



REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

REGULATORY DOCUMENT  
ON THE RECERTIFICATION OF HEALTH  
PROFESSIONALS



NATIONAL CENTER OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I	INTRODUCTION .....	5
A –	The purpose of the document .....	6
B –	Basic concepts .....	6
C –	Principles and standards .....	7
II	RECERTIFICATION PROGRAM .....	9
A –	Objectives of the Recertification Program .....	9
B –	Organization of the Recertification Programs .....	9
C –	Criteria of the Recertification Program .....	10
III	CONTINUING EDUCATION ACTIVITIES AND CREDITS .....	12
IV	PROFESSIONALS INCLUDED IN THE RECERTIFICATION PROGRAM .....	15
V	RECERTIFICATION PROGRAM PROCEDURES .....	16
A –	Registration of professionals in the recertification program .....	16
B –	Credit recognition and registration .....	16
C –	Recertification of professionals .....	19
VI	ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES .....	21
A –	National Board of Recertification and Accreditation .....	21
B –	National Center for Continuing Education .....	23
C –	Institute of Health Insurance .....	24
D –	National Center of Quality, Safety and Accreditation of Health Institutions .....	24
E –	Health Institutions .....	25
F –	Professionals included in the recertification program .....	25



## I – INTRODUCTION

The improvement of quality of health care services is closely related to the development of human resources in health sector, which represents one of the most central challenges of the reform on health sector in Albania. In this context, the development and implementation of a continuing education system for health professionals is of vital importance. Through this system the professionals will enhance their performance which will improve the healthcare services for the community.

The article 33 of the new “Health Care Law of the Republic of Albania”<sup>1</sup> is dedicated to the responsibility of health professionals and health care institutions to commit to the process of continuing professional education.

### Article 33

#### **Continuing professional education**

1. The Ministry of Health generates mandatory programs for continuing professional development.
2. Health care professionals must subject themselves to updated continuing professional education in order to enhance their professional knowledge and skills, with the view to increasing the quality of health care.
3. Employment, privileges or contracts with the health institutions shall cease to be in effect if the professional staff will not subject himself/herself to continuing education process established by the Ministry of Health.
4. Health care institutions shall be subjected to the respective sanctions if they elect to hire experts/specialists who do not meet the requirements stipulated by this Article.
5. Health care institutions facilitate continuing professional education of the health professionals.

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<sup>1</sup> Law on Health Care in the Republic of Albania, No. 10 107, of 30.03.2009.

In May 2008, the Ministry of Health established the National Center of Continuing Education (NCCE), based on the Council of Ministers decision nr. 825 on 14.05.2008<sup>2</sup>. Based on this decision, the NCCE will serve as a technical agency of the Ministry of Health for the establishment of the certification process for health professionals.

For the development and implementation of the procedures, criteria and standards related to the recertification process of health professionals, the NCCE should collaborate with other important actors in the field, such as professional's orders and associations, faculties of medicine and nursing, in order to ensure an inclusive representation of all the stakeholders in the process.

## **A – Purpose of the document**

The purpose of this document is to provide a regulatory framework for the establishment of the recertification system and the implementation of the recertification program for health professionals, based on their initial certification which gives them the right to practice their profession, according to the legislation in force.

The procedures, criteria and standards specified in this document refer to the recertification system of physicians, dentists and pharmacists that practice their profession in the Republic of Albania.

## **B – Basic concepts**

*Continuing education for health professionals* is the process through which health professionals update their knowledge and skills in order to meet the needs of patients, health services, and their professional development. The terminology acknowledges the multi disciplinary context of care for the patient which, in addition to medical knowledge and skills, includes managerial, social and personal skills.

*Continuing education activities* refer to the whole range of activities which are meant to fulfill the needs of health professionals in order to meet their professional

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<sup>1</sup> Establishment and operation of this center is supported by the Bilateral Project for Cooperation and Development between the Government of Swiss Confederation and the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania.

responsibilities and obligations. Some forms of continuing education include: Training (from one day to three months range); Conference; Seminars; Workshops; Lectures, Case discussions; Distance learning activities; Research activities.

*Recertification* is the official document certifying that the professional has earned the obligatory number of credits for a given cycle.

*Recertification Program* is the system based on periodic cycles, during which the professionals should gather a certain number of credits of continuing education activities, based on the pre-determined procedures, criteria and standards.

*Accreditation* refers to the process of approval of continuing education activities by the accrediting institution based on the pre-determined procedures, standards, and criteria.

*Accrediting institution* evaluates continuing education activities and assures they meet the approved standards and criteria and determines the number of credits for participants (professionals of the health sector)

*Providers of continuing education activities* include all academic and non-academic institutions, for profit and non-profit, which have the expertise and experience in organizing continuing education activities in health field, based on the criteria determined by the accrediting institution.

*Professionals involved in the Recertification Program* are all the physicians, dentists and pharmacists, Albanian or foreign citizens, that practice in the Republic of Albania based on the legislation in force in all the public or private institutions of primary, secondary and tertiary health care services, as well as the health-related academic institutions.

\* In the future, the recertification program will include nurses as well as other categories of professionals in the health sector.

## **C – Principals and standards**

Continuing education is based on the involvement of the professional in choosing and being active in his professional development process. The system of recertification aims to encourage and facilitate health professionals in fulfilling their needs for continuing education based on the following principles:

*Principle 1.* Professionals are encouraged to design individual continuing professional development plans based on their scope of practice, identified professional needs and competencies. It is important for the professional to invest time in

order to ensure the maintenance of the level of expertise in his/her practice.

*Principle 2.* The professional chooses activities that are based on the needs perceived by him/her, as well as on those that have been identified by other.

*Principle 3.* Continuing education activities must be relevant to the professional's specialty and responsibilities he/she has for the position he/she is holding.

*Principle 4.* Professionals should be committed to maintain the professionalism required during their practice and the services they offer.

*Principle 5.* Professionals are responsible for choosing appropriate learning methods or resources and evaluating the learning outcomes for their practice.

*Principle 6.* Professionals are encouraged to integrate their learning within inter-professional health care teams, groups or communities.

*Principle 7.* Health structures and institutions should create possibilities and the appropriate conditions so that professionals can attend continuing education activities.



## **II – RECERTIFICATION PROGRAM**

### **A - Objectives of the Recertification Program**

The recertification program was created to support, consolidate and promote continuing professional development for health workers. This program has two main objectives:

- To motivate health workers to follow continuing education activities in order to fulfill their personal needs, in support of best professional practices and highest quality services towards patients; and
- To document and record the number of credits earned from continuing education activities in support of recertification of workers. In the future, the recertification program could be integrated in the process of re-licensing the health workers.

### **B – Organization of Recertification Program**

The recertification program is organized in 5-year cycles. The first cycle begins in January 2010 and ends in December 2014. The requirements during the first cycle of the recertification program are reduced due to challenges related to the implementation of this program in a national scale. The main challenges include:

- The large number of health professionals included in this process
- The small number of continuing education activities that are offered for health professionals in Albania; and
- The limited experience and capacities of the Ministry of Health and other actors in implementing a program as such.

During the first cycle of the program, the professionals included in it should earn not less than 150 credits in five years, according to criteria and procedures specified in this document. In the succeeding cycles, the professional will be obligated to earn 250 credits per cycle.

## **C – Criteria of the Recertification Program**

The professionals registered in the recertification program are obligated to earn not less than 150 credits during the first 5-year cycle of the recertification program. Considering the challenges mentioned above, the number of recommended and obligatory credits for each calendar year of the first cycle is different.

Depending on their individual plans, the professionals included in the program should earn not less than 50% of the recommended credits for each calendar year, on condition that at the end of the first cycle the professional has earned a total of 150 credits (See table below):

First Cycle of Recertification Program	Recommended number of credits	Obligatory minimum number of credits
Year 2010	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>
Year 2011	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>
Year 2012	<b>30</b>	<b>15</b>
Year 2013	<b>40</b>	<b>20</b>
Year 2014	<b>50</b>	<b>25</b>

Professionals who chose to earn only the minimum required number of credits for one or more calendar years of the cycle should fulfill the required number of 150 credits for the entire cycle. In the same way, professionals who earn more credits than recommended for one or more calendar years of the cycle are able to transfer the extra credits to the following years of that cycle.

Professionals that do not earn the obligatory number of credits for each calendar year, or the total number of 150 credits for the 5-year cycle are in violation of the recertification program requirements based on continuing education activities, and will be subject to sanctions foreseen in chapter V-C of this document.

In the second and following cycles of the recertification program, the required

number of credits is 250. The recommended number of credits is 50 per year and the minimum obligatory number of credits is 30 per year. Professionals are allowed to transfer credits from one calendar year to the other, provided that they earn the minimum obligatory number of credits for each year and the total number of 250 credits in 5 years.

### ***Continuing education credits***

The number of continuing education credits required for every professional registered in the Recertification Program according to the categories of activities presented in chapter III, is the following:

- Credits earned from continuing education activities on subjects directly linked to the specialty of the professional should be not less than 50% of the total number of credits required for the professional for each calendar year and/or for each 5-year cycle.
- Credits earned from self-reported activities could constitute up to 20% of the total number of credits reported from the professional for each calendar year and/or for each 5-year cycle.
- The professional is free to decide how to earn the remaining number of credits based on his/her professional needs.

### III - CONTINUING EDUCATION ACTIVITIES AND CREDITS

Professionals can attend and obtain credits from a wide range of continuing education activities aimed at their professional development. In the context of the recertification program, the professional can plan and chose to attend:

- continuing education activities that are directly linked to his/her specialty
- other health related continuing education activities not necessarily pertaining to his/her specialty

The recertification program divides continuing education activities into two main categories:

#### 1. Continuing education activities accredited in advance, such as:

*Training* - Is an individual or group activity (20-25 people), mainly oriented towards professional practice, that combines lectures and other pedagogical techniques. The aim of training is for its participants to gain the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies in order to enhance their performance and practice. Training can be of different lengths, varying from 1-3 days to few weeks.

*Conference* - Refers to an activity lasting from 1 to 3 days on a given subject, usually organized by professional associations where experts of the field present lectures or new studies. The conference is organized in plenary and/or parallel sessions or workshops. The aim of a conference is to inform the audience on the latest scientific and technological innovations related to a particular field.

*Seminar* - Refers to an educational activity with a small number of participants (10-15) who learn through actively participating. During a seminar the participants discuss articles, present studies and informally debate among each other.

*Workshop* - Refers to an activity involving a small number of participants who discuss or try new techniques or manipulations with the help of an expert/ trainer. The goal is for the participants to learn by doing, to make mistakes and correct them by themselves or with the help of others.

*Focus group* - Is an assembly of 6-15 professionals who are guided by a facilitator and whose opinions are requested about a specific topic.

*Distance learning activities* - Refers to educational activities offered to students who wish to learn without being present physically or in real time. Depending on the technology used, the activity could be in synchrony or not. The first type refers to real time communication through a telephone, video conference or web-conference. In the second type, the student uses written materials, tapes, audiotapes, and email at their own time.

*University or post-university programs* (i.e. qualification courses) - Are programs offered by academic institutions, in or out the country.

In order that professionals included in the recertification program earn credits from the above mentioned activities, these activities should be accredited in advance by the accreditation bodies.

Calculation of credits for these activities will be done according to the criteria one hour – one credit point. Professionals who participate in these activities as lecturers or trainers earn credits calculated based on the 1 hour – 1.5 credit points criteria.

## **2. Post-accredited continuing education activities**

This category of activities includes: a) individual activities whose credits are calculated by the accreditation institution (research/publications) and b) individual activities whose credits are calculated by the professional himself (self-reported activities)

**2a. Research/publications** refer to the involvement of the professional in research that results in writing professional articles, books, and educational curriculums. In order to earn credits for such activities, the professional can apply to the accreditation institution (See chapter V-B). The calculation of credits for this category of activities is shown in the following table:

Type of activity	Number of credits
Publishing articles in a scientific magazine	Up to <b>20*</b>
Writing one chapter in a book	Up to <b>20*</b>
Publishing a book	Up to <b>50*</b>
Undergraduate and Graduate Curricula	Up to <b>30*</b>

**2b.** *Self-reported activities* include any form of self-learning such as: study of materials, articles, participation in web-conferences, watching videos related to the professional's field of work or study tours in other institutions or countries.

Activities included in this category cannot be documented; consequently the professional who wishes to earn credits for such activities needs to report to the accreditation institution. The calculation of credits for this category of activities is shown in the following table:

Type of activity	Number of credits
Reading an article in a scientific magazine	<b>0.5</b>
Reading a scientific book	<b>3</b>
Study tour	Up to <b>5*</b>
Participation in research activities	Up to <b>5*</b>

Activities mentioned in b.1 and b.2 can be on a specific topic related to the professional's specialty or on a general health topic.

\* Calculation of credits for the above mentioned category is done based on criteria and standards developed by the accrediting body, such as: number of co-authors, number of pages, duration in hours or work days etc.

#### **IV - PROFESSIONALS INCLUDED IN THE RECERTIFICATION PROGRAM**

All physicians, dentists and pharmacists, Albanian or foreign citizens, who practice their profession in the Republic of Albania, according to the legislation in force, in the public or private institutions of primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare and academic institutions will be automatically registered in the recertification program.

Physicians, dentists and pharmacists who will begin to practice their profession after the first cycle has already started (January 2010), should meet the requirements of the recertification program from January 1<sup>st</sup> of the following calendar year and gather the necessary credits for the phase in which the recertification program is. (e.g. professionals who start practicing their profession in 2012, will have to earn 40 credits in 2013, and 50 credits in 2014.

Physicians, dentists and pharmacists who during a calendar year of the cycle of the program stop working for a period of 4 months or longer, are excluded from the program requirements of that year.

Physicians, dentists and pharmacists who are retired and do not practice their profession are excluded from the recertification program.

Physicians, dentists and pharmacists who work part-time have the same program requirements as those who work full time.

\* In the future, nurses and other categories of health professionals will also be included in the recertification program.

## **V- PROCEDURES OF RECERTIFICATION PROGRAM**

### **A – Registration of professionals in the recertification program**

All physicians, dentists and pharmacists, Albanian or foreign citizens, who practice their profession in the Republic of Albania, according to the legislation in force in the public or private institutions of primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare and academic institutions will be automatically registered in the recertification program.

All professionals included in the recertification program will be registered in an electronic register and have a personal e-file. Each personal e-file will contain information about participation in continuing education activities and credits earned from each activity. The national register will be created and administered by the National Center of Continuing Education.(NCCE).

All physicians, dentists and pharmacists who practice their profession after January 2010 are responsible to register in the national register in order to be included in the recertification program.

### **B - Credit recognition and registration**

The recognition and registration of credits is done by the National Center of Continuing Education. The NCCE records the credits earned by each professional in their personal e-file.

The procedures of credit recognition and registration vary based on the type of continuing education activity attended by the professional.



## **1. Continuing education activities accredited in advance**

**1a.** Registration of credits from continuing education activities accredited in advance by NCCE

When a professional included in the recertification program participates in a pre-accredited continuing education activity, it is the responsibility of the provider of the activity to report the credits earned by each professional by sending the participation list to the accrediting body (according to procedures specified in the Regulatory Document on Accreditation of Continuing Education Activities for health workers). The credits, then, are automatically registered in each participant personal e-file by the NCCE.

The number of credits earned by a professional for a given activity matches the number of credits pre-approved by NCCE for that activity providing the participant attended the entire activity. On the contrary, the number of credits will be calculated based on one hour – one credit criteria.

If a professional attends a continuing education activity as a lecturer or trainer, the number of credits will be calculated based on one hour – 1.5 credit criteria.

**1b.** Registration of credits from continuing education activities accredited in advance by institutions other than NCCE

When a professional included in the recertification program attends a continuing education activity that is pre-accredited by other accrediting bodies, such as accredited university or post-university programs or conferences and seminars accredited in another country, a request for credit recognition should be made in person at the NCCE office. The professional should bring a copy of the activity program attended, the participation certificate or the diploma earned with the relevant number of credits.

Calculation of credits for such activities will be done according to the criteria one hour – one credit point. Professionals who participate in these activities as lecturers or trainers earn credits calculated based on the 1 hour – 1.5 credit points criteria. After the NCCE recognizes the credits, they are registered in the professional's personal e-file.

## **2. Post-accredited continuing education activities**

### **2a. Registration of credits from publications and scientific research**

When a professional included in the recertification program attends a continuing education activity of this category, a request for credit recognition should be made in person at the NCCE office. The documents required for credit recognition when publishing an article, chapter or book are a copy of the magazine or book cover and a copy of the first page of article or book. When the professional has written a university or post-university curricula, the required documents are a statement from the University Department and a copy of the first page of the curricula.

The number of credits earned from this category of continuing education activities are calculated based on criteria shown in Chapter III of this document. After the NCCE recognizes the credits, they are registered in the professional's personal e-file.

### **2b. Registration of credits from self-reported activities**

The professional is responsible for reporting credits earned from self-reported activities by filling out a special form which could be sent to the accrediting body via email or in person. By filling out the form, the professional declares any multimedia programs, study of scientific literature or study tours that s/he might have attended during each calendar year to fulfill his/her professional needs, as well as the number of active hours he/ she has dedicated to such activities.

The number of credits earned from this category of continuing education activities are calculated based on criteria shown in Chapter III of this document. After the NCCE recognizes the credits, they are registered in the professional's personal e-file.

## **Credit registration deadlines**

**a.** In order to register credits from continuing education activities, providers of such activities should submit participation lists at the NCCE no later than 30 days after the completion of the activity.

**b.** In order to register credits from continuing education activities accredited in advance by other accrediting bodies or from individual continuing education activities, the professional should apply in person before September 30<sup>th</sup>, for activities completed in the first 6 months of the calendar year, and before December 31st, for activities completed in the second half of the calendar year. If the professional fails to meet these deadlines, the credits will be registered in the individual file and will count towards the following year.

c. In order to register credits from self-reported activities, the professional needs to fill the special form, if necessary, only once a year for each calendar year before December 15<sup>th</sup>.

The NCCE will carry out the process of recognition and registration of credits in the professional's personal file no later than 30 days after all necessary documents have been submitted by the providers or the professional.

The NCCE should register the credits in the personal files no later than January 31<sup>st</sup>. After this date, the NCCE sends a report on the status of each professional included in the recertification program to the National Board of Recertification and Accreditation (NBRA)

## **C – Recertification of professionals**

The professionals included in the recertification program will be certified by the NBRA based on criteria and standards specified in this document.

At the end of the 5-year cycle of the recertification program, the professionals involved in the program obtain a certificate from the NBRA that shows satisfactory fulfillment of the requirements of the program, number of credits earned, and transfer to the following cycle.

The NBRA, based on the information on the status of each professional submitted by the accrediting body, is responsible for notifying all professionals who have not met the requirements for that phase of the cycle and taking the proper sanctions for the professional or the employing institution.

Professionals who fail to gather 150 credits during the first cycle of the recertification program, up to December 31, 2014, or the total number of 250 credits for the following cycles, are obligated to take a knowledge and comprehensive exam. Professionals who do not pass the exam the first time, or are not able to take it, have the possibility to take it a second time within 6 months from the completion of the first cycle of the recertification program. The professional cover all expenses of the test. If the professional fails the exam a second time, the contract he/she has with the employing institution is breached until the professional passes the exam.

The responsible institutions for developing and offering the exam are the professional orders in collaboration with respective departments at the Faculty of Medicine.

Sanctions can be imposed to institutions that hire professionals who have not met the requirements of the recertification program, as determined in the Healthcare Law in the Republic of Albania.

## **VI – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **A – National Board of Recertification and Accreditation (NBRA)**

The NBRA is the highest decision-making body in the recertification system for health professionals. The Board is composed of 7 members, representing the following institutions:

1. Ministry of Health.
2. National Center of Continuing Education.
3. Institute of Health Insurance
4. National Center of Quality, Safety and  
Accreditation of Health Institutions
5. Order of Physicians.
6. Order of Nurses.
7. Order of Pharmacists.
8. Faculty of Medicine.
9. Health Professional's Associations.

The NBRA is established by the Ministry of Health. The chairman of the NBRA is the Minister of Health. The NBRA convenes 4 times a year. If needed, the chairman can assemble the board for special cases. Decision-making is achieved by a simple majority.

The NBRA supervises the entire recertification process and is responsible for:

- 1) Approving changes or formulations of procedures, criteria and standards regarding the recertification process of health professionals.
- 2) Establishing and imposing sanctions for professionals who do not meet the requirements of the recertification program.
- 3) Establishing and imposing sanctions, in collaboration with the Institute of Health Insurance and the National Center of Quality, Safety and Accreditation of Health Institutions, for institutions that hire professionals who have not met the criteria of the recertification program
- 4) Issuing certificates to professionals who have fulfilled the requirements for each cycle.
- 5) Inspecting complaints from professionals regarding credit recognition and registration procedures.

As it is specified in the regulatory “Document on Accreditation of Continuing Education Activities for health professionals”, the responsibilities of NBRA regarding this process are:

- 1) Approving changes or formulations of procedures, criteria and standards regarding the recertification process of health professionals.
- 2) Making a list of independent experts for each field of expertise that will be included in the external evaluation of the activities.
- 3) Inspecting complaints from providers of continuing education activities regarding the external evaluation that have not been solved based on procedures determined in item F of chapter III in the Regulatory Document on Accreditation of Continuing Education Activities.

## **B – The National Center of Continuing Education**

The NCCE is responsible for creating and administrating the national register of recertification in collaboration with the NBRA.

The NCCE is responsible for:

- 1) Developing criteria and standards of quality for continuing education activities.
- 2) Accrediting continuing education activities for health professionals.
- 3) Determining the number of credits for various types of continuing education activities.
- 4) Publishing and updating the list of accredited continuing education activities for health professionals.
- 5) Updating the personal files of professionals included in the recertification program.

The center must save this documentation for at least five years and maintain confidentiality for all parties.

The NCCE must be fair, impartial and stable in developing and executing procedures, criteria and standards of the recertification process and use all information available to promote participation in continuing education activities for all professionals based on the professional development needs.

## **C - Institute of Health Insurance**

In compliance with article 33 of the Healthcare law, the Institute of Health Insurance:

- 1) Ensures that the contracts it has with health institutions include recertification program requirements for professionals employed in these institutions.
- 2) Is responsible for implementing sanctions determined by the NBRA on contracted institutions.
- 3) Allocates necessary funds for continuing education activities to the contracted institutions.
- 4) Determines and implements incentives that promote participation in continuing education activities.

## **D – The National Center of Quality, Safety and Accreditation of Health Institutions (NCQSA-HI)**

In compliance with article 33 of the Health Care Law of Republic of Albania the NCQSA-HI is responsible for:

- 1) Ensuring that the process of evaluation of quality, safety and accreditation of health institutions includes recertification program requirements for health professionals employed in this institutions.
- 2) Imposing sanctions approved by the NBRA for the institutions who do not meet these requirements



## **E – Health Institutions**

All private or public, academic or not academic, profit or non-profit, foreign or national institutions that have employed physicians, dentists and pharmacist that practice their professional according to the legislation in force, are responsible for:

- 1) Creating possibilities and proper conditions for their employees so they can attend continuing education activities in compliance with their professional needs.
- 2) Promoting participation in continuing education activities, and making the recertification program requirements part of their contracts with the employees.
- 3) Making one-year or longer plans regarding the professional development of their employees in compliance with their individual and institutional needs.

## **F – Professionals included in the recertification program**

All professionals included in the recertification program are responsible for verifying their own registration in the national recertification register and the authenticity of the documents in their personal files. In case of discrepancies related to information included in the personal files, the professional should contact the NCCE center and request an information change.

Professionals are responsible for saving all participation certificates, diplomas and any self-reported forms from continuing education activities for at least 5 years. This documentation should be submitted to the NCCE in cases of discrepancies related to the number of credits registered in the professional's personal file after the period of time foreseen for the registration of credits by NCCE.

In cases when disputes between a professional and the NCCE regarding credit recognition and registration, are not settled according to the above mentioned procedures, the professional has the right to complain to the NBRA.

Professionals included in the recertification program should use the principles and standards in chapter I – C as a guide for their professional development in fulfilling their individual needs, enhancing their practice and improving their performance.

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