

glycoproteomics, is far from sufficient to identify glycosylation biomarkers for early cancer diagnosis. Here we discuss about issues and resolutions in the use of lectins by introducing methods for sample preparation prior to lectin chromatography. In addition to lectin-based approaches which have been most frequently utilized in glycomics, other sophisticated glyco-capturing technologies are reviewed. Because the concept required for biomarker discovery phase or preclinical validation phase is fundamentally different, the adequate methodologies for each are separately described.

2 Glycoproteomics for biomarker screening

2.1 Lectins or chemicals

Nowadays, state-of-the-art glycoproteomic technologies have been developed to enrich glycoproteins or glycopeptides from crude serum samples. These technologies are separated into lectin-based methods and chemical-based methods in principle. Which is better for the purpose of carbohydrate-targeting tumor marker discovery? If we intend to identify glycan structure changes as tumor markers, rather than concentration of core proteins, lectin is the only enrichment tool recognizing specific oligosaccharide linkages, excepting sialic acid specific chemistry Reverse Glycoblotting [35, 36]. The chemical enrichment of glycopeptides, such as using hydrazide chemistry [37-42], boronic acid [43-45], or hydrophilic interactions [46-48], certainly exhibits rigid interaction with glycan moieties, whereas most of lectin-glycan interactions are fragile [49]. However all of the chemical approaches above are based on covalent or affinity bond with rich hydroxyl groups on oligosaccharides, resulting in comprehensive and structure-unspecific capture of glycopeptides. Therefore the chemical route is inadvisable for glycan structure-targeting biomarker

discovery. From the view of such features, we would like to focus on lectin-based glycopeptide enrichment methods in the following sections.

2.2 Using lectin column chromatography for glycoproteomics

Assuming that the eluate of lectin column chromatography would be analyzed in LC/MS/MS, it must be a critical issue whether we load proteins or digested peptides to lectin columns. When undigested serum proteins are purified with lectin column chromatography and eluted by hapten sugars, targeted glycoproteins would be eluted with a lot of nonspecific proteins and high concentration of hapten sugars, which could not be appropriate for mass spectrometric analysis (**Fig. 1 A**). The large amount of non-glycosylated protein elution is mainly caused by the limitation of solvent used in lectin column chromatography, with which the use of detergents, high salts, and organic solvents are not compatible. Furthermore, since most of serum proteins form complexes, co-elution of intact binding proteins is inevitable. More importantly, if enriched glycoproteins would have multiple glycosylation sites, it is hardly distinguishable which glycosylation sites might be associated with state of cancer.

On the other hand, when digested peptides are loaded to lectin columns, the purification efficiency of glycopeptides is relatively high due to the elimination of protein-protein interaction effect in the samples (**Fig. 1 B**). However elution of glycopeptides using hapten sugars still results in significant contamination of 200–1000 mM sugars in the eluate, which is not adequate for direct injection to LC/MS/MS. In addition to this fact, mass spectrometric analysis of eluted glycopeptides is also inefficient for comprehensive studies because automated

protein identification by database search is impossible for glycopeptides, for which additional deglycosylation steps would be finally required.

These characteristics of lectins on glycoproteomics have led to recent development of glycopeptidase elution technologies [46, 50]. After binding glycopeptides on lectin columns, PNGase-F elution in volatile salt buffers allows highly specific elution of only originally-glycosylated peptides. After lyophilizing eluate, the final product consists of completely deglycosylated peptides with no contaminant salts, which could be directly injected into LC/MS instruments and subjected to usual database search analysis on Mascot or Sequest software. Using this type of enzymatic elution procedure on click maltose HILIC beads, Zhu *et al.* successfully identified 92, 178, and 221 unique N-glycosylation sites from 10 nL, 100 nL, and 1 μ L of human serum, respectively [46]. They effectively excluded desalting, buffer exchanging, and lyophilization steps to finish all pre-analytical procedures by spin columns within 1.5 hours.

Regarding peptide sequencing of enzymatically deglycosylated peptides on database search analysis, N-glycosylation sites are recognized as aspartic acid residues converted from asparagine residues by PNGase-F (**Fig. 1 C**). However chemically identical conversion may artificially occur on asparagine residues known as deamidation of asparagine. To eliminate the false positive identification of N-glycosylation sites by deamidation, we can utilize the PNGase-F reaction in heavy water (H_2^{18}O) [50-57]. The incorporation of ^{18}O into glycosylated asparagine residues by PNGase-F induces generation of 3 Da-increased asparagine residues, providing N-glycosylation site-specific stable isotope tags on peptides (**Fig. 1C**). Our team recently integrated on-column PNGase-F elution with the ^{18}O stable isotope labeling method and reported as an effective glycoproteomic biomarker screening technology,

named isotopic glycosidase elution and labeling on lectin-column chromatography (IGEL) [50].

Hence issues on biochemical properties of lectins for glycoproteomics can be overcome by employing both protease digestion before lectin column purification and on-column glycopeptidase elution of peptides.

2.3 Pre-enrichment of glycopeptides prior to lectin purification

Lectin columns are convenient and widely-used enrichment tools for glycoproteins or glycopeptides. As contrasted with the benefits, enrichment ratio itself is not necessarily high enough. When we purified tryptic digest of crude serum by various types of 9 different lectin columns according to IGEL method described above, the enrichment efficiency (number of glycopeptide identification / total peptide identification \times 100) was only 20 - 45%. Such insufficient enrichment efficiency was mainly caused by weak lectin-oligosaccharide affinities and the fact that abundance of non-glycosylated peptides in tryptic digest of crude serum samples was absolutely higher than that of glycosylated peptides. This aspect emphasizes the importance of adequate pre-enrichment techniques for pan-glycosylated peptides, such as cellulose column [58-60], graphite carbon column [61-65], and other hydrophilic affinity resins. Sergei *et al.* constructed C₁₈-cellulose mix mode column chromatography and achieved high-yield extraction of N- and O-glycosylated peptides from mixture of 10 standard proteins [59]. Lam *et al.* applied an online combination of reversed-phase/reversed-phase (RP-RP) and porous graphite carbon (PGC) liquid chromatography to the comprehensive analysis of ConA lectin-purified human serum samples and identified 134 N-glycosylated serum proteins, 151 possible N-glycosylation sites, and more than 40 possible N-glycan structures [65].

The CL-4B Sepharose-based hydrophilic extraction of glycopeptides is also one of the most popular techniques in glycoproteomics. Selman et al. loaded 5 μ l of CL-4B Sepharose beads into 96-well format plate and enriched human IgG-derived glycopeptides for matrix-assisted laser desorption ionization Fourier transform ion cyclotron resonance mass spectrometry (MALDI-FTICR-MS) [66]. This type of multiplexed purification system is especially suitable for large scale biomarker screening assays. Actually we also applied CL-4B Sepharose beads pre-enrichment procedure before lectin column purification and obtained finally around 90% glycopeptide enrichment ratio [50]. Thus pre-enrichment of total glycopeptides from complex peptide mixtures can drastically improve the glycopeptide focusing efficiency by subsequent lectin column chromatography.

2.4 Selection of lectins for glycoproteomics

So far hundreds of lectins have been isolated from plants, microbes, or animals and most of them are commercially available. The selection of lectins is a critical step for precise and comprehensive profiling of cancerous glycan disorders. In the glycoproteomic studies, both high specificity for glycan structures and high affinity to capture glycopeptides are needed. The glycopeptide enrichment ratio acquired from IGEL purification experiments using human serum and 9 distinct lectins (LCA, SNA-I, SNA-II, UEA-I, WGA, LPA, ConA, and SSA) was shown in **Table 1**. Concerning specificity of lectins, LCA, SNA-I, ConA and SSA demonstrated over 80% glycopeptide enrichment rate, suggesting that ligand specificity of these 4 lectins would be sufficient. Meanwhile when looking into numbers of glycopeptide identification which indirectly reflected the lectin-glycan affinity of each lectin, LCA and SNA-I lectins showed much less glycopeptide recovery rate compared to ConA

or SSA. Additionally the remaining 5 lectins (Lotus, SNA-II, UEA-I, WGA, and LPA) were scarcely able to capture peptides. At least in our binding condition [100 mM ammonium bicarbonate, 5% acetonitrile, 1 mM calcium chloride, 1 mM manganese chloride], ConA and SSA lectin columns could be considered as appropriate materials to be used for specific and comprehensive profiling of human serum glycoproteome. Individual optimization would be required when analyzing other biological samples or using different condition of binding buffers. In order to cover a larger number of glycan structure changes, it is fundamental to increase options of lectins along with optimum purification protocols.

In recent studies, multi-lectin affinity chromatography (M-LAC) approaches were developed to enhance glycopeptide recovery rate and expand the comprehensiveness of targeted glycan structures. Zeng *et al.* combined high abundance protein depletion, ConA-Jacalin-WGA M-LAC, IEF separation, and LC-MS analysis and identified breast cancer associated proteins such as thrombospondin-1 and 5, alpha-1B-glycoprotein, serum amyloid P-component, and tenascin-X, which had potentially abnormal glycans [67]. The same group rigorously evaluated the identical lectin mixture in several glycoproteome profiling studies [68-72]. Qiu *et al.* integrated serial lectin purification by ConA and SNA with d0- or d3-*N*-acetoxysuccinamide stable isotope labeling on α -amino groups. By use of this methodology, they enabled effective enrichment of sialylated glycopeptides and also differential analysis of those [73].

2.5 Quantitative assessment of glycan structure changes

To identify cancer-associated alterations of glycosylation on multiple proteins, establishment of rigorous quantification strategies should be essential, which could

stoichiometrically evaluate the changing rate of each glycoform. Comparative quantification results of only enriched glycopeptides are affected by not only glycan structure changes but also concentration of original core proteins itself, indicating that it is hard to determine whether the identified candidates might be glycosylation-targeting biomarkers or protein concentration biomarkers. Therefore subtraction of protein concentration effects from quantification results of lectin-enriched glycopeptides is necessary (**Fig. 2**). Recently we demonstrated a practical example of this concept for the identification of carbohydrate-targeting lung cancer biomarker discovery [50]. Here we acquired relative quantification profiles from both lectin-purified glycopeptides and pre-enriched non-glycosylated peptides by LC/MS/MS analysis individually. Finally the site-specific glycoform changes were determined by subtracting core protein concentrations calculated by non-glycosylated peptides from quantification results of each glycopeptide. This approach can illuminate the glycan structure changes on diverse glycosylation sites individually.

2.6 Quantitative glycoproteomic approaches for O-glycans

Although tools for comprehensive analysis of O-glycosylation are still limited compared with the N-glycomics, recent development of sophisticated chemistries have potential to be breakthrough technologies for O-glycan biomarker discovery. Hang *et al.* developed a metabolic labeling approach which utilized incorporation of tetra-acylated-N-azidoacetylgalactosamine (GalNAz) into the reducing terminus of O-glycosylation sites [74, 75]. Following cell culture in the presence of GalNAz for several days, O-glycosylated proteins can be specifically collected by alkyne-activated resins (click chemistry) (**Fig. 3**). Using this technology, Slade *et al.* identified 267 potentially O-glycosylated proteins from the secretome of CHO cells

[76]. Furthermore the Bertozzi's group succeeded to apply GalNAz chemistry to rapid profiling of O-linked glycoproteins in living mice [77] and also *in vivo* imaging of membrane-associated glycans in zebrafish [78]. The other group expanded this technology by using GalNAz, ManNAz, and GlcNAz to discover cell surface differentiation markers on human mesenchymal stem cells (hMSCs) [79]. Integration of such metabolic labeling methods for O-glycans with mass spectrometric structural analysis may facilitate comprehensive screening of fine O-glycan structure alterations in the future.

3 Glycoproteomics for High-throughput Biomarker Validation

For clinical application of biomarkers, pre-clinical validation experiments are usually required using independent larger sample set and high throughput quantification methods. In general, most of protein biomarkers are quantitatively measured by immunoassays in the validation phase, which include sandwich ELISA, AlphaLISA [80-84], and Luminex technology [85-89]. However it is often extremely difficult to make specific antibodies against both detailed glycan structures and glycosylation sites mainly because of the low immunogenicity of oligosaccharides and structural hindrance of amino acid epitopes by glycans. Thus alternative glycoproteomic technologies must be established for the replication assays using hundreds of clinical samples, which could detect site-specific glycan structure changes quantitatively with high throughput manner from complex protein mixtures, such as crude serum/plasma. Here we introduce a couple of technologies used in the glycosylation biomarker validation area.

3.1 Lectin-antibody sandwich ELISA

A sandwich-type enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) using lectin and analyte specific antibody was originally developed by Drouin *et al.* in 1988 [90]. They intended to establish high throughput diagnostic assay for Bernard Soulier syndrome (BSS) which was a rare autosomal recessive coagulopathy leading to a deficiency of glycoprotein Ib (GpIb), an important clotting regulator as the receptor for von Willebrand factor. In that study they immobilized wheat germ agglutinin (WGA) lectin on 96 well plates to capture GpIb in prepared human platelet proteins and eventually succeeded to detect GpIb by specific monoclonal antibody AN51 quantitatively. They mentioned that this approach was simple, inexpensive and sensitive way to quantitate glycoproteins for which specific lectins and monoclonal antibodies were available. Tojo *et al.* applied the same concept of assay utilizing ConA-immobilized ELISA plates and specific polyclonal antibody to quantitate D-mannans of *Candida albicans* [91]. Since ConA lectin possessed a high binding specificity for the D-mannopyranose unit, the sensitivity and specificity of D-mannan detection were significantly improved compared to previous antibody-antibody ELISA or quantitative precipitin reaction (QPR), they reported.

In cancer diagnostic studies, Parker reported the application of lectin/antibody sandwich ELISA assay to the serological diagnosis of pancreatic cancer [92]. His team captured glycoproteins possessing *N*-acetylglucosamine and sialic acid moieties by WGA lectin and detected by CAM17.1 monoclonal antibody specific to a part of mucins. They provided diagnostic assay results from not only retrospective study showing a sensitivity of 78% for pancreatic cancer with a specificity of 76% [93], but also prospective study showing even better sensitivity and specificities (84 and 92%, respectively), suggesting that the assay probably performed better on fresh samples.

They also circumstantially summarized the usefulness of CAM 17.1/WGA test for pancreatic cancer diagnosis in Lancet journal [94]. Very recently Miyoshi's group found that fucosylated haptoglobin had a great potential for the detection of pancreatic cancer and prognosis of postoperative colorectal cancer [95, 96]. They coated 96 well plates with anti-haptoglobin Fab antibody because IgG had fucosylated oligosaccharides in its Fc portion, and detected fucosylated haptoglobin by biotinylated AAL lectin [95-98]. They measured serum samples from 397 individuals and concluded that the sensitivity and specificity for the diagnosis of pancreatic cancer patients from normal controls was 50% and 91%, respectively [98].

3.2 Energy resolved oxonium ion monitoring (Erexim) technology

For the purpose of first high-throughput site-specific quantification of glycan structure variations, we recently developed energy resolved oxonium ion monitoring (Erexim) technology [99]. The oxonium ions are defined as any oxygen cations with three bonds in chemistry, while they are used synonymously with sugar oxonium ions in glycoproteomics, which are produced as oligosaccharide fragment ions in collision cells of mass spectrometers during collision induced dissociation (CID) of glycopeptides [100]. Typical oxonium ions (m/z) and the corresponding oligosaccharide components are shown in the right side of **Fig. 4**. The detection of particular set of oxonium ions in MS/MS spectra of glycopeptides not only represents the existence of glycan modifications but also provides signature of original glycan structures [101]. Furthermore we found that monitoring the yields of oxonium ions over a wide range of collision energy by use of multiple reaction monitoring (MRM [102-104]) on quadrupole mass spectrometer exhibited a highly glycan structure-unique fragmentation patterns. Indeed the Erexim curves allowed us to clearly

distinguish even structural isomers (same mass with distinct glycan linkage) and separately quantify their contents (**Fig. 4**). This technology was then applied to the N-glycan profiling of three model therapeutic antibody drugs, Herceptin (trastuzumab), Avastin (bevacizumab), and Erbitux (cetuximab). In the lot-to-lot glycan structure variation test for Herceptin or Avastin, around 30 glycan structures on Fc region of antibody drugs were relatively quantified in 30 minutes analysis, revealing that at most 10% increase or decrease of several glycoforms were observed in both drugs (n = 4 for each of 4 lots). In the case of Avastin glycan profiling, glycans on both Fab and Fc regions were simultaneously quantified in a single Exxim analysis. The result showed that most of glycans on Fab region were non-human type glycan structures possessing N-glycolylneuraminic acids (Neu5Gc) or Gal (α 1-3) Gal structures, whereas Fc region had conserved non-immunogenic glycan structures. The limit of detection and dynamic range of this technology were 30 attomole and more than 4 orders, respectively. Since the required sample preparation prior to mass spectrometric analysis was only usual trypsin digestion, the Exxim procedure would be appropriate for automated high-throughput analysis. Thus this technology has enough potential to be applied to routine evaluation of drug quality, safety, and potency, for which extremely high reproducibility, quantitative capability, and throughput. Meanwhile our Exxim profiling technique is promising technology allowing rapid and site-specific validation of extracted glycan structure-targeted tumor marker candidates using multiple crude specimens.

4 Toward Industrialization and Approval of Carbohydrate-targeting Biomarkers

Biomarkers developed for commercial use and regulatory approval must be required to present data supporting validity and clinical utility. According to the FDA Guidance for industry: Pharmacogenomic data submissions 2005, a valid biomarker is a biomarker that is measured in an analytical test system with “well-established performance characteristics” and for which there is an “established scientific framework or body of evidence that elucidates the clinical significance of test results.” In case of carbohydrate-targeting biomarkers for cancer early detection or prognosis, the developed devices need to be approved as *in vitro* diagnostics.

Toward that purpose, a couple of key requirements have to be fulfilled. Firstly development of high-throughput, easy-to-use, reproducible, and not so expensive diagnostic devices would be required, which are suitable for widespread clinical use. As described in Section 3.1, lectin-antibody sandwich ELISA system could be the first choice satisfying all of these criteria. However, in some cases it would be difficult to achieve sensitive detection for low abundant serum glycoproteins because of insufficient specificity and affinity of lectins for the glycan epitopes. The Exxim technology (Section 3.2) can provide extremely high sensitivity, specificity, and reproducibility for the quantitative assessment of site-specific glycan structure disorders, whereas the high-spec mass spectrometer and proficient skills of LC/MS/MS operation are required.

The other requirement toward the approval of diagnostics is biological evidence explaining how and why the targeted glycan structure alterations would occur on a particular serum glycoprotein in cancer patients. It is often complicated to figure out the origin of biomarker glycoproteins and biochemical mechanisms of abnormal oligosaccharide generation, especially when investigating for glycoproteins identified from serum shotgun proteomics-driven biomarker screening. To present scientifically

strong evidences for carbohydrate-targeting biomarker candidates, further basic and detailed glycobiological studies will be necessary, including analysis of cellular glycan biosynthesis pathways, comprehensive expression analysis of glycosyltransferases, or confirmation of glycoform changes in cancer tissues. Future development of more sensitive, high-throughput, and site-specific glycan structure profiling technologies are also fundamental to facilitate clinical application of numerous carbohydrate-targeting biomarker candidates reported previously on papers.

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Footnotes

Competing interests – I have no conflict of interest to declare.

Accepted Article