Molecular Basis for the Homophilic Activated Leukocyte Cell Adhesion Molecule (ALCAM)-ALCAM Interaction*


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Adhesion molecules play an important role in development, leukocyte function, and homeostasis in multicellular organisms, which are mainly governed by inter- and intracellular communication via cell-cell interactions. Alterations in cellular adhesion and communication can contribute to uncontrolled cell growth (1) and life-threatening syndromes like leukocyte adhesion deficiency (2). Activation of adhesion molecules generally involves both modulation of affinity and avidity. The affinity of adhesion molecules often reflects a specific conformation of the extracellular ligand-binding domain. Avidity modulation involves changes in the cell surface distribution of adhesion molecules (e.g. lateral oligomerization), which leads to clusters of molecules and thereby specifically increases the number of available receptors at the site of cell-cell interaction.

Activated leukocyte cell adhesion molecule (ALCAM/CD166) is a type I transmembrane protein and a member of the Ig superfamily. It has over 90% homology with the chicken adhesion molecule BEN/SC1/DM-GRASP (3–5), and it has 30% identity and 50% similarity with the human melanoma cell adhesion molecule Mel-CAM/MUC18/CD146 (6). Furthermore, ALCAM has 93% sequence identity with the candidate liver high density lipoprotein receptor HB2 (7). ALCAM is involved in various physiological processes including hematopoiesis (8, 9), thymus development (10), the immune response (11), neurite extension (12), neural cell migration (13), and osteogenesis (14).

ALCAM has a short cytoplasmic tail and its extracellular part comprises five Ig domains: two amino-terminal variable (V) type Ig domains followed by three constant (C) type Ig domains (V1V2C1C2C3). ALCAM was first identified as a CD6 (V) type Ig domains followed by three constant (C) type Ig domains (V1V2C1C2C3). ALCAM was first identified as a CD6 ligand (15), but it also mediates homophilic ALCAM-ALCAM interactions. While the heterophilic ALCAM-CD6 interaction is extensively studied and mapped (16–18), little is known about the molecular basis for the homophilic ALCAM-ALCAM interaction as observed in human melanoma (19, 20) and hematopoiesis (8, 9).

Previously, we have shown that homophilic ALCAM-mediated cell-cell adhesion is regulated through actin cytoskeleton-dependent clustering of ALCAM molecules at the cell surface and that this clustering is necessary to obtain stable adhesive interactions (21). In analogy with other members of the immunoglobulin superfamily like NCAM (22) and Ng-CAM/L1-CAM (23), it is likely that the formation of ALCAM cis-homo-oligomers at the cell surface is essential for strong ligand binding and homophilic interactions.

Here we describe a detailed molecular analysis of the homophilic ALCAM interaction and the construction of an amino-terminally deleted ALCAM molecule that inhibited wild-type ALCAM-mediated aggregation in a dose-dependent manner. These combined data lead us to propose a model for homophilic ALCAM-mediated cell adhesion.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Cell Lines—The adherent human melanoma cell lines BLM and 530 (24) were grown as monolayers in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium as described before (19). The erythroleukemia cell line K562 growing in suspension and ALCAM-transfected K562 cells were cultured as described previously (21). Regular tests confirmed that cell lines were free of mycoplasma contamination.

Monoclonal Anti-ALCAM Antibodies—Anti-ALCAM antibody J4-81 (MA250020, IgG1) was purchased from Antigenix America Inc. (Franklin Square, NY). Monoclonal anti-ALCAM antibody AZN-L50 (IgG2a)

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1 The abbreviations used are: ALCAM, activated leukocyte cell adhesion molecule; FITC, fluorescein isothiocyanate; mAb, monoclonal antibody; NCAM, neural cell adhesion molecule.
was generated by immunization of BALB/c mice with K562-ALCAM cells. Four consecutive days before fusion, mice were boosted intravenously. The spleen was isolated, and spleen cells were fused with SP2/0 cells using standard technology. Supernatants of growing hybridomas were tested in a cell enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay using K562-ALCAM cells and K562 cells as a positive and negative control, respectively. Positive hybridomas were recloned several times to obtain true monoclonal hybridomas. The hybridoma AZN-L50 was selected for its strong and specific binding to ALCAM and its ability to inhibit the homophilic ALCAM-ALCAM interaction.

**Plate Adhesion Assay—**ALCAM-Fc recombinant protein consisting of the transmembrane domains of ALCAM fused to the human IgG1 Fc domain was produced and purified as described earlier (21). Adhesion of cells to immobilized ALCAM-Fc was tested as described before (21). Briefly, flat bottom microtiter 96 wells plates (NUNC, Roskilde, Denmark) were coated with 4 μg/ml goat anti-human-Fc(ab')2, in TSM (20 mM Tris, 150 mM NaCl, 1 mM CaCl2, 1 mM MgCl2, pH 8.0) for 1 h. Plates were blocked with 1% (w/v) bovine serum albumin in TSM and subsequently coated with 250 ng/ml ALCAM-Fc for 1 h. Cells (2 × 10^4 cells/well) were labeled with Calcein-AM (Molecular Probes, Inc., Eugene, OR) and preincubated with monoclonal anti-ALCAM antibody J4-81 (5 μg/ml) and/or AZN-L50 (10 μg/ml) for 5–10 min at room temperature. Cells were allowed to adhere in triplicate wells of the coated plates for 20 min (530 cells) or 45 min (KG1, K562-ALCAM) in culture medium at the indicated temperatures. Nonadherent cells were removed by washing the wells five times with TSM plus 0.5% bovine serum albumin at 37 °C. Cells were lysed with lysis buffer (50 mM Tris, 0.1% SDS), and fluorescence was quantified in a cytofluorometer (Per-Septive Biosystems). Adhesion was expressed as the percentage (mean ± S.D.) bound cells of the total cells allowed to adhere in triplicate wells.

**Soluble ALCAM-Fc Binding Assay—**For soluble ALCAM-Fc binding, the indicated concentrations of ALCAM-Fc were added to 5 × 10^4 cells in culture medium in V-bottom wells in a final volume of 50 μl. After an incubation of 30 min at 37 °C, cells were washed once with prewarmed (37 °C) medium and subsequently incubated with a fluorescein isothiocyanate (FITC)-conjugated secondary goat anti-human Fc antibody (Cappel Inc., West Chester, PA) in medium for 15 min at 37 °C. After washing with prewarmed medium, cells were analyzed on a FACS-Scan (Becton Dickinson, Mountain View, CA). The mean fluorescence intensity is a measure for the amount of ALCAM-Fc molecules bound to the cells. The percentage of cells that have bound ligand was determined.

**Construction of Amino-terminally Truncated ALCAM Mutants—**Amino-terminally truncated ALCAM mutants were generated using the polymerase chain reaction and carefully chosen restriction sites in pWD201 (2.1-kilobase pair ALCAM cDNA coding for the leader sequence, the two V-type and three C-type Ig domains, the transmembrane domain, and the short cytoplasmic tail) (V1, V2, C1, C2, C3) in pZip-neo-OX-1 containing the neomycin resistance gene (19)). A schematic representation is shown in Fig. 1. The ALCAM leader sequence was amplified using a 5' Rev/T3 primer (5'-ATT ACG CCA AGC TCG-3') and a 3' primer (5'-ATT ACG CCA AGC TCG-3') extending with a suitable restriction site. For the generation of pWD277 (V1+C2+C3 construct), the Rev/T3 and P9-PstI (5'-AG CAT GCC AGA AGG TAT GAT AAT GGT ATC TCC ATA T-3') primer pair was used to amplify the leader sequence. The amplified fragment was subsequently cloned in SstI/PstI-linearized pWD201. For the generation of pWD275 (C1+C2+C3 construct), the leader was amplified using the Rev/T3 and P8-BalI (5'-CTG GCC AGA AGG TAT GAT AAT GGT ATC TCC ATA T-3') primer pair and cloned in SacI/BalI-linearized pWD201. Finally, pWD278 (C2+C3 construct) was generated using the Rev/T3 and P7-NheI (5'-GCT AGC AGA TAT TGT GCA AGG TAT GAT AAT GGT ATC TCC ATA T-3') primer pair. Thereafter, the fragment was cloned in SstI/NheI-linearized pWD201. The sequences of all constructs were verified.

**Immunofluorescence—**Immunofluorescence was performed on methanol/aceton fixed monolayers of cells grown on a glass surface as described previously (19). Affinity-purified mouse monoclonal antibodies were used at 4 μg/ml in phosphate-buffered saline.

**Western Blotting—**Cells (7 × 10^6) were lysed for 30 min on ice in 1 ml of lysis buffer (25 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5, 1% Nonidet P-40, 100 mM KCl, 10 mM MgCl2, 0.25 mM dithioerythritol, 1 mM phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride, 1 mM benzamidine, 2 mM Na3VO4, 10 μg/ml leupeptin, 10 μg/ml aprotinin). Nuclei and the Nonidet P-40 insoluble fraction were spun down at maximum speed in an Eppendorf centrifuge. Supernatants were stored at −80 °C.

Protein concentration was determined using the Bio-Rad protein assay and reagents according to the supplier’s instructions. Equal amounts of protein were subjected to 6.5% SDS-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis and subsequently transferred to Hybond-C pure membrane (Amersham Pharmacia Biotech). Membranes were blocked for 1 h at room temperature in Tris-buffered saline containing 0.05% Tween 20 (TBS-T) and 5% (w/v) low fat milk powder. After washing the membranes three times with TBS-T, the blots were incubated with AZN-L50 (5 μg/ml in TBS-T supplemented with 3% (w/v) low fat milk powder) for...
2 h at room temperature. Following three washes with TBS-T at room temperature, the membranes were incubated with horseradish peroxidase-conjugated rabbit anti-mouse IgG (1:2000, Dako, Glostrup, Denmark) in TBS-T plus 5% milk powder for 1 h at room temperature. After three washes with TBS-T, proteins were visualized via the enhanced chemiluminescent reaction (Amersham Pharmacia Biotech).

RESULTS

Monoclonal Anti-ALCAM Antibodies Have Differential Effects on ALCAM-mediated Cell Aggregation and Adhesion—To elucidate the molecular mechanism underlying the homophilic ALCAM-ALCAM interaction, the availability of function-blocking monoclonal antibodies (mAbs) is virtually indispensable. The ALCAM-antibody J4-81 has previously been described to block heterophilic ALCAM-CD6 interactions (25). In contrast to these findings, we observed that the addition of mAb J4-81 markedly increased homotypic cell clustering of ALCAM-positive KG1 cells significantly upon treatment with mAb J4-81. This J4-81-induced cell aggregation was completely inhibited with mAb AZN-L50. Ectopic expression of ALCAM in erythroleukemic K562 cells (K562-ALCAM) resulted in the occurrence of large ALCAM-mediated cell clusters in suspension that were not observed in the parental K562 cells. While the addition of mAb J4-81 could not further enhance cell clustering of K562-ALCAM cells, mAb AZN-L50 completely blocked the spontaneous ALCAM-dependent cell clustering of these cells (Fig. 2A). Neither of the antibodies had any effect on the ALCAM-negative parental K562 cells (Fig. 2A).

Using human melanoma 530 cells, similar activating and inhibiting effects of the monoclonal antibodies on ALCAM-mediated aggregation were observed in an aggregation assay analyzed by flow cytometry. While parental 530 cells do not express ALCAM and do not aggregate, aggregation of these cells is induced by ectopic expression of ALCAM (530/V5/V9/C1/C2/C3) (19), and this clustering was further increased by 35% using mAb J4-81, whereas mAb AZN-L50 inhibited the ALCAM-mediated aggregation by 25% as compared with the untreated control (530/ALCAM) (Fig. 2B). Neither of the antibodies had any effect on the ALCAM-negative vector control 530 cells that did not aggregate (Fig. 2B). A similar pattern of
activation and blocking of adhesion by these mAbs was observed when using the human melanoma cell line BLM expressing endogenous ALCAM (not shown).

In addition to cell-cell aggregation assays, we analyzed the effect of mAbs J4–81 and AZN-L50 on ALCAM-mediated stable cell adhesion to immobilized recombinant ALCAM-Fc. KG1 cells were allowed to adhere to an ALCAM-Fc-coated surface in the presence or absence of ALCAM mAbs J4–81 and AZN-L50. No ALCAM-mediated adhesion was observed in the absence of mAbs. The addition of mAb J4–81 induced adhesion of KG1 to immobilized ALCAM-Fc, which in turn was efficiently inhibited by the addition of the function blocking mAb AZN-L50 at physiological temperatures (Fig. 2C). To exclude the possibility that mAb J4–81 enhanced cellular aggregation and adhesion via cross-linking of two ALCAM molecules on opposing cells (or immobilized ALCAM-Fc), adhesion of KG1 to immobilized ALCAM-Fc was performed at lower, nonphysiological temperatures (Fig. 2C). The strong induction of ALCAM-mediated adhesion of KG1 cells by mAb J4–81 was temperature-dependent as the observed adhesion was reduced when cell adhesion was performed at room temperature or at 4°C. Furthermore, the adhesion of KG1 cells induced by mAb J4–81 is efficiently blocked with mAb AZN-L50 (Fig. 2C). Similar results were obtained with K562-ALCAM cells (not shown). Thus, a pair of monoclonal antibodies was characterized that either activated (J4–81) or blocked (AZN-L50) the homophilic ALCAM-ALCAM interaction.

**Domain Mapping of mAbs J4–81 and AZN-L50 to Specific Ig Domains of ALCAM**—The results of these functional studies with mAbs are more informative when the respective antibody epitopes are known. To identify the Ig domains that are involved in the homophilic ALCAM-mediated interactions, domain mapping was performed for mAbs J4–81 and AZN-L50. A series of progressively amino-terminally truncated ALCAM mutants was generated and expressed in the ALCAM-negative human melanoma cell line 530. The extracellular part of wild-type ALCAM consists of two amino-terminal V-type domains and three membrane-proximal C-type domains (i.e. V1V2C1C2C3). Immunofluorescence analysis was performed with the anti-ALCAM antibodies on the transfected cells to identify the domains required for antibody recognition (Table I). mAb J4–81 only recognized wild-type ALCAM, while mAb AZN-L50 recognized all available ALCAM constructs. Thus, the epitope for anti-ALCAM mAb J4–81 is mapped to domain V1, whereas that for AZN-L50 is located in the C2C3 module of ALCAM.

**The Amino-terminal Ig Domain V1 of ALCAM Is Required for Ligand Binding and Homophilic Cell-Cell Interactions**—The adhesion, aggregation, and antibody mapping data obtained from experiments using mAbs AZN-L50 and J4–81 (Fig. 2 and Table I) suggest that the membrane-proximal domains C2C3 and the amino-terminal domain V1 are directly involved in homophilic ALCAM-ALCAM interactions. To further explore the role of domain V1 in ALCAM-mediated aggregation, the series of amino-terminally truncated ALCAM mutants expressed in the ALCAM-negative human melanoma cell line 530 were subjected to flow cytometry to determine the cell surface expression of the truncated ALCAM molecules, using mAb AZN-L50 that recognizes the membrane-proximal domains C2C3 of ALCAM (Fig. 3A). The ALCAM mutant lacking domains V1V2C1C2 did not localize at the cell surface; therefore, this mutant was not included in the subsequent aggregation assay. Deletion of domain V1 reduced the aggregation capacity to the background levels observed in the control 530 cells transfected with empty vector (Fig. 3B). In addition, the cell lines expressing truncated ALCAM did not aggregate with cells expressing wild-type ALCAM (not shown). From these findings, we conclude that domain V1 is essential in mediating homophilic ALCAM interactions.

**Binding of soluble ALCAM-Fc by ALCAM-expressing cells is a sensitive assay to assess the ALCAM ligand binding capacity, i.e. the affinity.** The ligand binding capacity of the amino-terminally truncated ALCAM molecules was compared with that of wild-type ALCAM. In line with the results of the cell aggregation assays, this assay also revealed that deletion of the amino-terminal domain V1 from the cell surface-expressed ALCAM (V1V2C1C2C3) completely abolished binding of soluble ALCAM-Fc as compared with 530 melanoma cells ectopically expressing wild-type ALCAM (V1V2C1C2C3) (Fig. 3C).

**Immunofluorescence-based epitope mapping of two monoclonal anti-ALCAM antibodies**

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<tr>
<th>Anti-ALCAM antibody</th>
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**Table I**

Involvement of the Membrane-proximal Domains C2C3 of ALCAM in Homophilic Cell-Cell Interactions—In addition to the involvement of domain V1 in ALCAM-mediated aggregation and adhesion, the specific inhibition of homophilic ALCAM interactions by mAb AZN-L50 suggests that the membrane-proximal domains C2C3 might be equally important in the formation of stable cell-cell interactions. Previously, it was
shown that increased clustering of ALCAM molecules at the cell membrane enhanced avidity, which was required for stable ALCAM-mediated adhesion (21). To explore the effects of partly deleting the ligand binding domain in these ALCAM complexes on ALCAM-mediated cell aggregation, amino-terminally truncated ALCAM (C1C2C3DN-ALCAM) was introduced into BLM melanoma cells expressing wild-type ALCAM by stable transfection. Three independently isolated transfected cell clones (BLM/ΔN-ALCAM-1, BLM/ΔN-ALCAM-2, and BLM/ΔN-ALCAM-3) with different ΔN-ALCAM expression levels were selected for further analysis. Overexpression of ΔN-ALCAM led to a decreased aggregation capacity of the BLM cells in a dose-dependent manner (Fig. 5, A and B), despite unaltered expression levels of wild-type ALCAM molecules (Fig. 5A). Therefore, elimination of domains V1V2 of ALCAM generates a dominant negative ALCAM molecule with respect to ALCAM-mediated homophilic cell aggregation when introduced in cells expressing wild-type ALCAM. To analyze whether the introduction of ΔN-ALCAM influenced the ligand binding affinity of wild-type ALCAM, the soluble ligand binding capacity of wild-type ALCAM-expressing BLM cells co-expressing ΔN-ALCAM was compared with parental BLM cells. The BLM cell lines expressing ΔN-ALCAM did not show a reduction in their capacity to bind soluble ALCAM-Fc compared with the parental ALCAM-expressing BLM cells.
pared with the control BLM cells transfected with the empty expression vector (BLM) (Fig. 5C). Control cells (BLM) and cells transfected with truncated ALCAM (BLM/DN-ALCAM) displayed similar apparent half-maximal ligand-binding values (1.6 and 1.3 \( \mu g/ml \), respectively). This strongly indicates that the decreased aggregation capacity of the DN-ALCAM-expressing cells is due to a decrease in wild-type ALCAM avidity rather than a decrease in the ligand binding capacity.

**DISCUSSION**

Heterophilic interactions between ALCAM and CD6 have been extensively studied and mapped (18, 26). In contrast, the molecular basis for homophilic ALCAM-ALCAM interactions has remained largely elusive. Functional homophilic ALCAM-mediated adhesion was demonstrated for melanoma cells (19) and hematopoietic cells (8). Recently, we have shown that ALCAM-mediated homophilic adhesion is dynamically regulated through the actin cytoskeleton (21). However, the involvement of specific domains in ALCAM-ALCAM-mediated adhesion had not been addressed yet.

Here we have shown that wild-type ALCAM \((V_1V_2C_1C_2C_3)\) is bimodular, consisting of a distinct ligand binding module comprising the membrane-distal domain \(V_1\) and an oligomerization module comprising the membrane-proximal C-type domains \(C_2C_3\). Both modules are required for stable cell adhesion and aggregation. We propose a molecular model that accounts for the observed properties of homophilic ALCAM interactions (Fig. 6).

Using a series of progressively amino-terminally truncated ALCAM mutants, we found that the amino-terminal domain \(V_1\) is critically involved in the homophilic interaction. Deletion of domain \(V_1\) not only disrupted the homophilic ALCAM-mediated cell-cell interaction but also completely prevented binding of soluble wild-type ALCAM-Fc. These observations indicated that a direct and exclusive interaction between two opposing domains \(V_1\) is crucial for homophilic ALCAM-mediated adhesion. If multiple Ig domains were directly involved in the homophilic ALCAM interaction, cells expressing an ALCAM construct that solely lacks domain \(V_1\) would be expected to display

**Fig. 4.** Aggregation blocking mAb AZN-L50 slightly reduced the soluble ALCAM-Fc ligand-binding capacity of K562-ALCAM cells. Cells (K562-ALCAM) were incubated with soluble ALCAM-Fc in the presence or absence of the aggregation-blocking mAb AZN-L50 (10 \( \mu g/ml \)). The percentage of cells that have bound ALCAM-Fc was determined by flow cytometry using a FITC-conjugated anti-human-Fc antibody. mAb AZN-L50 modestly increased the half-maximum ligand-binding capacity from 1.5 to 3.5 \( \mu g/ml \), indicative of a marginally reduced ligand binding capacity.

**Fig. 5.** DN-ALCAM \((C_1C_2C_3)\), expressed in the wild-type ALCAM-expressing cell line BLM, reduced cell aggregation in a dose-dependent fashion without affecting soluble ligand binding affinity. Cell clones overexpressing amino-terminally truncated ALCAM (DN-ALCAM) were generated from the parental cell line BLM with endogenous ALCAM expression by stable transfection. Three independently isolated cell clones (BLM/DN-ALCAM-1, -2, and -3) expressing different levels of DN-ALCAM were selected for further analysis. A, expression levels of the truncated molecule were determined by Western blotting using mAb AZN-L50 (3 \( \mu g/ml \)) that recognizes the membrane-proximal Ig domains \(C_2C_3\). The three established cell lines showed different expression levels of the truncated ALCAM molecule, while expression of the wild-type ALCAM molecule remained unaltered. B, the established cell lines expressing truncated ALCAM (BLM/DN-ALCAM -1, -2, and -3) were subjected to an in vitro aggregation assay and analyzed by two-color flow cytometry. Expression of truncated ALCAM reduced the aggregation capacity of these cells as compared with the vector control cell line (BLM/CTRL) in a dose-dependent manner, and thus truncated ALCAM \((C_1C_2C_3)\) functions as a dominant negative molecule with respect to wild-type ALCAM mediated aggregation. C, cells (BLM, BLM/DN-ALCAM-1, -2, and -3) were incubated with soluble ALCAM-Fc. The percentage of cells that have bound ALCAM-Fc was determined by flow cytometry using a FITC-conjugated anti-human-Fc antibody. Ectopic DN-ALCAM expression in BLM cells with wild-type ALCAM did not affect the capacity to bind soluble ALCAM-Fc ligand, demonstrating that ectopic expression of DN-ALCAM does not change the affinity of endogenously expressed ALCAM for soluble ALCAM-Fc.
a residual capacity to aggregate with cells expressing wild-type ALCAM. Moreover, truncated ALCAM-expressing cells would be expected to bind soluble wild-type ALCAM, albeit at lower affinity, if additional domains were involved in ligand binding. However, both cell-cell aggregation and soluble ligand binding were completely abolished upon deletion of the amino-terminal domain V1. Furthermore, mAb AZN-L50, which maps to the membrane-proximal domains C2C3, only slightly decreased the soluble ligand binding affinity, whereas it completely inhibited aggregation of these cells in suspension at the same concentration (10 μg/ml). It is therefore unlikely that the slight decrease in soluble ligand binding (i.e. increase in half-maximal ligand-binding value from 1.5 to 3.5 μg/ml in the presence of AZN-L50) accounted for the total inhibition of ALCAM-mediated cellular aggregation via AZN-L50. Thus, these data indicate that ligand binding in itself is independent of the C-type Ig domains and that homophilic ALCAM-ALCAM trans-interactions are exclusively mediated by binding of opposing amino-terminal V1 domains.

mAb J4-81, which specifically recognizes domain V1, enhanced homophilic ALCAM-mediated cell adhesion and aggregation, possibly by inducing a conformational change that promotes ligand binding. KG1 cells with abundant ALCAM cell surface expression were only able to form homotypic cell clusters after activation by mAb J4-81. In contrast, spontaneous cell clustering of K562 cells with ectopic ALCAM expression could not be further enhanced by J4-81 treatment. These findings suggest differential activation of ALCAM in these two cell lines. We could exclude the possibility that mAb J4-81-enhanced aggregation and adhesion to immobilized ALCAM-Fc is caused by cross-linking ALCAM molecules of opposing cells, because the stimulatory effect of mAb J4-81 was temperature-dependent and efficiently inhibited by the blocking anti-ALCAM mAb AZN-L50. The observed enhancement of homophilic ALCAM-mediated adhesion and aggregation by mAb J4-81 is in contrast with the inhibitory effect of this antibody on the heterophilic ALCAM-CD6 interaction (25). This indicates that different mechanisms are regulating the homophilic and heterophilic ALCAM ligand binding interactions.

The inhibitory effect of AZN-L50, which is mapped to the membrane-proximal domains C2C3, indicated that these domains are also essential for the homophilic ALCAM-mediated interaction. In analogy with other Ig superfamily molecules like IgG, major histocompatibility complex class II, NCAM (27), and Ng-CAM/L1-CAM (23), these C-type Ig domains are probably involved in the formation of cis-homo-oligomers at the cell surface via lateral oligomerization. Aruffo and co-workers (28) have speculated that ALCAM oligomerization might be essential for the heterophilic ALCAM-CD6 interaction. Recently, we have shown that homophilic ALCAM-mediated cell adhesion is regulated through actin cytoskeleton-dependent clustering of ALCAM molecules at the cell surface. The resulting increased avidity of ALCAM clusters is essential to obtain stable adhesive interactions (21). Here we show that expression of ΔN-ALCAM, which lacks the ligand binding domain, in the wild-type ALCAM-expressing BLM cells reduced cell aggregation but not soluble ligand binding. This indicates that ΔN-ALCAM expression changes wild-type ALCAM avidity rather than affinity, suggesting a direct interaction of ΔN-ALCAM with wild-type ALCAM without disturbing soluble ligand binding. In the model proposed in Fig. 6A, ALCAM monomers form lateral oligomers via their membrane-proximal C-type domains, whereas the amino-terminal domain V1 mediates the actual ligand binding. Triggering of lateral oligomerization might be a ligand-induced event, which possibly occurs through a conformational change of ALCAM. This concept is supported by previous findings that in response to ligand binding, the linkage of ALCAM to the actin cytoskeleton is strengthened (21), which can stabilize oligomers at the cell surface. Similar to ligand-induced clustering, mAb J4-81 might induce a conformational change that triggers oligomerization.

Since the epitope for ALCAM-blocking mAb AZN-L50 is localized in domains C2C3, it is tempting to speculate that the inhibitory effect of this mAb is a result of prohibited lateral

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**FIG. 6. Model for the oligomeric homophilic ALCAM-ALCAM interaction.** A, the membrane-proximal C-type Ig domains are involved in lateral oligomerization of ALCAM, which is inhibited with the anti-C2C3 mAb AZN-L50, while the NH2-terminal domain V1 mediates the actual homophilic interaction. Deletion of domain V1 resulted in a molecule that cannot bind soluble ALCAM and, therefore, has lost the ability to mediate cell aggregation. For reasons of simplicity, the formation of a dimer is shown, but the actual mechanism could involve the formation of higher oligomers of multiple ALCAM molecules, creating a two-dimensional lattice. B, a model for the dominant negative effect of truncated ALCAM. Overexpression of C2C3 ALCAM in cells already expressing wild type ALCAM results in the formation of hetero-oligomers of wild-type and truncated ALCAM molecules and subsequently interferes in the tight ALCAM network formation because only isolated ligand binding domains V1 are exposed instead of oligomers. Expression of the truncated molecule will reduce but not completely inhibit the ALCAM-mediated aggregation via the Ig domain V1, because ligand-binding modules are still provided by the endogenously expressed wild-type ALCAM.
oligomerization of ALCAM molecules by steric hindrance. This notion is supported by the observation that mAb AZN-L50 does not affect soluble ligand binding (Fig. 4) and therefore only modulates ALCAM avidity. Although inhibition of cell aggregation via ΔN-ALCAM was dependent on its expression level, aggregation could not completely be reduced to background levels. This residual cell-cell aggregation capacity is consistent with the proposed model because some homophilic ALCAM-mediated cell-cell interactions are maintained (Fig. 6B).

In conclusion, we have demonstrated that ALCAM-mediated homophilic interactions most likely require lateral homooligomerization through the membrane-proximal C-type Ig domains, while the membrane-distal Ig domain V1 is exclusively involved in ligand binding. Coordinate oligomerization and ligand binding leads to the formation of a tight, bilayered ALCAM network, enabling stable adhesive interactions.

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