

UC San Diego Researcher Funded for Stem-Cell-based Preeclampsia Therapies

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Preeclampsia is a pregnancy complication that is the primary cause of induced premature deliveries. Mana Parast, MD, PhD, an assistant professor of pathology at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine, has been awarded a \$3 million grant to continue her research into new therapies for preeclampsia, a pregnancy complication that often results in additional neonatal complications. The grant was part of more than \$36 million awarded today to 12 researchers by the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine or CIRM, the state's stem cell agency.

Preeclampsia is characterized by high blood pressure and abnormal kidney function and affects roughly 5 to 8 percent of all pregnancies. It's responsible for a significant proportion of maternal deaths and growth-restricted babies, and is the primary reason for inducing delivery prematurely.

The condition involves the placenta, the temporary organ that connects mother and unborn baby. Parast's work focuses upon the stem cells that give rise to the placenta, which are called trophoblast stem cells. Her lab has created a human trophoblast stem cell model – a first – that can be used to study stages of placental development. The CIRM grant will fund continuation of this work and be used to identify potential stem cell-based therapies for treating preeclampsia without resorting to premature delivery.

Parast's funding is part of the third round of CIRM's New Faculty Physician Scientist Translational Research Awards program, which supports promising young researchers in the early stages of their career. Parast is the fifth researcher from UC San Diego to receive such funding.

CIRM was established in November 2004 with the passage of Proposition 71, the California Stem Cell Research and Cures Act. The statewide ballot measure provided \$3 billion in funding for stem cell research at California universities and research institutions and called for the establishment of an entity to make grants and provide loans for stem cell research, research facilities, and other vital research opportunities.

The latest award brings the total value of UC San Diego's CIRM grants to more than \$115 million since the first awards in 2006.

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