

Developing Clinical Placement Programs in Aged Care

Report

This project report outlines the development, implementation and evaluation of a clinical placement program pilot in the aged care sector on the North Coast



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Executive Summary

The focus of the *Developing Clinical Placements In Aged Care* Project was to expand clinical training placement capacity in the aged care health sector, in a sustainable way.

With an increasing proportion of the population being over 65+ years of age, the demand for primary, community and aged health care services is set to continue. In view of this it is important that health science undergraduate clinical training programs are broadened to include clinical training in the non-acute health sectors. By expanding the scope of clinical training it will assist in better preparing health science students to work as future clinicians in a variety of healthcare settings.

Ageing is often thought about in terms of a process of degeneration of mental and physical abilities, leading to requiring complete and chronic care. However, complete and chronic care needs are not restricted to a particular age group but can be required by anyone, in any age group within the community.

As part of the learning journey, it is good practice to remind students of this fact, so that they learn to see people living dependently as part of the spectrum range and normal life cycles. A moment in time in the life-cycle rather than AGED.

The WHO indicates that there are many factors that influence how well people age and the need for long-term care is rising. Aged Care placements can provide students with accurate information about and experience with older adults. These experiences can help shape students attitudes which will ultimately influence the quality of health care received by older people.

In the past, caring for older people was devalued, however today the specialty of Gerontology is gaining importance and momentum. Tertiary education awards from Graduate Diplomas to Masters, are available nationwide, and the ageing population will continue to increase this need for highly qualified health professionals. Given current emphasis on quality and safety of service provision, it is important that students are aware of the special needs and requirements of older people and provide care correctly. By encouraging students to focus on enhancing their interpersonal skills, rather than just performing tasks to get signed off, may validate the decision for placement in aged care.

The *Developing Clinical Placements in Aged Care* Project is a collaborative project between UnitingCare Ageing (Goonellabah), St Andrews (Ballina), Southern Cross University, University Centre of Rural Health North Coast (UCRHNC) (Lismore) and North Coast Interdisciplinary Clinical Training Network (NCICTN).

A Governance Committee was formed comprising representation from the participating partner organisations and a community engagement framework approach to the project was adopted. A Project Officer was appointed and this position was hosted by Southern Cross University.

The focus of the project was to: develop, implement and evaluate a clinical training placement pilot program; consider sustainability options; explore opportunities to promote careers in aged care to health science students; identify barriers to working in aged care and prepare a project report that will add valuable knowledge about developing quality clinical placements in aged care.

Literature reviews were undertaken to better understand the features that underpin the development of positive practice learning in aged care environments. These features include: whole-of-organisational practice support; skilled clinical supervisors; patient involvement; learning architecture and a positive learning culture.

This project also provided the opportunity for a number of the university health professionals on the Governance Committee to develop and up-skill in the areas of action research and research publication.

The *Developing Clinical Placements in Aged Care* Project has been successful in achieving the aims of the project as outlined below:

Expanding Clinical Training Placement Capacity in Aged Care

A clinical training placement pilot was developed, implemented and evaluated. As a result of this pilot clinical training capacity was expanded by 1,140 hours. Southern Cross University, Nursing and Occupational Therapy students participated in the clinical placement pilot, which was implemented at the UnitingCare Ageing, Goonellabah campus and St Andrew's in Ballina.

Achieving Sustainable Clinical Training Placement Models

In partnership with UnitingCare – Ageing (Goonellabah) and St Andrews, Ballina and Southern Cross University, sustainable clinical placement programs have been established for nursing and occupational therapy students, that are now ongoing. It is anticipated that the four week occupational therapy clinical placement rotations will become continuous across the academic calendar, this will further increase capacity. Positive relationships have been established to enable the continuation and further expansion of clinical training programs at UnitingCare (Goonellabah) and St Andrews.

Increasing awareness of health science student about careers in Aged Care

A number of strategies were identified as part of this project to increase the awareness of health science students about careers in aged care and these will be further developed as part of the ongoing collaboration between the project partners.

Developing Clinical Placements in Aged Care Project Report - value adding knowledge

This project report provides valuable learnings in regards to developing clinical training programs in aged care and adds to the body of knowledge about the health workforce challenges in the aged care sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Project Governance Committee reviewed the evaluation feedback and made a number of recommendations as listed:

1. Project partners to continue to work together to develop and implement strategies to address the areas identified for improvement as detailed in the evaluation section of this report.
2. Continue the clinical placement program in aged care for another three years with the collaborating organisations. This will allow for the implementation of improvement strategies and further evaluation to be conducted.
3. To develop better student preparation systems and processes to ensure they regard working in Aged Care as a valuable part of their skill development and so they can clearly see the curriculum alignment.
4. Identify strategies to improve students' learning in regard to the need for the community to care for chronically ill people with high and complex needs (as opposed to the momentary unwell). Perhaps one strategy would be to implement a Continuity Model of Care where students buddy with an older person or resident in an Aged Care Facility in their first year and continue to visit them through their curriculum. This may be a way of broadening students thinking about the impact of intervention, prevention and promotion strategies on healthy ageing.
5. To reframe the student's perceptions of the Aged Care environment to generate a greater awareness and interest in helping people be well at all stages of the Circle of Life. The Project Governance Committee to consider a name change from Aged Care Placements to Caring for Our Elders or Residential Facility Placement.

Introduction

The North Coast Interdisciplinary Clinical Training Network (NCICTN) Local Innovation Funding (LIF) *Developing Clinical Placements In Aged Care Project* was made possible by the Australian Government Department of Health. Commonwealth funding was provided to the Health Education and Training Institute (HETI) of NSW under a Local Innovation Funding Program to assist NSW Interdisciplinary Clinical Training Networks expand regional clinical training and engagement activities. Northern NSW Local Health District was the LIF Fund Holder for this project.

In 2014, NCICTN received \$36,600 in Local Innovation Funding to support regional activities that were in alignment with *NSWICTN Strategic Directions 2013-2016* and *NCICTN Strategic Plan 2013-2016*.

The NCICTN Advisory Committee supported the development of a project to expand clinical training placement opportunities outside of the acute health care sector, with the strategic priority being in aged care.

An expressions of interest (EOI) to NCICTN Advisory Committee members demonstrated that there was keen interest from two local aged care facilities and regional universities in participating in a collaboration to develop a clinical placement program pilot.

A *Developing Clinical Placements In Aged Care Project* collaboration was formed between UnitingCare Ageing (Goonellabah), St Andrew's Aged Care (Ballina), Southern Cross University (SCU), University Centre of Rural Health North Coast (UCRHNC) and NCICTN. A Governance Committee was established to lead the project as detailed.

Project Governance Committee

| Name | Position | Organisation |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Lissa Ingram | Project Officer | Southern Cross University |
| Annette Barry | Clinical Nurse Consultant | UnitingCare Ageing, Goonellabah |
| Sabrina Pit | Board Member | St Andrew's Aged Care, Ballina |
| Neil Sproule | Director of Clinical Services | St Andrew's Aged Care, Ballina |
| Keri Moore | Director of Professional Experience Learning | School of Health and Human Sciences Southern Cross University |
| Ross O'Neill | Clinical Teacher Leader (Nursing) | School of Health and Human Sciences Southern Cross University |
| Maggie Scorey | Professional Experience Lecturer - Occupational Therapy | School of Health and Human Sciences Southern Cross University |
| Louise Horstmanhof | Curriculum Development Specialist | School of Health and Human Sciences Southern Cross University |
| Sheila Keane | Allied Health Academic | University Centre Rural Health North Coast (University of Sydney) |
| Karen Wickham | Network Co-ordinator | North Coast Interdisciplinary Clinical Training Network |

Aged Care Services - Clinical Placement Hosts

St Andrews, Aged Care Ballina (St Andrews) – residential (general low care, low care dementia, high care and high care dementia) care for 117 people and a range of community services.

UnitingCare Ageing – Goonellabah campus (UnitingCare) - Comprises three residential care services: Jarmen (80 low care hostel), Caroon Marima (80 nursing and 20 secure dementia) and Kalina (70 high care) for 250 people as well as an independent living village and range of community services.

Aim

The *Developing Clinical Placements In Aged Care* was formed to increase clinical training capacity in the aged care sector that would be sustainable.

Objectives

- Develop, implement and evaluation a clinical placement training program pilot in the aged care sector that would initially include nursing, occupational therapy and physiotherapy.
- Develop a clinical training placement model that would be sustainable.
- Improve the exposure of health science students to career opportunities of working in aged care.
- Increase clinical training opportunities for health science student outside of the acute health care to broaden clinical training experiences.
- Add knowledge and learnings about developing clinical placement programs in aged care to assist others who may be considering similar projects.

Resources

Project funding was used to support: the engagement of a Project Officer; evaluation activities; IT support; development of promotional materials and support access to clinical supervision training and resources.

Literature Review – *What We Know*

With an increasing proportion of the population being over 65+ years of age, the demand for primary, community and aged health care services is set to continue. In view of this it is important that health science undergraduate clinical training programs are broader to include clinical training in the non-acute health sectors. By expanding the scope of clinical training it will assist in better preparing health science students to work as future clinicians in a variety of healthcare settings.

A search of the literature from the last five years in journals hosted in the CINAHL database using the terms aged care, Student and Nursing or Occupational Therapy (OT) revealed a dearth of literature on models for nursing and allied health students working in aged care setting.

What is known is that the aged care environment is a great place for students to learn their clinical skills, that such work must be supported by professional development of on-site supervisors in each discipline when they work with students involved in patient health care events (Xiao et al, 2011; Grealish et al, 2010). Most important of all, is that in order for these educational events to be sustainable, collaboration between stakeholders is the critical factor (Xiao et al, 2011; Grealish et al, 2010).

Pearson and Lucas (2011) suggest, taking into consideration the views of multiple stakeholders, they wrote that a positive practice learning environment would include the features present in Box 1.

Box 1

- Whole practice support, including administrative and management enthusiasm
- A high-quality clinical environment
- Excellent teacher, with a range of enthusiastic and skilled clinical tutors
- Opportunities for peer and professional support
- Patient support: availability and involvement of patients in learning activities
- Learning architecture: facilities for formal learning designed to encourage information interactions
- A positive learning culture, at best a passion for education

Pearson and Lucas (2011, p.163).

In essence placing students in an aged care facility is placing them in a particular Community of Practice in which it is expected both staff and students will benefit from the education experiences so the staff are able to provide better education to students (Xiao et al, 2011; Grealish et al, 2010). Further ore it is important to know if patients feel properly cared for by students and if the host organizations administrators are satisfied with the undertaking

Occupations therapy students working in Aged Care Facilities

We could find no papers related to OT students working in Aged Care facilities. Regarding clinical placements in general Kent et al, 2014 published findings related to OT students working with older people in interprofessional student-led clinics. More generally, De Witt, Rotheberg & Bruce (2014) identified the benefits of Clinical Education to departments (host organizations) were assistance with client care, sharing of up to date clinical information, recruitment opportunities, networking and working with others. They identified the benefits to students as being developing their professional skills, knowledge sharing, exposure to large selections of client working with some independence and exposure to working with limited resources.

Nursing students working in Aged Care Facilities

In 2008, Neville, Yuginovich, Boyes reported nursing students undertook placements in aged care facilities during their first or third year of study and not all universities formally assessed students and that they often struggled to find suitably qualified educators in that sector. Circumstances make it necessary for universities to use clinical educators who have experienced in aged care but who do not hold tertiary level qualification and the converse is also true.

Grealish et al, 2010 reported there is an awareness in Aged Care facilities student bring fresh eyes to the setting and new knowledge, for example in relation to chronic wounds. The authors also reported that it is also understood that students are the future and staff are happy to make a contribution to the future aged care workforce.

On the other hand, Abbey,Abbey, Bridges, Elder, Lemcke, Liddle and Thornton 2006 reported students thought the aged care facilities did not offer an opportunity to practice modern nursing skills although the educators rebutted this point. Preparing students properly was seen as vital to success (abbey et al. 2006). The authors also identified students felt powerless and constrained in their ability to provide care because of lack of resources at many levels. This was compounded they continued because of the RN's increased and expanded Scope of Practice in the Aged Care setting. A very different role and scope than the RN's work in the acute or community setting. Finally the study reported students are aware of the lower pay rates for health staff in the aged care sector and the impact that sector has on their career path

In nursing Xiao et al, (2011) describe the lack of interest in nursing students working in aged care and posed some solutions. Grealish et al (2013) explored students experiences in aged care and found that in particular they developed skills in identifying and managing delirium and drug reactions in the aged and that afterword's, students seemed to exhibit more ageist behavior, which is a concern.

Project Methodology

A community engagement framework approach was applied in progressing the project through the planning, implementation and evaluation phases.

Planning and Implementation

The Governance Committee was established and met regularly to work through a wide-range of matters:

- Type and number of disciplines
- Supervision capacity and roles of the Aged Care Supervisors
- Discipline specific supervision model requirements
- Discipline specific clinical placement learning plans that align with university curriculum objectives
- Consideration of the aged care providers environment ,staffing and learning opportunities
- Clinical Placement timetables
- Setting-up Better Prepared Better Placement IT Portal (access for participating students and supervisors) – loading of useful information and provides forum for blackboard communications.
- Aged Care Clinical Placement Information Brochure – for students
- Orientation Program (OH&S, Code of Conduct etc)
- Aged Care Providers Resources to Accommodate students (access to Internet, computer, videoconferencing, lunch room)
- Clinical Supervision Training Needs – Aged Care Supervisors and staff
- University Perceptor /Supervisor roles
- Administration, Legal and Compliance Matters
 - Contact lists
 - Student Placement Checklists
 - Student Placement Agreements and Schedules
 - Compliance Process (National Police Checks, Immunisations)
 - Student Details
 - Research and Evaluation Activities - Ethics Application and Approvals
- Development of promotional materials re careers in aged care for health science students.
- Consultations/meetings occurred between the discipline co-ordinators (university) and the respective aged care services prior to the commencement of the clinical placements (nursing and OT).

Evaluation

Evaluation methodologies included specifically designed survey questionnaires that were developed and completed by the participating students and clinical supervisors (facility and university). A number of focus groups and interviews were also conducted to obtain feedback from students, clinical supervisors (facility and university) and patients.

An Ethics Research Application was prepared and approved by Southern Cross University.

CLINICAL PLACEMENT PROGRAM PILOT

Nursing

Southern Cross University, Bachelor of Nursing final year (3rd Year) nursing students participated in the pilot. Eleven nursing students attended clinical placement at *United Care* Lismore and four others attended *St. Andrews*, Ballina. The clinical placement was for two weeks (80hours) duration in a Residential Aged care facility.

The curriculum was a new curriculum being introduced for the first time for third year nursing students in the aged care setting. The curriculum design, development and implementation was in consultation with stakeholders representing students, industry partners and the community.

The stage of curriculum was for final year (3rd Year) final session. The students were to be given opportunities to integrate their previous knowledge in acute health breakdown with more complex nursing challenges that nurses face. The students attended lectures, tutorials and clinical laboratories in leadership and complex care in the teaching session prior to the placement. This placement was an applied clinical care experience where students may actively participate in specific leadership and management concepts and skills sets.

Learning outcomes and assessments relate directly to the curriculum and Australian Nursing & Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC) National Competency Standards for Registered Nurse RN (2006). The students were to demonstrate high-level assessment, planning and interventions to complex and challenging care situations. Students were to demonstrate leadership skills and their development of knowledge, safe competent skills and professionalism under the direct supervision of a Registered Nurse.

The value of this placement was that students would gain further knowledge and understanding of the older person. The student would better understand the role of the RN in the Aged care setting. The student was given the choice of an activity to relate and research issues confronting the RN and managers in the organisation. The care management of the resident and leadership knowledge and variety of skills required of the RN is also of value to this placement. Client –centred care is part of government reform for aged care, and requires the RN to lead a team of carers, assistants in nursing and enrolled nurses whilst coordinating multidisciplinary holistic care of the resident. Added value is the student has potential for future employment and Graduate program as an RN in Aged Care.

Quality outcomes for the resident should be centred around knowledge and the personal needs and care planning for the resident. Safety in care surrounding the environment and medication administration is well documented as requiring interventions and often poor outcomes. The RN is responsible and accountable for the prioritisation of care management of the resident. There are factors which influence the RN in their role. Often these include lack of support from the organisation, lower wages and conditions. Compounding this is the lack of education and motivation of staff which the RN manages and is responsible.

Overall there were some positive evaluations, with some helpful suggestions from student and staff evaluations. It is envisaged to discuss further placements with the facilities for 2015 and beyond.

Supplementary Clinical Training Experiences - A Wound Pressure Management Training Workshop, was being held locally and this opportunity was incorporated into the clinical training timetable for the nursing students to attend. The students who attended this workshop rated this learning opportunity very highly and then went on to provide in-service to the aged care clinical staff.

Occupational Therapy

Two Occupational Therapy (OT) students from SCU were hosted by *Uniting Care*. The OT students completed a four week (160hr) second year fieldwork placement between 27th October – 21st November 2015.

The focus of the placement was on developing and demonstrating clinical reasoning skills. The students were assessed in areas pertaining to professional behaviour and attitude, communication, documentation and development of basic clinical reasoning skills. It is expected that the students receive satisfactory results in all of these competencies to successfully complete the fieldwork.

Providing students with experience in Aged Care is an important aspect of the SCU Occupational Therapy curriculum. The care of older adults is discussed in the majority of study units with fieldwork placements offered across a number of different clinical services (with older adult clients). However, there are a very limited number of fieldwork placements in aged care facilities in Northern NSW and South Eastern Queensland regions.

The project pilot has been important as it provided the participating students with a unique experience not otherwise available. This learning experience teaches students a variety of different skills and provides exposure to the role of an Occupational Therapist in the age care sector. The OT students gained a greater understanding of what it means to work in an aged care facility and about the care needs of older adults in this setting.

Supervision was provided by the Occupational Therapist, UnitingCare Ageing, Goonellabah who was supported by the SCU Clinical Educator. A detailed student learning plan/timetable was developed

The pilot demonstrated that the OT fieldwork placement arrangement between SCU and *UnitingCare* is sustainable. Planning is underway to commence OT third year fieldwork placements in February 2015 between SCU and *UnitingCare* to develop learning activities and supervision support mechanisms.

Physiotherapy

The potential of including University of Sydney, third year physiotherapy students in the pilot at *UnitingCare*, as a community placement was considered in the planning phase. Through this process it was identified that the on campus clinical supervision capacity was not sufficient to support the requirements of the physiotherapy clinical placement program, at the time of the pilot.

However, *UnitingCare*, is in the process of finalising a new physiotherapy service contract that will significantly increase physiotherapy services to between 3-4 days per week. It is anticipated that by February/March 2015, *UnitingCare*, will be in a position to commence the planning and implementation of a clinical placement program for physiotherapy students.

Potential Future Disciplines – Speech Pathology and Podiatry

There is support between the participating partners (SCU, St Andrews and UnitingCare) for the future inclusion of other disciplines such as speech pathology and podiatry. However, identifying sustainable clinical supervision models remains the number one challenge and barrier.

Inter-professional Learning

Due to variations in the timetabling of the nursing and OT students inter-professional learnings opportunities were limited in this pilot. However, it is envisaged that the future schedule of clinical placements (at *UnitingCare*) will allow for health science students from different disciplines to be on placement at the same time and inter-professional learning opportunities will be incorporated into the respective Learning Plans.

Evaluation Summary

Participants

Eleven nursing (9=n) from Uniting Care and (n=2) from St Andrews and two OT students who attended Uniting Care responded to the surveys and attended focus groups: Nursing Student Focus Groups and Occupational Therapy Student Focus Groups in Aged Care. Two Nursing Clinical Supervisors and one Occupational Therapy Clinical Supervisor engaged in Interviews the project officer.

Also interviewed by the project officer were: One facility manager; One Deputy Care Manager, Nursing; One Deputy Service Manager and One resident.

Contextual Factors

One of the Aged Care facilities participating in the pilot was at the tail-end of an accreditation process across multiple sites and the student's presence added significantly to the already overstretched resources. The timing of the clinical placement was not ideal.

One of the Aged Care facilities had a history of taking nursing students and enrolled nursing students and had already developed a structured clinical training program.

Southern Cross University (SCU) approached the development of this clinical placement program from the perspective of providing an opportunity for students to learn more about caring for people in each part of the Circle of Life. That aged care is a normal part of the work of all health professions in every community. SCU has adopted the slogan:

SCU health students learning while supporting local health services.

It is the view of SCU that students need to be exposed to learning situations in which they develop an undertaking of skills in and ability to manage clinical interactions across the lifespan (infants through to senior adults).

Project Governance Committee and the people at the various facilities approached this project with an attitude of collegiality and goodwill.

Findings

Evaluation established that from the University perspective all students attending these placements were able to demonstrate they had met the learning objectives for the associated Unit of study in the OT and Nursing curriculum.

The majority of the students participating in the pilot at one of the age care facilities: did not rate a clinical training experience in aged care as being a valuable learning experience; were not looking forward to the aged care placement and were not seeking to work in aged care. Some of the feedback from these students about the pilot included: some on-site supervisors were not fully engaged/supportive of the clinical placement program, high workload environment made it difficult for supervisors to have time for them and some students felt that they were not welcome. A number of students felt that because they did not have the opportunity to practise the more technical type clinical tasks they did not learn a great deal.

On the other hand, two students reported that they had a very positive clinical training experience in the aged care facility that they were allocated to. Some of the reasons given included: they felt very welcomed by all staff within the organisation and that a structured program of clinical activities was in place. One student indicated an interest in working in aged care.

Overall, the feedback from the students indicates significant effort is required to generate among students, a greater sense of interest in the older people health care culture. The aim of which is to stimulate a more positive attitude towards clinical training placements in aged care facilities that may also lead to an interest in working in aged care, post-graduation.

Strategies may include reviewing the clinical placement learning objectives, timing of placements and looking at how students can be better prepared to appreciate this type of clinical training experience. For example a discussion on Ageism, and valuing older people as part of our community, may be useful prior to placement as an opportunity to explore myths and stereotypes.

A number of areas for improvement were identified that will require further collaborative work between the pilot partners, as well as within the individual organisations. Such matters covered :

- Pre-planning meetings between university educator and facility level managers.
- Student learning plans prepared prior to commencement.
- Improving communication about the Student Clinical Learning Outcomes (Handbook) to the on-site clinical supervisors.
- Review of University clinical teacher on-site role and timetabling.
- Number of students on placements.
- Enhancement of professional development of on-site supervisors to assist them to be better able to support the education and clinical training learning objectives of the health science students was identified. Both aged care facilities were invited to send staff to HETI funded clinical supervision support workshops that were held locally between May – October 2014. Both aged care facilities were keen to take up this opportunity and a number of staff attended the workshops.
- Identifying staff interested in becoming facility preceptors. It was suggested that an EOI (within the aged care organisations) seeking interest from staff was one way of doing this.
- Facility preceptors to be provided with clinical supervision training and ongoing professional development.
- Developing and recognising the role of the on-site clinical supervisors/preceptors. This may involve establishing dedicated time away from service duties
- Development of engagement and communication strategies that promote the value and importance of clinical placement training programs more broadly within aged care facilities.
- Preparation of specific clinical placement timetable that sets out the activities to achieve student clinical learning outcomes (more structured program).
- Reviewing on-site student orientation program.
- Review of student compliance process and time-lines(Immunisations and National Police Checks)

An emerging theme was that there was strong support and enthusiasm between the project partners to continue to work together in this model of engagement to further evaluate and refine the clinical placement program.

Recommendations

The Project Governance Committee reviewed the evaluation feedback and made a number of recommendations as listed:

1. Project partners to continue to work together to develop and implement strategies to address the areas identified for improvement as detailed in the evaluation section of this report.
2. Continue the clinical placement program in aged care for another three years with the collaborating organisations. This will allow for the implementation of improvement strategies and further evaluation to be conducted.
3. To develop better student preparation systems and processes to ensure they regard working in Aged Care as a valuable part of their skill development and so they can clearly see the curriculum alignment.
4. Identify strategies to improve students' learning in regard to the need for the community to care for chronically ill people with high and complex needs (as opposed to the momentary unwell). Perhaps one strategy would be to implement a Continuity Model of Care where students buddy with an older person or resident in an Aged Care Facility in their first year and continue to visit them through their curriculum. This may be a way of broadening students thinking about the impact of intervention, prevention and promotion strategies on healthy ageing
5. To reframe the student's perceptions of the Aged Care environment to generate a greater awareness and interest in helping people be well at all stages of the Circle of Life. The Project Governance Committee to consider a name change from Aged Care Placements to Caring for Our Elders or Residential Facility Placement.

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