

CJD Support Group Network, Australia
CJDSGN Memorial PhD Scholarship in Memory of Frank Burton
Report of funding 2017
Cathryn Ugalde

I received the CJDSGN Memorial PhD Scholarship in Memory of Frank Burton in 2017 when I was in the final stages of my PhD. This scholarship provided a 6-month PhD scholarship (\$14,803.80) along with money for consumables (\$5,000) for my project, totalling \$19,803.80.

My PhD project studied how misfolded proteins, such as prions, damage brain cells. Unfortunately this is an area of prion disease that is poorly understood and further insight into how this occurs will be beneficial to the development of effective therapeutic strategies to treat disease. A major component of my project involved developing a technique to study prion disease using organotypic brain slices cultures. This method has many advantages to traditional methods to study disease, particularly in terms of studying neuronal loss. During my PhD I developed and characterised disease in these brain slices, which allowed me to then go on and study how potential therapeutic compounds protect brain slices from neuronal loss. This was a successful PhD project that shed light on how neurons are affected in prion disease.

The development of the brain slice culture assay will be important both to my main interests in studying neuronal loss and to future studies conducted in our lab that focus on other aspects of prion disease, such as developing tools for early diagnosis of disease.

I submitted my PhD thesis in August 2017 and received comments on my thesis from reviewers in January 2018. My reviewers recommended that my thesis be passed without any amendments needed. I graduated in April 2018 and am now back working in the laboratory of my primary supervisor (Professor Andrew Hill), finishing off projects from my PhD. I plan on continuing my research into the prion disorders as a post-doctoral researcher.

This scholarship had a significant impact on both myself and my research output in the final stages of my candidature. The scholarship contributed to reagents for the final experiments of this project and funded my student stipend. I would like to thank the family of Frank Burton for their generous support with this scholarship. I was fortunate enough to meet several of Frank Burton's family members at the 10th Annual National CJD Conference held in Melbourne on November 11 2017. It was an absolute pleasure introducing myself, telling them about my work and talking about Frank. I hope to see them at future CJDSGN events.

Sincerely,

Cathryn Ugalde