



# The 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Society for Reproductive Biology

## FEATURE MEDIA RELEASE

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### Finding the answer to pregnancy problems

Australian researcher, Dr Claire Roberts, from the University of Adelaide's Research Centre for Reproductive Health, has found a protein that may be the answer to pregnancy problems such as preeclampsia, pre-term birth and growth restriction of the baby in the uterus.

The protein is called insulin-like growth factor-II (IGF-II) and is important for healthy placental development (promoting good growth of the placenta and stimulating transport of nutrients from Mum to baby) and enhances fetal growth near term. IGF-II may potentially be able to be used as a strategy to prevent or minimize the severity of the pregnancy complications in couples who are at risk of developing pregnancy problems.

Together these pregnancy complications afflict 20% of all first pregnancies in Australia and cause significant maternal and infant morbidity and mortality in Australia and worldwide. "In the developed world, an estimated US 41 billion dollars is spent annually on healthcare costs to provide antenatal and neonatal intensive care and hospitalisation for first time Mums and babies afflicted with these complications", Dr Roberts said.

"Ideally we want to develop a diagnostic test or genetic fingerprint that predicts a couple's risk well before the symptoms develop" said Roberts. In order to do this Dr Roberts and her team have embarked on a large study examining the genetic make up of patients and have discovered a few genes that may be involved in these complications of pregnancy. Dr Roberts cautions "that although the new findings are promising, more research is needed".

Dr Roberts said that "the benefit of a diagnostic test would revolutionize antenatal care because preventative strategies could be developed for both low and high risk women".

Dr Roberts will review these exciting findings at the 37<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Society for Reproductive Biology in the Gold Coast today.

For interviews with Dr Roberts contact: Dr Sarah Meachem: 0412 640 774 or

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Media material available from <http://www.srb.org.au/media.htm>