



**Identification and Characterisation  
of the Gene for  
Börjeson-Forssman-Lehmann Syndrome**

**By**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THESIS SUMMARY</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>DECLARATION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 – Introduction</b>	<b>11</b>
1.1 Intelligence	11
1.2 Mental Retardation	12
1.2.1 Definition of Mental Retardation	12
1.2.2 Prevalence of Mental Retardation	12
1.3 Causes of Mental Retardation	13
1.3.1 Environmental Causes of Mental Retardation	13
1.3.2 Genetic Causes of Mental Retardation	13
1.4 X-linked Mental Retardation	15
1.4.1 Definition and Prevalence	16
1.4.2 Non-syndromic X-linked Mental Retardation	17
1.4.3 Syndromic X-linked Mental Retardation	20
1.4.4 Excess of Genes for Cognitive Function on the X: Fact or Fiction?	24
1.5 Börjeson-Forssman-Lehmann Syndrome	26
1.5.1 Original Description	26
1.5.2 Prevalence of Börjeson-Forssman-Lehmann Syndrome	27
1.5.3 Clinical Description in Affected Males	28
1.5.4 Clinical Description in Carrier Females	30
1.5.5 Genetic Mapping of the BFLS Disease Gene	31
1.5.6 Candidate Genes Analysed	32
1.6 Research Aims	33
<b>CHAPTER 2 – Thesis Publications</b>	<b>34</b>
2.1 Publication 1 : Characterization of <i>ARHGEF6</i> , a Guanine Nucleotide Exchange Factor for Rho GTPases and a Candidate Gene for X-linked Mental Retardation: Mutation Screening in Börjeson- Forssman-Lehmann Syndrome and MRX27	34
2.1.1 Linking Statement	34

2.2 Publication 2 : Mutations in <i>PHF6</i> are Associated with Börjeson-Forssman-Lehmann syndrome	36
2.2.1 Linking Statement	36
2.3 Publication 3 : Molecular Genetics of X-linked Mental Retardation: A Complex Picture Emerging	37
2.3.1 Linking Statement	37
<b>CHAPTER 3 – Publications Supplementary to Thesis</b>	<b>38</b>
3.1 Publication 4 : Novel <i>PHF6</i> mutation p.D333del Causes Börjeson-Forssman-Lehmann Syndrome	38
3.1.1 Linking Statement	38
3.2 Publication 5 : The Clinical Picture of <i>PHF6</i> -tested Positive Börjeson-Forssman-Lehmann Syndrome in Males and Heterozygous Females	39
3.2.1 Linking Statement	39
3.3 Publication 6 : Mutations in the Human ortholog of <i>Aristaless</i> Cause X-linked Mental Retardation and Epilepsy	40
3.3.1 Linking Statement	40
<b>CHAPTER 4 – Conclusions</b>	<b>41</b>
4.1 Historical Significance	41
4.2 Significance to Families and Individuals with BFLS	41
4.2.1 Carrier Female Testing and Pre-natal Diagnosis	41
4.2.2 Diagnosis of BFLS	42
4.3 Significance of Understanding the Function of PHF6	43
4.3.1 PHD-like Zinc Fingers	43
4.3.2 Nucleolar Localisation of PHF6	44
4.3.3 Orthologues in Other Species	44
4.4 Significance to the Field of X-linked Mental Retardation	45
4.4.1 Role of <i>PHF6</i> in BFLS	45
4.4.2 Role of <i>PHF6</i> in X-linked Mental Retardation	45
4.5 Final Conclusions	46
4.6 Future Directions	47

<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>48</b>
Appendix 1 – Author Contributions and Statements	48
Publication 1	48
Publication 2	50
Publication 3	71
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>74</b>

## Tables

1. Genes for Non-syndromic X-linked Mental Retardation	19
2. Genes for Syndromic X-linked Mental Retardation	22
3. Clinical features of BFLS in Affected Males and Carrier Females	29

## Thesis Summary

Mental retardation (MR) affects approximately 2-3% of the population. A high proportion of cases is due to genetic factors, with estimates of approximately 25% of MR being caused by genes on the X chromosome.

One of the earliest X-linked forms of MR described was Börjeson-Forssman-Lehmann syndrome (BFLS; MIM 301900). Affected males display a phenotype of mild to severe MR, gynecomastia, hypoplastic external genitalia, obesity, deep set eyes, visual problems, “heavy” face, long ears (specifically earlobes), shortened toes and tapered fingers, with variable features including epilepsy, microcephaly and short stature.

The gene for BFLS was known to map to a large region on Xq26-q27; however, the molecular basis of BFLS remained unknown. This research project refined the localisation of the BFLS gene, identified the gene, and completed preliminary analysis of the cellular function of the protein.

The critical genetic interval was reduced from 24.6 cM to approximately 8 cM, and an *in silico* physical and transcriptional map of this reduced minimal BFLS region was constructed. Of the 62 identified genes, 19 were screened for mutations.

Mutations associated with BFLS were identified in a novel PHD-like zinc finger gene, which has since been named *PHF6*. The full genomic structure, expression analysis in both human tissues and mouse brain, and cellular localisation of the protein was analysed. Eight different missense and truncation mutations were identified in seven familial and two sporadic cases of BFLS. *PHF6* is a widely expressed gene, present in nearly all adult tissues studied, with specific developmental stage expression in mouse brain. Transient transfection studies with tagged PHF6 protein showed diffuse nuclear staining with prominent nucleolar

accumulation. Such localisation, combined with the presence of two PHD-like zinc fingers, is suggestive of a role for PHF6 in transcription.

This work facilitates precise and early diagnosis of individuals affected with BFLS. Families will benefit from a direct DNA test of carrier status for females, and with the aid of counselling will have the ability to make informed reproductive choices. The identification of this gene also provides wider insight into the cellular pathways that are integral for normal cognitive function and physical development.

## Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma 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.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

This thesis is in the form of PhD by Publication during Candidature, as described in Rule 1.2.1 of The Code of Practice for Maintaining and Monitoring Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Degrees, The University of Adelaide, Australia.

Karen Marie Lower

19<sup>th</sup> April 2003

Date



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*It's all swings and roundabouts*

## List of Abbreviations

<i>AGTR2</i>	angiotensin II receptor, type 2
<i>ARHGEF6</i>	Rho guanine nucleotide exchange factor 6
<i>ARX</i>	aristaless-related homeobox, X-linked
<i>ATR-X</i>	alpha-thalassemia/mental retardation syndrome, X-linked
<i>BFLS</i>	Börjeson-Forssman-Lehmann Syndrome
<i>cM</i>	centimorgans
<i>FGD1</i>	faciogenital dysplasia gene 1
<i>FHF2</i>	fibroblast growth factor homologous factor 2
<i>FMR1</i>	fragile X mental retardation 1
<i>FMR2</i>	fragile X mental retardation 2
<i>GEF</i>	guanine nucleotide exchange factor
<i>HGP</i>	human genome project
<i>IQ</i>	intelligence quotient
<i>Mb</i>	megabase
<i>MECP2</i>	methyl-CpG-binding protein 2
<i>MIM</i>	mendelian inheritance in man
<i>MR</i>	mental retardation
<i>MRX</i>	non-syndromic X-linked mental retardation
<i>MRXS</i>	syndromic X-linked mental retardation
<i>OMIM</i>	on-line mendelian inheritance in man
<i>PHD</i>	plant homeodomain
<i>PHF6</i>	PHD finger protein 6
<i>RSK2</i>	ribosomal protein S6 kinase
<i>SD</i>	standard deviation
<i>SOX3</i>	SRY (sex determining region Y)-box 3
<i>XLMR</i>	X-linked mental retardation
<i>XNP</i>	X-linked nuclear protein