

# Steroid Receptor Crosstalk in Breast Cancer Cells

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**B. LabMed, B. HSc (Hons)**

A thesis submitted to the University of Adelaide in the total  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

School of Medicine  
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The University of Adelaide  
Adelaide, South Australia

July, 2014

In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity

*Albert Einstein*

This thesis is dedicated to my Pa, Mum, and Dad

Thank you for this opportunity

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## **Abstract**

Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer related death in women, and approximately 1 in 11 women will develop breast cancer before the age of 75. In 2003, breast cancer was responsible for 16% of cancer related deaths in Australian women. This demonstrates that throughout the life span of the female, this organ has a high risk of developing cancer. The growth and survival of normal breast epithelial cells and breast cancer cells is promoted by estrogens and progesterone and both estrogen receptor (ER) and progesterone receptor (PR) have been shown to play prominent roles in breast cancer progression. It has also been demonstrated that co-treatment of breast cancer cells with corticosteroids and 17 $\beta$ -estradiol (E2) can have opposing effects on the proliferation of breast cancer cells compared with the single treatment. In addition, glucocorticoid receptor (GR) levels have been shown to have clinical implications for breast cancer cell survival. This suggests a possible role for activated GR in breast cancer development. Forkhead box protein 1 (FoxA1), a member of the forkhead class of DNA-binding proteins, has also been shown to be an important factor in breast cancer development. FoxA1 has been shown to dictate ER binding in breast cancer cells and has been deemed responsible for the rapid reprogramming of ER signalling seen in breast cancers with poor outcomes and treatment resistance. However, the effects of ER on the function of FoxA1 have been controversial. The aim of this thesis is to further investigate and characterise GR, ER, and FoxA1 crosstalk in three estrogenic breast cancer cell lines, MCF-7, ZR-75-1, and T-47D cells.

It has been determined that the combination of dexamethasone (Dex) and E2 have an altered affect on the cell proliferation of breast cancer cells, compared to the single treatment, suggesting GR can modulate the ER response. In an artificial cell model it has been demonstrated by genome-wide investigations, that activated GR and estrogen receptor (ER) can alter the binding of each other at a subset of sites, by a mechanism termed DynaLoad. In addition, it has been shown that Dex and E2 in combination can regulate a unique subset of genes in breast cancer cells. This provides evidence to indicate that Dex can oppose the growth stimulatory effects of E2 signalling, and further, in combination, Dex and E2, can alter the gene transcriptional prolife of MCF-7 breast cancer cells.

To understand how the molecular interplay between GR and ER effect breast cancer progression the genome-wide binding events of activated GR and ER have been investigated. These studies show that a GR and ER DynaLoad mechanism also exists in all three breast cancer cell lines utilised; however, there was very little crossover of binding patterns observed. This suggests that while the mechanisms of DynaLoad are present in all three cell lines, the sites altered are cell specific. Most surprisingly is the discovery of an elevated number of GR sites that are lost upon activation of ER in MCF-7 cells. However, in the other breast cancer cell lines, this finding is not as pronounced. Immunblots show that MCF-7 cells have lower GR protein levels than the other cell lines indicating that steroid receptor (SR) levels play a major role in the effect that the dual hormone treatment has on the cell. This suggests that in a highly estrogenic cell line, ER plays a strong role in modulating GR function, which could have important consequences for disease outcome.

Furthermore, and contrary to previous findings, this thesis establishes that activated ER and GR have the ability to alter the genomic response of the well-established pioneer factor FoxA1. Genome-wide analysis of FoxA1 binding, upon treatment of E2 or Dex, shows that both ER and GR can recruit FoxA1 to specific binding sites within the genome through a DynaLoad mechanism. These results indicate that there is not a specific set of pioneer factors which bind to closed chromatin and establish the binding landscape for other transcription factors (TFs). Instead this data suggests that every factor has the potential to affect the binding landscape of other TFs, depending on the chromatin context.

Overall, the findings from this thesis have provided novel insight into the crosstalk between GR, ER, and FoxA1, further highlighting the ability of activated SRs to alter the response of one another, and other TFs. In addition, it has also been determined that the outcomes of SR crosstalk is cell-specific and that differing estrogenic breast cancer cells can have altered outcomes, which are dependent on SR levels. This can have potential consequences in breast cancer disease outcomes and progression. In addition, the findings in this thesis have begun to shift our classical understanding of pioneer factors in breast cancer, demonstrating that activated GR and ER have the capabilities to recruit and alter the response of FoxA1. This has provided information on a previously unknown complexity to FoxA1 action in breast cancer cells. The studies in this thesis highlight the signalling complexity of TFs in breast cancer cells and provide the basis for further investigations into GR, ER, and FoxA1 mechanisms and the direct consequences of this on breast cancer outcomes.

## **Declaration**

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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Erin E. Swinstead

July 2014

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost I owe my deepest gratitude to my supervisor and mentor, Dr Gordon Hager. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to join your laboratory, to undertake this project, to learn from your expertise, and for empowering me to complete this thesis. If not for you, this would not have been at all possible. Thank you for believing in my capabilities and instilling confidence in me. You were the first to do so in this long journey and I cannot thank you enough. I feel indebted to you for all you have provided me and I will always be grateful in the kindness and support you have shown me.

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my mentor, Dr Tina Miranda. You were the change I needed to get this thesis completed and I wouldn't have been able to do it without your unwavering guidance and help. Thank you for providing me technical and bioinformatical assistance and for reading and editing this thesis. Thank you for being my solid rock when the unthinkable had to be achieved and keeping me calm throughout a task deemed impossible by many. A few highlights throughout the last year were the attempts at “blinging” every ones lab benches, the realisation that tap water may in fact be essential in some cases, your twisted humour, and reminding me when all else fails to consider jumping around like a penguin or dressing up as a Jedi. I am also indebted to you for everything you did for me over these last 12 months. You mentored me right to the end, provided me with endless personal and experimental support, and I am sure if you knew what you were signing up for when you were asked to teach an Australian student DHS you would have run in the opposite direction.



I would also like to extend a special thank you to Dr Diego Presman, Dr Ido Goldstein, Dr Ty Voss, Dr Lars Grontved, Dr Josefina Ocampo, and Dr Stephanie Morris. Thank you for all the technical advice, the laughs, the support, and helping me believe I can achieve this. Thank you for the friendship and the lab excursion for burgers at a real “American” diner for lunch. I would also like to thank Ms Mary Hawkins for her technical assistance and guidance.

Thank you to the other members of LRBGE, Dr Songjoon Baek, Dr Sohyoung Kim, Dr Diana Stavreva, Dr Lou Schiltz, Dr Mia Sung, Mr Tom Johnson, Dr Lyuba Varticovski, Dr John Pooley, Dr Qizong Lao, Dr Qiuyan Wang, Dr Bethrice Thompson, Dr Mike Guertin, Dr Iain Sawyer, and Dr Akhi Nagaich. This is truly a lab full of great minds and it was an honour to have the opportunity to be a part of it.

I must thank the University of Adelaide for accepting me into the graduate program and the Australian Government for providing me with the Australian Postgraduate Award. I would also like to thank Professor Alistair Burt, the Head of the School of Medicine at the University of Adelaide for supporting my transition to the graduate partnership program at the National Institute of Health and for taking the time to ensure I was in a suitable position to complete my PhD.

Further I would like to thank Ms Lauren Giorgio from the Cancer Biology Laboratory. I think if we had both known what the last three and a half years was going to have in store for us we may have thought twice about beginning. However, the quote “there is no education like adversity” seems to have a place here. Thank you for all your help, and supporting me during the tougher times in the first two years. I can only hope I provided you with the same support while I

finished in the states. Thank you for the endless laughs during my time at the Basil Hetzel Institute. The most memorable being the quote board, the Port road park bench, the suggestion of Neptune as an alternative place for people to live, and the millions of biohazard bags that weren't strong enough to hold a single tip box. I truly hope your future career is bright and filled with success and you never again think, your treatments evaporated.

On a more personal note I would like to thank my friends and family for the support that they showed during my candidature. Ms Tamyka Penglase, thank you for the endless friendship and support you showed me during the good and tough times during my PhD. Our regular sushi dates were truly missed while in America and I also miss everything that the softball life had to offer our friendship. You always asked how my project was going and what was happening and I am thankful for the support you provided.

Ms Emma McKee and Mrs Casey Barton, you are both such special and long time friends that have always showed such an interest in my studies and have supported my PhD through to the end.

Mrs Joanna Selth, thank you for being a shoulder to cry on when I needed it most and helping me believe that I really am capable of undertaking this PhD. You completely understood the ins and outs of my project and the PhD life. Thank you to Dr Luke Selth for the support and Ms Elsie Selth for being a very good listener!

To the softball crew, there are far too many to name, but the days I spent on and off the field with you all was so important and helped me get through the first two years. I would like to make a special mention to Ms Marni Nichols, thank you for

listening to me talk about my project and PhD life while we hung out in the outfield. I really appreciated the sincere interest you showed. I would also like to thank Ms Laura Bond. From the endless dinners to the emotional support you are a great friend and always had such words of wisdom when I needed them.

To my pets, Suzie at the beginning, and Lola and Ady at the end. As different as you all were there is always something calming found in the affection from a pet. I know this was a hard task for you, Lola!

To my new family; Cliff, Susan, Blair, and Juan. Thank you for the support and enthusiastic interest into my project and PhD. I hope I have done justice to a topic that you also have a personal connection to.

Michelle; my little sister, thank you for always showing an interest in my studies and knowing when to give me the advice of “this is the year to get this darn thing done” when I needed it. The FaceTime chats really kept me going until the end.

Pa, unfortunately you left us before I submitted and had the chance to tell you of this amazing opportunity I was presented with after my first trip to the states in 2012. Without your unwavering love and financial assistance I would never have made it here to begin with. Thank you for the message of “use it wisely,” I hope I did just that. Also thank you for telling Mum before you passed “that girl is going to achieve great things just mark my words” just what I needed to hear to make it to the end. Thank you for always believing I was a lot smarter than I ever realised.

Mum and Dad, thank you from the bottom of my heart for guiding me into the person I have become today. You both raised me to take every opportunity

presented to me with both hands, to never give up, and keep on trying. I truly believe that is one of the main reasons I made it through this PhD. Without you both supporting me financially, and in my decision to move I would not have been able to complete this. Mum, your fight with breast cancer was a driving force into the reasons I undertook this project and I hope I did you proud with this body of work.

Lastly, to my husband Reed. I'm not quite sure I have the words to thank you like I should but I don't know what I would have done without you. Your unconditional support and acceptance of this PhD was unwavering and I drew on your patience and optimism repeatedly. Thank you for bearing down and editing this thesis, and understanding that tumour is spelt with a u in Australia! Thank you for listening to the stresses, taking an interest into my project, however foreign it sounded, keeping me calm when the unthinkable had to be achieved, and for being there for me always. You never demonstrated any frustration toward me during this last year as frustrating as it was at times. You made life that much easier for me, especially while I was writing up and I will forever be thankful. I will never forget how kind and supportive you truly have been. Thank you, I would have been lost without you in the end. I love you.

## Abbreviations

17 $\beta$ -HSD	17 $\beta$ -hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase
3 $\beta$ -HSD	3 $\beta$ -hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase
ac	acetylation
AF-1	transcriptional activation function 1
AF-2	transcriptional activation function 2
AP-1	activating protein 1
AR	androgen receptor
Aromatase	aromatase cytochrome P-450 enzyme
bp	base pair
BSA	bovine serum albumin
CTCF	CCCTC-binding factor
ChIP	chromatin immunoprecipitation assay
ChIP-chip	tiled oligonucleotide microarrays
ChIP-seq	chromatin immunoprecipitation sequencing
cHRT	combined hormone replacement therapy
CO <sub>2</sub>	carbon dioxide
CSS	charcoal stripped fetal bovine serum
C/EBP	CCAAT/enhancer binding protein
DBD	DNA-binding domain
DCIS	ductal carcinoma <i>in situ</i>
Dex	dexamethasone
DHEA	dehydroepiandrosterone
DHEA-S	dehydroepiandrosterone sulphate

DHS	DNase I hypersensitivity
DHT	dihydrotestosterone
DMEM	Dulbecco's Modified Eagle Medium
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
DNase I	deoxyribonuclease I
DynaLoad	dynamic assisted loading
E2	17 $\beta$ -estradiol
EDTA	ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid
EGTA	ethylene glycol tetraacetic acid
EMT	epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition
ENCODE	The Encyclopedia of DNA Elements
ER	estrogen receptor
ERE	estrogen receptor response element
ER $\alpha$	estrogen receptor alpha
ER $\beta$	estrogen receptor beta
FAIRE	formaldehyde-assisted isolation of regulatory elements
FBS	fetal bovine serum
FDR	false discovery rate
FIMO	finding individual motif occurrences
FLIP	fluorescence loss in photobleaching
FoxA1	forkhead box protein 1
FRAP	fluorescence recovery after photobleaching
g	gram
GR	glucocorticoid receptor
GRE	glucocorticoid response element

H	histone
h	hour
H <sub>2</sub> O	water
HATs	histone acetyltransferase complexes
HCl	hydrogen chloride
HDACs	histone deacetylases
Helix 1	N-terminal helix
Helix 2	C-terminal helix
Her2	human epidermal growth factor receptor
Homer	Hypergeometric Optimization of Motif Enrichment
HRE	hormone response element
HRT	hormone replacement therapy
IDC	invasive ductal carcinoma
ILC	invasive lobular carcinoma
JunD	jun D proto-oncogene
K	lysine
kb	kilobase
KCl	potassium chloride
L	liter
LBD	ligand-binding domain
LCIS	lobular carcinoma <i>in situ</i>
LINE	long interspersed repetitive elements
M	molar
me1	monomethylation

me <sub>2</sub>	dimethylation
me <sub>3</sub>	trimethylation
MeV	Multiple Experiment Viewer
min	minute
mL	milliliter
mm	millimetre
mM	millimolar
MMTV array	mouse mammary tumour virus promoter
MMTV LTR	mouse mammary tumour virus long terminal repeat
MMTV-Luc	mouse mammary tumour virus promoter luciferase
MR	mineralocorticoid receptor
mRNA	message ribonucleic acid
MYC	v-myc avian myelocytomatosis viral oncogene homolog
NaCl	sodium chloride
P4	progesterone
PAD2	peptidylarginine deiminase 2
PBS	Dulbecco's phosphate buffered saline
PI	protease inhibitors
PR	progesterone receptor
qPCR	quantitative polymerase chain reaction
R	arginine
RO	reverse osmosis
rpm	revolutions per minute
RNA	ribonucleic acid
RNA PolII	RNA polymerase II



sec	second
SDS	sodium dodecyl sulphate
SR	steroid receptor
STR	short tandem repeats
T	testosterone
TAE	tris-acetate-EDTA
TF	transcription factor
trypsin-EDTA 0.25%	trypsin
TSS	transcription start site
ug	microgram
uL	microlitre
uM	micromolar
UV	ultraviolet
V	volts
WHI	Women's Health Initiative
<b>Other:</b>	
°C	degree Celsius
%	percentage
>	greater than
<	less than
≥	greater than or equal too
≤	less than or equal too