



Individual and institutional characteristics associated with short tenures of deanships in academic nursing

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ABSTRACT

Background: The departures of chief academic administrators of nursing programs within a short tenure are likely to affect the operation of their institutions significantly.

Purpose: To help nursing schools improve recruitment and retention of chief academic administrators.

Methods: We obtained deans' records from the membership database of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) for 11 starting cohorts between 2001 and 2011 and matched the data with dean data collected in the AACN Annual Survey to retrieve additional information on individual and institutional characteristics. Bivariate and multivariate analyses were used to examine the association between a characteristic and short tenures (less than 5 years).

Findings: We found that 41% of deanships have short tenures, and the figure increased from earlier cohorts to later cohorts in general. We did not find that first-time deans were more likely to experience a short tenure. However, we found in bivariate analyses that deans in newly created nursing programs have a higher likelihood of leaving deanships in less than 5 years. We also found in bivariate and multivariate analyses that an individual characteristic, age 60 or older, and three institutional attributes, deans with a title as Chair, Director, or Department Head, deans in nursing schools without a tenure system, and deans in baccalaureate or associate degree granting institutions are more likely to have a short tenure. In brief, our findings show that deans in smaller nursing programs are more likely than deans in larger nursing programs to experience a short tenure.

Discussion: Our findings that deans in smaller programs and newly created programs are more likely to experience early attrition provide useful information to the nursing education community so more focused efforts can be made to improve the retention of chief academic administrators in nursing programs.

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Introduction

The role and leadership ability of chief academic administrators of nursing schools in carrying out complex missions of education, research, service, and patient care is crucial for their institutions. In an environment of rapid career progression due to large numbers of sitting deans retiring, preparation to assume the role is not as strong as seen 20 years ago. Key competencies must be learned on the job, in the heat of the moment. Not surprisingly, if their tenures are interrupted, especially when they leave their deanships within a short time frame, the departures are likely to affect the operation of their institutions significantly. It is also resource intensive and time consuming for their schools to identify new leaders to replace them; the impact on students, programming issues, community relationships, and faculty cohesion are all significant. To help nursing schools improve retention of chief academic administrators, we conducted this study to identify individual and institutional characteristics that tend to be associated with short tenures of chief academic administrators. We refer to chief academic administrators throughout this study as deans whether the formal title is dean, chair, director, or department head.

Literature Review

Although there are numerous studies on leadership competency of deans in nursing schools (Coonan, 2008; Giddens, 2018; Giddens & Morton, 2018; Green & Ridenour, 2004; Mainous & Cavanagh, 2012; Potempa & Tilden, 2004; Redman, 2001; Short, 1997; Starck, Warner, & Kotarba, 1999; Wikes, Cross, Jackson, & Daly, 2015), studies on individual and institutional characteristics of deans are limited. Lucas found that deans in larger, doctoral-degree granting public institutions were more likely to consider themselves task oriented than deans in smaller, private baccalaureate programs (Lucas, 1986). Gevedon reported that deans at top-ranked schools considered professional values and a higher ethical code as the most important leadership attributes (Gevedon, 1992). Moore and Porter discussed the roles deans played in small, liberal arts colleges as chief executive officers, middle managers, and professional leaders altogether (Moore & Porter, 1987). Broome found that there were no differences in deans' self-identified leadership styles by gender, race, or degree (Broome, 2013).

There is no study on attrition or retention of nursing deans, although there is limited research on job satisfaction of deans, which could affect their retention. Lamborn found that deans with longer tenure in their positions or at larger institutions, were more satisfied (Lamborn, 1991). Another study reported that job dissatisfaction was the greatest factor for deans who considered leaving their positions (Hall, Tornay, & Mitsunaga, 1983). Emory, Lee, Miller, Kippenbrock, and

Rosen (2017) found that institutional personal and family friendly policies, which contribute to the culture, were positively associated with job satisfaction (2017). Frank found that size (measured by numbers of full-time students and faculty) and complexity (measured by number of degrees offered and number of administrators) of nursing programs were positively associated with job satisfaction of deans, suggesting that deans in larger programs were more satisfied (Frank, 1986).

Regarding the impact of institutional culture on the nursing dean role, Bouws (2017) suggested that academic nursing is at a crossroads between higher education and health, both sectors perceived as conservative and dominated by males, which may not fully appreciate nursings' contribution. Similarly, Ross, Marks-Maran, and Tye (2013) raised the issue of the legitimacy of nursing as a practice discipline in higher education, a common challenge to academic nursing leaders in the United Kingdom. In addition, Moore and Porter (1987) discussed the challenge for nursing deans in institutions with a strong focus on liberal arts and sciences. On the one hand, they must help their faculty and students to appreciate the value of a liberal education; and on the other hand, they must make their colleagues in arts and sciences appreciate the contribution of nursing, a practice discipline.

In brief, although there are limited studies on individual, institutional characteristics, job satisfaction of deans in nursing schools, and institutional culture that could affect the deans' performance, there is no study on factors associated with length of deans' tenure of nursing schools at either the local or national level. Therefore, we conducted this study to identify attributes that are associated with short stays in a deanship. Because the standard length of a deanship in academic nursing is 5 years (Pressler & Kenner, 2010), the point in time when a dean generally undergoes a formal decanal review, a short tenure of deanship is defined as less than 5 years in this study.

Specifically, we have the following research questions:

1. What percentage of deanships end in a short tenure?
2. Has the percentage of short tenures increased over time?
3. What individual characteristics are associated with short tenures of a deanship?
4. What institutional characteristics are associated with short tenures of a deanship?
5. Are deans in newly created nursing programs more likely to have a short tenure?
6. Are deans in their first deanship more likely to have short tenure?

Methods

We obtained deans' records from the membership database of the American Association of Colleges of

Nursing (AACN). The records include deans of 11 starting cohorts between 2001 and 2011 and contain name, dean status (dean or interim dean), and starting and ending dates for each deanship. Records for interim deans were removed and the remaining records were matched by school code, last name, first name, and deanship time with dean data collected in the AACN Annual Survey to obtain additional information on demographics and academic and institutional characteristics. Deans that started in the year 2001 were chosen as the first cohort for this study because names of deans were collected for the first time in 2001 in the AACN Annual Survey. Deans starting in the year 2011 were chosen as the last cohort because they were the latest cohort for which deanships lasted for 5 years and could be identified by 2016, when this study was conducted. If a dean had two or more deanships in the same school at different times, only the first deanship was selected given the consideration that the durations of later deanships could be affected by the first deanship. Therefore, the later deanships may not be independent events which may violate the assumption of statistical independence. As a result, 930 records of deanships were obtained from 653 nursing schools, which represented 75.6% of the nursing schools that responded to the 2001 AACN Annual Survey (The survey has a response rate of 80.8% of all baccalaureate and higher nursing schools in the United States in 2001) and 81.4% of the nursing schools responded to the 2011 AACN Annual Survey (The survey has a response rate of 87.5% of all baccalaureate and higher nursing schools in the United States in 2011).

In response to the nursing shortage and growing demand for nursing education, new nursing programs have been created steadily in the past two decades. The total number of nursing schools offering baccalaureate and graduate education increased from 678 in 2001 to 1,009 in 2017 (AACN, 2002, 2018). Based on the growth of nursing schools for the past 5 years (862 in 2013, 921 in 2014, 952 in 2015, 980 in 2016, and 1,009 in 2017; AACN, 2014-2018), and the national directive to increase the number of nurses with doctoral degrees, it seems that new nursing programs will continue to be created for some years. Deans in newly created nursing programs may face two situations that their counterparts in established nursing programs may not experience: First, they may have less experience in administration than deans in established nursing programs. Second, they may encounter issues that would not occur in established nursing programs. Therefore, are they more likely than deans in established programs to experience a short tenure? To address this research question, we defined nursing programs opened within 5 years between 2001 and 2011 as new nursing programs in this study.

It is not uncommon that deans may leave their current positions to take an offer for a deanship in another nursing program if the position offers better financial

compensation, has a higher prominence and more resources, or for possible personal reasons. Such transitions may occur during the first few years of a deanship and therefore, may have an impact on short tenures of deans. We defined such transitions between two deanships taken by the same individual, as those with a gap of 6 months or less between the first deanship and the second deanship in this study.

We divided the 930 records into two tenure groups: The short tenure group includes deanships with less than 5 years and the standard/long tenure group includes deanships with a duration of 5 or more years. Bivariate analyses using the chi-square test were performed to examine associations between individual and institutional characteristics and short tenures of deanships. Logistical regression analyses were also conducted to examine the association between a characteristic and short tenures while controlling other variables. All analyses were performed using SAS 9.3 (SAS Institute, Cary, NC). We obtained an IRB approval for this study from the American Institute for Research.

Findings

Table 1 shows that 41% of the 930 deanships starting between 2001 and 2011 lasted for less than 5 years, and the percentage for such short tenures increased from earlier cohorts of deans to later cohorts in general. For example, 37% of the 2001 starting cohort had a short tenure while the figure was 47.3% for the 2011 starting cohort. Based on the yearly distribution of durations of the 930 deanships, only 5.7% of the deans who did not finish a 5-year term departed in year 1, and the figure increased substantially to 13.5% in year 2, decreased to 10.5% in year 3, and then increased slightly to 11.2% in year 4 (see Table 2).

Table 1 – Numbers of Nursing Deans who Started Their Deanships in 2001 to 2011 by Short Tenure and Standard/Long Tenure

Year Deanship Started	N	Short Tenure Less Than 5 Years	Standard/Long Tenure 5 Years or Longer
2001	92	37.0%	63.0%
2002	67	32.8%	67.2%
2003	39	28.2%	71.8%
2004	79	34.2%	65.8%
2005	74	44.6%	55.4%
2006	87	39.1%	60.9%
2007	97	39.2%	60.8%
2008	97	42.2%	57.8%
2009	89	46.1%	53.9%
2010	77	48.1%	51.9%
2011	132	47.3%	52.7%
Total	930	41.0%	59.0%

Data source: AACN Annual Surveys and Membership Database.

Table 2 – Durations of Nursing Deanships Started in 2001 to 2011

Years	N	Percent
1	53	5.7%
2	126	13.5%
3	98	10.5%
4	104	11.2%
5	60	6.5%
6	76	8.2%
7	56	6.0%
8	35	3.8%
9	23	2.5%
10	32	3.4%
11	13	1.4%
12	13	1.4%
13	6	0.6%
14	2	0.2%
15	3	0.3%
Unfinished Deanship by 2016 for 5 or more years	230	24.7%
Total	930	

Data source: AACN Annual Surveys and Membership Database.

Of the 930 deanships, 927 have information on gender, with 44 males (4.8%) and 883 females (95.2%. see Table 3). Although male deans made a larger percentage in the short tenure group (6.1%) than their counterparts in the standard/long tenure group (3.8%), the difference is not statistically significant. Similarly, there are no statistically significant differences in the likelihood of having a short tenure between deans who are nonwhite and who are white, who are assistant professors or on other ranks and who are professors or associate professors, and who have a master's degree and who have a doctoral degree.

We found that 659 (70.9%) of the 930 deanships were reported by nursing schools as first deanship, while the other 271 (29.1%) were in second/more deanship. However, first-time deans made a smaller percentage in the short tenure group (66.7%) than their counterparts in the standard/long tenure group (73.8%), and the difference is statistically significant. The finding indicates that the first-time deans are less likely than second or more-time deans to experience a short tenure.

Table 3 – Percentages of Deans of the 2001 to 2011 Starting Cohorts having Short Tenure and Long Tenure by Individual and Institutional Characteristics

Characteristics	N (% of Total)	Short Tenure Less Than 5 Years (%)	Standard/Long Tenure 5 Years or Longer (%)	Chi-Square Value	p Value
Male	44 (4.8)	6.1	3.8		
vs. Female	883 (95.2)				
Nonwhite	95 (10.3)	10.1	10.5		
vs. White	825 (89.7)				
Age 60/Older	244 (26.4)	31.9	22.5	10.3	.0013
vs. Age 59/Younger	682 (73.6)				
Title as Chair/Director/Head/Other	573 (61.6)	70.3	55.6	20.8	<.0001
vs. Title as Dean	357 (38.4)				
Rank as Assistant Prof./Other	153 (16.5)	19.2	14.6		
vs. Rank as Prof./Associate Prof.	777 (83.5)				
Master's Degree	87 (9.4)	11.0	8.2		
vs. Doctoral Degree	842 (90.6)				
First Deanship	659 (70.9)	66.7	73.8	5.5	.0191
vs. Second/ More Deanship	271 (29.1)				
Left a Deanship for Another Deanship	32 (3.4)	5.8	1.8	10.6	.0011
vs. Did Not Leave a Deanship for Another Deanship	898 (96.6)				
New Nursing Schools Opened within 5 years in 2001–2011	142 (15.3)	18.4	13.1	4.8	.0284
vs. Established Nursing Schools	788 (84.7)				
Institution without a Tenure System	200 (21.5)	26.5	18.1	9.5	.0021
vs. Institution with a Tenure System	729 (78.5)				
Private Institution	499 (54.7)	59.8	51.2	6.6	.0101
vs. Public Institution	413 (45.3)				
Nursing Program as Department/Division/Other	610 (66.9)	73.9	62.1	13.7	.0002
vs. Nursing Program as College/School	302 (33.1)				
Without an Academic Health Center	814 (89.3)	93.5	86.5	11.5	.0007
vs. Academic Health Center	97 (10.7)				
*Baccalaureate/Associate Institution	202 (22.2)	27.5	18.5	10.4	.0013
vs. Graduate/Health Institution	710 (77.8)				

Data source: AACN Annual Surveys and Membership Database.

Note: p values are reported at p < .05 level.

* Institutions are measured by Carnegie Classification.

We also found that deans aged 60 or older are more likely to be in the short tenure group than in the standard/long tenure group (31.9% vs. 22.5%), indicating deans in the older age group are more likely than deans in the younger age group to have a short tenure. Similarly, deans with a title as Chair, Director, or Department Head are also more likely to have a short tenure than deans with a title as Dean (70.3% vs 55.6%). In addition, deans who left a deanship for a subsequent deanship are more likely to do so before finishing a 5-year term other than finishing a 5-year term (5.8% vs. 1.8%). This is also the case for deans in newly created programs compared to deans in established programs (18.4% vs. 13.1%), deans in schools without a tenure system compared to deans in schools with a tenure system (26.5% vs. 18.1%), deans in private institutions compared to deans in public institutions (59.8 vs. 51.2%), deans in departments or divisions of nursing compared to deans in colleges or schools of nursing (73.9% vs. 62.1%), deans without an Academic Health Center (AHC) institution compared to deans in AHC institutions (93.5% vs. 86.5%), and deans in baccalaureate or associate degree granting institutions measured by Carnegie Classification compared to deans in graduate degree granting institutions or health institutions (27.5% vs. 18.5%). All the differences are statistically significant at $p < .05$ level.

Our bivariate analyses above shows that several individual and institutional attributes, such as age 60 or older, without a tenure system, private institution, and non-AHC institution, are associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing a short tenure for deans. To examine the relationship between an attribute and having a short tenure while controlling for the impacts of all other covariates, we applied logistic regression. In the model, the outcome variable, a short tenure, or a standard/long tenure, is binary and the latter category was treated as the reference category. Additional chi-square analyses showed that there are high corrections (or multicollinearity) among the variables “type of private or public institutions,” “AHC status,” “type of nursing programs as college/school of nursing or department/division of nursing” and “type of baccalaureate/associate degree granting institutions or graduate degree granting/health institutions by Carnegie Classification.” We found that the former three variables do not improve the model (measured by difference in likelihood ratio chi-square values between a model including the three variables and a model excluding the three variables), therefore, the three variables are excluded. Table 4 shows the results of logistic regression analyses. We found that the odds of having a short tenure for deans aged 60 or older are 1.722 times the odds for deans aged 59 or younger. The odds of having a short tenure for deans with a title as Chair, Director, or Department Head are 1.986 times the odds for deans with a title as Dean. The odds for deans who left a deanship for a subsequent deanship are 4.242 times the odds for deans who did not do so. The odds for first-time deans is only 0.719 time the odds for second/more time

Table 4 – Logistic Regression on Short Tenure of Deans Who Started their Deanships in 2001 to 2011

Characteristics	Short Tenure Odds Ratio	p Value
Age 60 or Older (Age 59 or Younger)	1.722	.0007
Title as Chair/Director/Head/Other (Title as Dean)	1.986	<.0001
Left a Deanship for Another Deanship (Did Not leave a Deanship for Another Deanship)	4.242	.0004
First Deanship (Second or More Deanship)	0.719	.0363
Institution without a Tenure System (Institution with a Tenure System)	1.621	.0058
*Baccalaureate/Associate Institution (Graduate or Health Institution)	1.453	.0276
New Nursing Schools Opened within 5 years in 2001–2011 (Established Nursing Schools)	1.062	
Intercept	0.3796	<.0001
N = 907		
Likelihood ratio chi-square: 67.13, $p < .0001$		
Data source: AACN Annual Surveys and Membership Database.		
Note: p values are reported at $p < .05$ level.		
* Institutions are measured by Carnegie Classification.		

deans. In addition, the odds of having a short tenure for deans in schools without a tenure system are 1.621 times the odds for deans in schools with a tenure system. Finally, the odds for deans in baccalaureate or associate degree granting institutions are 1.453 times the odds for deans in graduate degree granting or health institutions measured by Carnegie Classification. The effect of the variable “newly created nursing programs,” became insignificant in the regression model.

Discussion

We found that 41% of the 930 deanships included in this study lasted for less than 5 years, which are defined as short tenures in this study. The figure increased from earlier cohorts to later cohorts, suggesting nursing deans in more recent cohorts are more likely than deans in earlier cohorts to leave their positions before finishing a 5-year term in their institutions. Given the significant financial resources and time devoted to formulating a dean search committee, hiring a dean search firm and conducting the search, these figures seem surprisingly high and of concern. High attrition of U.S. nursing deans may not be

isolated to those in the United States. Hull found that the turnover of nursing deans in 28 Canadian universities was about 30% between 2007 and 2009 and increased to 60% by 2011 (Hull, 2012), indicating that the attrition of nursing deanships in Canada is also high and the problem has accelerated in recent years.

We found there is no relationship between early attrition of nursing deans and most individual characteristics, including gender, race, and educational credentials. However, our bivariate and multivariate analyses show that deans aged 60 or older have a higher likelihood of having a short tenure than deans who were younger. We are unable to ascertain if this is from retirements, ageism, or something else. In addition, we found that three institutional characteristics are associated with having a short tenure: Deans with a title as Chair, Director, or Department Head, deans in schools without a tenure system, or deans in baccalaureate or associate degree granting institutions. It seems that all the three institutional variables measure different dimensions of smaller nursing programs. Deans in smaller programs with a higher rate of early attrition is not unique to academic nursing. A study found that deans in medical schools with smaller numbers of faculty tended to have shorter tenures (Levin, Bhak, Moy, Valente, & Griner, 1998). Since deans in larger systems and those with graduate programs are more satisfied with their role (Frank, 1986; Lamborn, 1991), there must be factors as alluded to above that are further correlated with length of stay in a deanship in the less satisfied group (who are also the group in our study who have short tenures). Dowling and Melillo (2015) in a qualitative analysis of 10 deans, who transitioned from a department to a school of nursing, found that the title of Chairperson and Director, often used in small schools, seems less important and conveys less influence. Moore and Porter (1987) pointed out that chief academic administrators in small, liberal arts institutions played multiple roles including middle manager. Without the help of associate and assistant deans, they are responsible for many labor-intensive and time-consuming tasks related to departmental governance, faculty, students, resources support staff, external affairs, budget, and professional development. Some might speculate that these smaller schools may be under resourced, and the Chairs, Directors, and Department Heads, who are possibly reporting to a non-nurse Dean, may have less control over their budgets, less independent decision-making, and less autonomy, all factors that may contribute to decreased satisfaction and a short tenure. Institutional culture and mission are often associated with size and may play a role as confounding variables. However, Emory et al. (2017) found that several institutional characteristics that exemplified a positive culture were correlated with intent to stay in the position and job satisfaction of nursing administrators: institutional leadership, shared governance, and departmental engagement. Our findings are also consistent with the conclusions of an early study on

medical school deans that organizational and environmental factors rather than individual characteristics played a dominant role in the increasing turnover of deans in medicine (Banaszak-Holl & Greer, 1995).

We did not find that deans in their first deanship have a higher likelihood of experiencing a short tenure compared with deans in second/more deanship. However, we found in our bivariate analyses that deans in newly created nursing programs are more likely than deans in established programs to experience a short tenure. The difference becomes insignificant statistically in our multivariate analyses after other variables are included. We believe there is a likely explanation: Newly created nursing programs are often smaller programs. Since, the impact of smaller programs on short tenures in our regression model are largely measured by the three institutional variables mentioned above, the effect of newly created programs therefore becomes insignificant in our regression model. Accordingly, the retention of deans in newly created nursing programs still deserves special attention, given the likely continued growth of new nursing programs in the coming years.

It has been estimated that the retirements of nurse faculty aged 60 or older will grow substantially in the coming years (Fang & Kasten, 2017). Given that the mean age of nursing deans has increased from 55.4 in 2001 to 58.4 in 2010 and 59.4 in 2017 (AACN 2001, AACN 2010, AACN 2017), their retirements are likely to grow significantly as well. Consequently, the growth of first-time deans, as replacements of retired deans, and growth of newly created nursing programs will also grow. New deans in smaller programs and newly created programs, as indicated by our findings, may have a higher rate of leaving academic administration early as they may feel overwhelmed, ill-prepared, or unsupported in the position. Adams found that workload and budgetary constraints were the top reasons chief administrators of nursing programs chose not to consider another administrative position (Adams, 2007). With the increase in dean retirements, new deans have had less time to move through traditional leadership roles with increasing responsibility over time and there are fewer individuals in the pipeline. They may be coming to a deanship with a different skill set than we have seen in the past. This indicates some significant implications for organizations such as AACN to provide leadership development opportunities at a variety of career levels.

Conclusions

Forty-one percent of deanships with short tenures is very significant operationally and impacts the growth of the profession; additionally, the number of those leaving their deanships is rising. Clearly much is needed in leadership development and support services such as a comprehensive institutional onboarding process, access to an executive coach, matching with a seasoned mentor in a

leadership position, and programming targeted to different career levels.

Recommendations

Two areas for further exploration are indicated. Research studies that are prospective and longitudinal would shed a great deal of light on why academics decide to seek a deanship, how they select a deanship, and what makes them leave a deanship. Further, a phenomenological approach to the lived experience of a new dean could elucidate ways to support the transition to the role and to increase satisfaction levels with an academic deanship. What types of scaffolding are required to support the aspiring leader for a successful and productive deanship? An important first step is finding out why they are leaving their deanships in order to determine how this trend can be reversed. What is the motivation to abandon a deanship after a few short years? What happens to those that do not move on to a subsequent deanship? How many of the interim deans eventually obtain a deanship? Also, with regards to those that are in new programs, could they be hired for the start-up but not expected to stay once the program is viable?

Our findings that deans who departed before finishing a 5-year term are more likely to do so in year 2 and that deans in smaller programs are more likely to experience a short tenure provides useful information about timing and type of nursing programs with higher likelihood of early attrition for deans. The impact is significant to colleges where smaller nursing programs reside, so more focused efforts can be made to improve retention of these chief academic administrators. Programs directed specifically to their needs may help substantially.

Finally, leadership development of both the aspiring leader and the new dean are critical: not only do we need to provide support to those currently in chair and associate dean roles so they are prepared to move up, but also concentrated programs are focused on the needs of the new dean once they assume a deanship. Leadership styles, strategic planning, working in an interprofessional environment, the art of negotiation, and development of a business acumen, all may support new deans in their roles and lead to a longer tenure as a dean. Mentoring, coaching, peer networks, and other supportive strategies should be available at a reasonable cost to those deans across the spectrum of size and mission. Sigma Theta Tau International, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, and the American Organization of Nurse Executives all have well respected, evidence based, leadership development programs that are tailored to meet the need of academic leaders. Provosts, Chancellors, and Presidents should be lobbied to support the aspiring and new dean journey through allocation of resources, support to attend leadership development programs, focused sabbaticals, or other means in order to secure succession

planning within schools and colleges of nursing and ultimately contribute to the health of the nation through the preparation of qualified nursing graduates.

Study Limitation

Although we identified associations between individual, and, mostly, institutional attributes with the short tenure of nursing deans in this study, our data does not allow us to further explore specific reasons for deans' early departures.

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