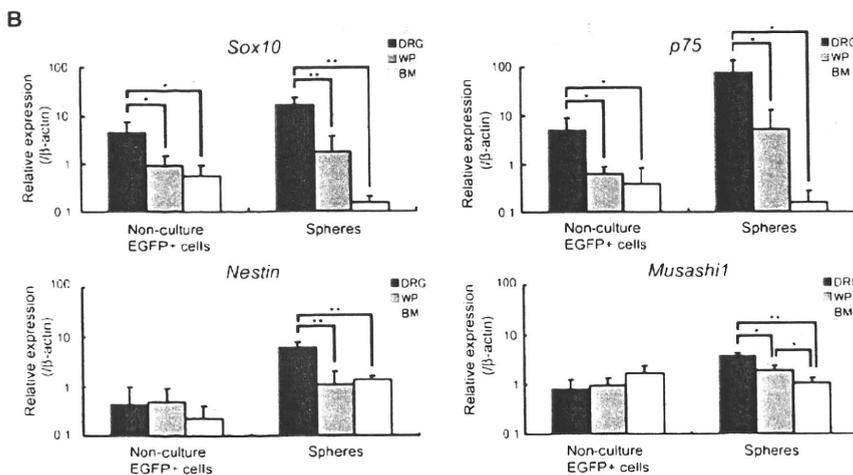


**Figure 6. Expression Patterns of Embryonic Neural Crest-Specific Markers in Adult P0-Cre/Floxed-EGFP Mice**

(A) Semiquantitative RT-PCR was conducted to evaluate the mRNA expression of various NCSC markers. Four types of cells were examined for each tissue source: EGFP<sup>-</sup> and EGFP<sup>+</sup> cells freshly fractionated by flow cytometry, EGFP<sup>+</sup> spheres after 14 days in culture, and differentiated cells. Total RNA from a whole E11.5 embryo was collected as a positive control. The expression frequencies of neural crest-lineage markers from the three tissue sources were variable and quite different from the CNS-type neurospheres cultured from the striatum of an E14.5 mouse (CNS sphere). The ventral marker *Nkx6.1*, observed in ES-cell-derived neurospheres ventralized by Shh induction, was not observed in any of the EGFP<sup>+</sup> neural crest-derived spheres.

(B) Quantitative PCR analysis revealed significantly higher expression of the NCSC markers *Sox10* and *p75* in the cells derived from the adult DRG. Immature stem/progenitor specific markers *Nestin* and *Musashi1* were also highly expressed in the DRG-derived spheres. \**p* < 0.05, \*\**p* < 0.01.



adult mice. Compared with the cells derived from the WP and BM, the neural crest-derived cells of the DRG contained a higher proportion of tripotent cells and displayed a greater ability to form secondary spheres (Figure 5 and Table 1). The expression levels of the NCSC markers *Sox10* and *p75*, and markers for undifferentiated stem/progenitor cells, *Nestin* and *Musashi1*, were also higher in the DRG-derived EGFP<sup>+</sup> cells from adult P0-Cre/Floxed-EGFP mice (Figure 6B), suggesting that the DRG contained the highest proportion of NCSCs of the tissues studied. The origin of the NCSCs in the DRG is presently unknown. The DRG develops from two

period of hematopoiesis of each site, suggesting that NCSCs join the migration pathway of hematopoietic cells on the way to the BM from the embryonic period through adulthood. Our present findings concerning the migration stream of NCSCs imply an undiscovered relationship between NCSCs and hematopoiesis.

The DRG is derived from the neural crest. Although several groups have demonstrated the existence of NCSCs in the embryonic DRG (Leimeroth et al., 2002; Paratore et al., 2001), we confirmed their existence in the DRG of adult rodents. Recently, DRG-derived sphere-initiating cells were reported in adult rodents, but their origin and potential were not elucidated (Li et al., 2007). In our present study, using P0 and Wnt1-Cre reporter mice, we demonstrated that the observed cells were of neural crest lineage. Furthermore, examination of the spheres formed through a valid clonal culture method confirmed the presence of cells with stem cell-like properties in the DRG of

sources: neural crest cells that follow the ventromedial pathway and BC cells that originate from the dorsal root entry zone (Maro et al., 2004). BC cells are also neural crest-derived populations that transiently occupy the dorsal entry and ventral exit points of trunk spinal nerve roots during peripheral nervous system development (Altman and Bayer, 1984; Niederlander and Lumsden, 1996). Since embryonic BC cells include multipotent NCSCs (Hjerling-Leffler et al., 2005), it is possible that NCSCs originating from the BC migrate to and remain in the DRG until adulthood.

The presence of NCSCs in the facial skin and whisker follicle was reported previously (Fernandes et al., 2004; Sieber-Blum et al., 2004), and our results confirm their existence. An interesting finding was the formation of spheres from EGFP<sup>-</sup> cells of the WP of P0 and Wnt1-Cre/Floxed-EGFP mice, although at a significantly lower percentage than the EGFP<sup>+</sup> cells (Figure 4D and

Figure S4C). These EGFP<sup>-</sup> spheres may develop from stem/progenitor cells with an origin other than the neural crest, such as the keratinocyte stem cells of the epithelium (Kobayashi et al., 1993). However, since the gene expression profile of EGFP<sup>-</sup> cells was similar to that of EGFP<sup>+</sup> cells, this seems unlikely (Figure 6A). Another possible explanation for their presence is transgene silencing through epigenetic modifications such as DNA methylation, which can weaken EGFP expression (Turker, 2002). When EGFP<sup>-</sup> spheres were cultured in medium containing the demethylating agent 5-azacytidine, we observed EGFP expression in some of them (data not shown), suggesting that DNA methylation-mediated transgene silencing partially accounts for the presence of EGFP<sup>-</sup> spheres.

Our results from culturing and characterizing NCSCs from the adult BM, DRG, and WP revealed significant tissue-source-dependent differences. Similarly, NCSCs from the embryonic gut and sciatic nerve exhibit heritable, cell-intrinsic differences in their responses to lineage-determination factors in vitro and in vivo (Bixby et al., 2002). Factors that come into play during the segregation, migration, and maintenance of neural crest cells have been proposed to explain these differences in NCSC characteristics. In the premigratory neural tube, a gradient of multiple signals is present along the rostrocaudal neuraxis, affecting the premigratory neural crest cells (Abzhanov et al., 2003; Lwigale et al., 2004). Once the neural crest cells separate from the neural tube, they are exposed to a multitude of factors through their path of migration, and NCSCs that survive in each respective tissue are affected by factors within that tissue (Couly et al., 2002; Trainor et al., 2002). There are also differences between embryonic and postnatal stages, as revealed in a study showing differences between fetal and adult gut NCSCs (Kruger et al., 2002). Therefore, it may be unrealistic to attempt to characterize NCSCs as a single population, since those from different sources display different traits. Instead, it will be important to understand these differences and to elucidate the molecular mechanisms for the maintenance and lineage determination of NCSCs in each tissue.

NCSCs are attracting increasing interest as potential candidates for cell transplantation therapy of nerve trauma and disease, because they are present in tissue that can be harvested from the patient. This allows for autologous transplantation, avoiding immunological complications as well as the ethical concerns associated with embryonic stem cells. We isolated and examined NCSCs from adult tissues with this in mind and discovered that NCSCs from different tissues had distinct characteristics. Further study of these NCSCs will hopefully lead to the culture and transplantation of NCSCs most appropriate for the lesion receiving treatment.

## EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

### Animals

Transgenic mice expressing Cre recombinase under control of the P0 promoter (P0-Cre) (Yamauchi et al., 1999) and Wnt1 promoter/enhancer (Wnt1-Cre) (Danielian et al., 1998) were mated with EGFP reporter mice (CAG-CAT<sup>10xP1/0xP</sup>-EGFP) (Kawamoto et al., 2000) to obtain P0-Cre/Floxed-EGFP and Wnt1-Cre/Floxed-EGFP double-transgenic mice. Mice heterozygous for a null allele of Flt1 (Flt1<sup>+/lacZ</sup>) (Fong et al., 1995) were crossed to P0-Cre/Floxed-EGFP double-transgenic mice to obtain P0-Cre/Floxed-EGFP/Flt1<sup>lacZ</sup> triple transgenic mice. Adult wild-type mice were purchased for mating from CLEA Japan. All experimental procedures were approved by

the ethics committee of Keio University and were in accordance with the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (U.S. National Institutes of Health).

### Immunohistochemistry

For histological analysis, samples were fixed in 4% paraformaldehyde (PFA) and embedded in cryomold for sectioning at 14  $\mu$ m. The following antibodies were used as primary antibodies: anti-green fluorescent protein (GFP) (rabbit IgG, 1:500, MBL, and goat IgG, 1:200, Santa Cruz Biotechnology), Sox10 (goat IgG, 1:200, R&D Systems), p75 (rabbit IgG, 1:500, Chemicon), TH (sheep IgG, 1:200, Chemicon), and P0 (chick IgG, 1:200, Aves). Immunoreactivity was visualized using secondary antibodies conjugated with Alexa 488 or Alexa 568 (Molecular Probes). Nuclear counterstaining was performed with Hoechst 33342 (10  $\mu$ g/ml, Sigma B2261). The samples were observed with a confocal laser scanning microscope (LSM510, Carl Zeiss). Whole-mount preparation of tibias and immunostaining were performed as described (Kubota et al., 2008).

### Preparation of DRG, WP, and BM Cells

Juvenile (14–28 days) and adult (2–12 months) P0-Cre/Floxed-EGFP mice were deeply anesthetized and sacrificed by cervical dislocation.

#### DRG

The vertebral body was dissected out, and the DRGs from C5 to L5 were resected into HBSS<sup>+</sup> (GIBCO 14025-092) supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS; Equitech-Bio SFB30-1478) and 1% penicillin/streptomycin (P/S; GIBCO-BRL). The peripheral nerve tissue was removed, and the DRGs were incubated with 0.25% collagenase (Sigma C5894) in HBSS<sup>+</sup> for 30 min at 37°C. After being rinsed in PBS, the DRGs were incubated in 0.25% trypsin-EDTA for 30 min at 37°C and mechanically dissociated into DRG medium (neurobasal medium [GIBCO 21103-049] supplemented with 20 ng/ml B27 [GIBCO], 1% L-glucose [GIBCO], and 1% P/S). The cells were collected by centrifugation at 800  $\times$  g for 3 min at 4°C.

#### WP

The facial WP was carefully dissected, washed in HBSS, and incubated in 0.3% dispase II (Roche 1276921) in DMEM-F12 (GIBCO 11330-032) containing 1% P/S for 3 hr at 37°C. Hair and dermis were removed with a cell lifter (Costar). The skin tissue was minced into small pieces and digested with 0.04% collagenase (Wako 038-10531) in DMEM-F12 for 1 hr at 37°C. Cell clusters were mechanically dissociated in medium, and the suspension was poured through a 70  $\mu$ m cell strainer (Falcon). The dissociated cells were collected by centrifugation at 480  $\times$  g for 3 min at 4°C.

#### BM

The femurs and tibias were dissected out and crushed with a pestle. The crushed bones were washed in HBSS<sup>+</sup> (GIBCO 14175-095) supplemented with 2% FBS, 10 mM HEPES (GIBCO 15630-080), and 1% P/S to remove hematopoietic cells. The bone fragments were collected and incubated for 1 hr at 37°C in 0.2% collagenase (Wako 032-10534) in DMEM (GIBCO 11885-084) containing 10 mM HEPES and 1% P/S. The suspension was filtered with a cell strainer (Falcon 2350) and collected by centrifugation at 280  $\times$  g for 7 min at 4°C. The pellet was resuspended for 5–10 s in 1 ml water (Sigma W3500) to burst red blood cells, after which 1 ml of 2  $\times$  PBS (diluted from Sigma D1408) containing 4% FBS was added. The cells were resuspended in HBSS<sup>-</sup>, and the suspension was poured through a cell strainer.

### Flow-Cytometric Analysis

Flow-cytometric analysis was performed as described previously (Matsuzaki et al., 2004). For detailed analysis of the BM in P0-Cre/Floxed-EGFP mice, BM cells were stained for 30 min on ice with PE-anti-PECAM-1 and APC-anti-CD45 (eBioscience, CA). After collecting 1  $\times$  10<sup>5</sup> events, the fluorescence intensity of PECAM-1 and EGFP in the CD45-negative cell population was plotted as a two-dimensional dot plot.

Blood cells from embryos were obtained by cutting the umbilical arteries and allowing the blood to flow freely into PBS. After collecting the PBS, EGFP<sup>+</sup> cells were identified by EGFP fluorescence.

### Primary and Secondary Sphere-Forming Cultures

Cells from the DRG, WP, and BM were seeded at 5  $\times$  10<sup>3</sup> cells/ml (Hulspas et al., 1997) in a serum-free sphere-forming medium consisting of DMEM/F-12 (1:1) (GIBCO 12100-046/21700-075) supplemented with insulin (25  $\mu$ g/ml), transferrin (100  $\mu$ g/ml), progesterone (20 nM), sodium selenate

(30 nM), putrescine (60 nM) (all from Sigma-Aldrich), recombinant human EGF (100 ng/ml) (Pepro Tech #100-15), human FGF-basic (100 ng/ml) (Pepro Tech #100-18b), and B27 (20 ng/ml) (modified from Reynolds and Weiss [1992]). Cells were cultured in an incubator at 37°C, 5% CO<sub>2</sub>, and half of the medium was changed every 6–7 days. For BrdU labeling, 1 μM BrdU was added to the culture medium every 3 days. For clonal sphere expansion, the cells were cultured in the above medium with 0.8% methylcellulose (nacalai tesque 22224-55) (Yoshida et al., 2006).

For secondary sphere formation assays, primary spheres were collected, incubated in 0.25% trypsin-EDTA for 30 min at 37°C, and triturated until a single-cell suspension was obtained. The cells were spun at 860 × g for 3 min at 4°C and resuspended in the aforementioned sphere culture medium.

For statistical evaluation of the primary and secondary sphere-forming assays, one-factor ANOVA and the Tukey-Kramer test were applied.

#### Differentiation Analysis

Spheres were plated on poly-D-lysine/laminin (Sigma P7405/Invitrogen 23017-015)-coated 8-well chamber slides (Iwaki 5732-008) and cultured for 10 days in the following differentiation medium: DMEM/F12 (1:1) supplemented with 10% FBS, without any growth factors. For immunocytochemistry, the cells were fixed in 4% PFA and stained with the following primary antibodies: anti-GFAP (rabbit IgG, 1:500, Dako Z0334), β-III tubulin (mouse IgG2b, 1:500, Sigma T8660), αSMA (mouse IgG2a, 1:1000, Sigma A2547), and BrdU (sheep IgG, 1:500, Fitzgerald 20-BS17). Secondary antibodies were the following: anti-mouse IgG2b (Alexa 488 A-21141), anti-mouse IgG2a (Alexa 350 A-21130), anti-rabbit IgG (Alexa 568 A11036), and anti-sheep IgG (Alexa 568 A-21099 [1:1000, Molecular Probes]). The samples were observed with a universal fluorescence microscope (Axioskop 2 Plus; Carl Zeiss).

#### RT-PCR Assay

RT-PCR assay is described in the Supplemental Experimental Procedures. For statistical analysis, real-time RT-PCR results were evaluated using Student's *t* test.

#### SUPPLEMENTAL DATA

Supplemental Data include five figures, Supplemental Experimental Procedures, and Supplemental References and can be found with this article online at <http://www.cellstemcell.com/cgi/content/full/2/4/392/DC1/>.

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## Cardiac Regenerative Medicine

Shinsuke Yuasa, MD<sup>\*,\*\*</sup>; Keiichi Fukuda, MD<sup>\*</sup>

Severe heart failure is associated with damage to the myocardium that is irreversible with current medical therapies. Recent experimental and clinical studies, however, have opened the possibility of solving many of the associated problems, making this an exciting and tangible goal. There are many potential cell sources for regenerative cardiac medicine, including bone marrow stem cells, endothelial progenitor cells, skeletal myocytes, adult cardiac stem cells, and embryonic stem (ES) cells. Although ES cells are highly proliferative and suitable for mass production, they are not autologous, and an efficient protocol is yet to be established to ensure selective cardiomyocyte induction. Recent studies have successfully established inducible pluripotent stem (iPS) cells from mouse and human fibroblasts by the gene transfer of 4 transcription factors that are strongly expressed in ES cells: *Oct3/4*, *Sox2*, *Klf4* and *c-Myc*. iPS cells can differentiate into all 3 germ layer-derived cells and are syngeneic, indicating that they can become an ideal cell source for regenerative medicine. Despite these successes, the accumulating evidence from fields as diverse as developmental biology, stem cell biology and tissue engineering must be integrated to achieve the full potential of cardiac regenerative medicine. (Circ J 2008; Suppl A: A-49–A-55)

**Key Words:** Cardiomyocyte; Cell differentiation; Cell transplantation; Stem cell; Tissue engineering

**H**earth failure is associated with decreased blood supply to tissues throughout the body, and in severe heart failure this can lead to markedly reduced cardiac systolic function. One exciting potential therapeutic option to improve cardiac function and mortality is the transplantation of healthy regenerative cardiomyocytes into the injured heart. Many potential cell sources can be utilized in regenerative cardiac medicine, including bone marrow (BM) stem cells, endothelial progenitor cells, skeletal myocytes, adult cardiac stem cells, and embryonic stem (ES) cells. BM mesenchymal stem cells (MSC) have been central to the development of cardiac regenerative medicine since we first reported that BM cells could differentiate into cardiac myocytes in 1999.<sup>2</sup> Hematopoietic stem cells (HSC), endothelial progenitor cells, ES cells, cardiac tissue stem cells, and adipose tissue stem cells have also been found to undergo myocardial differentiation, and it is possible that additional cell types may have cardiac differentiation abilities as well.<sup>3–6</sup> To date, a number of clinical trials have been performed using BM mononuclear cells, circulating endothelial progenitor cells, skeletal myoblasts, and MSC<sup>7–9</sup>; however, the results of these trials have been unsatisfactory because of the poor efficiency of differentiation into cardiomyocytes. In addition, the mechanism by which stem cell transplantation improves cardiac function remains obscure. Therefore, our main task involves refining methods that will enable the selective differentiation of stem cells into cardiomyocytes, optimizing the route of administration of stem

cells, and specifically inducing heart tissue regeneration. This review will focus on the recent advances in cardiac regenerative medicine.

### Generation of Inducible Pluripotent Stem (iPS) Cells

Compared with adult stem cells, ES cells are derived from the blastocyst embryo, have a strong proliferative ability and promising differentiation capability. However, ES cells are allogeneic, and strong autologous stem cells are better suited to tailoring cardiac regenerative medicine practices to individual patients. Based on this ideal, the most notable event in recent years is the successful generation of iPS cells. Murine iPS cells were generated from adult mouse fibroblasts by ectopic expression of 4 transcription factors: *Oct3/4*, *Sox2*, *c-Myc*, and *Klf4*.<sup>10</sup> The morphology, growth properties and pluripotency of these iPS cells are very similar to those of mouse ES cells. Moreover, the germline competency of murine iPS cells was demonstrated by using the *cis*-element of *Nanog* as a selection marker.<sup>11</sup> *c-Myc* is a known oncogene, but a recent study demonstrated that this gene is not required for the generation of iPS cells and that iPS cells without *c-Myc* did not develop tumors.<sup>12</sup> Human iPS cells have also been created from human adult somatic cells by gene transfer of the same 4 transcription factors: *Oct3/4*, *Sox2*, *c-Myc*, and *Klf4*, without selection.<sup>13–15</sup> Successful reprogramming of differentiated human somatic cells into a pluripotent state would allow the creation of stem cells specific to individual patients. The accumulating knowledge regarding ES cell differentiation is advancing the development of differentiation protocols.<sup>16,17</sup> As the stem cell characteristics of iPS cells resembles those of ES cells, it is likely that the cell differentiation methods of iPS cells will also resemble those of ES cells. Therefore, it is important that the results of ES cell-derived cardiomyocyte differentiation strategies are taken into account, so that the clinical application of iPS cells can occur in the near future.

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<sup>\*</sup>Department of Regenerative Medicine and Advanced Cardiac Therapeutics, <sup>\*\*</sup>Division of Cardiology, Department of Medicine, Keio University School of Medicine, Tokyo, Japan

Mailing address: Keiichi Fukuda, MD, Department of Regenerative Medicine and Advanced Cardiac Therapeutics, Keio University School of Medicine, 35 Shinanomachi, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-8582, Japan. E-mail: kfukuda@sc.itc.keio.ac.jp

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## ES Cells

The first mouse ES cell line was established by Evans and Kaufman in 1981, and ES cells were initially used as a model for the analysis of embryonic development and for generating genetically modified mice.<sup>18-20</sup> In the mid-1990s, ES cell research slowly moved to stem cell-based research into cell transplantation therapy using in vivo animal models.<sup>21,22</sup> In 1998, Thomson et al first reported the establishment of human ES cells<sup>23</sup> and although ethical issues surrounding their use still remain, they quickly attracted significant attention as a source for regeneration therapy. Researchers were interested in the proliferative and differentiation powers of ES cells, but were also aware that the immunological problems of allogeneic ES cells needed to be resolved before these cells could be used in a clinical setting. In 2001, Wakayama et al established murine ES cells by applying nuclear transfer techniques to nuclei derived from somatic cells.<sup>24</sup> Their findings strongly suggested that an individual's own ES cells could be generated by using somatic cells, thereby obviating immune rejection.<sup>25,26</sup> However, nuclear transfer techniques are technically difficult, so it was important to develop simpler methods for widespread use.

The in vitro differentiation of cardiomyocytes from mouse ES cells was first reported in 1985.<sup>27</sup> In 1996, Klug et al described the stable transfection of ES cells with a cDNA encoding aminoglycoside phosphotransferase under the control of the  $\alpha$ -cardiac myosin heavy chain promoter and these cells differentiated into a relatively pure population of cardiomyocytes in the presence of suitable antibiotics.<sup>21</sup> That study provided the impetus that encouraged the use of ES cells in the clinical setting. The development of methods for differentiating ES cells into cardiomyocytes more selectively and efficiently using a variety of factors progressed steadily from the late 1990s.<sup>23,28-34</sup> The differentiation of ES cells into any cell lineage partly mimics the physiological regulatory mechanisms that occur during normal early development. Although several signaling protein families, including BMPs, Wnts, Notch, and FGFs, are involved in the development of the heart, limited evidence is available about the exact signals that mediate the differentiation of ES cells into cardiomyocytes. In mouse embryos, cardiac progenitor cells appear around embryonic stage 7.0 (E7.0) and the cardiac crescent is formed by E7.5, indicating that the growth factors expressed in these regions and around the cardiac crescent may have an important role in cardiomyocyte induction.<sup>35,36</sup> BMPs are expressed in the lateral plate mesoderm including the anterior lateral plate, and gene targeting of *BMP-2* causes severe heart deformity in early-stage embryos.<sup>37</sup> Application of BMP-2-soaked beads in vivo has also been used to induce the ectopic expression of cardiac transcription factors, and the administration of soluble BMP-2 or BMP-4 to explant cultures induces cardiac differentiation in premature non-cardiogenic mesoderm.<sup>38</sup> These findings strongly suggest a critical role for BMPs in the induction of cardiomyocytes. In contrast, both BMP-2 and BMP-4 inhibit cardiomyogenesis before and during the early stages of gastrulation.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, we have observed that simple stimulation with BMP-2/BMP-4 does not augment or suppress cardiomyocyte induction from ES cells. We hypothesized that BMP antagonists may also be involved in cardiomyocyte induction and found that the BMP antagonist, Noggin, was transiently but strongly expressed in the heart-forming area. We speculated

that the context-dependent differential action of BMPs in cardiomyocyte induction might be explained by the local action of Noggin and other BMP inhibitors, and accordingly developed a protocol to induce cardiomyocyte differentiation from ES cells by transient Noggin addition. Expression of Noggin prior to the embryoid body (EB) formation stage mimicked the transient and strong expression of Noggin during the early gastrulation stage. In particular, expression of Noggin at 3 days and 0 days before EB formation led to a marked increase in the incidence of beating EBs 10 days after EB formation.<sup>40</sup>

Wnt signals also play major roles in cell adhesion, morphology, proliferation, migration, and structural remodeling during the developmental process.<sup>41-44</sup> The major components of this network are the Wnt ligands, which bind to Frizzled receptors at the cell surface. The Wnt ligands comprise at least 17 members, with some activating the canonical Wnt/ $\beta$ -catenin pathway and others activating the non-canonical pathway. Cytosolic  $\beta$ -catenin associates with cadherins on the intracellular side of the plasma membrane to promote cell adhesion, and with the actin microfilament network to control cell shape. Activation of Wnt signaling downregulates the intracellular degradation of  $\beta$ -catenin, thereby allowing it to translocate to the nucleus and activate other transcription factors in conjunction with its co-transcription factors, the LEFs/TCFs. The non-canonical Wnt pathway has no role in regulating  $\beta$ -catenin degradation, but can activate JNK and other signaling pathways. In past studies, Wnt signaling had been implicated as an inhibitor of cardiomyocyte induction.<sup>45</sup> Studies have shown that Wnt inhibitors, Crescent and Dkk-1, are expressed in the anterior endoderm during gastrulation and could induce the formation of beating heart muscle, and that ectopic Wnt signals could repress heart formation from the anterior mesoderm in vitro and in vivo.<sup>46-48</sup> In addition, the forced expression of either Wnt3A or Wnt8 promotes the development of primitive erythrocytes from the precardiac region. These findings indicate that inhibition of Wnt signaling by the diffusion of Dkk-1 and Crescent from the anterior endoderm promote heart formation in the anterior lateral mesoderm.

In contrast, the mesodermal marker, Brachyury(T), is a target of Wnt3, one of the canonical Wnt signaling ligands.<sup>49</sup> It was therefore expected that canonical Wnt signaling played a role in cardiac development. Recent reports have demonstrated that Wnt members play positive roles in cardiomyocyte differentiation in vitro and in vivo.<sup>45</sup> In particular, Wnt11 is expressed in the early mesoderm in a pattern that overlaps with the precardiac regions.<sup>50</sup> In addition, exogenous Wnt11 can promote cardiac differentiation in vitro and in vivo through the independent  $\beta$ -catenin pathway, but is dependent on protein kinase C and JNK.<sup>50,51</sup> The involvement of Wnt family members and  $\beta$ -catenin in mammalian cardiac myogenesis was examined using a pluripotent mouse embryonic carcinoma cell line (P19CL6), which can be induced to differentiate into cardiomyocytes by 1% DMSO.<sup>52</sup> The administration of DMSO induced Wnt3A and Wnt8A, which in turn activated Wnt/ $\beta$ -catenin signaling and thereby induced cardiac myogenesis in the P19CL6 cells. These findings indicated that Wnt/ $\beta$ -catenin signaling is activated at the inception of mammalian cardiac myogenesis in this pluripotent model system. Accumulating evidence has also shown that the Wnt pathway plays a crucial role in cardiomyocyte induction, although temporal and spatial regulation seems to be critical for cardiac develop-

ment.<sup>53–56</sup>

There is no single growth factor that acts constantly throughout the entire process of organ induction during the development of multiple organ systems; it is the time- and context-dependent expression of multiple factors that is critical for proper development. A single factor such as BMP, Wnt, Notch, or Hedgehog can exert opposite actions during different developmental processes. The use of growth factor combinations in their *in vivo* context will facilitate the specific differentiation of cardiomyocytes from ES cells in the near future. In 2001, it was reported that human ES cells, like mouse ES cells, could differentiate into cardiomyocytes with cardiac-specific structural and functional properties.<sup>57</sup> The same group recently revealed that transplanted human ES cell-derived cardiomyocytes can act as a pacemaker in porcine ventricles in which a complete atrioventricular block was artificially generated, and improve cardiac performance in the infarcted rat heart.<sup>58,59</sup> This study demonstrated that human ES cell-derived cardiomyocytes could make a successful electrical connection with recipient cardiomyocytes in large animals. Studies such as this one have demonstrated that research into ES cells as a source for regenerative medicine has progressed rapidly in recent years, and this also applies to human iPS cells, making feasible the clinical application of these cells as a source of cardiomyocytes in transplantation therapy.

### BM Stem Cells

In 1966, MSC were initially identified in BM and were known as bone formation progenitors.<sup>60</sup> For some time thereafter, BM-MSCs were believed to differentiate into osteoblasts, chondroblasts, adipocytes, and connective tissues only.<sup>61,62</sup> Subsequently, MSCs were reported to comprise approximately 0.001–0.01% of the total nucleated cells in BM, which is far less than that of HSCs.<sup>63,64</sup>

BM-MSCs were initially isolated from BM stromal cells by their morphology, proliferative activity and multipotency. Recent studies have demonstrated that BM-MSCs can also differentiate into neurons, skeletal muscle cells and cardiomyocytes, both *in vitro* and *in vivo*. Recent advances in fluorescence-activated cell sorting (FACS) techniques have enabled isolation of different cells by cell surface antigen expression and fluorescent dye efflux characteristics.<sup>65,66</sup> FACS analysis revealed that the HSC population in mice consists of a CD34<sup>+</sup> c-kit<sup>+</sup> Sca-1<sup>+</sup> Lin<sup>−</sup> tip-side cell population (SP), in which c-kit is a stem cell factor receptor, Sca-1 is a stem cell antigen specifically expressed in various stem cells in mice only, and Lin is a mixture of antibodies against lineage markers for hematocytes.<sup>67</sup> Despite some reports, cell surface markers able to isolate MSCs have yet to be determined. CD29, CD44, CD105, and murine Sca-1 are widely accepted cell surface markers for MSCs, but the acceptability of other markers differs among researchers.<sup>68–70</sup>

In 1999, we induced functional cardiomyocyte differentiation from mouse MSCs with 5-azacytidine, which demethylates methyl-cytosine.<sup>2</sup> At the time, this was considered a very surprising phenomenon because BM cells were thought to only differentiate into either blood cell lineages or bone cells. This finding was later pursued using a variety of approaches and BM cells were shown to have the potential to differentiate into a variety of tissues, including cardiomyocytes. In 2001, Beltrami et al observed mitotic cardiomyocytes in human hearts after a myocardial infarction;<sup>71</sup>

however, it was unknown whether mature cardiomyocytes had acquired the ability to proliferate, whether immature cardiomyocytes already residing in the adult heart had differentiated from stem cells into proliferating cardiomyocytes, or whether mature cardiomyocytes had acquired the ability to proliferate by fusing with cells that already had proliferative ability. In 2001, Orlic et al reported that transplanted c-kit<sup>+</sup> Lin<sup>−</sup> BM cells could differentiate into cardiomyocytes in peri-infarct tissue after myocardial infarction.<sup>72</sup> In 2002, numerous recipient-derived cardiomyocytes were observed in a donor heart following human heart transplantation,<sup>73</sup> and in 2003, numerous BM-derived cardiomyocytes were also shown to be present in the recipient heart after BM transplantation.<sup>74</sup> Subsequently, many studies examined the differentiation capacity of BM cells, the type of cells that BM cells were able to differentiate into and other possible mechanisms. Wagers et al examined a variety of organs after transplanting single GFP-labeled HSC (c-kit<sup>+</sup>, Lin<sup>−</sup>, Sca-1<sup>+</sup>) into irradiated mice and demonstrated that if HSC *trans*-differentiation does occur, it is extremely rare.<sup>75</sup> Goodell et al transplanted highly enriched HSCs into lethally irradiated mice, and following subsequent ischemia–reperfusion injury, found that HSCs differentiated into cardiomyocytes in the peri-infarct region at a prevalence of 0.02%.<sup>66</sup> In 2004, Balsam et al investigated whether c-kit<sup>+</sup> HSCs in BM are capable of differentiating into cardiomyocytes by directly injecting BM cells into the heart instead of transplanting them after irradiation. The results demonstrated that c-kit<sup>+</sup> HSCs could not differentiate into cardiomyocytes without the effects of irradiation.<sup>76</sup> Murry et al reported similar results.<sup>77</sup> During this same period, we also examined the differentiation ability of HSCs using a c-kit<sup>+</sup> Sca-1<sup>+</sup> CD34<sup>−</sup> Lin<sup>−</sup> side population (CD34<sup>−</sup>KSL<sup>−</sup>SP) of HSCs.<sup>78</sup> When we transplanted whole BM cells, which included both HSCs and MSCs, from GFP-transgenic mice into lethally irradiated mice and induced myocardial infarction, we found very few GFP<sup>+</sup> (BM-derived) cardiomyocytes. Moreover, we confirmed the presence of predominantly MSC-derived GFP<sup>+</sup> cardiomyocytes in the group transplanted with cardiomyogenic (CMG) cells. It should be emphasized that the radiation dose must be carefully determined in these BM transplantation experiments, because the radiation sensitivity of MSCs is much higher than that of the hematopoietic cells. We proposed that the differentiation of whole BM cells into populations excluding hematopoietic populations is attributable to MSCs, not HSCs, and that MSCs are mobilized from BM.

A great deal of clinical research has involved harvesting mononuclear cells from BM cells or peripheral blood, and infusing these cells through a catheter into a coronary artery to treat acute myocardial infarction. Strauer et al first reported the transplantation of BM mononuclear cells after a myocardial infarction, which resulted in a slight decrease in the left ventricular end-systolic dimension and infarct region, and an increase in the left ventricular ejection fraction (EF) and regional function.<sup>79</sup> The TOPCARE-AMI trial allocated 20 patients with reperfused acute myocardial infarction to receive intracoronary infusion of either BM-derived or circulating blood-derived progenitor cells into the infarct artery and showed a significant increase in the global left ventricular EF and a reduction of end-systolic left ventricular volumes.<sup>80</sup> The BOOST trial also transplanted BM mononuclear cells after acute myocardial infarction. In most of the studies, transplantation resulted in similar outcomes.<sup>81</sup> The REPAIR-AMI trial, which was the first dou-

ble-blind, placebo-controlled, randomized multicenter study to evaluate the effect of intracoronary transplantation of BMCs on infarct remodeling, also showed that BMCs improved the global left ventricular function in patients with acute myocardial infarction.<sup>82</sup> However, despite all these human studies, the mechanistic pathway of BMC differentiation remains unclear and in order for BMC transplantation to become a more powerful tool in the field of regenerative medicine, it must be solved to enable us to improve the effects of BMC transplantation.

### Cardiac Stem Cells

Stem cells are present in many adult organs, and contribute to the maintenance of physiological conditions and repair mechanisms in pathological states. However, until recently, the existence of stem cells in the heart was completely unknown. Recent advances in genetic engineering and techniques such as FACS are helping to elucidate the presence and properties of stem cells in the heart.

In 2003, Beltrami et al reported that c-kit<sup>+</sup> cells in the adult heart were pluripotent and possessed proliferative ability in vitro.<sup>83</sup> These cells were able to differentiate not only into cardiomyocytes but also into smooth muscle cells and endothelial cells. Transplantation of these stem cells into a murine myocardial infarction model confirmed their ability to differentiate into cardiomyocytes in vivo, implying the existence of a tissue repair mechanism by stem cells in the heart. In 2003, Oh et al reported that Sca-1<sup>+</sup> cells in the adult mouse heart existed as cardiomyocyte stem cells.<sup>84</sup> These cells were capable of differentiating into cardiomyocytes when exposed to 5-azacytidine in vitro, and after being administered to a murine model of myocardial ischemia. In 2004, Messina et al isolated myocardial stem cells capable of proliferating in vitro from the hearts of adult humans and mice.<sup>85</sup> After dissociating the heart by enzyme treatment, they added EGF, bFGF, cardiotrophin-1, and thrombin under low serum conditions, and revealed a cell population that formed spheroids with proliferative and differentiation ability.

We recently reported that rodent cardiac SP cell fractions form clonal spheroids in serum-free medium in the presence of EGF and FGF-2.<sup>86</sup> These clones expressed nestin, Musashi-1, MDR-1, and the p75 NGF receptor, all of which are markers of undifferentiated neural precursor cells. Following their initial differentiation, differentiation into neurons, glia, smooth muscle cells, and cardiomyocytes occurred. Neural crest-derived cells have stem cell characteristics, in that they are able to proliferate and differentiate into various types of cells. Some neural crest-derived cells in adults express nestin, Musashi-1 and p75, and can proliferate and differentiate into multiple lineages in vitro. We therefore transplanted rodent cardiosphere-derived cells into chicken embryos and observed their migration to the truncus arteriosus and cardiac outflow tract, where they contributed to the development of dorsal root ganglia, spinal nerves and aortic smooth muscle cells. Lineage studies using double transgenic mice encoding P0-Cre/Floxed-EGFP revealed the presence of undifferentiated and differentiated neural crest-derived cells in the fetal myocardium. Undifferentiated EGFP<sup>+</sup> cells expressed GATA4 and nestin, but not actinin, in the fetal or neonatal stage, while the differentiated cells were identified as cardiomyocytes in adults. These results suggest that cardiac neural crest-derived cells migrate into the heart, remain

there as dormant multipotent stem cells, and differentiate into cardiomyocytes and typical neural crest-derived cells including neurons, glia, and smooth muscle under the appropriate conditions.

In 2005, Laugwitz et al reported that *Isl1* (a LIM homeodomain transcription factor), which is known as a secondary heart field marker, can also be used as a cardiomyocyte progenitor marker in the postnatal heart.<sup>87</sup> These cells are present throughout the entire heart, in the following ratio order: right atrium, left atrium, right ventricle, septum, and left ventricle. *Isl1* expression is downregulated as soon as the cells adopt a differentiated phenotype, suggesting that this transcription factor delineates a cardiogenic progenitor cell population. In the postnatal heart, *Isl1*-positive cells are capable of self-renewal and readily differentiate into mature cardiomyocytes after clonal selection. ES cells harboring a reporter gene knock-in in the endogenous *Isl1* locus enabled the isolation of *Isl1*<sup>+</sup> cardiac progenitors from mouse and human ES cell systems during in vitro cardiogenesis.<sup>88</sup> These cells can also contribute to cardiomyocyte, vascular smooth muscle and endothelial cell lineages when clonally isolated from differentiating ES cells.

### Tissue Engineering

Regardless of the type of stem cells used, high-quality transplantation methods must be developed. Tissue engineering is a process by which tissue equivalents are constructed by combining biomaterials with living cells.<sup>89-92</sup> Isolated regenerated cardiomyocytes injected into injured hearts have failed to improve cardiac function because they were unable to survive in the recipient heart. Therefore, for cardiac regenerative medicine to be successful, myocardial tissue engineering has emerged as one of the most promising therapeutic methods of stem cell transplantation for patients suffering from severe heart failure.

The challenge in tissue engineering has been the production of functional heart grafts with a 3-dimensional structure.<sup>90</sup> To maintain the 3-dimensional structure of tissues, many biomaterials composed of synthetic materials, natural materials and combinations of these are currently being tested.<sup>89</sup> In addition to biomaterials, several tissue engineering matrices have been tested. Although the creation of thick cardiac patches has been limited by an inability to supply the high oxygen and energy demands of cardiomyocytes, engineered contractile rings and sheets have been transplanted into small animals successfully and improved cardiac function.<sup>93,94</sup> The use of channeled cardiac extracellular matrix (ECM) constructs, oxygen carriers and stacked cardiac sheets to improve thickness has reinforced the direct relationship between perfusion and graft size or cell density.<sup>95</sup> We also developed a novel and simple method for making functional myocardial cell sheets that may be used as transplants.<sup>96</sup> Polymerized human fibrin-coated dishes are prepared with fibrinogen monomers mixed with thrombin. Cardiomyocytes cultured on these dishes form myocardial cell sheets, which are easily dissociated in an intact state from the polymerized fibrin layer, because the fibrin has been digested by an intrinsic protease. Two overlaid myocardial cell sheets exhibit synchronized spontaneous beating and captured artificial pacing. Transplanted 3-layered myocardial cell sheets exhibit strong spontaneous beating, well-differentiated striations, and an increase in cell size. This simple method of cell-sheet engineering may be applicable for various other cell types.

Vascular tissues and cardiac valves are well-known targets for decellularization and reseeded with endothelial cells, processes involved in creating artificial tissues<sup>97-100</sup> Recent research revealed the creation of a bioartificial heart!<sup>101</sup> Hearts were decellularized by coronary perfusion with detergents, ensuring that the underlying ECM was preserved, and the constructs were reseeded with cardiac or endothelial cells. Under physiological load and electrical stimulation, constructs could generate pump function in a modified working heart preparation.

## Conclusion

Although BM and cardiac stem cells may have a role in cardiac regeneration and have the potential to be used in regenerative medicine, so far they cannot supply adequate amounts of healthy cardiomyocytes for therapeutic purposes. The enormous clinical potential of cardiac regeneration has generated great expectations in both clinicians and patients. Regenerative medicine protocols are already well established and used clinically to treat problems with skin, cartilage, bone, adipose tissue, and corneas. In contrast, cardiac regeneration has to overcome some hurdles before it is clinically viable, including the development of methods to increase the selectivity of cardiomyocyte induction, ensuring enough cardiomyocytes can be produced, and constructing transplantable tissues that include the vascular system. The realization of cardiac regeneration depends on the outcome of basic research and its subsequent application to the clinic. Careful clinical trials using the various stem-cell sources may gradually, but significantly, advance this field, and should be carried out in tandem with further intensive investigations into the basic mechanisms underlying the differentiation process.

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## Role of the hinge region of glucocorticoid receptor for HEXIM1-mediated transcriptional repression

Noritada Yoshikawa<sup>a,b,1</sup>, Noriaki Shimizu<sup>a,1</sup>, Motoaki Sano<sup>c</sup>, Kei Ohnuma<sup>a,b</sup>, Satoshi Iwata<sup>a</sup>, Osamu Hosono<sup>a,b</sup>, Keiichi Fukuda<sup>c</sup>, Chikao Morimoto<sup>a,b</sup>, Hirotohi Tanaka<sup>a,b,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Division of Clinical Immunology, Advanced Clinical Research Center, Institute of Medical Science, University of Tokyo, 4-6-1, Shirokanedai Minato-ku, Tokyo 108-8639, Japan

<sup>b</sup> Department of Rheumatology and Allergy, Research Hospital, Institute of Medical Science, University of Tokyo, Japan

<sup>c</sup> Department of Regenerative Medicine, Keio University School of Medicine, Tokyo, Japan

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## ABSTRACT

We previously reported that HEXIM1 (hexamethylene bisacetamide-inducible protein 1), which suppresses transcription elongation via sequestration of positive transcription elongation factor b (P-TEFb) using 7SK RNA as a scaffold, directly associates with glucocorticoid receptor (GR) to suppress glucocorticoid-inducible gene activation. Here, we revealed that the hinge region of GR is essential for its interaction with HEXIM1, and that oxosteroid receptors including GR show sequence homology in their hinge region and interact with HEXIM1, whereas the other members of nuclear receptors do not. We also showed that HEXIM1 suppresses GR-mediated transcription in two ways: sequestration of P-TEFb by HEXIM1 and direct interaction between GR and HEXIM1. In contrast, peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor  $\gamma$ -dependent gene expression is negatively modulated by HEXIM1 solely via sequestration of P-TEFb. We, therefore, conclude that HEXIM1 may act as a gene-selective transcriptional regulator via direct interaction with certain transcriptional regulators including GR and contribute to fine-tuning of, for example, glucocorticoid-mediated biological responses.

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Glucocorticoid hormone is essential for maintenance of homeostasis and its actions are believed to exclusively be mediated via binding to its cognate receptor glucocorticoid receptor (GR) [1]. The GR is a ligand-dependent transcription factor belonging to the nuclear receptor superfamily. In particular, the GR, mineralocorticoid receptor (MR), androgen receptor (AR), and progesterone receptor (PR), sharing a common structure, compose subfamily NR3C, and are also called oxosteroid receptors because their cognate ligands have C3-ketone group in the steroid A-ring [2]. GR-mediated transcriptional regulation is originally proposed to be mediated via binding of GR to the glucocorticoid response elements (GRE) on the target gene promoters, however, currently considered to be controlled by communication with a variety of cellular factors [3,4]. The GR protein consists of six distinct domains. The N-terminal A/B domains include transactivational function domain 1 (AF-1). The central C-domain constitutes the DNA-binding domain (DBD). The C-terminal E/F-domains contains the ligand-binding domain (LBD) and transactivational function domain 2 (AF-2). The D-domain, which is called hinge region as well, is relatively less conserved across

nuclear receptors, and, concerning GR, was initially suggested to be a flexible linker between the DBD and the LBD, allowing proper DNA binding, dimerization, and nuclear translocation of the receptor [5]. Although several reports have raised the possibility that this hinge region mediates the interaction with a certain classes of nuclear proteins [6,7], its precise role in functional regulation of GR remains unknown.

Transcription is a complex process controlled at various steps, such as initiation, elongation, and termination [8]. Recently, it has become evident that the positive transcription elongation factor b (P-TEFb), which is composed of cyclin-dependent kinase 9 (CDK9) and cyclin T1 (CycT1), stimulates transcription elongation via phosphorylating the C-terminal domain of RNA polymerase II [9]. A nuclear protein HEXIM1 (hexamethylene bisacetamide-inducible protein 1) negatively regulates this transcription elongation via sequestration of P-TEFb using 7SK small nuclear RNA as a scaffold [10]. HEXIM1 consists of an N-terminal self-inhibitory domain, a C-terminal inhibitory domain, and a central basic region (BR) conveying nuclear localization signal (NLS) and 7SK-binding domain [10]. On the other hand, a growing body of evidence indicates that HEXIM1 has other functions for modulation of gene expression. For example, HEXIM1 has been shown to directly bind and modulate the activities of transcription factors including ER $\alpha$  [11], GR [12], and CCAAT/enhancer-binding protein  $\alpha$  (C/EBP $\alpha$ ) [13].

\* Corresponding author. Address: Division of Clinical Immunology, Advanced Clinical Research Center, Institute of Medical Science, University of Tokyo, 4-6-1, Shirokanedai Minato-ku, Tokyo 108-8639, Japan. Fax: +81 3 5449 5547.

E-mail address: [hirotnk@ims.u-tokyo.ac.jp](mailto:hirotnk@ims.u-tokyo.ac.jp) (H. Tanaka).

<sup>1</sup> These authors equally contributed to this work.

We previously showed that GR binds to the BR of HEXIM1 to form a separate complex distinct from the HEXIM1/7SK/P-TEFb complex [12]. Moreover, overexpression of HEXIM1 decreases ligand-dependent association between GR and a coactivator transcription intermediate factor-2 (TIF2), resulting in suppression of glucocorticoid-responsive gene activation [12]. Since GR inhibition by HEXIM1 was still preserved even after antisense-mediated knockdown of 7SK, we speculated that HEXIM1 could directly suppress GR-mediated transactivation independent of inhibition of transcription elongation [12]. In the present study, we studied molecular details of this GR-HEXIM1 interaction and revealed that the hinge region of GR is responsible for the interaction with HEXIM1. Moreover, we indicated that HEXIM1 BR differentially modulates two distinct gene regulatory pathways: P-TEFb-dependent transcription elongation and suppression of GR-mediated transactivation via direct binding to the hinge region of the receptor.

## Materials and methods

**Reagents, antibodies, and cells.** Dexamethasone (DEX) and troglitazone (TGZ) were purchased from Sigma. Other reagents were from Nacalai Tesque (Kyoto, Japan) unless otherwise specified. Anti-CDK9 antibody was obtained from Santa Cruz Biotechnology. COS-7 and HeLa cells were obtained from RIKEN Cell Bank (Tsukuba, Japan) and cultured in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (Invitrogen) supplemented with 10% fetal calf serum and antibiotics in a humidified atmosphere at 37 °C with 5% CO<sub>2</sub>.

**Recombinant DNA.** cDNAs of human MR, retinoic acid receptor  $\alpha$  (RAR $\alpha$ ), retinoid X receptor  $\alpha$  (RXR $\alpha$ ), AR, peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor  $\gamma$  (PPAR $\gamma$ ), vitamin D receptor (VDR), and farnesoid X-activated receptor (FXR) were kindly gifted from Drs. R.M. Evans (the Salk Institute, La Jolla, CA), H. Nawata (Kyushu University, Fukuoka, Japan), E.A. Jansson (Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden), K. Umesono (Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan), and D.J. Mangelsdorf (University of Texas, Dallas, TX), respectively. The expression plasmids for human wild-type and various truncated GR and other nuclear receptors were generated by cloning appropriate PCR fragments into pCMX-HA vector as described before [14]. The expression plasmids for the wild-type and BR mutated FLAG-HEXIM1 and glutathione-S-transferase (GST)-fused HEXIM1 were generous gifts from Dr. Q. Zhou (UC Berkeley, CA) and described previously [12]. To construct expression plasmids for deletion mutant of the hinge region of GR (488–520 and 491–515a.a.) and PPAR $\gamma$  (173–288a.a.) (pCMX-HA-GRdD1, pCMX-HA-GRdD2, and pCMX-HA-PPAR $\gamma$ dD, respectively), cDNAs encompassing the deleted regions with appropriate flanking sequences containing XhoI cloning site were amplified with PCR and subcloned into pCMX-HA-GR and pCMX-HA-PPAR $\gamma$ . To construct the chimeric protein expression plasmids pCMX-HA-GRdD1 + MRD, pCMX-HA-GRdD1 + PPAR $\gamma$ dD, and pCMX-HA-PPAR $\gamma$ dD + GRD, we opened pCMX-HA-GRdD1 and pCMX-HA-PPAR $\gamma$ dD at XhoI site, and the cDNA fragments encompassing the hinge region of MR (670–704a.a.), PPAR $\gamma$  (173–288a.a.), and GR (488–520a.a.) were subcloned, respectively. The GRE- and PPAR-response element (PPARRE)-driven reporter plasmids p2xGRE-LUC and p3xPPARRE-LUC, respectively, were described previously [12] and gifted from Dr. E.A. Jansson, respectively.

**In vitro protein-protein interaction studies.** To obtain the proteins of each nuclear receptor, *in vitro* transcription and translation was performed using various pCMX-HA plasmids as template with the TNT Coupled Reticulocyte Lysate System (Promega) in the presence of [<sup>35</sup>S] Met (1000 Ci/mmol, Amersham Biosciences). Ten microliters of each protein was added to FLAG-HEXIM1-immobilized FLAG-affinity resin or GST- or GST-HEXIM1-immobilized glutathione Sepharose beads and incubated in binding buffer (25 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.9, 1 mM DTT, 50 mM NaCl, 1 mM PMSF, and 0.1% (v/v) NP-40) at room temperature for 90 min. Then, the beads were washed, and bound proteins were eluted with 1 M NaCl, analyzed on SDS-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE), and followed by fluorography.

**Sequence alignment.** Pretty in SeqWeb package (Genetics Computer Group, Accelrys Inc.) was used with default parameters to align the hinge region sequences of GR to that of the other members of the nuclear receptors.

**FLAG-affinity purification.** Whole cell extracts were prepared from various FLAG-tagged HEXIM1 expressing HeLa cells, applied to Anti-FLAG M2-agarose beads (Sigma-Aldrich), and incubated for 2 h at room temperature. The beads were washed and bound proteins were eluted with SDS-sample loading buffer, and subjected to Western blot analysis using appropriate antibodies.

**Transfection and reporter gene assay.** Cells were cultured on 6-cm diameter culture dishes and cell culture medium was replaced with OPTI-MEM medium lacking phenol red (Invitrogen) before transfection. Total amount of the plasmids was kept constant by adding appropriate empty vectors and transfection was performed with TransIT-LT1 (Takara). After 6 h of incubation, media were replaced with fresh OPTI-MEM, and the cells were further cultured with ligands for 24 h at 37 °C. Whole cell extracts were prepared and luciferase enzyme activities were determined using Luciferase Assay System (Promega). Relative light units were normalized to the protein amounts determined with BCA Protein Assay Reagent (PIERCE).

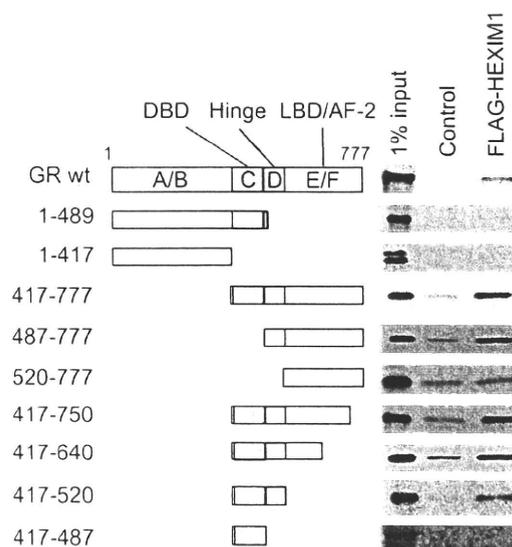
## Results

### The hinge region of GR was essential for the interaction between GR and HEXIM1

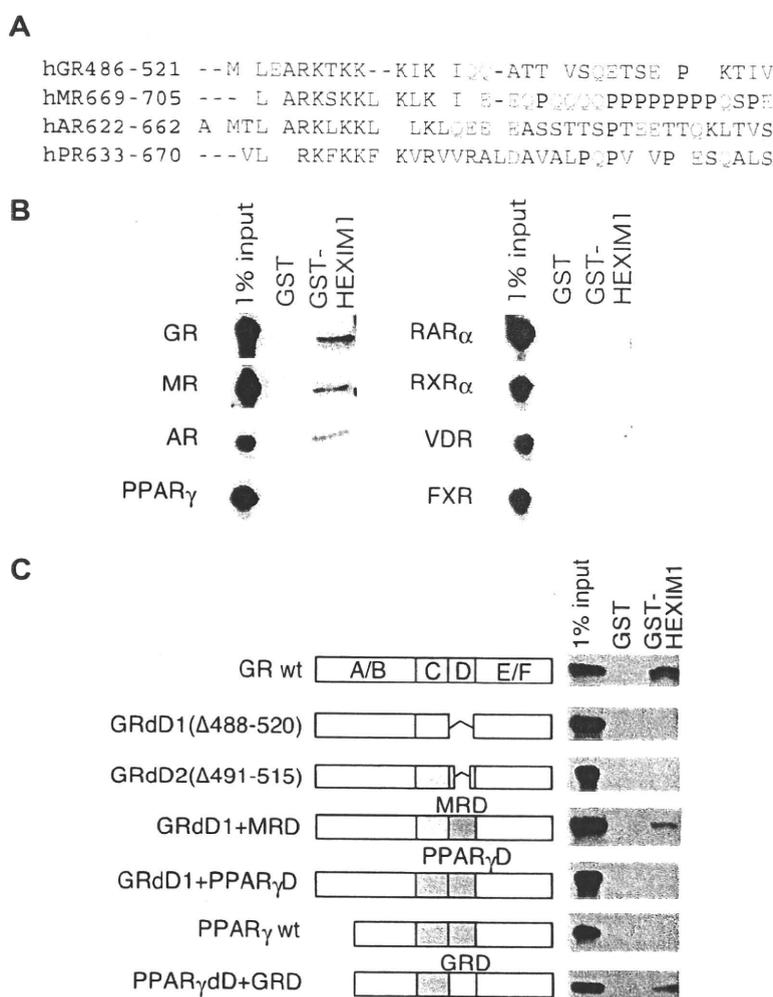
To address the protein-protein interaction of GR with HEXIM1, we investigated which region of GR is essential for the interaction with HEXIM1. We synthesized various [<sup>35</sup>S] Met-labeled GR mutants *in vitro* (Fig. 1), and applied them onto FLAG-affinity resin bound FLAG-tagged HEXIM1. Since, we preliminarily showed that neither AF-1 nor DBD is prerequisite for the interaction [12], we focused on the relatively C-terminal part of GR including the hinge region and the LBD/AF-2 (D, E, and F domain). As shown in Fig. 1, HEXIM1 bound to not only wild-type GR but also GR 417–777, 487–777, 417–750, 417–640, and 417–520. However, GR 1–489, 1–417, 520–777, and 417–487 did not bind to HEXIM1. These results indicated that the amino acids spanning 487–520, which overlaps with the hinge region, are important for binding to HEXIM1.

### Oxosteroid receptors showed amino acid sequence homology in their hinge regions and bound to HEXIM1 *in vitro*

Among nuclear receptors, amino acid sequence homology of the hinge region was hardly seen except for the oxosteroid receptor subfamily including GR, MR, AR, and PR (Fig. 2A). Given this, we tested whether the representative members of the nuclear receptor superfamily interact with HEXIM1. For that purpose, GST-fused HEXIM1-immobilized beads were incubated with *in vitro* translated nuclear receptors as indicated in Fig. 2B. As expected, HEXIM1 significantly bound to not only GR but also MR and AR, but to neither PPAR $\gamma$ , RAR $\alpha$ , RXR $\alpha$ , VDR, nor FXR (Fig. 2B). To further examine the role of the hinge region for the interaction between GR and HEXIM1, we applied domain deletion and swap analyses (Fig. 2C). Deletion of the hinge region (amino acids 488–520 and 491–515) from GR (GRdD1 and GRdD2, respectively) lost the ability of GR to bind to HEXIM1. GRdD1 + MRD, in which the GR hinge



**Fig. 1.** HEXIM1 interacts with the hinge region of GR. Primary structures of the wild-type and mutant GR are schematically illustrated on the left. Numbers depict the positions of amino acids and boxes show the domain structures. FLAG-fused HEXIM1-immobilized beads were incubated with *in vitro* translated [<sup>35</sup>S]Met-labeled GRs, bound proteins were analyzed on SDS-PAGE followed by fluorography, and representative results are shown.



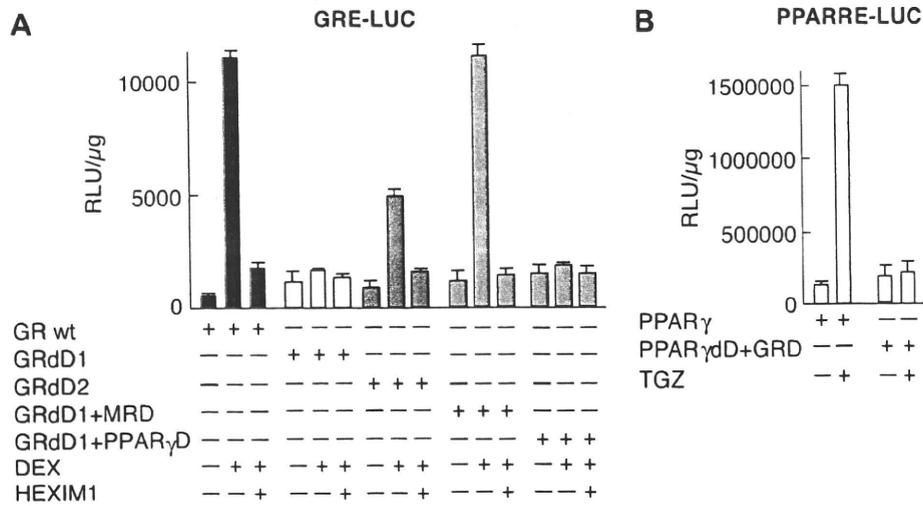
**Fig. 2.** The structure of the hinge region of the nuclear receptors determines their binding ability to HEXIM1. (A) Pretty in SeqWeb package (Accelrys Inc.) was used with default parameters to align the hinge sequence of GR to those of the all other members of the nuclear receptors. Homology was not significantly detected except for MR, AR, and PR and the multiple alignments of their hinge regions are shown. Dashes represent gaps in the alignment. (B,C) GST or GST-fused HEXIM1-immobilized beads were incubated with *in vitro* translated [<sup>35</sup>S]Met-labeled proteins as indicated, bound receptors were analyzed on SDS-PAGE followed by fluorography, and representative results are shown. Deletion and swap mutants of the hinge region of GR, MR, and PPAR<sub>γ</sub> are schematically shown on the left (C). D, D-domain (hinge region); MRD, PPAR<sub>γ</sub>D, and GRD depict the D-domain of MR, PPAR<sub>γ</sub>, and GR, respectively (C).

region was substituted with that of MR, bound to HEXIM1, whereas GRd1 + PPAR<sub>γ</sub>D, in which the GR hinge region was substituted with that of PPAR<sub>γ</sub>, did not. Although wild-type PPAR<sub>γ</sub> did not bind to HEXIM1, PPAR<sub>γ</sub>D + GRD, in which the PPAR<sub>γ</sub> hinge region was substituted with that of GR, acquired the ability to bind to HEXIM1 (Fig. 2C). Collectively, we concluded that HEXIM1 binds particular members of nuclear hormone receptors, especially oxosteroid receptors including GR, and that the hinge regions of those receptors may be critical for the interaction.

#### *The role of the hinge region of GR for its transactivation function and HEXIM1-mediated suppression*

Next, to analyze the role of the hinge region of GR transactivation function and HEXIM1-mediated transcriptional suppression, wild-type and various mutant GR expression plasmids (See Fig. 2) were transfected with HEXIM1 expression plasmids and GRE-luciferase reporter plasmids in COS7 cells (Fig. 3A). As previously reported, wild-type GR-activated reporter gene expression was suppressed by HEXIM1, and the hinge region-deleted mutant

GRd1 was transcriptionally silent, however, GRd2 was capable of inducing GRE-dependent transcription albeit weakly compared with wild-type GR (refs [12,15] and Fig. 3A). Of our surprise, DEX-induced transactivation of GRd2 was also repressed by HEXIM1 (Fig. 3A). Since not only GRd1 but also GRd2 lacks interaction ability with HEXIM1, these results suggest that HEXIM1-mediated GR suppression is regulated mainly by direct interaction between GR and HEXIM1, but that, in the absence of that interaction, effect of sequestration of P-TEFb by HEXIM1 becomes evident. On the other hands, GRd1 + MRD completely preserved HEXIM1-mediated repression as well as sufficient DEX-induced transactivation, as expected from the results in Fig. 2C. In contrast, GRd1 + PPAR<sub>γ</sub>D and PPAR<sub>γ</sub>D + GRD did not even activate GRE- or PPARRE-driven luciferase reporter gene in the presence of DEX or TGZ, respectively (Fig. 3A and B). Together, it is indicated that, although precise mechanisms remain unknown, the integrity of the receptor architecture involving the hinge region is important in transcriptional regulation by nuclear receptor, especially oxosteroid receptors including GR. In addition, the hinge region may be essential for GR-binding-mediated repression by HEXIM1.



**Fig. 3.** The requirement of the hinge region of the nuclear receptors for their transactivation function and HEXIM1-mediated repression. (A,B) COS7 cells were cotransfected with 2  $\mu$ g of reporter plasmids, pGRE-LUC (A) or pPPARRE-LUC (B), and 100 ng each of various receptor expression plasmids (also see Fig. 2C) with or without 500 ng of HEXIM1 expression plasmids as indicated, and further cultured with or without 100 nM DEX (A) or TGZ (B) for 24 h. The cell lysates were prepared for measurement of luciferase activities. All reporter gene experiments were performed in triplicate, results are expressed as relative light units (RLU) per microgram of protein in the extract, and means  $\pm$  SD are shown.

**HEXIM1 mutants lacking P-TEFb-binding ability suppressed GR-mediated but not PPAR $\gamma$ -mediated transactivation**

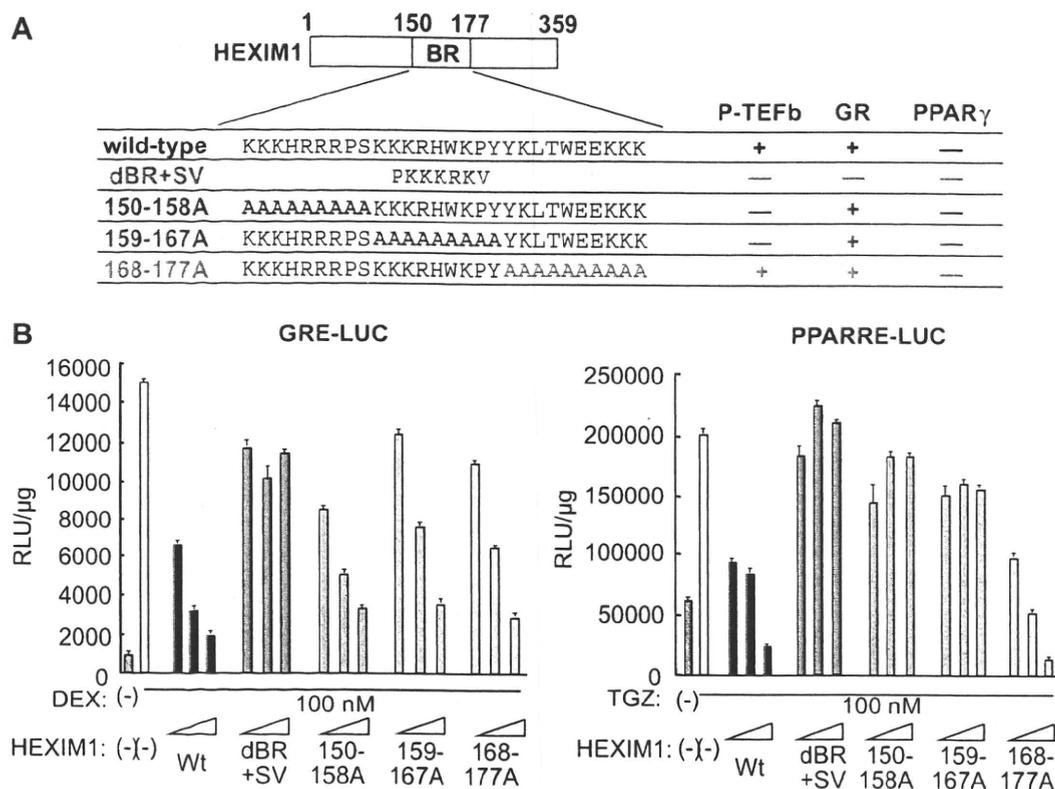
To further analyze the molecular interplay between GR and HEXIM1, we used several HEXIM1 mutants that contain amino acid substitution in distinct portion of BR and differentially affect P-TEFb and GR activity as summarized in Fig. 4A. Those BR mutated HEXIM1 were classified according to the binding ability to P-TEFb, GR, and PPAR $\gamma$ , and tested in GRE- or PPARRE-driven reporter gene assays (Fig. 4B). HEXIM1 dBR + SV, which bound to neither P-TEFb, GR, nor PPAR $\gamma$ , did not affect reporter gene activity of PPARRE-LUC or GRE-LUC (Fig. 4B). Either HEXIM1 mutant, which could bind to GR (GR: + in Fig. 4A), suppressed ligand-dependent activation of GRE-driven reporter gene expression as well as wild-type HEXIM1, irrespective of P-TEFb-binding activity (Fig. 4B, left panel). In clear contrast, PPAR $\gamma$ -mediated activation of the reporter gene was repressed solely by wild-type HEXIM1 and 168–177A (P-TEFb: + in Fig. 4A) (Fig. 4B, right panel). In these experimental settings, HEXIM1 and its mutants did not affect protein expression of GR or PPAR $\gamma$  (data not shown). It, therefore, is indicated that direct interaction between GR and HEXIM1 plays a major role in HEXIM1-mediated suppression of GR, but that a certain category of the nuclear receptors such as PPAR $\gamma$  is negatively modulated by HEXIM1 solely via sequestration of P-TEFb.

**Discussion**

We previously revealed that HEXIM1 acts as a negative regulator of GR-mediated transcription, and that HEXIM1-binding to GR does not affect either ligand binding, nuclear translocation, or *in vitro* DNA-binding ability of GR [12]. Here we found that direct association of GR with HEXIM1 requires the hinge region of the receptor and HEXIM1 prefers oxosteroid receptors as an interacting partner among nuclear receptors. Indeed, amino acid sequence of the hinge region is least conserved across nuclear receptors, but the hinge region of GR is homologous only with those of the oxosteroid receptors (Fig. 2A). Although biological function of the very region remains largely unknown, several groups reported the biochemical interaction of the hinge region of GR with coregulatory proteins. For example, a eukaryotic

cochaperone Bag1-M interacts with the hinge region of GR and negatively regulates GR action by inhibition of the ligand and DNA-binding activity of GR [6]. A nuclear receptor COUP-TFII also represses GR-induced transactivation by attracting a corepressor SMRT [7]. Moreover, it is demonstrated that the hinge region contains nuclear retention signal (NRS), overlapping with the NLS in GR [16]. In fact, the substitution of NRS dramatically weakens transactivational ability of GR [16]. We, therefore, cannot completely rule out such possibility that HEXIM1, via interacting with those coregulators or NRS, indirectly represses GR-mediated transcription. However, we previously showed that a certain fraction of HEXIM1 docks in the nucleus with GR [12], and the present study showed that the hinge region of GR is prerequisite for HEXIM1 binding at least *in vitro*. Moreover, our recent chromatin immunoprecipitation assays showed that HEXIM1 suppresses GR recruitment onto the target gene promoter (manuscript in preparation). We, therefore, favor such a model that at least part of HEXIM1 directly binds and sequesters GR to repress transcription initiation triggered by GR. Since it is generally considered that GR coactivators including TIF2 are recruited after GR binding to the promoter [4], this model may fit with our previous observation that overexpression of HEXIM1 decreases ligand-mediated GR-TIF2 association *in situ* [12]. In any case, it should be emphasized that the hinge region and its surrounding architecture may have multiple regulatory roles in GR-mediated signal transduction. The functional differences among GR, GRdD1, and GRdD2 strongly support this idea. Therefore, clarification of the molecular mechanism underlying this multimodal regulation of receptor function would be of importance to understand the integral role of the hinge region of GR.

Originally, it is estimated that majority of nuclear HEXIM1 forms complex with 7SK or Brd4, regulating expression of a large set of class II genes via intervening P-TEFb-mediated elongation reaction [10]. However, our present study rather highlights the distinct role of HEXIM1 independent from inhibition of elongation, gene-selective modulation of transcription. Recently, Montano et al. created mice carrying an insertional mutation in the HEXIM1 gene that disrupted its C-terminal region and found that the HEXIM1 C-terminal region is critical for cardiovascular development [13]. They indicated that HEXIM1 attenuates a repressive effect



**Fig. 4.** HEXIM1 represses transactivation function of GR and PPAR $\gamma$  via functionally discrete mechanisms. (A) Primary structure of HEXIM1 (numbers depict amino acid positions), amino acid sequences of HEXIM1 mutants, and their interaction properties with P-TEFb, GR, and PPAR $\gamma$  are summarized. For testing P-TEFb binding, whole cell extracts of FLAG-tagged HEXIM1 or its mutants expressing HeLa cells were prepared and immunoprecipitated with anti-FLAG affinity resin, and CDK9 subunit of P-TEFb was detected using immunoblot. For testing GR and PPAR $\gamma$  binding to HEXIM1 and its BR mutants, various GST-fused HEXIM1-immobilized beads were incubated with *in vitro* translated [ $^{35}$ S]Met-labeled proteins, and bound receptors were analyzed on SDS-PAGE followed by fluorography. (B) COS7 cells were cotransfected with 2  $\mu$ g each of pGRE-LUC (left) or pPPARRE-LUC (right) and 100 ng of expression plasmids for wild-type GR (left) or PPAR $\gamma$  (right), respectively, with or without increasing amounts (100, 500, and 1000 ng) of expression plasmids for HEXIM1 or its mutants as indicated. The cells were further cultured with or without 100 nM DEX (left) or TGZ (right) for 24 h and the cell lysates were prepared for measurement of luciferase activities. Experiments were performed in triplicate, results are expressed as relative light units (RLU) per microgram of protein in the extract, and means  $\pm$  SD are shown.

of C/EBP $\alpha$  on vascular endothelial growth factor gene transcription. Note that C-terminal deletion of HEXIM1 does not affect P-TEFb inhibition [13]. Together with our study, it is strongly suggested that HEXIM1 may elicit modulation of gene expression not only via P-TEFb suppression but also via gene context-dependent mechanisms.

At this moment, many questions remain to be answered. It was reported that HEXIM1 represses transactivation function of ER $\alpha$  [11] which belongs to NR3A subfamily of the nuclear receptor superfamily [2]. They showed that HEXIM1 binds with ER $\alpha$  not via the hinge region but via the LBD [11]. Although the requirement of distinct domains for interaction with HEXIM1 between GR and ER $\alpha$  is interesting, we do not know how HEXIM1 can distinguish these two receptors classified in distinct subcategories of the nuclear receptor. This is also the case among oxosteroid receptors, since several members of this receptor group often are simultaneously expressed with fulfilling their own roles in the same tissue [17,18]. Similarly, it is also of particular importance to clarify how HEXIM1, using the central BR, differentially controls P-TEFb inhibition and GR suppression. Further studies, therefore, are clearly needed to address these issues. However, control of GR function *in situ* still remains to be a critical issue in medical fields [19]. Since HEXIM1 has a unique mode of modulation of GR function, HEXIM1 might be a pharmacological target for drug development to modulate GR function.

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# ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## G-CSF Augments Small Vessel and Cell Density in Canine Myocardial Infarction

Takashi Yagi,<sup>1</sup> Keiichi Fukuda,<sup>2</sup> Jun Fujita,<sup>2</sup> Jin Endo,<sup>1</sup> Yasuyo Hisaka,<sup>2</sup>  
Yoshiyuki Suzuki,<sup>3</sup> Masahiko Tamura<sup>4</sup> and Satoshi Ogawa<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Cardiopulmonary Division, Department of Internal Medicine, Keio University School of Medicine, Tokyo, Japan*

<sup>2</sup> *Institute for Advanced Cardiac Therapeutics, Keio University School of Medicine, Tokyo, Japan*

<sup>3</sup> *Fuji Gotemba Research Labs, Chugai Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd., Shizuoka, Japan*

<sup>4</sup> *Chugai Research Institute for Medical Science, Inc., Shizuoka, Japan*

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**Abstract:** We recently reported that granulocyte-colony stimulating factor (G-CSF) prevented cardiac remodeling by mobilization and differentiation of bone marrow-derived cells in murine experimental myocardial infarction (MI). Little is known, however, whether these findings can be reproduced in large animals. The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of G-CSF after MI in canine model. MI was generated in twenty-six beagle dogs by ligation of left anterior descending artery. They were divided into two groups: G-CSF group which received subcutaneous injection of G-CSF (10  $\mu$ g/kg/day) for 10 days, and the control group with saline injection. After six weeks, they were subjected to echocardiography and catheterization to measure hemodynamic parameters, and histological analysis was performed. No dogs died during the period. No hemodynamic changes were observed between these two groups probably due to the smaller size of the MI than we expected. We found significant increase in wall thickness and higher cell density in G-CSF group. Immunohistochemical staining against  $\alpha$ -smooth muscle actin and CD31 revealed increased vessel density mainly in the epicardium in G-CSF group. The number of survived cardiomyocytes in G-CSF group was slightly greater than that in the control group, although it was not statistically significant. These findings suggested G-CSF prevented cardiac remodeling in canine model not by increasing the cardiomyocytes but by increasing the vessel density and cell numbers in the infarcted area. (*Keio J Med* 57 (3) : 139–149, september 2008)

**Key words:** G-CSF, myocardial infarction, bone marrow derived cell, cardiac remodeling

### Introduction

Recent studies have reported that granulocyte-colony stimulating factor (G-CSF) administration can improve cardiac function and survival after myocardial infarction (MI).<sup>1–3</sup> G-CSF can mobilize bone marrow (BM) stem cells into the systemic circulation, however it remained unknown whether mobilized-BM cells contribute to the healing process or prevention of cardiac remodeling after MI. Experimental and clinical studies have recently suggested that BM cells contribute to the repair of an in-

farcted heart, although the precise mechanism underlying this clinically promising effect remains to be determined.<sup>4–6</sup> A number of studies have suggested that BM cells can contribute to regeneration processes in various tissues.<sup>7,8</sup> Cardiomyocytes derived from BM cells have been observed both in mice and human,<sup>1,9</sup> and BM-derived cells mobilized by cytokines were capable of regenerating the myocardial tissue, leading to an improvement in survival and cardiac function after MI.<sup>1</sup> BM contains both hematopoietic and non-hematopoietic cells, and the origin of the BM cells with the ability to

repair damaged myocardial tissue remained unknown. The identification of specific cell types involved in myocardial repair is a crucial step towards the development of effective stem cell-based therapies for MI. The most likely candidates for the BM-derived stem cells with the ability to regenerate myocardial tissue are hematopoietic stem cells<sup>1,10,11</sup> and mesenchymal stem cells.<sup>12-14</sup> Alvarez-Dolado *et al.* demonstrated that BM-derived cardiomyocytes sporadically detected in non-infarcted mice were exclusively generated by fusion with donor CD45<sup>+</sup> cells, possibly hematopoietic cells,<sup>15</sup> suggesting that the so-called phenomenon of hematopoietic stem cells 'plasticity' might result from the fusion of hematopoietic stem cells with cells residing in the target tissue. In addition, two recent studies also confirmed that hematopoietic stem cells can not transdifferentiate into cardiomyocytes *in vivo*.<sup>16,17</sup> Another candidates for the regeneration of cardiomyocytes are mesenchymal stem cells; we previously reported that BM mesenchymal stem cells could differentiate into spontaneously beating cardiomyocytes *in vitro*,<sup>12,13</sup> and other groups have repaired the myocardium using mesenchymal stem cells transplantation *in vivo*.<sup>18,19</sup> We recently examined two independent clonal studies to determine the origin of BM-derived cardiomyocytes, and concluded that mesenchymal stem cells had been mobilized and differentiated into cardiomyocytes, but hematopoietic stem cells could not. However, since the number of regenerated cardiomyocytes was only restricted, it is difficult to explain the effect of G-CSF by the cardiomyocyte regeneration.<sup>20</sup>

To further understand the mechanism of beneficial effect of G-CSF, this study is designed to investigate the changes in cellular density and cellular component (endothelial cells, smooth muscle cells, and cardiomyocytes) in the infarcted area of dogs treated with G-CSF administration. We demonstrate that G-CSF treatment increased the number of endothelial cells and myofibroblasts in the infarcted area, which might reinforce the infarcted ventricular wall, and be essential for the improved cardiac function and survival.

## Materials and Methods

### *Animal experiment protocol*

All experimental procedures and protocols were reviewed and approved by the Animal Care and Use Committees of the Keio University and conformed to the NIH Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. Twenty-three beagle dogs (10 male and 13 female) were anesthetized with pentobarbital (30-35 mg/kg) intravenously, intubated, and the respiration was controlled by a Harvard respirator with a tidal volume of 20 ml/kg/stroke, the respiratory rate of 10-15 /min, and the room air mixed with 0.5-1 l/min oxygen. The left thoracotomy

was performed at the 4<sup>th</sup> intercostal space, and the pericardial cradle was prepared. MI was created by ligation of the left anterior descending coronary artery after the first diagonal branch. After ligation, the chest was closed, and the dogs were carefully observed in the recovery room. One day after MI, the dogs were randomly divided into two groups: a control group (n=10) and a G-CSF treated group (n=13). Dogs of G-CSF group were injected subcutaneously with recombinant human G-CSF (10 µg/kg/day), and control group received saline injection subcutaneously for 10 days after MI. The peripheral blood cell counts were examined on the 10<sup>th</sup> day. Hemodynamic measurement and histological analysis were performed at 6 weeks after MI.

### *Echocardiographic and hemodynamic analyses*

The dogs were similarly anesthetized, mechanically ventilated, and left thoracotomy was performed at the 5<sup>th</sup> intercostals space. Under direct observation, echocardiography was performed using a Power Vision SSA-380A (Toshiba Medical) equipped with a 2.5 MHz transducer (PSK-25AT, Toshiba Medical). Left ventricular end-diastolic diameter (LVEDD), left ventricular end-systolic diameter (LVESD) and heart rate (HR) were measured by M-mode echocardiography. Fractional shortening (FS) and ejection fraction (EF) were calculated from the following formula:  $FS = (LVEDD - LVESD) / LVEDD$  and  $EF = (LVEDD^3 - LVESD^3) / LVEDD^3$ . The measurement was performed three times and the mean value was used.

Thereafter, 7 Fr. double micro-tip catheter transducer (model SPC-771, Millar) was inserted from the left femoral artery to the left ventricle (LV), and LV systolic pressure (LVSP), LV end diastolic pressure (LVEDP), LVdp/dt, and -LVdp/dt were measured. Systolic arterial blood pressure (SBP), diastolic arterial blood pressure (DBP) and heart rate (HR) were also measured. Swan-Ganz thermo-dilution catheter was inserted from right femoral vein to pulmonary artery, and pulmonary artery pressure (PAP) and cardiac output (CO) were measured by thermo-dilution method. All the hemodynamic data was measured at three times and the mean value was used.

### *Histological analysis*

After hemodynamic measurements, dogs were sacrificed by rapid intravenous injection of KCl. The hearts were quickly removed. Right ventricle was eliminated, and left ventricle was cut into five transverse slices. LV diameter, infarcted wall thickness were measured at the level of papillary muscles. The percentage of infarcted area was calculated by following formula:  $\text{infarcted area (\%)} = (\sum[(\text{outer arc length of infarcted myocardium} + \text{in-})$

ner arc length of infarcted myocardium)/(outer circle length of whole LV slice + inner circle length of whole LC slice) $\times$ (observed LV slice weight)]/(whole LV weight). The infarcted myocardium were sampled from the slice of papillary muscle level and fixed with periodate-lysine-paraformaldehyde (PLP) fixative. The samples were embedded in OCT compound or paraffin. Frozen sections (5  $\mu$ m thickness) were cut by cryostat, and used for immunostaining. The sections were incubated with primary mouse monoclonal antibodies against  $\alpha$ -actinin (SIGMA, 1:800),  $\alpha$ -smooth muscle actin ( $\alpha$ SM A (SIGMA, 1:5000), and CD31 (DAKO, 1:20) for overnight at 4°C. After rinsing with PBS, secondary antibodies labeled with Alexa488 were incubated for 30 min at room temperature. The samples were observed with confocal laser scanning microscopy (LSM510 ver3.0, Karl Zeiss, Germany). Azan staining was performed on paraffin-embedded sections.

#### Quantitative analysis of the histological samples

Cellular number of the infarcted area was measured by Azan staining or TOTO-3 staining. Red-stained area in the Azan staining was processed by Photoshop Ver7.0, and quantitated by NIH image Ver5.8. The nuclei in the samples were visualized by TOTO-3 staining, and their number was counted by NIH image Ver5.8.

#### Statistical Analysis

Values are shown as mean $\pm$ SEM. The significance of differences was evaluated by Welch's t test. The probability level accepted for significance was  $p < 0.05$ .

### Results

No dogs died and were dropped out during experimental period in both G-CSF and control groups. There found no apparent adverse effect of G-CSF administration. Both groups of animals' behavior was normal during experiment.

#### Peripheral white blood cell counts

To check the bioactivity of human G-CSF in dogs, we measured peripheral blood cell counts (Fig. 1). At 10 days after MI, the WBC counts were significantly elevated to  $5.7 \times 10^4/\mu\text{l}$  in the G-CSF group, whereas  $1.3 \times 10^4/\mu\text{l}$  in the control group. There were no differences between the two groups in the RBC counts, but platelets were significantly decreased to  $2.1 \times 10^5/\mu\text{l}$  in G-CSF group than in control group ( $3.3 \times 10^5/\mu\text{l}$ ), probably due to well-known side effect of G-CSF.

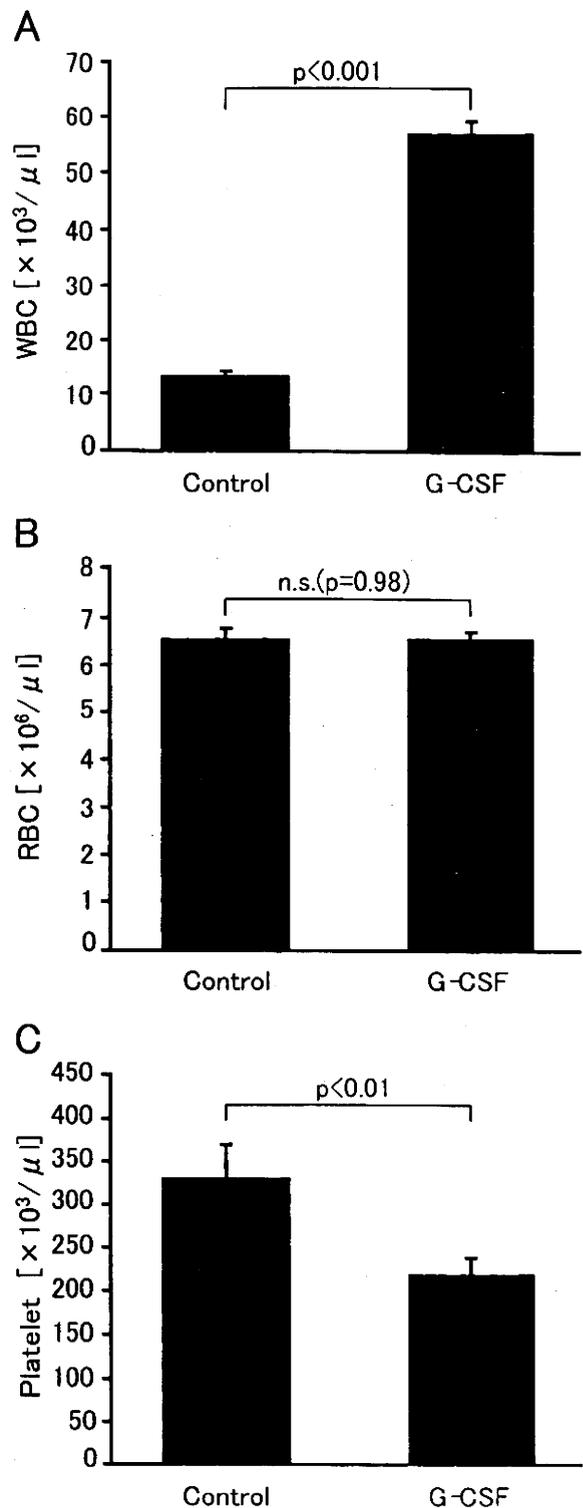


Fig. 1 Effect of G-CSF administration on blood cell counts at 10 days.

White blood cell counts (WBC) increased by 4.4-fold of the control, while platelet counts decreased by 0.6-fold. The red cell counts was unchanged.