

## Pregnancy, indoleamine 2,3-dioxygenase (IDO) and chlamydial abortion: An unresolved paradox

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#### 24 Abstract

25 Chlamydophila abortus infects the placental trophoblast in sheep, humans and mice, 26 causing cell damage and inflammation that culminates in abortion. Host control of C. 27 *abortus* appears to be heavily dependent on interferon (IFN)-y production. IFN-y induces 28 expression of the enzyme indoleamine 2,3-dioxygenase (IDO), resulting in the degradation of intracellular pools of tryptophan, thereby depriving the organism of this 29 30 essential growth nutrient. The anti-chlamydial effects of IFN- $\gamma$  can be reversed by the 31 addition of exogenous tryptophan. This finding is consistent with studies of the C. 32 abortus genome sequence that have revealed that the organism lacks the capability to 33 synthesise tryptophan from host cell substrates and is therefore dependant on host 34 tryptophan. This raises an interesting paradox since the placental trophoblast in humans 35 and mice is known to constitutively express IDO and degrade tryptophan, a phenomenon 36 that has been linked to maternal immunological tolerance of the semi-allogeneic fetus. 37 This paradox is discussed in the context of immune modulation during pregnancy, 38 tryptophan biosynthesis by Chlamydiaceae and differences in placental structures 39 between sheep, humans and mice.

#### 40 Introduction

41 The nine species of obligate intracellular Gram-negative bacteria that belong to the 42 genera Chlamydia/Chlamydophila can infect a variety of hosts and cause a wide range of species of 43 diseases Different (Longbottom Coulter. 2003). and 44 Chlamydia/Chlamydophila preferentially infect different anatomical sites within their 45 hosts, with epithelial cells at mucosal surfaces being the primary target for infection. In 46 some cases, infection and disease may be restricted to mucosal epithelium (e.g. the trachoma biovar of C. trachomatis) or the infection may disseminate to cause disease at 47 48 other sites (e.g. C. pneumoniae, C. abortus). The factors that determine tissue tropism 49 and host tropism of different *Chlamydia/Chlamydophila* species are not entirely clear, but 50 evidence from genome sequences indicates that the ability to acquire or synthesise 51 nutrients in the face of intracellular host immune defence mechanisms induced by 52 interferon (IFN)-y plays an important role, particularly during persistent infections 53 (Nelson et al., 2005).

54

Among all the species of Chlamydia/Chlamydophila, C. abortus has a particular affinity 55 56 for the placenta, causing abortion in ruminants, humans and mice (Longbottom and 57 Coulter, 2003). On one hand, the placenta could be considered as a favourable site for C. 58 abortus since expression of inflammatory cytokines such as IFN-y tend to be highly 59 restricted at the maternofetal interface (Entrican, 2002a). On the other hand, the placenta 60 could be regarded as an unfavourable site for C. abortus since trophoblast cells in 61 humans and mice constitutively express indoleamine 2,3-dioxygenase (IDO) (SedImayr, 62 2007). IDO is an IFN- $\gamma$ -inducible enzyme that degrades tryptophan, an essential amino

acid for *C. abortus* growth (Entrican, 2002a; Entrican, 2004; Thomson et al., 2005). It is therefore paradoxical that an organism such as *C. abortus* that is auxotrophic for tryptophan should infect trophoblast. To address this paradox we need to elucidate the intracellular host defence pathways that control *C. abortus* growth, identify the biosynthetic pathways encoded by the pathogen that dictate its ability to survive under restricted nutrient conditions, and define the specialised nature of trophoblast that permit survival of the semi-allogeneic fetus in the face of adaptive maternal immunity.

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#### 71 IFN-γ, IDO, tryptophan and control of chlamydial growth

72 The link between IFN-y-induced tryptophan degradation, IDO and control of chlamydial 73 growth was first described in detail in human uroepithelial cells infected with the 6BC 74 strain of C. psittaci. The production of N-formylkynurenine in the IFN-y-treated cells was 75 indicative of tryptophan catabolism by IDO (Byrne et al., 1986). This anti-chlamydial 76 host defence pathway has since been reported to operate in many different cell types infected with *Chlamydiaceae* species, although it is not ubiquitous across host species. 77 For example, IFN-y-inducible IDO appears to be a predominant anti-chlamydial 78 79 intracellular defence pathway in human cells, whereas IFN-y-inducible nitric oxide 80 synthase (iNOS) appears to be the predominant defence pathway in mouse cells (Roshick 81 et al., 2006). To date, no evidence has been found for iNOS as an anti-chlamydial 82 defence mechanism in sheep, whereas there is strong evidence for IDO and tryptophan 83 degradation. The addition of exogenous tryptophan to ovine cells in vitro reverses IFN-y-84 mediated restriction of C. abortus growth (Brown et al., 2001) and IFN-y induces the

expression of IDO in ovine cells (Figure 1). These observations suggest that *C. abortus* is
not capable of synthesising its own tryptophan.

87

#### 88 Tryptophan biosynthesis by *Chlamydiaceae*

89 There are five genes in the tryptophan operon that are necessary for the biosynthesis of 90 tryptophan from chorismate as a substrate. These are designated trpA, trpB, TrpC, TrpD 91 and *trpE*, with *trpA* and *trpE* each having an  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  subunit (Xie et al., 2002). The 92 identification of tryptophan deprivation as an intracellular defence mechanism to restrict 93 chlamydial growth preceded the sequencing and annotation of the Chlamydiaceae 94 genomes that are now available. To date, no complete tryptophan operon has been 95 described in any genome sequence of Chlamydiaceae, which explains the effectiveness of 96 IFN-γ-induced tryptophan catabolism in restricting chlamydial multiplication. However, 97 Chlamydiaceae species do differ in their complement of genes encoding components of 98 the tryptophan operon within their plasticity zones (PZ), which appears to be linked to 99 their pathogenesis. The genome of C. pneumoniae lacks all genes of the tryptophan operon whereas the genome of C. psittaci has an almost complete tryptophan operon, 100 101 lacking only the  $trpA\alpha$  and  $trpA\beta$  genes (Xie et al., 2002). This provides an opportunity 102 for C. psittaci to synthesise tryptophan from kynurenine and thereby to potentially 103 survive and persist in the presence of high levels of IDO expression (assuming that host 104 ATP and host serine are also available). This biosynthetic survival strategy is clearly not 105 an option for C. pneumoniae that relies on host cell tryptophan. Tryptophan availability 106 has been linked to the tissue tropism of the trachoma biovar of C. trachomatis. Genital 107 serovars of C. trachomatis encode functional tryptophan synthase genes that permit the

108 synthesis of tryptophan from indole produced by genital microflora (Caldwell et al., 109 2003). Ocular serovars of *C. trachomatis* have mutated tryptophan synthase genes and 110 exhibit an absolute requirement for tryptophan. This theoretically makes ocular serovars 111 more susceptible to IFN- $\gamma$ -mediated IDO expression than genital serovars (McClarty et 112 al., 2007).

113

Thus, although the factors that govern tissue tropism of *Chlamydiaceae* are not fully 114 115 elucidated, the biosynthetic pathways that allow organisms to survive in the presence of IFN-y-induced intracellular host defence pathways appear to be important. Pathogen 116 117 genome sequences are an invaluable resource in defining such factors. Additionally, improvements in molecular typing of Chlamydiaceae will provide a clearer picture of 118 119 pathogen load, identify strains and/or species associated with disease pathogenesis. Such 120 information will ultimately inform on control strategies and may even challenge current paradigms of chlamydial infections and why certain organisms preferentially infect 121 122 certain sites or certain hosts. This is already becoming apparent with the identification of 123 previously-unrecognised C. psittaci and C. pneumoniae infections in the conjunctiva of patients with trachoma (Dean et al., 2008). The link between such infections and IFN-y-124 125 induced host defence pathways will be interesting, particularly since this is likely to 126 extend beyond tissue-tropism into host-tropism of Chlamydiaceae. For example, C. 127 *muridarum* appears to have evolved mechanisms to survive the effects of IFN- $\gamma$  in murine 128 epithelial cells by circumventing the inducible GTPases, rather than IDO (Nelson et al., 129 2005).

Like *C. pneumoniae*, the PZ of the genome of the S26/3 isolate of *C. abortus* lacks the tryptophan operon gene cluster. Moreover, the PZs in six other *C. abortus* strains from sheep, cattle and goats (including the vaccine strains A22 and 1B) do not vary significantly from the S26/3 strain (Thomson et al., 2005). Thus, dependency on host tryptophan is a common feature of *C. abortus* isolates. The question is: how does this equate with tropism for placental trophoblast? To attempt to answer that question we need to look at the function of the trophoblast at the maternofetal interface.

138

#### 139 **IDO and pregnancy**

One of the basic principles of modern immunology is the Clonal Selection Model. This 140 141 states that immunological tolerance is acquired, that the immune system can discriminate 142 between self and nonself and respond accordingly to combat infectious agents and reject foreign tissue grafts (Burnet, 1959). A logical extension of the model is the prediction 143 144 that eutherian (placental) mammals should reject the semi-allogeneic fetus. This does not 145 occur and therefore presents a challenge to the model. It was recognised by Peter 146 Medawar that certain conditions would have to be met for mammalian pregnancy to be 147 accommodated within the self-nonself model of immune activation (Medawar, 1953). 148 One of these conditions was that the placenta acts as a barrier between mother and fetus, 149 thereby preventing maternal rejection. However, this is an over-simplified concept, since 150 placentation and the degree of contact between fetal cells and maternal tissues (and 151 maternal blood) varies greatly between mammals. Pigs and horses have the least invasive (epitheliochorial) placentation whereas humans and mice have the most invasive 152 153 (hemochorial) placentation (Moffett and Loke, 2006). These structural differences mean

154 that immunological comparisons relating to reproduction in different species must be 155 drawn with care. Most of our current knowledge has been derived from studies in mice 156 and humans, and how these relate to sheep that have a synepitheliochorial placenta is 157 debatable.

158

159 It is beyond the scope of this review to cover all of the mechanisms thought to be 160 involved in maternal tolerance of the semi-allogeneic fetus that are reviewed elsewhere 161 (Rocchi et al, submitted), but one is of particular interest: trophoblast expression of IDO. 162 Given that *C. abortus* is a natural pathogen of humans and ruminants, and that mouse 163 models of chlamydial abortion have been developed, there are comparisons to be drawn 164 across these species.

165

The role of IDO in the maintenance of pregnancy came to prominence when it was found 166 167 that pregnant mice treated with a metabolic inhibitor of IDO experienced pregnancy 168 failure (abortion/resorption). Abortion only occurred when female mice were mated with 169 males of a different major histocompatibility complex (MHC) haplotype and carrying 170 semi-allogeneic fetuses and not when mated with males of the same MHC haplotype and 171 therefore carrying syngeneic fetuses (Munn et al., 1998). The mechanism of abortion was 172 found to be breakdown of tolerance of maternal CD8+ve T cells to paternal MHC class I 173 molecules expressed by the fetus, elucidated by adoptive transfer of transgenic CD8+ve T 174 cells in the pregnant, treated mice. The interpretation of these experiments has been 175 challenged with the argument that by degrading tryptophan to kynurenine, IDO prevents 176 tryptophan catabolism to serotonin. Serotonin is a potent vasoconstrictor and would be

undesirable in the placenta since it could restrict blood flow to the fetus, resulting in
tissue damage and abortion (Bonney and Matzinger, 1998). Reduced IDO expression in
human placenta has been linked to pre-eclampsia, a disorder of restricted placental blood
flow (Kudo et al., 2003; Nishizawa et al., 2007). IDO may therefore have both a
physiological and immunological role in mammalian reproduction (Entrican, 2004).

182

In the highly-invasive haemochorial placentation of humans and mice, trophoblast cells 183 184 of the chorionic epithelium infiltrate maternal blood vessels and come into direct contact 185 with maternal blood. In the mouse it is the outer layer (and thus most invasive) 186 trophoblast giant cells of the placenta that express IDO (Baban et al., 2004). The analogous cells in humans are the extravillous cytotrophoblasts that express IDO in the 187 188 first trimester of pregnancy (Honig et al., 2004). However unlike the mouse, the 189 expression of IDO is not completely restricted to the extravillous cytotrophoblast. Several 190 studies have demonstrated the presence of IDO expression in the villous 191 synctiotrophoblast in first trimester and term placenta (Sedlmayr et al., 2002; Kudo et al., 2004; Ligam et al., 2005). The expression of IDO in trophoblast of other placental types 192 193 has not been studied in any detail and not to our knowledge in sheep or goats. Sheep have 194 a cotyledonary, synepitheliochorial placenta in which there are discreet attachment points 195 between the chorioallantois and the endometrium (the placentome) (Wooding and Flint, 196 1999). Within the placentome there is fusion between the uterine epithelium and 197 trophoblast to form structures known as syncytial plaques (Igwebuike, 2006). There is 198 therefore a limited degree of invasion of cells of fetal origin into maternal tissue (Figure 199 2), suggesting that some maternal immunological tolerance of the fetus is required.

200

#### 201 The paradox of placental IDO expression and chlamydial abortion

202 Since IDO is expressed by human and mouse trophoblast, it is intriguing that both can 203 experience chlamydial abortion (Wong et al., 1985; Kerr et al., 2005). Why would C. 204 abortus, an organism that lacks a tryptophan operon, have tropism for a tissue where 205 tryptophan is degraded? One possibility is that the cells targeted by C. abortus are not the 206 cells expressing IDO. In aborted human placenta, C. abortus antigen is detected within 207 the villous trophoblast by immunolabelling (Figure 3). To date there has been no attempt 208 to ascertain whether the infected cells are synctiotrophoblast or villous cytotrophoblast, 209 or if infected cells do indeed express IDO. This is theoretically possible since there are 210 antibodies to human IDO that have been used to stain trophoblast, but with conflicting 211 results. Studies on human term placenta report strong IDO staining (Kudo et al., 2004), 212 low grade staining (Nishizawa et al., 2007), patchy staining (Sedlmayr et al., 2002) or no 213 IDO staining (Ligam et al., 2005). These differences cannot be attributed to the antibody 214 specificity since all four used the same antibody from the same source. However, 215 immunolabelling is a highly complex technique that is affected by many parameters, 216 including tissue processing, antigen retrieval and staining protocols, all of which may 217 contribute to the different outcomes reported.

218

There are few *in vitro* studies of *C. abortus* infection of trophoblast, although the human BeWo choriocarcinoma trophoblast line has been used as a target. However, BeWo cells not only fail to constitutively express IDO, it cannot be induced by IFN- $\gamma$ , despite the expression of IFN- $\gamma$  receptor (Entrican et al., 2002b). The apparent paradox of placental

expression of IDO and *C. abortus* infection remains to be resolved. However, there are several potential experimental approaches to address this. Firstly, primary human trophoblast constitutively expressing IDO could be experimentally infected *in vitro* with *C. abortus*; secondly, IDO gene knockout mice could be infected with *C. abortus*; and thirdly, and most importantly from the point of view of ovine enzootic abortion, probes could be developed to study IDO expression in sheep placenta. We are in the process of cloning the full-length ovine IDO cDNA with a view to addressing this question.

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#### 231 Conclusions

It remains unclear if *C. abortus* overcomes constitutive IDO expression in trophoblast or if *C. abortus* preferentially targets trophoblast in which IDO is low or absent. The first scenario may be less likely given the lack of a tryptophan operon in *C. abortus* whereas the second scenario is a more realistic hypothesis and one that can be addressed experimentally. Probes are being developed to study IDO expression in the trophoblast. It will be of interest to examine IDO expression at different stages of gestation in sheep since its expression could be temporally controlled.

239

Finally, it is worth commenting that the role of IFN- $\gamma$  and IDO as a host defence mechanism against *Chlamydia/Chlamydophila* doesn't always fit the current paradigms. As mentioned earlier, the ocular serovars of *C. trachomatis* lack any capability of synthesising tryptophan and therefore appear to be highly susceptible to IDO (Nelson et al., 2005). However, in a recent study of patients with trachoma, a positive correlation was found between pathogen load and the expression of *IFN-\gamma* and *IDO* transcripts in

246	conjunctival epithelia (Faal et al., 2006). This is in conflict with the C. trachomatis
247	genome data, although the underlying reasons remain unclear. That particular study was
248	conducted prior to the discovery that C. pneumoniae and C. psittaci could infect the
249	human conjunctiva (Dean et al., 2008). However, given that C. pneumoniae lacks a
250	tryptophan operon, the same IFN-\gamma-mediated principle host defence mechanism would be
251	expected to apply. The fact that it does not indicates that we have many remaining
252	unanswered questions regarding chlamydial pathogenesis and host immunity.
253	
254	
255	Conflict of interest statement
256	None of the authors (GE, MR, SW, NW) has a financial or personal relationship with
257	other people or organisations that could inappropriately influence or bias the paper
258	entitled "Pregnancy, indoleamine 2,3-dioxygenase (IDO) and chlamydial abortion: an
259	unresolved paradox".
260	
261	
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266	

266 Figure legends

267 Figure 1

268 Ovine ST-6 fibroblast cells were cultured for 24 hours in the presence of 250U/ml recombinant ovine interferon (IFN)-y. Cells were lysed, RNA was prepared using a 269 270 Qiagen RNeasy<sup>TM</sup> kit and then reverse transcribed using Taqman<sup>®</sup> reverse transcription 271 reagents (Applied Biosytems) according to the manufacturer's instructions. The cDNA encoding ovine IDO was amplified using primers based on the published human IDO 272 5'-CCTGACTTATGAGAACATGGACG-3', 273 reverse 5'sequence (forward GAAGTTCCTGTGAGCTGGTG-3'). A 493 bp fragment of expected size was observed 274 275 in cells treated with IFN- $\gamma$  (lane 3) that was not present in untreated cells (lane 2). The molecular weight reference ladder is shown in lane 1. 276

277

#### **Figure 2**

279 Schematic representation of the migration of ovine binucleate fetal trophoblast cells (1) 280 as they invade (2) and fuse (3) with maternal uterine cells to form feto-maternal hybrid 281 syncytial plaques (4). Blood vessels are indicated at either side of the materno-fetal 282 interface and there is no mixing of maternal and fetal blood.

283

#### 284 **Figure 3**

A section of placenta from a human case of abortion caused by *C. abortus* showing lipopolysaccharide (LPS) of *C. abortus* localising to trophoblast surrounding placental villi. Immunolabelling was conducted with a primary anti-LPS mouse monoclonal antibody (13/4) and a second-stage anti-mouse peroxidase conjugate.

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