

# Stress Treatment for Medical Students: Implementation of an Online Platform at the University of Freiburg

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## Summary

In response to insights from an internal survey about stress related psychosomatic symptoms of medical students at the University of Freiburg, we developed an **online platform** to help students **cope with their stressors** and promote discussion of such issues and **mutual support amongst the students**. The platform was well received, however a **rather passive way of usage** has been observed since the platform launched.

## Theoretical Background

Data from a **survey we conducted in 2014** revealed that a majority of third year **medical students** at the University of Freiburg **suffer from stress-related psychosomatic symptoms**. These were often related to internal and/or external pressure to succeed in their studies. While international research reports similar findings [1,2] it also claims that students are often **reluctant to seek help** and that **anonymity plays a major role** here [3]. Hence we developed an online platform where students could seek help and actively support each other by sharing their problems anonymously.

## Method

The platform was integrated into the university's online learning management system (OLMS), guaranteeing that only enrolled medical students can access it. Students of all semesters could find **information** (text, audio, video) about common stress-related psychosomatic symptoms, a range of **self help tools**, lists of contact points for **professional help** and an **anonymous online-forum**.

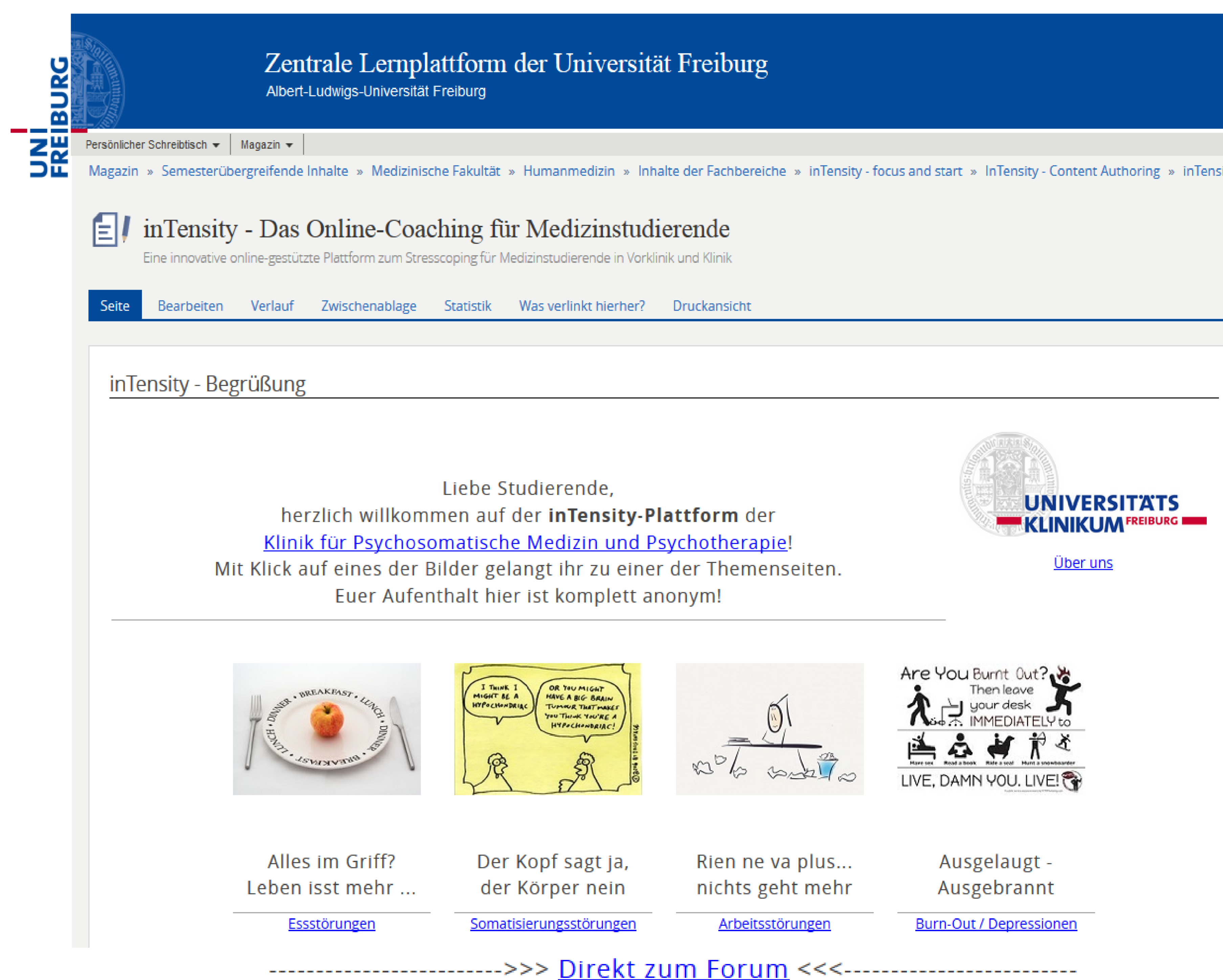


Figure 1: Online-Plattform (front page)

## User Statistics

We analysed the user statistics of the platform with the **data available through the OLMS**. During the period between April and July 2015 the platform was **accessed 383 times** (front page; see Figure 1). The section about eating disorders was accessed the most (18% of clicks in relation to total number of clicks). The list of contact points for external professional help was accessed the least. Whilst a lot of students accessed the forum to read the posts of their colleagues, we could only register **5 entries in the forum**.

## Conclusion and remaining Questions

The offer of different psychological-based interventions and information about stress-related psychosomatic disorders was **well received** by Freiburg's medical students. However, whilst students seem to be eager in searching help for their stress-related problems, they do so in a **rather passive way**: Active engagement in the forum was rare. There may be **other barriers** to discussing stress-related psychosomatic symptoms, other than anonymity.

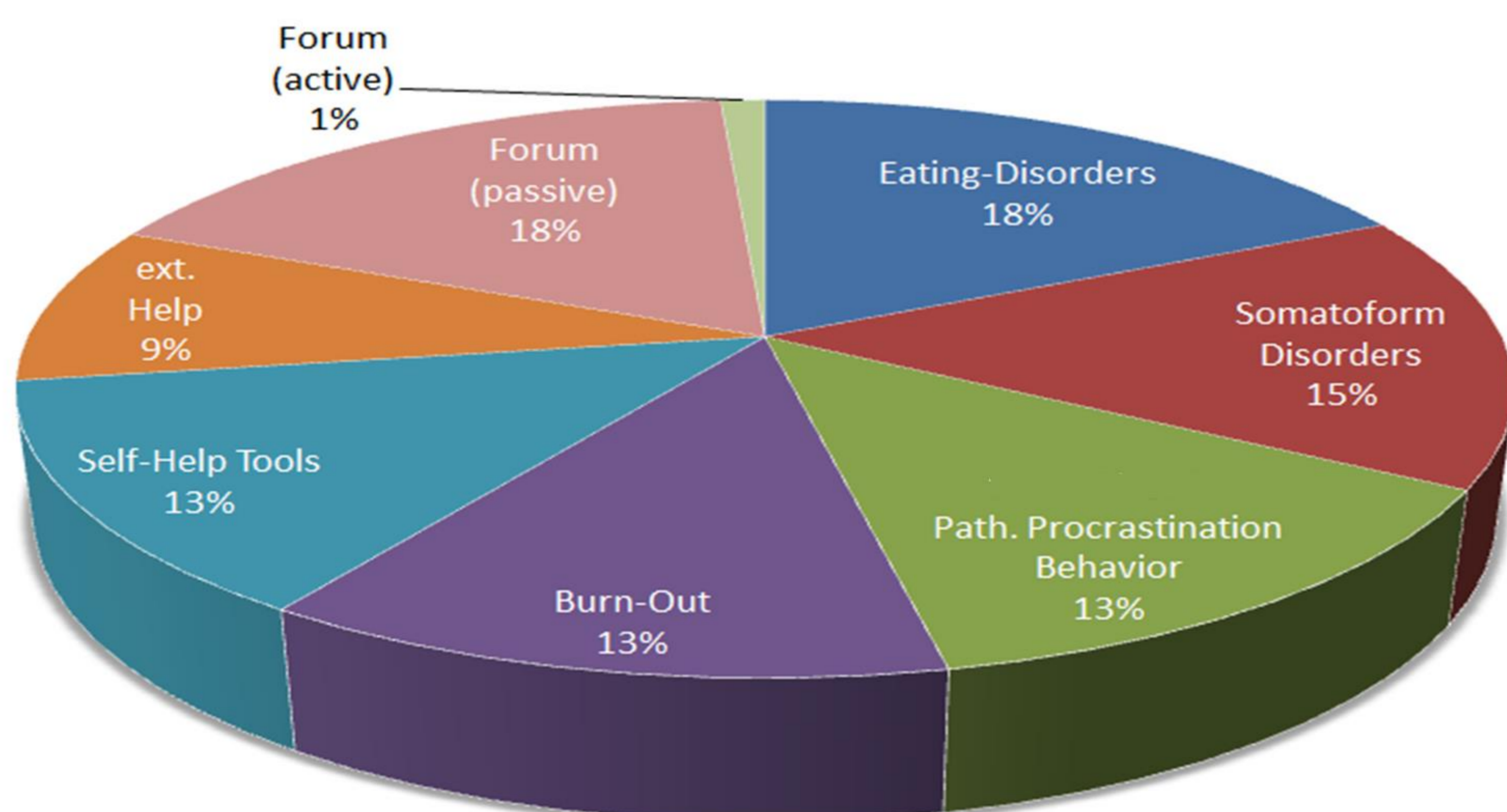


Figure 2: User Statistics (April – July 2015) per section

## References

- [1] Chew-Graham CA, Rogers A, Yassin N. I wouldn't want it on my CV or their records': medical students' experiences of help-seeking for mental health problems. *Med Educ* 2003;37 (10):873–80.
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