Transplantation procedures

Forty-one patients received a myeloablative conditioning regimen that included BU (orally 4 mg/kg per day × 4 days or i.v. 3.2 mg/kg per day × 4 days) plus CY (60 mg/kg per day × 2 days, $n = 27$), CY plus 12 Gy TBI ($n = 10$) or other ($n = 4$). Twenty-three patients received a reduced-intensity conditioning regimen that included fludarabine (30 mg/m^2 per day × 6 days) or cladribine (0.11 mg/kg per day × 6 days) plus BU (oral 4 mg/kg per day × 2 days or i.v. 3.2 mg/kg per day × 2 days). Low-dose TBI (2 or 4 Gy, $n = 10$) and/or low-dose ATG (total dose 5–10 mg/kg ATG-F or 5 mg/kg thymoglobulin, $n = 15$) were added. GVHD prophylaxis included CYA- ($n = 13$) and tacrolimus-based regimens ($n = 51$), with an additional short course of MTX. G-CSF was administered in all patients from day +6 after transplantation until engraftment. Most patients received ciprofloxacin (200 mg orally three times daily) for bacterial prophylaxis after the beginning of the conditioning regimen until neutrophil engraftment. Fluconazole (100 mg once daily) was administered for fungal prophylaxis after the beginning of the conditioning regimen. Low-dose acyclovir was given for prophylaxis against herpes simplex virus and VZV after the beginning of the conditioning regimen until immunosuppressive agents were discontinued. Prophylaxis against *Pneumocystis jiroveci* infection consisted of trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole (400 mg of sulfamethoxazole once daily) from the first day of conditioning to day −3 of transplantation, and from day +28 until day +180 or the cessation of immunosuppressive agents. Patients who developed fever during the neutropenic period were treated with cefepime or other cephalosporin, and additional agents including vancomycin, aminoglycosides and amphotericin B were given as clinically indicated. Neutrophil engraftment was defined as the first of 3 consecutive days after transplantation that the ANC exceeded 0.5×10^9 per l.

Glucose management protocol

In the IGC group, the blood glucose level was routinely tested every morning to adjust the dose of insulin so as to keep the level within the range of 80–110 mg per 100 ml. Owing to the presence of fewer nursing staff in the HSCT unit than in the ICU, we replaced the continuous infusion of insulin with the addition of Humulin R to the bottle of PN to control the glucose level within the target range. In TPN, we universally added at least 1 unit of Humulin R per 10 g glucose. In patients who had an elevated blood glucose level, we also added Humulin R to the bottle of PN. We monitored the glucose level at least once a day in the morning as long as the level remained within the target range of 80–110 mg per 100 ml. When the glucose level became elevated, we increased the frequency of monitoring up to 2–4 times daily. In most patients, we adjusted the dose of insulin added to the bottle of PN as described in Table 2. When the blood glucose level was >180 mg per 100 ml or the dose of insulin was high, we manually adjusted the dose of Humulin R and administered insulin subcutaneously according to the attending physician's discretion. S.c. insulin administration usually consisted of 3–5 units at the beginning, and, if this was insufficient, the dose was manually adjusted by 2–4 units. When the patients received high-dose systemic steroid such as methylprednisolone 1–2 mg/kg per day for GVHD, we used the preprandial s.c. injection of insulin Aspart (NovoRapid) three times daily to avoid postprandial hyperglycemia and adjusted the dose according to the amount of food intake and the postprandial glucose level. When patients exhibited nausea, anorexia or vomiting, the amount of food intake became unstable. In such situations, insulin Aspart was injected immediately after the meal. When food intake was <50%, the dose was reduced or discontinued. Routine glucose monitoring was continued until PN was stopped, whereas the blood glucose level was maintained within the target range. Daily caloric intake was calculated by the dietitians. We tried to maintain oral intake as much as possible by using a suitable diet in jelly or liquid form. A dietitian adjusted the dose of supplemental PN to maintain the total caloric intake over 1.0 × basal energy expenditure (BEE), and if the glucose level was stable, the nutritional intake could be increased up to 1.5 × BEE. The glucose concentration in PN was usually started at 7.5% glucose as supplemental PN. The concentration was gradually increased to 12%, and, if necessary, this was further increased up to 18% to meet the target caloric intake. A lipid emulsion was also used to supply 10–30% of total caloric intake. The minimal total nutritional intake was set at 1.0 × BEE because a retrospective analysis at our institute showed that caloric intake of more than 1.0 × BEE was not associated with clinically significant wt loss.[17] To improve the glucose control, this level was set to be slightly lower

Table 2 Protocol for adjustment of Humulin R

Glucose level (mg per 100 ml)	*Adjustment of Humulin R*
BS ⩽ 40	i.v. 50% glucose 20 ml and recheck the glucose level Reduce the dose of Humulin R to 40–60% of the original dose
40 ⩽ BS < 60	i.v. 50% glucose 20 ml and recheck the glucose level Reduce the dose of Humulin R to 60–80% of the original dose
60 ⩽ BS < 80	i.v. 50% glucose 20 ml and recheck the glucose level Reduce the dose of Humulin R to 70–90% of the original dose
80 ⩽ BS ⩽ 110	No change
110 < BS < 130	Increase the dose of Humulin R to 110–120% of the original dose
130 ⩽ BS < 150	Increase the dose of Humulin R to 120–130% of the original dose
150 ⩽ BS < 180	Increase the dose of Humulin R to 130–150% of the original dose
BS ⩾ 180	Manually adjust the dose of Humulin R combined with sliding subcutaneous insulin administration

Abbreviation: BS = blood sugars.

than the recommendation in the HSCT setting (1.3–1.5 × BEE[18]). There are two beneficial aspects of this protocol: we could maintain the minimal caloric intake with supplemental PN and we could immediately start insulin as required after the introduction of PN. The SGC group was managed without a specific protocol for nutrition practice and glucose control, although we routinely monitored blood glucose at least three times weekly to avoid severe hyperglycemia (blood glucose >200 mg per 100 ml).

Outcome measures

Serially monitored glucose values were compared between the IGC group and the SGC group. We also analyzed the association between the mean glucose level during monitoring and the infection rate in both the SGC group and IGC group. Mean glucose levels were estimated for each patient and were categorized as follows: 80–110, 111–140, 141–179 and >180. Glycemic variability, defined as the s.d. of the mean glucose value, was also analyzed. The outcome measures were time to the occurrence of documented infectious complications within 100 days after HSCT, time to each organ dysfunction defined as described below, time to grades II–IV and grades III–IV acute GVHD and time to NRM. These were calculated from the date of the start of the conditioning regimen. Organ dysfunction was defined with reference to van den Berghe[5–7] as follows: (1) hypercreatininemia; serum creatinine level ⩾2.0 mg per 100 ml or more than twice the baseline, (2) hyperbilirubinemia; serum total bilirubin level ⩾2.0 mg per 100 ml and (3) increased inflammatory markers; serum C-reactive protein (CRP) level ⩾15 mg per 100 ml. In our institute, the CRP level was routinely monitored at least three times a week, as we previously reported that the preengraftment CRP level may predict a subsequent occurrence of acute GVHD and NRM after allogeneic HSCT.[19] These results suggested that CRP might be useful not only as a marker of infectious diseases but also as a surrogate marker for produced cytokines. Therefore, the serial changes of CRP level were compared between the two groups. Acute GVHD was graded by the consensus criteria.[20]

Statistical analyses

Baseline characteristics were summarized using descriptive statistics. The Student's t, χ^2 and Wilcoxon rank-sum tests were used to compare clinical and patient characteristics. The probability of documented infectious complications and organ dysfunction were calculated using Kaplan–Meier estimates. A stratified Cox regression model, which accounts for the matched-cohort design, was used to estimate hazard ratios (HRs) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs). On the basis of 64 patients, the study has an approximately 80% power to detect a HR of 0.5 for documented infections. The glucose values, measured repeatedly, were compared between groups using a repeated-measure analysis with a linear mixed-effect model. A level of $P<0.05$ was defined as statistically significant. All P-values are two-sided. All analyses were performed using SAS version 9.1.3 (Cary, NC, USA).

Results

Patient characteristics

Table 1 lists the patients' clinical and transplantation characteristics. Patients and transplantation characteristics were well balanced with the application of matching criteria. Nevertheless, in the IGC group, more patients received tacrolimus for GVHD prophylaxis (68 vs 36%, $P=0.01$) and more had a previous transplantation (32 vs 7%, $P=0.01$). The median duration of follow-up in surviving patients was 299 days (range, 78–607 days) in the IGC group and 1146 days (range, 329–1774 days) in the SGC group.

Glycemic control

Duration of monitoring and number of tests. The median duration of glucose monitoring and intervention in the IGC group was 38 days (range, 24–70 days) after the start of the conditioning regimen. The total number of glycemic monitorings was 867 and 1094 in the SGC group and IGC group, respectively.

Mean values and distribution of values. Patients in the IGC group had a lower glucose level (least-square mean, 116.4 vs 146.8 mg per 100 ml, $P<0.001$) than the SGC group. The trend of the glucose value is shown in Figure 2a. All glycemic results for the SGC and IGC groups were stratified into six levels: <40, 40–79, 80–110, 111–140, 141–179 and ⩾180, as shown in Figure 2b.

Hypoglycemia

In the IGC group, the incidence of mild hypoglycemia (CTCAE grades 1–2, glucose level 40–69 mg per 100 ml) was significantly higher than that in the SGC group (11 vs 3 patients, $P<0.001$). Although one patient (4.5%) in the IGC group who was diagnosed as type 2 diabetes mellitus developed severe hypoglycemia (CTCAE grade 3, glucose level 30–39 mg per 100 ml) with faintness, no patient developed seizure or loss of consciousness.

Glycemic variability

The mean glycemic variability in the SGC group and IGC group was 37.2 mg per 100 ml (range, 10.1–121.7 mg per 100 ml) and 27.5 mg per 100 ml (range, 11.3–46.6 mg per 100 ml), respectively, and glycemic variability in the IGC group tended to be lower than that in the SGC group ($P=0.07$).

TPN and insulin dosing

The percentage of patients who received TPN was 60% (25 patients) and 77% (17 patients) in the SGC group and the IGC group, respectively. The mean duration of TPN was 9 days (range, 0–35) and 13 days (range, 0–38) in the SGC group and IGC group, respectively. There was a tendency for more patients in the IGC group to receive TPN compared to the SGC group, but this difference was not statistically significant. The mean maximal dose of insulin (median (range), 51 (0–100) vs 2 (0–110) IU, $P<0.001$) and the mean maximal dose of insulin per 1 g parenteral glucose

were significantly higher in the IGC group (median (range), 0.22 (0–0.71) vs 0.003 (0–0.4) IU/g glucose, $P<0.001$).

Infections

Table 3 summarizes the results. In the IGC group, dramatically fewer patients developed documented infections within 100 days compared to the SGC group, as shown in Figure 3.

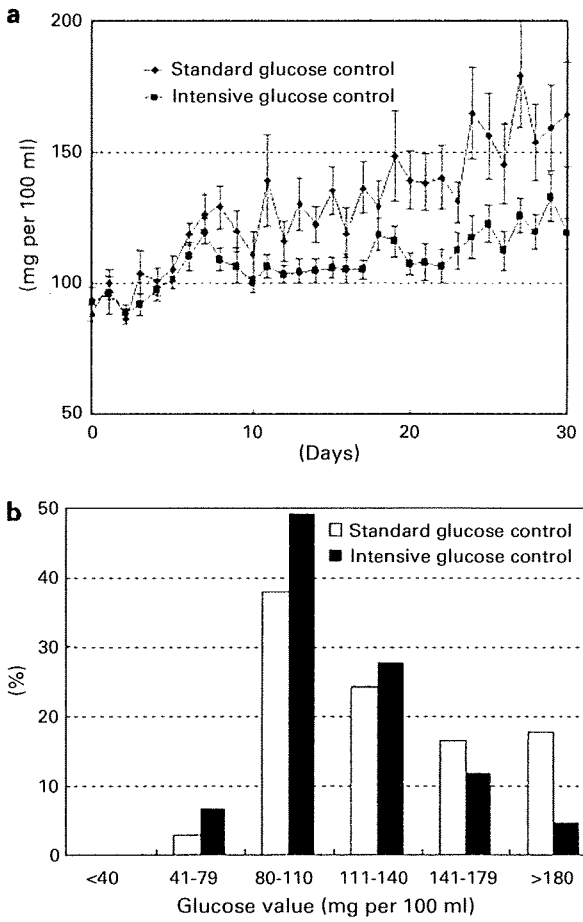

Figure 2 Serial changes in the mean glucose level in the intensive glucose control (IGC) and standard glucose control (SGC) groups. Values are mean + s.e. (a). The distribution of the glucose values in IGC and SGC is shown as a histogram (b).

Relation to mean glucose level

We also analyzed the association between the mean glucose level during monitoring and the infection rate in both the SGC and IGC groups. The incidence of infection was 34, 17, 67 and 40%, respectively, with mean glucose levels of 80–110, 111–140, 141–179 and ⩾180. When we compared a lower glucose-level group (mean glucose level of 80–140) with a higher glucose-level group (mean glucose level of >140), the incidence of infection was significantly higher in the latter group (28 vs 57%, $P=0.042$). When we assessed only patients with a lower glucose level, the IGC group tended to show a lower incidence of infectious diseases than the SGC group (14 vs 41%, $P=0.061$).

Relation to glycemic variability

We also analyzed the association between glycemic variability and the infection rate. The mean glycemic variability in patients with and without infection was 34.6 mg per 100 ml (range, 10.5–121.7 mg per 100 ml) and 33.3 mg per 100 ml (range, 10.1–110.6 mg per 100 ml), respectively, with no significant difference. As the importance of glycemic variability could vary among patients

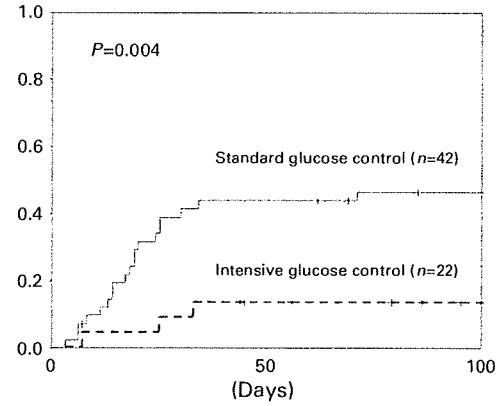

Figure 3 Probability of documented infections in the IGC and SGC groups.

Table 3 Incidence of infectious diseases and organ dysfunction

Variable	N *(%)/median (range)*			
	Intensive glucose control n = *22 (%)*	*Standard glucose control* n = *42 (%)*	*HR (95% CI)*	P-*value*
Documented infection	13	46	0.17 (0.04–0.75)	0.004
Bacteremia	9	39	0.10 (0.01–0.74)	0.002
Organ dysfunction				
Hypercreatininemia[a]	19	37	0.60 (0.19–1.88)	0.36
Hyperbilirubinemia[b]	28	31	1.05 (0.38–2.91)	0.93
Increased inflammatory markers[c]	18	38	0.45 (0.15–1.37)	0.13

Abbreviations: CI = confidence interval.
[a]Serum creatinine level ⩾2.0 mg per 100 ml or more than twice of baseline.
[b]Serum bilirubin level ⩾2.0 mg per 100 ml.
[c]Serum C-reactive protein level ⩾15 mg per 100 ml.

with different mean glucose levels,[21] we divided the patients into two groups based on mean glucose level 80–140 or 140+ and then determined whether glycemic variability was associated with an increased incidence of infections. However, there was no significant association between glycemic variability and the incidence of infections in both groups.

CRP levels

Figure 4 shows serial changes in the CRP level. Even though there was no difference in the CRP level between the two groups at the beginning of the conditioning regimen, the CRP level was significantly elevated in the SGC group compared to that in the IGC group 15 days after the beginning of the conditioning regimen, and this trend continued up to 40 days ($P<0.05$). The maximal CRP level during the neutropenic period in the IGC group was significantly lower than that in the SGC group (median (range), 6.9 (0.9–16.3) vs 11.5 (1.6–37.3), $P=0.007$).

Other clinical outcomes

The probability of grades II–IV acute GVHD within 100 days was 28 and 37% in the IGC and SGC groups (HR 1.05, 95% CI 0.38–2.91, $P=0.93$). The incidences of grades III–IV acute GVHD and NRM within 100 days were low in both groups (one and two patients, and one and one patient, in the IGC and SGC groups, respectively).

Discussion

This is the first study to evaluate the outcomes in allogeneic HSCT patients who were treated with a glucose management protocol. A salient finding of this study is that the incidence of documented infections, especially the incidence of bacteremia, was significantly lower in the IGC group than in the SGC group, as in a previous report in the ICU setting.[1] Moreover, there tended to be fewer organ dysfunctions in the IGC group, albeit this difference was not statistically significant. Furthermore, the CRP level, which might be a surrogate marker for produced cytokines,[19] was significantly lower in the IGC group than in the SGC group, as shown in Figure 4. Even though this study did not have enough power to detect a decrease in acute GVHD and NRM, it could be anticipated that IGC could reduce the CRP level, which would lead to a reduced incidence of acute GVHD and NRM.

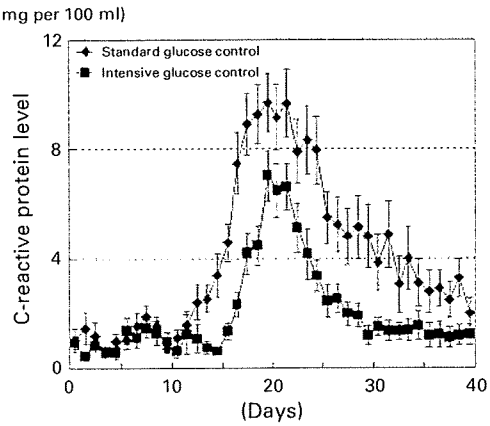

Figure 4 Serial change in the CRP level in the IGC and SGC groups. Values are mean + s.e.

This study has several limitations. One limitation is that only 64 patients were analyzed with no sufficient power to demonstrate any statistically significant changes in the incidences of organ dysfunctions, which was similar to the result in a previous report in the ICU.[1,2] An additional limitation was that the control of the glucose level could be suboptimal. This could be because of the glucose control protocol, which included monitoring of glucose level and the administration of insulin. With regard to the administration of insulin, we replaced the continuous infusion of insulin with the addition of Humulin R to the bottle of PN to control the glucose level within the target range because of the presence of fewer nursing staff in the HSCT unit than in the ICU. This could delay the normalization of hyperglycemia. Even though severe hyperglycemia (>180 mg per 100 ml) was reduced, a glucose value within the normal range (80–110 mg per 100 ml) could be achieved in only 49% of the IGC group as shown in Figure 1b. From a methodological point of view, it might be inappropriate to simply count the number of glucose value measurements, as patients with hyperglycemia were monitored more frequently, as defined in this protocol. Furthermore, as the mode of glucose monitoring was quite different between the IGC group and the SGC group, it could be inappropriate to compare the glucose values. A future protocol should include a more appropriate monitoring of glucose level and administration of insulin system that assures the fine tuning of glucose levels within the target range. Finally, there was a possible selection bias that may have affected the results, as this study was not a randomized-control study and there were many nonparticipants. However, the incidence of documented infections in nonparticipants within 100 days after allogeneic HSCT was 42%. Therefore, the reduction in the incidence of documented infections in the IGC group could not simply be explained by other causes such as the selection of antibiotics or catheter management.

With these limitations in mind, we took several steps to improve the quality of the study. First, we carefully matched patients and transplantation characteristics. Second, the IGC strategy was applied prospectively. Third, the low rate of patients who developed clinically significant hypoglycemia should be emphasized. As previously reported, the IGC procedure becomes very difficult in the medical ICU, especially in patients who have sepsis, a high APACHE score or mechanical ventilation.[1,2,22,23] The low rate of hypoglycemia could be because the medical acuity of our patients were relatively mild compared to those of patients in the medical ICU. Moreover, patients undergoing HSCT are younger and might have better β-cell function. The low rate of hypoglycemia could be important for maximizing the benefit of IGC because severe hypoglycemia could be associated with an increased risk of mortality.[23]

The biological plausibility of the intervention should be discussed. The reduction in infectious diseases by IGC may reflect the deleterious effects of hyperglycemia on macrophage or neutrophil function or insulin-induced protective effects on mucosal and skin barriers.[24–27] The improvement of innate immunity could be quite important, especially during the period of granulocytopenia after allogeneic HSCT. The protection of mucosal tissues could reduce bacterial translocation, which might lead to a reduced incidence of sepsis.

In conclusion, our results suggest that prospective IGC reduced the incidences of infectious diseases and organ dysfunction after allogeneic HSCT. To confirm these findings, a larger, prospective randomized-controlled trial is warranted.

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Positive impact of maintaining minimal caloric intake above 1.0 × basal energy expenditure on the nutritional status of patients undergoing allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplantation

To the Editor. Parenteral nutrition (PN) is frequently required for patients undergoing allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (ASCT). However, the recommended dose of PN is associated with hyperglycemia [1,2], which leads to an inferior outcome [1,3]. Body weight (BW) and biochemical indices are used to assess the nutritional status, but these measures are affected by fluid status and inflammation [4]. Therefore, we retrospectively analyzed the values of nutritional variables in a cohort of 112 consecutive adult patients, who received myeloablative ASCT between January 2002 and June 2006. Sixteen patients who died before day 28, developed renal failure or liver failure, or received previous ASCT were excluded. Based on the mean caloric intake from the beginning of the conditioning regimen to day 28 or discharge, the remaining 96 patients were divided into low (n = 67) and high (n = 29) caloric groups [< or ≥ than 1.0 × basal energy expenditure (BEE)]. Patients' characteristics are summarized in Table I. During this period, nutritional support had been left entirely to the individual physicians. Six time periods were considered: (1) before the conditioning regimen, (2) from conditioning to day 0, (3) from days 1 to 7, (4) from days 8 to 14, (5) from days 15 to 21, (6) from days 22 to 28. Biochemical indices including total protein, albumin, cholinesterase, and prealbumin were monitored serially at least once a week.

TABLE I. Patients' Characteristics

Variable	N (%)/ median (range)	
	Low caloric group <1.0 × BEE n = 67	High caloric group ≥1.0 × BEE n = 29
Age (year)	33 (18–57)	47 (20–55)
Body mass index (kg/m^2)	22.3 (15.2–38.1)	21.0 (15.1–27.2)
Sex		
Male	29 (43)	15 (52)
Female	38 (57)	14 (48)
Conditioning		
TBI-containing	34 (51)	15 (52)
Non-TBI-containing	33 (49)	14 (48)
Stem cell source		
Bone marrow	38 (57)	13 (45)
PBSC	28 (42)	12 (41)
Cord blood	1 (1)	4 (14)

Abbreviations: BEE, basal energy expenditure; TBI, total body irradiation; PBSC, peripheral blood stem cells.

Changes in BW are shown in Fig. 1A: a greater number of patients in the low caloric group lost more than 5% or 10% of their BW compared with the high caloric group (38 vs. 4, $P < 0.001$ and 8 vs 0, $P = 0.1$, respectively). No significant differences were seen for serum albumin, total proteins, cholinesterase, and prealbumin, whereas fasting glucose levels were significantly reduced from days 15 to 28 in the low caloric group (Fig. 1B). The significantly greater weight loss in the low caloric group could be associated with protein loss and organ dysfunction, although changes in fluid status and effects of chronic inflammation should also be considered. The absence of significant differences in biochemical indices between the two groups suggests that these parameters do not directly reflect malnutrition in ASCT patients [5]. Hyperglycemia was observed in patients receiving ≥1.0 × BEE caloric intake. We previously reported that hyperglycemia and neutropenia were associated with an inferior outcome [3]. The results suggest that a minimal caloric intake of >1.0 × BEE is necessary to maintain BW after ASCT, and that the assessment of nutritional status should not rely solely on biochemical indices. However, attention should be paid to the identification and prevention of hyperglycemia in these patients.

Shigeo Fuji[1]
Sung-Won Kim[1]
Takahiro Fukuda[1]
Shigemi Kamiya[2]
Setsuko Kuwahara[2]
Yoichi Takaue[1]

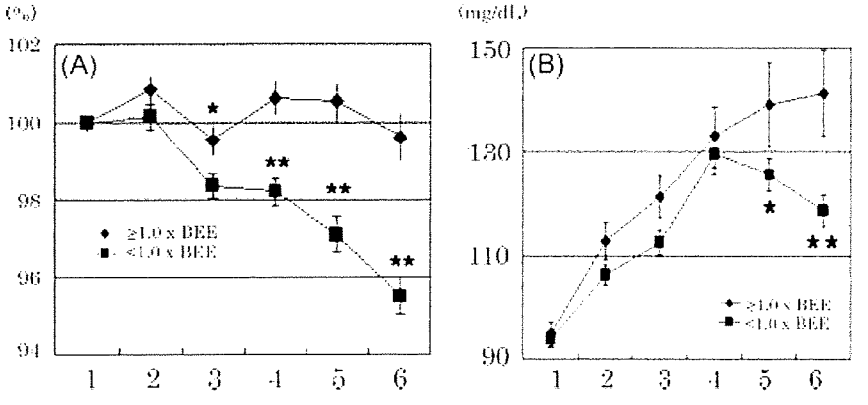

Figure 1. (A) Change in body weight in ASCT (*P 0.05, **P < 0.001). (B) Change in fasting serum glucose level in ASCT (*P 0.06, **P 0.003). The time course was divided into six periods: (1) before the conditioning regimen, (2) from conditioning to day 0, (3) from days 1 to 7, (4) from days 8 to 14, (5) from days 15 to 21, (6) from days 22 to 28.

[1]Department of Hematology and Stem Cell Transplantation, National Cancer Center Hospital, Tokyo, Japan
[2]Division of Nutritional Management, National Cancer Center Hospital, Tokyo, Japan
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IGF-I treatment of patients with Laron syndrome suppresses serum thrombopoietin levels but does not affect serum erythropoietin

To the Editor: Growth hormone (GH) and insulin-like growth factor I (IGF-I) stimulate the proliferation and differentiation of many cell types including bone marrow cells. IGF-I was shown to stimulate erythropoiesis in in vitro studies [1]. In a previous study, we reported that children with Laron syndrome (LS, OMIM #262500) with congenital IGF-I deficiency responded to IGF-I treatment by an increase of hemoglobin (Hb) and red blood cells (RBC) and a decrease of a high platelet count (PLT) [2]. To investigate whether the effects induced by IGF-I are mediated by erythropoietin (Epo) and thrombopoietin (Tpo), we studied seven patients with LS: three untreated adults (ages: 43, 44, and 52) and four girls aged: 5, 9, 13, and 15 years receiving IGF-I replacement therapy (120–180 μg/kg/day s.c., Fujisawa, Osaka, Japan) for an average period of 9 ± 4 years. The mean age at initiation of therapy was 4.6 ± 3.5 years. Serum Tpo and Epo levels were measured using ELISA kits (Quantikine, R&D Systems, Minneapolis). In the children, before initiation of IGF-I treatment, Tpo levels were above normal for age, m ± SD: 285 ± 189 pg/ml (normal: 15–80 pg/ml). During IGF-I treatment Tpo levels dropped to 36 ± 19 pg/ml ($P = 0.04$). The mean PLT levels before treatment were 334 ± 53 × 10^9/l and decreased to 253 ± 30 × 10^9/l during therapy ($P = 0.04$). In the three untreated adult patients, Tpo serum levels were above normal but the PLT were within the normal limits (Table I). In the IGF-I treated-children, Epo levels did not correlate with the increase of RBC and Hb; and in the untreated adults, Epo levels varied within normal limits (1.0–21.5 mIU/ml). Experimental studies have indicated that the effects of GH on erythropoiesis are mediated by IGF-I of endocrine or paracrine origin [3]. We report for the first time that IGF-I administration reduces the high PLT count in young LS patients concomitantly with serum Tpo levels.

TABLE I. The Effect of IGF-I on Tpo and Platelets

	Before treatment	During treatment	*P* value
LS children			
Tpo (pg/ml)	285 ± 189	36 ± 19	0.04
Platelets (×10^9/l)	334 ± 53	253 ± 30	0.04
Untreated LS adults			
Tpo (pg/ml)	84 ± 60	–	
Platelets (×10^9/l)	240 ± 35	–	

Whether the reduction of Tpo during IGF-I treatment is due to a direct effect of IGF-I on the liver, or whether there exists a negative feedback mechanism between PLT and Tpo synthesis [4], remains to be clarified. The finding that Epo levels do not correlate with the IGF-I induced stimulation of erythropoiesis suggests that this effect is not Epo mediated as was also shown in rats [5] and in children [6]. Recently, it has been suggested that IGF-I secreted by macrophages may directly stimulate erythroblastic islands [7].

ORIT SHEVAH[1]
JOANNE YACOBOVICH[2]
MEIRA ZOLDAN[2]
HANNAH TAMARY[2]
ZVI LARON[1]

[1]Endocrinology and Diabetes Research Unit, Schneider Children's Medical Center, Sackler Faculty of Medicine, Tel-Aviv University, Petah-Tikva, Israel
[2]Division of Oncology Hematology, Schneider Children's Medical Center, Sackler Faculty of Medicine, Tel-Aviv University, Petah-Tikva, Israel
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Impact of T Cell Chimerism on Clinical Outcome in 117 Patients Who Underwent Allogeneic Stem Cell Transplantation with a Busulfan-Containing Reduced-Intensity Conditioning Regimen

Bungo Saito, Takahiro Fukuda, Hiroki Yokoyama, Saiko Kurosawa, Toshihiro Takahashi, Shigeo Fuji, Noriko Takahashi, Kinuko Tajima, Sung-Won Kim, Shin-ichiro Mori, Ryuji Tanosaki, Yoichi Takaue, Yuji Heike

Within the concept of reduced-intensity stem cell transplantation (RIST) there is a wide range of different regimens used, and little information is available on the clinical impact of chimerism status in patients conditioned with a busulfan-containing regimen. Therefore, we retrospectively reviewed lineage-specific chimerism and the subsequent clinical outcome in 117 patients (median age, 55 years; range: 29-68) who underwent busulfan-containing RIST. The conditioning regimen consisted of busulfan (oral 8 mg/kg or i.v. 6.4 mg/kg) and fludarabine (180 mg/m^2, n = 64) or cladribine (0.66 mg/kg, n = 53), with or without 2-4 Gy total-body irridiation (TBI) (n = 26) or antihuman T-lymphocyte immunoglobulin (ATG; 5-10 mg/kg; n = 31). Chimerism was evaluated with peripheral blood samples taken on days 30, 60, and 90 after transplantation by polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based amplification of polymorphic short tandem repeat regions. The median follow-up of surviving patients was 1039 days (153-2535). The percent donor-chimerism was significantly higher in granulocyte than T cell fraction throughout the entire course, and the median (mean) values were, respectively, 100% (96%) versus 95% (83%), 100% (98%) versus 100% (89%), and 100% (98%) versus 100% (91%) at days 30, 60, and 90 after RIST. In a multivariate analysis, having received <2 types of chemotherapy regimens before RIST was the only factor that was significantly associated with low donor T cell chimerism (<60%) at day 30 (hazard ratio [HR]: 6.1; 95% confidence interval [CI], 2.1-18.4; $P < .01$). The median percentage of donor T cell chimerism at day 30 was 9% (0%-63%) in 5 patients who experienced graft failure, which was significantly lower than that (97%; 15%-100%) in the rest of the patients ($P < .01$). No correlation was found between the kinetics of T cell chimerism and the occurrence of acute or chronic GVHD (aGVHD, cGVHD). The stem cell source and the addition of TBI or ATG were not associated with the degree of T cell chimerism, overall survival (OS) or event-free survival (EFS). In a Cox proportional hazard model, low donor T cell chimerism of <60% at day 30 was associated with both poor OS (HR: 2.2; 95% CI, 1.1-4.5; $P = .02$) and EFS (HR: 2.0; 95% CI, 1.1-3.8; $P = .02$). In conclusion, we found that 43% of the patients retained mixed donor T cell chimerism (<90% donor) at day 30, whereas 92% achieved complete chimerism in granulocyte fraction. Low donor T cell chimerism of <60% at day 30 may predict a poor outcome, and a prospective study to examine the value of early intervention based on chimerism data is warranted.

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KEY WORDS: Reduced-intensity stem cell transplantation, Chimerism, Busulfan

INTRODUCTION

Hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT) with a reduced-intensity conditioning (RIC) regimen has been increasingly used in patients with hematologic diseases who cannot be candidates for conventional HSCT because of age, medical comorbidities, or prior failed myeloablative SCT. Many different RIC regimens are currently in use, but most of them

From the Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation Division, National Cancer Center Hospital, Tokyo, Japan

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Correspondence and reprint requests: Takahiro Fukuda, MD, PhD, Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation Division, National Cancer Center Hospital, 5-1-1, Tsukiji, Chuo-ku, Tokyo, 104-0045, Japan (e-mail: tafukuda@ncc.go.jp).

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incorporate fludarabine (Flu) as a background agent in combination with other drugs including cyclophosphamide (Cy) [1], melphalan (Mel) [2], busulfan [2,3], low-dose total body irradiation (TBI) [4], antithymocyte globulin (ATG) [3], and alemtuzumab [5].

RIC regimens have been investigated in the hope of reducing toxicity, whereas their engraftment potential and antileukemia effect rely mainly on the expansion of donor-derived cells and subsequent immune-mediated graft-versus-leukemia (GVL) effects [6,7]. In this setting, lineage-specific chimerism analysis to assess the origin of lymphohematopoietic cells becomes particularly important for identifying patients at risk for graft failure/rejection, graft-versus-host disease (GVHD), and relapse or progressive disease (PD) [4,8,9]. Because the posttransplantation chimerism status is based on a fine balance between the cytotoxicity or immunosuppressive potential of the regimen used and the recipient's reserve immunocompetence, each RIC regimen should be evaluated individually for chimerism kinetics [1,4,10-13].

Compared with a regimen that includes Flu and Me, it has been reported that the combination of Flu and i.v. Bu was associated with improved survival in patients transplanted in remission, which was more frequently associated with mixed chimerism [2]. However, very little information is currently available on the clinical impact of lineage-specific chimerism status in patients who are conditioned with a Bu-containing RIC regimen. Therefore, we examined the correlation between specific patterns of lineage-specific chimerism and subsequent clinical outcomes.

PATIENTS AND METHODS

Patients and Transplantation Procedures

We retrospectively reviewed the medical records of 117 patients who had various hematologic malignancies and underwent allogenic HSCT with Bu-containing RIC at our hospital from January 2000 to December 2006. The reasons for selecting RIC regimens included older patient age, medical comorbidities, and prior failed myeloablative SCT. The patients' characteristics are summarized in Table 1. The median age of the patients was 52 years (range: 29-68 years), and the hematologic malignancy included acute myelogenous leukemia (AML) (n = 23), AML evolving from a myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS) (n = 16), acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) (n = 5), malignant lymphoma (n = 44), MDS (n = 16), chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML) (n = 9), chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) (n = 1), multiple myeloma (MM) (n = 1), and atypical CML (n = 2).

The conditioning regimen consisted of Bu (oral 8 mg/kg or i.v. 6.4 mg/kg) and Flu (180 mg/m^2, n = 64) or cladribine (0.66 mg/kg, n = 53), with or without 2-4 Gy TBI (n = 26) or antihuman T-lymphocyte immunoglobulin (Fresenius Biotech GmbH, Germany) (ATG; 5-10 mg/kg, n = 31).

In Japan, only bone marrow is permitted as a stem cell source in transplantation from an unrelated healthy volunteer donor. In the setting of nonmyeloablative SCT from an unrelated donor, the sustained engraftment rate has been reported to be lower for recipients of bone marrow than for those given granulocyte colony-stimulating factor-mobilized peripheral blood mononuclear cells (G-PBMC) [14]. Therefore, low-dose TBI was also added to the conditioning regimen in 25 of the 32 patients who underwent reduced intensity stem cell transplantation (RIST) from an unrelated bone marrow donor to facilitate engraftment. Recipients of HLA-mismatched grafts tended to receive ATG-containing conditioning regimens (20 of the 27 recipients of HLA-mismatched grafts [74%] versus 11 of the 90 recipients of HLA-matched grafts

Table 1. Association between patients characteristics and donor T-cell chimerism at day 30

Characteristics	Total (n=117)	T cell chimerism at day 30 <60% (n=18)	T cell chimerism at day 30 ≥60% (n=99)
Patient age, years			
Median (range)	55 (29-68)	57 (35-66)	54 (29-68)
<55	56 (48%)	6 (33%)	50 (51%)
≥55	61 (52%)	12 (67%)	49 (49%)
Diseases type			
Acute leukemia	44 (38%)	5 (28%)	39 (39%)
Lymphoma	46 (39%)	6 (33%)	40 (40%)
MDS/MPD	27 (23%)	7 (39%)	20 (20%)
Disease risk			
High	91 (78%)	15 (83%)	76 (77%)
Low	26 (22%)	3 (17%)	23 (23%)
No. of prior chemotherapy regimens			
≥2	77 (66%)	6 (33%)	71 (72%)
<2	40 (34%)	12 (67%)	28 (28%)
Donor			
Unrelated	32 (27%)	2 (11%)	30 (30%)
Related	85 (73%)	16 (89%)	69 (70%)
HLA			
Match	90 (77%)	15 (83%)	75 (76%)
Mismatch	27 (23%)	3 (17%)	24 (24%)
Stem cell source			
G-PBMC	81 (69%)	13 (72%)	68 (69%)
Bone marrow	36 (31%)	5 (28%)	31 (31%)
Conditioning regimen			
2CdA/Bu	24 (21%)	4 (22%)	20 (20%)
2CdA/Bu/ATG	18 (15%)	4 (22%)	14 (14%)
2CdA/Bu/TBI	11 (9%)	1 (6%)	10 (10%)
Flu/Bu	38 (32%)	8 (44%)	30 (30%)
Flu/Bu/ATG	11 (9%)	1 (6%)	10 (10%)
Flu/Bu/ATG/TBI	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)
Flu/Bu/TBI	13 (11%)	0 (0%)	13 (13%)

Acute leukemia (n=44): acute myelogenous leukemia (AML; n=23), AML evolving from a myelodysplastic syndrome (n=16), and acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL; n=5); Lymphoma (n=46): malignant lymphoma (44), chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL; n=1) and multiple myeloma (MM; n=1); MDS/MPD (n=27): MDS n=16 and MPD including chronic myelogenous leukemia (n=9) and atypical CML (n=2); G-PBMC indicates granulocyte colony-stimulating factor-mobilized peripheral blood mononuclear cells; 2CdA, cladribine; Bu, busulfan; Flu, fludarabine; ATG, antihuman T-lymphocyte immunoglobulin; TBI, total-body irradiation.

[12%]). Prophylaxis for GVHD consisted of cyclosporin (CsA) alone (n = 55), Cyclosporin with short-term methotrexate (sMTX) (n = 38), tacrolimus alone (n = 13), or tacrolimus with sMTX (n = 11).

In 81 of the 117 patients, the source of stem cells was G-PBMC from a related donor, which contained a mean of 3.3×10^6 $CD34^+$ cells/kg (range: 1.5-7.0 $\times 10^6$ $CD34^+$ cells/kg) and 8.7×10^7 $CD3^+$ cells/kg (range: 6.4-86.1 $\times 10^7$ $CD3^+$ cells/kg). The other 36 patients received related (n = 4) or unrelated (n = 32) bone marrow, which contained a mean of 2.9×10^8 total nucleated cells (TNC)/kg (range: 0.97-6.53 $\times 10^8$ TNC/kg).

A total of 9 patients received donor lymphocyte infusion (DLI), mainly after day 90, and all of them received DLI for relapse of disease. There was no patient who received DLI for low donor T cell chimerism.

Informed consent was obtained according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

Definitions

Graft failure was defined as (1) failure of absolute neutrophil count (ANC) to surpass 500 /mm^3 at day 30 after HSCT or (2) decrease in ANC <100 /mm^3 at 3 determinations after the initial engraftment or (3) absence of donor T cells (<5%) before relapse, disease progression, second HSCT, or death. The diagnosis and clinical grading of acute and chronic GVHD (aGVHD, cGVHD) were performed according to established criteria [15-17]. Complete remission (CR) was defined as according to the International Workshop Criteria in AML [18] and lymphoma [19] patients. Low disease risk was defined as AML or ALL in first CR, MDS-refractory anemia, and CML in first chronic phase. All other diagnoses were classified as high risk.

Chimerism Analysis

We assessed donor-recipient chimerism by the polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based amplification of a polymorphic short tandem repeat region. Chimerism was evaluated using peripheral blood samples on days 30, 60, and 90 after transplantation. Samples were separated using Ficoll-hypaque into mononuclear cells and a precipitate that included red blood cells and granulocytes. Mononuclear cells were further separated into CD3-positive and -negative fractions with immunomagnetic beads (CD3 Magnetic Particles-DM, BD Pharmingen, San Diego, CA). Granulocytes were collected by lysing red blood cells in the precipitate. Briefly, DNA was extracted from selected cells using QIAamp DNA Mini Kit (QIAGEN, Hilden, Germany). Multiplex PCR was performed using primer sets (AmpFISTR Identifiler Kit, Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA). Five-color fluorescence detection was performed on an ABI 3100-Avant Genetic Analyzer (Applied Biosystems). For each STR allele, the area under the curve for the corresponding signal was automatically processed using GeneScan 3.7 software (Applied Biosystems). The percentage of donor cells was calculated as (area signal donor)/(area signal donor + area signal recipient). The range of the error of chimerism was regarded as 5% at our laboratory (Heike et al., unpublished data).

Statistical Analysis

The chi-square test, Fisher's exact test, and Pearson correlation coefficients were used to evaluate the association of percent donor chimerism with various clinical factors such as patient age at the time of RIST (with 55 years as a cutoff), disease type (acute leukemia, MDS/myeloproliferative disease [MPD], lymphoma), disease risk (high, low), stem cell source (G-PBMC, bone marrow), serologic HLA matching (match, mismatch), and conditioning with TBI (yes, no) or ATG (yes, no).

Overall survival (OS) was defined as the time between stem cell infusion to death from any cause. Event-free survival (EFS) was defined as the time from stem cell infusion to graft failure, PD, or nonrelapse mortality (NRM), whichever occurred earlier. OS and EFS were estimated by the Kaplan-Meier method [20]. The log-rank test and the generalized Wilcoxon test were used to compare the probabilities of survival after HSCT over time across patient subgroups. Multiple Cox regression models were used for multivariate risk factor analysis for OS and EFS. Clinical factors evaluated in the OS and EFS analyses were donor T cell chimerism at day 30 (with 60% as a cutoff), patient age at the time of RIST, disease type, disease risk, stem cell source, HLA matching, and conditioning. Logistic regression models were used for multivariate risk factor analysis for low donor T cell chimerism (<60%) at day 30. Clinical factors evaluated for the risk of low donor T cell chimerism at day 30 were number of prior chemotherapy regimens (≥2, <2) and donor type in addition to the variables mentioned above. We considered 2-sided *P*-values of <.05 to be statistically significant. Statistical analyses were performed with SAS version 8.2 (SAS Inc., Cary, NC).

RESULTS

Kinetics of Chimerism

Whereas 43% of the patients retained mixed donor chimerism (<90% donor) in the T cell fraction, 92% achieved complete chimerism (≥90%) in the granulocyte fraction at day 30 after RIST (Figure 1). In the peripheral blood mononuclear cell (PBMC) fraction, 72% of the patients achieved complete chimerism

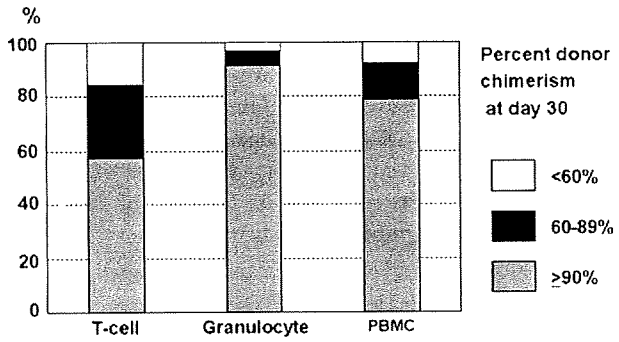

Figure 1. Distribution of chimerism status at day 30 after RIST.

(≥90%). The percent donor-chimerism was significantly higher in granulocyte than T cell fraction throughout the entire course, and the median (mean) values were, respectively, 100% (96%) versus 95% (83%), 100% (98%) versus 100 % (89%), and 100% (98%) versus 100% (91%) at days 30, 60, and 90, respectively after RIST (Figure 2).

In univariate and multivariate analyses (Table 2), having received <2 types of chemotherapy regimens before RIST was the only factor that was significantly associated with low donor T cell chimerism (<60%) at day 30 (hazard ratio [HR]: 6.1; 95% confidence interval [CI], 2.1-18.4; $P < .01$). Non-TBI regimens and related donor also tended to be associated with lower donor T cell chimerism.

Graft Composition and Donor Chimerism

By examining the impact of graft composition of G-PBMC on donor chimerism, we found that increases in TNC and $CD3^+$ T cells contents paralleled the increase in donor T cell chimerism at day 30 ($P < .03$ and $P < .05$, respectively). The same relationship was observed between $CD34^+$ cell contents and granulocyte chimerism ($P = .06$). In patients who received bone marrow, a higher number of TNC infused was associated with a higher level of donor T cell chimerism at day 30 ($P < .01$).

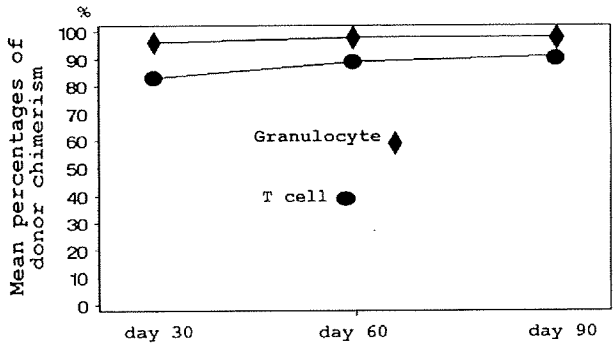

Figure 2. Kinetics of chimerism status after RIST (mean percentages of donor chimerism levels). Percent donor cell chimerism was significantly higher in granulocyte than T cell fraction throughout the entire course, and the mean values were, respectively, 96% versus 83%, 98% versus 89 %, and 98% versus 91% at days 30, 60, and 90 after RIST.

Table 2. Factors affecting low donor T cell chimerism (<60%) at day 30

	Univariate analysis		Multivariate analysis	
Characteristics	Odds ratio (95% CI)	P	Odds ratio (95% CI)	P
Patient age, years				
<55	1			
≥55	2.04 (0.71 - 5.87)	0.19		
Disease type				
Lymphoma	1			
MDS/MPD	2.33 (0.69 - 7.87)	0.17		
Acute leukemia	0.86 (0.24 - 3.03)	0.81		
Disease risk				
Low	1			
High	1.51 (0.40 - 5.69)	0.54		
No. of prior chemotherapy regimens				
≥2	1		1	
<2	5.07 (1.73-14.83)	<0.01	6.08 (2.01–18.41)	<0.01
Stem cell source				
G-PBMC	1			
Bone marrow	0.84 (0.28 - 2.57)	0.77		
Donor				
Unrelated	1		1	
Related	3.48 (0.75-16.08)	0.11	4.21 (0.86–20.49)	0.08
HLA				
Match	1			
Mismatch	0.63 (0.17 - 2.34)	0.49		
TBI				
No	1		1	
Yes	0.17 (0.02 - 1.38)	0.10	0.13 (0.02–1.05)	0.06
ATG				
No	1			
Yes	1.08 (0.35 - 3.32)	0.89		

Association between Donor T Cell Chimerism at Day 30 and RIST Outcome

Graft failure

The median (mean) percentage of donor T cell chimerism at day 30 was 9% (18%) (0%-63%) in 5 patients who experienced graft failure, which was significantly lower than those in the other patients (97% [86%], 15%-100%, $P < .01$), as shown in Figure 3. Day 30 T cell chimerism below 60% was associated with a significantly increased risk of graft failure (Table 3). Among the 5 patients who experienced graft failure, 4 had achieved complete donor chimerism at day 30 when evaluated in the granulocyte fraction.

Whereas 4 of the 5 patients (80%) who experienced graft failure received HLA-mismatched grafts, 23 of the 112 patients (21%) who did not experience graft failure received HLA-mismatched grafts ($P = .01$). In a multivariate analysis, however, neither day 30 T cell chimerism below 60% nor HLA mismatch was associated with an increased risk of graft failure. Among 18 patients with <60% donor T cell chimerism at day 30, HLA mismatch was significantly associated with an increased risk of grafts failure (3 of 3 who received HLA-mismatched graft versus 1 of 15 who received HLA-matched grafts, $P = .005$). In contrast, HLA mismatch was not associated with an increased risk of graft failure in 99 patients with 60% or more donor T cell chimerism at day 30 (1 of 24

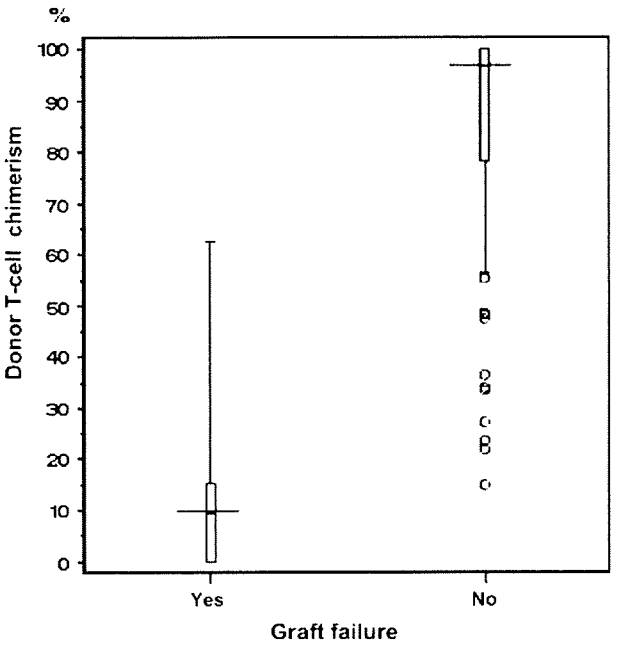

Figure 3. Donor T cell chimerism levels at day 30 in patients with or without subsequent graft failure. Five of the 117 patients (4%) who experienced graft failure had a significantly lower donor T cell chimerism level than the other engrafted patients (n = 112) (donor T cell chimerism, median 9% [range: 0%-63%] versus 97% [range: 15%-100%], respectively) ($p < .01$). Horizontal lines, median; boxes, 25-75 percentile; vertical lines, 10-90 percentile; circles, individual data outside the 10-90 percentile.

who received HLA-mismatched grafts versus 0 of 75 who received HLA-matched grafts, $P = .24$).

GVHD

Grade II-IV aGVHD occurred in 54 patients (46%), and cGVHD occurred in 63 patients (64%). No correlation was found between the kinetics of T cell chimerism and the occurrence of aGVHD or cGVHD, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Association between donor T-cell chimerism at day 30 and clinical outcome

Outcome	Total (n=117)	T-cell chimerism at day 30 <60% (n=18)	T-cell chimerism at day 30 ≥60% (n=99)	P
Graft failure				
No	112 (96%)	14 (78%)	98 (99%)	<0.01
Yes	5 (4%)	4 (22%)	1 (1%)	
Acute GVHD				
0-I	64 (55%)	11 (61%)	53 (54%)	
II-IV	53 (45%)	7 (39%)	46 (46%)	0.55
Chronic GVHD*				
No	36 (36%)	7 (50%)	29 (34%)	0.25
Yes	63 (64%)	7 (50%)	56 (66%)	
NRM (at 1 year)	11.0%	11.1%	10.9%	0.26
PD (at 1 year)	27.3%	22.6%	28.1%	0.45
OS (at 1 year)	78.0%	65.7%	80.3%	0.02
EFS (at 1 year)	61.8%	55.6%	62.8%	0.02

GVHD indicates graft-versus-host disease; NRM, non-relapse mortality; PD, relapse or progressive disease; OS, overall survival; EFS, event-free survival;
*Proportion of patients with chronic GVHD was assessed among 99 evaluable patients.

NRM and PD

Nineteen patients experienced NRM, with a 1-year probability of 11% (Table 3). No correlation was found between T cell chimerism at day 30 and the incidence of NRM.

PD was observed in 39 patients, with a 1-year probability of 27% (Table 3). No correlation was found between T cell chimerism at day 30 and the incidence of PD.

Cause of death

Among the 18 patients who had <60% donor T cell chimerism at day 30, 7 (39%) died of PD and 4 (22%) died of NRM, including bacteria sepsis (n = 2), pneumonitis (n = 1), and secondary carcinoma (n = 1). In contrast, among the remaining 99 patients who achieved 60% or more donor T cell chimerism, 21 (21%) died of PD and 15 (15%) died of NRM, including pneumonitis (n = 8), sepsis (n = 3), hemorrhage (n = 1), GVHD (n = 1), cerebral infarction (n = 1), and unknown cause (n = 1).

OS and EFS

Seventy patients (60%) are currently alive at a median follow-up of 1040 days after RIST (range: 153-2535). The 1-year probabilities of OS and EFS among all of the patients were 78% and 62%, respectively. As shown in Figure 4, OS was significantly better in patients who achieved 60% or more donor T cell chimerism at day 30 than in those who did not ($P = .02$). In a Cox proportional hazard model, low T cell donor chimerism (<60%) at day 30 was associated with poor OS (HR: 2.2; 95% CI, 1.1-4.5; $P = .02$) and EFS (HR: 2.0; 95% CI, 1.1-3.8; $P = .02$) adjusted for other significant prognostic factors (Table 4). In addition, high-risk disease and patient age (≥55 years) were associated with an increased risk of poor EFS (HR: 2.4; 95% CI, 1.2-5.0; $P = .02$, HR: 1.8; 95% CI, 1.1-3.0; $P = .03$, respectively) (Table 4).

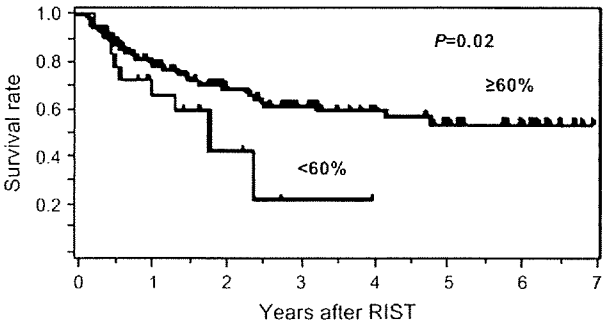

Figure 4. OS stratified according to donor T cell chimerism at day 30. OS was significantly better in patients who achieved 60% or more donor T cell chimerism at day 30 than in those who did not ($P = .02$).

Table 4. Multivariate analysis: factors associated with clinical outcome

Outcome	Variable	Harzard ratio	95% CI	P
OS				
	Donor T-cell chimerism at day 30			
	≥60%	1		
	<60%	2.25	1.13–4.47	0.02
EFS				
	Donor T-cell chimerism at day 30			
	≥60%	1		
	<60%	2.05	1.10–3.81	0.02
	Patients age, years			
	<55	1		
	≥55	1.80	1.07–3.04	0.03
	Disease risk			
	Low	1		
	High	2.44	1.19–5.01	0.02

Clinical factors evaluated in the OS and EFS analyses were donor T-cell chimerism at day 30 (with 60% as a cutoff), patient age at the time of RIST, disease type, disease risk, stem cell source, HLA matching and conditioning.

DISCUSSION

In this retrospective study of RIST with Bu, we showed that 43% of the patients retained mixed donor T cell chimerism (<90%), whereas 92% achieved complete chimerism in the granulocyte fraction, which was consistent with previously published observational studies in RIST [4,10,11,13,21]. Furthermore, we showed that low donor T cell chimerism of <60% at day 30 predicted poor OS and EFS, which suggests that the kinetics of T cell chimerism are important after Bu-containing RIST.

Consistent with other reports, we found that the induction of complete chimerism in T cell fraction after a Bu-containing regimen was rather slow, and granulocyte engraftment was earlier than T cell engraftment compared to patients who received RIC regimens containing a combination of Flu and Mel [10]. When the combination of Cy and Flu was used for RIST conditioning, full donor chimerism was achieved earlier in T cells than in myelogenous cells [1,22]. Interestingly, when alemtuzumab was used in a RIC regimen, 58% retained mixed donor chimerism at day 90 after RIC [13]. This may be because of the fact that alemtuzumab remained in the peripheral circulation long after RIST, which suppressed not only host but also donor lymphocytes. Based on these reports, we suspected that a Cy-containing regimen suppresses host granulocytes less intensely than a Bu-containing regimen, whereas a Mel-containing regimen suppresses host lymphocytes more intensely than a Bu-containing regimen.

The only significant variable associated with a lower level of donor T cell chimerism at day 30 was having received <2 regimens of chemotherapy pretransplant in our results. This result was consistent with previous reports [4,10]. When a patient is treated with RIST, such as our low-dose Bu-containing regimen, prior chemotherapy may facilitate the achievement of higher levels of donor T cell chimerism by decreasing the recipient immunocompetence.

In previous reports there has been some controversy regarding whether there are any differences in the levels of donor T cell chimerism after RIST with or without low-dose TBI [11,13]. In our study with Bu-containing regimens, regimens that included additional low-dose TBI tended to offer higher donor T cell chimerism in a multivariate analysis. However, there was no correlation between ATG-conditioning regimens and donor T cell chimerism at day 30, which was consistent with other regimens [13]. This might be because of the lower dose of ATG (Fresenius, 5-10 mg/kg) in our regimens compared to other studies that utilized the same ATG preparation (Fresenius, 40-90 mg/kg) [23,24]. Alternatively, this might be simply because of the small number of patients who received ATG in our study.

In previous reports, recipients of G-PBMC after RIST showed higher percentages of donor T cell chimerism than those who received bone marrow [4,25], which was not confirmed in our study. With regard to regimens that include Bu, no previous large-scale study has analyzed the correlation between the type of stem cell source and T cell engraftment. When low-dose Bu is contained in the RIC regimen, the stem cell source may no longer influence the level of T cell chimerism. Alternatively, this may be because of the fact that most of the bone marrow recipients in our study also received an additional 2-4 Gy TBI. There was a trend toward a decreased risk of low donor T cell chimerism in recipients of unrelated grafts, although the difference was not significant. We speculate that a lower probability of low donor T cell chimerism might be because of the addition of low dose TBI for patients who underwent unrelated HSCT.

Patients who received G-PBMC showed an increase in TNC and $CD3^+$ T cells that paralleled an increase in donor T cell chimerism at day 30 after RIST in our study. The same relationship was observed between $CD34^+$ cell contents and granulocyte chimerism. Baron et al. [26] reported that higher numbers of donor T cells and $CD34^+$ progenitor cells in the grafts were associated with higher levels of day 28 donor T cell chimerism. Similarly, Carvallo et al. [22] reported that higher levels of $CD34^+$ progenitor cells in the grafts were associated with higher levels of donor myeloid chimerism early after RIST.

In this study, donor T cell chimerism levels of below 60% early after RIST were significantly associated with an increased risk of graft failure. It has been reported that patients with <50% donor T cell chimerism early after nonmyeloablative HSCT were more likely to have graft failure than those with more than

50% donor T cell chimerism [4]. After Bu-containing RIC, Mattsson et al. [21] reported that 2 of the 8 patients who had >50% recipient T cells on day 28 had graft failure or rejection, whereas this was not seen in any of the 22 patients with <50% recipient T cells. Lower donor natural killer NK-cell chimerism after Bu-containing RIST was associated with an increased risk of graft failure [4,27]. Although significant associations of low donor T cell chimerism and HLA mismatch with graft failure disappeared in our multivariate model, our data suggested that HLA mismatch was an important predictor of graft failure only in patients with <60% donor T cell chimerism at day 30. The current study demonstrated that patients at high risk of graft failure could be identified by chimerism analysis at day 30 in T cell fractions, but not in granulocyte fractions, and that chimerism analysis at day 30 after Bu-containing RIST may allow early interventions aimed at reversing graft failure.

Our results suggest that low donor T cell chimerism of <60% at day 30 may predict a poor outcome, although levels of donor T cell chimerism were not associated with NRM PD. In our study, the levels of donor T cell chimerism were not associated with aGVHD or cGVHD, although some reports have stated that donor T cell chimerism was associated with the risk of GVHD [1,4,13,19,28]. It is still controversial whether or not achievement of complete donor T cell chimerism is needed to improve OS and reduce the relapse risk in patients who undergo RIST. Baron et al. [9] suggested that the assessment of donor chimerism levels helps to identify patients who are at higher risk of relapse after nonmyeloablative HSCT. High donor chimerism levels among immune competent cells including T cells and NK cells might be a surrogate for a high graft-versus-tumor effect, and a fractionated chimerism analysis may be useful for detecting and quantifying minimal residual disease after RIST. In a small case series of Bu-containing RIST, mixed donor chimerism was associated with an increased risk of relapse and a worse prognosis [12,29]. In contrast, among patients who underwent RIST that contained Flu, Bu, and alemtuzumab, those who showed mixed donor chimerism beyond day 100 were associated with an improved OS and a lower incidence of GVHD and NRM, without any effect on the relapse risk [13]. Further studies are needed to determine whether the achievement of complete chimerism after RIST is beneficial with less risk of PD and/or more risk of NRM.

In conclusion, within the limitations of a retrospective study, we found that the percentage of donor chimerism was significantly higher in granulocyte than T cell fraction throughout the entire course after Bu-containing RIST. Low donor T cell chimerism of <60% at day 30 may predict a poor outcome, and a prospective study to examine the value of early intervention based on chimerism data is warranted.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Reduced-intensity unrelated donor bone marrow transplantation for hematologic malignancies

Sung-Won Kim · Keitaro Matsuo · Takahiro Fukuda · Masamichi Hara · Kosei Matsue · Shuichi Taniguchi · Tetsuya Eto · Mitsune Tanimoto · Atsushi Wake · Kazuo Hatanaka · Shinji Nakao · Yoji Ishida · Mine Harada · Atae Utsunomiya · Masahiro Imamura · Yoshinobu Kanda · Kazutaka Sunami · Fumio Kawano · Yoichi Takaue · Takanori Teshima

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Abstract To review a current experience of unrelated bone marrow transplantation (BMT) with reduced-intensity conditioning (RIC) regimens, we conducted a nationwide survey with 77 patients (age, 25–68 years). The backbone RIC regimen was a combination of fludarabine or cladribine, busulfan or melphalan and total body irradiation at 2–4 Gy. Five patients died early, but 71 (92%) achieved initial neutrophil recovery. Thereafter, 36 patients (47%) died of therapy-related complications, 23 (30%) of whom died within day 100. Grades II–IV acute graft-versus-host disease (GVHD) occurred in 34 of the 68 evaluable patients (50%). In a multivariate analysis, a regimen containing antithymocyte globulin (ATG) was significantly associated with a decreased risk of acute GVHD ($P = 0.041$). Thirty-three patients are currently alive with a median follow-up of 439 days (28–2002 days), with an OS of 50% at 1 year. In conclusion, unrelated BMT with RIC regimens can be a curative treatment in a subset of patients.

S.-W. Kim · T. Fukuda · Y. Takaue
Hematology and Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation Division, National Cancer Center Hospital, Tokyo, Japan

K. Matsuo
Division of Epidemiology and Prevention, Aichi Cancer Center Research Institute, Nagoya, Japan

M. Hara
Department of Hematology, Ehime Prefectural Central Hospital, Matsuyama, Japan

K. Matsue
Division of Hematology/Oncology, Kameda Medical Center, Kamogawa, Japan

S. Taniguchi · A. Wake
Department of Hematology, Toranomon Hospital, Tokyo, Japan

T. Eto
Department of Hematology, Hamanomachi Hospital, Fukuoka, Japan

M. Tanimoto
Department of Hematology and Oncology, Okayama University Graduate School of Medicine and Dentistry, Okayama, Japan

K. Hatanaka
Department of Internal Medicine, Rinku General Medical Center, Izumisano, Japan

S. Nakao
Department of Hematology, Kanazawa University Graduate School of Medical Science, Kanazawa, Japan

Y. Ishida
Division of Hematology/Oncology, Iwate Medical University School of Medicine, Morioka, Japan

M. Harada
Department of Medicine and Biosystemic Science, Kyushu University, Fukuoka, Japan

A. Utsunomiya
Department of Internal Medicine, Imamura Bun-in Hospital, Kagoshima, Japan

M. Imamura
Department of Hematology and Oncology, Hokkaido University Graduate School of Medicine, Sapporo, Japan

Y. Kanda
Division of Hematology, Saitama Medical Center, Jichi Medical University, Saitama, Japan

Keywords Unrelated transplantation · Reduced-intensity conditioning · Hematologic malignancy

1 Introduction

Allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT) is a possible curative approach for patients with various hematologic malignancies. Recently, the application of reduced-intensity conditioning (RIC) regimens, mostly incorporating fludarabine as a backbone agent, has been explored for patients whose age or concomitant medical conditions contraindicate the use of conventional myeloablative regimens [1–3]. Since only 30–40% of patients have an appropriate family donor available [4], the establishment of an unrelated donor transplantation program with RIC regimens is urgently needed.

Graft rejection, regimen-related toxicities and graft-versus-host disease (GVHD) have been the major problems in unrelated HSCT with RIC [5–13]. In unrelated transplantation, engraftment is influenced by the source of stem cells and superior results have been observed with peripheral blood stem cells (PBSC) compared to bone marrow [9, 14]. Nevertheless, PBSC has not yet been approved as a graft source for unrelated transplantation in Japan [15]. The level of regimen-related toxicities directly depends on the intensity of the regimen, and the incidence of GVHD increases with unrelated donors compared to related donors. Although attempts have been made to overcome these problems, a suitable procedure for unrelated bone marrow transplantation (BMT) with RIC regimens has not yet been established. To accumulate further expertise, we conducted a nationwide survey of Japanese patients with hematologic malignancy who had undergone BMT from an HLA-matched or -mismatched unrelated donor with RIC regimens. Although the present data were obtained from a limited population of patients, these findings may show a current status of unrelated BMT with RIC.

K. Sunami
Department of Internal Medicine,
National Hospital Organization Okayama Medical Center,
Okayama, Japan

F. Kawano
Department of Internal Medicine,
National Hospital Organization Kumamoto Medical Center,
Kumamoto, Japan

T. Teshima (✉)
Center for Cellular and Molecular Medicine,
Kyushu University, 3-1-1 Maidashi,
Higashi-ku, Fukuoka 812-8582, Japan
e-mail: tteshima@cancer.med.kyushu-u.ac.jp

2 Patients and methods

2.1 Data sources

This survey collected the data of 77 consecutive patients in 17 participating hospitals who received unrelated BMT with RIC for hematologic malignancies between 2000 and 2004. Data were derived from questionnaires distributed to each hospital. Additional questionnaires were sent to confirm the follow-up data, including the occurrence of GVHD. The minimum data required for inclusion of a patient in this study were age, sex, histological diagnosis, status at transplant, donor information, conditioning regimen, date of transplant, donor chimerism status, therapy-related complications, date of last follow-up, disease status at follow-up, date of disease progression (PD)/death and cause of death.

This study was approved by institutional review board of each individual center. All patients provided written informed consent according to the Declaration of Helsinki. Unrelated donors provided consent through the Japan Marrow Donor Program as part of its standard procedures. The indications, conditioning regimens, management of GVHD and supportive care for BMT were left to the discretion of each institution. Patients who had previously received allogeneic HSCT and those younger than 20 years were not included. Patients younger than 50 years who had organ dysfunction and/or have previously received high-dose chemotherapy with autologous HSCT were also included.

2.2 Definitions

RIC regimens were defined as previously reported [6, 9, 10], and conditioning regimens that included either beyond 4 Gy of total body irradiation (TBI), 8 mg/kg of busulfan or 140 mg/m^2 of melphalan were excluded from the study. Alleles at the HLA-A, -B, and -DRB1 loci were identified by middle-resolution DNA typing as described previously [16]. Risk status at transplantation was categorized as either standard risk or high risk. Standard-risk diseases included acute leukemia in first complete remission, chronic myeloid leukemia in first chronic phase, and refractory anemia of myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS). Other diseases were categorized as high-risk disease. Graft failure was analyzed in patients who survived more than 28 days posttransplant according to the criteria reported by Petersdorf et al. [17]. Briefly, the definition included failure of the absolute neutrophil count (ANC) to surpass 500/mm^3 before relapse, death or second transplantation, as well as a decrease in the ANC to less than 100/mm^3 on at least three consecutive determinations with a finding of severe hypoplastic marrow. The degree of donor chimerism among peripheral blood T cells was assessed several times

between day 28 and day 100 after HSCT using fluorescence in situ hybridization (FISH) to detect X and Y chromosomes for recipients of grafts from sex-mismatched donors, and polymerase chain reaction-based analyses of polymorphic microsatellite regions for recipients of sex-matched or sex-mismatched transplants. Mixed chimerism was defined as the detection of 5–90% of donor cells in the peripheral blood. Acute and chronic GVHD were graded according to the consensus criteria [18, 19]. Patients who survived 100 days were evaluable for the assessment of chronic GVHD. Overall survival (OS) was measured as the time from the day of transplantation until death from any cause, and progression-free survival (PFS) was the time from the day of transplantation until PD/relapse or death from any cause. Patients who died from transplantation-related causes were classified as non-relapse mortality (NRM) regardless of their disease status.

2.3 Statistical analysis

The primary endpoint of this study was OS and chimerism. The secondary endpoints were PFS, NRM, PD, and the incidence of acute and chronic GVHD. Descriptive statistical analysis was performed to assess patient baseline information. Patients were divided into two groups: age 60 or above and less than 60. OS and PFS were calculated using the Kaplan–Meier method. The cumulative incidence of acute GVHD was calculated using the method described by Gooley et al. [20] to eliminate the effect of competing risks. The competing event for acute GVHD was defined as death without grades II–IV acute GVHD. For each endpoint, a Cox proportional hazard model was used for univariate and multivariate analyses. The factors included in the analysis were HLA disparity (mismatch vs. identical), recipient age (age 60 or above vs. less than 60), use of TBI (yes vs. no), use of ATG (yes vs. no), diagnosis of AML (yes vs. no), risk status (high vs. standard) and acute GVHD (II–IV vs. 0–I). Acute GVHD in the model was treated as a time-varying covariate. We defined statistical significance as a P value less than 0.05. All statistical analyses were performed using STATA version 8 (College Station, TX).

3 Results

3.1 Patients and diagnoses

The patients' characteristics are listed in Table 1. The median age of the patients was 54 years (range, 25–68 years) as a whole. Twenty-one patients (27%) had acute myelogenous leukemia (AML), 2 (3%) had acute lymphoblastic leukemia, 5 (7%) had chronic myeloid leukemia, 20 (26%) had MDS or myeloproliferative disease (refractory anemia, $n = 8$; refractory anemia with excess blasts, $n = 9$; others, $n = 3$), 19 (25%) had non-Hodgkin lymphoma (follicular lymphoma, $n = 12$; diffuse large B-cell lymphoma, $n = 4$; mantle cell lymphoma, $n = 2$; peripheral T-cell lymphoma, unspecified, $n = 1$), 7 (9%) had adult T-cell leukemia/lymphoma, and 3 (4%) had multiple myeloma. Sixty-three patients (82%) had high-risk disease at the time of allogeneic BMT.

3.2 Conditioning regimens

Conditioning regimens are shown in Table 2. None received ex vivo T-cell depleted transplantation.

3.3 HSCT procedure and supportive care

Forty-seven patients (61%) were transplanted from a matched, 24 (31%) were from a 1 allele-mismatched, and 6 (8%) were from a 2 or 3 allele-mismatched unrelated donor. All patients received bone marrow as a source of stem cells. The prophylaxis of GVHD was either cyclosporine- or tacrolimus-based. Thirty-nine patients (51%) received cyclosporine with methotrexate, including five patients who received an ATG-containing preparative regimen. Nine patients (12%) received cyclosporine alone, including five patients who received ATG. Each patient received cyclosporine with mycophenolate mofetil and cyclosporine with prednisolone, respectively. Twenty-five patients (33%) received tacrolimus with methotrexate, including one patient who received ATG. Two patients (3%) received tacrolimus alone, including one who received ATG. Granulocyte colony-stimulating factor was administered intravenously from day +1 or +6 until neutrophil engraftment in all patients.

3.4 Engraftment and chimerism

Five patients died before the engraftment evaluation, with a median survival time of 15 days (range, 2–17 days). Seventy-one patients (92%) achieved initial neutrophil recovery, but three patients (two AMLs and one MDS) later experienced secondary graft failure; one each with AML and MDS after unrelated BMT from an HLA-1 allele-mismatched donor received a second transplantation when they failed to achieve subsequent complete donor-type chimerism, but both died of infectious complications. The other patient with AML after unrelated BMT from an HLA-6 allele-matched donor achieved initial complete chimerism, but later developed secondary graft failure upon the administration of ganciclovir for cytomegalovirus antigenemia. However, this patient achieved the spontaneous recovery of autologous marrow function and is currently surviving beyond 2,000 days.

Table 1 Patient characteristics

Variable	Younger than 60 years ($n = 60$)	60 years or older ($n = 17$)
Patient age (range, median)	25–59, 52	60–68, 63
Disease		
Acute myelogenous leukemia	16 (27%)	5 (29%)
Acute lymphoblastic leukemia	2 (3%)	0
Chronic myeloid leukemia	5 (8%)	0
Myelodysplastic syndrome or myeloproliferative disease	12 (20%)	8 (47%)
Malignant lymphoma	16 (27%)	3 (18%)
Adult T-cell leukemia/lymphoma	7 (12%)	0
Multiple myeloma	2 (3%)	1 (6%)
Risk status		
Standard	13 (22%)	1 (6%)
High	47 (78%)	16 (94%)
HLA disparity		
Matched	37 (62%)	10 (59%)
One-mismatched	19 (32%)	5 (29%)
Two or more mismatched	4 (7%)	2 (12%)
Donor–recipient sex match		
Male–male	20 (33%)	11 (65%)
Male–female	16 (27%)	2 (12%)
Female–male	9 (15%)	4 (24%)
Female–female	15 (25%)	0
GVHD prophylaxis		
Cyclosporine ± methotrexate	38 (63%)	10 (59%)
Tacrolimus ± methotrexate	21 (35%)	6 (35%)
Others	1 (2%)	1 (6%)
Median nucleated cell dose infused ($\times 10^8$/kg, range)	2.80 (0.39–5.52)[a]	2.92 (0.76–4.30)

HLA Human leukocyte antigen, *GVHD* graft-versus-host disease

[a] The data of two patients were excluded because infused nucleated cell dose was unknown

Chimerism was evaluated in 68 patients (88%), with short tandem repeats analysis ($n = 52$), variable number of tandem repeats analysis ($n = 5$) and FISH analysis in the case of sex mismatch ($n = 11$). Complete donor chimerism was confirmed in 58 (85%) within day 100. Mixed chimerism was confirmed in nine patients (13%), but two later reverted to recipient type. One patient failed to achieve donor-type chimerism due to disease relapse on day 20. The incidence of complete donor chimerism was similar in those younger and older than 60 years (85 and 86%), with a similar incidence of mixed chimerism (15 and 14%). No patients received donor lymphocyte infusion.

3.5 GVHD

Acute GVHD occurred in 41 of the 68 evaluable patients (60%), grades II–IV in 34 (50%) and grades III–IV in 14 patients (21%). Chronic GVHD occurred in 26 of the 42 evaluable patients (62%), with extensive type in 23 (55%). The incidence of grades II–IV acute GVHD was the same in patients younger and older than 60 years (50%). The incidence of grades III–IV acute GVHD (22 and 14%) and extensive chronic GVHD (56 and 50%) was similar. In unrelated BMT, from HLA-6 allele-matched ($n = 40$), HLA-1 allele-mismatched ($n = 23$), and HLA-2 or 3 allele-mismatched ($n = 5$) donors, grades II–IV acute GVHD occurred, respectively, in 18 (45%), 10 (43%) and 3 patients (60%), and chronic GVHD occurred in 15 (38%), 9 (39%) and 2 patients (40%). In univariate and multivariate analyses, an ATG-containing regimen was significantly associated with a decreased risk of the onset of grades II–IV acute GVHD (data not shown).

3.6 Survival

Thirty-three patients are currently alive with a median follow-up of 439 days (28–2,002 days), with an OS of 50% at 1 year and 46% at 2 years. The OS of patients younger than 60 years was 49% at 2 years (95% confidence interval [CI], 34–62%), and this could not be defined in older patients (95% CI, 15–45%). Patients younger than 60 years

Table 2 Conditioning regimens

Conditioning regimens	Younger than 60 years ($n = 60$)	60 years or older ($n = 17$)
TBI-containing		
Fludarabine 180 mg/m^2 (or cladribine 0.66 mg/kg), oral busulfan 8 mg/kg, TBI 4 Gy	30 (50%)	6 (35%)
Fludarabine 125–180 mg/m^2, melphalan 80–140 mg/m^2, TBI 4 Gy	5 (8%)	3 (18%)
Fludarabine 180 mg/m^2 (or cladribine 0.66 mg/kg), oral busulfan 8 mg/kg, TBI 2 Gy	2 (3%)	0 (0%)
Fludarabine 180 mg/m^2, TBI 4 Gy	0 (0%)	1 (6%)
ATG-containing		
Fludarabine 180 mg/m^2 (or cladribine 0.66 mg/kg), oral busulfan 8 mg/kg, ATG	5 (8%)	4 (24%)
Fludarabine 180 mg/m^2, cyclophosphamide 60 mg/kg, ATG	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Fludarabine 180 mg/m^2, ATG	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
TBI and ATG-containing		
Fludarabine 180 mg/m^2, oral busulfan 8 mg/kg, TBI 4 Gy, ATG	1 (2%)	1 (6%)
Non-TBI and non-ATG		
Fludarabine 180 mg/m^2, oral busulfan 8 mg/kg	6 (10%)	2 (12%)
Fludarabine 125–180 mg/m^2, melphalan 140 mg/m^2	5 (8%)	0 (0%)
Fludarabine 180 mg/m^2, oral busulfan 8 mg/kg, cyclophosphamide 60 mg/kg	2 (3%)	0 (0%)
Fludarabine 180 mg/m^2, oral busulfan 8 mg/kg, thiotepa 10 mg/kg	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Fludarabine 180 mg/m^2, cyclophosphamide 60 mg/kg	1 (2%)	0 (0%)

TBI Total body irradiation, *ATG* antithymocyte globulin (ATG-Fresenius 10 mg/kg or thymoglobulin 5 mg/kg)

tended to show better survival than older patients ($P = 0.124$). The HLA disparity (match vs. mismatch), TBI vs. non-TBI, ATG vs. non-ATG-containing regimen, and disease category (AML vs. MDS or myeloproliferative disease vs. lymphoid malignancies) was not significantly associated with OS (data not shown). Patients with standard risk tended to show better survival than those with high risk ($P = 0.129$). In univariate and multivariate analyses, no variables were significantly associated with OS (data not shown).

3.7 NRM and PD

Thirty-six patients (47%) died of therapy-related complications, with a cumulative incidence of NRM at 1 year of 43% (95% CI, 31–56%). Of the patients who died of therapy-related complications, 23 (30%) died within day 100 of transplantation and 13 (17%) died thereafter. The NRM at 1 year in patients younger and older than 60 years was 38% (95% CI, 25–53%) and 61% (95% CI, 36–85%), respectively, as shown in Fig. 1. The causes of NRM were infection (23%), regimen-related toxicity (14%) and GVHD (9%). GVHD-related mortality was found in 26%. Infection was the major cause of death in patients younger than 60 years. Regimen-related toxicity, mainly pulmonary complications, was the major cause of treatment failure for patients older than 60 years. In univariate and multivariate analyses, no variables were significantly associated with

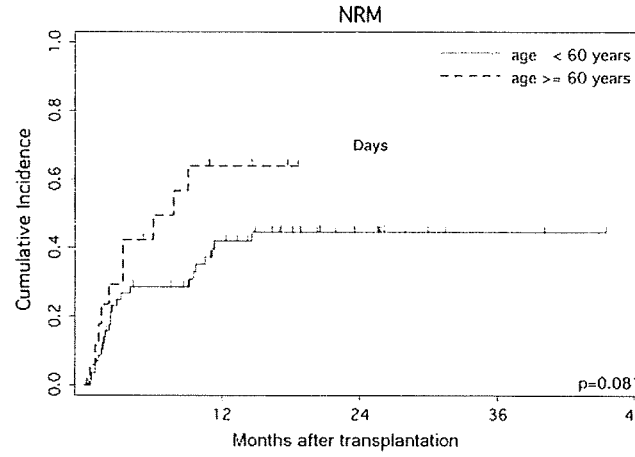

Fig. 1 Non-relapse mortality stratified according to patient age, younger or older than 60 years

NRM (data not shown). Relapse or progression of primary disease after unrelated BMT with RIC regimens was observed in 13 patients (17%; 10 patients younger than 60 years and 3 older than 60 years). There were no relapsed patients after transplantation in standard risk group. The incidence of death due to relapse or progression of primary disease was 14%. In univariate and multivariate analyses, no variables were significantly associated with PD although patients with grades II–IV acute GVHD showed a relatively lower incidence of PD (data not shown).