

CJD Support Group Network, Australia
CJDSGN Memorial PhD Scholarship in Memory of David Matthews
Report of Funding 2017
Cathryn Ugalde

I received the CJDSGN Memorial PhD Scholarship in Memory of David Matthews in 2017 when I was in the final stages of my PhD. This scholarship provided a PhD top-up scholarship (\$1,250) and support to go to the international conference 'Prion' (\$2,000) in May 2017. The total amount of the scholarship was \$3,250.

My PhD project studied how brain cells, particularly neurons, are affected in prion disease. 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. 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.

Prion is an annual conference focused specifically on the prion disorders. Last year it was held in Edinburgh, Scotland. The program went over four days and included many talks on a broad range of topics associated with disease; from therapeutics and diagnostics in human disease to understanding the disorder in animals. It was wonderful hearing from leading researchers in the field, learning about aspects of the disease outside my research focus area and meeting other early career prion researchers. Another highlight was supporting invited speakers from Australia, Vicki Lawson and Suzanne Solvyns. It was a really rewarding experience and attending this conference at the end of my PhD really helped me focus my research interests in the prion field. Attending conferences is an important part of a student's PhD candidature and I was fortunate to be able to attend a conference that is so relevant to my research interests.

In addition to financial support to attend Prion, the CJDSGN Memorial PhD Scholarship in Memory of David Matthews also included a top-up scholarship. This scholarship financially supported me during the end of my PhD while I was writing my thesis. 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 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.

I would like to thank the friends and family of David Matthews for their generous support with this CJDSGN Memorial PhD Scholarship.

Sincerely,

Cathryn Ugalde