



João Peça

SHANKAstro

Astrocytes dysfunctions in Phelan-McDermid syndrome: from mechanisms towards new therapeutic strategies

Project Coordinator:

João Peça, Center for Neuroscience and Cell Biology, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal

Project Partners:



Paola Bezzi, Dept. of Basic Neuroscience, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland



Davide Ragozzino, European Center for Brain Research, Santa Lucia Foundation, Rome, Italy



Tobias Boeckers, Institute of Anatomy and Cell Biology, Ulm University, Ulm, Germany



Lutgarde Arckens, Center for Brain and Disease Research, VIB-KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium



Mutations in the SHANK3 gene are one of the most common diagnosed causes for autism. However, we still know surprisingly little about the consequences arising from mutations in this gene. Since their original discovery, SHANK3 mutations have most commonly been studied in neurons. However, recent evidence suggests that astrocytes, a largely overlooked brain cell, may also play a key role in the development of autism. Astrocytes provide critical metabolic and trophic support to neurons and have recently been found as key players in the formation and maturation of neuronal circuits. Therefore, astrocyte dysfunction, resulting from SHANK3 mutation, may lead to problems in neuronal circuit formation and maturation, which will ultimately lead to behavioral and cognitive abnormalities. Our consortium brings together several experts in the field of SHANK3 and astrocyte-biology, to tackle these questions using an array of innovative models that include genetically engineered mouse models, as well as human brain organoids capable of

closely mimicking human cellular physiology.

Understanding which brain cells are key players in autism, and how SHANK3 mutations impact normal function during disease pathophysiology will allow us to discover and design successful therapies for neurodevelopmental disorders.

