

# **Importance of Oocyte to Cumulus Cell Bi-directional Signalling on Oocyte and Subsequent Embryo and Foetal Development and Viability**

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A doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Adelaide in total fulfilment of  
the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy.

**May 2010**

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# ABSTRACT

Oocyte in vitro maturation (IVM) possesses significant scientific and clinical benefits such as the elimination of dangerous side-effects like ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome. Unfortunately, due to a lack of understanding of the intricate processes involved, IVM success rates are low and cannot rival that of current IVF protocols involving hormonal stimulation. Recent scientific advancement has unveiled the existence of the oocyte-cumulus cell (CC) bi-directional regulatory loop and its importance to the development and survival of both cell types during folliculogenesis. This thesis therefore aimed to investigate the significance of these communication axes during IVM on oocyte and CC functions such as cumulus expansion, metabolism and oxidative stress levels and oocyte developmental competence into foetal development.

To target oocyte to CC signalling, growth differentiation factor 9 (GDF9), the primary identified oocyte paracrine factor in the mouse, and its SMAD2/3 signalling pathway were investigated. FSH/EGF were examined as modulators of CC to oocyte signalling, as these can only exert their effects on oocyte maturation through the CCs.

Maturation of mouse cumulus-oocyte complexes (COCs) in the absence of FSH/EGF and/or in the presence of SMAD2/3 inhibition resulted in the ablation of cumulus expansion whereas the addition of exogenous GDF9 to intact COCs significantly increased cumulus expansion. To assess the importance of cumulus expansion independent of oocyte and cumulus communications to embryo development, azaserine, an inhibitor of hyaluronan synthesis was used. Azaserine did not successfully attenuated cumulus

expansion in this system however subsequent blastocyst formation was severely diminished. Cumulus expansion was therefore not indicative of oocyte developmental competence.

Meiotic maturation was only affected by FSH/EGF but both signalling pathways affected sperm penetration. While blastocyst formation was unaffected, disrupted oocyte or cumulus signalling significantly decreased blastocyst inner cell mass (ICM) numbers. Conversely, addition of exogenous GDF9 with FSH/EGF during IVM increased ICM numbers. Significantly, exogenous supplementation of GDF9 during IVM increased foetal survival while inhibition of SMAD2/3 signalling had the opposite effect. Implantation rates and foetal weights were unaffected in both treatments.

The effect of GDF-9 and SMAD 2/3 signalling on metabolism of the COC was examined. The existence of 6-phosphofructo-2-kinase/fructose-2,6-bisphosphatases (PFKFB) isoforms were discovered in COCs and along with other metabolic gene transcripts, were significantly altered in the absence of FSH/EGF and with exogenous GDF9 and FSH/EGF although SMAD2/3 inhibition had no effect. Glycolytic activity however, was decreased in the absence of FSH/EGF and with SMAD2/3 inhibition but increased with exogenous GDF9. TCA cycle activity was only affected by FSH/EGF. The absence of FSH/EGF, SMAD2/3 inhibition and azaserine during IVM all resulted in increased oxidative stress levels in the oocyte.

The work in this thesis also demonstrated that oocyte and CC signalling are co-dependent on each other as apart from cumulus expansion and slower developmental rates,

perturbations of both signalling pathways simultaneously did not have additive effects on oocyte developmental competence or on CC metabolic functions.

This thesis has therefore provided significance to the field of oocyte IVM through the evidence that oocyte-CC bi-directional communication during IVM is essential to oocyte viability and foetal outcomes.

# DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Christine Xueling Yeo and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in text.

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May 2010

Christine Xueling Yeo

\* Data presented in Chapter 5 and 6 have published as listed respectively

- a. **Yeo CX**, Gilchrist RB, Lane M. Disruption of Bi-directional Oocyte-Cumulus Paracrine Signalling during In-Vitro Maturation Reduces Subsequent Mouse Oocyte Developmental Competence. *Biology of Reproduction* 2009 May; 80(5):1072-80.
- b. **Yeo CX**, Gilchrist RB, Thompson JG, Lane M. Exogenous Growth Differentiation Factor 9 in Oocyte Maturation Media Enhances Subsequent Embryo Development and Fetal Viability in Mice. *Human Reproduction* 2008 Jan;23(1):67-73.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors Dr Michelle Lane, Dr Robert B. Gilchrist and A/Prof Jeremy Thompson, The University of Adelaide and the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council for making the commencement and completion of this PhD physically and financially possible.

My principle supervisor Dr Michelle Lane has been an inspiration and without her guidance care, patience, encouragement and constant support, I would not be where I am today. She has been a pillar of strength and her enthusiasm and excitement in my work and ideas has kept me fuelled throughout the course of my PhD. Most importantly I wish to thank her for believing in me at times when I doubted myself and providing me the opportunities to develop and grow as a researcher. Your mentorship and leadership of me, not just as a student but as an individual, are values which I will carry on throughout in life and I sincerely thank you for the honour to have been your PhD student.

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my co-supervisors Dr Robert Gilchrist and A/Prof Jeremy Thompson, for all their enthusiasm, advice and scientific input into my PhD. Rob and Jeremy, you both always had the time and were ready to answer whenever I knocked on your doors. The passion you both have for your research is a tremendous inspiration and I have learnt a great deal from you both in areas of critical scientific thinking and the art of scientific writing.

I would also like to thank my Honours supervisor Dr Darryl Russell for introducing me to the world of reproductive biology and for planting the seed of my interest in the cumulus oocyte complex.

My deepest appreciation goes out to Dr Megan Mitchell not only for her scientific advice throughout my PhD but for her friendship. Your integrity as a person and as a scientist is truly admirable and I am fortunate to have had you with me throughout my PhD experience. Thank you for being there through the best and importantly the most challenging times.

Alicia Filby and Kara Cashman, thank you for assisting with my experiments, you have helped more than I can describe. Dave Froiland, thank you for assisting with microscope technicality and also for bringing such life into the office. I would also like to thank Lesley Ritter and Samantha Schultz for all their help and technical contributions. Thank you also to fellow PhD students for their comradeship and staff and members of the School of Paediatrics and Reproductive Health for the support they have provided.

Last but not least I wish to thank my family and friends, in particular my mother, for their love, sacrifices and emotional support throughout my PhD. Your understanding, patience, encouragement and faith in me, are the reasons I have had the strength to complete my PhD. Thank you for supporting me through this journey.

# GLOSSARY/ ABBREVIATIONS

293H	293 human embryonic kidney cell line
ALK	Activin receptor like kinase
BMP	Bone morphogenetic protein
BMPRII	Bone morphogenetic protein receptor type II
cAMP	Cyclic adenosine monophosphate
CC	Cumulus cell
CEEF	Cumulus expansion enabling factor
COC	Cumulus oocyte complex
DO	Denuded oocyte
EGF	Epidermal growth factor
EMP	Embden-Myerhof pathway
FCS	Foetal calf serum
FGO	Fully grown oocyte
FSH	Follicle stimulating hormone
GC	Granulosa cell
GDF9	Growth differentiation factor 9
GFPT1	Glutamine-fructose-6-phosphate transaminase 1
GV	Germinal vesicle
GVBD	Germinal vesicle breakdown
HA	Hyaluronic acid
Has2	Hyaluronan synthase 2
HBP	Hexosamine biosynthesis pathway
ICM	Inner cell mass
IVF	In vitro fertilisation
IVM	In vitro maturation
Ldh	Lactate dehydrogenase
LH	Luteinising hormone
MAPK	Mitogen activated protein kinase
mGC	Mural granulosa cell



MI	Meiosis metaphase I
MII	Meiosis metaphase II
OHSS	Ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome
OOX	Oocytectomised cumulus complex
OSF	Oocyte secreted factor
PDE	Phosphodiesterase
PFKFB	6-phosphofructo-2-kinase/fructose 2,6-bisphosphatase
PFKP	Phosphofructokinase platelet
PGE2	Prostaglandin E <sub>2</sub>
PI3K	Phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase
PKA	cAMP dependent protein kinase A
PKC	cAMP dependent protein kinase C
PTGS2	Prostaglandin endoperoxide synthase 2
TCA	Tricarboxylic acid cycle
TE	Trophectoderm
TGFβ	Transforming growth factor beta
TGFBR1	Transforming growth factor beta 1 receptor

# PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

## Referred Journal Articles

**Yeo CX**, Gilchrist RB, Lane M. Disruption of Bi-directional Oocyte-Cumulus Paracrine Signalling During In-Vitro Maturation Reduces Subsequent Mouse Oocyte Developmental Competence. *Biology of Reproduction* 2009 May; 80(5):1072-80.

**Yeo CX**, Gilchrist RB, Thompson JG, Lane M. Exogenous Growth Differentiation Factor 9 in Oocyte Maturation Media Enhances Subsequent Embryo Development and Foetal Viability *Human Reproduction* 2008 Jan;23(1):67-73.

Lane M, Gebhardt K, **Yeo CX**, Cashman K, Thompson. Glutamine:Fructose-6-Phosphate Transaminase Activity Is Involved In Cumulus Cell Expansion and Oocyte Developmental Competence In The Mouse. (Under Review 2010)

## Referred Conference Journal Article

**Yeo CX**, Gilchrist RB, Thompson JG, Lane M (2006) 6-Phosphofructo-2-kinase/fructose-2, 6-bisphosphatase (PFKFB) is present in mouse cumulus oocyte complexes and regulated by growth differentiation factor 9 (GDF9). *Biology of Reproduction Special Issue 2006* Page 104-104

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**C.X. Yeo**, R.B. Gilchrist, M.Lane (2008) Disruption of Bi-Directional Oocyte-Cumulus Paracrine Signalling During In Vitro Maturation Reduces Subsequent Mouse Foetal Survival. *Proceedings of The Society For Reproductive Biology 2008 Annual Scientific Conference*

**C.X. Yeo**, R.B. Gilchrist, J.G Thompson, M.Lane (2007) Disruption of Bi-Directional Oocyte-Cumulus Paracrine Signalling During In Vitro Maturation Reduces Subsequent Mouse Oocyte Developmental Competence. *Proceedings of The Society For Reproductive Biology 2007 Annual Scientific Conference*

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