

## **SERUM METABOLOMIC BIOMARKERS AND LUMBAR DISC DEGENERATION**

*(1) Dino Samartzis, (2) Jaro Karppinen, (3,4) Mika Ala-Korpela, (3,4) Pasi Soininen, (3) Antti J. Kangas, (5) Danny Chan, (1) Keith DK Luk, (1) Kenneth MC Cheung*

(1) Department of Orthopaedics and Traumatology, University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong, SAR China (2) Department of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine, University of Oulu, Finland (3) Computational Medicine, Institute of Health Sciences, University of Oulu, Oulu, Finland (4) NMR Metabolomics Laboratory, School of Pharmacy, University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio, Finland (5) Department of Biochemistry, University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong, SAR China

**INTRODUCTION:** It has been suggested that altered metabolism may contribute to lumbar disc degeneration (DD). Quantitative high-throughput serum nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) metabolomics has recently been introduced as a cost-effective way to obtain comprehensive data on systemic metabolism. Here we report our preliminary work on the identification of serum metabolomic biomarkers in relation to lumbar DD, with a primary focus on small molecules and lipid extracts.

**METHODS:** A radiographic and clinical cross-sectional study of 810 Southern Chinese volunteers was performed. A serum NMR metabolomics platform was utilized to assess the systemic metabolic profiles (~150 metabolic measures for each individual). Sagittal MRIs were utilized to assess DD (Schneiderman criteria) from L1-S1. A summated degenerative disc disease (DDD) score of the lumbar levels was obtained. Subject demographics and environmental/lifestyle factors were also assessed. ROC analysis and multivariate logistic regression analysis were performed to determine the strength and risk of various metabolomic biomarkers in relation to DD.

**RESULTS:** There were 315 male and 495 females (mean age: 51 years). DD was noted in 77% of the subjects. Multivariate model adjusted for age, sex, BMI, smoking status, triglycerides, ESR, and hs-CRP where appropriate. Serum tyrosine:lactate (OR: 1.60; 95% CI: 1.03-2.49) and leucine:isoleucine (OR: 2.65; 95% CI: 1.01-6.92) were significantly associated with the overall presence of DD. Elevated serum biomarker ratio of valine to histidine (critical value  $\geq 3.8$ ; DDD Score  $\geq 5$ ; OR: 1.74; 95% CI: 1.07 -2.85) and lipid extracts (e.g. fatty acids;  $p < 0.05$ ) were significantly associated with moderate to severe DD.

**CONCLUSIONS:** This is the first study to report on a serum metabolomics approach in relation to DD. Novel serum biomarkers associated with early and moderate/severe lumbar DD were identified. Future studies are needed to validate the findings.