Lisa Nicholas  
Sansom Institute for Health Research, UniSA  
A travel grant awarded by Healthy Development Adelaide supported by attendance at the Society for Gynecologic Investigation’s (SGI) 60th Annual Meeting, which was held at the Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek, Florida. The theme of the meeting was ‘Plasticity: Molecules to Motherhood and Beyond’. This was my third time attending the SGI annual meeting and as usual it was a very rewarding experience. SGI is the premier scientific organization in obstetrics and gynecology and has about 1200 members globally who are involved in all areas of reproductive sciences and women’s health.

The conference commenced with a host of satellite meetings, which encompassed themes pertaining to reproductive sciences. This included a session on fetal physiology, which I found most interesting. The satellite meetings were then followed by three full days of conference proceedings. Throughout the course of the conference, I had the opportunity to listen to many interesting presentations by both senior and junior scientists as well as PhD candidates involved in basic, translational and clinical investigations. There were also a number of opportunities to interact with fellow researchers as well as leading academics in the field of developmental programming and reproductive biology during the breaks and the welcome reception.

I enjoyed sharing my work with fellow researchers and to know that my work is well received by my peers. There were also three poster sessions during which about 300 posters were showcased. I found these sessions particularly useful as I was able to interact one on one with the poster presenter, which resulted in the exchange of interesting information. My abstract titled ‘Maternal Obesity in the Periconceptional Period Results in Altered Insulin Signalling in Visceral but not Subcutaneous Fat of the Offspring’ was selected for a poster presentation.

The highlight of the conference was SGI’s New Investigator event; Connection Corners. This event provided an informal platform for young researchers to meet and connect with senior researchers about jobs, career advice etc. This was an ideal event as I have submitted by PhD thesis and was therefore looking for career advice and opportunities. This event allowed me to maximise my networking opportunities and it also resulted in an evening of fun and laughter with researchers from all around the world.

All in all, my attendance at the SGI 60th Annual Meeting has been a rewarding experience from both a personal and professional point of view. With the support of HDA, I have been given an invaluable opportunity to gain an international perspective on research and it has also allowed me to keep abreast of the most recent developments in my field.

Monalisa Padhee  
Sansom Institute for Health Research, UniSA  
Thanks to the HDA travel grant, I was able to attend the 17th Annual congress of the Perinatal Society of Australia and New Zealand, which was held at the Adelaide Convention Centre from 15th - 17th April 2013. The main theme of the congress was “Controversies in Perinatal Care”.

The congress aims to strengthen communication between the people who are engaged in research concerning both the mum and bub and hence, brought together a variety of professionals including research scientists, obstetricians, midwives, neonatologists, neonatal nurses, epidemiologists, surgeons, therapists and perinatal medicine specialists at both the national and international level.

My abstract entitled ‘In vitro culture and transfer of the embryo increases heart weight but not basal blood pressure in fetal or early postnatal life’ was accepted as an oral presentation in the developmental programming session. I enjoyed this opportunity as it helped me to present my research to an international audience and get some valuable feedback.

The congress consisted of many interesting plenary sessions and I thoroughly enjoyed the session on the “developmental programming” as it gave me a better understanding of this field and made me aware of some of the exciting new findings in this field. In addition, the session on ‘Controversial questions in IVF’ provided me with some new insights on this area which is directly related to my research.

The poster sessions at the conference presented me with great opportunities for networking. I was fortunate to meet some of the established researchers from my area and enjoyed speaking with them and learning from their experiences. I also benefitted from the informal conversations with fellow student researchers and heard from them about their work at local, national and international institutions.

A particular highlight of the congress was the tribute to David Henderson Smart who was a pioneer in the field of neonatal medicine. I am so inspired to hear about his dedication to his work and his helpful attitude towards young researchers.

The conference certainly helped me in gaining knowledge, enhancing my communication skills and networking with researchers which will be valuable for my PhD and career development. It was truly an amazing experience.
Dr Caroline Bull, SIEF John Stocker Postdoctoral Fellow
CSIRO Nutritional Genomics Laboratory

I was privileged to attend the 20th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Psychoneuroimmunology Research Society (PNIRS) held in Stockholm in June. With outstanding science (including presentations from two Nobel Laureates) and a genuinely friendly atmosphere, this was an excellent experience. Conference topics included biochemical mechanisms underlying placebo effects, inflammation in depression and stress, cytokines and immune cell trafficking, and impact of sleep (and its deprivation) on immune response and function. Some interesting work was presented on exposure to depression and stress in utero, inflammation arising from sleep variability during pregnancy, and associations between childhood trauma, depression and inflammatory cytokines.

PNI has a strong focus on supporting and encouraging students and postdocs, with specific ‘trainee’ events in the program. One which I found particularly valuable was an educational short course on “Neuro-endocrine-immune interactions: Some hot points in inflammation”; an intensive, focussed session with speakers on neuroscience, epigenetics, immunology, nutrition and biochemistry. In addition, a presentation and Q&A session with the Editor In Chief of the Society’s journal, Brain Behaviour and Immunity, provided helpful advice on publishing our work.

With it’s lovely Stockholm setting, and the local organising team being based at the Karolinska Institute, the topic of Nobel Prizes was an inevitable feature. Attending a Satellite Symposium held at the Nobel Forum, where the winner for the Nobel in Physiology and Medicine is announced each year, and the lecture delivered, was humbling to say the least. We also attended City Hall where the formal award banquet and ball are held. (For far less effort than that required to achieve a real Nobel Prize, dinner settings from the banquets can be purchased from the gift shop!).

Other highlights included Nobel Laureate Prof Elizabeth Blackburn’s Keynote address on her work on telomeres and telomerase, and their relationship to psychological stress; work that inspired my current project. It was great to see local colleague and collaborator, Dr Mark Hutchinson from University of Adelaide, receive prestigious “Robert Ader New Investigator Award”, for which he delivered an impressive and inspiring (1hr!) seminar.

The poster sessions were particularly enjoyable, providing a great opportunity to meet other researchers, to discuss and exchange ideas and protocols. I was gratified by interest I received in my work on effects of cortisol on DNA damage and telomeres. These sessions provided invaluable feedback on my work, as well as helpful input for my upcoming in vivo study. En route to Stockholm I took the opportunity of visiting a collaborating lab in Singapore, to build on my skills in a method learned there few years ago, and to visit with colleagues and friends made during that time.

My sincere thanks to HDA for their support to attend the PNIRS meeting; it was an extremely positive and beneficial experience.

Dr Amelia Searle
Centre for Traumatic Stress Studies, University of Adelaide

In June I was fortunate to attend and present at two important European conferences with the financial assistance of HDA.

First, the 13th Conference of European Society for Traumatic Stress Studies was held in Bologna, Italy. This leading conference on stress, trauma and PTSD brought together scientists and clinicians from across globe, including small contingent of Australian researchers! Despite focussing on one mental disorder (PTSD), the diversity in topics was impressive, with samples including new mothers, Holocaust survivors, Iraqi civilians, and relatives of people undertaking assisted suicide.

Of direct relevance to my research were the military mental health sessions. Several research groups across the UK, the Netherlands, and Denmark presented results of recent prospective studies with multiple assessments spanning pre-and post-deployment. These types of military studies are relatively rare, yet are essential to properly address important questions regarding the emergence and continuation of PTSD. Two presentations demonstrated the long-debated existence of delayed-onset PTSD, while others examined persistent PTSD, stress sensitisation, and other symptom trajectories. Several particularly relevant presentations came from the King’s College military research group, whose study design and findings draw important parallels with our own; presentations included home-related predictors of PTSD while on deployment (Dr Neil Greenberg), and associations between deployment and PTSD (Dr Margaret Jones). I really valued being able to converse with these UK researchers about details of their and our work.

My presentation examined ability of the PCL-C questionnaire to screen for PTSD in Australian military personnel (which has been abstracted in European Journal of Psychotraumatology 2013, Vol 4, S1), with results having important implications for military screening worldwide. My presentation was first occasion where results from Australian Mental Health Prevalence and Wellbeing Study (largest representative study of mental disorder prevalence in an entire military population) were presented to international academic audience. I was pleased with audience interest, and found it very valuable to discuss other researchers’ experience with PCL among English and Norwegian military forces.

Second, the 14th International Neurotoxicology Association meeting held in Egmond Aan Zee, the Netherlands, focussed on the neurodevelopmental basis of health and disease, including neurobehavioural consequences of toxic metal exposure. With a mix of neurobiological and epidemiological researchers, this conference bridged the boundaries between animal and human research, providing a holistic perspective on important topics. I presented within the ‘hot topics’ symposium, on the adult follow-up of the Port Pirie cohort study, one of the seminal prospective childhood lead
exposure studies, and one of the few to have followed-up participants into adulthood. This was a particularly valuable opportunity as I was able to speak with other esteemed lead exposure researchers, and in particular Professor Tomas Guilarte, about implications of our findings, and parallels between our work.

Overall, attending these conferences was a very rewarding and worthwhile experience. My thanks again go to HDA for this opportunity to share my research, make valuable new connections with international researchers, and learn recent advances in my field.

Dr Andrea Gordon  
School of Nursing and Midwifery, UniSA
A travel grant awarded by Healthy Development Adelaide (HDA) supported my attendance at the College on Problems of Drug Dependence (CPDD) 75th Annual Meeting, held at Hilton Bayfront San Diego, California from 15-20 June 2013. CPDD is the oldest organization in the US concerned with drug dependence research. Originally founded in 1929 as part of the National Academy of Sciences, CPDD is now an independent, leading scientific society in the drug dependence field. In order to serve both researchers and policy makers, CPDD offers updates on recent research advances that have implications for public health agendas.

This was my fourth time attending the CPDD annual conference and as with previous years, it was a highly rewarding and fulfilling experience. The conference was attended by over 1100 delegates from all over the world presenting their work in relation to the latest findings in epidemiology, prevention and advances in treatment of drug abuse and dependence across the spectrum of prescribed and illicit drugs.

My presentation "Genetic predictors of neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) in methadone exposed infants" was chosen for an oral presentation in the one of the many parallel oral sessions; "Baby bumps in the road, consequences of perinatal drug abuse". This session was co-chaired by one of the matriarchs of research into NAS, Loretta Finnegan. In addition, being the 75 year of CPDD, each oral session was preceded by a 5 minute video (75th Anniversary Reflections) from senior CPDD members portraying stories from the initiation of the college, right through to the advances in addiction medicine of the current day. Loretta Finnegan presented the 75th Anniversary Reflections at the commencement of my oral session and reflected on the initial battles she encountered promoting addiction medicine research by, and for women (and their infants) in the early years of the college. It was therefore humbling that following my presentation, Loretta commented that my work was a novel and valuable approach to investigating better ways to predict and manage NAS. As a result of my presentation I was also offered a further collaboration in New South Wales in order to increase participant numbers in my current research.

Four poster sessions were held where over 500 posters were showcased. These sessions were particularly useful as it enabled one-on-one interaction with those who were presenting to gauge further information in relation to their studies, in particular a poster entitled "Characterisation of placental efflux transporters" which is directly in my field of interest.

The conference dinner provided an invaluable opportunity to informally network with colleagues from the US, Norway and even those closer to home who I had not previously discussed research opportunities with from WA. Overall, my attendance at the CPDD 75th Annual Meeting was a very rewarding experience. With the support of HDA, I was given the opportunity to gain further international perspectives and reputation in relation to my area of research in substance use and pregnancy, at the same time as keeping abreast of the most recent developments in my field.

Jessica Gugusheff  
FoodPlus Research Centre, University of Adelaide
With the assistance of a HDA travel grant, I was recently able to attend the 21st Annual Meeting of Society for the Study of Ingestive Behavior, which was held in New Orleans, Louisiana. The meeting covered many different aspects of food intake including the role of early-life influences and comprised of both basic science and clinical investigation presentations.

The conference commenced with a fascinating plenary session summarizing our growing understanding of central appetite regulation over the past 20 years followed by an opening reception which gave a great opportunity for networking. Over the next four days, oral presentations were given on range of topics as diverse as ‘invertebrate models of feeding’ to the ‘role of economics in feeding behavior’. The breadth of research presented, exposed me to many new ideas and has given me invaluable insight into how my research relates to other work being done in the field.

Three poster sessions supplemented the oral presentations, I found these session especially beneficial as they gave me greater opportunity to interact with other presenters and discuss our mutual research interests in more depth. My abstract ‘A Maternal ‘Junk Food’ Diet Alters the Response of the Mesolimbic Reward System to Naloxone in Offspring Postweaning’ was selected for a poster presentation and I was fortunate to receive much interesting feedback and engage in many conversations which I feel will assist me with my research going forward.

The ‘professional development’ and ‘meet the professor’ sessions were also particular highlights of the conference. These sessions enabled me to get to know other young researchers from many international institutes and share experiences and information about our studies and life as postgraduate students. In addition, it also allowed me to meet more senior people in the field, who provided valuable career advice and contacts, to aid with the transition from PhD student to postdoctoral employment.
Attending the 21st Annual SSIB meeting, was both highly enjoyable and informative. It provided me with an amazing opportunity to present my work to an international audience and meet many researchers who are at the forefront of the field. I feel have greatly benefitted from the experience, which has given me both information about current research being conducted internationally as well as improved skills in communication and networking. What I have learnt by going to this conference will without doubt assist me in my future career development and I am grateful for HDA’s assistance, in helping me attend.

Dr Lisa Akison
Robinson Institute, University of Adelaide

In July, a HDA Travel grant enabled me to attend the 46th Annual Meeting of the US-based Society for the Study of Reproduction (SSR) in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. This is the largest meeting in the field of reproductive biology in the world, attracting researchers from over 30 countries.

This year’s meeting had a record number of abstracts submitted for presentation. There were over 220 platform presentations covering plenary/keynote lectures, concurrent sessions and topic-specific ‘Modules’, and over 680 scientific posters presented over 3 days.

The opening Keynote Lecture was by Dr Martin Matzuk (Baylor College of Medicine) entitled ‘Therapeutics, Small RNAs, and Reproductive Global Health’ in which he talked about his work utilising many different knockout mouse strains to understand the regulators of both female and male reproduction and how these may be potential targets for contraceptives in the future. This addressed the main theme of the meeting ‘Reproductive Health: Nano to Global’ and set the scene for the rest of the conference.

On the morning of the second day, I presented my poster on some of my PhD/Post-doctoral work on the role of progesterone receptor (PGR) in regulating genes potentially involved in oocyte and embryo transport in the oviduct. There was quite a lot of interest in this work, as very little is known about the mechanisms regulating oviducal transport and there have been no studies to examine PGR-regulated pathways in the oviduct. This work was submitted for publication in Biology of Reproduction on my return to Adelaide.

There were many highlights for me amongst the presentations: Dr Sabra Klein (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health) presented a plenary on differential immune responses in females versus males and how this affects infection and vaccination. Dr Stephanie Pangas (Baylor College of Medicine) presented one of the New Investigator Lectures on conditional knockout mouse models to study various aspects of ovarian development and disease. The Gonad Module Session on ‘Ovarian causes of female infertility’ and the platform sessions on ‘Ovarian follicle biology’.

The President’s Symposium which discussed research in which physicists, engineers and mathematicians have collaborated with reproductive biologists, for example, to understand the motility of sperm in the reproductive tract. Prof JoAnne Richards Historical Perspectives lecture on ovulation research. The Hormones Module Session, particularly an entertaining presentation on the influence of seminal plasma on ovarian function in llamas and mice.

On the final morning, I participated in a Trainee Forum which focussed on strategies for transitioning into an independent career. The first panel session dealt with securing your first post-doctoral position and included a presentation by our own Prof Sarah Robertson. The second panel session discussed various career options for reproductive biologists and included presentations by academics, a freelance scientific writer and a researcher working for the National Institute of Health (NIH).

Overall, I found the conference to be full of incredibly exciting and ground-breaking science which has strengthened my enthusiasm for working in this field. It also put into context the fantastic work being done here in Adelaide by researchers in the Robinson Institute.

Stefania Velardo
School of Education, Flinders University

In August I was privileged to attend the 21st IUHPE (International Union for Health Promotion and Education) World Conference on Health Promotion in Pattaya, Thailand. This leading triennial conference brought together over 1800 researchers, professionals and students from 76 countries, with fantastic diversity in topics that centred on the broad theme of best investments for health. Work was presented in a variety of formats, ranging from oral presentations to symposia and hands-on workshops, which were also complemented by several side meetings and a daily poster session. Of direct relevance to healthy development was the focus on investments in early life, drawing on the importance of a whole child approach and inter-sectoral collaboration to reduce inequalities. Some interesting work was also presented on role of emerging health technologies, related to social media and smart phones.

The sub-theme of health literacy was particularly relevant to my PhD research. Several interesting debates centred on the health literacy construct and its connection to health promotion and the social determinants of health. I really valued being able to hear about latest advancements in health literacy knowledge and measurement, by learning about the work that is being done in Australia, Europe, and more recently, Asia. My own presentation examined health literacy from the child’s perspective, with specific focus on the ways in which disadvantaged children access, understand, and utilise
nutrition information. It was exciting to be able to discuss my own perspectives with a diverse audience and I was really pleased with the interest that I received from some conference attendees, including other researchers in the field. I was also fortunate to attend the side meeting of the IUHPE Global Working Group on Health Literacy during this time. This was particularly valuable as I was able to converse with world leaders, including Prof Don Nutbeam, who first inspired my current research project, whilst contributing ideas about the future directions for health literacy research. As a new member of the group I am now connected to many esteemed researchers, which is exciting, to say the least.

It was particularly interesting to learn about work that’s taking place in developing countries such as Thailand and I really enjoyed daily poster sessions focused on community-based strategies, alongside other research. As a research student who’s constantly immersed within literature and academic debate, one sometimes feels removed from the passionate grassroots health workers and new initiatives being developed at community level. The posters demonstrated fantastic local work that’s being implemented across globe and it was exciting to talk to authors about their experiences. I also took opportunity to attend conference’s Thai Cultural Night that combined delicious cuisine with exhibitions and traditional performances from the nation’s four regions.

In these uncertain times, researchers play an integral role in driving health promotion to forefront of global health agenda. In doing so, we also need to show concrete and understandable evidence for ‘what we do’. Overall, attending this conference was extremely rewarding and I extend my sincere thanks to HDA for this opportunity to share my research findings, expand my understanding of health literacy, and network with a range of fantastic researchers and practitioners. It is an experience that I will treasure in years to come, as I reflect on this conference was extremely rewarding and I extend my sincere thanks to HDA for this opportunity to share my research findings, expand my understanding of health literacy, and network with a range of fantastic researchers and practitioners. It is an experience that I will treasure in years to come, as I reflect on rich cultural diversity, friendly atmosphere, and, ultimately, delegates’ passion for health promotion.

Victor Chen
Discipline of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Adelaide

I attended the 69th Annual Meeting of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) and 21st World Congress of the International Federation of Fertility Societies (IFFS) conference held in Boston of the USA from 12 October to 17 October. This conference covered a lot of different topics of reproductive medicine such as assisted reproductive technologies, in vitro fertilisation (IVF), ovarian stimulation, embryo culture and cryopreservation. This is the biggest meeting in this field so there are more than 10,000 people from all over the world attending the conference.

Prior to the scientific programs, I attended the postgraduate program course which is cryobiology, cryophysics and quality control concerns of gamete, embryo and tissue vitrification. This is a hands-on workshop so we are able to practice various commercially available vitrification systems and assess the pros and cons in establishing a vitrification program. This is of great importance for me to undertake the further studies using vitrification system.

The scientific program comprised of plenary lectures, trilogies, symposia, workshop, interactive sessions, roundtable luncheons, panel discussions, regional meetings, and over 1,000 video, oral and poster presentations. I was very interested in first plenary lecture given by the 2009 Nobel laureate Prof Elizabeth Blackburn talking about the telomere. In addition, there are some interesting plenary talks during the conference such as “small RNAs, stem cells, and self-renewal” given by Dr. Haifin Lin, and “the effect of ART and IVF on epigenetic programming in the embryo” presented by Prof Renne A. Reijo Pera.

I was also interested in talks regarding female reproduction, fertility preservation, cryopreservation, obesity and reproduction, oocyte biology, sperm biology, embryo biology, ovarian stimulation, embryo culture, safety in ART, mitochondrial metabolism of embryos. These topics are relevant with my PhD studies so these studies are very useful for my future study. Moreover, I attended the talks for prize paper abstract sessions and these studies also gave me some ideas for my future study. The IFFS author workshop on Tuesday is very valuable for my journal article writing. I attended the Asia Pacific Initiative on Reproduction Symposium focusing on strategies for implantation disorder in ART on Wednesday and it is very interesting.

I present some recent works in humans on Monday afternoon and mice study of my PhD project on Tuesday afternoon in the conference. Our data showed IVF may increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes in the offspring and both ovarian stimulation and embryo culture may contribute to metabolic consequences later in life. I have got some valuable questions and suggestions from the audience and they are very interested in my study. More importantly, I have improved my communication skills and was confident in my presentation so I have also got some positive responses from the audience for my talk.

In conclusion, attending the conference provided me with an excellent opportunity to meet international research leaders, network with other researchers in the field and introduce my researches to them. It is also important for my career development. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Healthy Development Adelaide (HDA) for providing me the travel grant to make it possible.