# INVOLVEMENT OF MEK SIGNALLING ON ENDOTHELIAL-LIKE DIFFERENTIATION OF DENTAL STEM CELLS CULTURED ON HUMAN AMNIOTIC MEMBRANE WITH VEGF TREATMENT

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by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT			ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS			ii
LIST	OF TA	BLES	xi
LIST	OF FIG	GURES	xii
LIST	OF SY	MBOLS	xiv
LIST	OF AB	BREVIATIONS	xvi
ABST	RAK .		xix
ABST	RACT		xxi
CHA	PTER 1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Backg	round of the study	1
1.2	Justifi	cation of the study	6
1.3	Resear	rch objectives	6
	1.3.1	General objective	6
	1.3.2	Specific objectives	7
	1.4	Research hypotheses	7
	1.5	Research questions	8
CHAI	PTER 2	LITERATURE REVIEW	9
2.1	Regen	erative medicine and tissue engineering	9
2.2	Angio	genesis	12
	2.2.1	Endothelial cells	13
	2.2.2	Endothelial cells markers	17
		2.2.2 (a) Angiopoietin – 1	17

		2.22 .(b) Cyclooxygenase-2	17
		2.2.2 (c) VE-Cadherin	17
		2.2.2 (d) CD31	18
		2.2.2 (e) Von Willebrand factor	18
		2.2.2 (f) NOS3	19
2.3	Stem	cells	17
	2.3.1	Dental tissue-derived stem cells	19
	2.3.2	Stem cells from human exfoliated deciduous teeth (SHED)	23
	2.3.3	Stem cells markers	26
		2.3.3 (a) Nestin	26
		2.3.3 (b) Nanog	26
		2.3.3 (c) CD73	27
	2.3.4	Differentiation of SHED into endothelial-like cells	27
2.4	Grow	th factor	29
	2.4.1	Vascular endothelial growth factor	29
	2.4.2	Delivery system of sustained release for VEGF	31
2.5	Preco	nditioning strategies	32
2.6	Scaffe	old	33
	2.6.1	Human amniotic membrane (AM)	35
	2.6.2	Physical characteristics of human AM	37
	2.6.3	The decellularised human AM for tissue engineering	38
2.7	Signa	lling pathways for angiogenic differentiation	42
	2.7.1	Mitogen-Activated Protein Kinase/ Extracellular-Signal- Regulated Kinase (MEK) pathway	42
	2.7.2	MEK/ERK signalling pathway in angiogenic differentiation	46

	2.7.3 MEK Inhibitor PD 184352	48
CHAI	PTER 3 MATERIALS AND METHODS	52
3.1	In vitro experimental design	52
3.2	Materials	55
	3.2.1 Human amniotic membrane (AM) preparation	55
	3.2.2 Cell culture study	56
	3.2.3 Agarose gel electrophoresis	57
	3.2.4 Gene expression analyses	57
	3.2.5 Materials, buffers and reagents for Western blot	58
	3.2.5 (a) Protein extraction	58
	3.2.5 (b) Sodium dodecyl sulphate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE)	58
	3.2.6 List of consumable items	61
	3.2.7 Equipment	62
	3.2.8 List of kits	63
	3.2.9 Software	63
3.3	Methods	64
	3.3.1 Preparation of solutions and buffers	64
	3.3.1 (a) Growth media for SHED	64
	3.3.1 (b) Growth media for HUVEC	64
	3.3.1 (c) Phosphate buffer saline	64
	3.3.1 (d) Glycerol at various concentrations (40%, 60%, 80%, 90% and 95%)	65
	3.3.1 (e) 30% acrylamide	65
	3.3.1 (f) Separation buffer (2X)	65
	3.3.1 (g) Stacking gel buffer (2X)v	65

	3.3.1 (h) Ammonium persulfate solution (25 %)	65
	3.3.1 (i) Electrophoresis buffer for Western blot	66
	3.3.1 (j) Blotting buffer (10X)	66
	3.3.1 (k) Washing solution (10X phosphate-buffered saline-tween 20 (PBST))	66
	3.3.1 (l) Blocking solution	66
	3.3.1 (m) Sodium hypochlorite (0.05%)	66
	3.3.1(n) Preparation of duragen	67
	3.3.1 (o) Agarose gel for gel electrophoresis	67
	3.3.1 (p) Lithium Boric Buffer (1X)	67
	3.3.1 (q) DEPC-treated water	67
	3.3.1 (r) Different concentrations of ethyl alcohol (Ethanol)	68
	3.3.1 (s) Primers	68
	3.3.1 (t) 10% normal goat serum	68
	3.3.1 (u) Permeabilisation buffer (0.25% Triton-X)	68
3.4	Glycerol-preserved human AM	68
	3.4.1 Preparation of glycerol-preserved human AM	68
	3.4.2 Decellularisation of human amniotic membrane	69
3.5	Cell culture	70
	3.5.1 Expansion of human umbilical vein endothelial cells (HUVEC)	70
	3.5.2 Expansion of stem cells from human extracted deciduous teeth (SHED)	70
	3.5.3 Subculturing	71
	3.5.4 Cell counting	72
	3.5.5 Cryopreservation of cells	73
	3.5.6 Culturing and harvesting of SHED on AM	73

3.6	Vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF)	74
3.7	Characterisation of mesenchymal stem cells (MSC) protein markers expression of SHED	74
	3.7.1 Expression of MSC protein markers of SHED from passage 10 and 15	74
3.8	Investigation of Angiopoietin-1 expression in SHED cultured on AM treated with and without VEGF	77
	3.8.1 Cell culture and harvesting	77
	3.8.2 Preparation of lysate from flask	77
	3.8.3 Preparation of lysate from cell seeded on AM	78
	3.8.4 Measurement of protein concentrations	78
	3.8.5 Western Blot	79
	3.8.5 (a)Preparation of sodium dodecyl sulphate polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE)	79
	3.8.5 (b) Preparation of samples for loading into gel	80
	3.8.5 (c) Setting up the SDS-PAGE gel electrophoresis apparatus	80
3.9	Investigation the effect of 24 hours VEGF pre-induction to the angiogenic differentiation potential of SHED prior culture on AM and treated with VEGF	83
	3.9.1 Cell culture and harvesting	83
	3.9.2 RNA extraction	84
	3.9.3 RT-PCR analyses of stem cell and angiogenic gene markers	85
3.10	Investigation of the role of MEK molecule on the angiogeneic differentiation of SHED by Real Time RT-PCR	89
	3.10.1 Cell culture and harvesting	89
	3.10.2 RNA extraction	89
	3.10.3 Validation of melting curve	89
	3.10.4 Standard curve	93
	3.10.5 Quantification of gene expression by quantitative RT-PCR	95

3.11	Investigation of the role of MEK molecule on the angiogenic differentiation of SHED by ELISA	98
	3.11.1 Cell culture and harvesting	98
	3.11.2 Preparation of lysate from flask	98
	3.11.3 Preparation of lysate from cell seeded on AM	98
	3.11.4 Measurement of protein concentrations	98
	3.11.5 ELISA	99
3.12	Investigation of the role of MEK molecule on the angiogenic differentiation of SHED by immunocytochemistry	100
	3.12.1 Cell culture and harvesting	100
	3.12.2 Immunofluorescence staining	101
	3.12.2 (a) Anti-CD31 antibody (1:100)	101
	3.12.2 (b)Anti-F-actin antibody (1:100)	101
	3.12.2 (c) Anti-van Willebrand Factor (vWF) antibody (1:100)	102
	3.12.2 (d) Immunofluorescence staining analysis	102
3.13	Statistical analysis	103
CHAI	PTER 4 RESULTS	104
4.1	Characterisation of mesenchymal stem cells (MSC) protein markers expression of SHED	104
	4.1.1 Expression of MSC protein markers of SHED from passage 10 and 15 using flow cytometry	104
	4.1.1(a) Gating	105
	4.1.1(b) Analysis of CD90 MSC protein cell surface marker	107
	<ul><li>4.1.1(b) Analysis of CD90 MSC protein cell surface marker</li><li>4.1.1(c) Analysis of CD73 MSC protein cell surface marker</li></ul>	107 109
	<ul> <li>4.1.1(b) Analysis of CD90 MSC protein cell surface marker</li> <li>4.1.1(c) Analysis of CD73 MSC protein cell surface marker</li> <li>4.1.1(d) Analysis of CD105 MSC protein cell surface marker</li> </ul>	107 109 111
	3.11 3.12 3.13 CHAI 4.1	<ul> <li>3.11 Investigation of the role of MEK molecule on the angiogenic differentiation of SHED by ELISA</li> <li>3.11.1 Cell culture and harvesting</li> <li>3.11.2 Preparation of lysate from flask</li> <li>3.11.3 Preparation of lysate from cell seeded on AM</li> <li>3.11.4 Measurement of protein concentrations</li> <li>3.11.5 ELISA</li> <li>3.12 Investigation of the role of MEK molecule on the angiogenic differentiation of SHED by immunocytochemistry</li> <li>3.12.1 Cell culture and harvesting</li> <li>3.12.2 Immunofluorescence staining</li> <li>3.12.2 (a) Anti-CD31 antibody (1:100)</li> <li>3.12.2 (b)Anti-F-actin antibody (1:100)</li> <li>3.12.2 (c) Anti-van Willebrand Factor (vWF) antibody (1:100)</li> <li>3.12.2 (d) Immunofluorescence staining analysis</li> <li>CHAPTER 4 RESULTS</li> <li>4.1 Characterisation of MEC protein markers of SHED from passage 10 and 15 using flow cytometry</li> <li>4.1.1(a) Gating</li> </ul>

4.2	Protein expression of Angiopoietin-1 and Cyclooxygenase-2 in SHED cultured on AM treated with and without VEGF	115
4.3	Gene expression analysis after 24 hours VEGF pre-induction of SHED cultured on AM and treated with VEGF	117
	4.3.1 RNA integrity of SHED	117
	4.3.2 Gene expression analysis by quantitative RT-PCR	119
4.4	Investigation of the effect of PD 184352 inhibitor on MEK signalling on the angiogenic differentiation of SHED cultured on AM, induced by VEGF	123
	4.4.1 Proliferation of SHED inhibited by PD184352 by MTT assay	123
	4.4.1 (a) Optimisation of MEK inhibitor PD184352 by using MTT.	123
	4.4.1 (b) Effect of 1 μM PD184352 on SHED proliferation by using AlamarBlue assay	126
	4.4.2 Gene expression analysis of SHED inhibited by PD184352	128
	4.4.2 (a)RNA integrity of SHED	128
	4.4.2 (b) Optimisation of Real Time RT-PCR primer conditions	130
	4.4.2 (c) Gene expression analysis by quantitative Real Time RT- PCR	135
	4.4.3 Protein expression analysis of SHED inhibited by PD184352	162
	4.4.3 (a) Analysis of protein expression of SHED associated with MEK signalling inhibited by PD184352 by ELISA	162
	4.4.3 (b) Analysis of protein expression of SHED associated with MEK molecule inhibited by PD184352 by immunocytochemistry	171
CHAI	PTER 5 DISCUSSION	182
5.1	Expression of MSC protein markers of SHED from passage 10 and 15 using flowcytometry	182
5.2	Protein expression of Angiopoietin-1 and Cyclooxygenase-2 in SHED cultured on AM treated with and without VEGF	184
5.3	Gene expression analysis of VEGF-induced SHED cultured on AM and treated with VEGF	186

	5.3.1 Gene expression analyses of stem cells gene markers	186
	5.3.2 Gene expression analyses of endothelial specific markers	190
	5.3.3 Optimisation of MEK inhibitor PD184352 by using MTT	192
	5.3.4 Effect of 1 µM MEK inhibitor PD184352 on MEK inhibition towards SHED proliferation	193
	5.3.5 Effect of MEK on angiogenic differentiation	194
	5.3.5 (a) Gene expression of MEK downstream molecules inhibited by PD184352 inhibitor by Real Time RT-PCR	194
5.4	Protein expression of MEK downstream molecules inhibited by PD184352	202
5.5	Protein expression of CD31, vWF and F-actin inhibited by PD184352	194
5.0	endothelial differentiation cultured on AM treated with VEGF.	208
5.7	Limitation of study	211
5.8	Future directions	212
CHAF	PTER 6 CONCLUSIONS	213
REFE	RENCES	214
LIST (	OF PUBLICATIONS	

APPENDICES

## LIST OF TABLES

## Page

Table 3.1	Materials used to prepare glycerol-preserved human	
	amniotic membrane and its decellularisation	55
Table 3.2	Materials used in cell culture	56
Table 3.3	Materials used for agarose gel electrophoresis	57
Table 3.4	Materials used for gene expression analyses	57
Table 3.5	Materials used for protein extraction	58
Table 3.6	Materials used for SDS-PAGE	58
Table 3.7	Materials for 30% acrylamide solution	59
Table 3.8	Materials for separation buffer (2X) stock solution	
	concentration	59
Table 3.9	Materials for stacking gel buffer (2X)	59
Table 3.10	Materials for ammonium persulfate solution (25%)	59
Table 3.11	Materials for electrophoresis buffer	59
Table 3.12	Materials for blotting buffer (10X)	60
Table 3.13	Materials for washing solution (10X Phosphate-buffered	
	saline-Tween 20 (PBST))	60
Table 3.14	Materials for blocking solution	60
Table 3.15	Consumables used in this study	61
Table 3.16	List of equipment	62
Table 3.17	Kits used in this study	63
Table 3.18	Software utilised in this study	63
Table 3.19	Components in the Human MSC Analysis Kit	76
Table 3.20	12% separation gel preparation	79
Table 3.21	Stacking gel preparation	79
Table 3.22	Components of MyTaq <sup>TM</sup> One-Step RT-PCR Kit	86
Table 3.23	Sequences of primers used for reverse transcriptase	
	polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR)	87
Table 3.24	Cycle conditions of OneStep RT-PCR (C1000 Thermal	
	Cycler)	88
Table 3.25	Primer sequences used in Real Time RT-PCR study	91
Table 3.26	Cycling conditions of Real Time RT-PCR in melting curve	
	study	92
Table 3.27	Real time RT-PCR cycle for each primer	97
Table 4.1	The efficiency and $\mathbf{R}^2$ for the genes of interest acquired	
	after the standard curve was performed	134
	1 L	

### LIST OF FIGURES

#### Page

Figure 1.1	An overview of biological based wound healing products and the evaluation for the proposed construct that combined	I uge
	SHED, VEGF and amniotic membrane by genes and proteins expression as well as the signalling pathway	5
Figure 2.1	The triad of tissue engineering.	11
Figure 2.2	Image of HUVEC morphology grown on the plastic surface	
e	observed using an inverted microscope	16
Figure 2.3	Images of SHED visualised under inverted microscope cultured in T75 culture flask	25
Figure 2.4	Schematic diagram of human amniotic membrane (Adapted from Hashim <i>et al.</i> (2016)).	36
Figure 2.5	Images of the human amniotic membrane under the light	50
	microscope	41
Figure 2.6	Images of SHED cultured on stromal side of AM at day 1 until	41
Figure 2.7	Schematic diagram of the MEK/ERK signalling pathway with	41
	its role for proliferation, differentiation, angiogenesis and	
	apoptosis (Adapted from Vural et al., (2018)).	43
Figure 2.8	Schematic diagram of the organisation and function of MEK/ERK signalling pathway with and its role for	
	angiogenesis	47
Figure 2.9	Schematic diagram of the MEK/ERK signalling pathway and	
<b>F</b> ' <b>0.1</b>	the target molecule of PD184352	49
Figure 3.1	A summary of experimental design. SHED only (S), SHED on	
	AM (SA), SHED on AM with VEGF (SAV), 24 nf-VEGF	
	VEGE (ISAV) and 24 hr VEGE induced SHED on AM with	
	VEGE with PD18/252 (ISAVP)	54
Figure 3.2	A representation of the components of a transfer "sandwich"	82
Figure 3.3	Preparation of serial dilution of RNA for standard curve assay	94
Figure 4.1	Histograms of flow cytometric analysis on unstained cell	71
119010 111	samples	106
Figure 4.2	Histograms of flow cytometric analysis on CD90-FITC	
U	stained cell samples	108
Figure 4.3	Histograms of flow cytometric analysis on CD73-PE stained cell samples	110
Figure 4.4	Histograms of flow cytometric analysis on CD105-PerCP	110
8	stained cell samples	112
Figure 4.5	Histograms of flow cytometric analysis on hematopoietic cell	
U	protein surface markers-PE stained cell samples	114
Figure 4.6	Western blot image of Ang-1 and COX-2 protein expression	
U U	on SHED treated with AM and VEGF	116
Figure 4.7	Image of agarose electrophoresis gel showing RNA integrity	
	extracted from non-treated and treated SHED	118

Figure 4.8	Images of reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) products of stem cells and endothelial-specific	100
Figure 4.9	Cell viability of SHED treated with 0.1, 1.0, 5.0, 10, 20, 30,	122
	50 and 100 $\mu$ M PD184352 and cultured for 24 hours	125
Figure 4.10	Proliferation rate profile of SHED cultured in $\alpha$ -MEM with and without PD184352	127
Figure 4.11	Image of agarose electrophoresis gel showing RNA integrity of SHED in all groups at all-time points	129
Figure 4.12	Melt curve graphs of various amplicons of Real-Time RT- PCR	129
Figure 4.12	Melt curves of various amplicons of Real-Time RT-PCR	131
(continue)		
Figure 4.13	PCR	133
Figure 4.15	Relative expression levels of <i>CD31</i> MEK signalling associated gene markers	137
Figure 4.16	Relative expression levels of <i>vWF</i> MEK signalling associated gene marker	140
Figure 4.17	Relative expression levels of <i>NOS3</i> MEK signalling	1/2
Figure 4 18	associated gene markers	143
Figure 4.18	gene markers	146
Figure 4.19	Relative expression levels of <i>IL-8</i> MEK signalling associated	140
Figure 4.20	Relative expression levels of $TNF-\alpha$ MEK signalling	149
Figure 1 21	associated gene markers	152
Figure 4.21	associated gene markers	155
Figure 4.22	Relative expression levels of <i>ICAM-1</i> MEK signalling	150
Figure 4.23	Relative expression levels of <i>RCAN-1.4</i> MEK signalling	138
	associated gene markers	161
Figure 4.24	Relative expression levels of CD31 protein	165
Figure 4.25	Relative expression levels of p-ERK protein	167
Figure 4.26	Relative expression levels of MEKK1 protein	170
Figure 4.27	Protein expression of CD31 in endothelial-like differentiated	170
(a) E: 4.27	cells from SHED.	173
Figure 4.27	Semi-quantification measurement for the expression of CD31	1.7.4
(b)	protein relative fluorescence unit.	1/4
Figure 4.28 $(a)$	Protein expression of vWF in endothelial-like differentiated	176
$\begin{array}{c} (a) \\ \text{Eigund}  4.29 \\ \end{array}$	Cells from SHED.	1/0
Figure 4.28 $(h)$	Relative expression levels of vwF protein relative	177
(0) Figure 4.20	Drotain avprassion of E actin in andothelial like differentiated	1//
(a) $Figure 4.29$	cells from SHED.	180
Figure 4.29	Semi-quantification measurement for the expression of	
(b)	F-actin protein relative fluorescence unit	181
Figure 5.1:	Involvement of MEK signalling pathway during endothelial differentiation by SHED in the propagad construct	207
	unterentiation by SHED in the proposed construct	207
	¥111	

### LIST OF SYMBOLS

Registered
Degree Celsius
Fold change
Number of average cells (total cell count divided by four)
Cell concentration (cells/ml)
Threshold cycle
Trademark
Percentage
Alpha
Beta
Kappa

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of variance
ATP	Adenosine 5'-triphosphate
С	Cell concentration (cells/ml)
с	Calibrator (control sample)
IS	24h VEGF pre-induced SHED
ISAV	24h VEGF pre-induced SHED on AM with VEGF
ISAVP	24h VEGF pre-induced SHED on AM with VEGF with $1\mu M$
	MEK inhibitor PD184352
M <sup>1</sup> <sup>°</sup> I	3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium
	dronnde
DAPI	
APC	Allophycocyanin
AM	Amniotic membrane
Ang-1	Angiopoietin I
bp	Base pair
BSA	Bovine serum albumin
	Carbon dioxide
CIII CD21	Cluster of differentiation 21
CD31 COX 2	Cluster of differentiation 51
COX-2	Cyclooxygenase-2
et al.	And others
F-actin	Cytoskeletal filament actin
DF	Dilution factor
DFPC	Dental follicle progenitor cells
DSC	Dental stem cells
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DEPC	Diethyl pyrocarbonate
DMSO	Dimethyl sulfoxide
Na <sub>2</sub> HPO <sub>4</sub>	Disodium hydrogen phosphate
NT5E	Ecto-5'-nucleotidase
EBM	Endothelial basal medium
EGM-2	Endothelial cell growth medium 2
EC	Endothelial cells
NOS3	Endothelial nitric oxide synthase
E-selectin	Endothelial-selectin
ECL	Enhanced chemiluminescence
ELISA	Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay
EGF	Epidermal growth factor
EDTA	Ethylenediamine tetra acetic acid
ECM	Extracellular matrix

ERK	Extracellular signal-regulated kinase
FBS	Foetal bovine serum
FITC	Fluorescein isothiocyanate
FAK	Focal adhesion kinase
GAPDH	Glyceraldehyde 3-phosphate dehydrogenase
GOI	Gene of interest
g	Gram
G	G-force or relative centrifugal force (RCF)
HSCs	Hematopoietic stem cells
HBSS	Hepes Buffered Saline Solution
HRP	Horseradish peroxidase
Н	Hour
BMSC	Human bone marrow mesenchymal stem cells
HFGF-B	Human fibroblast growth factor-B
hMSCs	Human mesenchymal stem cells
HUVEC	Human umbilical vascular endothelial cells
HIF1a	Hypoxia-inducible factor-1α
ICAM-1	Intercellular Adhesion Molecule 1
IL1 <i>-β</i>	Interleukin-1-beta
IL-6	Interleukin-6
IL-8	Interleukin-8
LacZ	LacZ encodes β-galactosidase
MMP	Matrix metalloproteinase
MALDI-	Matrix-assisted laser desorption ionisation-time of flight
TOF MS	mass spectrometry
MSC	Mesenchymal stem cells
mRNA	Messenger ribonucleic acid
μΜ	Micromolar
mm	Millimetre
ml	Millilitre
α-MEM	Minimum essential medium (MEM) alpha
min	Minutes
MAPK	Mitogen-activated protein kinase
MEKK-1	Mitogen-activated protein kinase kinase kinase 1
MERZ	Mitogen-Activated Protein Kinase/ Extracellular-Signal-
MEK	Regulated Kinase Mitogen Activated Protein Kinase/Extracellular Signal
MEK1	Regulated Kinase 1
NaH <sub>2</sub> PO <sub>4</sub>	Monosodium phosphate
BIS	N,N'-methylene-bis-acrylamide
ng	Nangogram
nM	Nanomolar
NSC	Neural stem cells

norm	normalizer
NF-κB	Nuclear factor kappa light chain enhancer of activated B cells
NFAT	Nuclear factor of activated T-cells
Р	Passage
PerCP	Peridinin-Chlorophyll-protein
PDLSC	Periodontal ligament stem cells
PBS	Phosphate Buffered Saline
PBST	Phosphate-buffered saline-Tween 20
PI3K	Phosphoinositide 3-kinases
p-ERK	Phosphorylated-extracellular signal-regulated kinase
PE	Phycoerythrin
PLGA	Poly(lactic-co-glycolic acid)
PAGE	Polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis
PCR	Polymerase chain reaction
PVDF	Polyvinylidene fluoride or polyvinylidene difluoride
pН	Potential of hydrogen
AKT	Protein kinase B
qRT-PCR	Real-time reverse-transcription polymerase chain reaction
RIPA	Radioimmunoprecipitation assay
Raf	Rapidly accelerated fibrosarcoma
Ras	Rat sarcoma
R3-IGF-1	Recombinant long arginine insulin-like growth factor
RCAN-1.4.	Regulator of Calcineurin 1 Isoform 4
RT-PCR	Reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction
RPM	Revolutions per minute
RNA	Ribonucleic acid
RT	Room temperature
S	Seconds
S	Sample of experimental
S	SHED
SA	SHED on AM
SAV	SHED on AM with VEGF
STAT3	Signal transducer and activator of transcription 3
NaCl	Sodium chloride
SDS	Sodium dodecyl (lauryl) sulphate
SC	Stem cells
SCAP	Stem cells from apical papilla
SEM	Standard error mean
SHED	Stem cells from extracted human deciduous teeth
TEMED	Tetramethyl ethylenediamine
IC <sub>50</sub>	Half-maximal inhibitory concentration
3D	Three dimensional
T cells	Thymus cells

TE	Tissue engineering
TIMP3	Tissue inhibitor of metalloproteinase 3
TIMP4	Tissue inhibitor of metalloproteinase 4
TNS	Trypsin neutralizing solution
TNF-α	Tumour necrosis factor - alpha
2D	Two dimensional
VEGF	Vascular endothelial growth factor
VEGFR2	Vascular endothelial growth factor receptor 2
VEGF-B	Vascular endothelial growth factor-B
VEGF-C	Vascular endothelial growth factor-C
VEGF-D	Vascular endothelial growth factor-D
VE-Cadherin	Vascular endothelial-cadherin
V	Voltage
vWF	Von Willebrand factor
W	Watt
Wnt	Wingless and Int-1

# PENGLIBATAN PENGISYARATAN MEK DI DALAM PEMBEZAAN STEM SEL GIGI KEPADA SEL SEPERTI ENDOTELIAL YANG DIKULTURKAN DI ATAS MEMBRAN AMNIOTIK DENGAN RAWATAN VEGF

#### ABSTRAK

Penyembuhan luka masih menjadi beban penjagaan kesihatan yang dikaitkan dengan peningkatan morbiditi dan mortaliti yang serius. Kejuruteraan tisu menawarkan penyelesaian yang berpotensi untuk merungkai keperluan perubatan yang tidak dipenuhi ini dengan membina konstruk hasil gabungan sel, faktor pertumbuhan, dan perancah bagi angiogenesis, iaitu suatu proses asas dalam penjanaan semula tisu. Pemahaman mekanisma molekul yang mendasari pembezaan angiogenik secara menyeluruh adalah sangat penting bagi pembangunan semula tisu dalam menyembuhkan luka. Justeru itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat peranan tapak jalan pengisyaratan MEK apabila teraruh dengan faktor pertumbuhan endotelium vaskular (VEGF) terhadap pembezaan sel tunjang daripada gigi susu manusia yang terkelupas (SHED) dan sel SHED yang teraruh dengan VEGF kepada sel seperti endotelium yang dikultur di atas lapisan stromal (SS) membran amnion manusia (AM). Bagi merungkai tujuan tersebut, ujikaji sitometri aliran, tindak balas berantai polimerase transkriptase berbalik (RT-PCR), tindak balas rantai polimerase transkriptase berbalik masa nyata (qRT-PCR), asai imunoserapan terangkai enzim (ELISA), dan analisis imunositokimia (ICC) telah dijalankan. Keputusan sitometri aliran menunjukkan SHED pada pasaj 10 dan 15 mengekspreskan penanda protein sel tunjang mesenkima secara positif, membuktikan SHED mengekalkan sifat ketunjangan. SHED juga tidak mengekspreskan penanda sel hematopoietik iaitu CD34, CD11b, CD19, CD45, dan HLA-DR. Hasilan Western Blot menunjukkan penanda protein sel endotelium iaitu Ang-1 dan COX-2 diekspreskan di dalam SHED terbeza yang dikultur di atas lapisan SS AM dengan rawatan VEGF pada hari 1 dan 7. Hasil RT-PCR menunjukkan SHED terbeza mengekspreskan kedua-dua penanda sel tunjang (Nestin, Nanog, dan CD73) dan spesifik-endotelium (Ang-1, COX-2, dan VE-*Cadherin*) di dalam setiap kumpulan rawatan pada hari 1, 7, 10 dan 14. Pra-aruhan VEGF selama 24 jam meningkatkan pengekspresan CD73, Nanog, dan COX-2. Dos sub-maut sebanyak 1.0 µM perencat PD184352 telah mengurangkan kebolehidupan sel secara signifikan (ujian t sampel tidak bersandar, p < 0.05). Analisis statistik menggunakan ANOVA sehala bagi keputusan qRT-PCR menunjukkan pra-aruhan VEGF meningkatkan pengekspresan gen NOS3 dan IL-8 pada hari 1 dan 10 secara signifikan (p < 0.05). Sebaliknya, pengekspresan gen CD31, vWF, IL1- $\beta$ , TNF- $\alpha$ , Eselectin, ICAM-1, dan RCAN-1.4 tidak dinaikkan oleh pra-aruhan. Perencat MEK PD184352 pula menyebabkan perencatan penuh kepada pengekspresan gen CD31 dan *NOS3* pada hari 1 dan 7, dan gen-gen tersebut telah dikesan pada hari ke-10 dan pada hari berikutnya. Sementara itu, PD184352 mengurangkan regulasi vWF,  $IL1-\beta$ , dan IL-8. Sebaliknya, PD184352 telah meningkatkan pengekspresan gen TNF- $\alpha$ , E-selectin, ICAM-1, dan RCAN-1.4. Hasil keputusan ELISA menunjukkan pengekspresan protein p-ERK, CD31, dan MEKK1, membuktikan bahawa pengisyaratan VEGF melalui tapak jalan MEK/ERK diperlukan bagi pembezaan angiogenik dalam konstruk yang dicadangkan. Keputusan ujikaji ICC bagi pengekspresan protein CD31, vWF, dan Factin mengukuhkan lagi dakwaan bahawa pembezaan SHED kepada sel seperti endotelium dikawalatur oleh pengisyaratan MEK. Oleh itu, hasil kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa tapak jalan MEK mengawalatur pembezaan SHED kepada sel seperti endotelium menggunakan konstruk yang dicadangkan bagi kejuruteraan tisu untuk menyembuhkan luka.

# INVOLVEMENT OF MEK SIGNALLING ON ENDOTHELIAL-LIKE DIFFERENTIATION OF DENTAL STEM CELLS CULTURED ON HUMAN AMNIOTIC MEMBRANE WITH VEGF TREATMENT

#### ABSTRACT

Wound healing continues to be a healthcare burden associated with increased morbidity and substantial mortality. Tissue engineering offers a potential solution to address this unmet medical need by building a construct combining cells, growth factor, and scaffold for angiogenesis, a fundamental process for tissue regeneration. A detailed understanding of the molecular mechanism underlying the angiogenic differentiation is vital for developing an engineered tissue for wound healing application. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the role of the MEK signalling pathway onto the differentiation of stem cells from human exfoliated deciduous teeth (SHED) and VEGF pre-induced SHED into endothelial-like cells when induced with VEGF and cultured on the stromal side (SS) of human amniotic membrane (AM). In order to decipher the pathway involved, the current study was conducted by employing techniques such as flow cytometry, reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR), real-time reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (qRT-PCR), enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) and immunocytochemistry (ICC). Flow cytochemistry results showed that SHED at passage 10 and 15 positively expressed CD90, CD73, and CD105 mesenchymal stem cell protein markers, indicating that SHED were able to maintain their stemness property. Concurrently, SHED did not express hematopoietic cell markers, namely, CD34, CD11b, CD19, CD45, and HLA-DR. Western blot results showed that Ang-1 and COX-2 endothelial cells protein markers were expressed in differentiated SHED cultured on SS of AM

with VEGF treatment on day 1 and 7. RT-PCR findings revealed that differentiated SHED expressed both stem cells (Nestin, Nanog, and CD73) and endothelial-specific markers (Ang-1, COX-2, and VE-Cadherin) in all treatments on day 1, 7, 10, and 14. Twenty four hours VEGF pre-induction elevated the expression of CD73, Nanog, and COX-2. A sub-lethal dose of 1.0 µM MEK inhibitor PD184352 reduced the cell viability significantly (independent sample t-test p < 0.05). Statistical analysis using one-way ANOVA for qRT-PCR outcomes demonstrated that VEGF pre-induction upregulated the gene expression of NOS3 and IL-8 significantly at day 1 and 10 (p<0.05). On the other hand, the expression of CD31, vWF, IL1- $\beta$ , TNF- $\alpha$ , E-selectin, ICAM-1, and RCAN -1.4 were not promoted by the pre-induction. MEK inhibitor PD184352 blocked the gene expression of *CD31* and *NOS3* on day 1 and 7, and the genes were detected on day 10 afterwards. Meanwhile, PD184352 downregulated *vWF*, *IL1-\beta*, and *IL-8*. In contrast, PD184352 promoted TNF- $\alpha$ , E-selectin, ICAM-1, and RCAN-1.4 gene expressions. ELISA results showed that p-ERK, CD31, and MEKK1 protein expression provided confirmatory evidence that VEGF signalling through the MEK/ERK pathway was required for angiogenic differentiation by this proposed construct. Besides, the ICC results of CD31, vWF, and F-actin protein expression enforced that SHED performed endothelial-like differentiation, and it was regulated by MEK signalling. Hence, these findings proposed that the MEK pathway regulates the differentiation of SHED into endothelial-like cells using the proposed construct for wound healing tissue engineering.

#### **CHAPTER 1**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1** Background of the study

A human's ability to heal wounds is an evolutionary advantage for survival. It is believed that humans heal faster than other forms of life, such as amphibians or unicellular organisms, to protect us from other predators and to ensure existence (Cohen, 2006). Physiologically, wound healing involves important phases; haemostasis, inflammation, proliferation, and maturation, requiring angiogenesis for nutrients and oxygen delivery to the multitude of cells (Reinke & Sorg, 2012). A deficit in angiogenesis leads to the pathological of chronic non-healing wounds. Innovations for wound healing is as old as modern human history. Retrospectively, it can be traced back to Egyptian civilisation in their record using compression for haemostasis (Broughton *et al.*, 2006). Later, after almost 3 millennia, various strategies are employed to treat acute and chronic wounds, such as third-degree burn diabetic wound ranging from non-biological materials to biological-based products.

Nevertheless, wound healing is still an unmet medical need. This gap means a massive opportunity for improvisation. According to Fortune Business Insights (2020), the global market wound care size was \$ 10.43 billion in 2019 and is projected to reach USD 15.59 billion by 2027. In the US healthcare sector, more than \$ 25 billion has been spent on a chronic non-healing wound.

Tissue engineering (TE) offers a solution for wound healing, especially in understanding its principles and mechanisms. TE converges three key components; stem cells (SC), growth factors and a supporting scaffold to form a 3D construct that ultimately aims in restoring the function of injured tissue (Tollemar et al., 2016). Stem cells from extracted human deciduous teeth (SHED) were first discovered by Miura et al. (2003). This mesenchymal SC (MSC) is highly proliferative with the ability to perform neurogenic, adipogenic and odontogenic differentiation property (Miura et al., 2003). Interestingly, SHED was found to express VEGF, a pro-angiogenic factor both at the mRNA and protein level (Bronckaers et al., 2013). Due to the fact SHED are isolated from extracted deciduous teeth, harvesting SHED is technically noninvasive and, most importantly, with no ethical issue involved as compared to bone marrow SC and embryonic SC. Vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) is one of the most well studied classic pro-angiogenic growth factors for angiogenesis in humans (Ucuzian et al., 2010). Hence, this makes VEGF a popular agent for angiogenic differentiation induction. A scaffold made of human amniotic membrane (AM) is an organic biomaterial rich in the extracellular matrix (ECM) clinically proven as dressing for wound healing (Bianchi et al., 2018), abundantly available yet usually discarded (Ramuta & Kreft, 2018). As AM is unable to trigger an allogeneic or xenogeneic immunologic reaction, AM has attracted great interest in tissue engineering and transplantation (Malhotra & Jain, 2014). This robust performance is possible due to the combination of anti-inflammatory properties, low immunogenicity, and immunomodulatory properties (Wassmer & Berishvili, 2020).

The aim of this research was to grow the SC with the cues from growth factor and natural scaffold that mimic the natural milieu of the human body in an attempt to create body parts such as angiogenic structures for wound healing application. Thus, assembling this triad, SHED, VEGF, and AM as a 3D construct of engineered tissue to develop a basic angiogenic structure, the endothelial cells, would be the next frontier to be pushed forward (Figure 1.1). Also, the pathway involved when SHED differentiate into endothelial-like cells by VEGF induction and cultured on the stromal side of AM was also taken into consideration. In order to evaluate the angiogenic differentiation of this proposed construct, it is necessary to clarify the effect of these two pro-angiogenic factors, VEGF and AM, in promoting SHED into endothelial-like cells at the genes and proteins expression couple with elucidating the role of MEK signalling for the differentiation regulation. The combination between VEGF and AM previously was tested by Md Hashim *et al.* (2019) and postulated the pro-angiogenic promoting effect by these factors towards angiogenic differentiation by SHED. The mechanobiological effects of these chemical and physical inductions are interesting to be deciphered as they may provide a microenvironment that can be a potential model for various applications such as angiogenesis study and evaluation of drug toxicity.

The data from the present study would enrich the information on the SHED and its differentiation capability with the designed niche. This 3D construct can be used as an angiogenic model to study angiogenesis for wound healing (Figure 1.1). Angiogenesis is also significant for the progression of tumour cells because it relies on oxygen and nutrients supplied via blood vessels, just like any normal cells (Nishida *et al.*, 2006). In order to so, cancer cells produce pro-angiogenic factors to stimulate angiogenesis to support their demands (Rajabi & Mousa, 2017). Thus, this 3D model can be used for anti-angiogenic drugs screening against cancer, not only for cellular cytotoxicity analysis but also for functional effects on the behaviour of tumour cells. By identifying the inducer of MEK for endothelial differentiation too, this information can be manipulated to promote angiogenesis.



**Figure 1.1**: An overview of biological based wound healing products and the evaluation for the proposed construct that combined SHED, VEGF and amniotic membrane by genes and proteins expression as well as the signalling pathway.

#### **1.2** Justification of the study

There are many studies conducted to evaluate the angiogenic differentiation potential of SHED (Sakai et al., 2010; Bento et al., 2013; Shi et al., 2020). Md Hashim et al. (2019) highlighted that AM offers a microenvironment that subsequently promoted SHED differentiation into endothelial-like cells. Whilst VEGF has been established as a potent angiogenic inducer (Harmey et al., 2013). Both mechanobiology and chemical cues from these pro-angiogenic factors are important to drive the SC to an appropriate fate and modulate the cell responses by tuning the signal transduction pathway (Alenghat & Ingber, 2002). Previous studies have revealed that 24 hours pre-induction and prolonged enhanced angiogenic differentiation (Stannard et al., 2007; Valente et al., 2014). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no literature exploring on how the MEK signalling affects the 24 hours VEGF pre-induction on SHED angiogenic differentiation potential when treated with VEGF and seeded on the stromal side of AM. This novel information will bridge the gap in tissue engineering field as these will update the multipotent capability of SHED when cultured in this proposed 3D construct as well as the role of MEK signalling regulation within this model.

#### **1.3** Research objectives

#### **1.3.1** General objective

This study aimed to investigate the role of MEK signalling pathway during the differentiation of SHED into endothelial-like cells when induced with VEGF and cultured on stromal side of AM.

#### **1.3.2** Specific objectives

- To evaluate the stem cell properties of SHED by quantifying MSC specific protein markers at passage 10 and 15 by flow cytometry.
- To screen the angiogenic property of cultured SHED on AM upon VEGF treatment and VEGF pre-induction by Western blot and reverse-transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR).
- To determine the expression of angiogenic gene markers of SHED induced by VEGF and cultured on AM and treated with and without MEK inhibitor PD184352 by real time reverse-transcription polymerase chain reaction (qRT-PCR)
- 4. To assess the expression of protein markers related to VEGF/MEK/p-ERK pathway during the angiogenic differentiation of SHED induced by VEGF and cultured on AM and treated with and without MEK inhibitor PD184352 by ELISA and immunocytochemistry

#### **1.4** Research hypotheses

MEK signalling regulates the angiogenic differentiation of SHED into endothelial-like cells when induced with VEGF and cultured on stromal side of AM.

## **1.5** Research questions

- 1. Do SHED cultured on AM with VEGF treatment express higher angiogenic genes and protein markers during differentiation into endothelial-like cells?
- 2. Does MEK signalling pathway regulate the endothelial differentiation by SHED in this proposed construct?

#### CHAPTER 2

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Regenerative medicine and tissue engineering

Humans suffer from tissues and organs loss because of congenital defects, diseases, and trauma. Globally, many people would benefit immensely if damaged tissues can be replaced on demand (Hippen *et al.*, 2009). Heavy reliance on transplantation has caused a bottleneck effect of people waiting for their turn to get donated tissues and organs as supply cannot meet the demand (Arshad *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, the economic burden of caring for patients to society, with injured tissues and debilitating diseases, is enormous and counter-productive (Pol *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, strategies and technologies using regenerative medicine and TE to increase the supply of tissues must be developed further (Pokrywczynska *et al.*, 2014; Jain & Bansal, 2015).

Regenerative medicine appears to have been coined by Haseltine (2001) to capture his view on the future of medicine for promotional purposes. Seven years later, Mason & Dunnill (2008) defined regenerative medicine as "the process of replacing or regenerating human cells, tissues or organs to restore or establish normal function". Regenerative medicine employs various techniques to induce organ regeneration, including cell-based therapies, immunomodulation, gene therapy, nanomedicine, and TE itself (Salgado *et al.*, 2013).

Langer & Vacanti (1993) popularised TE as a term that alludes to the combination of cells, tissue-inducing substances and placement of cells on or within

matrices used to develop functional substitutes for damaged tissue. It is one spectrum under the regenerative medicine domain (Furth & Atala, 2013), while for TE, it is a science that converges the triad; cells, growth factors and scaffolds (Figure 2.1) (Salgado *et al.*, 2004). It is an interdisciplinary field that applies engineering and life sciences principles towards the development of biological substitutes that restore, maintain or improve tissue function (Sudhakar et al., 2015). The process can involve *de-novo* growth in tissue culture (*in vitro* and *ex vivo*) or tissue regeneration *in vivo* at sites (Huang *et al.*, 2010). Eventually, due to the related objectives by regenerative medicine and TE, these two fields have been merging in recent years, originating the broad field of tissue engineering and regenerative medicine (TERM) (Salgado *et al.*, 2013). TE is also a promising strategy to restore the damages caused by COVID-19 (Aydin *et al.*, 2020).

There is an exponential growth in regenerative medicine products entering the clinical arena (Cossu *et al.*, 2018). Nevertheless, it plays a relatively minor role in patient care at present (Kaoud, 2018). One clinically proven TE product is MyDerm<sup>®</sup> to regenerate skin (Mohamed Haflah *et al.*, 2018). However, the number of current success stories may less than the public expectations. The community of tissue engineering worldwide works to address the challenges by gathering more scientific and significant evidence to translate the effort from bench to bedside. The effort continues to tune the optimal cell numbers, the effective growth factor and the best scaffold for tissue engineering application.



**Figure 2.1 The triad of tissue engineering.** Tissue engineering is a combination of three key components namely cells, biomaterial scaffold and biologically active factors

#### 2.2 Angiogenesis

Angiogenesis plays a central role in human physiology, from reproduction and foetal development to wound healing and tissue repair/regeneration (Reddy *et al.*, 2019). Clinically relevant therapies are needed for promoting angiogenesis to supply oxygen and nutrients after transplantation (Rademakers *et al.*, 2019). By history, angiogenesis was introduced by Flint (1900) to explain the vascularisation of the adrenal gland. However, this term is arguably coined by John Hunter, a surgeon that lived circa 1728-1719 (Lenzi *et al.*, 2016).

According to Adair & Montani (2010), angiogenesis is defined as a morphogenic development for new blood vessels from the existing vasculature. It occurs throughout life in both physiological and pathological, beginning in utero and continuing postnatally. There is no metabolically active tissue inside the body located beyond a few hundred micrometres from a blood capillary, which is formed by angiogenesis. The initiation of angiogenesis begins with endothelial cell activation, matrix modulation, proliferative expansion and vascular morphogenesis (Claffey, 2002).

Angiogenesis involves a series of events, which starts with endothelial cells (ECs) responding to angiogenic factors produced either by endothelium or stromal cells (Dulak *et al.*, 2016). Initiation of angiogenesis is completed in response to hypoxia to overcome oxygen depletion and starvation. Hypoxia-inducible factor-1 $\alpha$  (HIF1 $\alpha$ ) is one of the transcription factors that is stable and active under low oxygen tension. It is responsible for driving substantial pro-angiogenic growth factor

expression. They are a prerequisite for angiogenesis and activate EC for proliferation, survival and migration via endothelial receptors (Giaccia *et al.*, 2003).

#### 2.2.1 Endothelial cells

Endothelial cells (ECs) are monolayer cell lining the entire vascular system, from the heart to the smallest capillary, and regulating the exchanges between the surrounding tissues and bloodstream (Alberts *et al.*, 2002). ECs produce signals to organise the growth and development of connective tissue cells that form the surrounding layers of the blood vessel wall (Cleaver & Melton, 2003).

The cardiovascular system is the first organ system to develop in the embryo (Risau, 1997). The luminal surface of the circulatory system in contact with blood is a single layer of EC derived from mesoderm stem cells (Adair & Montani, 2010). Subsequently, mesodermal stem cells differentiate into "haemangioblasts". Haemangioblast was proposed almost a century ago as a term to describe the common origin of haematopoietic/endothelial progenitor cells (Murray, 1932).

This progenitor gives rise either into an angioblast, a precursor for arterial and venous EC or hemogenic EC, capable of hematopoietic cell generation (Grochot-Przęczek *et al.*, 2013). Angioblasts are a cell type with potency to differentiate into EC but have not yet acquired all EC characteristic markers (Risau, 1997). EC can also transdifferentiate into mesenchymal cells and intimal smooth muscle cells (Choi *et al.*, 1998).

The EC provide a barrier between blood and tissues and additionally act as an endocrine organ. The process of angiogenesis is entirely sustained by ECs (Munaron & Pla, 2009). ECs participate in vascular constriction and relaxation. These cells control the extravasation of fluid, hormones, macromolecules and solutes. They also guide inflammatory cells to foreign materials, defence against infections or tissue region in need of repair. Likewise, ECs are essential in governing platelet adhesion, blood fluidity, adhesion and aggregation, leukocyte activation and transmigration (Nawroth & Stern, 1986; Sadler, 1997; Cines *et al.*, 1998; Jain, 2003).

*In vitro* angiogenesis studies use human umbilical vascular endothelial cells (HUVEC) (Figure 2.2) as a model to represent human ECs due to their behaviour that faithfully behave like human vascular endothelium when compared to the other cell lines (Garbern *et al.*, 2013). HUVEC is used to investigate the molecular aspect and signalling cascade involving angiogenesis (Howe *et al.*, 2017; Zhang *et al.*, 2019; Zhao *et al.*, 2019). Interestingly, the application of HUVEC has been documented in a large number of published studies such as tissue engineering, diabetes and cancer (Rhim *et al.*, 1998; Onat *et al.*, 2011; Maiullari *et al.*, 2018).

The harvesting protocol for HUVEC as a source of cells requires a noninvasive method with a high number cells (Kocherova *et al.*, 2019). HUVEC are acquired from discarded umbilical cord that typically becomes "medical waste" after a child's birth (Kadam *et al.*, 2009). Nevertheless, one major drawback of HUVEC is that these cells are terminally differentiated adult cells, site-specific phenotype property with high immunogenic response, and it is impossible to use HUVEC for auto-transplantation among adult patients (Kocherova *et al.*, 2019). Identifying a novel cell source that would be more feasible for tissue engineering if a novel cell source for angiogenic engineering can be identified and clinically tested.



Figure 2.2: **Image of HUVEC morphology grown on the plastic surface observed using an inverted microscope.** HUVEC has a cobblestone-like shape (white arrow) (magnification at 100x). (Adapted from Md Hashim (2017)).

#### 2.2.2 Endothelial cell markers

#### 2.2.2 a) Angiopoietin 1 (Ang-1)

Lacking *Ang-1* resulted in defects in the vasculature (Davis *et al.*, 1996). Additionally, this gene is involved at the stage of vascular morphogenesis and maturation (Claffey, 2002). This angiogenic marker previously was suggested not only in angiogenic differentiation but also cell migration (Aziz *et al.*, 2018).

#### 2.2.2 b) Cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2)

COX-2 is a key enzyme in the synthesis of prostaglandins from arachidonic acid (Vane *et al.*, 1998). During angiogenesis, COX-2 initiates prostaglandins synthesis, consequently inducing the expression of pro-angiogenic factors forming new capillaries and inducing proliferation (Iñiguez *et al.*, 2003). COX-2 activity appears to be modulated by VEGF (Wu *et al.*, 2006) and can be increased mechanobiologically (Yoon *et al.*, 2015 & Khan *et al.*, 2004).

#### 2.2.2 c) VE-Cadherin

*VE-Cadherin* is an endothelial cell-specific cadherin that regulates the assembly of a new blood vessel and vascular integrity maintenance (Breviario *et al.*, 1995). In an *in vitro* study by (Sakai *et al.*, 2010), VEGF induced SHED to express *VE-Cadherin*. SHED following angiogenesis and migratory induction by

supplementing angiogenic factors positively expressed VE-Cadherin (Aziz et al., 2018).

#### 2.2.2 d) CD31

*CD31* is also described as *PECAM-1* (platelet/endothelial cell adhesion molecule-1). This gene is named after its role in maintaining and restoring the vascular cell adhesion and speed recovery of the vascular permeability barrier after thrombotic challenge function and highly expressed in endothelial cells (Lertkiatmongkol *et al.*, 2016). According to Buckley *et al.* (1996), *CD31* belongs to the immunoglobulin gene superfamily (IgSF) and associated with various function, including angiogenesis, cell differentiation, inflammation and integrin activation. The expression of this marker is highly detected on endothelium and cells of myeloid lineage (Buckley *et al.*, 1996)

#### 2.2.1 e) Von Willebrand factor (vWF)

vWF is a multifunctional glycoprotein best known for its essential roles in primary and secondary haemostasis and as a mediator of platelet adhesion (Stockschlaeder *et al.*, 2014). ECs and megakaryocytes synthesise vWF, while congenital decrease or dysfunction of vWF causes von Willebrand disease (Randi & Laffan, 2017). This gene promotes platelets' adhesion to vascular injury sites by forming a molecular bridge between the sub-endothelial collagen matrix and plateletsurface receptor complex (Ruggeri, 2009). This highly selective angiogenic marker is claimed to be exclusively expressed by ECs and megakaryocyte (Piovella *et al.*, 1978)

#### 2.2.2 f) Endothelial nitric oxide synthase (NOS3)

Endothelial nitric oxide synthase (NOS3; also referred to as eNOS or NOSIII) is a low output enzyme where the prototypical isoform is located in ECs (Kleinert & Forstermann, 2007). This angiogenic marker is a major determinant of vascular tone and blood pressure and several diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and atherosclerosis (Robinson *et al.*, 1994). Beltran-Povea *et al.* (2015) revealed that ESC expressed *NOS3*. During ESC differentiation into cardiomyocytes, this gene was downregulated as observed after 14 days of the experiment (Krumenacker *et al.*, 2006).

#### 2.3 Stem cells

Ernst Haeckel, a German biologist, coined the "stem cell" term to describe the fertilized egg that turns into an organism during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Reisman & Adams, 2014). Stem cells (SC) are defined as unspecialised cells with self-renewal ability through cell division (Biehl & Russell, 2009). During mitosis, a divided SC has two faith options; either to retain as a stem cell or differentiate into other kinds of cells that form the body's tissues and organs (Mummery *et al.*, 2014). SC differentiate into many types of cells in response to appropriate inductions and conditions within the body (Zakrzewski *et al.*, 2019). These properties equip SC with unique tissue repair capabilities, replacement, and regeneration (Falanga, 2012). These properties have become valuable research tools for regenerative medicine and possible stem cell therapies (Reisman & Adams, 2014).

Primarily, SC exists both in embryos and adult cells (Fortier, 2005). Embryonic SC is a pluripotent SC population that can differentiate into all types of adult cells without a limited number of times. However, this SC's creation involves the destruction of live human embryos (Landry & Zucker, 2004). Another type is the adult SC that is undifferentiated, self-renewal with multilineage property present in many adult tissues (Prochazkova *et al.*, 2015). In contrast, adult SC is a multipotent cell with limited ability to differentiate as compared to embryonic SC.

Among the type of adult SC are mesenchymal stem cells (MSC), hematopoietic stem cells (HSC) and neural stem cells (NSC) (Shi *et al.*, 2006). Adult SC can be found in dental tissue, bone marrow, foreskin, adipose tissue and umbilical cord with angiogenic differentiation potential (Gronthos *et al.*, 2000; Kang *et al.*, 2013; Lu *et al.*, 2018; Shojaeian *et al.*, 2020). For this justification, adult SC is also known as postnatal SC. This type of SC is more applicable than embryonic SC in SC therapies and regenerative medicine because SC's isolation lacks ethical concerns. Additionally, adult SC have low immunogenicity reactions and less tumorigenic potency which made adult SC a potential cell source for regenerative medicine (Potdar, 2015).

Adult SC transplants are already widely used to benefit over a million people (Gratwohl *et al.*, 2015). SC transplant has been used for many conditions, including multiple myeloma and leukaemias, have moved beyond clinical trials to become a standard medical practice to treat the patients (Gupta & Kumar, 2011; Tian *et al.*, 2015). Interestingly, SC is believed in the past; it can only differentiate specifically into adult cells of the originated cells extraction site (Rajabzadeh *et al.*, 2019). Currently, the of SC's angiogenic research is extensive and novel therapeutic strategies

are emerging utilising SC as the primary cellular component of various TE constructs (de Cara *et al.*, 2019; Wanjare *et al.*, 2019; Merckx *et al.*, 2020).

Currently, TE depends on the autologous cells from which specific cells types can be extracted, propagated and seeded onto a matrix for subsequent transplantation. However, this is for the ideal case scenario that under some circumstances, neoplasia or bad organ failure, isolation of normal cells from a patient is often problematic (Yamzon *et al.*, 2008). The ability of SC to propagate and differentiate into desired tissue types makes them an attractive alternative cell source for regenerative medicine applications (Kolios & Moodley, 2012).

#### **2.3.1** Dental tissue-derived stem cells

Numbers of adult MSC populations have been discovered that reside in various dental tissues. These SC include dental pulp stem cells (Gronthos *et al.*, 2000), stem cells from Human Exfoliated Deciduous teeth (SHED) (Miura *et al.*, 2003), Periodontal Ligament Stem Cells (PDLSC) (Seo *et al.*, 2004), Dental Follicle Progenitor Cells (DFPC) (Morsczeck *et al.*, 2005), Stem Cells from Apical Papilla (SCAP) (Sonoyama *et al.*, 2006). Mammalian teeth originate from the embryonic source of neural crest ectomesenchyme (Huang *et al.*, 2009). Hence, this is an additional plasticity advantage for dental stem cells (DSC), displaying characteristics of both ectoderm and mesoderm. Like the other type of adult SC, these MSC are clonogenic and self-renewal postnatal SC (Chalisserry *et al.*, 2017).

In terms of the cell harvesting protocol, DSC is easily accessible by tooth extraction with a local anaesthetic or when a deciduous tooth is replaced (Sunil *et al.*, 2015). A comparative study was described by (Yusoff *et al.*, 2015) found that dental SC has differentiation higher passage numbers than amniotic membrane SC. Both SC from the dental and amniotic membrane are isolated from discarded tissue, then can be expanded for cell generation by multiple sub-cultures and differentiated to specific lineages in response to appropriate stimuli (Prisk & Huard, 2005). However, dental SC can achieve up to 25 passage number without compromising proliferative property (Jiang *et al.*, 2006). On the other hand, amniotic membrane SC ceases proliferation until passage 6 (Bilic *et al.*, 2008; Parolini *et al.*, 2008). Large-scale SC expansion with a low grade of senescence effect is substantial criteria for stem cell transplantation (Diomede *et al.*, 2017). However, continuous passages of adult SC for an extended period may affect the SC stemness properties, including proliferation and differentiation markers (Yu *et al.*, 2010). Thus, DSC has more competitiveness to be a potential SC source.

Another intriguing fact about DSC is that they can be isolated from inflamed or compromised dental tissue, yet the properties are conserved and identical those of healthy tissue (Alongi *et al.*, 2010; Sun *et al.*, 2014). In terms of multipotency, dental SC able to differentiate into five cell lineages; adipogenic, angiogenic, chondrogenic, neurogenic and odontogenic (Zhang *et al.*, 2006; Sonoyama *et al.*, 2008; Huang *et al.*, 2009; Sakai *et al.*, 2010). Clinical-grade human SC should meet essential preconditions such as normal genetic karyotype and genetically stable during longterm culturing and after cryopreserved cell banking (Bolouri, 2015). MSC has genetic stability during culturing *in vitro* (Soukup *et al.*, 2006; Lange *et al.*, 2007). Contradict reports disclosed that an increased passage number caused MSC spontaneous genomic alternation (Borgonovo *et al.*, 2015; Stultz *et al.*, 2016). Iwanaka *et al.* (2020) revealed that DSC is not tumorigenic and maintains both the stem cell properties and therapeutic efficacy after a continuous cell expansion and tested safe for liver regeneration. Therefore, based on the previous mention of the scientific evidences, DSC is a potential source of cells for TE and regenerative medicine.

#### **2.3.2** Stem cells from human exfoliated deciduous teeth (SHED)

Miura and colleagues (2003) isolated and identified SHED from the remnant pulp structure in the crown of incisors. As an MSC, SHED are described as a highly proliferative and clonogenic and higher number of cell population doubling when compared to bone marrow stem cells (Miura *et al.*, 2003). Hence, it offers attractive advantages over other types of MSC as these SC can be obtained from a source which non-invasive, no ethical concerns and readily accessible (Fortier, 2005). SHED exhibited good proliferation capacity at passage 40 with genetic stability and normal karyotype without tumour formation in nude mice (Yin *et al.*, 2016).

The robust differentiation plasticity of this neural crest-derived SC was also reported by various studies subject to appropriate culture conditions. The ability of SHED to undergo differentiation not only limited to osteogenic, neurogenic, odontogenic and adipogenic but also myogenic and chondrogenic cell faith (Miura *et al.*, 2003; Huang *et al.*, 2009; Sakai *et al.*, 2010; Zhang *et al.*, 2016; Yusof *et al.*, 2018). When cultured with a basic medium alpha-MEM, SHED grow into individual fibroblastic cells adhered to the culture dish (Figure 2.3).

All these criteria, non-immunogenic, highly proliferative yet non-tumorigenic, non-invasive, genetically stable and no ethical issue, suggest that SHED could be a promising source of stem cells for TE to regenerate damaged tissue structures and possibly to treat wound injury effectively. Like any other MSC, SHED express mesenchymal markers of CD73, CD90, CD105 (Gazarian & Ramírez-García, 2017). As stipulated, SHED also positively express embryonic SC markers Nestin (Zhang *et al.*, 2016) and Nanog (Kerkis *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, these pluripotent markers could be associated with SHED to display highly proliferative activity, clonogenic, multilineage differentiation capacities.