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Jun Jiang

University of Massachusetts Medical School

Et al.

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ABSTRACT:

Translating dosage compensation to trisomy 21

Jun Jiang¹, Yuanchun Jing¹, Gregory J. Cost², Jen-Chieh Chiang¹, Heather J. Kolpa¹, Allison M. Cotton³, Dawn M. Carone¹, Benjamin R. Carone¹, Meg Byron¹, Philip D. Gregory², Carolyn J. Brown³, Fyodor D. Urnov², Lisa L. Hall¹, and Jeanne B. Lawrence¹

¹Department of Cell and Developmental Biology, University of Massachusetts Medical School,

²Sangamo BioSciences, ³Department of Medical Genetics, University of British Columbia

Down syndrome is the leading genetic cause of intellectual disabilities, occurring in 1 out of 700 live births. Given that Down syndrome is caused by an extra copy of chromosome 21 that involves over-expression of 400 genes across a whole chromosome, it precludes any possibility of a genetic therapy. Our lab has long studied the natural dosage compensation mechanism for X chromosome inactivation. To “dosage compensate” X-linked genes between females and males, the X-linked *XIST* gene produces a large non-coding RNA that silences one of the two X chromosomes in female cells. The initial motivation of this study was to translate the natural mechanisms of X chromosome inactivation into chromosome therapy for Down syndrome. Using genome editing with zinc finger nucleases, we have successfully inserted a large *XIST* transgene into Chromosome 21 in Down syndrome iPSC cells, which results in chromosome-wide transcriptional silencing of the extra Chromosome 21. Remarkably, deficits in proliferation and neural growth are rapidly reversed upon silencing one chromosome 21. Successful trisomy silencing *in vitro* surmounts the major first step towards potential development of “*chromosome therapy*” for Down syndrome. The human iPSC-based trisomy correction system we established opens a unique opportunity to identify therapeutic targets and study transplantation therapies for Down syndrome.

Contact information:

Jun Jiang, M.D. & Ph.D.

Research Assistant Professor in Dr. Jeanne Lawrence lab

Department of Cell and Developmental Biology

University of Massachusetts Medical School

Office: (508) 856-1088

Email: jun.jiang@umassmed.edu