

## **Final Report: SRF Travel Award**

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I would like to thank the SRF for the award of this travel grant, which helped fund my travel to and attendance at the Society for Gynaecological Investigation (SGI) Meeting in Florence, Italy from the 26-29<sup>th</sup> of March 2014. At this meeting I delivered an invited plenary lecture in the Placenta Association of the Americas symposium entitled “How to build a placenta: harnessing placental stem cells to understand early placental development”. The ability to give an hour long talk on my research helped establish my name as an independent researcher with a research topic separate to that of my former supervisor, which is critical to establish my own independence in the placental research field. This talk received very good feedback, and I was approached by several researchers to follow up on the findings I had presented in more detail. In particular, I was able to spend some time discussing this work with Prof. Graham Burton of Cambridge who leads one of the major groups looking at human trophoblast stem cells to compare the similarities and differences between our findings and being able to discuss some of his unpublished observations with him directly provided several insights that I will take back to our current work on these cells.

The SGI meeting also provided an excellent networking opportunity. I was able to make direct contact with several senior members of the field who all agreed to act as referees for me for an upcoming fellowship round, and I hope that being able to communicate my research to them in person will aid me in being able to secure one of these fellowships. Italy also has a number of groups working on mesenchymal stem cells in the placenta who were all present at this meeting, and being able to discuss their work with them and learn what direction their research is taking will be key in the future planning of experiments to ensure that the work we are undertaking in Auckland is taking advantage of our unique strengths this field and not directly overlapping with that of others.