

**THE EFFECT OF CLOMIPHENE CITRATE
TREATMENT ON THE EXPRESSION OF
THREE SPECIFIC GENES: ESTROGEN
RECEPTOR ALPHA, 90kD HEAT SHOCK
PROTEIN AND HOXA10 IN THE RAT
UTERUS**

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requirements for the degree of Master of Science

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master of Science in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

11th day of October 2005

Abstract

Clomiphene citrate (CC), a synthetic estrogen, is an efficient superovulator used in infertility treatment. However pregnancy rates resulting from CC treatment are low. Research has suggested that this may be due to an aberrant effect on implantation; CC binds to estrogen receptors (ER) and may affect estrogen responsive gene expression and thus implantation. This study investigates the effect of CC on ER α , 90kDa heat shock protein (Hsp90) and Hoxa10 expression in the rat uterus. Hsp90 binds to ER α in the absence of ligand and is involved in inducing a high affinity ligand binding conformation in the ER and in transactivation of the ER. Hoxa10 has been shown to be essential for uterine receptivity to implantation. CC (0.25mg) was given to ovariectomized rats, either alone or prior to a hormonal regime known to induce uterine receptivity for implantation. Expression of ER α , Hsp90 and Hoxa10 was determined by Western blotting, fluorescence immunocytochemistry and reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction. The single dose CC treated rats were compared to the controls as well as to ovariectomized rats treated with 0.5 μ g 17 β estradiol (E₂). The CC treated pseudopregnant rats (CCPPPE treated) were compared to 5½ day pregnant and pseudopregnant rats without CC (PPPE treated), to determine CCs effect at implantation. E₂ upregulated ER α and Hsp90 expression in the rat uterus compared to controls (p<0.05). The finding for ER α was unexpected as other studies have shown that E₂ decreases ER α levels a few hours after administration in the uterus. The present study therefore suggests a biphasic effect of E₂ on ER α expression in the rat uterus. The effect of E₂ on Hsp90 and ER α also proposes a balance between the levels of these two proteins in the uterus, to keep ER α in its optimal state and suggests that too high and too low a concentration of Hsp90 may both be inhibitory to ER α functioning. No significant difference was found in ER α and Hsp90 expression between the non-receptive (vehicle treated) and the receptive (PPPE treated) rat uteri, suggesting that these two genes are not markers for receptivity. However E₂ is known to induce implantation of donor blastocysts in progesterone (P₄) primed uteri. Therefore it is still essential for ER α to be present at implantation. It is of interest that CC downregulated ER α levels both in

the absence of ovarian hormones and at implantation in the rat uterus. It is therefore proposed that this antiestrogenic effect would render the uterus less sensitive to the E₂ required to induce implantation, thus accounting for low pregnancy rates with CC use. Although CC did not alter the expression of Hsp90 in this study, the reduction in ER α levels in response to CC may also upset the balance in the expression of these two genes, which may affect the transcriptional activity of ER α , and further prevent implantation. No clear results were obtained for Hoxa10 expression with the Western blots. However based on the ICC results, CC did not appear to affect Hoxa10 expression. Since P₄ and not E₂ is known to have the predominant effect on Hoxa10 expression, it is likely that E₂ analogs, such as CC, would also not affect Hoxa10 expression to a significant degree. Future work will aim to separate the different uterine compartments and to determine the effects of CC on the expression of other implantation specific genes in the uterus.

Dedicated to:

My mom and dad

and to Peter Le Roux

I am forever grateful for their
support and encouragement

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CONTENTS

	Page
DECLARATION	i
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
LIST OF TABLES	xv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 CLOMIPHENE CITRATE.....	1
1.1.1 Clomiphene as a Selective Estrogen Receptor Modulator (SERM), and the Interaction of SERMs with the Estrogen Receptor (ER).....	2
1.1.2 Clomiphene Citrate's Effects on the Uterus and Implantation.....	6
1.2 ESTROGEN, ESTROGEN RECEPTOR AND HSP90.....	8
1.2.1 Estrogen Signaling Pathway.....	8
1.2.2 Implantation and the Role of 17 β Estradiol in Implantation.....	9
1.2.3 Estradiol 17 β Associated Uterine Changes for Implantation.....	11
1.2.4 Estrogen Receptor Alpha.....	13
1.2.5 90kDa Heat Shock Protein.....	14
1.3 HOXA10 AND ITS ROLE IN IMPLANTATION.....	17
1.3.1 Homeobox Genes.....	17
1.3.2 The Hoxa Cluster of Homeobox Genes.....	17
1.3.3 Hoxa10 and Implantation.....	18
1.3.4 Hoxa10 and Genes Involved in Implantation.....	21
1.3.5 Hormonal Control of Hoxa10.....	23
1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY.....	25
CHAPTER 2: MATERIALS AND METHODS	26
2.1 ANIMALS.....	26
2.1.1 Pregnant Animals.....	26
2.1.2 Ovariectomy.....	26

2.1.3 Pseudopregnant Animals.....	26
2.2 DRUG TREATMENT REGIMES:.....	27
2.2.1 Clomiphene Citrate Treatment.....	27
2.2.2 17 β Estradiol Treatment.....	27
2.2.3 Progesterone Treatment.....	28
2.2.4 Treatment Regimes.....	28
2.3 SACRIFICE OF ANIMALS.....	30
2.4 WESTERN BLOTTING.....	31
2.4.1 Protein Extraction.....	31
2.4.2 Protein Concentration (Bradford Assay).....	31
2.4.3 Sodium Dodecyl Sulphate-Polyacrylamide Gel Electrophoresis (SDS- PAGE).....	35
2.4.3.1 Gel preparation.....	35
2.4.3.2 Sample preparation.....	35
2.4.3.3 Electrophoresis (gel running).....	35
2.4.3.4 Staining of molecular weight markers.....	36
2.4.4 Transfer onto Nitrocellulose Membrane.....	38
2.4.5 Quantifying Western Blot Data and Statistics.....	41
2.5 LIGHT MICROSCOPY.....	42
2.5.1 Preparation of Tissue.....	42
2.5.2 Cryosectioning of Tissue.....	42
2.6 HAEMATOXYLIN AND EOSIN (H&E) STAIN.....	42
2.7 FLUORESCENCE IMMUNOCYTOCHEMISTRY.....	43
2.8 REVERSE TRANSCRIPTION POLYMERASE CHAIN REACTION.....	45
2.8.1 RNA Extraction.....	45
2.8.2 RNA Integrity and Concentration Determination.....	46
2.8.3 Complementary DNA (cDNA) Synthesis (Reverse Transcription Step)...	50
2.8.4 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR).....	51
2.8.5 1.6% Agarose Gel.....	53
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS.....	54
3.1 EFFECT OF CC ON ER α AND HSP90 EXPRESSION IN THE RAT UTERUS	54

3.1.1 Effect of a Single Dose of CC or E ₂ on the Expression of ER α and Hsp90 in the Ovariectomized Rat Uterus 24 Hours after its Administration.....	54
3.1.1.1 Western blotting analysis of ER α and Hsp90 protein expression in the ovariectomized rat uterus 24 hours after a single dose of CC or E ₂	54
3.1.1.2 Histology of ovariectomized rat uteri 24 hours after a single dose of E ₂ or CC.....	58
3.1.1.3 Fluorescence Immunocytochemistry of ER α and Hsp90 protein expression in the ovariectomized rat uterus 24 hours after a single dose of E ₂ or CC	62
3.1.1.4 Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) of ER α mRNA expression in the ovariectomized rat uterus 24 hours after a single dose of E ₂ or CC.....	69
3.1.2 Effect of CC on the Expression of ER α and Hsp90 in the Pseudopregnant Rat Uterus in Relation to Implantation.....	73
3.1.2.1 Western blot analysis of the ER α and Hsp90 protein expression, in the pseudopregnant rat uterus, at the time of implantation.....	73
3.1.2.2 Histology of pseudopregnant and pregnant rat uteri at the time of implantation.....	77
3.1.2.3 Fluorescence ICC of ER α and Hsp90 protein expression in the pseudopregnant rat uterus at the time of implantation.....	81
3.1.2.4 Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction of ER α mRNA expression, in the pseudopregnant rat uterus, at the time of implantation....	86
3.2 EFFECT OF CC ON HOXA10 EXPRESSION IN THE RAT UTERUS.....	89
3.2.1 Effect of a Single Dose of E ₂ or CC on the Expression of Hoxa10 in the Ovariectomized Rat Uterus 24 Hours after its Administration.....	89
3.2.2 Effect of CC on Hoxa10 Protein Expression in the Pseudopregnant Rat Uterus in Relation to Implantation.....	94
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION.....	97
4.1 IMPORTANCE OF OVARIAN HORMONES ON RECEPTIVITY TO IMPLANTATION IN THE UTERUS.....	97
4.1.1 Histological Changes between the 5½ Day Pregnant and PPPE Treated Rat Uteri.....	97

4.1.2 Similarity in Expression of ER α , Hsp90 and Hoxa10 between the 5½ Day Pregnant and PPPE Treated Rat Uteri.....	99
4.2 ESTROGEN RECEPTOR ALPHA EXPRESSION IN THE RAT UTERUS..	100
4.2.1 Effect of a Single Nidatory Dose of E ₂ on ER α Expression in the Rat Uterus	100
4.2.1.1 Mechanism of E ₂ induced biphasic regulation of ER α in the uterus..	101
4.2.2 Estrogen Receptor Alpha Expression During Uterine Receptivity to Implantation in the Rat Uterus.....	102
4.2.2.1 Effect of P ₄ on ER α expression.....	102
4.2.2.2 Estrogen Receptor Alpha levels at implantation in the rat uterus...	103
4.2.2.3 Biphasic regulation of ER α and implantation.....	104
4.2.3 Changes in ER α Immunolocalization and Changes in Uterine Histology in Response to P ₄ and/or E ₂ Treatment.....	105
4.2.3.1 Histological changes, in response to E ₂ treatment, in the luminal epithelium of ovariectomized and pseudopregnant rat uteri, are brought about by the predominant expression of ER α in these cells.....	105
4.2.3.2 Effect of P ₄ on luminal closure in the rat uterus.....	108
4.2.4 Effect of CC on ER α Expression in the Rat Uterus.....	109
4.2.4.1 Clomiphene downregulates ER α levels in the rat uterus.....	109
4.2.4.2 Influence of P ₄ and/or E ₂ on CC's effect on ER α expression.....	110
4.2.4.3 Decreased ER α could lead to decreased implantation and pregnancy rates, in response to CC.....	111
4.2.4.4 Decreased ER α , in response to CC, affects other estrogen regulated effects in the uterus.....	115
4.2.4.5 Estrogenic effects of CC in the luminal epithelium.....	116
4.3 HSP90 EXPRESSION IN THE RAT UTERUS.....	119
4.3.1 Effect of Ovarian Hormones on Hsp90 Expression in the Rat Uterus....	119
4.3.1.1 17 β Estradiol on Hsp90.....	119
4.3.1.2 Effect of P ₄ on Hsp90.....	119
4.3.2 Hsp90 and ER α	120
4.3.2.1 Hsp90-ER α balance at implantation.....	122
4.3.3 Effect of CC on Hsp90 Expression in the Rat Uterus.....	123

4.3.3.1 Mechanism of CC action on Hsp90 expression in the rat uterus....	123
4.3.3.2 Influence of CC on ER α functioning through changes in Hsp90 expression.....	125
4.3.4 Conclusion to CC's Effect on ER α and Hsp90 Expression in the Rat Uterus	126
4.4 HOXA10 EXPRESSION IN THE RAT UTERUS.....	127
4.4.1 Effect of a Nidatory Dose of E ₂ on Hoxa10 Expression in the Rat Uterus..	128
4.4.2 Effect of P ₄ on Hoxa10 Expression Levels in the Rat Uterus.....	129
4.4.3 Effect of Ovarian Hormones on the Location of Hoxa10 in the Rat Uterus.	131
4.4.4 Effect of CC on Hoxa10 Expression in the Rat Uterus.....	133
4.5 FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THIS STUDY.....	135
REFERENCES.....	137
APPENDIX.....	156
I. SOLUTIONS AND RECIPES.....	156
5.1 Vaginal Smears.....	156
5.1.1 Shorr's staining solution.....	156
5.2 Miscellaneous.....	156
5.2.1 Phosphate Buffered Saline (PBS) pH7.5.....	156
5.2.2 1X Tris Buffered Saline (TBS) pH8.....	156
5.3 Western Blotting.....	157
5.3.1 Homogenizing buffer pH7.5.....	157
5.3.2 30%T 2.7%C _{Bis} Acrylamide monomer stock solution.....	157
5.3.3 10% SDS-polyacrylamide separating gel.....	157
5.3.4 4% SDS-polyacrylamide stacking gel.....	158
5.3.5 2X Sample buffer pH6.8.....	158
5.3.6 Electrophoresis tank buffer.....	158
5.3.7 Coomassie Blue staining solution.....	158
5.3.8 Destaining solutions.....	158
5.3.9 Transfer buffer pH 8.3.....	159
5.3.10 Primary antibody solutions for Western Blotting.....	159
5.3.11 Secondary antibody solutions for Western Blotting.....	159

5.3.12 Diaminobenzidine solution	160
5.4 Light Microscopy and Fluorescence Immunocytochemistry.....	161
5.4.1 2% 3-Aminopropyl-triethoxysilane in acetone treated slides.....	161
5.4.2 Haematoxylin staining solution.....	161
5.4.3 Eosin staining solution.....	161
5.4.4 PBS-BSA-Triton-X.....	161
5.5 Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR).....	162
5.5.1 50X Tris Acetate EDTA (TAE) buffer pH8.....	162
5.5.2 1.2% Agarose gel in 1X TAE buffer pH8.....	162
5.5.3 10X Tris Borate EDTA (TBE) buffer pH8.3.....	162
5.5.4 1.6% Agarose gel in 1X TBE buffer pH8.3.....	162
II CALCULATIONS.....	163
5.6 Example of Calculating Protein Concentration and Loading Volume from Absorbance Values.....	163
5.7 Calculating RNA Concentration and Purity from Absorbance Values.....	164
5.8 Calculation to Dilute All RNA Extract Samples to the Same Concentration for RT-PCR.....	164
III STATISTICS FOR WESTERN BLOTTING.....	165
5.9 ER α Protein Expression for Single Dose Treatments (Samples A-E).....	165
5.9.1 Raw data from scans of Western blots.....	165
5.9.2 Summaries of statistics tests for significant differences between the mean ER α protein expression in the untreated and vehicle treated controls	166
5.9.3 Summaries of statistics tests for significant differences in the mean ER α protein expression between the single dose treatment groups.....	167
5.9.4 Summaries of statistics tests for significant differences in the mean raw volumes of actin bands in the ER α Western blots between the single dose treatment groups.....	168
5.10 Hsp90 Protein Expression for Single Dose Treatments (Samples A-E)....	169
5.10.1 Raw data from scans of Western blots.....	169
5.10.2 Summaries of statistics tests for significant differences between the mean Hsp90 protein expression in the untreated and vehicle treated controls.	170

5.10.3 Summaries of statistics tests for significant differences between the mean Hsp90 protein expression in the single dose treatment groups.....	171
5.10.4 Summaries of statistics tests for significant differences between the mean raw volumes of actin bands in the Hsp90 Western blots in the single dose treatment groups.....	172
5.11 ER α Protein Expression for the Pseudopregnant and Pregnant Rat Uteri at the Time of Implantation (Samples A, F-I).....	173
5.11.1 Raw data from scans of Western blots.....	173
5.11.2 Summaries of statistics tests for significant differences between the mean ER α protein expression in the untreated and vehicle treated (SOOO) control groups.....	174
5.11.3 Summaries of statistics tests for significant differences between the mean expression of ER α protein in pregnant and pseudopregnant rat uteri, with or without CC treatment.....	175
5.11.4 Summaries of statistics tests for significant differences between the mean raw volumes of actin bands in the ER α Western blots in the pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment groups.....	176
5.12 Hsp90 Protein Expression for the Pseudopregnant and Pregnant Rat Uteri at the Time of Implantation (Samples A, F-I).....	177
5.12.1 Raw data from scans of Western blots.....	177
5.12.2 Summaries of the statistics tests for significant differences between the mean Hsp90 protein expression in the untreated and vehicle treated (SOOO) control groups.....	178
5.12.3 Summaries of statistics tests for significant differences between the mean Hsp90 protein expression in pregnant and pseudopregnant rat uteri, with or without CC treatment.....	179
5.12.4 Summaries of statistics tests for significant differences between the mean raw volumes of actin bands in the Hsp90 Western blots in the pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment groups.....	180

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Figure 1.1: Molecular Structure of 17 β Estradiol (estrogen) (A) and Clomiphene citrate (CC) (B).....	2
CHAPTER 2: MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	26
Figure 2.1: Standard curve for the absorbance at 595nm of Bovine Serum Albumin (BSA) at known concentrations in mg/ml (regression line: y=0.9412x+0.0588) for samples A2-E2.....	32
Figure 2.2: Gels representing protein present in the different treatment samples A-I	37
Figure 2.3: Diagram representing the Western blot process.....	40
Figure 2.4: Flow diagram showing procedure for fluorescence immunocytochemistry.....	44
Figure 2.5: 1.2% Agarose gel showing RNA samples extracted using the Qiagen RNeasy Mini Kit.....	47
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS.....	54
Figure 3.1: Western blots representing expression of ER α (I) and Hsp90 (III) protein in the ovariectomized rat uterus 24 hours after a single treatment.....	55
Figure 3.2: Graphs representing Mean $\pm$ SEM (Standard Error of the Mean) of ER α (I) Hsp90 (II) and actin (III) protein expression in ovariectomized rat uteri, 24 hours after a single treatment, as obtained from scans of the Western blots...	56
Figure 3.3: Light microscopy images representing crossections of ovariectomized rat uteri 24 hours after a single treatment and stained with Haematoxylin and Eosin.....	59-60
Figure 3.4: Fluorescence Immunocytochemistry (ICC) confocal images representing ER α protein expression in the ovariectomized rat uterus 24 hours after a single treatment.....	63-64
Figure 3.5: Fluorescence ICC confocal images representing Hsp90 protein expression in the ovariectomized rat uterus 24 hours after a single treatment.	65-66

Figure 3.6: Agarose gel representing results of RT-PCR showing expression of ER α mRNA, in the ovariectomized rat uterus, 24 hours after a single treatment..	70
Figure 3.7: Western blots representing expression of ER α (I) and Hsp90 (II) protein in the ovariectomized, pregnant or pseudopregnant rat uterus with or without treatment with CC.....	74
Figure 3.8: Graphs representing Mean $\pm$ SEM of ER α (I); Hsp90 (II) and actin (III) protein expression in the ovariectomized, pregnant or pseudopregnant rat uterus and the effect of CC on their expression, at the time of implantation, as obtained from scans of the Western blots.....	75
Figure 3.9: Light microscopy images representing crosssections of ovariectomized, pregnant or pseudopregnant rat uteri at the time of implantation with or without treatment with CC and stained with Haematoxylin and Eosin.....	78-79
Figure 3.10: Fluorescence ICC confocal images representing ER α protein expression, in the ovariectomized, pregnant or pseudopregnant rat uterus, at the time of implantation, with or without treatment of CC.....	82
Figure 3.11: Fluorescence ICC confocal images representing Hsp90 protein expression, in the ovariectomized, pregnant or pseudopregnant rat uterus, at the time of implantation, with or without treatment of CC.....	83
Figure 3.12: Agarose gel representing results of RT-PCR showing expression of ER α mRNA, in the ovariectomized, pregnant or pseudopregnant rat uterus, at the time of implantation, with or without CC treatment.....	87
Figure 3.13: Western blot representing expression of Hoxa10 protein in the rat uterus	90
Figure 3.14: Immunofluorescence confocal images representing Hoxa10 protein expression in the ovariectomized rat uterus 24 hours after a single treatment.....	92-93
Figure 3.15: Fluorescence ICC confocal images representing Hoxa10 protein expression in the ovariectomized, pregnant or pseudopregnant rat uterus at the time of implantation with or without CC treatment.....	95

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 2: MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	26
Table 2.1: Treatment regime for the single dose treated samples.....	29
Table 2.2: Treatment regime for the pseudopregnant and pregnant samples..	29-30
Table 2.3: Absorbance readings, final concentration in µg/µl and Loading Volume of protein extracts.....	33-34
Table 2.4: RNA absorbance values, concentration and purity.....	48-50
Table 2.5: Reagents and volumes used per sample in Master Mix for cDNA synthesis.....	50
Table 2.6: Reagents and volumes used per sample in PCR Master Mix.....	52
 CHAPTER 3: RESULTS.....	 54
Table 3.1: Table representing semiquantitative results from RT-PCR agarose gels showing expression of ERα 24 hours after a single treatment.....	71
Table 3.2: Table representing semiquantitative results from RT-PCR agarose gels representing the expression of ERα mRNA in the pregnant and pseudopregnant rat uteri and the effect CC has on its expression at the time of implantation.....	86
 APPENDIX.....	 156
Table 5.1: Example of BSA standard concentrations and absorbencies at 595nm to determine the standard curve for samples A3-E3.....	163
Table 5.2: Raw volumes of ERα and Actin bands and the quantities of ERα protein expression in ovariectomized rat uteri treated with a single dose of CC or E ₂ , as obtained from Western blot scans.....	165
Table 5.3: Means and standard deviations of control groups (for ERα protein expression in single dose treatment regime).....	166
Table 5.4: Tests for homogeneity of the data (equality of variance) in the control groups for ERα protein expression using the O'Brien's and Bartlett's tests at the 5% level of significance (single dose treatment regime).....	166
Table 5.5: One-way analysis of variance test for significant differences between the mean ERα protein expression in the control groups (single dose groups).	166

Table 5.6: Means and standard deviations of ER α protein expression in the different groups treated with a single dose of CC or E ₂	167
Table 5.7: Tests for homogeneity of the data in the single dose treatment groups for ER α protein expression using the O'Brien's and Brown-Forsythe tests.....	167
Table 5.8: One-way analysis of variance test for significant differences between the mean ER α protein expression in the single dose treatment groups.....	167
Table 5.9: Means and standard deviations of the raw volume of Actin bands in the ER α Western blots in the different single dose treatment groups.....	168
Table 5.10: Tests for homogeneity of data of the raw volume of Actin bands in the ER α Western blots in the single dose treatment groups using the O'Brien's and Bartlett's tests.....	168
Table 5.11: Welch ANOVA test for significant differences between the mean raw volume of Actin bands in the ER α Western blots in the single dose treatment groups.....	168
Table 5.12: Raw volumes of Hsp90 and Actin bands and the quantities of Hsp90 protein expression in ovariectomized rat uteri treated with a single dose of CC or E ₂ , as obtained from Western blot scans.....	169
Table 5.13: Means and standard deviations of control groups (for Hsp90 protein expression in single dose treatment regime).....	170
Table 5.14: Tests for homogeneity of the data in the control groups for Hsp90 protein expression using the O'Brien's and Bartlett's tests (single dose treatment regime).....	170
Table 5.15: Welch ANOVA test for significant differences between the mean Hsp90 protein expression in the control groups (single dose treatment groups).	170
Table 5.16: Means and standard deviations of Hsp90 protein expression in the different groups treated with a single dose of CC or E ₂	171
Table 5.17: Tests for homogeneity of the data in the single dose treatment groups for Hsp90 protein expression using the O'Brien's, Brown-Forsythe's and Bartlett's tests.....	171
Table 5.18: Welch ANOVA test for significant differences between the mean Hsp90 protein expression in the single dose treatment groups.....	171
Table 5.19: Means and standard deviations of the raw volume of Actin bands in the Hsp90 Western blots in the single dose treatment groups.....	172

Table 5.20: Tests for homogeneity of the raw volume of Actin protein data in the Hsp90 Western blots in the single dose treatment groups using the O'Brien's and Bartlett's tests at the 5% level of significance.....	172
Table 5.21: Welch ANOVA test for a significant difference between the mean raw volume of Actin bands in the Hsp90 Western blots in the single dose treatment groups at the 5% level of significance.....	172
Table 5.22: Raw volumes of ER α and Actin bands and the quantities of ER α protein expression in pseudopregnant and pregnant rat uteri with or without CC treatment, as obtained from Western blot scans.....	173
Table 5.23: Means and standard deviations of control groups (for ER α protein expression in pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment regime).....	174
Table 5.24: Tests for homogeneity of the data in the control groups for ER α protein expression using the O'Brien's and Bartlett's tests at the 5% level of significance (pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment regime).....	174
Table 5.25: Welch ANOVA test for significant differences between the mean ER α protein expression in the control groups at the 5% level of significance (pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment regime).....	174
Table 5.26: Means and standard deviations of ER α protein expression in the pregnant and pseudopregnant rat uteri with or without CC treatment.....	175
Table 5.27: Tests for homogeneity of the data in the pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment groups for ER α protein expression using the O'Brien's and Bartlett's tests at the 5% level of significance.....	175
Table 5.28: Welch ANOVA test for significant differences between the mean ER α protein expression in the pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment groups at the 5% level of significance.....	175
Table 5.29: Means and standard deviations of the raw volume of Actin bands in the ER α Western blots in the pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment groups.	176
Table 5.30: Tests for homogeneity of the raw volume of Actin protein data in the ER α Western blots in the pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment groups using the O'Brien's and Bartlett's tests.....	176

Table 5.31: Welch ANOVA test for significant differences between the mean raw volume of Actin bands in the ER α Western blots in the pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment groups.....	176
Table 5.32: Raw volumes of Hsp90 and Actin bands and the quantities of Hsp90 protein expression in pseudopregnant and pregnant rat uteri with or without CC treatment, as obtained from Western blot scans.....	177
Table 5.33: Means and standard deviations of control groups (for Hsp90 protein expression in pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment regime).....	178
Table 5.34: Tests for homogeneity of the data in the control groups for Hsp90 protein expression using the O'Brien's and Bartlett's tests at the 5% level of significance (pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment regime).....	178
Table 5.35: Welch ANOVA test for significant differences between the mean Hsp90 protein expression in the control groups at the 5% level of significance (pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment regime).....	178
Table 5.36: Means and standard deviations of Hsp90 protein expression in the pregnant and pseudopregnant rat uteri with or without CC treatment.....	179
Table 5.37: Tests for homogeneity of the data in the pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment groups for Hsp90 protein expression using the O'Brien's and Bartlett's tests at the 5% level of significance.....	179
Table 5.38: Welch ANOVA test for significant differences between the mean Hsp90 protein expression in the pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment groups at the 5% level of significance.....	179
Table 5.39: Means and standard deviations of the raw volume of Actin bands in the Hsp90 Western blots in the pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment groups...	180
Table 5.40: Tests for homogeneity of the raw volume of Actin protein data in the Hsp90 Western blots in the pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment groups using the O'Brien's and Bartlett's tests at the 5% level of significance.....	180
Table 5.41: Welch ANOVA test for a significant difference between the mean raw volume of Actin bands in the Hsp90 Western blots in the pregnant and pseudopregnant treatment groups at the 5% level of significance.....	180

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

α	alpha
$\alpha=0.05$	statistics tests performed at the 5% level of significance
β	beta
-/-	homozygous mutant
-RT	minus reverse transcriptase control
A	untreated ovariectomized control sample
A ₂₆₀	Absorbance at 260nm
A ₂₈₀	Absorbance at 280nm
ACE	Associated Chemical Enterprises
AF	activation function
ANOVA	one-way analysis of variance
APS	ammonium persulfate
B	saline treated (vehicle control) sample
bp	base pairs
BSA	bovine serum albumin
C	oil treated (vehicle control) sample
C ₁	initial concentration
C ₂	final concentration
CC	clomiphene citrate
CCPPPE	treatment regime: 0.25mg clomiphene citrate on 1 st day followed by 5mg progesterone on the 2 nd and 3 rd days and then 5mg progesterone and 0.5 μ g 17 β estradiol on the 4 th day
cDNA	complementary deoxyribonucleic acid
conc	concentration
COX	cyclooxygenase
D	0.25mg CC treated sample (single treatment)
DAB	diaminobenzidine
DBD	DNA binding domain
DF	degrees of freedom
DF NUM	degrees of freedom of the numerator
DF DEN	degrees of freedom of the denominator
dH ₂ O	distilled water (autoclaved)

DNase	deoxyribonuclease
dNTPs	deoxynucleotide triphosphate mix
DTT	dithiothreitol
E	0.5µg 17β estradiol treated sample
E ₂	17β estradiol
EDTA	ethylenediamine tetraacetate
ELISA	enzyme linked immunosorbant assay
EP3 and EP4	prostaglandin E2 receptor subtypes
ER	estrogen receptor
ERα	estrogen receptor alpha
ERβ	estrogen receptor beta
ERE	estrogen response element
F	SOOO treated (vehicle control) sample
Fig.	Figure
FITC	fluorescein isothiocyanate
FSH	follicle stimulating hormone
G	5½ day pregnant sample
GE	glandular epithelium
GIFT	gamete intra-fallopian tube transfer
gl	glands
GnRH	gonadotropin-releasing hormone
GR	glucocorticoid receptor
GST	glutathione-S-transferase
H	PPPE (pseudopregnant) sample
H&E	Haematoxylin and Eosin stain
H12	helix 12 of the estrogen receptor structure
H ₂ O ₂	hydrogen peroxide
HeLa	uterine cervical adenocarcinoma
Hox	homeobox
Hsps	heat shock proteins
Hsp70	70kDa heat shock protein
Hsp90	90kDa heat shock protein
I	CCPPPE (CC treated pseudopregnant) sample

ICC	immunocytochemistry
IGF	insulin-like growth factor
ip	intraperitoneal
IVF	<i>in vitro</i> fertilization
kDa	kilo Daltons
LBD	ligand binding domain
LE	luminal epithelium
lu	lumen
M	molar
MCF7	breast carcinoma cell line
µg	microgram
mg	milligram
ml	millilitre
mRNA	messenger ribonucleic acid
MW	molecular weight marker
myo	myometrium
n	sample size (number of observations)
NegI	negative control in which the primary antibody is omitted
NegII	negative control in which the secondary antibody is omitted
ng	nanogram
N.H	Null Hypothesis
NTC	no template control
O	oil treatment
p<0.05	significantly different at the 5% level of significance
p>0.05	not significantly different at the 5% level of significance
P ₄	progesterone
PBS	phosphate buffered saline
PCR	polymerase chain reaction
PE	progesterone and 17β estradiol treatment
PPPE	treatment regime to induce pseudopregnancy: 5mg progesterone on 1 st 2 days followed by 5mg progesterone and 0.5µg 17β estradiol on the 3 rd day
PR	progesterone receptor

Prob	probability
RBC	red blood cells
RNase	ribonuclease
rpm	revolutions per minute
rRNA	ribosomal ribonucleic acid
RT-PCR	reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction
S	saline treatment
sc	subcutaneous
SDS	sodium dodecyl sulphate
SDS-PAGE	sodium dodecyl sulphate polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis
SEM	Standard Error of the Mean
SERM	selective estrogen receptor modulator
SOOO	treatment regime: saline on 1 st day; oil on the following 3 days
Std Dev	standard deviation
str	stroma
TAE	Tris acetate EDTA
TBE	Tris borate EDTA
TBS	Tris buffered saline pH8
TBS-Tween	Tris buffered saline with 0.05% Tween-20 [®]
TEMED	tetramethylethylenediamine
TGF- β	transforming growth factor beta
TM	melting temperature
UV	ultraviolet light
V ₁	initial volume
V ₂	final volume
VEGF	vascular endothelial growth factor