

## **Morulas' Young Researcher Career Spotlight**

After hatching, preimplantation embryos are exposed to the uterine environment, which can sometimes be hostile. Similarly, after finishing their PhDs, young researchers are exposed to a different environment, which sometimes can be challenging. The Morulas' Young Researcher Career Spotlight is an organized effort to learn from the recent experience of (ex-)Morula members who opted to follow a career in academia or industry after finishing their PhD. In a series of reports written in an interview-like format, we will seek out comments and advice from ex-Morula members and post their answers on our Facebook and Twitter accounts. In this way, younger Morulas will understand the upcoming challenges and difficulties in their future careers.

### **Pouya Dini**

#### **Citizenship, institution, and PhD thesis title?**

My name is Pouya, and I am from Iran. I am a veterinarian with board-certification in the European College of Animal Reproduction (ECAR; subspecialty biotechnology) and the American College of Theriogenologists (ACT; subspecialty equine reproduction). I also hold two PhD degrees, one in animal reproduction from Azad University / Ghent University, and one in equine reproduction from Ghent University / University of Kentucky. During my second PhD, I mainly focused on the genomic aspect of equine reproduction using high-throughput data. The title of my PhD was "Parental contribution in placental angiogenesis."



#### **When in your life did you decide to start a career as a clinician and when did you decide to move to academia?**

After obtaining my DVM, I worked in a mixed practice for a year. Soon, I realized that I wanted to learn more about the physiology of reproduction and wanted to do research besides clinical work. I started to work on bovine reproduction and then equine reproduction. I was fortunate to have great mentors (Drs. Peter Daels and Barry Ball) to guide me throughout the process.

#### **How do you apply for a PhD? Suggestions?**

I think the first step is to figure out your own expectations, what you want to achieve by getting a PhD and what do you want to do with it afterward. Then, look for specific programs. If possible, spend some time in the lab you chose. Talk to the current and previous graduate students from the lab and try to gather as much information as you can. The other important part is the financial aspect of PhD. Nothing is more attractive for a lab than a student with a fully funded fellowship. Do your research and check what programs you are eligible for. Some students can get funds from their home country. Some others can get funding from other institutes or centers, such as Marie-Skłodowska Curie Training programs.

#### **How can you describe your life during your PhD?**

Work hard, party hard!

**What are the most significant changes in your life after your PhD? What are your next steps?**

After I finished my PhD, I started my own laboratory at the University of California Davis, the School of Veterinary Medicine. At UC Davis, I continue to study normal and abnormal placental development in mares and biotechnology of equine reproduction. The goals of the research in my laboratory are to understand placental development and its pathologies, optimize the use of biotechnology in equine reproduction, and ultimately better understand the effect of the assisted reproductive technique on placental development and fetal.

**If you could change something in your academic career, what would it be?**

I would take a few more courses on epigenetic and cell signalling. I would also have traveled a little bit more because after graduation, it is all work!

**Do you have some suggestions for bachelor students looking for a PhD or PhD looking for a postdoc?**

Go to conferences, meet people, and talk to them. It is amazing how many things can be accomplished by just meeting people and having the right attitude.