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Differential NOD/SCID mouse engraftment of peripheral blood CD34+ cells and JAK2V617F clones from patients with myeloproliferative neoplasms

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1. Introduction

Chronic myeloproliferative diseases (MPD) are heterogeneous diseases characterized by clonal proliferation at the hematopoietic stem cell (HSC) level [1]. A gain-of-function V617F mutation in the JH2 auto-regulatory domain of the Janus Kinase 2 (JAK2) gene (JAK2V617F) is the commonest molecular abnormality in MPD, occurring in more than 90% patients with polycythemia vera (PV) and 50% patients with essential thrombocythemia (ET) and primary myelofibrosis (PMF), underscoring the pathogenetic role of deregulated Jak2 [2–4]. JAK2V617F transgenic mice [5,6] and mice receiving JAK2V617F-transduced bone marrow (BM) cells [2,7–9] developed PV and other MPD-like diseases. The JAK2V617F mutation has also been found in the primitive hematopoietic cell population [10] as well as the hematolymphoid progenitors from some cases of PV [11], supporting the proposition that JAK2V617F mutation is a stem cell event.

The xenogeneic transplantation of human hematopoietic cells into immunodeficient mice has become a standard model for the study of MPD. The xenografting of human peripheral blood or BM with JAK2V617F clones into NOD/SCID mice is a useful model to study the HSC origin of the JAK2V617F mutation and engraftment in vivo. PV patients with a JAK2V617F mutation in their CD34+ cells were transplanted into NOD/SCID mice. The results suggested that events in addition to the JAK2V617F mutation were necessary for successful engraftment of HSC, and a comparison with similar cases has allowed the establishment of superior engraftment of HSC from patients without JAK2V617F PV or PMF. The latter was a JAK2V617F-negative non-neoplastic condition in which erythropoiesis is stimulated by increased serum erythropoietin. The change in JAK2V617F clone in PV upon NOD/SCID mouse engraftment was also enumerated. Finally, we also compared the HSC activity between PV and ET by examining their engraftment and changes in JAK2V617F clone in NOD/SCID mice.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Patients

CD34+ cells were obtained from PB of patients with JAK2V617F-positive PV and SP. PB mononuclear cells (MNC) were purified by density gradient centrifugation. CD34+ cells were isolated immunomagnetically (Miltenyi, Bergisch, Gladbach, Germany) and were either transplanted directly or stored in liquid nitrogen until use. BM MNCs were also prospectively collected from PV, ET and PMF patients. The investigation was approved by the Institution Review Board in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.2. NOD/SCID mouse transplantation and enumeration of engraftment

PB CD34+ cells from PV and SP patients were transplanted into sublethally irradiated (250 cGy) 6–8 weeks old NOD/SCID mice (Jackson Laboratory, Bar Harbor, Maine, USA) by direct intra-femoral injection as described [15]. Engraftment was monitored weekly by enumeration of peripheral blood (PB) CD45+ cells and confirmed by analysis of femur BM MNCs. The results suggested that events in addition to JAK2V617F are involved in the pathogenesis of PV and ET.

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clones were constructed by plotting the C of more than 0.1% human CD45+ mouse CD45.1 specific fluorescein isothiocyanate (FITC)–conjugated antihuman CD45 antibody (clone 2D1) and mouse specific phycoerythrin (PE)–conjugated antimouse CD45.1 antibody (clone A20) (BD Biosciences, San Jose, CA, USA) for 30 min in ice, followed by flow cytometry analysis. Successful human cell engraftment was defined by the presence of more than 0.1% human CD45+ mouse CD45.1+ cells in the recipient mouse BM. In some experiments, human BM MNC or CD34+ cells from PV, ET and PMF patients were transplanted via an intravenous or intra-femoral route and engraftment was similarly enumerated.

2.3. Real-time quantitative polymerase chain reaction (Q-PCR)

To quantify the JAK2V617F clone in engrafting human cells, genomic DNA was extracted from the mouse BM cells. Q-PCR was set up with the TaqMan Universal PCR Master Mix (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA), the genomic DNA (0.5 μL), the primers (200 nM each) and TaqMan probe (100 nM each), using the ABI Prism 7700 Sequence Detector (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA). Sequences of primers and probes used in Q-PCR and the PCR conditions have been described previously [16]. Standard curves for the quantification of JAK2 and JAK2V617F clones were constructed by plotting the Ct against the logarithm of the starting amount (0.05–500 ng) of JAK2V617F plasmids containing either the JAK2 or JAK2V617F sequence. The quantity of JAK2V617F clones was determined by correlating the Ct values from the standard curve. Percentage of JAK2V617F clone in each sample was calculated as the amount of JAK2V617F (amount of JAK2 + amount of JAK2V617F). The Q-PCR was human specific and non-transplanted mouse marrow invariably gave negative results.

2.4. Amplification refractory mutation system PCR (ARMS-PCR)

In the latter part of the study in which BM MNC and CD34+ cells from PV, ET and PMF patients were transplanted intravenously into NOD/SCID mice, the JAK2V617F clone before and after transplantation was enumerated using ARMS-PCR, performed for 40 cycles as described [17]. Comparison of the JAK2V617F clone relative to total JAK2 (JAK2V617F + JAK2) was performed semi-quantitatively by comparing the mutant and wild-type PCR bands in the same sample by the Image J program (Version 1.38x, National Institutes of Health, USA). The ARMS-PCR was also human specific and non-transplanted mouse marrow invariably gave negative results.

2.5. Correlation between ARMS-PCR and Q-PCR

As the enumeration of JAK2V617F clone by ARMS-PCR was only semi-quantitative, we validated it by concomitant Q-PCR, where DNA was available. In a total of 53 samples, the burden of the JAK2V617F clone in each sample was semi-quantitatively compared by using each PCR product with the standard curve of JAK2V617F clone. The quantity of JAK2V617F clones was determined by correlating the Ct values from the standard curve. Percentage of JAK2V617F clone in each sample was calculated as the amount of JAK2V617F (amount of JAK2 + amount of JAK2V617F), using the real-time Q-PCR. Correlation between ARMS-PCR and real-time quantitative PCR. Every point in the graph represents the simultaneous enumeration of JAK2V617F clone by real-time Q-PCR (y-axis) and ARMS-PCR (x-axis) of one sample.

3.2. Engraftment of PV CD34+ cells in NOD/SCID xenogeneic transplantation

To examine if PV CD34+ cells exhibited an engraftment advantage, PBCD34+ cells were transplanted in comparable numbers into irradiated NOD/SCID mice from patients with PV (median cell dose = 0.3 × 10^6 mouse−1, range: 0.075 × 10^6 to 1.5 × 10^6 mouse−1) and SP (median cell dose = 0.3 × 10^6 mouse−1, range: 0.1 × 10^6 to 1.0 × 10^6 mouse−1) via direct intra-femoral injection. In BM harvested from the mouse femur injected with human cells (injected BM), 8/26 mice transplanted with 5/13 PBCD34+ cells from PV patients engrafted (median: 4.26%, range: 0.3–5.56%), in contrast to 0/14 mice from 9 SP patients (P = 0.017) (Fig. 2A). The engrafting PV cells were capable of differentiating into myeloid cells (CD45+CD34+: 31.6 ± 9.0%), B-lymphoid cells (CD3−CD19+: 75.5 ± 11.9%), as well as maintaining the primitive CD34+ phenotype (9.8 ± 1.9%). In BM harvested from the other mouse femur and tibias that had not been injected with human cells (uninjected BM), 4/26 mice transplanted with 3/13 PBCD34+ cells from PV patients engrafted (median: 1.43%, range: 0.11–1.81%), in contrast to 0/14 mice from 9 SP patients (P = 0.058) (Fig. 2B, also Table 2).

3.3. Reduction of JAK2V617F clone upon NOD/SCID engraftment

We next investigated if the JAK2V617F mutation conferred engraftment advantage to PV cells in NOD/SCID mice. We compared the JAK2V617F clone size in PV CD34+ cells in the initial graft and 6 weeks after direct intra-femoral transplantation into NOD/SCID mice. When the uninjected BM were analyzed, there was a consistent decrease in the JAK2V617F clone after transplan-

injected BM of NOD/SCID mice.

When BM MNC from three ET patients were transplanted, 2/3
patients were able to engraft into NOD/SCID mice via both intra-
femoral and intra-femoral routes and differentiate into multiple
hematopoietic lineages. Similar observations have been reported
recently, supported the proposition that the JAK2V617F mutation
in PV occurred at the HSC level. Both the percentage of PV samples
and the absolute level of successful engraftment were remarkably
similar to those reported by Ishii et al. [13] but lower than those
by James et al. [14], suggesting that either depletion of NK cells
or the use of CD34+ cells of BM origin in the latter study might
lead to a more robust xenogeneic engraftment. This limitation
notwithstanding, there are a number of interesting observations
which may provide us with further insights into the pathogenesis
of JAK2V617F-positive MPD.

First, we demonstrated that PBCD34+ cells from patients with
PV but not SP engrafted in NOD/SCID mice. Previous studies have
shown that HSC in PV and PMF patients undergo spontaneous
mobilization [18], and that PB CD34+ cells could engraft into
NOD/SCID mice [13]. On the other hand, although G-CSF mobilized
CD34+ cells from health donors consistently engraft in NOD/SCID
mice [19], whether unmobilized CD34+ cells from patients with
non-neoplastic disease can also engraft is unclear. We addressed
this issue by examining venesection samples from SP patients, the
closest non-neoplastic control of PV patients. We believed that it
presented a valid control to evaluate the impact of JAK2V617F in PV
on NOD/SCID mouse engraftment. On the other hand, G-CSF mobil-
ized or bone marrow CD34+ cells are expectedly different from
unmobilized CD34+ and may introduce confounding factors in the
comparison, irrespective of the presence of JAK2V617F mutation.

Surprisingly, none of the 14 mice receiving 0.1–1.0 × 10^6 CD34+
cells from 9 SP patients engrafted, compared with 8/26 mice who

4. Discussion

In this study, we demonstrated that BM and PB cells from PV
patients were able to engraft into NOD/SCID mice via both intra-
venous and intra-femoral routes and differentiate into multiple
hematopoietic lineages. Similar observations have been reported
recently, supported the proposition that the JAK2V617F mutation
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Surprisingly, none of the 14 mice receiving 0.1–1.0 × 10^6 CD34+
cells from 9 SP patients engrafted, compared with 8/26 mice who
results suggested that PB CD34+ cells from PV exhibited engraftment superiority when compared with those from SP. Microarray study comparing BM CD34+ cells from PV patients and healthy donors demonstrated differential expression of more than 100 genes [20]. It remains to be defined if the differential gene expression may account for the engraftment capability of PB CD34+ cells from PV patients.

Secondly, we demonstrated that the engraftment capability of PV CD34+ cells was unrelated to changes in JAK2V617F clones. In fact, a diminution of the JAK2V617F clone upon engraftment of PV HSC in NOD/SCID mice have also been reported recently [13,14]. Intriguingly, the reduction in JAK2V617F clones was only consistently seen in un.injected but not the injected BM, which might be explained by defective homing of the JAK2V617F clones to the recipient BM. Overall, the results suggested that the JAK2V617F mutation has not conferred a proliferative advantage to HSC in NOD/SCID mouse model.

Thirdly, in contrast to PV, the JAK2V617F clones in PMF were preserved in the engrafting cells. Similar results have been reported recently, supporting the proposition that PMF contained more JAK2V617F HSC than PV [14]. In addition, we observed a significant reduction in JAK2V617F clones when BM cells from ET patients engrafted in NOD/SCID. In these experiments, BM MNC from all patients were similarly transplanted in comparable numbers. Therefore, the preservation or loss of JAK2V617F clones in PMF versus PV/ET.

Our findings of an engraftment superiority of PB CD34+ cells in PV and the diminution of JAK2V617F clones upon engraftment suggested that a pre-JAK2V617F mutation event might be of pathogenetic significance. They also corroborated with the observations of JAK2V617F-negative clonal hematopoiesis [21–23] and leukemic transformation in JAK2V617F-positive PV [16,17]. Whether the JAK2V617F-negative NOD/SCID repopulating cells were of clonal origin would have to be carefully evaluated. Recent studies have reported that specific TET2 (ten-eleven translocation2) [24] and ASXL1 (additional sex comb-like 1) [25] mutations, karyotypic aberration [26] or specific haplotype [27,28] may also play a pathogenetic role in PV. These issues should be vigorously investigated.

Conflict of interest statement

No financial interest/relationships with financial interest relating to the topic of this article have been declared.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:10.1016/j.leukres.2010.01.028.
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