



Society for Reproduction and Fertility

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS FOR EARLY CAREER REP VACANCY TERM JULY 2018 – JANUARY 2020

Name: Briet Bjarkadottir

Institution: Nuffield Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Oxford

Statement:

I am a first year PhD student in Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Oxford, under the supervision of Dr Suzannah Williams. I hold a BSc in Molecular Biology and Biochemistry (University of Iceland) and an MSc in Clinical Embryology (University of Oxford). Following my MSc, and before starting my DPhil, I worked as an embryologist at a fertility clinic in Iceland. My research interests are focused on developing new methods of fertility preservation for women, and particularly young girls.

In my role as an SRF Early Career Rep, I would advocate for any issues relevant to postgraduate or postdoctoral scientists. As a new member of the SRF I would be able to approach the role with a fresh perspective. During my term I would like to explore how the society currently supports postgraduate or postdoctoral researchers in their career progression (whether it be into an academic, clinical or industrial setting) and see if additional resources and support may be added, or improvements made.

Having recently joined the SRF, I look forward to gaining a better understanding of the society and how it supports its members, in addition to meeting fellow researchers within the field of reproduction and fertility.

Name: Vahid Ghaffarilaleh

Institution: University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Statement:

To whom it may concern,

I hereby wish to apply for the Early Career Representative position on the SRF council as advertised.

My name is Vahid Ghaffari-Laleh, a senior postdoc at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), Cape Town, South Africa. I hold a DVM degree from Iran and a PhD degree in reproductive biotechnology from Spain. My scientific qualifications come backed with experiences in different departments in Iran, UK, Spain, and South Africa. My experiences also involve co-ordinating symposiums, chairing and judging conferences as well as a being a scientific reviewer of 4 international peer-reviewed journals. I have become fluent in 5 different languages which allow me to converse respectfully with my peers.

My current research is about male contraceptives with the use of South African indigenous medicine plants. Previous researches included assisted reproductive technology.

Currently I'm the chairperson of the postdoctoral research fellows at UWC and have been involved in drafting the constitution and acting on behalf of the postdocs to resolve all issues in an attempt to make their contractual period more efficient.

I would create awareness in the international universities/organizations to recognise that the postdocs are the engine of their research divisions, by encouraging and implementing international collaboration between postdocs via the SRF society. I have had the privilege of being associated with the SRF since 2010 and I have been a recipient of their benefits. I see this position as an opportunity to now give back to the SRF.

Regards,

Vahid

Name: Hager Kowash
Institution: University of Manchester

Statement:

My name is Hager Kowash, and I am in the second year of my PhD at the University of Manchester. I have always had a strong interest in reproductive and developmental biology and pursued this by undertaking a MSc investigating the differentiation potential of chorionic stem cells at Imperial College London; this served to intensify my interest in understanding the mechanisms underlying developmental events. This was further consolidated by later roles, driving my passion in developmental biology. I am particularly fascinated by the role of the placenta in mediating developmental programming of the fetus in response to maternal stress, which forms the basis of my PhD project. The focus is to understand how maternal immune activation causes alterations in placental and yolk sac structure and function that impact on fetal brain development to mediate changes in post-natal development, which may contribute to the pathogenesis of neurodevelopmental disorders such as schizophrenia. I am a highly passionate, committed and motivated individual who is enthusiastic about creating opportunities for postgraduate and early career researchers as well as encouraging early career researchers to showcase and develop their skills through public engagement and community outreach. This is reflected in my current roles as a student rep for my academic division, as a teaching assistant and demonstrator and through my involvement in community projects such as the Ramadan tent project. These roles exemplify my strong interpersonal skills, which along with my commitment to personal development advancement will enable effective representation of members within the SRF community.

Name: Xin Meng

Institution: Nuffield Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Oxford

Statement:

I hold a medical degree from Harbin Medical University, China and an MSc in Medical Sciences from the University of Hong Kong. During this time, I mastered a series of laboratory techniques, including assisted reproductive technology (ART) and microRNA-related techniques. I was also the President of the University Student's Union.

I am now a second year DPhil student in the Nuffield Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Oxford. My research focuses upon ART, particularly the implications and effects of artificial oocyte activation (AOA) on embryogenesis. I also investigate male infertility by studying a sperm-specific protein, phospholipase C zeta (PLC ζ). I also act as a laboratory tutor for the Oxford MSc in Clinical Embryology. In addition, I am secretary of the Oxford Futurists Society and a committee member of the Oxford Chinese Student & Scholars Association. These activities allow me to keep updated with respect to global innovation and research, particularly in the field of medicine.

I see the Early Careers Representative as a vital feature of the SRF hierarchy as this provides significant opportunities for postgraduates and postdoctoral fellows to learn from experts and each other, and to obtain valuable careers advice. My goal is to provide more opportunities for SRF members to communicate with professionals, to share information on employment in the fertility field, and to broaden the topic and the people involved.

I am enthusiastic to join the SRF in this capacity and would be deeply honoured if selected.

Name: Shahriar Mowla

Institution: Department of surgery and cancer, Imperial College London (PhD)

Statement:

Dear members of SRF,

I was selected as a trainee scientist at Coventry hospital (2011-2012) during my undergraduate degree. Whilst at the hospital, I secured funding to carryout research on sperm DNA fragmentation and presented my findings to the hospital and university. Upon graduation, I held the position of andrologist at Coventry hospital for 3 years (2013-2016) before getting back into research. Recently, I completed an MRes degree at the University of Nottingham (2016-2017) where the main focus of my research was validating a novel immunoassay for indirect sperm counts as well as studying SP-10 in human population and assessing its feasibility to function as a male fertility marker. Currently, I am doing my PhD at Imperial College London focusing on trends of microbiome expression in female reproductive tract during pregnancy and their impact on the outcome of ART.

I believe the position of early career rep at SRF is a great opportunity for me to engage with members of the society particularly with young scientists across different fields of reproduction. I am very eager to take part in organising training events and workshops for the members and representing the views of early career scientists such as myself in the committee. I aim to encourage young members of the society to take part in the educational activities as well as making the most of networking opportunities which can contribute to further establish their career in reproductive research.

Thank you

Name: Eleni Papadopoulou

Institution: Nuffield Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Oxford

Statement:

To whom it may concern,

I would like to introduce myself as a 2nd year D.Phil candidate student at the University of Oxford. Under the supervision of Dr. Williams, I am fulfilling two of my biggest ambitions: working on translational research in reproductive sciences and interacting with the best experts in this field. Being a member of the SRF society has contributed significantly to the latter. It is a great opportunity to engage with colleagues and acquire new acquaintances.

My research subject focuses on establishing a technique to restore infertility in women and will be applicable to both pre-pubertal and post-pubertal ovarian cancer survivors, providing them the potential to restore their fertility after chemotherapy treatments.

Being a member of the SRF has significantly contributed to broadening my knowledge in the field of Reproduction. I have been a member of the SRF for over a year now and attended Fertility 2017. I am also attending Fertility 2018 where I will have a poster presentation. I wish to apply for the position of postgraduate representative to further my interaction with the society. My main reason for applying is to be able to contribute wholeheartedly to the society as a postgraduate student. Being a member of Fertility 2017, had a great impact on my personal career development, helped me to understand the needs of postgraduate students and realize that I want to engage more actively through this position.

As an early career representative, I will support postgraduate students' interests and present ideas of how we might improve their engagement in the scientific community. Also, I would like to participate and take on responsibilities of organization matters (e.g. conferences), as well as to gain in depth knowledge on the scientific society as a whole.

Given the opportunity, I believe that I could make an excellent early career representative.

Yours sincerely,
Eleni Papadopoulou

Name: Jessica Roach
Institution: Royal Veterinary College London

Statement:

Joining SRF this year, in the first year of my PhD, I bring a fresh view on what it is like being a newcomer, not only to the society but also to research and academia. This year I gained valuable experience in conference organisation; leading the social media for the International Symposium on Equine Reproduction, held every 4 years, as well as helping to organise a “New Investigators” breakfast for the event. This will provide the opportunity for networking and breaking down barriers for new attendees of the symposium. Over the summer, I trained and facilitated an immersive course on emotional intelligence for undergraduates. This experience helped my understanding of the topic as well as my experience in team dynamics and resilience. Being involved in these events will provide the skills necessary to excel in the Early Career Representative role. I hope to use my organisational abilities and my understanding of the awkwardness of being a new member, to continue to develop SRF as the welcoming and approachable society for which it is known.

After a stint in stud medicine veterinary practice, I am now undertaking a 4-year PhD exploring umbilical cord torsions as a cause of abortion in thoroughbred mares. This project is working to identify the environmental and genetic factors associated with cord torsions as well as define the pathological features. Reproductive sciences, particularly through gestation, have always been a curiosity of mine and I am enjoying the opportunity to align my interests with my veterinary education.

Name: Rebecca Sumner

Institution: Royal Veterinary College London

Statement:

I am currently in the first year of my first post-doctoral research post. My main topic of focus is regarding the co-operative roles of key signalling molecules and transcription factors in the ovarian somatic cells, which are key for female reproductive development. The skills and knowledge acquired in the short time since graduation have demonstrated how much is involved in an active scientific career and I feel I have valuable advice in which I can disseminate. Standing as an early career representative for the SRF would enable me the opportunity to forward opinions from the early career researchers in the field to the SRF to ensure it remains a positive and attractive society to be a member of. During my membership, I have been fortunate to attend several SRF meetings and two World Congresses, which have been invaluable for career progression. In particular, the meet the professors programme section at the World Congress in Japan was particularly beneficial by providing an informal yet professional setting in which to ask questions to those who have been in the position you, as an early career researcher, currently stand. I feel that as an enthusiastic and approachable individual I would make an ideal ECR representative to highlight exciting, beneficial themes at future meetings. Furthermore, being on council as a representative would allow me to have input on what opportunities and training are arranged by the SRF and help guide and support the Early Career Researcher through the initiation of their scientific career.
