

Figure 8

Griseofulvin does not influence HCV IRES-mediated translation. (A) Structure of the plasmid, pEF-Rluc-HCV IRES Feo. Transcription is initiated under the control of a composite Elongation factor 1 alpha (EF1 α) promoter. The upstream cistron encodes *Renilla* luciferase (Rluc) and is translated by a cap-dependent mechanism in transfected cells, while the downstream cistron encodes a fusion (Feo) of the firefly luciferase (Fluc) and neomycin phosphotransferase (Neo^r) genes, translated under the control of the HCV IRES. (B) pEF-Rluc-HCV IRES Feo was stably transfected into Huh7 cells. The cells were treated without (Control) and with 20 μ M of griseofulvin. Dual luciferase activities were measured at the indicated time points after exposure to griseofulvin. Values are displayed as ratios of Fluc to Rluc. Error bars indicate means \pm SD.

Figure 9

Griseofulvin suppresses JFH-1 replication. Immunofluorescent staining of Huh 7.5.1/JFH-1 cells treated with various concentrations of griseofulvin. HCV NS3 protein is stained green and nuclei are stained with 7-AAD (red).

Fig.1

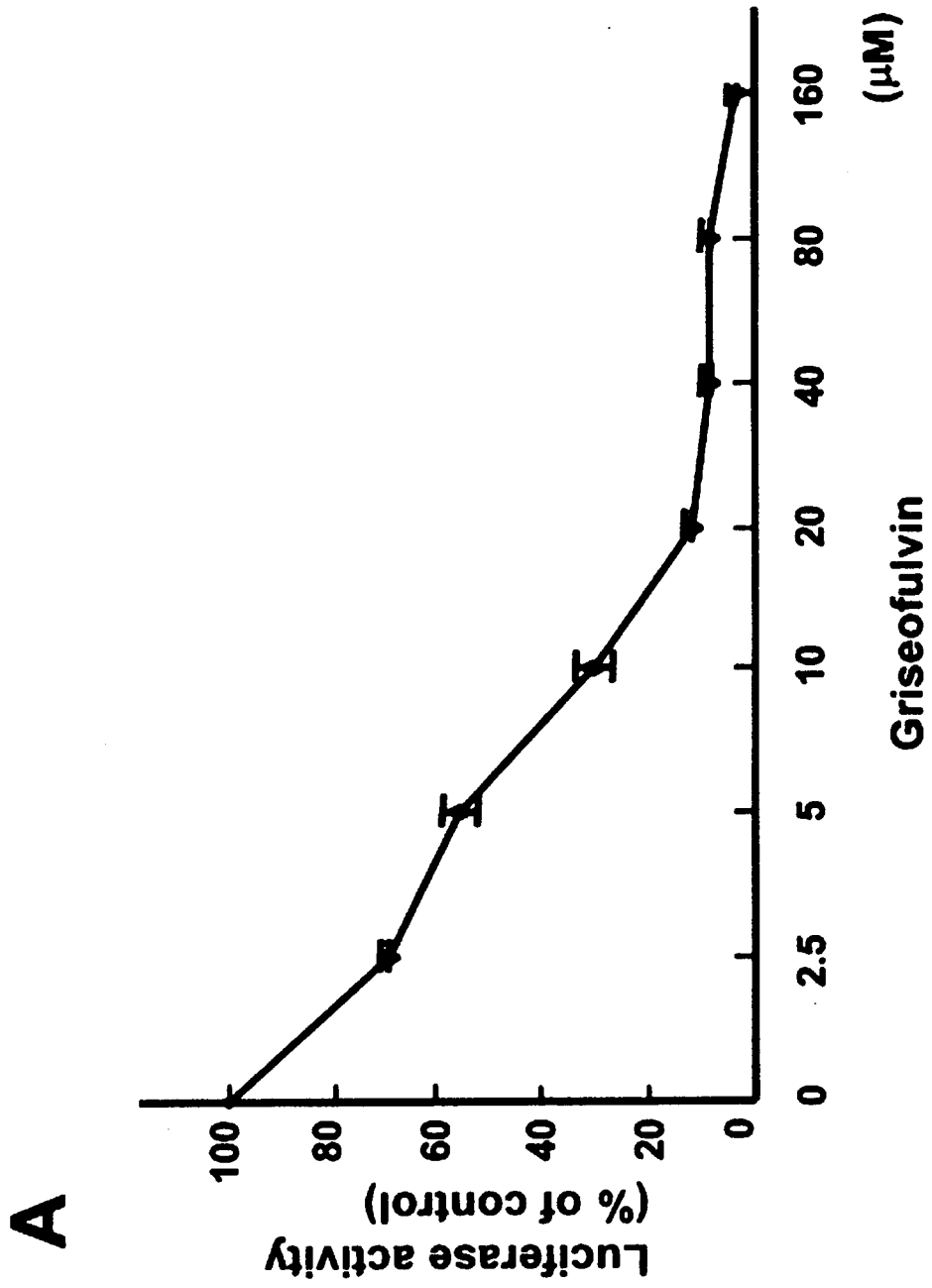


Fig.1

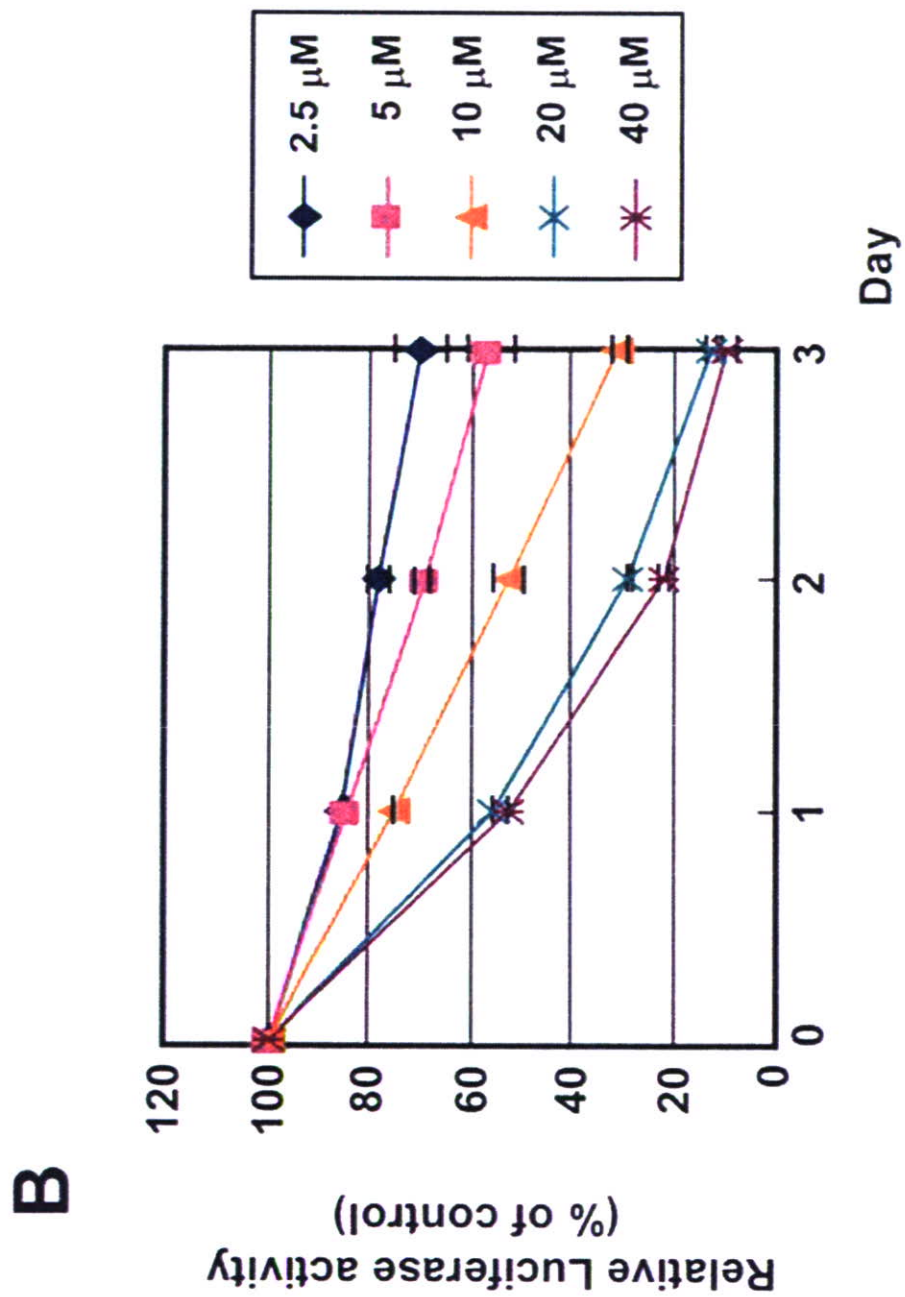


Fig.1

C

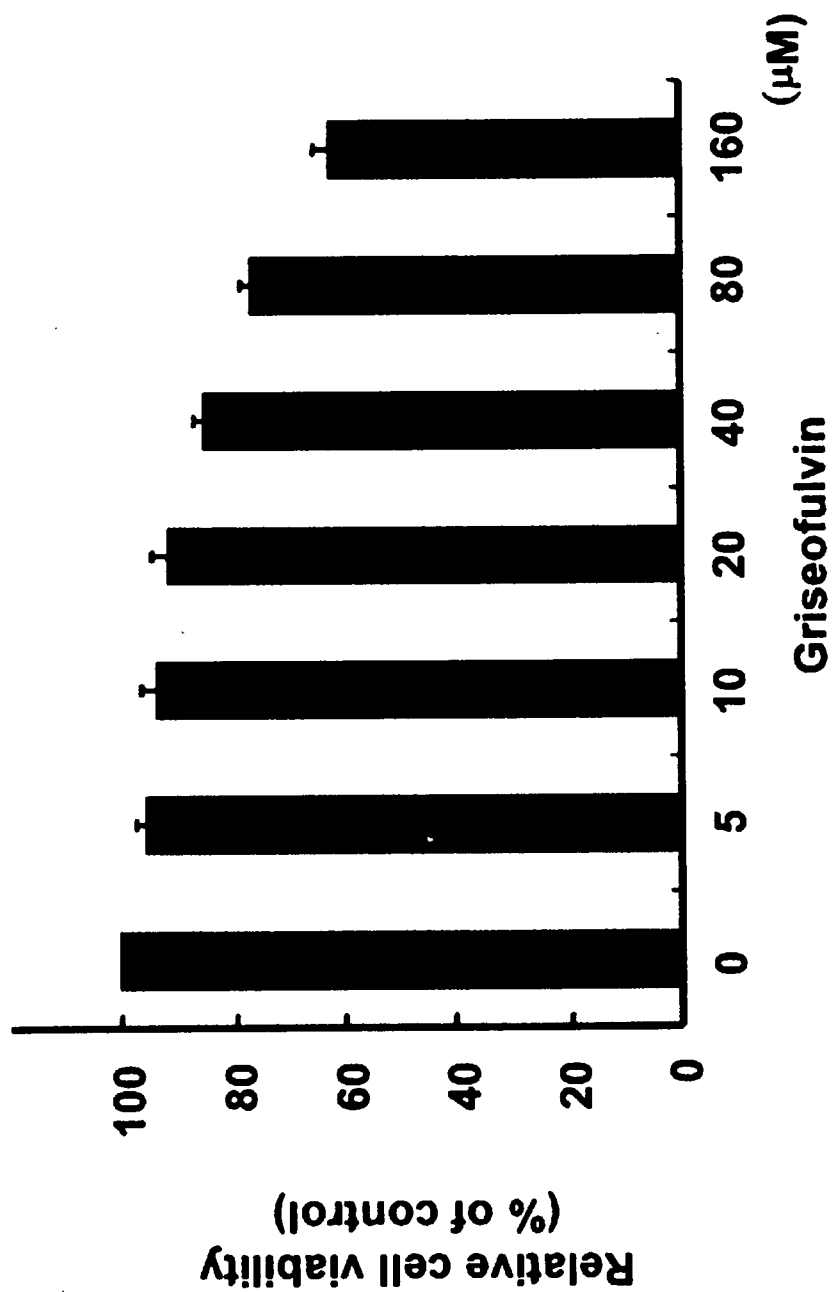


Fig.2

A

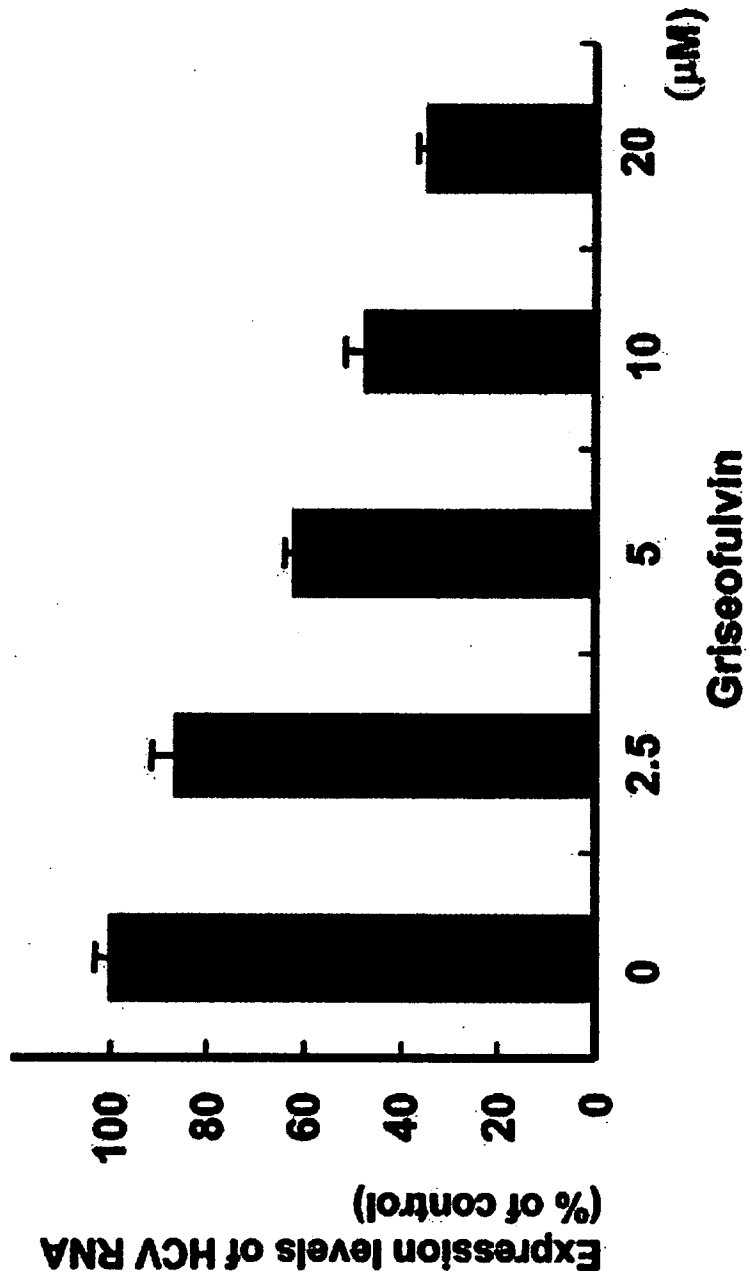


Fig.2

B

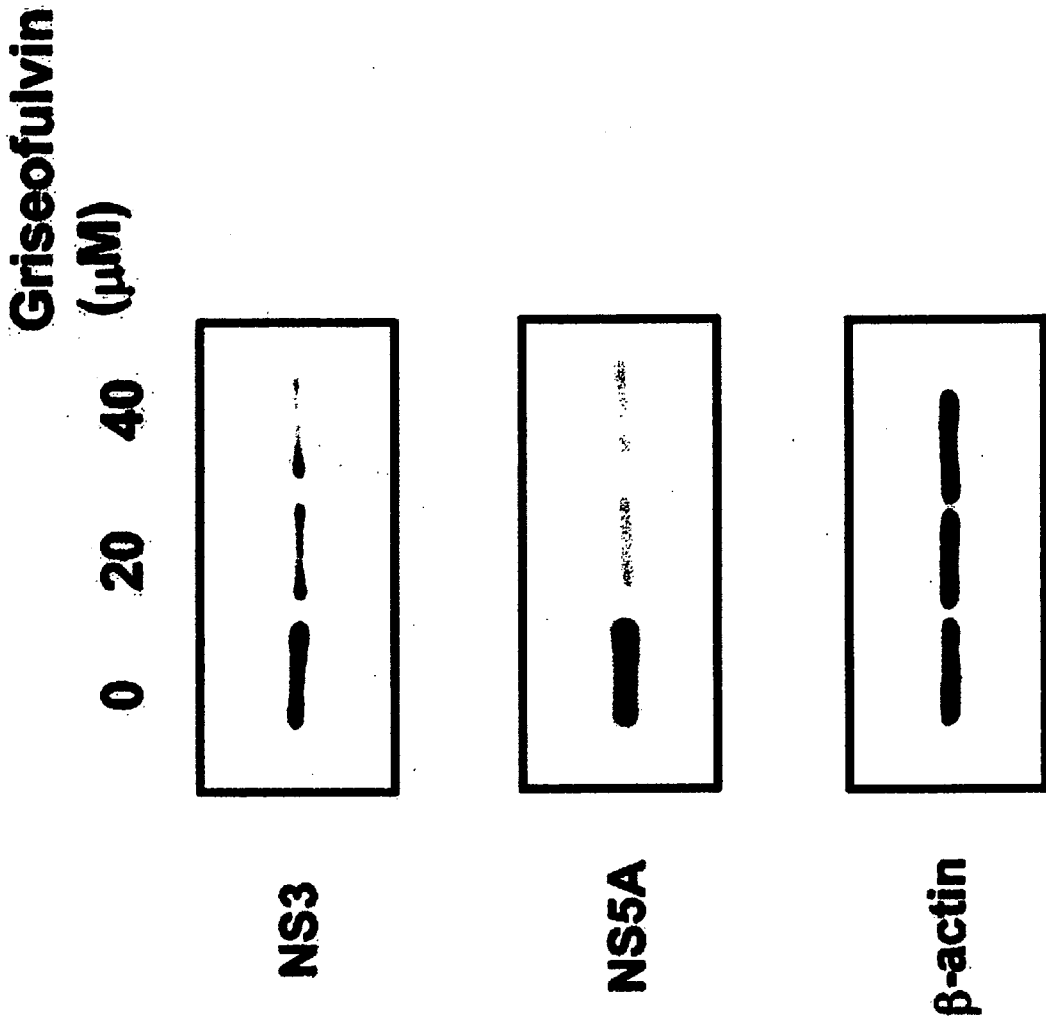


Fig.3

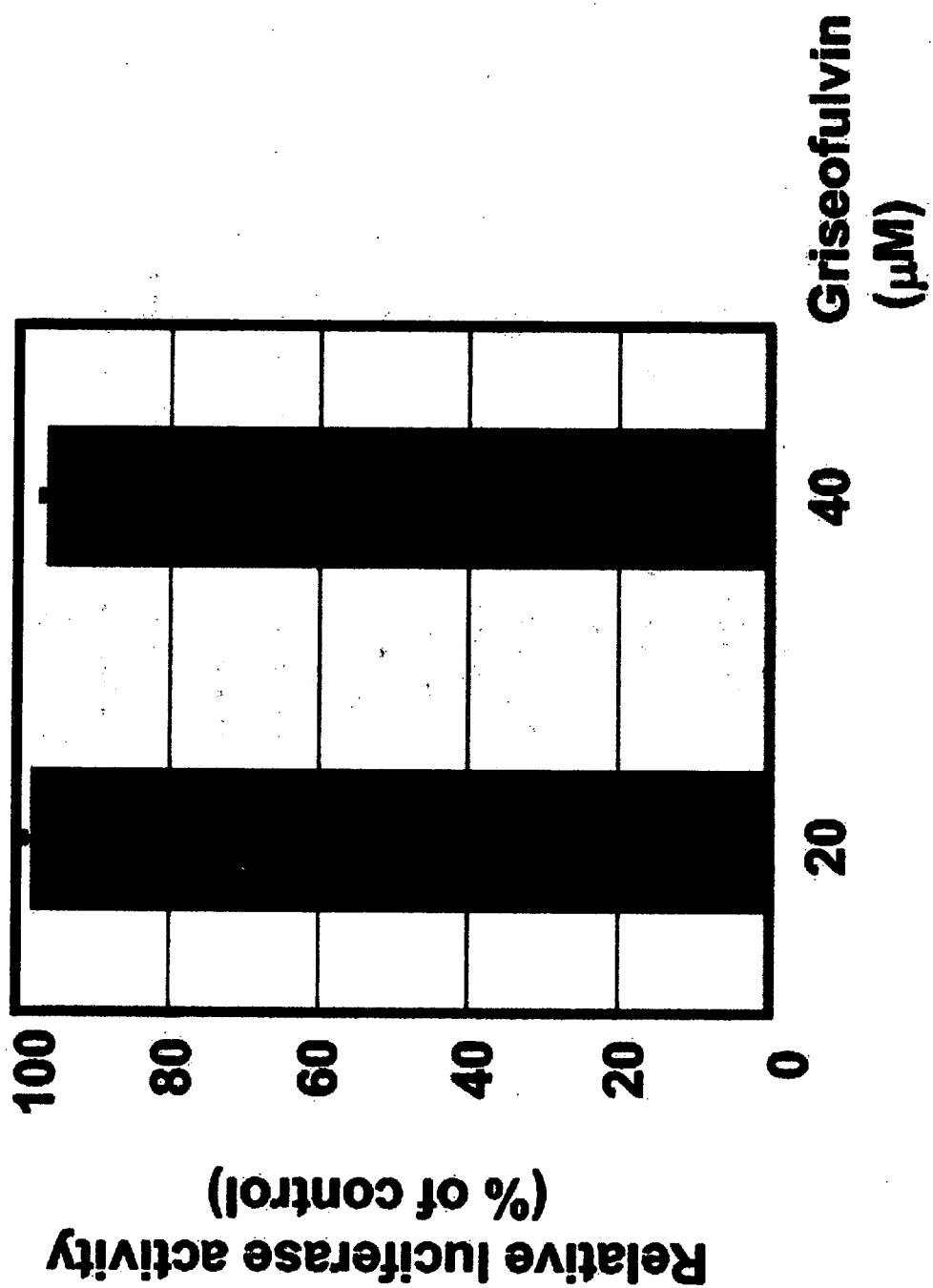


Fig.4

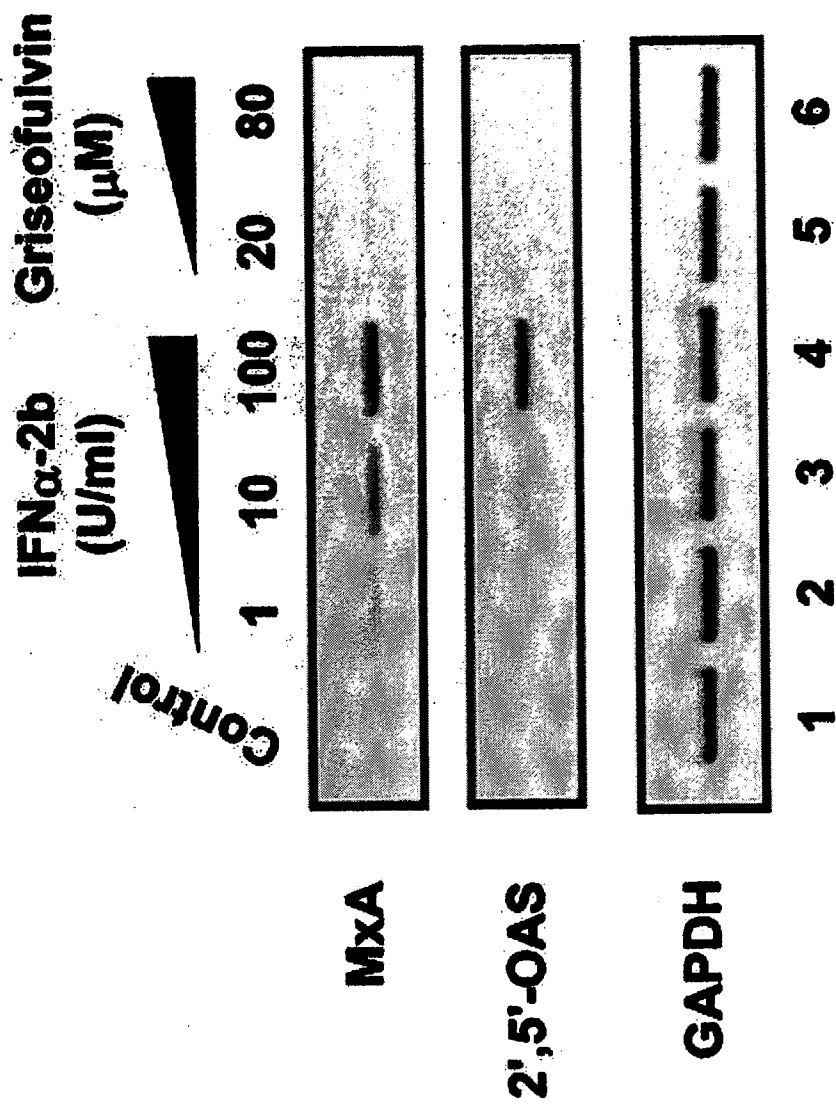


Fig.5

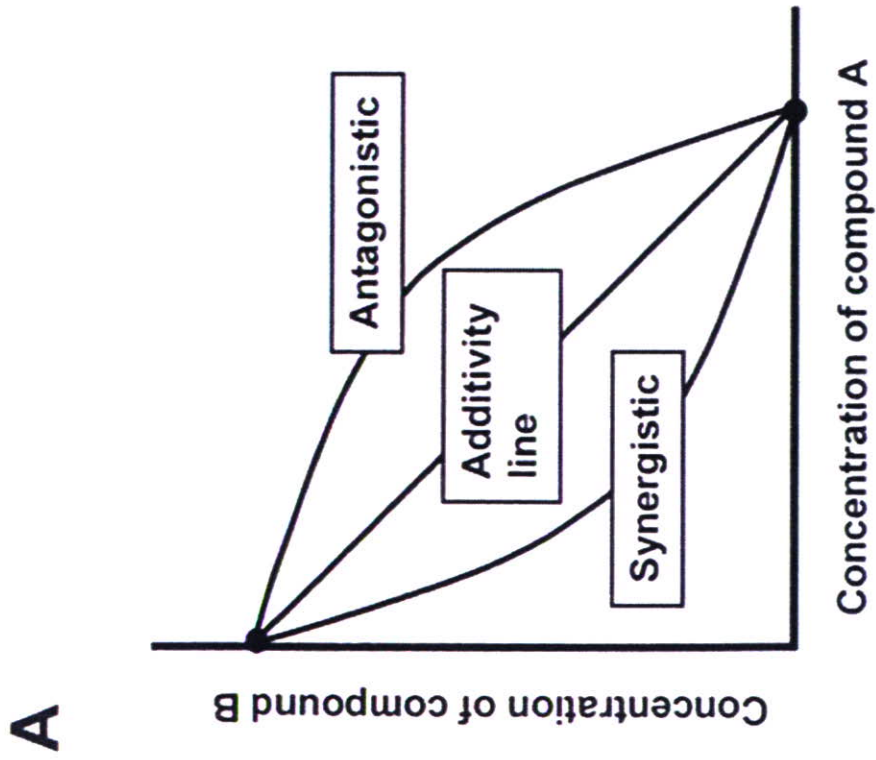
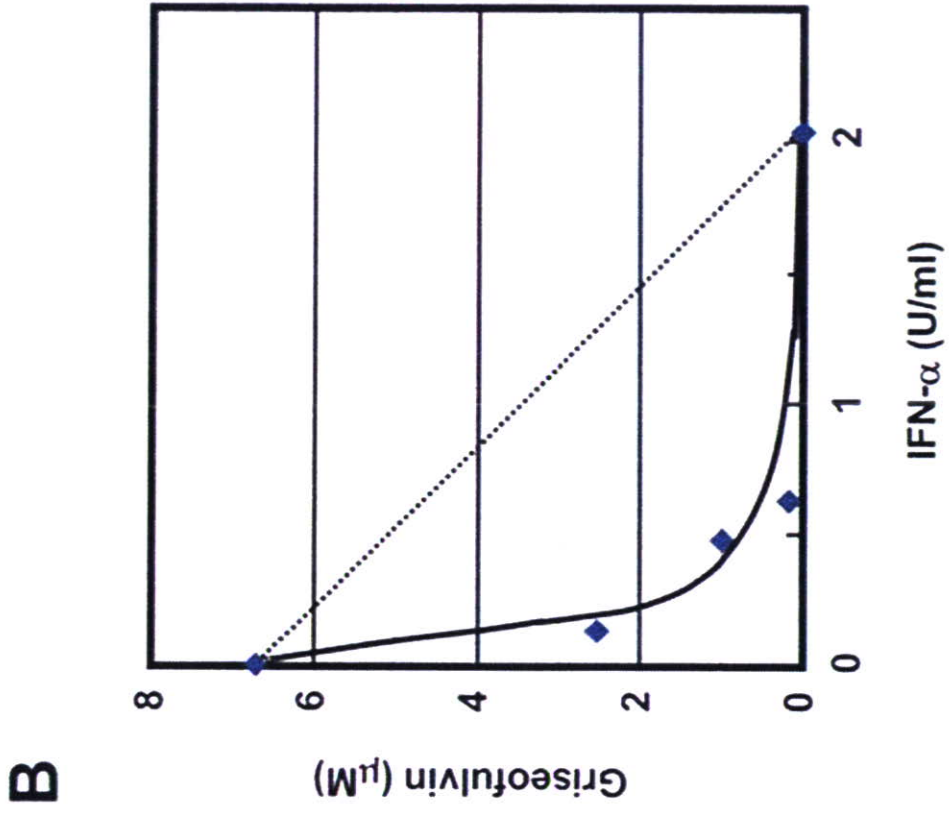


Fig.6

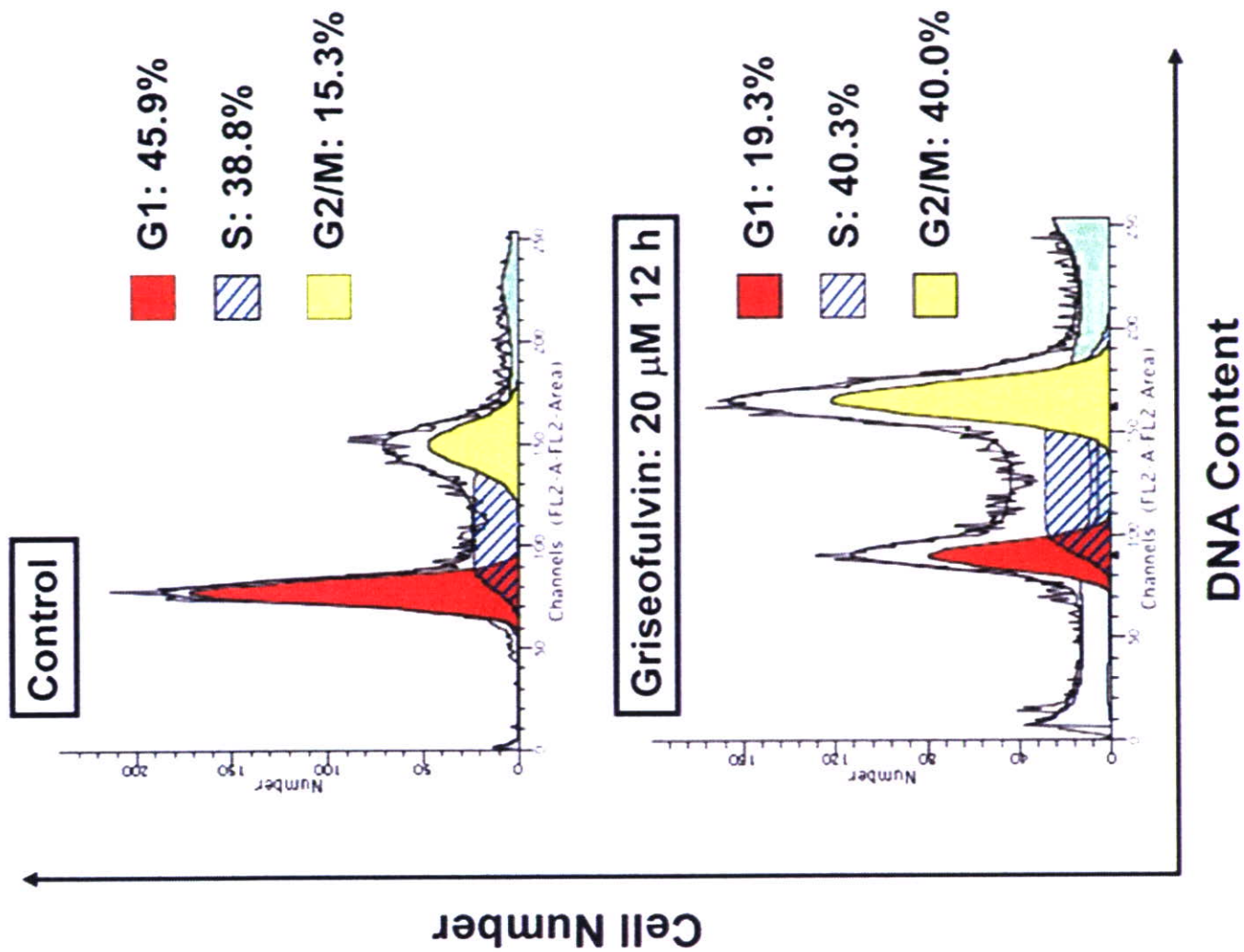


Fig.7

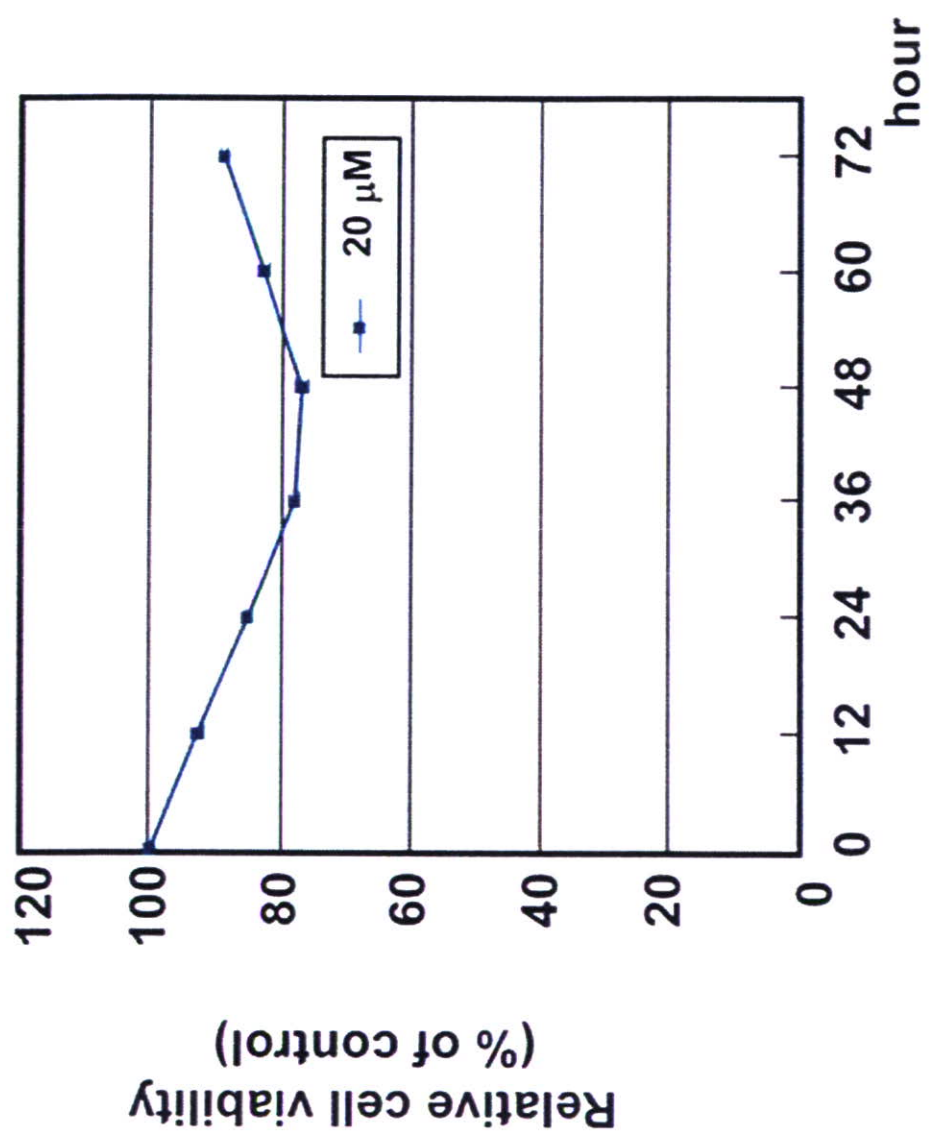


Fig.8

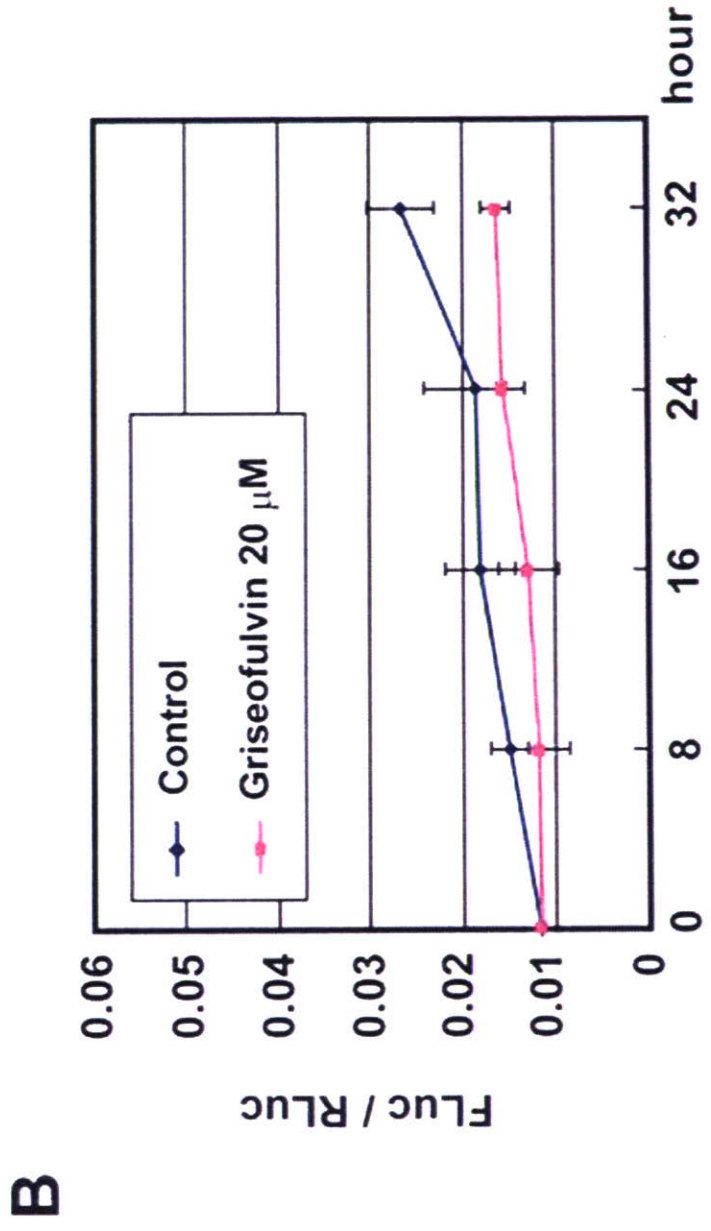
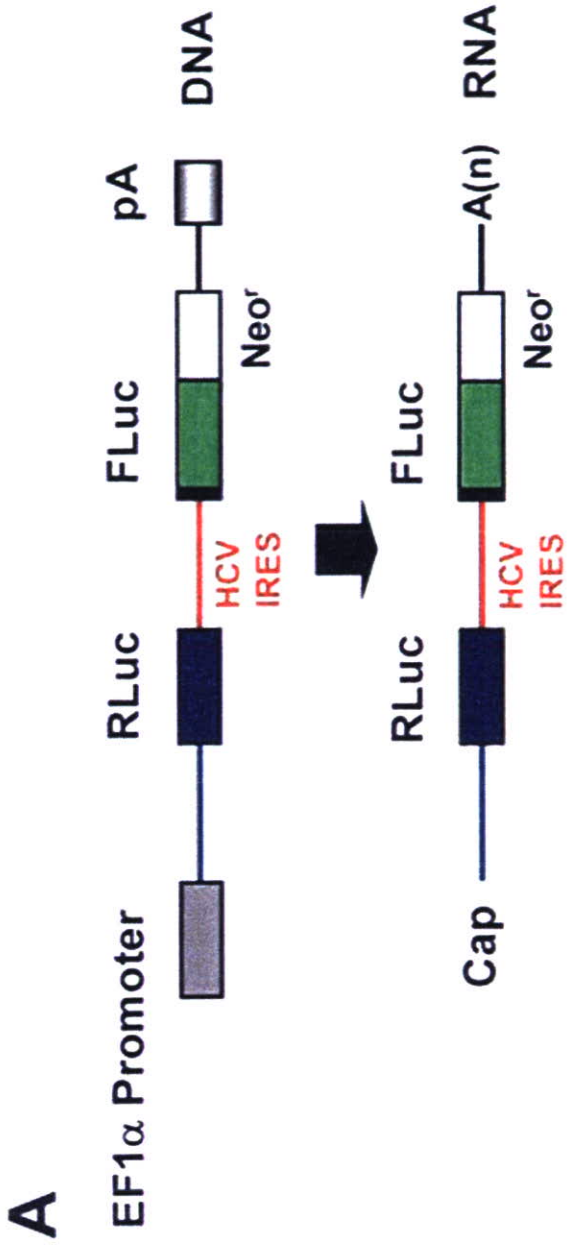
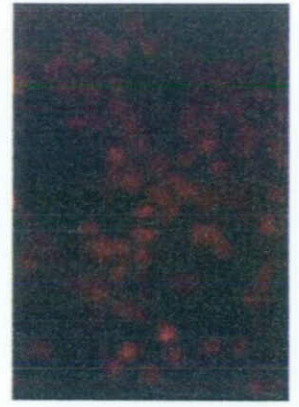


Fig.9

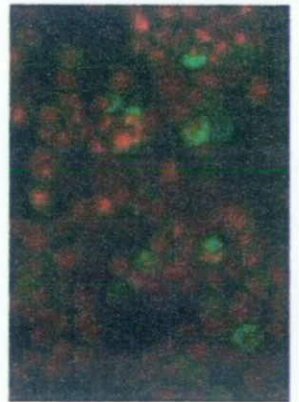
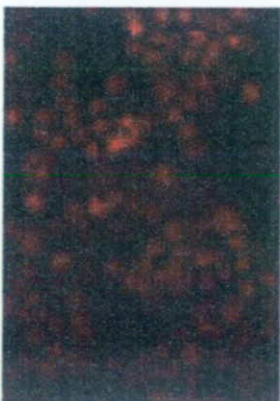
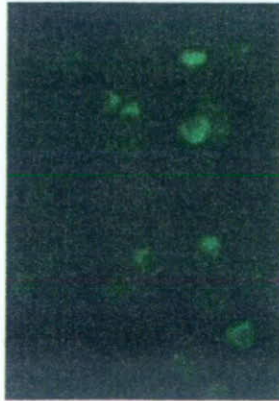
Griseofulvin
20 μ M



Griseofulvin
10 μ M



Control



Anti-NS3

7-AAD

Merge

Table 1. Anti-HCV activities of oral antifungal agents in Huh7/Rep-Feo cells ^a

	EC₅₀^b (μM)	CC₅₀^c (μM)	SI^d
Griseofulvin	6.13 \pm 0.17	217.93 \pm 3.49	35.5
Fluconazole	135.6 \pm 1.25	159.06 \pm 1.07	1.2
Itraconazole	1.24 \pm 0.21	3.35 \pm 0.17	2.7

- a.** All data represent means \pm standard deviation for three separate experiments.
- b.** Fifty percent effective concentration based on the inhibition of HCV replication.
- c.** Fifty percent cytotoxicity concentration based on the reduction of cell viability.
- d.** Selectivity Index (CC₅₀/ EC₅₀).

Critical role of PA28 γ in hepatitis C virus-associated steatogenesis and hepatocarcinogenesis

Kohji Moriishi*, Rika Mochizuki*, Kyoji Moriya[†], Hironobu Miyamoto*, Yoshio Mori*, Takayuki Abe*, Shigeo Murata[‡], Keiji Tanaka[‡], Tatsuo Miyamura[§], Tetsuro Suzuki[§], Kazuhiko Koike[†], and Yoshiharu Matsuura*[¶]

*Department of Molecular Virology, Research Institute for Microbial Diseases, Osaka University, Osaka 565-0871, Japan; [†]Department of Internal Medicine, Graduate School of Medicine, University of Tokyo, Tokyo 113-8655, Japan; [‡]Department of Molecular Oncology, Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Medical Science, Tokyo 113-8613, Japan; and [§]Department of Virology II, National Institute of Infectious Diseases, Tokyo 162-8640, Japan

Edited by Peter Palese, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, NY, and approved December 1, 2006 (received for review August 23, 2006)

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is a major cause of chronic liver disease that frequently leads to steatosis, cirrhosis, and eventually hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC). HCV core protein is not only a component of viral particles but also a multifunctional protein because liver steatosis and HCC are developed in HCV core gene-transgenic (CoreTg) mice. Proteasome activator PA28 γ /REG γ regulates host and viral proteins such as nuclear hormone receptors and HCV core protein. Here we show that a knockout of the PA28 γ gene induces the accumulation of HCV core protein in the nucleus of hepatocytes of CoreTg mice and disrupts development of both hepatic steatosis and HCC. Furthermore, the genes related to fatty acid biosynthesis and *srebp-1c* promoter activity were up-regulated by HCV core protein in the cell line and the mouse liver in a PA28 γ -dependent manner. Heterodimer composed of liver X receptor α (LXR α) and retinoid X receptor α (RXR α) is known to up-regulate *srebp-1c* promoter activity. Our data also show that HCV core protein enhances the binding of LXR α /RXR α to LXR-response element in the presence but not the absence of PA28 γ . These findings suggest that PA28 γ plays a crucial role in the development of liver pathology induced by HCV infection.

fatty acid | proteasome | sterol regulatory element-binding protein (SREBP) | RXR α | LXR α

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) belongs to the Flaviviridae family, and it possesses a positive, single-stranded RNA genome that encodes a single polyprotein composed of \approx 3,000 aa. The HCV polyprotein is processed by host and viral proteases, resulting in 10 viral proteins. Viral structural proteins, including the capsid (core) protein and two envelope proteins, are located in the N-terminal one-third of the polyprotein, followed by nonstructural proteins.

HCV infects >170 million individuals worldwide, and then it causes liver disease, including hepatic steatosis, cirrhosis, and eventually hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) (1). The prevalence of fatty infiltration in the livers of chronic hepatitis C patients has been reported to average \approx 50% (2, 3), which is higher than the percentage in patients infected with hepatitis B virus and other liver diseases. However, the precise functions of HCV proteins in the development of fatty liver remain unknown because of the lack of a system sufficient to investigate the pathogenesis of HCV. HCV core protein expression has been shown to induce lipid droplets in cell lines and hepatic steatosis and HCC in transgenic mice (4–6). These reports suggest that HCV core protein plays an important role in the development of various types of liver failure, including steatosis and HCC.

Recent reports suggest that lipid biosynthesis affects HCV replication (7–9). Involvement of a geranylgeranylated host protein, FBL2, in HCV replication through the interaction with NS5A suggests that the cholesterol biosynthesis pathway is also important for HCV replication (9). Increases in saturated and monounsaturated fatty acids enhance HCV RNA replication, whereas increases in polyunsaturated fatty acids suppress it (7). Lipid homeostasis is regulated by a family of steroid regulatory element-binding proteins (SREBPs), which activate the expression of >30 genes involved in

the synthesis and uptake of cholesterol, fatty acids, triglycerides, and phospholipids. Biosynthesis of cholesterol is regulated by SREBP-2, whereas that of fatty acids, triglycerides, and phospholipids is regulated by SREBP-1c (10–14). In chimpanzees, host genes involved in SREBP signaling are induced during the early stages of HCV infection (8). SREBP-1c regulates the transcription of acetyl-CoA carboxylase, fatty acid synthase, and stearoyl-CoA desaturase, leading to the production of saturated and monounsaturated fatty acids and triglycerides (15). SREBP-1c is transcriptionally regulated by liver X receptor (LXR) α and retinoid X receptor (RXR) α , which belong to a family of nuclear hormone receptors (15, 16). Accumulation of cellular fatty acids by HCV core protein is expected to be modulated by the SREBP-1c pathway because RXR α is activated by HCV core protein (17). However, it remains unknown whether HCV core protein regulates the *srebp-1c* promoter.

We previously reported (18) that HCV core protein specifically binds to the proteasome activator PA28 γ /REG γ in the nucleus and is degraded through a PA28 γ -dependent pathway. PA28 γ is well conserved from invertebrates to vertebrates, and amino acid sequences of human and murine PA28 γ s are identical (19). The homologous proteins, PA28 α and PA28 β , form a heteroheptamer in the cytoplasm, and they activate chymotrypsin-like peptidase activity of the 20S proteasome, whereas PA28 γ forms a homoheptamer in the nucleus, and it enhances trypsin-like peptidase activity of 20S proteasome (20). Recently, Li and colleagues (21) reported that PA28 γ binds to steroid receptor coactivator-3 (SRC-3) and enhances the degradation of SRC-3 in a ubiquitin- and ATP-independent manner. However, the precise physiological functions of PA28 γ are largely unknown *in vivo*. In this work, we examine whether PA28 γ is required for liver pathology induced by HCV core protein *in vivo*.

Results

PA28 γ -Knockout HCV Core Gene Transgenic Mice. To determine the role of PA28 γ in HCV core-induced steatosis and the development of HCC *in vivo*, we prepared PA28 γ -knockout core gene transgenic mice. The PA28 γ -deficient, PA28 γ ^{-/-} mice were born without

Author contributions: K. Moriishi, K.T., T.M., T.S., K.K., and Y. Matsuura designed research; K. Moriishi, R.M., K. Moriya, H.M., Y. Mori, and T.A. performed research; S.M. contributed new reagents/analytic tools; Y. Matsuura analyzed data; and K. Moriishi, K.K., and Y. Matsuura wrote the paper.

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

This article is a PNAS direct submission.

Freely available online through the PNAS open access option.

Abbreviations: CoreTg, HCV core gene-transgenic; HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma; HCV, hepatitis C virus; LXR, liver X receptor; LXRE, liver X receptor-response element; MEF, mouse embryonic fibroblast; ROS, reactive oxygen species; RXR, retinoid X receptor; SRC-3, steroid receptor coactivator-3; SREBP, sterol regulatory element-binding protein.

[¶]To whom correspondence should be addressed. E-mail: matsuura@biken.osaka-u.ac.jp.

This article contains supporting information online at www.pnas.org/cgi/content/full/0607312104/DC1.

© 2007 by The National Academy of Sciences of the USA

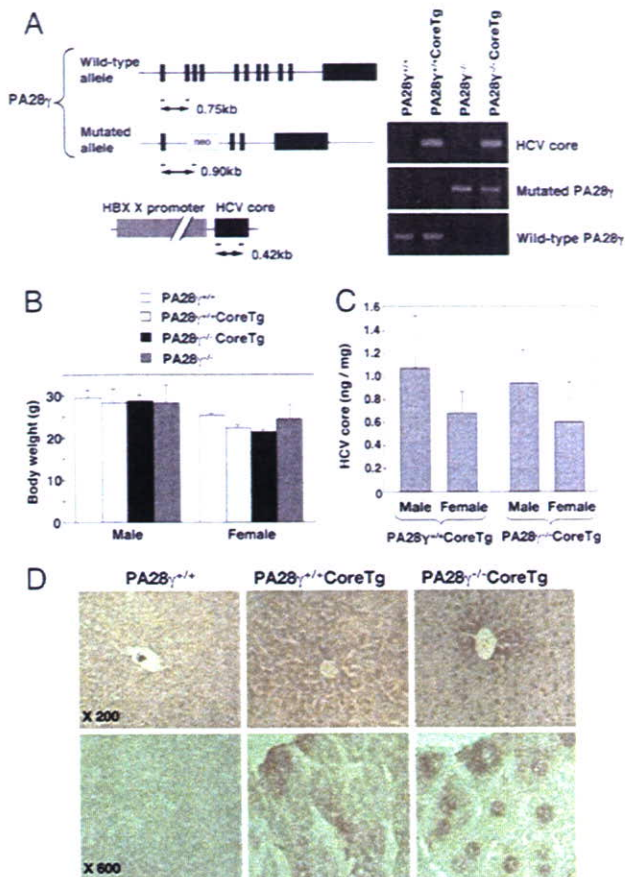


Fig. 1. Preparation and characterization of PA28 γ -knockout HCV core-transgenic mice. (A) The structures of the wild-type and mutated PA28 γ genes and the transgene encoding the HCV core protein under the control of the HBV X promoter were investigated. Positions corresponding to the screening primers and sizes of PCR products are shown. PCR products of the HCV core gene as well as wild-type and mutated PA28 γ alleles were amplified from the genomic DNAs of PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$, PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg, PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$, and PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice. (B) Body weights of PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$, PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg, PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg, and PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ mice at the age of 6 months. (C) HCV core protein levels in the livers of PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg and PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice were determined by ELISA (mean \pm SD, $n = 10$). (D) Localization of HCV core protein in the liver. Liver sections of PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$, PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg, and PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice at the age of 2 months were stained with anti-HCV core antibody.

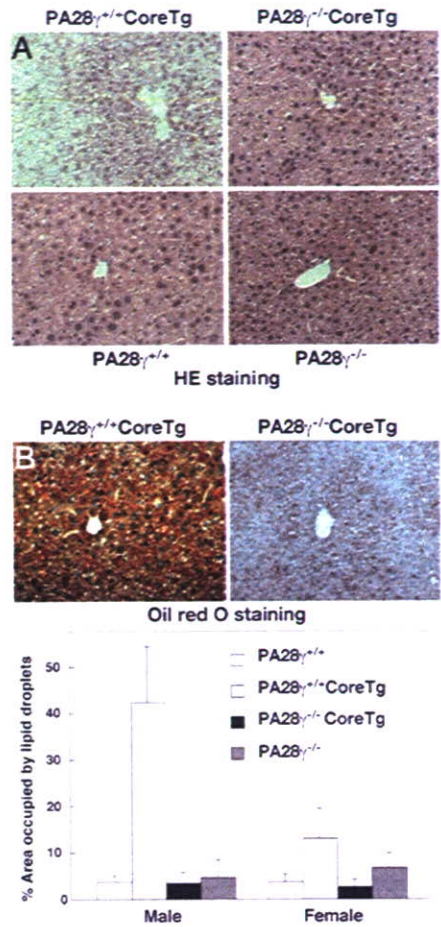


Fig. 2. Accumulation of lipid droplets by expression of HCV core protein. (A) Liver sections of the mice at the age of 6 months were stained with hematoxylin/eosin (HE). (B) (Upper) Liver sections of PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg and PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice at the age of 6 months were stained with oil red O. (Lower) The area occupied by lipid droplets of PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ (white), PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg (gray), PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg (black), and PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ (dark gray) mice was calculated by Image-Pro software (MediaCybernetics, Silver Spring, MD) (mean \pm SD, $n = 10$).

appreciable abnormalities in all tissues examined, with the exception of a slight retardation of growth (22). HCV core gene-transgenic (PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg) mice were bred with PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ mice to create PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg mice. The PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg offspring were bred with each other, and PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg mice were selected by PCR using primers specific to the target sequences (Fig. 1A). No significant differences in body weight were observed among the 6-month-old mice, although PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ mice exhibited a slight retardation of growth (Fig. 1B). A similar level of PA28 γ expression was detected in PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg and PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ mice (see Fig. 5B). The expression levels and molecular size of HCV core protein were similar in the livers of PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg and PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg mice (Fig. 1C; see also Fig. 5B).

PA28 γ Is Required for Degradation of HCV Core Protein in the Nucleus and Induction of Liver Steatosis. HCV core protein has been detected at various sites, such as the endoplasmic reticulum, mitochondria, lipid droplets, and nucleus of cultured cell lines, as well as in hepatocytes of PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg mice and hepatitis C patients

(6, 23, 24). Although HCV core protein is predominantly detected in the cytoplasm of the liver cells of PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice, as reported in ref. 6, in the present study a clear accumulation of HCV core protein was observed in the liver cell nuclei of PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice (Fig. 1D). These findings clearly indicate that at least some fraction of the HCV core protein is translocated into the nucleus and is degraded through a PA28 γ -dependent pathway. Mild vacuolation was observed in the cytoplasm of the liver cells of 4-month-old PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice, and it became more severe at 6 months, as reported in ref. 25. Hematoxylin/eosin-stained liver sections of 6-month-old PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice exhibited severe vacuolating lesions (Fig. 2A), which were clearly stained with oil red O (Fig. 2B Upper), whereas no such lesions were detected in the livers of PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg, PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$, or PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ mice at the same age. The areas occupied by the lipid droplets in the PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg mouse livers were ≈ 10 and 2–4 times larger than those of male and female of PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$, PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$, and PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice, respectively (Fig. 2B Lower). These results suggest that PA28 γ is required for the induction of liver steatosis by HCV core protein in mice.

PA28 γ Is Required for the Up-Regulation of SREBP-1c Transcription by HCV Core Protein in the Mouse Liver. To clarify the effects of a knockout of the PA28 γ gene in PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice on lipid

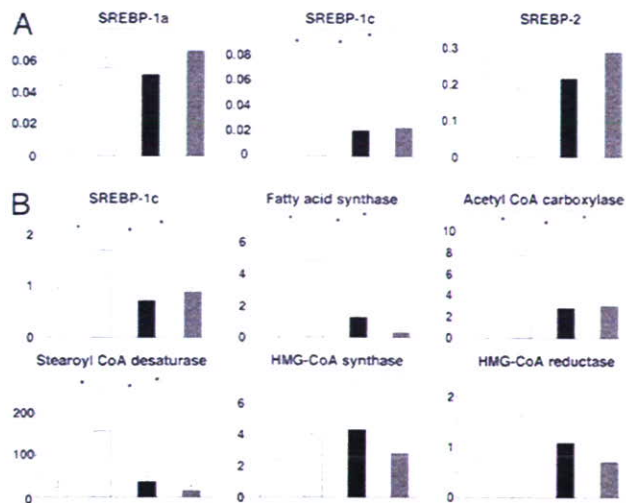


Fig. 3. Transcription of genes regulating lipid biosynthesis in the mouse liver. (A) Total RNA was prepared from the livers of 2-month-old mice; and the transcription of genes encoding SREBP-1a, SREBP-1c, and SREBP-2 was determined by real-time PCR. (B) The transcription of genes encoding SREBP-1c, fatty acid synthase, acetyl-CoA carboxylase, stearoyl-CoA desaturase, HMG-CoA synthase, and HMG-CoA reductase of 6-month-old mice was measured by real-time PCR. The transcription of the genes was normalized with that of hypoxanthine phosphoribosyltransferase, and the values are expressed as relative activity ($n = 5$; *, $P < 0.05$; **, $P < 0.01$). The transcription of each gene in PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$, PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg, PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg, and PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice is indicated by white, gray, black, and dark gray bars, respectively.

metabolism, genes related to the lipid biosyntheses were examined by real-time quantitative PCR. Transcription of SREBP-1c was higher in the livers of PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice than in those of PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$, PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$, and PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg mice at 2 months of age, but no such increases in SREBP-2 and SREBP-1a were observed (Fig. 3A). Although transcription of SREBP-1c and its regulating enzymes, such as acetyl-CoA carboxylase, fatty acid synthase, and stearoyl-CoA desaturase, was also enhanced in the livers of 6-month-old PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice compared with the levels in the livers of PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$, PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$, and PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg mice, no statistically significant differences were observed with respect to the transcription levels of cholesterol biosynthesis-related genes that are regulated by SREBP-2 (e.g., HMG-CoA synthase and HMG-CoA reductase) (Fig. 3B). These results suggest the

following: (i) the up-regulation of SREBP-1c transcription in the livers of mice requires both HCV core protein and PA28 γ ; and (ii) the nuclear accumulation of HCV core protein alone, which occurs because of the lack of degradation along a PA28 γ -dependent proteasome pathway, does not activate the *srebp-1c* promoter.

HCV Core Protein Indirectly Potentiates *srebp-1c* Promoter Activity in an LXR α /RXR α -Dependent Manner. LXR α , which is primarily expressed in the liver, forms a complex with RXR α and synergistically potentiates *srebp-1c* promoter activity (16). Activation of RXR α by HCV core protein suggests that cellular fatty acid synthesis is modulated by the SREBP-1c pathway, although HCV core protein was not included in the transcription factor complex in the electrophoresis mobility shift assay (EMSA) (17). To analyze the effect of HCV core protein and PA28 γ on the activation of the *srebp-1c* promoter, we first examined the effect of HCV core protein on the binding of the LXR α /RXR α complex to the LXR-response element (LXRE) located upstream of the SREBP-1c gene (Fig. 4A). Although a weak shift of the labeled LXRE probe was observed by incubation with nuclear extracts prepared from 293T cells expressing FLAG-tagged LXR α and HA-tagged RXR α , a clear shift was obtained by the treatment of cells with 9-*cis*-retinoic acid and 22(*R*)-hydroxycholesterol, ligands for LXR α and RXR α , respectively. In contrast, coexpression of HCV core protein with LXR α and RXR α potentiated the shift of the probe irrespective of the treatment with the ligands. Addition of 500 times the amount of nonlabeled LXRE probe (competitor) diminished the shift of the labeled probe induced by the ligands and/or HCV core protein. Furthermore, coinubation of the nuclear fraction with antibody to FLAG or HA tag but not with antibody to either HCV core or PA28 γ caused a supershift of the labeled probe. These results indicate that HCV core protein does not participate in the LXR α /RXR α -LXRE complex but indirectly enhances the binding of LXR α /RXR α to the LXRE.

The activity of the *srebp-1c* promoter was enhanced by the expression of HCV core protein in 293T cells, and it was further enhanced by coexpression of LXR α /RXR α (Fig. 4B). Enhancement of the *srebp-1c* promoter by coexpression of HCV core protein and LXR α /RXR α was further potentiated by treatment with the ligands for LXR α and RXR α . The cells treated with 9-*cis*-retinoic acid exhibited more potent enhancement of the *srebp-1c* promoter than those treated with 22(*R*)-hydroxycholesterol. HCV core protein exhibited more potent enhancement of the *srebp-1c* promoter in cells treated with both ligands than in those treated with either ligand alone. These results suggest that HCV core protein poten-

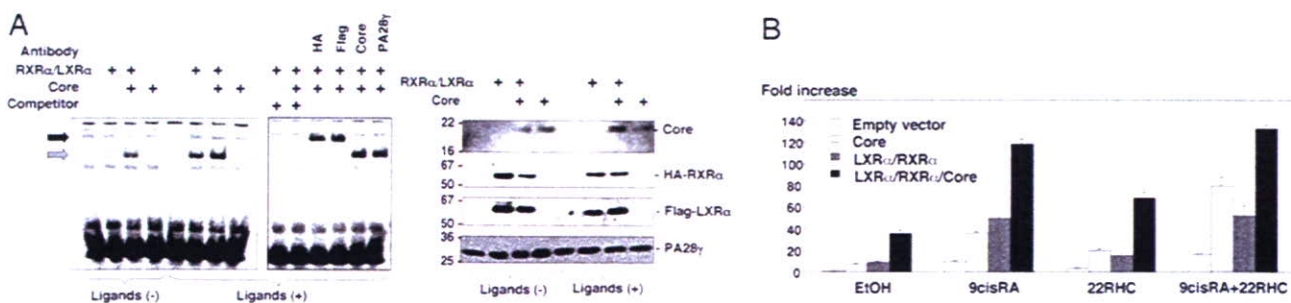


Fig. 4. Activation of the *srebp-1c* promoter by HCV core protein. (A) FLAG-LXR α and HA-RXR α were expressed in 293T cells together with or without HCV core protein. Ligands for LXR α and RXR α dissolved in ethanol [Ligands (+)] or ethanol alone [Ligands (-)] were added to the culture supernatant at 24 h posttransfection. Cells were harvested at 48 h posttransfection, and nuclear extracts were mixed with the reaction buffer for EMSA in the presence or absence of antibody (100 ng) against HA, FLAG, HCV core or PA28 γ , or nonlabeled LXRE probe (Competitor). (Left) The resulting mixtures were subjected to PAGE and blotted with horseradish peroxidase/streptavidin. The mobility shift of the LXRE probe and its supershift are indicated by a gray and black arrow, respectively. (Right) Expression of HCV core, HA-RXR α , FLAG-LXR α , and PA28 γ in cells was detected by immunoblotting. (B) Effects of ligands for RXR α , 9-*cis*-retinoic acid (9cisRA), and for LXR α , 22(*R*)-hydroxycholesterol (22RHC), on the activation of the *srebp-1c* promoter in 293T cells expressing RXR α , LXR α , and/or HCV core protein. Ligands were added into the medium at 24 h posttransfection at a concentration of 5 μ M, and the cells were harvested after 24 h of incubation.

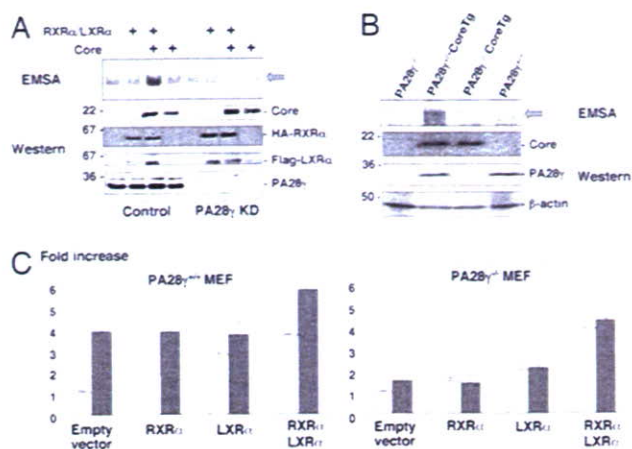


Fig. 5. PA28 γ is required for HCV core-dependent activation of the *srebp-1c* promoter. (A) Effect of PA28 γ knockdown on the LXR α /RXR α -DNA complex. FLAG-LXR α and HA-RXR α were expressed in FLC4 (control) or PA28 γ -knockdown (PA28 γ KD) cells together with or without HCV core protein. Cells were harvested at 48 h posttransfection, and nuclear extracts were mixed with the reaction buffer for EMSA. (Upper) The resulting mixtures were subjected to PAGE and blotted with horseradish peroxidase-streptavidin. The mobility shift of the LXRE probe is indicated by an arrow. (Lower) Expression of HCV core, HA-RXR α , FLAG-LXR α , and PA28 γ in cells was detected by immunoblotting. (B) Effect of PA28 γ knockout on the LXR α /RXR α -DNA complex in the mouse liver. (Upper) Nuclear extracts were prepared from the livers of 2-month-old PA28 γ ^{+/+}, PA28 γ ^{-/-} CoreTg, PA28 γ ^{-/-} CoreTg, and PA28 γ ^{-/-} mice and subjected to EMSA. The mobility shift of the LXRE probe is indicated by an arrow. (Lower) The expression of HCV core, PA28 γ , and β -actin in the livers of the mice was detected by immunoblotting. (C) Effect of HCV core protein on *srebp-1c* promoter activity in PA28 γ -knockout fibroblasts. A plasmid encoding firefly luciferase under the control of the *srebp-1c* promoter was transfected into MEFs prepared from PA28 γ ^{+/+} (Left) or PA28 γ ^{-/-} (Right) mice together with a plasmid encoding a *Renilla* luciferase. An empty plasmid or plasmids encoding mouse RXR α or LXR α were also cotransfected into the cells together with (gray bars) or without (white bars) a plasmid encoding HCV core protein. Luciferase activity under the control of the *srebp-1c* promoter was determined, and it is expressed as the fold increase in relative luciferase activity after standardization with the activity of *Renilla* luciferase.

tiates *srebp-1c* promoter activity in an LXR α /RXR α -dependent manner.

HCV Core Protein Activates the *srebp-1c* Promoter in an LXR α /RXR α - and PA28 γ -Dependent Manner. To examine whether PA28 γ is required for HCV core-induced enhancement of *srebp-1c* promoter activity in human liver cells, a PA28 γ -knockdown human hepatoma cell line (FLC4 KD) was prepared. Enhancement of binding of the LXRE probe to LXR α /RXR α by coexpression of HCV core protein and LXR α /RXR α in FLC4 cells was diminished by knockdown of the PA28 γ gene (Fig. 5A). Furthermore, formation of the LXR α /RXR α -LXRE complex was enhanced in the livers of PA28 γ ^{+/+} CoreTg mice but not in those of PA28 γ ^{-/-}, PA28 γ ^{-/-}, or PA28 γ ^{-/-} CoreTg mice (Fig. 5B). The expression of the HCV core protein in the mouse embryonic fibroblasts (MEFs) of PA28 γ ^{+/+} mice induced the activation of the mouse *srebp-1c* promoter through the endogenous expression of LXR α and RXR α (Fig. 5C Left). Further enhancement of the activation of the *srebp-1c* promoter by HCV core protein in PA28 γ ^{+/+} MEFs was achieved by the exogenous expression of both LXR α and RXR α . However, no enhancing effect of HCV core protein on *srebp-1c* promoter activity was observed in PA28 γ ^{-/-} MEFs (Fig. 5C Right). These results support the notion that HCV core protein enhances the activity of the *srebp-1c* promoter in an LXR α /RXR α - and PA28 γ -dependent manner.

Table 1. HCC in mice at 16–18 months of age

Mouse and sex	Total no. of mice	No. of mice developing HCC	Incidence, %
PA28 γ ^{+/+} CoreTg			
Male	17	5	29.4
Female	28	3	10.7
PA28 γ ^{-/-}			
Male	16	0	0
Female	4	0	0
PA28 γ ^{-/-} CoreTg			
Male	23	0	0
Female	13	0	0
PA28 γ ^{+/+} CoreTg			
Male	15	0	0
Female	21	0	0

PA28 γ Plays a Crucial Role in the Development of HCC in PA28 γ ^{+/+} CoreTg Mice. The incidence of hepatic tumors in male PA28 γ ^{+/+} CoreTg mice older than 16 months was significantly higher than that in age-matched female PA28 γ ^{+/+} CoreTg mice (6). We reconfirmed here that the incidence of HCC in male and female PA28 γ ^{+/+} CoreTg mice at 16–18 months of age was 29.4% (5 of 17 mice) and 10.7% (3 of 28 mice), respectively. To our surprise, however, no HCC developed in PA28 γ ^{-/-} CoreTg mice (males, 15; females, 21), although, as expected, no HCC was observed in PA28 γ ^{-/-} (males, 16; females, 4) and PA28 γ ^{-/-} mice (males, 23; females, 13) (Table 1). These results clearly indicate that PA28 γ plays an indispensable role in the development of HCC induced by HCV core protein.

Discussion

HCV core protein is detected in the cytoplasm and partially in the nucleus and mitochondria of culture cells and hepatocytes of transgenic mice and hepatitis C patients (6, 23, 24, 26). Degradation of HCV core protein was enhanced by deletion of the C-terminal transmembrane region through a ubiquitin/proteasome-dependent pathway (27). We previously reported (18) that PA28 γ binds directly to HCV core protein and then enhances degradation of HCV core protein in the nucleus through a proteasome-dependent pathway because HCV core protein was accumulated in nucleus of human cell line by treatment with proteasome inhibitor MG132. In this work, accumulation of HCV core protein was observed in nucleus of hepatocytes of PA28 γ ^{-/-} CoreTg mice (Fig. 1D). This result directly demonstrates that HCV core protein migrates into the nucleus and is degraded through a PA28 γ -dependent pathway. However, HCV core protein accumulated in the nucleus because knockout of PA28 γ gene abrogated the ability to cause liver pathology, suggesting that interaction of HCV core protein with PA28 γ in the nucleus is prerequisite for the liver pathology induced by HCV core protein. We have previously shown (18) that HCV core protein is degraded through a PA28 γ -dependent pathway, and Minami *et al.* (28) reported that PA28 γ has a cochaperone activity with Hsp90. Therefore, degradation products of HCV core protein by means of PA28 γ -dependent processing or correct folding of HCV core protein through cochaperone activity of PA28 γ might be involved in the development of liver pathology. We do not know the reason why knockout of the PA28 γ gene does not affect the total amount of HCV core protein in the liver of the transgenic mice. PA28 γ -dependent degradation of HCV core protein may be independent of ubiquitination, as shown in SRC-3 (21), whereas knockdown of PA28 γ in a human hepatoma cell line enhanced the ubiquitination of HCV core protein [supporting information (SI) Fig. 6], suggesting that lack of PA28 γ suppresses a ubiquitin-independent degradation but enhances a ubiquitin-dependent degradation of HCV core protein. Therefore, the total amount of HCV

core protein in the liver of the mice may be unaffected by the knockout of the PA28 γ gene.

Our results suggest that the interaction of HCV core protein with PA28 γ leads to the activation of the *srebp-1c* promoter along an LXR α /RXR α -dependent pathway and the development of liver steatosis and HCC. HCV core protein was not included in the LXR α /RXR α -LXRE complex (Fig. 3A), suggesting that HCV core protein indirectly activates the *srebp-1c* promoter. Cytoplasmic HCV core protein was shown to interact with Sp110b, which is a transcriptional corepressor of RAR α -dependent transcription, and this interaction leads to the sequestering of Sp110b in the cytoplasm, resulting in the activation of RAR α -dependent transcription (29). The sequestration of an unidentified corepressor of the LXR α /RXR α heterodimer in the cytoplasm by HCV core protein may also contribute to the activation of the *srebp-1c* promoter. Although the precise physiological function of PA28 γ -proteasome activity in the nucleus is not known, PA28 γ has previously been shown (21) to regulate nuclear hormone receptors by means of the degradation of its coactivator SRC-3 and to participate in the fully Hsp90-dependent protein refolding (28). It appears reasonable to speculate that degradation or refolding of HCV core protein in a PA28 γ -dependent pathway might be involved in the modulation of transcriptional regulators of various promoters, including the *srebp-1c* promoter. Saturated or monounsaturated fatty acids have been shown to enhance HCV RNA replication in Huh7 cells containing the full-length HCV replicon (7). The up-regulation of fatty acid biosynthesis by HCV core protein may also contribute to the efficient replication of HCV and to the progression of HCV pathogenesis.

Expression of HCV core protein was reported to enhance production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) (30), which leads to carbonylation of intracellular proteins (31). Enhancement of ROS production may trigger double-stranded DNA breaks and result in the development of HCC (30, 32, 33). HCV core protein could enhance the protein carbonylation in the liver of the transgenic mice in the presence but not in the absence of PA28 γ (SI Fig. 7), suggesting that PA28 γ is required for ROS production induced by HCV core protein. Development of HCC was observed in PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg mice but not in PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice (Table 1). Enhancement of ROS production by HCV core protein in the presence of PA28 γ might be involved in the development of HCC in PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg mice.

It is well known that resistant viruses readily emerge during the treatment with antiviral drugs targeting the viral protease or replicase, especially in the case of infection with RNA viruses. Therefore, antivirals targeting the host factors that are indispensable for the propagation of viruses might be an ideal target for the development of antiviral agents because of a lower rate of mutation than that of viral genome, if they have no side effects to patients. Importantly, the amino acid sequence of PA28 γ of mice is identical to that of human, and mouse PA28 γ is dispensable because PA28 γ knockout mice exhibit no abnormal phenotype except for mild growth retardation. Therefore, PA28 γ might be a promising target for an antiviral treatment of chronic hepatitis C with negligible side effects.

In summary, we observed that a knockout of the PA28 γ gene from PA28 $\gamma^{+/+}$ CoreTg mice induced the accumulation of HCV core protein in the nucleus and disrupted the development of both steatosis and HCC. Activation of the *srebp-1c* promoter was up-regulated by HCV core protein both *in vitro* and *in vivo* through a PA28 γ -dependent pathway, suggesting that PA28 γ plays a crucial role in the development of liver pathology induced by HCV infection.

Materials and Methods

Histology and immunohistochemistry, real-time PCR, and detection of proteins modified by ROS are discussed in *SI Materials and Methods*.

Plasmids and Reagents. Human PA28 γ cDNA was isolated from a human fetal brain library (18). The gene encoding HCV core protein was amplified from HCV strain J1 (genotype 1b) (34) and cloned into pCAG-GS (35). Mouse cDNAs of RXR α and LXR α were amplified by PCR from the total cDNAs of the mouse liver. The RXR α and LXR α genes were introduced into pEF-FLAGspGBK (36) and pcDNA3.1 (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA), respectively. The targeting fragment for human PA28 γ knockdown (GGATCCGGTGGATCAGGAAGTGAAGTTCAAGAGACTTCACTTCCTGATCCACCTTTTTGGAAAAGCTT) was introduced into the BamHI and HindIII sites of pSilencer 4.1 U6 hygro vector (Ambion, Austin, TX). Mouse anti-FLAG (M2) and mouse anti- β -actin antibodies were purchased from Sigma (St. Louis, MO). Rabbit polyclonal antibody against synthetic peptides corresponding to amino acids 70–85 of PA28 γ was obtained from AFFINITI (Exeter, U.K.). Horseradish peroxidase-conjugated goat anti-mouse and anti-rabbit IgGs were purchased from ICN Pharmaceuticals (Aurora, OH). Rabbit anti-HCV core protein was prepared by immunization with recombinant HCV core protein (amino acids 1–71), as described in ref. 24. Mouse monoclonal antibody to HCV core protein was kindly provided by S. Yagi (37). The plasmid for expression of HA-tagged ubiquitin was described in ref. 27.

Preparation of PA28 γ -Knockout HCV CoreTg Mice. The generation of C57BL/6 mice carrying the gene encoding HCV core protein genotype 1b line C49 and that of PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ mice have been reported previously (22, 25). Both strains were crossed with each other to create PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice. PA28 $\gamma^{-/-}$ CoreTg mice were identified by PCR targeted at the PA28 γ or HCV core gene (22, 25). Using 1 μ g of genomic DNA obtained from the mouse tail, the PA28 γ gene was amplified by PCR with the following primers: sense, PA28-3 (AGGTGGATCAGGAAGTGAAGCTCA); and antisense, PA28 γ -5cr (CACCTCACTGTGTATCCGCTCTCTGAAAGAATCAACC). The targeted sequence for the PA28 γ -knockout mouse was detected by PCR using the PA28-3 primer and the PAKO-4 primer (TGCAGTTCATTCAGGGCACCAGGACAG). The transgene encoding HCV core protein was detected by PCR as described in ref. 25. The expression of PA28 γ and HCV core protein in the livers of 6-month-old mice was confirmed by Western blotting with mouse monoclonal antibody to HCV core protein, clone 11-10, and rabbit antibody to PA28 γ . Mice were cared for according to the institutional guidelines. The mice were given ordinary feed, CRF-1 (Charles River Laboratories, Yokohama, Japan), and they were maintained under specific pathogen-free conditions.

All animal experiments conformed to the Guidelines for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, and they were approved by the Institutional Committee of Laboratory Animal Experimentation (Research Institute for Microbial Diseases, Osaka University).

Preparation of Mouse Embryonic Fibroblasts. MEFs were prepared as described in ref. 22. MEFs were cultured at 37°C under an atmosphere of 5% CO₂ in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (Sigma) supplemented with 10% FBS, penicillin, streptomycin, sodium pyruvate, and nonessential amino acids.

Transfection and Immunoblotting. Plasmid vectors were transfected into the MEFs and 293T cells by liposome-mediated transfection by using Lipofectamine 2000 (Invitrogen). The amount of HCV core protein in the liver tissues was determined by an ELISA as described in ref. 37. The cell lysates were subjected to SDS/PAGE (12.5% gel), and they were then transferred onto PVDF membranes. Proteins on the membranes were treated with specific antibody and Super Signal Femto (Pierce, Rockford, IL). The results were then visualized by using a LAS3000 imaging system (Fuji Photo Film, Tokyo, Japan). The method of immunoprecipitation test is described in ref. 18.

Reporter Assay for *srebp-1c* Promoter Activity. The genomic DNA fragment encoding the *srebp-1c* promoter region (located from residues -410 to +24) was amplified from a mouse genome. The fragment was introduced into the KpnI and HindIII sites of pGL3-Basic (Promega, Madison, WI), and it was designated as pGL3-*srebp-1c*Pro. The plasmids encoding RXR α and LXR α were transfected into MEFs together with pGL3-*srebp-1c*Pro and a control plasmid encoding *Renilla* luciferase (Promega). The total DNA for transfection was normalized by the addition of empty plasmids. Cells were harvested at 24 h posttransfection. The ligand of RXR α , 9-*cis*-retinoic acid (Sigma), and that of LXR α , 22(*R*)-hydroxycholesterol (Sigma) were added at a final concentration of 5 μ M each to the culture medium of 293T cells transfected with pGL3-*srebp-1c*Pro together with expression plasmids encoding RXR α , LXR α , and HCV core protein at 24 h posttransfection. Cells were harvested 24 h after treatment. Luciferase activity was measured by using the dual-luciferase reporter assay system (Promega). Firefly luciferase activity was standardized with that of *Renilla* luciferase, and the results are expressed as the fold increase in relative luciferase units.

Electrophoresis Mobility Shift Assay (EMSA). EMSA was carried out by using a LightShift Chemiluminescent EMSA kit (Pierce) according to the manufacturer's protocol. Nuclear extract of the cell lines and liver tissue was prepared with an NE-PER nuclear

and cytoplasmic extraction reagent kit (Pierce). Briefly, double-stranded oligonucleotides for EMSA were prepared by annealing both strands of each LXRE of the *srebp-1c* promoter (5'-GGACGCCCGCTAGTAACCCCGGC-3') (16). Both strands were labeled at the 5' ends with biotin. The annealed probe was incubated for 20 min on ice with nuclear extract (3 μ g of protein) in a reaction buffer containing 10 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.5), 50 mM KCl, 1 mM DTT, 0.05 μ g μ l poly(dI-dC), 2.5% glycerol, 0.05% Nonidet P-40, and 0.1 nM labeled probe, with or without 1 mM nonlabeled probe. The resulting mixture was subjected to PAGE (5% gel) at 120 V for 30 min in 0.5 \times TBE. The DNA-protein complex was transferred to a Hybond N+ membrane (Amersham, Piscataway, NJ), incubated with horseradish peroxidase-conjugated streptavidin, and visualized by using an LAS3000 imaging system.

Statistical Analysis. The results are expressed as the mean \pm SD. The significance of differences in the means was determined by Student's *t* test.

We thank H. Murase for secretarial work and D. C. S. Huang for providing the plasmids. This work was supported in part by grants-in-aid from the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare; the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology; the 21st Century Center of Excellence Program; and the Foundation for Biomedical Research and Innovation.

1. Wasley A, Alter MJ (2000) *Semin Liver Dis* 20:1-16.
2. Bach N, Thung SN, Schaffner F (1992) *Hepatology* 15:572-577.
3. Lefkowitz JH, Schiff ER, Davis GL, Perrillo RP, Lindsay K, Bodenheimer HC, Jr., Balart LA, Ortego TJ, Payne J, Dienstag JL, et al. (1993) *Gastroenterology* 104:595-603.
4. Barba G, Harper F, Harada T, Kohara M, Goulinet S, Matsuura Y, Eder G, Schaff Z, Chapman MJ, Miyamura T, Breehot C (1997) *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 94:1200-1205.
5. Hope RG, McLaughlan J (2000) *J Gen Virol* 81:1913-1925.
6. Moriya K, Fujie H, Shintani Y, Yotsuyanagi H, Tsutsumi T, Ishibashi K, Matsuura Y, Kimura S, Miyamura T, Koike K (1998) *Nat Med* 4:1065-1067.
7. Kapadia SB, Chisari FV (2005) *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 102:2561-2566.
8. Su AI, Pezacki JP, Wodicka L, Brideau AD, Supekova L, Thimme R, Wieland S, Bukh J, Purcell RH, Schultz PG, Chisari FV (2002) *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 99:15669-15674.
9. Wang C, Gale M, Jr, Keller BC, Huang H, Brown MS, Goldstein JL, Ye J (2005) *Mol Cell* 18:425-434.
10. Horton JD, Shimomura I, Brown MS, Hammer RE, Goldstein JL, Shimano H (1998) *J Clin Invest* 101:2331-2339.
11. Pai JT, Guryev O, Brown MS, Goldstein JL (1998) *J Biol Chem* 273:26138-26148.
12. Shimano H, Horton JD, Hammer RE, Shimomura I, Brown MS, Goldstein JL (1996) *J Clin Invest* 98:1575-1584.
13. Shimano H, Horton JD, Shimomura I, Hammer RE, Brown MS, Goldstein JL (1997) *J Clin Invest* 99:846-854.
14. Shimano H, Shimomura I, Hammer RE, Herz J, Goldstein JL, Brown MS, Horton JD (1997) *J Clin Invest* 100:2115-2124.
15. Repa JJ, Liang G, Ou J, Bashmakov Y, Lobaccaro JM, Shimomura I, Shan B, Brown MS, Goldstein JL, Mangelsdorf DJ (2000) *Genes Dev* 14:2819-2830.
16. Yoshikawa T, Shimano H, Amemiya-Kudo M, Yahagi N, Hasty AH, Matsuoka T, Okazaki H, Tamura Y, Iizuka Y, Ohashi K, et al. (2001) *Mol Cell Biol* 21:2991-3000.
17. Tsutsumi T, Suzuki T, Shimoike T, Suzuki R, Moriya K, Shintani Y, Fujie H, Matsuura Y, Koike K, Miyamura T (2002) *Hepatology* 35:937-946.
18. Moriishi K, Okabayashi T, Nakai K, Moriya K, Koike K, Murata S, Chiba T, Tanaka K, Suzuki R, Suzuki T, et al. (2003) *J Virol* 77:10237-10249.
19. Masson P, Andersson O, Petersen UM, Young P (2001) *J Biol Chem* 276:1383-1390.
20. Li J, Recheine M (2001) *Biochimie* 83:373-383.
21. Li X, Lonard D, Jung SY, Malovannaya A, Feng Q, Qin J, Tsai SY, Tsai M, O'Malley BW (2006) *Cell* 124:381-392.
22. Murata S, Kawahara H, Tohma S, Yamamoto K, Kasahara M, Nabeshima Y, Tanaka K, Chiba T (1999) *J Biol Chem* 274:38211-38215.
23. Falcon V, Acosta-Rivero N, Chinae G, Gavilondo J, de la Rosa MC, Menendez I, Duenas-Carrera S, Vina A, Garcia W, Gra B, et al. (2003) *Biochem Biophys Res Commun* 305:1085-1090.
24. Suzuki R, Sakamoto S, Tsutsumi T, Rikimaru A, Tanaka K, Shimoike T, Moriishi K, Iwasaki T, Mizumoto K, Matsuura Y, et al. (2005) *J Virol* 79:1271-1281.
25. Moriya K, Yotsuyanagi H, Shintani Y, Fujie H, Ishibashi K, Matsuura Y, Miyamura T, Koike K (1997) *J Gen Virol* 78:1527-1531.
26. Yasui K, Wakita T, Tsukiyama-Kohara K, Funahashi SI, Ichikawa M, Kajita T, Moradpour D, Wands JR, Kohara M (1998) *J Virol* 72:6048-6055.
27. Suzuki R, Tamura K, Li J, Ishii K, Matsuura Y, Miyamura T, Suzuki T (2001) *Virology* 280:301-309.
28. Minami Y, Kawasaki H, Minami M, Tanahashi N, Tanaka K, Yahara I (2000) *J Biol Chem* 275:9055-9061.
29. Watashi K, Hijikata M, Tagawa A, Doi T, Marusawa H, Shimotohno K (2005) *Mol Cell Biol* 25:7498-7509.
30. Machida K, Cheng KT, Lai CK, Jeng KS, Sung VM, Lai MM (2006) *J Virol* 80:7199-7207.
31. Nystrom T (2005) *EMBO J* 24:1311-1317.
32. Bromberg JF, Wrzeszczynska MH, Devgan G, Zhao Y, Pestell RG, Albanese C, Darnell JE, Jr (1999) *Cell* 98:295-303.
33. Carballo M, Conde M, El Bekay R, Martin-Nieto J, Camacho MJ, Monteseirin J, Conde J, Bedoya FJ, Sobrino F (1999) *J Biol Chem* 274:17580-17586.
34. Aizaki H, Aoki Y, Harada T, Ishii K, Suzuki T, Nagamori S, Toda G, Matsuura Y, Miyamura T (1998) *Hepatology* 27:621-627.
35. Niwa H, Yamamura K, Miyazaki J (1991) *Gene* 108:193-199.
36. Huang DC, Cory S, Strasser A (1997) *Oncogene* 14:405-414.
37. Aoyagi K, Ohue C, Iida K, Kimura T, Tanaka E, Kiyosawa K, Yagi S (1999) *J Clin Microbiol* 37:1802-1808.