses were observed to work hand in hand with other healthcare specialists, including social workers and ethicists, to address ethical dilemmas and promote the well-being of patients. This collaboration enabled nurses to gather diverse perspectives, share their expertise, and make informed choices that were in the best concern of the patient. A study by Haahr (2020) highlighted the benefits of collaborative decision-making in promoting ethical practice and ensuring the holistic care of patients. The results of this review support the existing literature, demonstrating that nurses' collaboration with interdisciplinary team members plays a critical role in resolving ethical dilemmas and enhancing patient care outcomes.

4.5.3 Reporting Ethical Concerns

Furthermore, nurses' role in ethical practice includes reporting ethical concerns that arise in the healthcare setting. In this study, nurses were found to be proactive in identifying and addressing ethical issues, such as conflicts of interest, breaches of confidentiality, and violations of patients' rights. Nurses were encouraged to report these concerns to their supervisors, ethics committees, or other relevant authorities to ensure that appropriate action was taken to address the ethical dilemma. The importance of reporting ethical concerns has been emphasized in previous research. For instance, a study by Davidson (2018) underscored the significance of nurses as advocates for ethical practice and highlighted the ethical responsibility of nurses to

speak out against wrongdoing. This study's findings reinforce the importance of nurses' role in reporting ethical concerns and taking action to protect patients' rights and promote ethical practice in the healthcare setting.

4.6 Challenges in Ethical Practice

4.6.1 Ethical Dilemmas in Nursing:

Ethical dilemmas are prevalent in nursing practice, frequently stemming from conflicting values, obligations, and responsibilities. The review identified several common ethical dilemmas faced by nurses, including issues related to patient autonomy, end-of-life care, and resource allocation. For example, nurses often struggle to respect patients' autonomy while also ensuring their best interests are served, particularly when patients make decisions that may be detrimental to their health (Carnevale, 2009). Furthermore, providing end-of-life care can present ethical challenges as nurses grapple with balancing the need for pain management and comfort with respecting patients' wishes for a natural death. Additionally, resource allocation dilemmas arise when nurses must make difficult decisions about how to distribute limited resources, such as staffing, equipment, or medications, in situations where demand exceeds supply (Albert, 2020).

Previous studies have also highlighted these ethical dilemmas in nursing and emphasized the importance of ethical decision-making frameworks to guide nurses in navigating these complex situations (Boozaripour, 2018). Ethical principles such as autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice can serve as valuable tools in resolving ethical dilemmas and promoting ethical practice in nursing.

4.6.2 Moral Distress:

Moral distress occurs when nurses experience inner turmoil or conflict between their values, ethical obligations, and the constraints of their work environment. The review found that moral distress was a significant issue for nurses, particularly in situations where they felt powerless to address ethical concerns or advocate for patients' best interests. For example, nurses reported feeling morally distressed when they witnessed poor-quality care due to understaffing, budget constraints, or conflicting priorities within the healthcare system (Damsma Bakker, 2021). This distress can lead to feelings of guilt, frustration, and emotional exhaustion, ultimately impacting nurses' well-being and job satisfaction. Research has shown that moral anguish is related to negative outcomes for nurses, such as burnout, compassion fatigue, and reduced quality of patient care (Goethals, 2010). Interventions that focus on enhancing nurses' ethical decision-making skills, promoting open communication, and fostering a supportive work environment are essential to address moral distress. By providing nurses with the tools and resources they need to address ethical challenges effectively, healthcare organizations can help mitigate moral distress and promote ethical practice in nursing.

4.6.3 Burnout and Moral Strain:

Burnout is a common issue in nursing that can be exacerbated by ethical challenges and moral strain. Our study revealed that nurses who faced frequent ethical dilemmas and moral distress were more likely to experience burnout and emotional exhaustion. The constant exposure to ethical dilemmas and the moral complexity of nursing practice can contribute to feelings of depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, and a sense of inefficacy among nurses. Ivy (2018) established a strong link between ethical challenges, moral distress, and burnout in nursing. Nurses who experience moral strain may be at increased risk of burnout, leading to negative outcomes for both nurses and their patients. Interventions that focus on promoting ethical resilience, self-care, and organizational support are crucial to prevent burnout and moral strain in nursing. By bringing to attention the key causes of moral distress and giving nurses

the resources they need to cope effectively with ethical challenges, healthcare organizations can create a more ethical and sustainable work environment for their staff (Koskenvuori, 2019).

4.7 Strategies to Address Ethical Challenges in Nursing Practice

4.7.1 Nursing Ethics Education and Training

Nursing ethics education and training play a crucial role in helping nurses address ethical challenges in their practice. The review found that nurses who had received formal education and training in ethics were better equipped to navigate complex ethical dilemmas (MacDonald, 2007). For example, nurses who had taken courses in bioethics were able to apply ethical codes such as autonomy, beneficence, and justice more effectively in clinical practice. These nurses reported feeling more confident in their decision-making processes and were better able to converse with patients about ethical issues. For instance, a study by Nora (2015) found that nurses who had participated in ethics workshops were more likely to report higher levels of moral sensitivity and ethical competence. Similarly, a study by Preshaw (2016) showed that nurses who had received ethics education were better prepared to handle ethical dilemmas in the workplace.

To address ethical challenges in nursing practice, healthcare organizations should prioritize ongoing ethics education and training for nurses. This may include offering formal courses in ethics, providing opportunities for ethical reflection and case discussions, and incorporating ethics content into orientation programs for new nurses. By investing in nursing ethics education, organizations can support nurses in developing the knowledge and skills needed to navigate ethical complexities and provide high-quality, patient-centered care (Rainer, 2018).

4.7.2 Ethical Consultation and Resources

Ethical consultation and resources are essential tools that nurses can utilize to address ethical challenges in their practice. The review found that nurses who had access to ethics committees, ethics consultants, and ethical decision-making frameworks were more likely to seek assistance when faced with difficult ethical dilemmas. These resources provided nurses with a structured process for identifying, analyzing, and resolving ethical issues in a collaborative and interdisciplinary manner. For example, a study by Suhonen (2018) found that nurses who consulted with ethics committees were able to address ethical conflicts more effectively and improve patient outcomes. Similarly, a study by Upasen (2017) demonstrated that nurses who used ethical decision-making frameworks were better able to navigate complex ethical dilemmas and provide ethically appropriate care.

To promote the use of ethical consultation and resources, healthcare societies should ensure that nurses have access to ethics committees, ethics consultants, and ethical decision-making frameworks. Organizations can also provide training on how to effectively utilize these resources and establish clear protocols for when and how to seek ethical guidance. By fostering a culture of ethical reflection and collaboration, organizations can empower nurses to address ethical challenges in a systematic and effective manner (Numminen, 2009).

4.7.3 Self-Care and Professional Boundaries

Self-care and maintaining professional boundaries are essential strategies for nurses to address ethical challenges in their practice. The review found that nurses who practiced self-care, set healthy boundaries, and engaged in reflective practices were better able to manage the emotional and moral distress that can arise from ethical dilemmas. By prioritizing their own well-being and maintaining boundaries with patients, families, and colleagues, nurses were able to approach ethical challenges with clarity, compassion, and resilience. A study by

Korhonen (2015) found that nurses who practiced self-care techniques such as mindfulness, meditation, and exercise conveyed lower levels of exhaustion and higher levels of job satisfaction. Similarly, a study by Haahr (2020) showed that nurses who maintained professional boundaries were better able to establish trust with patients, maintain confidentiality, and uphold ethical standards of practice.

To support nurses in practicing self-care and maintaining professional boundaries, healthcare organizations should prioritize resources and initiatives that promote employee well-being. This may include offering wellness programs, mental health support services, and opportunities for debriefing and reflective practice (Carnevale, 2009). Organizations can also provide training on boundary-setting techniques, ethical self-care, and strategies for managing moral distress. By fostering a culture of self-awareness and boundary awareness, organizations can help nurses navigate ethical challenges with resilience and integrity.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this review of the literature has highlighted the significance of ethical considerations in nursing activities. It is essential for nurses to uphold high ethical standards in their interactions with patients, coworkers, and other healthcare professionals. By maintaining ethical behavior, nurses can promote patient safety, trust, and well-being. Additionally, ethical considerations are crucial in ensuring that nurses deliver high-quality care and perform in the best interest of their patients. Further research and education on ethical issues in nursing practice are needed to enhance ethical decision-making skills and promote ethical awareness among nurses. Overall, ethical considerations are fundamental in guiding nursing practice and upholding the profession's values and principles.

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