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THE Dandelion

THE NEWSLETTER OF FERTILITY NEW ZEALAND (FERTILITY NZ), A REGISTERED CHARITY WALKING ALONGSIDE ALL PEOPLE FACING FERTILITY CHALLENGES

WINTER 2022



Heartbreak, hope and happiness

Fertility NZ volunteer Billie opens up about her PCOS diagnosis and fertility journey.

It was April 2019 when I visited the doctor about unexplained weight gain and period problems I was experiencing. I was referred for an ultrasound as my doctor suspected I had Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) and this confirmed my ovaries were covered in cysts. I was shocked to discover this as I was 26 years old at the time and had flown under the radar until now. I remember the doctor saying there was no rush for children however, given my PCOS diagnosis, I should start thinking about planning for a family in the following months to optimise my chances.

My husband and I were married in 2017, both unsure if we even wanted a family. We were still young and wanted to travel and continue to live life as a newly married couple. Receiving this diagnosis changed the course of our direction. It wasn't until somebody else said, 'you might struggle to have children' that we immediately knew we wanted a family and why not pursue it now while we can.

We started trying for a baby in June 2019 and were delighted to fall pregnant first shot. We thought we had nailed it and couldn't believe our luck. A few

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Welcome Notes

Welcome to *The Dandelion* newsletter.

Kia ora kotou,

A change in seasons always brings with it a change in mood and focus. I love the colours of autumn and the return of hearty soups but it is a little sad to see those long summer days disappear.

The transition to autumn then winter, combined with a pandemic and the onset of flu season brings another complex set of circumstances for those facing infertility – particularly if you are in the midst of treatment. The constant risk assessment around whether to attend an event or simply visit the shops, and how likely that outing will result in COVID-19 exposure that may halt treatment, is mentally exhausting. At Fertility NZ we recognise that our members are travelling a complicated pathway and our support groups, information platforms and webinars

are more important than ever. In this newsletter our Board Advisor, Fertility specialist, Dr Greg Phillipson offers some great information on managing viruses, including COVID-19, fertility treatment and pregnancy.

While many of our Support groups are now meeting face-to-face once again, there are still online options for those wishing to lay low or who are isolating.

In January we welcomed our new CEO, Lydia Hemingway. Lydia comes to Fertility NZ with a wealth of experience in the not-for-profit sector and also has her own experience of infertility. There is a little more about her on page four. Lydia was also a guest on the infertility Podcast *Waiting for you*. It's a wonderful discussion about Secondary Infertility and Donor conception.

The Fertility NZ Board has also elected

two new Directors in recent months, Nick Roberts and Hannah Owenson, and one ex-officio member, Suzanne Sherwin. All bring incredible skills and talent to our Board. Strong governance is what will ensure Fertility NZ not only survives but thrives in these very trying economic times.

Our Board is focused on making strategic decisions that will benefit the charity and, in turn, the community we serve. There is immense goodwill and hundreds of volunteer hours each year that make this goal a reality. It is also made a reality by donations from the public. There are many ways you can donate to Fertility NZ and every donation makes a genuine impact.

Nga mihi,
Juanita Copeland – Chair

About Fertility NZ

Fertility NZ walks alongside all people facing fertility challenges.

Fertility NZ was founded in 1990 and is a registered charity. It operates on a national level and much of its work is undertaken by dedicated volunteers. Fertility NZ provides assistance for people with fertility issues through the following channels:

- **Support** A network of regular support gatherings, workshops and contact groups throughout the country; an 0800 line and email address for enquiries, and infertility forums on our website where members can provide support to one another.

- **Information** Fertility NZ's website www.fertilitynz.org.nz is the focal point of information; informative fact sheet brochures are available for members and through clinics; regular publication of *The Dandelion* newsletter and email updates to members; conferences and information events. Regular campaigns to raise awareness of infertility and fertility issues.

- **Advocacy** Representing the voice of people affected by infertility on medical, ethical and policy issues.

Our vision

Fertility NZ has a vision that everyone has the opportunity to achieve their family dream where:

- Infertility is recognised, understood and supported;
- All New Zealanders faced with the medical condition of infertility have access to appropriate, timely and fully-funded medical treatment;
- Everyone has all the information necessary to enable them to make informed decisions regarding their fertility;
- Young New Zealanders learn about fertility preservation;
- Fertility and all alternative forms of whānau-building are respected and valued.

Heartbreak, hope and happiness

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days after we found out, I woke up one morning, went to the bathroom and realised I was having a miscarriage. This was a lot to process when we had just told some of our family. We didn't know a soul who had experienced this pain or loss. Our doctor confirmed this for us and said the chances of having another miscarriage was slim so we should soldier on with trying.

Amazingly one month later, we fell pregnant again. We were a lot more reserved and we didn't tell many people. We were very anxious and paranoid that something would go wrong. I did weekly HCG testing with my doctor, the first two looked great, but our third blood test identified the hormones hadn't doubled as they should have. I was sent for a scan that showed a baby and a heartbeat measuring perfectly. A week later, I started spotting. However, scans continued to show a growing baby. It was torture every time I went to the bathroom. A few weeks later, whilst on a family trip in the USA, I miscarried at a hospital in Hawaii. I was nine weeks at this stage. Again, my husband and I were broken.

We took a break from trying, we needed to heal and give my body a break. In early 2020 we engaged with a fertility clinic to do some further testing to figure out why this kept happening. The testing uncovered nothing, and all our test results came back normal for everything aside from my PCOS. We were still young, healthy, and active but we were confused and frustrated. We didn't think it would be this hard.

Given I had longer cycles my specialist decided in February of 2020 that we should begin Letrozole cycles to speed things along. We did four cycles, with number four ending in another chemical pregnancy. That was miscarriage number three for us. My specialist had faith we would conceive without IVF and wanted us to keep going with Letrozole. We felt differently and started pursuing IVF with PGS testing to ensure we wouldn't continue to miscarry.



Billie with her husband Sam, longed for baby Boh, and four-legged Leo.

“We were still young, healthy, and active but we were confused and frustrated. We didn't think it would be this hard.”

We signed the paperwork, started blood work and did the required needle training. On my last and final cycle of Letrozole, before we started IVF, we found out I was pregnant, and we stayed pregnant. With the help of my naturopath, my specialist and heparin with progesterone.

I carried a baby girl to full term. We welcomed Boh into our lives in June 2021. She's our true miracle baby, our rainbow, and we are eternally grateful for her every day.

This year we plan to pursue baby number two. We are anxious, hopeful, and realistic. It may not be

straightforward, or it might. We will be seeking Letrozole treatment again with help from my naturopath and will be right back into the trenches of TTC like so many others out there. ■

Billie volunteers for Fertility NZ. We are grateful to the army of volunteers who dedicate their time and energy to support and comfort others on this isolating journey – we hear you and see you.

The Fertility Support Series is a semi-structured series of three sessions held on consecutive weeks. It addresses topics such as; dealing with thoughtless comments, others' pregnancy news, and protecting your relationship during infertility. It's an opportunity to learn, take control, and meet others in a confidential space.

Fertility NZ is expanding our support offerings and the Fertility Support Series will be available online in the future. You will find more information and how to be involved on the back page.

Welcome Lydia



Lydia Hemingway joined Fertility NZ in January as our new CEO. Lydia has a strong background in fundraising, business development and the not-for-profit sector and is thrilled to bring her wealth of experience to Fertility NZ.

Lydia has a strong connection to the work we do having had her own fertility journey. During her treatment she was a regular attendee at our Christchurch support group and got immense value from the support and information she received.

Lydia is based in Christchurch where she lives with her husband Richie and two daughters Jemima and Mabel. ■



BOARD MEMBER PROFILE

Hannah Owenson



Fertility NZ is governed by a volunteer Board of Trustees and supported by our Board Advisors. They all bring an incredibly valuable range of expertise and perspective to our organisation.

Hannah joined the Fertility NZ Board in November 2021 after being a volunteer for over two years with the Wellington branch.

Hannah works in public policy in the international development space and brings her skills in analysis, advocacy, and programme management to the Board.

Hannah is particularly interested in the advocacy work that Fertility NZ is undertaking. "There are so many different areas of fertility that can benefit from an amplified voice, and Fertility NZ is able to bring that together for our members," she says.

Hannah truly understands the work of Fertility NZ. "Having had an often lonely fertility journey," she says, "I am passionate about increasing services and support for others experiencing infertility."

Hannah and husband Joe are parents to two-year-old Jasmine and are loving this age. Hannah describes Jasmine as a "chatterbox and an absolute delight to spend time with, even when the parenting bit gets hard."

Thank you Hannah for sharing your time, passion and expertise with Fertility NZ! ■

Fundraising through WODS

Through completing 60 Workout of the Days (WODS) in two days a group of crossfit enthusiast in Waikato raised an incredible \$2,125 for Fertility NZ through Givealittle in late 2021.

60 WODS in two days may seem impossible but not for Fertility NZ supporter Sam and his crossfit buddies.

A WOD is crossfit-based, uses multiple movements and is approximately 15 minutes long therefore, 60 WODS meant about 15 hours of working out across two days. Wow! But why would they do this? Simple, to raise money for two charities including Fertility NZ.

Sam and his wife Chloe had been going through IVF and the toll had taken a lot out of both of them. "Chloe especially has been through a lot,"

says Sam. "I can't even imagine what she has been through mentally and physically. I owe her a debt of gratitude for what she has done in an attempt to start a family for us."

The whole team support Sam and Chloe on this journey and showed this by embracing the 60 WODS in Two Days challenge raising an incredible \$2,125 through a fundraising campaign on givealittle.co.nz.

Thank you so much to Sam and the whole team for fundraising for Fertility NZ. This truly makes a difference to our work and we love that you had fun doing it!

Fertility NZ is a registered charity and we rely on donations and support from individuals, families



and businesses so that we can walk alongside all people facing fertility challenges. If you would like to fundraise for Fertility NZ, like Sam and his crossfit buddies, please contact Lydia at lydia@fertilitynz.org.nz. ■



Jess and Michael's story: Daring to dream

After getting married in 2016 Jess and Michael dreamed of a future with children. They were both young, fit and healthy however, month after month brought heartache and tears as 'Aunt Flo' arrived like clockwork. Jess and Michael share their fertility journey as they followed their family dream.

It was June 2018 when Jess saw her doctor about not being able to fall pregnant. Tests followed by an appointment with a fertility clinic came next where it was revealed there was no obvious reason why they couldn't conceive.

Jess and Michael were given a number of different options to consider and they chose a privately funded round of IVF. Nerves grew as bookings were made to begin their IVF cycle nine days later when Jess's period was due. In a flurry of paperwork, payments and preparations the glimmer of hope in starting a family began to grow.

Nine days later, her period having arrived, their first round of IVF began. Jess took three weeks leave from work to focus on having the best outcome possible for their family. The daily injections started, first with Gonal-F and then also Orgalutran. Scans, blood tests, phone calls and drives into the city dotted the next few days as Jess's follicles grew.

Finally, they were instructed to use the trigger injection and, 36 hours later it was egg collection day. Fifteen eggs were collected, 12 made it through the night, six grew to high-quality five-day blastocysts, one was transferred into Jess's womb and the remaining five were frozen for future use.

Nine days and one blood test later,



Jess and Michael didn't know anyone else who had had trouble conceiving. Now they know they are not alone.

they received the phone call they were waiting a lifetime for. They were pregnant! At their final appointment with the fertility clinic, they saw the flickering heartbeat of their much longed for IVF miracle.

At this final appointment it was also revealed that Jess and Michael had 'unexplained' infertility as all their testing came back as normal.

After the birth of their first child, they decided to expand their family. Trying to conceive naturally returned the flood of emotions and negative results so they went back to the fertility clinic to have one of their frozen embryos transferred. This was successful and they were pregnant again!

However, as New Zealand moved alert levels in their COVID-19 response, Jess and Michael's elation at their expanding family was cruelly halted. The first day of alert level four would be a day they would never forget as Jess miscarried their unborn child.

A series of events including an ambulance, urgent trips to hospital, visits to the after-hours doctor, multiple blood tests and a lumbar puncture were made even more difficult as they stayed in their bubble away from much needed support during this difficult time.

After some consideration, Jess and Michael returned to the fertility clinic for another frozen embryo transfer. They were pregnant again and their rainbow baby was born mid-2021. Jess and Michael were now a family of four!

Jess and Michael didn't know anyone else who had had trouble conceiving. They had a sense of loneliness and isolation around them as everyone else seem to conceive easily. Now they know they are not alone.

They never thought when they first got married that being able to create a family would be such a journey and looking at them, you wouldn't know what they had to go through to become parents.

They were young and healthy and even now do not know why they cannot conceive naturally. But, as they have learnt, infertility and miscarriage can happen to anyone, no matter the age and stage of their life. ■

Thank you

Our sincere thanks to One Foundation for their generous grant which funded the design and production of this newsletter. ■



There is a lot of information regarding COVID-19 and it can be overwhelming. Fertility NZ Board Advisor, Dr Greg Phillipson, shares some useful information regarding fertility treatment, COVID-19 and more.

Virus protection during fertility treatment and pregnancy

Vaccines during pregnancy

Vaccines are designed to protect us against infection through stimulating the production of antibodies to provide immunity against one or several diseases. The following vaccines are safe during pregnancy:

- Influenza (flu) infection – If unvaccinated may cause fever, chills, aches, cough and sore throat. Severe illness may occur even in healthy pregnant people.
- Tetanus infection – If unvaccinated may cause severe muscle problems.
- Pertussis (whooping cough) – If unvaccinated may cause a severe long lasting cough.

Even if previously vaccinated, flu and Boostrix (tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis) is recommended during pregnancy in New Zealand.

The COVID-19 Vaccine*

- Before conception and during pregnancy the COVID-19 vaccination is recommended.
- The vaccine does not affect a woman's ovarian reserve.
- Some women may notice a change in their next period after receiving a vaccine. This is a temporary effect which does not have consequences on fertility.
- Sperm test results are not affected by having the vaccine however COVID-19 infection has the potential to reduce sperm quality.
- There is no evidence that the success of fertility treatment is altered by vaccines.



- COVID-19 vaccines can be given during fertility treatment. Some people will get side effects a few days after vaccination and for that reason may plan their vaccination for a week before or after a procedure such as egg collection or surgical sperm collection. This means that, should an infection occur after the collection, it would not be confused with the occasional fever that can occur after vaccination.
- The only reason to consider delaying fertility treatment is if you want to be protected before you are pregnant. A short delay is unlikely to affect your chance of treatment success however, for those aged over 36 a long delay of several months may reduce the chance of pregnancy.
- Fertility treatment can be initiated without delay after vaccination unless

you wish to wait until booster doses have been given.

- The COVID-19 vaccine can be given in early pregnancy. There is no reason to indicate vaccines are harmful in pregnancy to the woman or baby. This is based upon follow up studies of more than 130,000 pregnant women after vaccination during pregnancy.
- Sperm or egg donation can occur a week after vaccination. If a donor feels unwell after vaccination, then they should not donate until seven days after symptoms. This may alter the safe starting time for treatments.
- If a woman has had recurrent miscarriages there is no evidence they should postpone getting pregnant after a vaccination. It will not affect the chance of a future healthy pregnancy.

* Collated from various sources including The British Fertility Society, New Zealand Ministry of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists

COVID-19 during pregnancy

Worldwide studies have shown that pregnant women are no more likely to get COVID-19 than other healthy adults. About two thirds of pregnant women with COVID-19 have no symptoms at all. Those that do have symptoms often describe it like a mild cold or flu. Most will recover before having their baby and do not need to stay in hospital. However, some pregnant women can develop a severe illness requiring hospital care. The risk factors for severe illness in pregnancy include:

- Not being fully vaccinated
- Aged over 35 years
- Obesity (BMI over 30)
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes

COVID-19 infection in pregnancy may increase the chance of pre-term birth, pneumonia and there is a small increase in stillbirth.

What should I do if I have symptoms?

If you develop cold or flu symptoms your caregiver (GP, LMC or your healthcare provider) should be notified. They will tell you whether you need to be seen in person and when testing can be planned. They may choose to delay or reschedule any future appointments or arrange for a phone health review.

What treatment is recommended?

For fever and cough without trouble breathing it is normal to isolate at home and maintain good fluid and food intake. Regular contact with a caregiver by phone is important. If symptoms worsen then review and hospital care may be needed. Medicines should only be taken if advised by your caregiver.

What should I do if I plan to keep the placenta?

There is a very small chance that infection may transmit from a placenta/whenua. If planning to keep the placenta:

- Follow thorough hand hygiene practices and then use gloves.
- The placenta should be placed in a container or leakproof bag and a second container or bag should also cover the placenta before removing gloves.
- Repeat handwashing.

Other viruses during pregnancy

Although COVID-19 is a concern due to the current pandemic, other infections can also be tested for and several can cause fever and flu-like illness with muscle aches and cough.

If planning a pregnancy or in early pregnancy, infection is a concern because: some may be worse than when not pregnant; some could cause problems for your baby before birth and some can be passed to your unborn baby and cause infection soon after birth.

Most New Zealanders have had the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccination as a child. Measles is now rare however can occur in the unvaccinated.

Rubella is also uncommon and is part of the antenatal screening blood test that is usually done in early pregnancy. However, it is worth testing prior to pregnancy if there is any possibility that you have not been vaccinated. The vaccination is straight forward and ensures no risk of rubella infection in pregnancy. Although often not worse than a cold for many people, if it does occur in the first three months of pregnancy it can harm the developing baby.

Other infections to be aware of during pregnancy

- Parvovirus (commonly called slapped cheek) – This may cause a rash on face, body, arms or legs as well as joint pain and aches. A blood test can check for infection.
- Zika Virus – This can be spread by mosquito or by sex with someone who has the virus. The symptoms are like a mild flu. The infection is more common in certain countries. Although rare, there are specific risks to the developing baby.

- Listeria – Spread by some uncooked foods, this can cause fever, chills and back pain. Food such as shellfish, raw milk, deli meats and unpasteurised cheeses should be avoided during pregnancy.
- Cytomegalovirus (CMV) – This can cause a fever, sore throat and aches and is spread from saliva, urine and other body fluids. A blood test can confirm previous or recent infection. Repeat infections are possible.
- Toxoplasmosis – This can be caught by eating uncooked meat or by touching cat waste when gardening or cleaning cat litter boxes. It usually does not cause symptoms in adults but in pregnancy can harm the baby. Wearing gloves while gardening, washing hands afterward and frequent hand hygiene when caring for cats is advised during pregnancy.

If you do get any of these viruses or infections, treatment depends on the diagnosis and whether the infection will be harmful to you or your unborn baby.

Infection prevention

When pregnant follow these simple tips to help stay healthy:

- Regularly and thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water especially after preparing food, changing baby nappies, gardening or touching animals. Hand sanitisers work but soap and water remain the best.
- Avoid sharing food and drinks with other people.
- Avoid eating the high-risk foods mentioned.
- Avoid mosquito bites. ■

This article is for informational purposes only. It is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your doctor or other qualified health care provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition or treatment and before undertaking a new health care regimen.

Dr Greg Phillipson (MB, ChB, FRANZCOG, CREI) is an Obstetrician, Gynaecologist and Subspecialist in reproductive medicine and surgery.

noticeboard

Contact your local support volunteers for details of group meeting and any questions.

AUCKLAND

CASUAL COFFEE GROUP, MT EDEN

Group meets monthly on Wednesdays at 7pm: 13 July, 17, August, 21 September, 19 October

CASUAL COFFEE GROUP, NORTH SHORE

Group meets monthly on Thursday at 7.30pm: 21 July, 18 August, 15 September, 20 October

CASUAL COFFEE GROUP, PUKEKOHE

Group meets monthly. Please email for more details: support@fertilitynz.org.nz

PREGNANT AFTER FERTILITY TREATMENT

Group meets monthly on Sundays: 10 July, 7 August, 11 September, 2 October

SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

Group meets monthly please email for details: singlewomensupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

SECONDARY INFERTILITY

Please email for details: secondariesupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

AUCKLAND FERTILITY SUPPORT SERIES

Semi-structured course ideal for couples and single persons who have yet to conceive. This series is run over three consecutive weeks: 26 July, 2 & 9 August; 18, 25 October & 1 November

WAIKATO

Group meets every 3rd Saturday at 10am: 16 July, 20 August, 17 September, 15 October

Please note, due to Covid-19 restrictions our in-person support may be changed to online support calls, or cancelled at short notice.

TAURANGA

Group meets every bi-monthly on Saturday at 10.30am: 27 August

TARANAKI

Group meets monthly on the first Tuesday of every month at 7pm: 5 July, 2 August, 6 September, 4 October

WELLINGTON

Virtual Support and Connect meeting held on the first Thursday of each month via Zoom: 7 July, 4 August, 1 September, 6 October,

CHRISTCHURCH

Group meets on the last Tuesday of every month 6.30-8pm: 26 July, 30 August, 27 September, 25 October

SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE

Group meets every 6 weeks on a Sunday. Please email for details: singlewomensupportchch@fertilitynz.org.nz

DUNEDIN

Please email for more details: dunedinsupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

QUEENSTOWN

Group meets monthly on Wednesdays, 6pm-7.30pm: 13 July, 10 August, 14 September, 12 October

INVERCARGILL

Group meets online once per month on Wednesdays: 20 July, 23 August. Please email for details: invercargillsupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

Fertility NZ support contacts

REGIONAL SUPPORT

Auckland

Central/Mt Eden and Pregnant After Fertility Treatment
aucklandsupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

North Shore

northshoresupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

South Auckland/Pukekohe

support@fertilitynz.org.nz

Waikato

hamiltonsupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

Tauranga

taurangasupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

Taranaki

taranakisupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

Wellington

wellingtonsupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

Christchurch

christchurchsupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

Queenstown

queenstownsupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

Dunedin

dunedinsupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

Invercargill

invercargillsupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

SPECIALISED TOPIC GROUPS

Secondary Infertility

secondariesupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

Single Mothers by Choice, Auckland

singlewomensupport@fertilitynz.org.nz

Single Mothers by Choice, Christchurch

singlewomensupportchch@fertilitynz.org.nz

Childless by Circumstance

support@fertilitynz.org.nz

Fertility Support Series

fss Auckland@fertilitynz.org.nz

VIRTUAL SUPPORT

Each region and topic group have their own private Facebook group. Join your local group to keep up to date with what is happening on in your region: www.facebook.com/FertilityNewZealand/groups.

We continue to provide virtual support to our Donor Conception Surrogacy Network and Childless by Circumstance communities.

The Fertility Support Series is going online

Due to COVID-19 restrictions over the last two years, we have sadly had to cancel more in-person Support Series than we have hosted. However, this has also brought about the opportunity to create an innovative online Fertility Support Series (FSS) to run alongside in-person support. We will run a mixture of online and in person support programmes from 2023.

Later this year we will be trialling a free pilot programme. The pilot programme seeks to work with participants and facilitators and develop the programme before the official launch in March 2023.

Each session of the online FSS will be 90 minutes and will run weekly over four weeks. This differs from the in-person FSS which will remain at two hours per weekly session over three weeks.

We are excited to be able to bring FSS online and offer this valuable support programme outside of Auckland to all New Zealanders regardless of where you are based.

For more information about the online or in-person Fertility Support Series please contact us on support@fertilitynz.org.nz.

This material is supported by way of an educational grant from Bayer New Zealand Limited. The information submitted is intended to assist health care professionals and patients in forming their own conclusions and making decisions, but may not represent a comprehensive listing of all available information on the subject. The views and opinions expressed by the individual presenters do not necessarily represent the opinion of Bayer New Zealand Limited.

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