

Bring it up

A Workit guide to elevating the conversation around substance use and pregnancy.

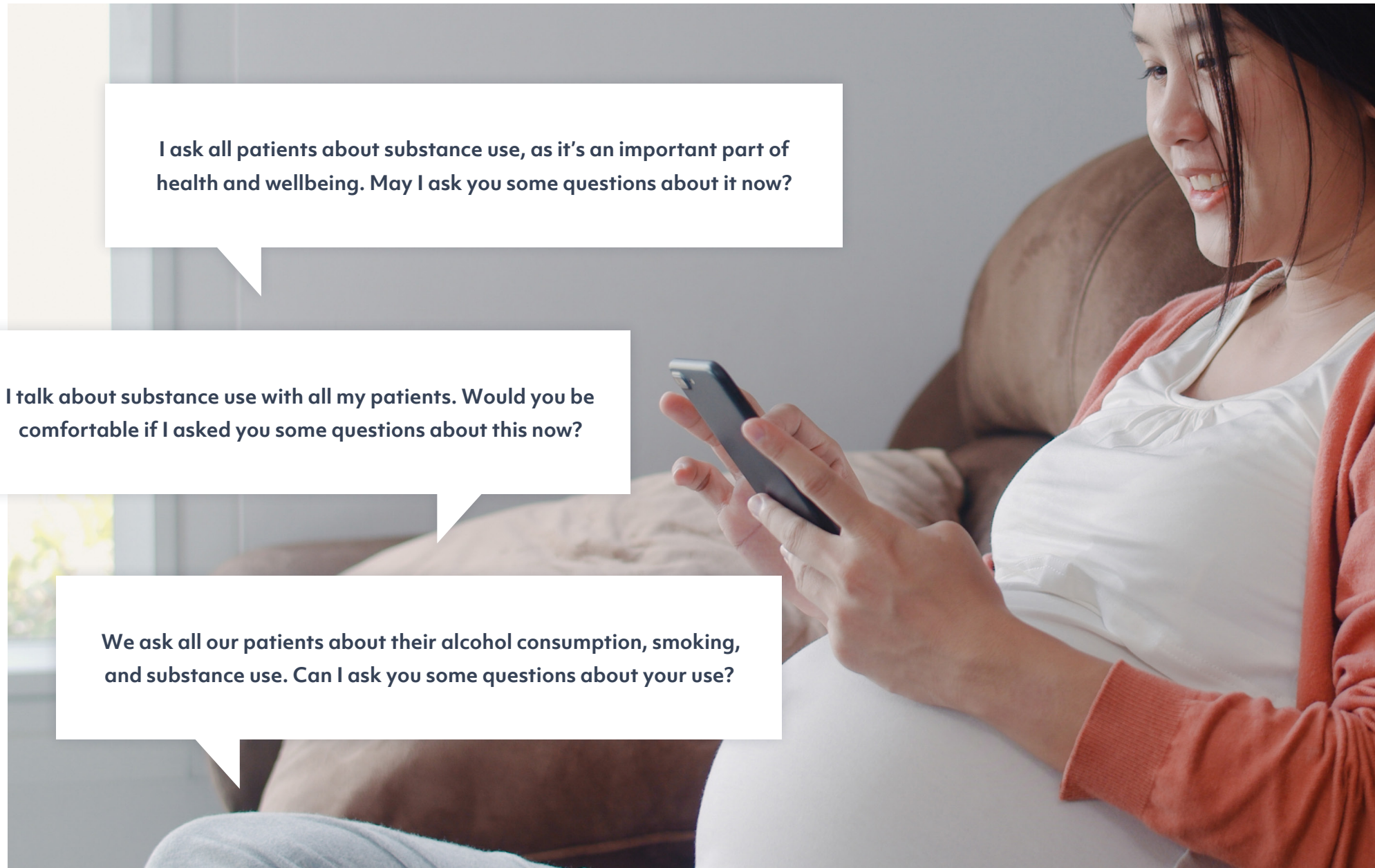


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Elevate the Conversation



According to a national survey by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 6% of pregnant women use drugs, 8.5% drink alcohol, and 17% smoke cigarettes.¹

In spite of this information and guidelines for discussing substance use with pregnant patients, many clinicians may feel they lack the resources, time, or rapport required to discuss substance use with the pregnant population.²

Many providers may be concerned about coming across as judgmental or shaming in discussion of substance use with their pregnant patients.³ Systematic reviews and meta-analyses show that brief interventions are effective in reducing substance use.⁴ This guide offers suggestions for engaging in open conversations about substance use in pregnancy that leave patients feeling empowered to make change.



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Empowering Change: Conversation Toolkit

R

Resist telling them what to do.

Avoid telling, directing, or convincing your patient about the right path to good health.

U

Understand their motivation.

Seek to understand their values, needs, abilities, motivations, and potential barriers to changing behaviors.

L

Listen to your patient.

Ask open-ended questions, follow up on their answers, and make sure you understand what they're saying.

E

Empower them.

Work with your patient to set achievable goals and to identify techniques to overcome barriers.

Screening Tools and Brief Interventions

Screening tools and brief interventions can act as a pathway to change and open up avenues for candid conversations. Screening tools include the 4P's Plus, NIDA Quick Screen-ASSIST (Modified Alcohol, Smoking, and Substance Involvement Screening Test), and the SURP-P (Substance Use Risk Profile-Pregnancy) scale.⁵ Some providers may be hesitant to implement these tools at the risk of jeopardizing their relationship with the patient. Being open about why these questions matter, and asking for permission to engage in conversation about substance use can empower the patient and ensure they understand they're not being judged.

Motivational Interviewing

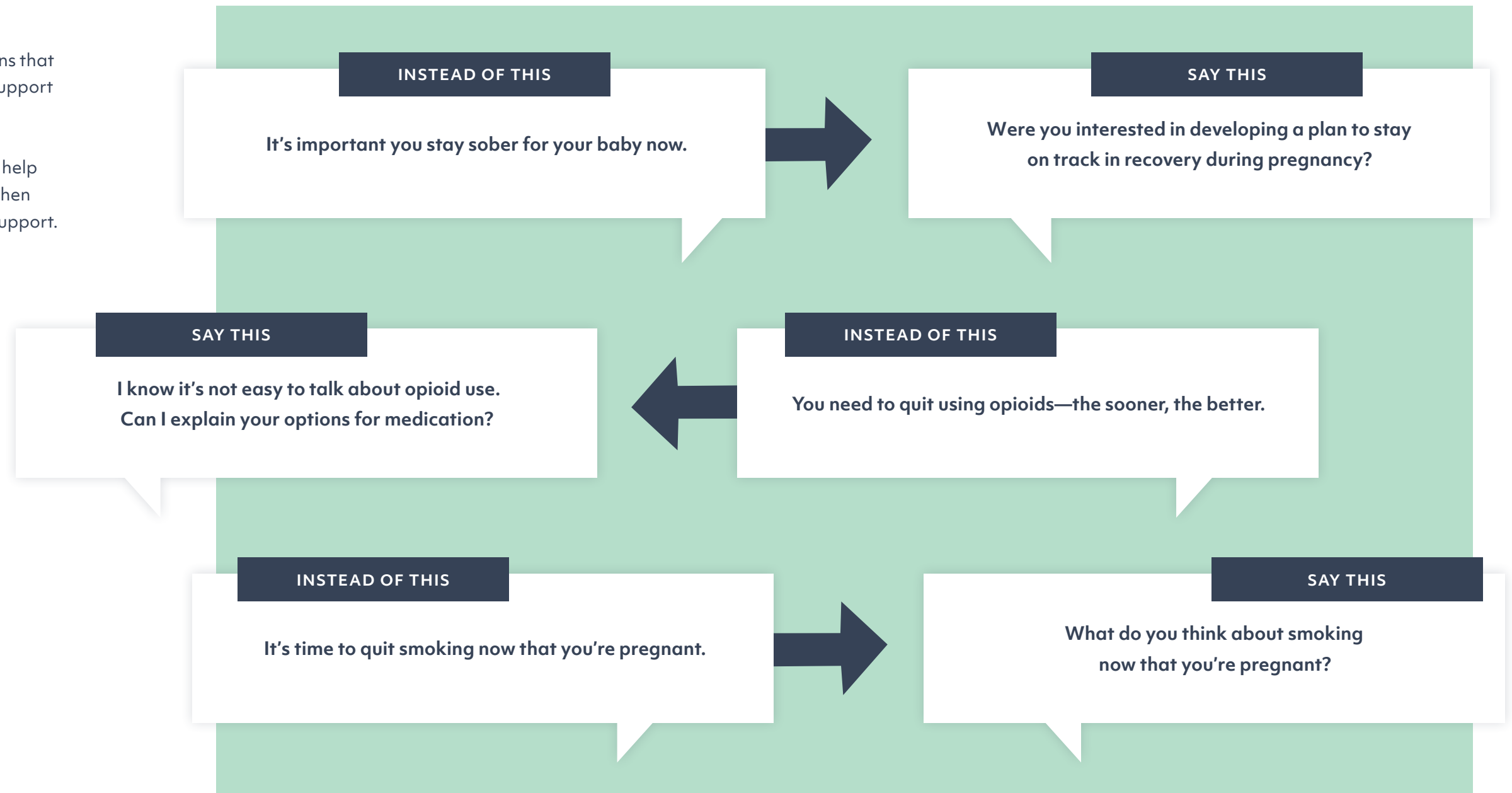
Motivational interviewing and other patient-centered approaches have been shown to be helpful in reducing the harms associated with alcohol use, smoking, and the use of other substances.⁶ Motivational interviewing involves asking questions to uncover each individual patient's motivation and listening from a place of compassion. Motivational interviewing is guided by principles represented by the acronym RULE: Resist the righting reflex; Understand the patient's own motivations; Listen with empathy; and Empower the patient.⁷



Additional Substance Use Points of Concern and Opportunities for Intervention

Healthcare providers can open up conversations that offer opportunities for brief intervention and support related to many aspects of substance use.

The lists on the following pages can be used to help inspire conversations with your patients, and when necessary incorporate brief intervention and support.





A conversation starter for alcohol use

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | I see that some of your medications interact with alcohol. Have you noticed any combined effect? | Ask this to open the conversation about the effects of mixing with other medications and drugs (especially other depressants such as sedatives or opioids) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | A lot of people think of alcohol as a way to unwind and relax. What is your usual way to de-stress? | Ask this to open the conversation about mental wellness, the effects of alcohol on anxiety and depression, coping with stress and difficult circumstances |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Many women have a complicated relationship with food. How do you feel about eating and nutrition? | Ask this to open the conversation about alcohol's connection to diet and disordered eating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Have you heard the same myths I have about drinking during pregnancy? | Ask this to open the conversation about the fact that there is no safe time or amount to drink during pregnancy, and to mention the risks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | We learn so much about parenting from what we've seen and experienced. What has been your experience in being around other parents who drink? | Ask this to open the conversation about balancing alcohol use with caregiving responsibilities, role modeling and discussing alcohol use with children |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | What are your plans for feeding the baby? | Ask this to open the conversation about alcohol being expressed in breastmilk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | What is your partner like when they drink alcohol? | Ask this to open the conversation about relationship dynamics and drinking, personal safety, sexual assault |





A conversation starter for **tobacco**

-
- Quitting smoking can be really hard for a lot of people. Are you open to talking about cutting back or harm reduction?** Ask this to open the conversation about reducing or cutting back, reducing exposure to second-hand smoke, available resources (including medications) when ready to quit
-
- We learn so much about parenting from what we've seen and experienced. What has been your experience in being around other parents who smoke?** Ask this to open the conversation about second-hand smoke, role modeling and discussing tobacco use with children
-
- What are your plans for feeding the baby?** Ask this to open the conversation about nicotine being expressed in breast milk and timing feedings and smoking for harm reduction
-
- Can we talk about your partner's relationship to tobacco?** Ask this to open the conversation about partner smoking and its effects on personal use and household wellness
-
- Some Native American peoples have traditions around tobacco use. Is that true in your culture?** Ask this to open the conversation about Indigenous wellness and traditional or sacred tobacco vs. commercial tobacco





A conversation starter for cannabis use

Your history indicates that you've used marijuana. Are you open to talking about how you use it?

Ask this to open the conversation about medical vs. recreational cannabis use, different ways of consuming

Are you interested in talking about cutting back or harm reduction?

Ask this to open the conversation about lower-risk guidelines, secondhand smoke, avoiding synthetic cannabis, cannabis and driving

What guidelines have you heard about using cannabis during pregnancy?

Ask this to open the conversation about possible effects on the fetus, decisions about medical cannabis during pregnancy, health risks associated with using it for nausea or morning sickness, exposure to second-hand smoke

We learn so much about parenting from what we've seen and experienced. What has been your experience in being around other parents who use cannabis?

Ask this to open the conversation about balancing use with caregiving responsibilities, role modeling and discussing cannabis use with children, second-hand smoke, safe storage





A conversation starter for prescription opioids

I see that you've used prescription opioids as part of pain management. Can we talk about your pain management plan?

Ask this to open the conversation about other components of pain management beyond opioid medications

A lot of people find that their prescription meds impact their state of mind. What effects have you noticed?

Ask this to open the conversation about mental wellness, the effects of opioids on anxiety and depression, coping with stress and difficult circumstances

Many people have a knee-jerk reaction to the idea of opioids and pregnancy, which can make it hard to get real information. Are you open to talking about that?

Ask this to open the conversation about the effects of opioids on the fetus, opioid agonist treatment, Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome

There's a whole section of baby-proofing and parenting around medications. Are you willing to talk about how you plan to handle that?

Ask this to open the conversation about role modeling and discussing opioid use and misuse with children, safe storage

What are your plans for feeding the baby?

Ask this to open the conversation about opioids being expressed in breastmilk, safety, monitoring, co-sleeping

It's common for people to find themselves using their prescription medications in ways they weren't intended. Are you open to talking about how that can happen?

Ask this to open the conversation about opioid misuse and coping with stress, difficult life circumstances, gender-based violence





Citations

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³Lynne, T. and M. Peter, Smoking cessation dialogue and the complementary therapist: Reluctance to engage? Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice, 2014. 20(4): p. 181-187.

⁴Bertholet N, Daeppen JB, Wietlisbach V, Fleming M, Burnand B. Reduction of alcohol consumption by brief alcohol intervention in primary care: systematic review and meta-analysis. Arch Intern Med. 2005 May 9;165(9):986-95. doi: 10.1001/archinte.165.9.986. PMID: 15883236.

⁵Coleman-Cowger, Victoria H. PhD; Oga, Emmanuel A. MD, MPH; Peters, Erica N. PhD; Trocin, Kathleen E. MPH; Koszowski, Bartosz PharmD, PhD; Mark, Katrina MD Accuracy of Three Screening Tools for Prenatal Substance Use, Obstetrics & Gynecology: May 2019 - Volume 133 - Issue 5 - p 952-961 doi: 10.1097/AOG.0000000000003230

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