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## Letters

### Smoking status and pregnancy

#### Utility of point of care cotinine test during pregnancy

Shipton and colleagues highlight the unreliability of self reported smoking status by pregnant women.<sup>1</sup> Their findings reinforce the need for biochemical verification of smoking habit to identify all smokers, who can then be offered advice and support to quit.

We used a new 5 minute point of care urine test for cotinine called SmokeScreen to gather information about smoking habit from more than 800 pregnant women at their booking visit. The women were interviewed shortly after their interview with the midwife and were aware that a test for smoking would be used. We found that 10.3% had denied smoking to the midwife and 38.4% significantly underreported their cigarette consumption.<sup>2</sup>

We showed that cotinine could be measured easily in an antenatal setting with repeat measurements to monitor smoking behaviour after advice to quit. Showing the colorimetric test result to the smoker and giving feedback doubled the quit rate and increased birth weight.<sup>3</sup> Few pregnant smokers appreciate why stopping smoking is important. They are weary of the constant anti-smoking message and become immune to it. They also do not appreciate that tobacco products get into the blood stream, and so into their developing fetus. This information with personalised results reinforced the message and improved smoking cessation.

Biochemically verified information is required during pregnancy. Carbon monoxide monitoring is one approach, but the short half life of carboxyhaemoglobin allows a short abstinence to give a negative result. The SmokeScreen test monitors smoking over the previous three days or so and measures cotinine quickly and easily.

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Competing interests: GFC invented the SmokeScreen tests and is a director of GFC Diagnostics, which manufactures and distributes the test.

## References

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2. Cope GF, Nayyar P, Holder R. Measurement of nicotine intake in pregnant women—association to changes in blood cell count. *Nic Tob Res* 2001;3:119-22.[\[CrossRef\]](#)
3. Cope GF, Nayyar P, Holder R. Feedback from a point-of-care test for nicotine intake to reduce smoking during pregnancy. *Ann Clin Biochem* 2003;40:674-9.[\[Abstract/Free Full Text\]](#)