

2017 EUROSPINE TFR Main Study Grant (€ 50,000) Recipient: Raquel Gonçalves

Disc degeneration: immune- and neuro-modulation

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Why do you think the research you have been funded for is important?

I believe our project is very interesting since it aims to establish new models to better understand the crosstalk between disc degeneration, the immune response and innervation and how cell therapies using mesenchymal stem cells influence these key players so important in low back pain.

I think this is a step forward since the research in the field usually focus on the molecular mechanisms of the immune response or the outcome of cell based therapies in disc “regeneration”, but it’s not usual to approach cell-based therapies for low back pain using a more “holistic” approach.

What do you think it will change for patients / the clinical outcome of the study?

For patients I think the outcome of this project is the better definition of the role of cell-based therapies using mesenchymal stem cells in low back pain. It is crucial to better stratify the patients in order to understand the real potential of these therapies in different types of patients: for example patients with back pain, but no evident signs of disc degeneration; patients with inflammatory response in the disc, but without evident signs of degeneration. Only with increased research in the field, patients could be better advised by their doctors if they are good candidates to these therapies, instead of only testing them.

For your research group, does this mean that you will go further and will apply for further funding?

Of course, personally I think it means a lot for a young researcher in the field have the recognition of EUROSPINE, an organisation at European level. But I always continue to apply for funding to other sources as the national science foundation or European projects, since it is also necessary to have more funding to contract people for instance, buy new equipment, etc.

Do you think that the process of the application was smooth with EUROSPINE?

Yes. Especially compared to other calls in which you have to fill a lot of paper work, here I think this is more straightforward and a very easy process to apply. I totally encourage others to try it.