

Journal Policies Regarding Medical Writing Assistance and Industry Sponsorship

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective was to determine whether select medical journals will consider manuscripts that were developed with medical writing assistance and/or pharmaceutical industry sponsorship, and to assess if there is a relationship between nonacceptance of such articles and impact factor, circulation, or professional society affiliation.

Research design and methods: UlrichsWeb™ was used to select infectious disease or general medicine journals. Then journal websites were reviewed to determine policies regarding medical writing assistance or industry sponsorship. If information was unavailable on the journal website, emails were sent to a journal contact. Impact factor, circulation, and professional society affiliations were compared for journals that do or do not consider such articles.

Results: 180 journals were reviewed; 9 were excluded (eg, ceased publication, newspaper/magazine format). The final analysis included 171 journals (52 general medicine, 31 infectious disease, and 88 other specialties [eg, basic science, critical care]). More than a third of the journals (60/171 regarding medical writing assistance, 65/171 regarding industry sponsorship) did not specify their policies on their website and did not respond to 2 emails. Medical writing assistance is permitted by 90% (100/111) of journals with available policies, and 86% (91/106) allow industry-sponsored papers. No association was found between these policies and impact factor, circulation, and professional society affiliations.

Conclusions: Our observations show that the majority of medical journals in this study accept journal articles supported by medical writing assistance and pharmaceutical industry sponsorship as indicated by their policies or in direct response to inquiries. For one third of journals included in this study, it was unclear what their policies on acceptance of manuscripts supported by medical writing assistance or pharmaceutical industry sponsorship were and further probing would be needed. Overall, it appears that medical writing assistance and/or pharmaceutical industry sponsorship are not inhibitors of manuscript acceptance to quality journals.

BACKGROUND

Current journal policies vary regarding acceptance of manuscripts that are supported with medical writing assistance or pharmaceutical industry sponsorship. In 2010, a survey found that 84% of 210 member journals of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) accept pharmaceutical-sponsored manuscripts and 77% accept manuscripts with writing assistance provided by medical communication companies.¹ The survey showed that US journals had more restrictive policies than international journals. Journals may avoid such papers because analyses have shown a potential for bias in favor of the sponsors' drugs² or because some professional societies, such as the Association of Clinical Researchers and Educators, discourage the involvement of external writing agencies.³ In contrast, many journal editors acknowledge that medical writing assistance may enhance reporting standards, guideline compliance, and editorial quality and is acceptable with proper disclosure.⁴ The ICMJE published *Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals* and stated that writing assistance and sponsor involvement should be acknowledged but did not provide any other comments on the matter.⁵

This analysis was performed on general medicine journals with a particular interest in potential target journals for infectious disease topics, one area of expertise for Scientific Therapeutics Information, Inc. The objective was to determine whether select medical journals will consider manuscripts that were developed with medical writing assistance and/or pharmaceutical industry sponsorship, and to observe if nonacceptance of such articles had an influence on impact factor, circulation, or professional society affiliation.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

- The UlrichsWeb™ database and journal websites were accessed in December 2013
- UlrichsWeb™ was used to select scholarly, peer-reviewed journals in infectious disease or general medicine
 - Search terms:
 - "infection," "antimicrobial," OR "infectious" in the title
 - "medic*" in the title AND subject (exact): medical sciences
 - Results were limited by:
 - Status: active
 - Content type: "academic/scholarly"
 - Subject area: "medicine and health"
 - Key feature: "refereed/peer-reviewed," "available online," "abstracted or indexed," "Copyright Clearance Center (CCC)"
 - Language of text: English
 - Frequency: bimonthly, monthly, other, weekly
- Journal websites were then reviewed to determine policies regarding medical writing assistance or industry sponsorship
 - Key words below were searched
 - "industry"
 - "writ*"
 - "pharma"
 - "assist"
 - "manufacturer"
 - "commercial"
 - "acknowledg*"
 - If these key words were not found, a read-through of the author guidelines was conducted to identify whether alternative terminology was used
- If information was unavailable on the journal website, emails were sent to a designated journal contact as noted on the website (eg, managing editor, editorial coordinator, etc)
 - A follow-up email was sent approximately 1 week after the first email
 - If a journal did not provide information within 2 weeks after a second follow-up email, its policies were considered "not specified"
- Impact factor, circulation, and professional society affiliations were assessed, if available, for all journals included in the analysis.

RESULTS

- Of 180 journals identified, 9 were excluded (2 have ceased publication, 2 were newspapers, 1 magazine, 2 only published on the history of medicine, 2 journals were duplicates and were therefore only counted once). The final analysis included 171 journals (52 general medicine, 31 infectious disease, and 88 other specialties [eg, basic science, critical care, clinical research, palliative care]; 62 United States, 109 international) (Figure 1)
 - More than a third of the journals (60/171 regarding medical writing assistance, 65/171 regarding industry sponsorship) did not specify their policies on their website and did not respond to 2 emails
- Medical writing assistance is permitted by 90% of journals with available policies (Figure 2), and 86% allow industry-sponsored papers (Figure 3)
 - Policies of journals that accept manuscripts with medical writing assistance or pharmaceutical company sponsorship did not appear to influence impact factor, circulation, and professional society affiliations (Tables 1 and 2)
 - A few journals only allowed medical writing assistance and/or industry sponsorship for specific types of articles (eg, review articles cannot be sponsored or only supplements can be sponsored). With the available data, it appears that these were journals with a high impact factor and circulation number
 - In a comparison between US and international journals, a slightly greater proportion of international journals allowed medical writing assistance and/or industry sponsorship (Figures 4 and 5)
 - A greater proportion of international journals compared with US journals did not provide policies on industry sponsorship
 - Of the journals that did not publish their policies online but did respond via email, 79% (33/42) allowed medical writing assistance and 76% (35/46) allowed industry sponsorship.

Figure 1. Journal Search Results

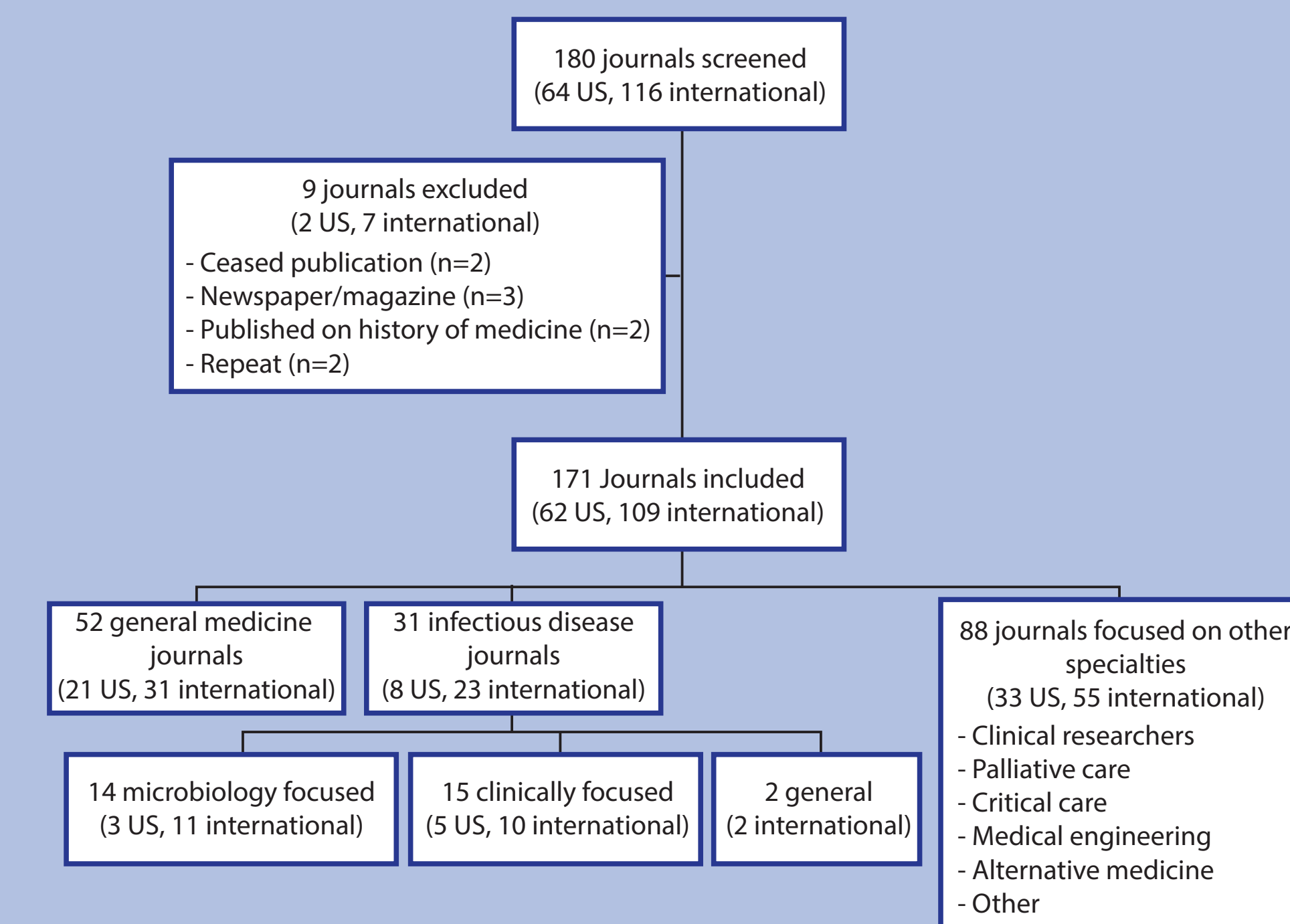


Figure 2. Journal Policies on Articles Prepared with Medical Writing Assistance (Total Journals, N=171)

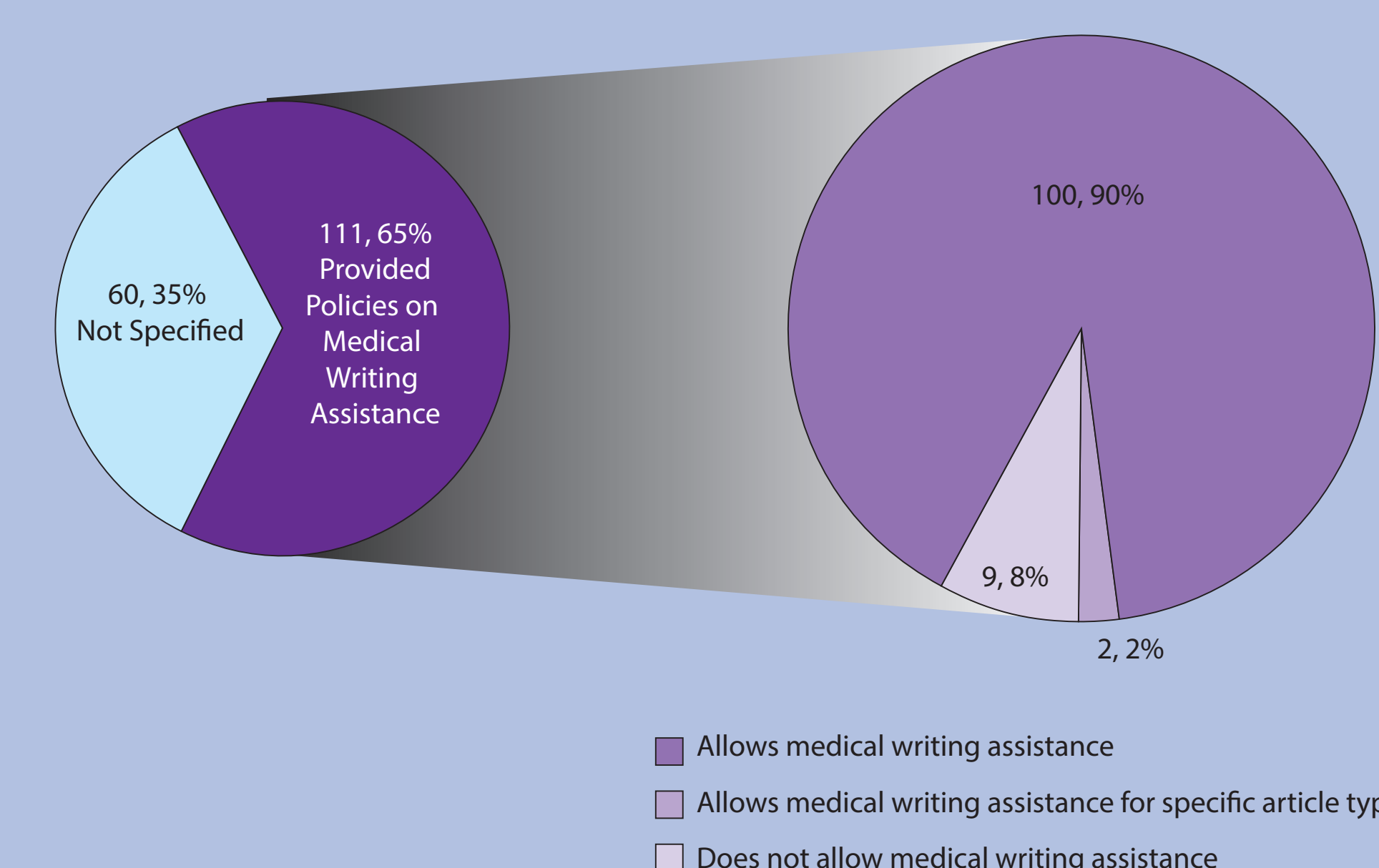


Figure 3. Journal Policies on Articles Prepared with Pharmaceutical Industry Support (Total Journals, N=171)

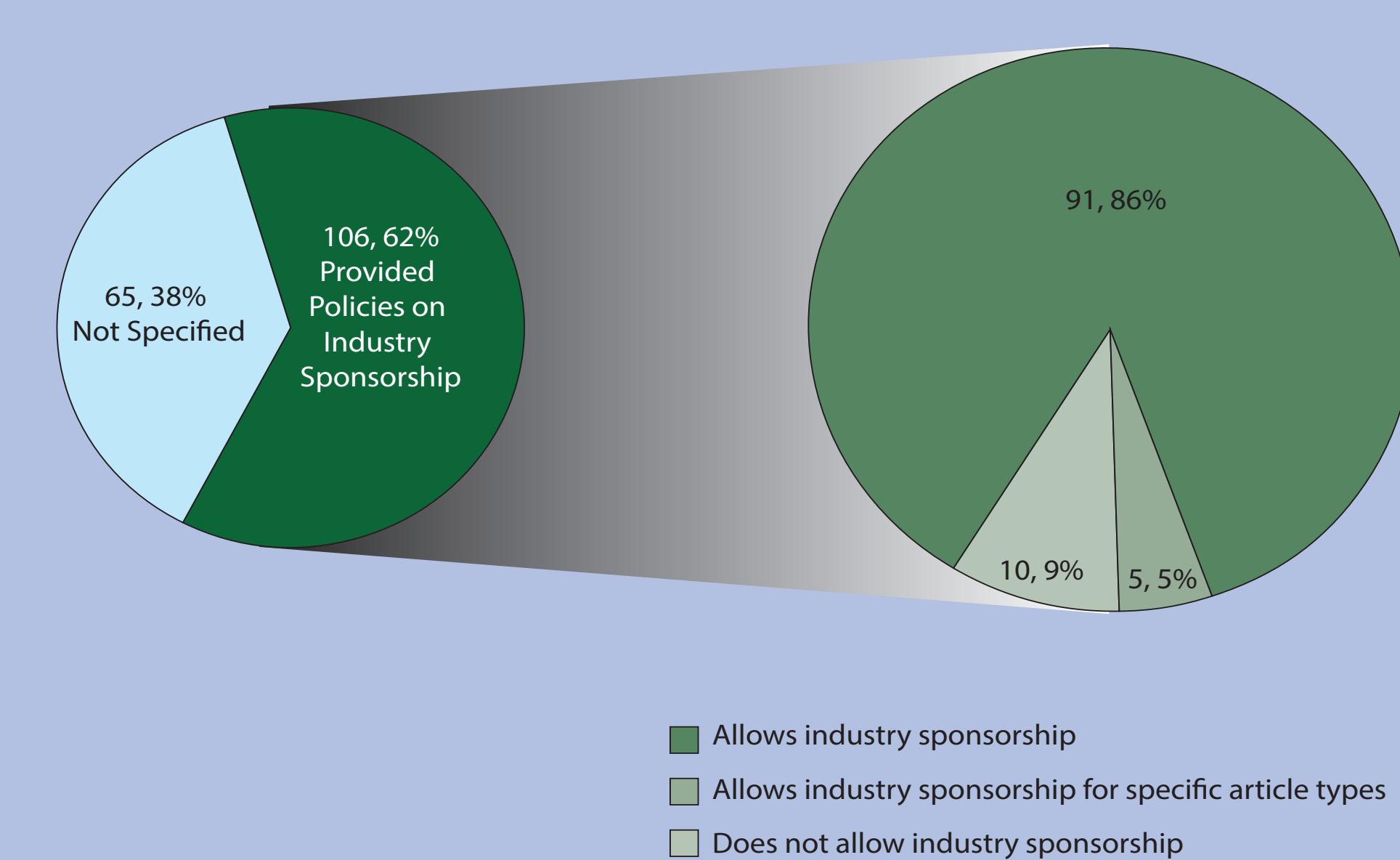


Table 1. Policies on Medical Writing Assistance and Impact Factor, Circulation, and Professional Society Affiliations

Criterion	Allows medical writing assistance (N=100)	Allows medical writing assistance for specific article types (N=2)	Does not allow medical writing assistance (N=9)	Not specified (N=60)
Impact factor, median (range)	n=76 2.369 (0.2-51.68)	n=1 3.4	n=8 1.918 (0.915-4.87)	n=41 1.871 (0.341-24.302)
Circulation, median (range)	n=63 2380 (25-300,000)	n=2 66,902 (32,279-101,525)	n=8 2350 (495-14,400)	n=20 3558 (175-109,388)
Affiliated with professional society	n=100 52%	n=2 0%	n=8 50%	n=60 57%

n = number of journals that report impact factor, circulation, or professional society affiliations in each category.

Table 2. Policies on Industry Sponsorship and Impact Factor, Circulation, and Professional Society Affiliations

Criterion	Allows industry sponsorship (N=91)	Allows industry sponsorship for specific article types (N=5)	Does not allow industry sponsorship (N=10)	Not specified (N=65)
Impact factor, median (range)	n=72 2.284 (0.2-24.302)	n=4 2.92 (1.845-51.658)	n=8 2.223 (0.915-4.87)	n=44 1.818 (0.341-30)
Circulation, median (range)	n=58 2440 (25-101,073)	n=5 187,127 (1350-101,525)	n=6 2350 (495-14,400)	n=24 3500 (129-300,000)
Affiliated with professional society	n=91 42%	n=5 20%	n=10 50%	n=65 63%

n = number of journals that report impact factor, circulation, or professional society affiliations in each category.

Figure 4. Comparison Between US and International Journals for Policies on Medical Writing Assistance

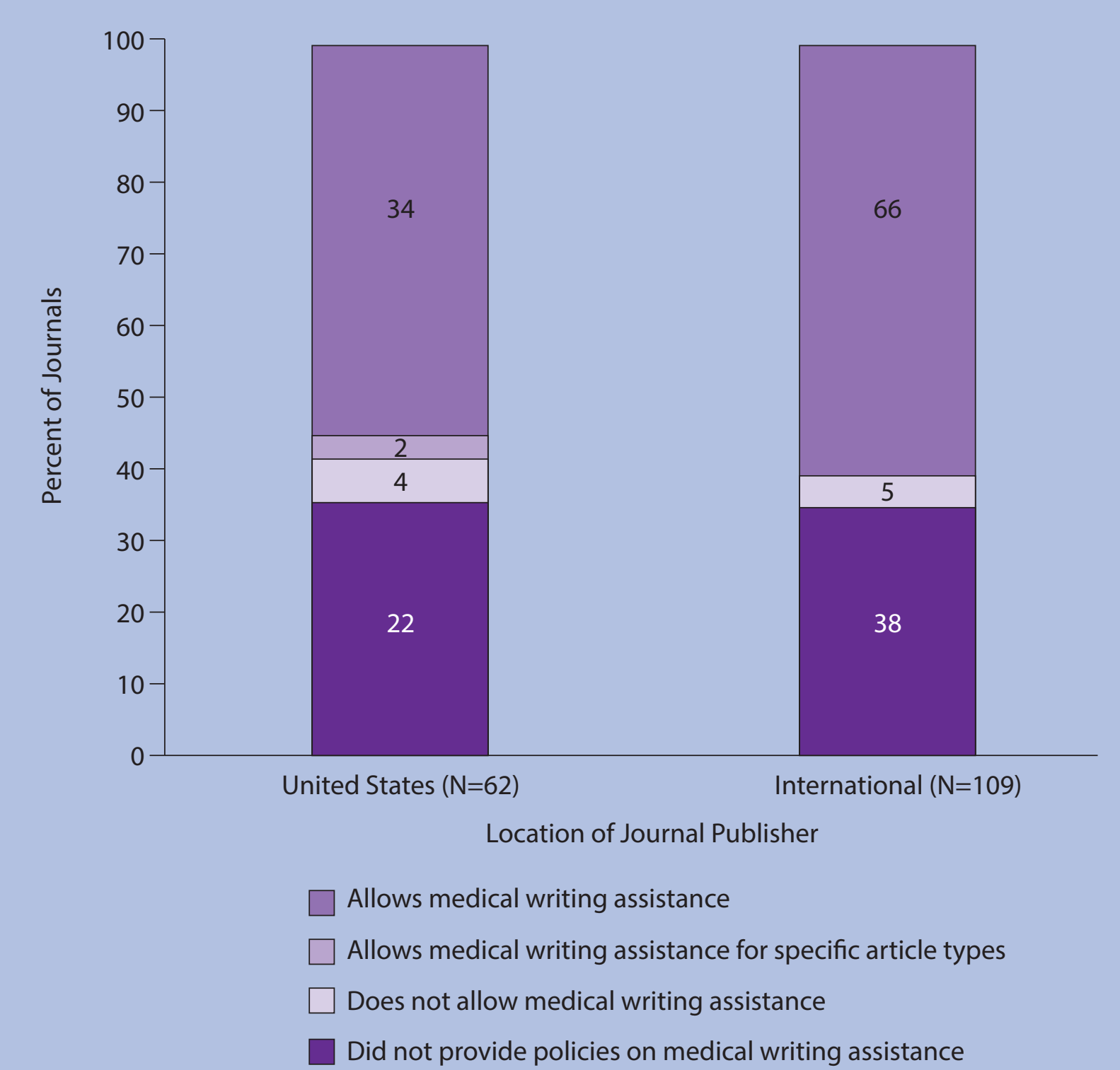
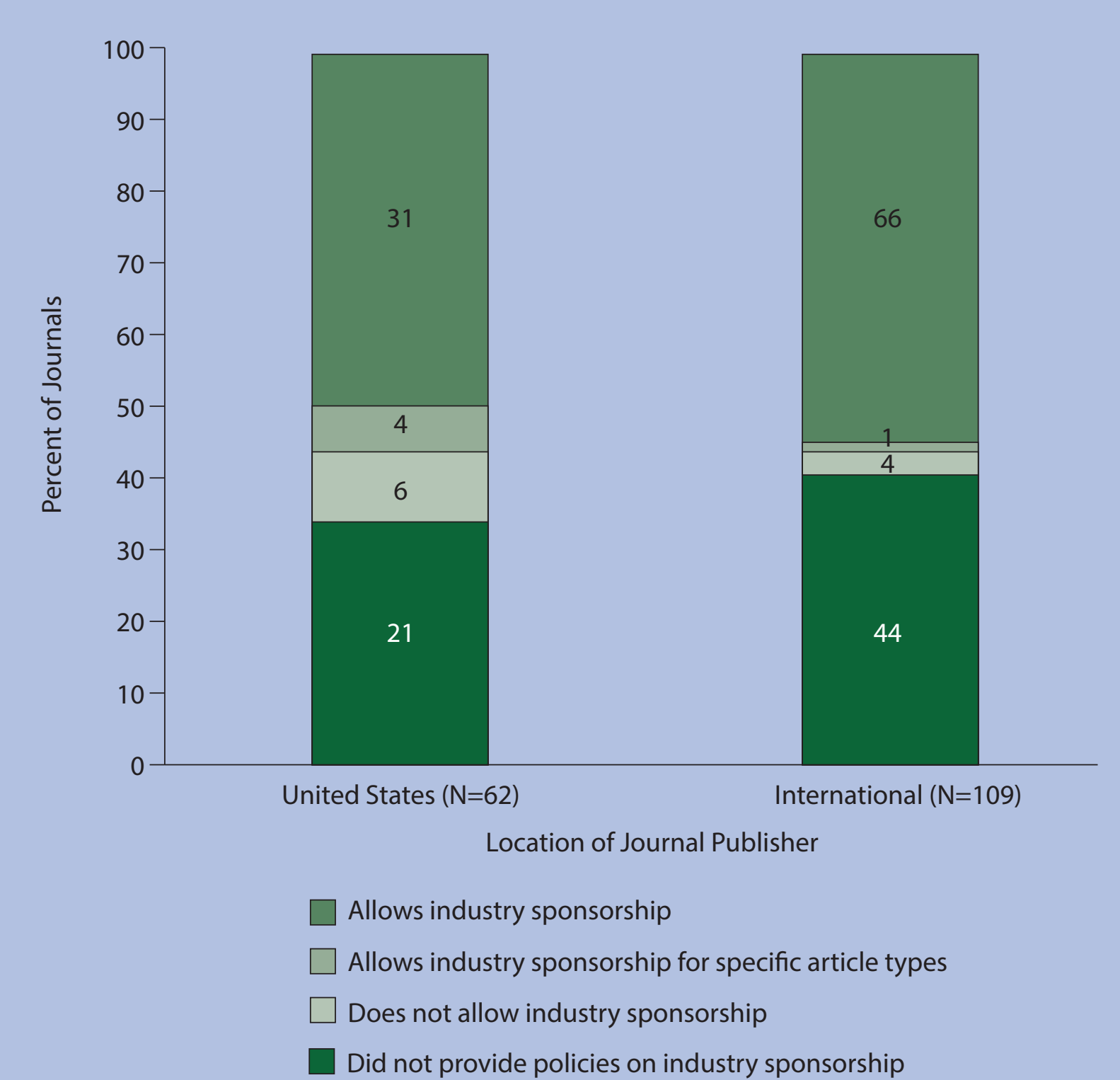


Figure 5. Comparison Between US and International Journals for Policies on Industry Sponsorship



CONCLUSIONS

- These findings demonstrate that medical writing assistance and pharmaceutical industry sponsorship are acceptable to the majority of journals that disclose their policies or are responsive to email inquiries. However, approximately one third of journals do not clearly state policies on these matters
 - In these situations, the best approach may be to call the editorial office to confirm their policies
- It would be very helpful for journal publishers to clearly state their policies regarding consideration of manuscripts on which there was medical writing assistance or pharmaceutical industry sponsorship
- These findings are encouraging and should lead to quality publications developed with medical writing assistance and pharmaceutical industry sponsorship, which include full disclosure and follow current guidelines, to appear in quality journals.

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