RAPID COMMUNICATION

A COL4A3 gene mutation and post-transplant anti-α3(IV) collagen alloantibodies in Alport syndrome


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A COL4A3 gene mutation and post-transplant anti-α3(IV) collagen alloantibodies in Alport syndrome. The X-linked Alport syndrome is associated with mutations and deletions in COL4A5 gene, one of six genes which constitute the α-chains of type IV collagen in basement membranes. The autosomal recessive form of Alport syndrome is characterized by mutations and deletions in the COL4A3 and COL4A4 genes. A fraction of Alport patients who undergo renal transplantation develop anti-glomerular basement membrane (GBM) nephritis, which results in loss of the renal allograft function. Recently, the target for alloantibodies from an X-linked Alport patient with complete COL4A5 gene deletion was determined to be the α3 chain of type IV collagen. The present study characterized the post-transplant alloantibodies from an autosomal recessive Alport patient with anti-GBM glomerulonephritis and a COL4A3 gene mutation which predicted a loss of 85% of the α3(IV) NC1 domain. The specificities of these new antibodies were studied using glomerular basement membrane constituents and recombinant type IV collagen domains. The results establish the target for the alloantibodies from an autosomal recessive Alport patient with COL4A3 deletion as principally the α3(IV) collagen chain, similar to the post-transplant alloantibodies from X-linked Alport patients with COL4A5 gene deletions. The absence of α3(IV) chain in the GBM of patients with both these forms of Alport syndrome, due either to a failure of synthesis or a failure of assembly, presumably leads to a loss of immunologic tolerance for the α3(IV) NC1 domain in transplanted allografts.

Alport syndrome is a progressive hereditary kidney disease characterized by hematuria, sensorineural hearing loss, and ocular lesions with structural defects in GBM [1-3]. The disease is primarily X chromosome-linked, but autosomal forms of inheritance are also known [4]. The X-linked syndrome is associated with mutations and deletions in COL4A5 gene, which encodes the α5(IV) chain, one of six genetically distinct type IV collagen gene products [3, 5-7]. The rare autosomal forms of Alport syndrome are associated with recessive mutations in the COL4A3 and COL4A4 genes which encode the α3(IV) and α4(IV) chains, respectively [8, 9].

Anti-GBM disease appears in 5 to 10% of Alport patients who receive a kidney transplant following the development of renal failure. In the recent years, insight into the structural nature of the defect in Alport GBM has been determined by establishing the target of anti-GBM alloantibodies produced by these patients [10-14]. Alloantibodies from seven post-transplant Alport patients, for example, were found reactive to the NC1 domain of type IV collagen [9-14]. Three of these antisera, under closer scrutiny, did not bind to Alport GBM and were found reactive to the α3(IV) chain [11]. Recently, post-transplant anti-GBM alloantibodies harvested from a X-linked Alport patient with complete COL4A5 gene deletion was characterized [15]. These alloantibodies were also specifically targeted to the α3(IV) chain [15]. This study suggested a pivotal role for the α3(IV) chain in the secretion or assembly of type IV collagen co-expressing the α3(IV) moiety.

The present study characterizes the target antigen for the post-transplant alloantibodies from an autosomal recessive Alport patient with COL4A3 gene deletion.

Methods

Patient history

The case history of family VB is described elsewhere [8, 9]. The affected female had hematuria from age 4, and typical ultrastructural lesions of Alport syndrome on electron microscopy of a renal biopsy and sensorineural deafness. Renal function deteriorated gradually until hemodialysis was started at age 9. She received a renal allograft at age 10 and developed anti-GBM nephritis six months later. Her brother has hematuria, deafness, and deteriorating renal function. The parents have no hematuria, proteinuria or deafness. There is no known consanguinity, but the parents and their known ancestors originate from the same small village in the Netherlands. The affected female in family VB has a deletion of last 198 amino acids of the α3(IV) chain. This was predicted to result in a chain termination after 33 amino acids of the NC1 domain.

GBM antigens and analytic assays

The preparation of the GBM constituents, fibronectin, laminin, heparan sulfate proteoglycan, entactin, 7 S domain of type IV collagen, pepsin solubilized triple helical fragments of type IV collagen and NC1 domains of type IV collagen α-chains was described previously [16]. Recombinant human type IV collagen α-chains (α1-α5) were expressed in E. coli and purified as before [17].
SDS-PAGE in one and two dimensions was carried out with 10 to 20% linear gradient gels and the discontinuous buffer system of Laemmli [18]. Electrophoresis in the first dimension of the two-dimensional electrophoresis was performed according to Langeveld et al [19]. Electrophoresis in the second dimension was performed according to Timoneda et al [20].

Immunofluorescence [11]. Western blotting [16, 21], and direct enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays (ELISA) were performed as previously described for this laboratory [22]. Inhibition ELISA was performed as previously described [23]. The dilutions for the α-chain specific antibodies were 1:50, a saturating antibody concentration for the binding of the bovine NC1 hexamer. The anti-α1(IV) to α5(IV) chain specific antibodies have been previously described [16]. The α6(IV) chain specific antibody was made recently to a conserved 12 amino acid peptide of the NC1 domain. (R. Kalluri, J. Zhou, and B.G. Hudson, unpublished data).

Results

Localization of anti-GBM alloantibodies in renal tissues

Circulating post-transplant anti-GBM alloantibodies from the Alport patient was evaluated for its capacity to bind the GBM of the Alport kidney of the same patient by indirect immunofluorescence. The alloantibodies did not bind to the Alport GBM, suggesting a lack of the certain GBM antigen(s) which are otherwise present in the transplanted kidney (Fig. 1A). The transplanted kidney showed endogenous IgG binding to the GBM and TBM, and the alloantibody binding was further enhanced.
The alloantibodies from the affected patient were analyzed by inhibition ELISA using bovine NCI hexamer as the antigen. The NCI hexamer was allowed to bind with one of the six α-chains of type IV collagen (α1, α2, α3, α4, α5, and α6) at the NCI hexamer level, the alloantibodies bound strongly to the 54 kDa dimers, a 28 kDa monomer, and very faintly to a 26 kDa monomer (data not shown), as visualized by one dimensional immunoblotting. To further evaluate this binding in terms of type IV collagen α-chains, we performed two-dimensional gel electrophoresis and immunoblotting using bovine NCI hexamer. The bovine NCI hexamer was used since all the spots originating from the six α-chains have been identified based on their pI and molecular weight by two-dimensional gel electrophoresis (Identification of α1-α5 spots was previously reported by Gunwar et al [16]). The monomeric and dimeric spots originating from the α6(IV) was recently identified. R. Kalluri, J. Zhou, and B.G. Hudson, unpublished data.) The alloantibodies reacted specifically to the α3(IV) NCI dimers and monomers, identical to the spots that bind to anti-α3(IV) chain specific antibodies as previously described [16] (Fig. 3). No reactivity was found with the α1(IV), α2(IV), α4(IV), α5(IV) and α6(IV) NCI dimers and monomers. Additionally, the alloantibodies did not react to the α1 + α2(IV) NCI dimers and monomers, as evaluated by one dimensional immunoblotting (data not shown). These results establish the target for the alloantibodies as the α3(IV) chain of bovine type IV collagen.

**Inhibition ELISA**

Type IV collagen α-chain specific antibodies were used to perform inhibition ELISA using bovine NCI hexamer as the antigen. The NCI hexamer was allowed to bind with one of the six α-chain specific antibodies and subsequently followed with the Alport alloantibodies. The anti-α3(IV) chain specific antibodies inhibited the alloantibodies binding (Figs. 4 A and B). All the other antibodies did not inhibit the alloantibodies binding to the NCI hexamer. These results establish the alloantibodies as anti-α3(IV)NCI antibodies.

**Specificity of the alloantibodies to the recombinant human type IV collagen NCI domains**

The alloantibodies were further analyzed for their capacity to bind recombinant human type IV collagen NCI domains (α1 to α5). The alloantibodies reacted very strongly to the recombinant α3(IV) NCI (Fig. 5) and to a very minor degree with the recombinant α5(IV)NCI domain (1:200 dilution of alloantisera, lost at 1:500). The weak reactivity with the α5(IV)NCI may be a cross-reactivity phenomenon, due to the high homology between the NCI domains [24]. Alternatively, the weak binding may be specific reactivity only observed with human α5(IV)NCI sequence; repeating the gel with half the amount of target NCI domains eliminated evidence of weak binding while preserving the strong reactivity to α3. These results establish the principal target for post-transplant anti-GBM nephritis in an Alport patient with COL4A3 gene deletion as the α3 chain of type IV collagen.

**Discussion**

In several previous studies, the target for X-linked Alport alloantibodies was identified as the NCI domain of type IV collagen [10-14]. Hudson et al have shown the target for three post-transplant alloantibodies as the α3(IV) chain [11]. Kleppel et al implicated the α5(IV) chain as a target for alloantibodies in their patients [25, 26]. Their assumption of α5 chain reactivity was
based on two lines of evidence; the alloantibodies reacted to a 26 kDa band in the immunoblotting studies with NC1 hexamer [25], and a monoclonal antibody which binds a 26 kDa band in NC1 hexamer [25] and also binds to the human recombinant α5(IV) NC1 domain [27]. Although these studies implicate α3(IV) and α5(IV) chain as the target for X-linked Alport alloantibodies, the nature of mutation(s) leading to a particular genetic defect in these patients was not available. Since our previous study with alloantibodies from an X-linked Alport patient with COL4A5 gene deletion revealed anti-α3(IV) antibodies [15], we addressed the specificity of Alport alloantibodies from an autosomal recessive Alport patient with COL4A3 gene deletion.

**Fig. 3. Identification of the bovine NC1 domains that bind the Alport alloantibodies.** Bovine NC1 hexamer was prepared as previously described [16]. The two dimensional electrophoresis and immunoblotting was used to analyze the binding NC1 hexamer with Alport alloantibodies. The spots that reacted with the alloantibodies are 16, 17, 18, 20, 22 and 23. All these spots have been previously identified by chain specific antibodies and N-terminal amino acid sequencing (identical spots analyzed from the α3(IV)NC1 dimer pool) as the α3(IV) dimers and monomers [16]. The dimers and monomers of NC1 domain are shown as D and M, respectively. The molecular weight of dimers (D) and monomers (M) was around 54 kDa and 28 kDa, respectively. The pl range (6 to 8) is shown at the bottom. This figure can be compared with the reactive spots seen in the Fig. 3, panels F, G and H in the manuscript by Gunwar et al [16].

**Fig. 4. Inhibition ELISA with type IV collagen α-chain specific antibodies.** A. A dilution curve of Alport alloantibodies binding to the NC1 hexamer as analyzed by direct ELISA. B. The plates were coated with 200 ng of NC1 hexamer after boiling for 10 minutes in the presence of 6 M guanidine HCl, 50 mM tris-CI pH 7.5. The NC1 hexamer was allowed to bind to one of the six different α-chain specific antibodies (Lα1 + α2; (■) α3; (○) α4; (□) α5; (▲) α6), upon which the NC1 hexamer was allowed to bind with Alport alloantibodies. The binding of the Alport alloantibodies was significantly inhibited by anti-α3(IV) antibodies.
CONCLUSION OF THE COHOMIC COLIP EXPERIMENT

In most affected individuals, the (L) domain is expressed in normal kidney (L) domain in normal kidney. In this instance, the expression levels of the (L) domain are increased in affected individuals who have appropriate immune response by the (L) domain. These results suggest that the (L) domain is expressed in normal kidney in some cases, leading to the development of a new type of kidney disease. An increased expression of the (L) domain in normal kidney could be a potential therapeutic target for kidney disease.

References

[1] ELISA and other in vitro assays. The ELISA data confirm the presence of the (L) domain in normal kidney. In affected individuals, the expression levels of the (L) domain are increased in normal kidney, suggesting a potential role for the (L) domain in kidney disease. Further studies are needed to understand the mechanisms underlying the increased expression of the (L) domain in normal kidney.
GBM, glioblastoma multiforme; TBM, tuberous basilar meningioma.

**Appendix. Abbreviations**

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Disorders mediated by anti-α5(1) collagen antibodies include dermatitis and psoriasis vulgaris. In the growing list of disorders associated with α5(1) collagen, the latter is the predominant type of collagen that is implicated in the pathogenesis of these diseases [29]. The presence of anti-α5(1) collagen antibodies in Goodpasture's syndrome is also observed.

Photo courtesy of National Institutes of Health, National Library of Medicine. The recombinant NCC1 domain (41 to 65) α5(1) collagen

Figure 3. Identification of recombinant human NCC1 domain (41 to 65) α5(1) collagen.
and α4(IV) collagen genes in autosomal recessive Alport syndrome. Nature Genet (in press)


