Accessory molecules utilized by endothelial cells for allogeneic stimulation of T-lymphocytes

University Hospital, Nijmegen, Department of Pathology and Nephrology, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Introduction
One of the major problems in allograft transplantation is rejection of the graft, as a result of an immune response mounted by the recipient against alloantigens expressed by the graft [1,2]. Owing to their unique anatomical position, endothelial cells (ECs) are among the first cells of the allograft that are encountered by the recipient’s immune system. MHC class-I and class-II antigens expressed by the ECs may activate alloreactive CD8+ and CD4+ T-lymphocyte subsets respectively [3-10]. T-cell activation requires not only engagement of the T-cell receptor-CD3 complex, but also one or more co-stimulatory or accessory signals [11-16]. In several in vitro systems, the potent antigen-presenting and co-stimulatory capacities of ECs have been demonstrated [17-19]. In this study we have analysed the accessory signals involved in the proliferation of alloreactive peripheral blood T-lymphocytes induced by allogeneic MHC class-II molecules in vitro. Allogeneic MHC class-II molecules induced by treatment with interferon γ (IFN-γ) were presented by either ECs or fibroblasts (FBs). The expression of co-stimulatory molecules on both these cell types was compared. The T-cell-proliferation-inhibiting effect of a panel of antibodies directed against co-stimulatory molecules expressed by the ECs or against their counterstructures on the T-cells was assessed. Distinct inhibition of T-cell proliferation was observed with monoclonal antibodies (mAbs) directed against CD2, lymphocyte-function-associated antigen (LFA)-3, LFA-1 or a combination of anti-[intercellular adhesion molecules (ICAM)-1 and -2]. We conclude that CD2-LFA-3 and LFA-1-ICAM interactions are crucially involved in allogeneic T-cell-EC interactions.

Materials and methods

ECs and FBs
ECs and FBs were isolated from human umbilical cord vein and foreskin fragments respectively as described previously [20]. Cells were serially subcultured under standard conditions. Passages 3 to 15 were used; no influence of the passage number on the outcome of the experiments was observed.

Monocytes and T-cells
Monocytes and T-cells were isolated as described previously [20-22]. Briefly, leucocyte-enriched cell suspensions were obtained from healthy volunteers by cytapheresis. Mononuclear cells were isolated from these suspensions by centrifugation on Ficoll (density 1.077 g/ml; Pharmacia, Uppsala, Sweden), and monocytes and lymphocytes were subsequently separated by counterflow centrifugation. T-cells were isolated from the lymphocyte fraction by rosetting with 2-aminoethylisothiouronium bromide-treated sheep red blood cells. Monocytes as well as T-cells were cryopreserved in liquid nitrogen until use.

Allogeneic T-cell-proliferation assay
T-cells were cultured in 96-well U-bottomed microtitre plates. Per incubation, 1.5 x 10^5 T-cells and 5.0 x 10^4 ECs or FBs were added. ECs and FBs were γ-irradiated with 4000 rad before addition. In most experiments, HLA class-II expression was induced on ECs or FBs before use by a 3-day incubation with 200 units/ml IFN-γ (a gift from Boehringer-Ingelheim, Ingelheim, Germany). After 5 days of culture, T-cell proliferation was measured as [3H]thymidine incorporation.

Antibodies
mAbs used for inhibition experiments and/or immunofluorescence are listed in [20]. mAbs directed against adhesion molecules were selected for their capacity to block interactions between the adhesion molecule and its ligand. In inhibition experiments, mAbs were present during the entire duration of the EC-T-cell co-culture.
Immunofluorescence
ECs or FBs were detached from culture flasks non-enzymically. Cells were washed and incubated with mAb at 0°C in suspension, stained with FITC-conjugated sheep anti-mouse antibody, and analysed using a flow cytometer.

Results
Analysis of antigen expression on human ECs and FBs before and after treatment with IFN-γ
Expression of MHC class-I and class-II antigens and of co-stimulatory molecules was determined by immunofluorescence followed by flow-cytometry analysis. Both ECs and FBs expressed MHC class-I antigens constitutively, and did not express class-II antigens. Treatment with IFN-γ increased class-I antigen expression, especially on ECs, and induced a marked class-II antigen expression on both ECs and FBs (Figure 1). The expression levels of HLA class-I and -II molecules on IFN-γ-treated FBs were somewhat lower than, but comparable with, those on IFN-γ-treated ECs. The expression profiles of co-stimulatory molecules on ECs and FBs were very similar. LFA-3 had a low expression level on both ECs and FBs which was hardly affected by treatment with IFN-γ. Vascular cell adhesion molecule (VCAM)-1 and E-selectin were absent from all the cells tested, as was the B7/BB1 molecule (results not shown). ICAM-1 was expressed on a subpopulation of untreated ECs and FBs, and was considerably up-regulated by treatment with IFN-γ. ICAM-2 was constitutively expressed on ECs but not on FBs, and was not affected by treatment with IFN-γ (results not shown).

Allogeneic HLA class-II antigen expression on ECs is necessary, but not sufficient for induction of T-cell proliferation
Both untreated and IFN-γ-treated ECs and FBs were cultured in the presence of purified allogeneic peripheral blood T-cells. T-cell proliferation was determined for different combinations of T-cell, FB and EC donors. A representative experiment is shown in Figure 2. Untreated ECs induced only marginal T-cells proliferation, ranging in these experiments between a 3- and 38-fold increase in [1H]thymidine uptake as compared with T-cells alone. ECs treated with IFN-γ, however, induced a 22- to 257-fold increased T-cell proliferation. In contrast,
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tested four different anti-CD44 mAbs in our model system. A modest inhibition (35%) could be observed with mAb 212.3, but not with the other three anti-CD44 mAbs. Whereas anti-LFA-1 mAbs were distinctly inhibitory (60–70%), anti-ICAM-1 inhibited no more than the control mAb. A somewhat higher inhibition was observed with anti-ICAM-2, whereas the combination of anti-ICAM-1 and -2 inhibited in an additive manner. A cocktail of mAbs directed against all components of the LFA-1/ICAM adhesion couple, however, was no more inhibitory than the anti-LFA-1 mAb alone.

Two mAbs directed against CD2 were inhibitory up to 55–85%. This inhibition was, however, only partially mirrored by the inhibition obtained with mAbs directed against the endothelial counterpart, LFA-3. mAbs directed against two alternative counterstructures of CD2, CD48 and CD59, were not inhibitory. Of the third co-stimulatory couple investigated, VLA-4/VCAM-1, only the anti-VLA-β mAb was moderately inhibitory. Almost complete blockage of T-cell proliferation could be observed with a cocktail of all mAbs directed against adhesion molecules on the T-cell and, to a lesser extent, by blocking adhesion molecules on the endothelial cells.

**Discussion**

Numerous aspects of EC-mediated activation of T-cells have been extensively investigated in a number of previous studies (reviewed in [17–19]). Two types of interaction have to be distinguished: those occurring between autologous cells and those between allogeneic or xenogeneic cells. The autologous interactions have been the focus of attention during the past few years. Several studies have revealed the importance of interactions between CD2 and LFA-3 molecules as a source of EC-derived co-stimulatory activity [22,28–30]. In the allogeneic situation, the interactions between lymphocytes and the endothelium are more complex. *In vivo*, they occur in vascularized allografts, where recipient lymphocytes enter the graft via the bloodstream, and encounter donor ECs. Via adhesion events probably similar to or identical with those taking place in inflammatory lymphocyte–vessel wall interactions, binding to the endothelium will be established, followed by extravasation into the allogeneic tissue. In addition to the molecular interactions that occur in the autologous situation, MHC class-I and class-II antigens expressed by the vascular endothelium may deliver initial activation and proliferation signals to recipient T-lymphocytes. The notion of T-cell activation by allogeneic ECs is supported by a large body of experimental evidence [7,10,31–34]. In this study we investigated the role of co-stimulatory molecules in the induction of allogeneic T-cell activation, using an *in vitro* co-culture system with human umbilical vein ECs and purified peripheral blood T-lymphocytes.

Human FBs, induced by IFN-γ to express MHC class II molecules, were unable to induce a T-cell response, confirming previously published data [35–37]. We therefore conclude that accessory signals, provided by ECs, play a crucial additional role. We assessed the expression of ICAM-1 and -2, VCAM-1, E-selectin, CD31, B7 and LFA-3 on untreated and IFN-γ-treated ECs and FBs, and found that levels of expression on the two cell types were comparable, with the exception of ICAM-2. This might suggest that this alternative ligand for LFA-1 may have a specific function in the accessory function of ECs. Antibodies directed against ICAM-2 were indeed more inhibitory than anti-ICAM-1 mAbs in our T-cell-proliferation assay, but did not inhibit T-cell proliferation completely, suggesting the existence of one or more additional, as yet unidentified, EC-specific factors. Our inhibition experiments further showed involvement of CD2/LFA-3, but not of VLA-4/VCAM-1, B7/CD28/CTLA-4, E-selectin, CD31/CD31 or CD26 interactions in T-cell proliferation induced by allogeneic endothelial cells, confirming data presented in several recent publications [31,32,37–40]. In the case of VCAM-1, E-selectin and B7, this is not surprising, since these molecules are not expressed by either unstimulated or IFN-γ-treated ECs. Taken together, our inhibition results indicate that both LFA-1–ICAM-1 and -2, CD2–LFA-3 interactions play a role in allogeneic stimulation of T-cells by ECs. Similar observations to those made in this report were also made in a previous study, in which we examined the accessory capacities of ECs in T-cell proliferation induced by anti-CD3 mAb [22].

Recently some progress has been made in investigating the effects *in vivo* of reagents that block adhesion events involved in EC-mediated T-cell activation. Administration of a cocktail of anti-LFA-1 and anti-ICAM-1 mAbs could prolong indefinitely the survival of cardiac allografts.
between fully incompatible mouse strains [41]. Thurlow et al. [42] did not find any effect of anti-CD2 mAb administration on renal allograft rejections by humans, but cocktails of anti-CD2 and anti-LFA-3 mAbs may have different effects. Recently, increased survival of cardiac allografts in a primate model achieved by administration of an LFA-3-Ig chimaeric molecule was reported by Kaplon et al. [43]. Further studies on the role of adhesion molecules in allograft rejection in experimental animals and in man may provide alternative strategies for rejection therapy besides the conventional immunosuppressive treatments aimed at the depletion of immune-competent T-cells.

**Introduction**

Lymphocyte-endothelial interactions are bidirectional, complex and dynamic. Contact with T-cells can change endothelial behaviour [1], and contact with endothelial cells can change T-cell behaviour (reviewed in [2]). Studies in the latter area have focused primarily on the ability of endothelial cells to serve as alloantigen-presenting cells (APCs) for T-cells. This may have obscured other more subtle effects of endothelial cells on T-cell behaviour. We have developed gonadal vein endothelial cell (GVEC) lines from cadaver organ donors that can be obtained along with autologous splenocytes [3]. This permits an examination of non-alloantigenic lymphocyte-endothelial interactions. In this experimental system, we have observed a non-conventional mechanism of T-cell co-stimulation that involves interleukin (II)-2 and endothelial cell contact.

**Methods**

**Cell populations**

Peripheral blood mononuclear cells were obtained from fresh heparinized blood, collected by venipuncture from normal individuals, isolated using Ficoll-Hypaque gradients. Cells recovered from the peripheral blood mononuclear cell interface were washed three times in Seligman's balanced salt solution (Gibco) and resuspended in complete Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium [4].

CD3⁺ T-cells were isolated from peripheral blood mononuclear cells by negative selection, with a commercially available cocktail of monoclonal antibodies (mAbs) and C' (T Lymphoto-Kwik; One Lambda Inc., Canoga Park, CA, U.S.A.) using the methods of Clouse et al. [5]. In order to remove any remaining APCs, the cells were added to a 250 cm² culture flask and incubated with the flask on its side at 37°C under 10% CO₂ for 45 min. Non-adherent cells were collected, washed once, and adjusted to 1 × 10⁶/ml, and kept at 4°C for long-term use. Cells pre-stained >95% with undetectable levels of monocyte contamination (as verified by the absence of cells staining positive for CD4 and undetectable levels of monocyte contamination (as verified above).

GVK were gonadal vein obtained from cadaveric donors and propagated as previously described [3]. Cultures were maintained in endothelial medium (Gibco supplemented with 20% fetal bovine serum (UBI, Lake Placid, NY, U.S.A.), 100 µg/ml endothelial growth factor [6], 12 units/ml sodium heparin and 20 mM Hepes buffer. Before use, all endothelial cell lines were characterized by flow cytometry for the surface expression of CD3, CD4, CD8, and CD38.

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**Non-conventional mechanisms of T-cell co-stimulation by endothelial cells**

C. G. Orosz, D. Pidwell and P. W. Adams

Ohio State University College of Medicine, Department of Surgery/Transplant, Columbus, OH 43210, U.S.A.

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