ードを体系的に捉え、劇的な生体生理作用を引き起こすステロイドの最終的な作用点である下流応答遺伝子群に焦点を絞り、老化・老年病の疾患モデル動物を作製・応用し、その新規創薬・治療法の開発を目的とする。

これらの問題を改善するため、段階的 に研究を展開することが必要と考えられ る。

第一に生体におけるエストロゲン合成 の中心的な臓器としての卵巣におけるエ ストロゲンレセプターの作用機構の解明 をする。つまり、エストロゲンとエスト ロゲンレセプターの制御機構を解明する ことは、加齢に伴うステロイドシグナル の減衰・破綻が種々の老年病疾患の発症 プロセスを理解するのに必須と考えられ る。また、このエストロゲンシグナルが 他のステロイドシグナルやホルモンレセ プターと相互作用または制御機構につい て検討することは、老年病を生体内で体 系的に理解するために極めて重要なコン セプトと考えられ、ステロイドシグナル の階層性について解明することを目的と する。

第二に現在使用されているステロイド 性製剤とは別の作用点を持つ因子を同 定・解析し、より副作用の少ない老年病 への創薬・治療の開発を目的とした研究 を行う。これらステロイド性製剤の特徴 として、転写因子である核内レセプターを介して、リガンド特異的な下流応発現した タンパク質が生体において多様な生理作用を引き起こす。つまり、リガンド特異的な下流応答遺伝子群のシグナルに着り 地域である。の生体において多様な生理作用な下流応答遺伝子群のシグナルに着り 生体における下流応答遺伝子群の生体作用、および他の生理作用についない創薬・ 検討・評価し、より副作用の少ない創薬・ 治療法の盤を提供することを最終目的と する。

## B. 研究方法

平成 15 年度:エストロゲンシグナルに おける生体作用:疾患モデルマウスの作 製と下流応答遺伝子群の発現制御

エストロゲンレセプターは 2 種類 (ER  $\alpha$  および ER  $\beta$ ) 存在し、その生理作用 について類似・相違性について未だ明確 な報告がなく、ERαと ERβがお互いに オートクライン的に発現量、またはダイ マー形成により転写因子としての作用を 制御する可能性も考えられる。エストロ ゲン特異的シグナルを検討するには、KO マウスを検討することが重要と思われる が、より顕著に特異的なエストロゲンの 生体作用を見るためにリガンド非依存型 エストロゲンレセプター (caER α および caERβ) のコンディショナルトランスジ ェニック (cTg) マウスおよび 組織特異 的プロモーター/Cre 作製・交配させるこ とにより、標的臓器のみでリガンド非依 存的に ER B シグナルのみを活性化する ことが可能である。さらに、 $Er \alpha KO$  (ER βシグナルのみ存在)マウスを利用する ことにより、ER のシグナル特異性とそ の生体作用の特異性についても検討する ことが可能と考える。つまり、今まで不 明瞭であった標的臓器での 1) エストロ ゲン (ステロイド)  $\Rightarrow$  2) ER  $\alpha$ /ER  $\beta$  の 特異性およびその作用メカニズムについ て詳細に検討し、エストロゲンシグナル 経路の特異性について、生体内で生理作 用および作用メカニズムについて検討を おこなう。

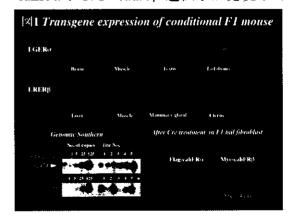
平成 16 年度:エストロゲンシグナルの 生体作用:標的臓器としての卵巣とエスト ロゲンシグナル

エストロゲンを合成する主要な臓器で ある卵巣について、そのステロイドレセ プターである  $\mathbf{ER} \alpha$  および  $\mathbf{ER} \beta$  の発現が 報告されており、妊娠期に劇的に変化を ともなう子宮および乳腺が近接して存在 する代表的な標的臓器として考えられる。 とりわけ老年病との関連について考える と、女性の閉経後における生体変化は極 めて重要な問題であり、骨粗鬆症、血管 疾患、およびホルモン依存性ガン等と深 く関連することが示唆されている。先ず、 生体内の卵巣でエストロゲンシグナルの 時間軸を換えて誘導することにより、他 のホルモンシグナルとの作用について検 討する。これらのエストロゲンレセプタ - (ER  $\alpha$  および ER  $\beta$ ) に卵巣作用に相 違または類似性が存在するか検討した。 また、エストロゲンシグナルおよび下流 応答遺伝子の生体生理作用およびリスク について検討するために、受精卵 2 細胞 後期から発現が知られている  $CAG(\beta)$ actin/CMV-IE) プロモーター/Cre マウス と cTg マウスを交配して下流応答遺伝子 が過剰発現される条件を実験系により作 製し、エストロゲンシグナルを介する下 流応答遺伝子の生体での生理作用の解析、 および副作用について評価する。さらに、 エストロゲンレセプターの遺伝子改変マ ウスに卵巣特異的/Cre マウス (ZP3-Cre:Zona pellucidae 3 プロモーターに Cre を融合した Tg マウス)を交配し、卵巣 の卵胞組織にエストロゲンレシグナルを 過剰または異所的に誘導する系を目指し た。マウスにおいてエストロゲンは生後 11 日目前後から合成が開始されると考え られるが、ZP3 プロモーター支配下に Cre を発現したマウスを交配することにより、 生後 3 日前後でエストロゲンレセプターをリガンド非依存的に活性化し、エストロゲンシグナルの卵巣機能について検討する。また、これらのエストロゲン下流応答遺伝子が発現することにより引き起こされる生体作用について検討するとともに、他のステロイドホルモンシグナルとのクロストークに関しても併せて検討する。

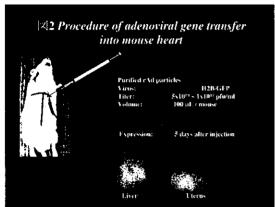
以上、段階的に研究計画を遂行し、本研究課題である老化と老年病の疾患モデル動物の開発とその応用について検討することにより、作用メカニズムが明確で非リガンド性物質であり、かつ副作用の少ないステロイドシグナル経路を分子標的とした新しい老年病の予防・治療法のへの応用できる因子の同定を目指し、研究を推進していく。

### C. 研究結果

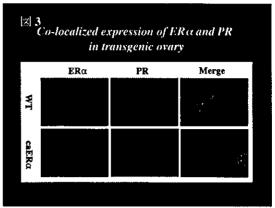
第 1 テーマは、 $caER \alpha$  および  $caER \beta$  の cTg マウスの作製にそれぞれ成功し、少なくともこれらの cTg マウスの数ラインの種々の臓器でレポーター遺伝子(GFP または DsRed) を発現していることが確かめられ、これらのレポーター遺伝子とが可能なこれのでリガンド非依存型エスとが可能なことを示唆した(図 1)。 また、Cre を発現可能な組換えアデノウイルををです。 ない cTg 由来の cTg 由来の cTg 由来の cTg は cTg は



いることを確認した。さらに in vivo において、高濃度に精製した Cre を発現する 組換えアデノウイルスを心臓より直接接 種することにより、外来性のエストロゲンシグナルを付加可能か検討した(図 2)。

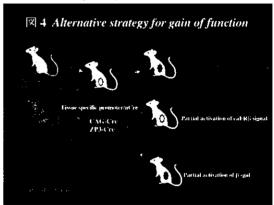


組換えウイルス導入 2 週間後にエストロ ゲンシグナルの標的臓器である卵巣を摘 出し、トランスジェニックマウス由来の 卵巣において異所性の外来性 caER α の シグナルを ISH 法により RNA レベルで 確認すると共に、異所的な内在性の ER αおよび ERβシグナルの発現を確認し た。Cre 処理卵巣は、部分的に外来性の  $caER \alpha$  の発現が確認でき、これらの卵 巣では黄体様の組織構造および発達した 卵胞の減少が観察され、外来性の caER α の発現する部分において ER の下流応 答遺伝子と知られている  $ER \alpha \setminus ER \beta$ 、 EBAG9、および efp が本来発現する部位 で発現するのみでなく、外来性の caER α の発現が強い黄体様組織で異所的な 発現が見られた。さらに、この外来性の caERαの発現が強い黄体様の組織で、黄 体機能の作用が存在するか検討するため に、エストロゲンの下流応答遺伝子とし て知られるプロゲステロンレセプター (PR)が発現しているか検討した結果、外 来性の caER α の発現により下流応答遺 伝子として知られる PR の発現を同じ黄 体様組織において観察した(図3)。一方、 前述で挙げた in vivo においてコンディシ ョナルに目的の遺伝子を発現させるため に Cre を発現できる組換えアデノウイ



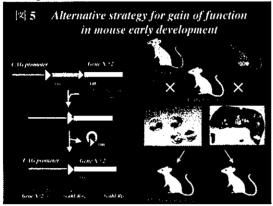
ルスを利用した方法について検討した結果、肝臓、肺等には導入効率が良いが特異性がなく、他の標的臓器に特異性を持って効率的に発現させるためには、組換えアデノウイルスを利用する系には短所があることが示唆された。 それ故、より特異性が高く安定的なデータを得るために、組織特異的なプロモーターに Creを発現できる遺伝子改変マウスを作製し検討した。

第 2 テーマに関しては、本研究で作製した cTg マウスに Cre を発現するトランスジェニックマウスを交配することにより、組織・時期を任意に変化可能な系を確立した(図 4)。これらをさらに発展



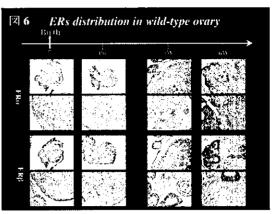
させ発生初期および胎児期での異所性のエストロゲンシグナルの過剰発現における作用について検討するために、CAG-Cre トランスジェニックマウスを 2 ライン作製した。Cre の発現する時期と組織を検討するために、テスターマウスである ROSA26LacZ マウスを交配し、X-Gal 染色をすることにより、Cre の発現時期・

分布を検討した結果、発現時期は 2 細胞期 (受精後 24 時間) 一胚盤胞期 (受精後 96 時間) から発現を確認することができ、胎生 19.5 日の胎児で体全体的にユビキタスに X-gal 染色が確認され、Cre 遺伝子が発生初期からユビキタス発現する Tg マウスを作製できた(図 5)。生体

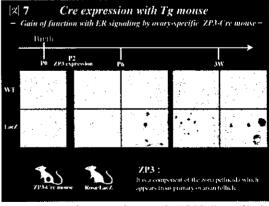


内でエストロゲンシグナル付加するため に、CAG-Cre マウスを作製して、マウ スの初期胚 2 細胞期から発生初期に Cre を発現させることにより、受精後の 数日以内にエストロゲンシグナル(caER  $\alpha$  および caER  $\beta$ ) を初期発生から胎児 で過剰に付加した場合、全体的に産仔数 の低下、および異常なメンデル法則から かけはなれた率でしか産仔が得られない ことが判明した。このエストロゲンシグ ナルを過剰に付加された産仔が、どの時 期から過剰なエストロゲンシグナルの作 用を受けるか詳細に検討する必要がある が、生後数日間までにメンデル法則で生 まれてくるはずの産仔が減少し、少なく とも生後数日以内にほとんどのマウスが 致死となることがわかった。

つづいて、エストロゲン合成の中心的な標的臓器である卵巣作用に焦点を絞り解析を検討した。実際に卵巣での内在性の ER の発現を抗体染色により時系列的に検討すると、出産後 0 日目の卵巣では ER の発現はほとんど確認できず、その後 6 日目の卵巣の卵胞組織周辺でに ER  $\beta$  が ER  $\alpha$  より強く発現していることがわかる(図 6)。それ故、より特異性が高



く安定的なデータがとれる系を検討する ために、組織特異的なプロモーターに Cre を発現できる遺伝子改変マウスによ る交配する系についても検討した。卵巣 組織の卵胞および卵球細胞近位で発現し 卵子を保護している Zona Pellucidae と呼 ばれるカプセル様の形態を示すタンパク 質は主に 3 種類から構成されており、そ の内の 1 つである ZP3 と呼ばれるタンパ クのプロモーター支配下に組換え酵素で ある Cre を融合させたマウスを得て、 Cre の時期・組織特異性の検討を上述と 同様にテスターマウスと交配することに より、X-gal 染色を検討した結果、生後 2-6 日目の胎児卵巣で X-gal 染色ポジティブ である青色の染色が確認され、極めて卵 巣の卵胞源基特異的な発現をすることを 確認した(図 7)。この ZP3-Cre マウスと



エストロゲンシグナルを活性化可能な cTg マウスを交配することにより、卵巣 組織特異的に過剰なエストロゲンシグナルの付加を生体内で検討した。少なくとも caER  $\alpha$   $\ge$  ZP3-Cre マウスの交配により

両方の遺伝子をもった 3 週齢マウス卵巣 において、ヒト ER α の抗体染色により 異所的な卵胞周辺組織での発現を確認し た。

## D. 考察

本研究により、エストロゲンシグナル が卵巣機能の黄体化作用に関与すること が示唆され、下流応答遺伝子の1つであ る PR の発現を制御していることが推測 される。1つのモデルとして、卵巣にお いてエストロゲンシグナルがプロゲステ ロンシグナルを階層的に制御する可能性 を示唆している(図 10)。また、エストロ ゲンレセプターの下流応答遺伝子である EBAG9、および efp についても、生体内 で過剰な ERαシグナル付加することに より転写を上昇させることが示唆された。 とりわけ、efp は乳癌の細胞増殖におけ る重要な因子であることを研究代表者お よび分担者により既に報告しており、ガ ンとの関連について生体内での作用メカ ニズムを解明することは重要と考えられ る。

発生初期からエストロゲンシグナル が過剰に付加された場合、ほとんどのマウスでメンデル法則から逸脱して胎生期 に致死となることが示唆されたが、妊娠 期にエストロゲンシグナルが細胞増殖・分化に関与する可能性が示唆された。実際、エストロゲンシグナルが欠如した ER KO マウスにおいて、ER  $\alpha$  KO では受精障害、性周期の異常、排卵障害等が報告、ER  $\beta$  KO では排卵障害、出産数の減少等が報告されており、エストロゲンシグナルの卵巣機能を解析していくためには、時系列的に解析を検討していく必要性が示唆された。

### E. 結論

研究課題である"老化と老年病の疾患 モデル動物の開発とその応用"に対する 観点から、エストロゲンシグナルをリガ ンド非依存的に活性化できる遺伝子改変 マウスを作製し、生きた試薬を準備する ことができた。コンディショナルトラン スジェニック(cTg)マウスについては、そ れぞれ  $caER \alpha$  および  $caER \beta$  について数 ラインのトランスジェニックマウスが得 られた。発生初期からエストロゲンシグ ナルを過剰に付加するとほとんどのマウ スでメンデル法則を逸脱し、胎生期で致 死となることがわかった。エストロゲン 合成の主要組織である卵巣で特異的にエ ストロゲンシグナルを付加する系を確立 し、異所性のエストロゲンシグナルを付 加することが可能であった。また、これ らのトランスジェニックマウスをコンデ イショナルに過剰発現をさせる系を確立したが、in vivo でより組織特異性・時間軸を制御可能な系を開発し特定疾患に焦点を絞った cTg マウスの過剰発現系の確立が必須と考えられた。

今後の研究の方向性として、これらの 遺伝子改変マウスを利用し、病態のメカ ニズム、治療法への応用性、老年病の治 療効果およびそのリスクについて生体内 で総合的に検討することは、治療法への 新たなコンセプトの提案および新薬の開 発に必須と考えられる。

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研究成果の刊行に関する一覧表

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IV-	発表者氏名	論文タイトル名	発表誌名	卷名	ページ	出版年
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# Estrogen-responsive RING finger protein controls breast cancer growth

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### **Abstract**

Most of the breast cancers initially respond to endocrine therapy that reduces the levels of estrogens or competes with estrogen for binding to its receptor. Most of the patients, however, acquire resistance to endocrine therapy with tamoxifen and aromatase inhibitors later. We assumed that identification of estrogen-responsive genes those regulate the growth of breast cancer is indispensable to develop new strategies targeting the genes and overcome the resistance to current endocrine therapy. Estrogen-responsive finger protein (Efp) is one of the estrogen receptor (ER)-target genes we have cloned using genomic binding site cloning. Efp features a structure of the RING-finger B-box coiled-coil (RBCC) motif. We postulated that Efp is a critical factor in proliferation of breast tumors. In a model system using MCF7 cells grown in xenografts, we showed that inhibition of Efp expression by antisense oligonucleotide reduced the tumor growth. MCF7 cells overexpressing Efp formed tumors in xenografts even in estrogen deprivation environment. By yeast two-hybrid screen, we identified that Efp interacts with 14-3-3σ, which is known as a cell cycle brake that causes G2 arrest and expressed in normal mammary glands. In vitro studies have revealed that Efp functions as a ubiquitin-protein ligase (E3) that targets 14-3-3σ. These data suggest that Efp controls breast cancer growth through ubiquitin-dependent proteolysis of 14-3-3σ. Future studies may provide a new therapy to block breast tumor proliferation by targeting Efp.

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Keywords: Breast cancer; Endocrine therapy; Estrogen; Efp; RING finger; RBCC motif; Ubiquitin-protein ligase (E3); 14-3-3σ

# 1. Introduction

Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer in female and continues to be a major cancer death among women in the western world. Although primary treatment of breast cancer is surgical removal of the tumor, patients treated by surgery alone are likely to be further suffered from recurrent and metastatic disease. More than 100 years ago, removal of ovaries had been found to be effective in remission of metastatic breast cancer [1]. The ovarian hormone estrogen was discovered to stimulate breast tumor growth. Efforts had been made thereafter to establish endocrine therapy to inhibit estrogen actions or estrogen synthesis [2](Fig. 1). The endocrine therapy since the 1940s, and tamoxifen in particular, has revolutionized the treatment of breast cancer.

The direct effect of estrogens on estrogen-responsive tissues are mediated via the estrogen receptors (ERs), namely  $ER\alpha$  and  $ER\beta$ , in low levels in normal mammary gland tissue and in higher concentrations in about two-third of human

breast cancers [3]. It is known that most of the ER-positive breast cancers are primarily responsive to endocrine therapy. Tamoxifen, which is one of the selective estrogen receptor modulators or SERMs, was first used in the treatment of metastatic breast cancer, and now the first choice of adjuvant treatment after surgery [4].

In postmenopausal women, local estrogen synthesis is important in tumor progression because of cease of ovarian function. Aromatase in breast tissue is responsible for local estrogen synthesis [5]. Aromatase inhibitors such as anastrozole and letrozole are now being used as second- and third-line agents in endocrine therapy, once resistance to tamoxifen has developed [2].

In spite of all strategies of endocrine therapy, however, a substantial proportion of patients with breast cancers eventually acquire resistance against those treatment. Current antiestrogenic agents are not originally beneficial to patients with ER-negative breast tumors. Several critical side effects due to tamoxifen therapy are reported, including development of endometrial cancer or an increased incidence of venous thrombosis and strokes [4]. Aromatase inhibitors such as anastrozole have fewer thromboembolic and vaginal bleeding episodes than tamoxifen, yet have side effects including hot flashes, vaginal dryness, osteoporotic fractures, nausea, and gastrointestinal disturbances [6–8]. Thus, we need to

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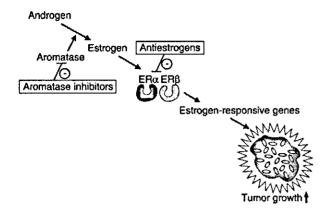


Fig. 1. Antiestrogenic drugs in cascade of estrogen action.

develop new agents that can overcome the resistance against today's endocrine therapy and have minimal side effects. Elucidation of precise estrogen/ER signaling pathway may give us some clues to develop future endocrine therapy.

### 2. Efp as an estrogen-responsive gene

Our group identified several downstream genes of ER that include estrogen-responsive elements in their promoter-enhancer regions, using genomic-binding site cloning

technique that we previously designed [9,10]. We specially interested in one of the ER-downstream molecules, Efp or estrogen-responsive finger protein [11], containing a RING finger, two B-boxes, a  $\alpha$ -helical coiled-coil domain, and C-terminal SPRY domain (Fig. 2A). The structure of Efp has the RING-finger B-box-coiled-coil motif or RBCC [9]. The RING finger features a set of cysteine and histidine residues that have a distinctive spacing owing to their roles as the ligands of two zinc ions that stabilize a characteristic globular conformation (Fig. 2B) [12]. It is notable that several RING finger proteins are known to be responsible for some malignant tumors (Fig. 3). For example, PML is responsible for acute premyelocytic leukemia when it forms a fusion protein with retinoic acid receptor (RAR)  $\alpha$  [13], or loss of the tumor suppressor BRCA1 results in chromosomal instability leading to development of familial breast and ovarian cancers [14].

Efp is predominantly expressed in estrogen target tissues including mammary glands, uteri, and osteoblasts [15,16], and also in breast cancers [17]. Efp is essential for growth of female organs such as uteri, since mice deficient in Efp gene have underdeveloped uteri [18].

To investigate a role of Efp in breast tumor growth, we performed experiments to examine the effects of Efp antisense oligonucleotide on tumor formation in female nude mice inoculated with human breast cancer MCF7 cells [19]. When the tumor volume reached 300 mm<sup>3</sup>, mice were treated with

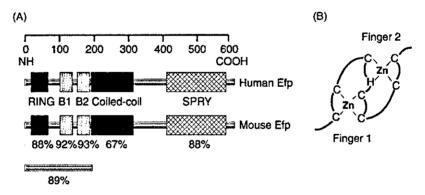


Fig. 2. Structure of Efp: (A) domain structure of human Efp and mouse Efp; (B) structure of RING finger motif.

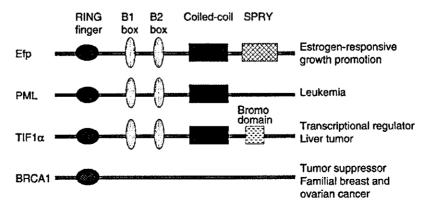


Fig. 3. Several members of RING finger family.

ovariectomy or with antisense/sense Efp oligonucleotides. Efp antisense oligonucleotide as well as ovariectomy efficiently reduced the size of tumor generated by MCF7 cells in the recipient mice. We postulated that Efp is an oncogenic factor in breast cancers.

MCF7 cells are originally ER-positive and can initially proliferate in the presence of estrogen. We next examined whether MCF7 cells can grow even in estrogen deprived environment by Efp overexpression. MCF7 cells stably expressing Efp (Efp-MCF7) could proliferate even in mice treated with ovariectomy. Cell cycle analysis revealed that a higher ratio of Efp-MCF7 cells were in the proliferating stage compared to control MCF7 cells transfected with vector alone (30–35% versus 10–15%). It is also notable that endogenous levels of negative regulators of cell cycle progression such as p21<sup>Cip1</sup> and 14-3-3σ were reduced in Efp-MCF7 cells as compared with control MCF7 cells. Those results give us a notion that elevated levels of Efp promote cell growth of breast cancer, indicating that Efp might directly regulate the cell cycle machinery.

### 3. Mechanism of Efp function in cell cycle progression

We next assessed the molecular mechanism of Efp in cell cycle progression. As a first step, we performed yeast two-hybrid screening from a mouse embryo cDNA library using Efp as a bait. These screens led to the identification of 14-3-3 $\sigma$  as an interacting clone with Efp [19]. 14-3-3 $\sigma$  is a cell cycle brake that causes G2 arrest by sequestrating cdc2 in the cytoplasm [20]. Although 14-3-3 $\sigma$  is well expressed in epithelial cells of normal mammary glands, reduced levels of 14-3-3 $\sigma$  seem to be related to breast malignancy, as

downregulation of the protein [21] or hypermethylation of its promoter region [22] is reported in breast cancer.

Since we found that  $14-3-3\sigma$  is an interacting clone of Efp and the amount of  $14-3-3\sigma$  was reduced in Efp-MCF7 cells, we investigated whether Efp directly regulates the activity of  $14-3-3\sigma$ . When we expressed Efp and  $14-3-3\sigma$  in COS7 cells, the two proteins colocalized in the cytoplasm and the protein-protein interaction of those proteins was confirmed by immunoprecipitaion. Co-transfection of Efp and  $14-3-3\sigma$  resulted in lower levels of  $14-3-3\sigma$  protein compared with cells transfected with  $14-3-3\sigma$  alone. We identified that the B-box coiled-coil domain in Efp is the motif that specially interacts with  $14-3-3\sigma$ .

Recent advances of molecular research have revealed that a large number of RING finger proteins function as ubiquitin-protein ligases or E3s in the ubiquitination signaling pathway [13]. Ubiquitination regulates a variety of cellular functions, frequently by mediating the selective degradation of master regulatory proteins by proteasomes. The ubiquitin-dependent proteolysis is important to eliminate misfolded or abnormal proteins as well as to confer short half-lives on specific normal proteins such as mitotic cyclins whose critical concentrations must change promptly with alterations in the state of a cell. We hypothesized that Efp functions as an E3 that ubiquitinates  $14-3-3\sigma$  (Fig. 4). By pulse and chase experiments, we confirmed that the degradation rate of 14-3-3 $\sigma$  protein was explicitly enhanced in Efp-MCF7 cells. The protein breakdown of 14-3-3σ is proteasome-dependent because a proteasome inhibitor MG132 increased the amount of 14-3-3σ protein binding to Efp. Finally, we confirmed that Efp directly degrades  $14-3-3\sigma$  through a ubiquitin-dependent pathway in which Efp functions as an E3.

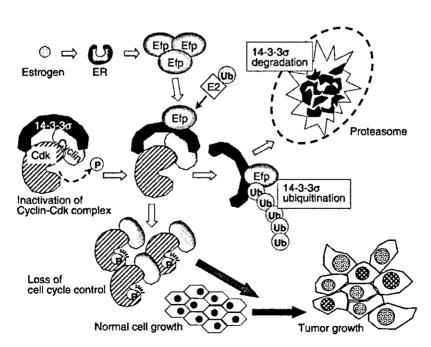


Fig. 4. Estrogen-responsive RING finger protein Efp targets 14-3-3\u03c3 for proteolysis as a ubiquitin ligase and stimulates tumor growth.

### 4. Perspective

Our experimental data suggest that Efp may provide unlimited proliferation of breast cancer cells by accelerated destruction of 14-3-3 $\sigma$ . It is intriguing that Efp might proliferate breast tumor in an estrogen deprivation environment although Efp has been originally identified as an estrogen-responsive gene. We speculate that overexpression of Efp might be one of the reasons for resistance to endocrine therapy. It remains to be determined whether Efp plays a similar critical role in human breast tumor progression. We anticipate that Efp could be used as a potential molecular target for clinical application that provides promising future direction of breast cancer treatment.

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# EBAG9/RCAS1 EXPRESSION AND ITS PROGNOSTIC SIGNIFICANCE IN PROSTATIC CANCER

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Estrogen receptor-binding fragment-associated gene 9 (EBAG9) has been identified as a primary estrogen-responsive gené from MCF-7 human breast cancér cells (Watanabe T, et al., Mol Cell Biol 1998;18:442-9). EBAG9 is identical with RCAS1 (receptor-binding cancer antigen expressed on SiSo cells), which has been reported as a cancer cell surface antigen implicated in immune escape (Nakashima M, et al., Nat Med 1999;5:938-42). In our present study, we examined EBAG9 expression in human prostatic tissues and investigated its prognostic significance in patients with prostatic cancer. EBAG9 expression in normal prostatic epithelial cells and PC-3, DUI45 and LNCaP cancer cells was determined by Western blot analysis. Immunohistochemic analysis was performed in 21 benign and 81 malignant prostatic specimens, and patients' charts were reviewed for clinical, pathologic and survival data. EBAG9 was abundantly expressed in the prostate cancer cells compared to the normal epithelial cells. strong and diffuse immunostaining in the cytoplasm of EBAG9 was found in 44 of 81 (54%) cancerous tissue samples. EBAG9 expression significantly correlated with advanced pathologic stages and high Gleason score (p = 0.0305 and < 0.0001, respectively). EBAG9 was more frequently expressed the interpretable of 170% and breath and seed at sites of capsular penetration (79%) and lymph node metastasis (100%) compared to intracapsular primary tumors (54%) (p = 0.0264 and 0.0048, respectively). Positive EBAG9 immunoreactivity significantly correlated with poor PSA failure-free survival (p = 0.0059). EBAG9/RCAS1 may play a significant role in cancer progression via an immune escape system. Immunodetection of EBAG9/RCASI expression can be a negative prognostic indicator for patients with prostatic

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**Key words:** EBAG9; RCAS1; estrogen responsive gene; prognosis; immune escape

Estrogen receptor-binding fragment-associated gene 9 (EBAG9) is an estrogen-responsive gene that has been isolated from a CpG island library of MCF-7 human breast cancer cells using a genomic binding site cloning method. EBAG9 has an estrogen-responsive element (ERE) in the 5' flanking region, and its transcript is upregulated in the presence of estrogen. 1.2 Recently, a cDNA encoding the antigen recognized by the 22-1-1 antibody, which is frequently expressed in uterine and ovarian carcinomas, has been isolated and named receptor-binding cancer antigen expressed on SiSo cells (RCAS1).3-5 RCAS1 has been reported to be identical with EBAG9, and assumed to act as a ligand for a putative receptor present on various human cell lines and normal peripheral lymphocytes, such as T, B and natural killer (NK) cells.6 RCAS1 has been found to inhibit the in vitro growth of receptor-expressing cells and induce apoptotic cell death.6.7.21 Recent investigations demonstrated that EBAG9/RCAS1 was expressed in several human cancers, such as the uterine, lung, gastric, hepatic and breast cancers,8-14 and associated with tumor progression in some of these cancers. 8.9.11-13 These findings suggest that tumor cells expressing EBAG9/RCAS1 may suppress clonal expansion and induce apoptosis in its receptor-positive immune cells, and subsequently evade immune surveillance.6,7

Prostate cancers have an extensive variability of clinical behavior. A mechanism underlying the processes of tumor invasion and

metastasis remains unknown. Recently, a new estrogen receptor has been isolated from a cDNA library of the rat prostate, and termed estrogen receptor  $\beta$  (ER $\beta$ ). Several investigations, including ours, demonstrated ER $\beta$  expression in human prostatic cancer, 16-19 suggesting that estrogen-responsive genes may play a significant role in the development of prostatic cancers. In our present study, we evaluated EBAG9/RCAS1 expression in normal and malignant human prostate, and determined whether EBAG9/RCAS1 was associated with the cancer progression and prognosis.

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

Antibody

Anti-EBAG9 antibody is a rabbit polyclonal antibody that has been raised against a GST-EBAG9 fusion protein. The characterization of anti-EBAG9 polyclonal antibody was confirmed by Western blotting, and utilization of the antibody for immunohistochemistry has been previously reported. A monoclonal antibody for ER $\alpha$  (NCL-ER-6F11) was purchased from Novo-castra Laboratories (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK). A polyclonal antibody specific for ER $\beta$  was raised in rabbit against synthesized peptides of the C-terminal region of ER $\beta$  (CSPAEDSKSKEGSQN-PQSQ). The characterization and utilization of the antibody have been previously reported. P-21 A rabbit polyclonal antibody for CD3 (A0452), which recognizes T lymphocytes was obtained from DAKO (Carpinteria, CA).

Cell culture and western blot analysis

A batch of normal human prostatic epithelial cells (PrECs) were purchased from Clonetics Co. (San Diego, CA). The PrECs were cultured in PrE-basal medium supplemented with SingleQuots (Clonetics Co.) according to the manufacturer's recommended protocol. Three human prostate cancer cell lines (LNCaP, DU145 and PC-3) were purchased from American Type Culture Collec-

Abbreviations: AI, apoptotic index; EBAG9, estrogen receptor-binding fragment-associated gene 9; ER, estrogen receptor; ERE, estrogen responsive element; HGPIN, high-grade prostatic intraepithelial neoplasia; NK, natural killer cells; PFECs, normal human prostatic epithelial cells; PSA, prostate-specific antigen; RCASI, receptor-binding cancer antigen expressed on SiSo cells; TIL, tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes.

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