

Technology enabling the largest free and accessible event worldwide on COVID-19 management: experience report

Tecnologia viabilizando o maior evento gratuito e acessível do mundo sobre gestão da COVID-19: relato de experiência

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RESUMO

Introdução: O uso das redes sociais como fonte de informação durante a pandemia de Covid-19 possibilitou o acesso do grande público a informações atualizadas, mas também permitiu uma intensa disseminação de notícias falsas no Brasil e no mundo. **Objetivo:** Este relatório tem como objetivo apresentar a experiência da tecnologia que possibilita a organização e implantação de um evento científico online gratuito de grande escala sobre a Covid-19, com foco em informações baseadas em evidências, atendimento e gestão do paciente. **Métodos:** O "Primeiro Congresso Brasileiro de Evidências Clínicas sobre Covid-19" aconteceu entre os dias 03 e 07 de maio de 2021 e foi realizado pela Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, a principal universidade federal do Brasil. **Resultados:** Houve 27.102 cadastros. A transmissão teve 29.170 visualizações no primeiro dia. Em 25 de junho de 2021, foram 80.923 visualizações para a versão original em áudio e 10.352 visualizações para a tradução simultânea. Os tópicos compreenderam prevenção da Covid-19, gestão na atenção primária, atendimento pré-hospitalar, assistência hospitalar, unidade de terapia intensiva, longa-COVID-19, vacinas, saúde mental e custos. Minipalestras foram seguidas de discussão e interação com os participantes. Palestrantes e moderadores de todo o Brasil e do exterior foram escolhidos de acordo com sua expertise em temas de Covid-19 e em medicina baseada em evidências. Entre as sessões, foram apresentados depoimentos em vídeo de pessoas que não puderam trabalhar em casa sobre o que tocou seu coração durante a pandemia. A acessibilidade foi garantida por meio de tradução simultânea para a Língua Brasileira de Sinais. A satisfação dos participantes foi avaliada, com 2.228 respondentes, dos quais 97,4% disseram que suas expectativas foram superadas e 86,8% relataram adquirir novos conhecimentos sobre a Covid-19. **Final considerations:** Essa experiência mostrou que a tecnologia possibilitou a divulgação de evidências científicas acessíveis sobre a Covid-19 para um grande público por meio de um evento online gratuito.

Palavras-chave: acessibilidade, COVID19, reuniões científicas, pandemia.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Social media usage as a source of information during the Covid-19 pandemic enabled the access of the general public to up-to-date information, but also allowed an intense spread of false news in Brazil and worldwide. **Objective:** This report aims to present the experience of technology enabling organization and deployment of a large-scale free online scientific event about Covid-19, focusing on evidence-based information, patient care and management. **Methods:** The "First Brazilian Congress of Clinical Evidence on Covid-19" took place between May 03 and 07, 2021 and was hosted by the *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais*, Brazil's top federal university. **Results:** There were 27,102 registrations. The transmission had 29,170 views on the first day. On June 25th, 2021, there were 80,923 views for the original audio version and 10,352 views for the simultaneous translation. Topics comprehended Covid-19 prevention, management in primary care, prehospital care, hospital care, intensive care unit, long-COVID-19, vaccines, mental health and costs. Mini lectures were followed by discussion and interaction with participants. Speakers and moderators from all over Brazil and abroad were chosen according to their expertise on Covid-19 topics and on evidence-based medicine. Video testimonies were presented between sessions from people who could not work from home about what touched their heart during the pandemic. Accessibility was ensured through simultaneous translation to Brazilian Sign Language. Participant's satisfaction was evaluated, with 2,228 respondents, of which 97.4% said their expectations were exceeded and 86.8% reported acquiring new knowledge about

Covid-19. Conclusion: This experience showed that technology enabled the dissemination of accessible scientific evidence on Covid-19 to a large audience through a free online event.

Keywords: accessibility, COVID-19, scientific meetings, pandemic.

1 INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 and spread of Covid-19 with increase in deaths, there has been a parallel effort by scientists and researchers around the world to make scientific evidence public with regards to SARS-CoV-2 genome mapping; transmission profile; diagnosis; treatment and vaccines.¹ Therefore, there was an exponential growth in the number of scientific publications on Covid-19. Thus, several researchers around the world have opted for instant dissemination of evidence through alternative methods, even before peer review including social media and preprints.^{2,3,4}

Mass publication brought reflections regarding the quality and completeness of the evidence that quickly became public⁵, especially regarding the redundant content of literature about the topic.⁶ As a consequence of acquiring vast scientific information, healthcare professionals face the difficulty of critically assessing and managing scientific evidence for daily updating.

Additionally, social media usage as a source of information enabled the access of the general public to up-to-date information, but also allowed an intense spread of false news in Brazil and worldwide. Therefore, more than one year after the first Covid-19 case in the country, the population still had many doubts about the disease.

Given the emergency need of disseminating reliable clinical evidence on Covid-19 in times of pandemic, we aimed to report the experience of conducting a large-scale free online scientific event about Covid-19.

2 METHODS

2.1 STRUCTURE OF THE EVENT

The “First Brazilian Congress of Clinical Evidence on Covid-19 Management” was developed as a collaborative project by Covid-19 Brazilian Registry's team.⁷ The idea was to translate evidence on Covid-19 management and the main concepts of evidence-based medicine.

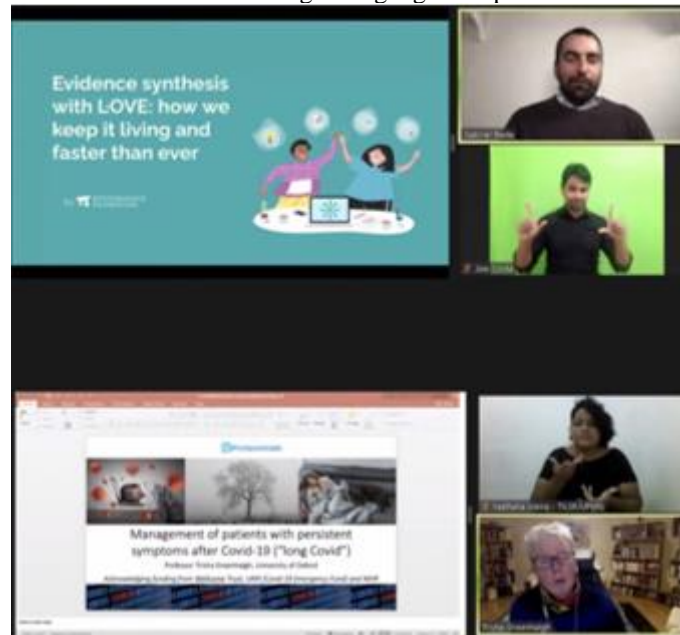
The event was organized in three sub-events, namely “First Brazilian Congress of Clinical Evidence on Covid-19” (Supplemental Table 1), “First Academic Symposium of Evidence on Covid-19” (Supplemental Table 2) and “First Symposium 'Myths and Truths about Covid-19” (Supplemental Table 3). It was a collaborative effort between the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), and the Brazilian research institutions (IATS and FAPEMIG), with leadership of researchers from the large multicentric cohort and Medical students.

2.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM, LOGO AND CHOICE OF SPEAKERS AND MODERATORS

The “First Brazilian Congress of Clinical Evidence o Covid-19” took place from May 3rd to May 6th from 16:00 to 22:30 (GMT-3). The program included the whole Covid-19 "system of care", since prevention, management in primary care, prehospital care, hospital care, intensive care unit and post-Covid-19 symptoms management, as well as vaccines, mental health during the pandemic and associated costs. Although evidence-based care was a mainstay of every presentation, there was also a session on important concepts of evidence based care applied to Covid-19 management.

Speakers and moderators of different states of four Brazilian regions were chosen according to their expertise on specific Covid-19 topics and on evidence-based practice. Keynote speakers from other countries, such as Dr Trish Greenhalgh and Dr Gabriel Rada (Figure 1), two world renowned experts, led discussions on long Covid.

Figure 1. Examples of presentations from Dr. Gabriel Rada and Dr. Trish Greenhalgh, with Brazilian Sign Language interpretation



Source: Author's collection.

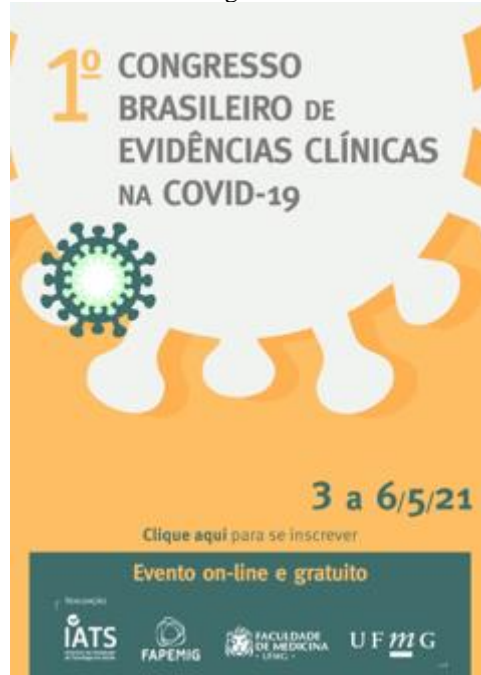
The schedule of the “First Academic Symposium of Evidence on Covid-19” covered a variety of topics and academic presentations on Covid-19, tailoring to undergraduate students from health-related areas while maintained open to the general public. The event took place on May 7th, from 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm (GMT -3). Lectures included the propaedeutics and therapeutics of Covid-19, the role of undergraduate students in the battle against Covid-19 and the world post-Covid. Referring to scientific studies, 10 undergraduate students from different courses made oral presentations to contribute to knowledge construction about Covid-19.

The “First Symposium 'Myths and Truths about Covid-19' focused on disseminating scientific evidence to the general public. It aimed to raise awareness and answer the community's main doubts on Covid-19. The event was also held on May 7th, from 18:30 to 22:30 (GMT-3) and included lectures on recognizing and combating fake news, vaccine efficacy and safety, correct masks usage; the importance of social distancing, hand washing, and respiratory etiquette to reduce the spread of Covid-19; clarifying the science about the Covid kit for early treatment; and optimal conditions for seeking medical assistance during Covid-19.

Additionally, we strove to include a human element throughout each one of the subevents, with several video testimonies from professionals that could not work from home, about what touched their heart during the pandemic.

A logo was developed by a cinema professor. The idea was to develop a logo that would be the synthesis of the actions developed in the seminars and in the congress, using a stylized image of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is strongly present in people's imagination, in addition to nuclei associated with the universe of health, such as white, which is the fusion of all the nuclei (remembering Newton's disc, Disappearing Colour Disc) referring to the idea of peace, purification, clarity, asepsis and the green that brings us to the idea of well-being, health and balance, purposefully running away from strong, aggressive colors. The idea of superimposing images has to do with the concept of target and with different dimensions to be achieved by three actions developed (congress and seminars) and which metaphorically represents our objective of promoting best scientific evidence on Covid-19. Concomitantly, the overlap presented in the brand conveys the idea of expansion. Something that starts small, almost invisible, but gradually expands, taking introspective, closed aspects, which characterize viral action in a pandemic environment, generating fear and insecurity (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Logo of the First Brazilian Congress on Scientific Evidence at Covid-19, 2021



Source: Author's collection.

2.3 MEDIA

The aims of the media team were to publicize the event and to disseminate the best scientific evidence available to as many different audiences as possible.

For advertising, the main platform used was Instagram® (@congressobrasileiro.covid), accruing 4,038 followers in 30 days (between 26st, April

until 25st, May) and a peak of 415,918 impressions. The event was also promoted by the team on instant messaging application (WhatsApp®) groups, Facebook, radio and television (CBN radio and Canção Nova®). There was also a report on UFMG's official website and two emails messages were sent to the academic community.

The team worked with the dissemination of reliable public scientific content from the World Health Organization website and UpToDate, as well as critical analysis of scientific articles and general information concerning Covid-19 and videos with questions from the public and an expert's answers. Team members summarized the texts and translated it into an easy to understand, organized it for dissemination, and developed the artwork. All the material went through orthographic and content review by two of the team's most experienced professionals in evidence-based health practice.

2.4 ORGANIZATION AND TEAMWORK

Some organization tools were essential for deploying the event, so an action plan, work schedule and daily report on the number of entries were used. As for the management, weekly meetings were held via video call with the entire organizing committee team. The Even3 platform was used to manage registrations, submissions and certificates.

Planning and organizing an event in 28 days would not be possible without the effective contribution of a team engaged with the purpose. In this way, teamwork was fundamental for the organization and execution of the project. The organizing committee was composed of a multidisciplinary team of 23 members, including 6 doctors, an administrator, a production engineer, a pharmacist and 14 medical students. A multidisciplinary team allowed the sharing of different views and experiences, which enriched the event's development process.

The team worked voluntarily, reducing costs of holding the event, facilitating its execution. The teamwork and collaboration are evidence of the engagement of the organizing committee in order to disseminate quality information about Covid-19 and contribute in some way to the calamity situation facing Brazil and the world.

The organizing committee team was divided into 3 groups: scientific committee, executive committee, and coordination. Each working group prepared an action plan to organize and carry out the activities necessary to achieve a high quality event. The organization of working groups allowed an efficient division of the activities necessary for the execution of the event.

The official communication of the organizing committee was carried out online. As official communication tools, instant messaging applications (Whatsapp), electronic email, shared folders stored in the cloud (Google Drive) and video meetings (Google Meet and Zoom) were used. For the organization and management of information and files of the organizing committee, a shared folder stored in the cloud (Google Drive) was used. The online communication and storage tools were important for communication and information sharing among the team, since everyone performed their activities remotely from several different places.

2.5 ACCESSIBILITY

Far beyond the goal of reaching a high number of participants in the event, a major concern of the organizing team was to spread the knowledge about Covid-19 meeting the needs of all participants. To this end, we sought partnerships with the Directorate of International Relations and the Center for Accessibility and Inclusion of the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais for simultaneous translation and interpretation in Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) to ensure accessibility and provide a satisfactory experience for all participants.

3 RESULTS

3.1 EVENT CHARACTERISTICS

The event was open to the general public and had no specific funding, except for the simultaneous translation to English for the first day and to the Brazilian Sign Language on the last day of the event and counted with a total workload of 22.5 hours in total. Funding was minimal (2.658 Real or 532.92 United States Dollar for payment of the Brazilian Sign Language professionals and 3.360 Real or 674.97 United States Dollar for payment for simultaneous translation) considering the proportion of the event that was mostly organized without any costs and was available free of charge.

A free, online platform that hosts events, providing registration, transmission, abstract submission and certification tools was required. Therefore, the platform Even3 was chosen, since it allowed the creation of a website for the event with its information (time, duration, speakers, hosters, funding, etc) and registration (L3 Soluções Em Tecnologia LTDA. Even3: Create Your Event. 2021). Three websites -one for each event- were created on the platform. Registrations were made into 4 main types: health professionals, graduate students, undergraduate students and the general public. On the

“First Brazilian Congress” and “First Academic Symposium of Evidence on Covid-19” websites there was an option of abstract submission.

In the “First Brazilian Congress”, there were 20,750 registered participants from Brazil and other countries, such as Cuba, Mexico and the UK. Health professionals were responsible for 58.9% registrations, of which 5.6% were from graduate students, 32.6% from undergraduate students and 2.2% were from general audiences. The remaining registrations (n=46) were made by presenters and speakers.

As for the “First Academic Symposium of Evidence on Covid-19”, there were 2,723 participants including 16.05% from the general public. Out of the registered participants 75.6% were undergraduate students or health professionals. The “First Symposium 'Myths and Truths about Covid-19' ” reached 3,629 participants divided into general audience (13.2%), health professionals (38.8%), undergraduate students (46.3%), and 16 presenters (Table 1).

Table 1- Participants' Categories per Event According to Registration on the Platform Even3

Variables	Number of Registrations	%
<i>1st Brazilian Congress of Clinical Evidence on Covid-19</i>	20,464	100
Health Professionals	12,045	58.9
Graduate Students	1,154	5.6
Undergraduate Students	6,755	33.0
General Audience	455	2.2
Presenters*	46	0.3
<i>1st Academic Symposium of Evidence on Covid-19</i>	2,504	100.0
Health Professionals and Students	2,060	82.3
General Audience	437	17.4
Presenters*	7	0.3
<i>1st Symposium of Myths and Truths about Covid-19</i>	3,586	100.00
Health Professionals	1,409	39.29
Undergraduate Students	1,681	46.88
General Audience	480	13.39
Presenters*	16	0.44

*Not all presenters registered for the events on the platform Even3

The events were broadcast live on YouTube on the channels of Coordinating Community Affairs (*Coordenação de Assuntos Comunitários- CAC UFMG*) of Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais; Minas Gerais State Agency for Research and Development (*Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de Minas Gerais - FAPEMIG*); Institute for Health Technology Assessment (*Instituto de Avaliação de Tecnologias em Saúde - IATS*) and Telehealth Center, University Hospital of UFMG. Up to June 25th of 2021, there were 80,923 views for the original audio version for the whole event and 10,352 views for the simultaneous translation, with a total reach of 91,275 views on YouTube.

3.2 ORAL ABSTRACTS PRESENTATION

In order to disseminate results from national scientific research, the organizers encouraged the presentation of oral abstracts. For the selection of presentations, abstracts concerning vulnerability of individuals with the most severe clinical form of Covid-19 and that were taken care of by evidence-based practice were approved. The oral abstracts presentations were evaluated by professors and researchers, known to be a reference in clinical research, in different areas (infectious diseases, clinical medicine, systematic reviews and meta-analysis, scientific methodology) according to criteria of originality, clarity and objectivity, mastery of the theme and communicability, methodology, linguistic suitability, social relevance, suitability of the time available.

At the end of the event, the scientific studies were awarded 1st, 2nd, 3rd place and honor to merit and all presenters received a prize registration in an evidence-based medicine course or to scientific congresses according to their respective areas of interest (clinician or technology). The proposal to award all the presenters was based on the initiative to value the work developed by researchers during the pandemic who, even with the scarcity of resources, have played a highly relevant role in Brazilian science.

3.3 PARTICIPANT'S SATISFACTION

Participants' satisfaction was assessed at the end of the event by an online questionnaire (Appendix 1). From respondents (n=2,228), it was observed that residents from 27 Brazilian states attended this event (60.9% were from Brazil's Southeast region, the most developed region in the country). We observed that 79.0% of the respondents were health professionals or health managers. With regards to their satisfaction with the events, 97.4% of the participants replied that their expectations were exceeded and 86.8%

reported acquiring new knowledge about Covid-19. Also 94.8% of participants reported that the Congress changed their practice and/or perspective on evidence-based medicine. Finally, 98.7% of the participants recommended the event to someone they know.

After the end of the events, the Instagram profile remained as a source of reliable evidence on Covid-19 management (@congressobrasileiro.covid), and the Twitter account (@congressocovid) was also used to disseminate information about the event.

3.4 LESSONS LEARNT

In this section we highlight lessons learnt about running a free, large, scientific congress which translated evidence on Covid-19 to healthcare practitioners, managers and the general public, so that others can learn from our experience.

Due to social distancing, it was needed to adapt and develop strategies in order to maintain knowledge acquisition beyond the number of participants avoiding face-to-face meetings. New formats of teleconferences allow interactions by participants through a live chat, accessible from smartphones, tablets and computers, from any location, only requiring an internet connection. There are no limitations in the number of participants and it can be recorded and accessible for later review.⁹

Among the positive points of the remote mode, we observed that the technology allowed us to reach participants from the 27 Brazilian states and from Cuba, Mexico and the UK, since the congress did not receive any funding from the pharmaceutical industry and was totally free of charge without need to pay visa fees, airline tickets and accommodation as required in personal formats, as well as for the speakers, which was easier to reconcile availability, giving the congress an innovative characteristic. Such relevance was proven with the high percentage among the survey respondents not having to be released from work to attend the lectures (71.3%) but had the interest to participate. We believe that the number of people interested in participating is higher, given the individuals who did not respond and had the opportunity to watch the recordings at a later time.¹⁰

In the Fake News's era, we observed that 64.0% of our participants reported that attending the congress had improved their interpretation of scientific studies. This result shows that despite being focused on Covid-19, our event had presentations based on scientific evidence and evidence-based practice enabling translational application of knowledge to other areas.^{11,12} Translational knowledge is indeed very important for the technical training of health professionals, optimizing the clinical and social practice of

health professionals.^{13,14} Generally, it is noted the absence of approaches directed to evidence-based practice in undergraduate courses. However, it is noteworthy that knowledge about this topic is essential for health professionals in training, since the development of skills for searching and critically evaluating evidence minimizes the gap between research and care practice.

The proposal to hold a multidisciplinary event was fundamental to integrate knowledge about Covid-19 among health professionals from different areas, since the complexity of SARS-CoV-2 infection requires a broad spectrum of expertise to deal with diverse clinical presentations, levels of severity, and complications of the disease¹⁵. In this scenario the multi-professional approach in the management and rehabilitation of patients diagnosed with Covid-19 is able to reduce long-term complications and ensure better outcomes; this is recommended strategy for planning care and care flows in addressing the pandemic.¹⁵ However, 21.0% of the participants were from the general public, which indicates great demand from the general public for obtaining quality information in the emerging context of misinformation, and anti-science movements worldwide.

In this aspect, accessible, evidence-based and easy to understand information is essential for the general public. Therefore, the involvement of speakers focused on evidence-based care has ensured the provision of reliable information to participants of the event, since the most of the respondents (86.7%) reported having gained new knowledge about Covid-19. It was possible to achieve what no medical society in the country has achieved, to organize an event of this size and free of charge. Candidates for medical residency programs need to participate in events like this to get points in the curriculum, but for the unified selection process in Minas Gerais, the event will not be counted, as it was not organized by a "medical entity", which raises the discussion about why the Faculty of Medicine could not be considered a medical entity.

On the first day of the "First Brazilian Congress of Clinical Evidence on Covid-19", simultaneous translation from English to Portuguese and Portuguese to English was available, streamed on the Department of International Relations of the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais' YouTube channel. Besides that, in all of the three events, throughout every session, a linguist for the Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS) was present. Both structures contributed to making a more inclusive event, especially when referring to a free scientific evidence-based Congress available to the general public. An in-presence event of this magnitude (with international speakers, simultaneous translation

to English and to LIBRAS) would have had a high cost for the organization and for participants,⁸ therefore, technology allowed the creation of a minimum-cost, free for the audience, event that contemplated a diverse public.

In pandemic times, in which fake news rapidly spreads within the population and reliable information stays restrained to the scientific community, a simple and clear method of transmitting information is crucial.⁵ In order to do that, accessibility was a key point in the 'First Brazilian Congress of Clinical Evidence on Covid-19'. The aim was to guarantee that the event could reach the most diverse groups encompassing the concern that the majority of Brazilians do not acquire English, such as the English-speaking community (from Brazil and from other countries) and deafened people. By the proportion of all three events, the growth of the event's instagram account and feedback from the evaluation questionnaire, the goal was successfully achieved.

It is still a concern how to bring quality evidence-based information about Covid-19 to the population, which has an important role in fighting the pandemic. According to the latest (2019) National Household Sample Survey conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)¹⁶ about 82.7% of national dwellers have access to internet, but approximately 12.6 million houses still do not have access due to lack of knowledge (25.7%) or expensive service price (26.2%).

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The "*First Brazilian Congress of Clinical Evidences on Covid-19* represented the effort of a motivated group of volunteers in disseminating the main evidence and updates on Covid-19. The presentation of Brazilian studies that have provided a great contribution to the pandemic and knowledge to fight Covid-19 in the country was also an important part of the event. Additionally, the selection of topics related to the vulnerability of individuals facing a disease with high potential severity and lethality was essential to bring reflections on the impact of the pandemic nationally and worldwide. However, given the current scenario where the lack of reliable information is still a reality, and due to the fact that there were a lot of questions in the Youtube chat that could not be answered due to their large number, the group organized a new event with the same principles in order to clarify the numerous issues raised by the participants. This event was named "Second Brazilian Congress on Clinical Evidence in Covid-19" and took place 40 days after the first event.

FUNDING

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