

HER Foundation Helps UCLA, USC and 23&Me Link Debilitating Pregnancy Illness to Two Genes



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DAMASCUS, Ore., March 23, 2018 /PRNewswire/ -- FINALLY A BREAKTHROUGH FOR women suffering from the severe pregnancy illness, hyperemesis gravidarum (HG). Many people remember Princess Kate Middleton being hospitalized during her first pregnancy due to the severity of the disorder. However, other women affected by the pregnancy illness have limited family size, quit their jobs or sadly felt so desperate due to the debilitating illness that they terminated wanted pregnancies. Many HG women describe the illness as something no one can truly understand unless they have endured it themselves. Instead of the joy every pregnancy should bring, HG women spend most of the 9 months suffering in silence unable to eat or simply keep water down.

"Without the help of the women who have come to HelpHER.org website over the past 10 years and signed up to be participants in our genetic research, we would not be here today. Since the inception of the HER Foundation over fourteen years ago, one of our main research goals has been obtaining funding and participants for collaborative projects. We have been dreaming of these research findings for years," said HER Foundation Director, Kimber MacGibbon. "No woman should suffer this badly during pregnancy, and the lack of medical research and understanding has gone on far too long," continued MacGibbon.

The HER Foundation, researchers at UCLA and USC, and 23andMe, Inc. conducted the first genome-wide analysis of Hyperemesis Gravidarum (HG) and identified two genes associated with HG, which was published this week in Nature Communications. (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-018-03258-0>). Contrary to popular belief, the study does not support a role for the pregnancy hormones, estrogen and hCG.

In further work presented at the ICHG last October (<https://vimeo.com/260389622>), Dr. Marlena Fejzo, an HG survivor herself, presented that not only were the genes *GDF15* and *IGFBP7* linked to HG, but also, their proteins are abnormally high in HG patients. The genes *GDF15* and *IGFBP7* are turned on in the placenta in early pregnancy and code for proteins that regulate appetite. Dr. Fejzo says "prior research has shown *GDF15* is a regulator of physiological body weight and appetite via activation of neurons in the hypothalamus and area postrema (vomiting center) of the brain." *GDF15* and *IGFBP7* also play a role in cachexia, a disease with similar symptoms to HG, debilitating fatigue, weight loss and muscle wasting that causes death in about 20% of cancer patients.

These findings may lead to genetic screening to predict which women will have more severe symptoms and need more proactive therapy. This information should put an end to the misconception that HG is "all in your head" and opens new avenues for diagnosis, research, and novel treatments. We are hopeful that this breakthrough will ultimately improve the care mothers receive and the health of mother and child long-term. More information can be found here (<http://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/two-genes-likely-play-key-role-in-extreme-nausea-and-vomiting-during-pregnancy>).

The HER Foundation is the world's largest network of HG survivors and the leading website for HG information. HER is dedicated to helping those suffering with HG and those who have survived it. Over fourteen years ago HER was created as a voice of hope and understanding for HG women globally. Their mission is to find a cure for HG through research funding and recruiting, to provide education and support for those seeking effective management strategies, and to provide information to family and friends who may not understand what their loved one is enduring.

Media Contact:

Ann Marie King

192276@email4pr.com

703-399-1272

SOURCE HER Foundation

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<http://helper.org>