骨関節疾患の再生医療においてすでに臨床 応用されており、最近では MSC を用いた心 疾患患者への細胞移植も行われている。 MSC は自己の体内にある細胞であること、 また他の幹細胞と比較し腫瘍化が少ないた め、安全性が高いと考えられている。

同じ様な方法論を用いて、本実験では安全かつ有効にマウス蝸牛組織内に MSC を誘導する実験方法の確立を検討した。

3NP投与後のMSC移植では組織内に軽度の 炎症を起こすことでケモカインであるMC P1の誘導が促進され、それに伴いMCP1の レセプターであるCCR2が過剰発現する。こ のことにより、MSCの組織内への透過性が 高まるため、組織への生着率が高まると考 えられた。この誘導機序を応用して骨髄間 葉系幹細胞の内耳組織内への誘導効率およ び細胞置換を高めることができると考えら れる。そこでMSCにMCP1およびCCR2の発 現プラスミドを導入し各遺伝子を強発現さ せる細胞を作成した。この細胞の投与にし たところ、細胞の導入効率は向上を認めて いる。今後は細胞のCCR2発現率を更に高め、 移植する予定である。

なし

また、実験系の確立により内耳疾患モデルマウスに同実験を行いMSC誘導に伴う治療結果の評価を検討する方針である。

E. 結論

本研究では蝸牛組織にごく軽微な損傷を与えることにより骨髄間葉系幹細胞の蝸牛組織への導入効率を高めることに成功した。 また、炎症反応を応用し作成した細胞を投与することで更に移植効率の向上を認めた。

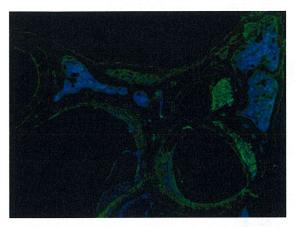
G. 研究発表

1. 論文発表なし

2. 学会発表

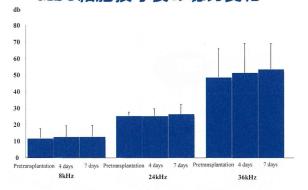
Hiromi Kasagi et al. Transplantation of bone marrow Mesenchymal stem cell into neonatal, adult and aged mouse cochlea. 32rd ARO Mid Winter Meeting, 2010年2月米国 アナハイム

H. 知的財産権の出願・登録状況



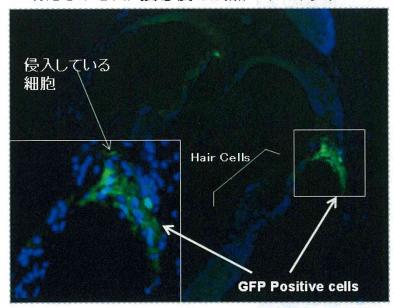
幼若マウスの前庭組織では多くの MSC(緑)の組織定着が確認された。

MSC細胞投与後の聴力変化



細胞移植後の ABR 閾値の変化 前庭組織では多くの MSC (緑) の組織侵入が確認された。 移植手術による聴力の低下は見られず、骨髄間葉系幹細胞内耳 移植の安全性が確認された。

MSC+3NP投与後の成熟マウス内耳

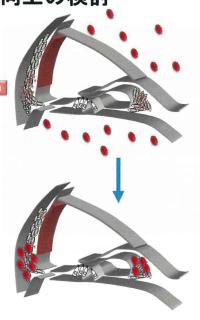


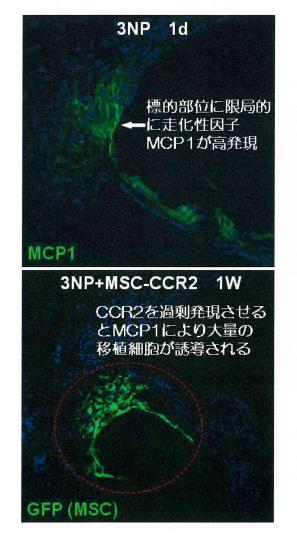
3NP+MSC投与 (MSC投与後1週間) MSC細胞が移植され、蝸牛外側壁内への生着が 認められた。一部ラセン靱帯内への侵入を認める。

幹細胞導入効率向上の検討



MSCの蝸牛組織内への細胞侵入率の向上 が期待出来る。





3NP により蝸牛外側壁に軽 度の炎症を起こした後、 CCR2 過剰発現細胞を投与。

蝸牛外側壁に多くの細胞の 生着を認めた。

厚生労働科学研究費補助金(再生医療実用化研究事業) 分担研究報告書

内耳への幹細胞移植法および遺伝子導入法の開発 4 Connexin26 欠損マウス蝸牛組織へのウイルスベクターを用いた遺伝子治療法の検討

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研究要旨

先天性難聴は1000出生に一人と高頻度に発生しその半数は遺伝性であると考えられている。コネキシン26をコードするGjb2遺伝子は遺伝性難聴の中で最も高頻度に発生する遺伝性難聴原因遺伝子として知られている。本研究では遺伝性難聴の治療法確立を目的としGjb2遺伝子を組み込んだアデノ随伴ウイルス(AAV)を作成した。同ウイルスベクターのGjb2Jックアウトマウスへの導入を検討し、これにより同マウスの蝸牛組織内にGjb2遺伝子がコードするコネキシン26を発現させることに成功した。

A. 研究目的

出生1000人に1人の割合で生まれてくる高度難聴児のうち少なくとも半数は遺伝子の関与によると推測されている。この中でも GJB2 変異による遺伝性難聴が最も頻度が高いことが知られているが、現在根本的な治療はない。GJB2 遺伝子はギャップジャンクション蛋白である Connexin 26 (Cx26)をコードする遺伝子である。細胞間の結合様式の1つであるギャップジャンクションは内耳蝸牛では主に支持細胞に局在しており、水やカリウムイオンなど低分子物質を自由に細胞間の移動をさせて、内

リンパ液中のカリウムイオンサイクルや、コルチリンパの形成にも関与しているとされ、聴力に不可欠である。また、遺伝性難聴モデルにはマウスが使われることが多いが、成熟したマウスでは非侵襲的に蝸牛支持細胞に遺伝子導入できた報告はない。一方、GJB2遺伝子変異モデルマウスの検討により出生後の蝸牛コルチ器の発育が傷害されていることが判った。そこで我々は遺伝性難聴モデルである Gjb2 コンディショナルノックアウトマウスを用いて発育不全のコルチ器を遺伝子治療で回復させるのを目標にマウス蝸牛支持細胞へのウイルスベク

ターによる遺伝子導入を試みた。

B. 研究方法

内耳への遺伝子導入の方法として蝸牛壁に小孔を開けての投与、正円窓からの投与があるが、半規管からの投与は導入効率が低いため今回は検討しなかった。ウイルスベクターはアデノウイルスベクター(AdV)とアデノ随伴ウイルスベクター(AAV)を用いた。また、投与前後に聴性脳幹反応を行い、聴力を比較した。

C. 研究結果

過去に当研究室で所有する Gjb2 ノック アウトマウスを用いた我々の結果では、過 去の報告と同様に外リンパ腔への導入では コルチ器や内リンパ腔への発現はみられず、 内リンパ腔への投与では高度難聴を認めた。

我々はマウス *Gjb2* 遺伝子を組み込んだ AAV を作成し、*Gjb2* ノックアウトマウスの 蝸牛に導入した。凍結切片を作成し免疫染色にて検討したところらせん板縁とらせん 靱帯に Cx26 の発現を認めた。比較としてベクターを導入していない *Gjb2* ノックアウトマウスを用いたものは発現を認めなかった。

D. 考察

我々は正円窓経由で AAV を出生直後のマウスに投与することにより聴力の損失なく蝸牛支持細胞に遺伝子を導入することを報告した (T. iizuka et al. 2008)。今後この導

入方法で Gjb2 ノックアウトマウスに Gjb2 遺伝子を組み込んだ AAV の導入を行って いく予定である。

E. 結論

本研究では遺伝性難聴の治療法確立を目的としGjb2遺伝子を組み込んだAAVを作成した。同ウイルスベクターをGjb2ノックアウトマウスへの導入を検討し、これにより同マウスの蝸牛組織内にGjb2遺伝子がコードするコネキシン26を発現させることに成功した。

G. 研究発表

1. 論文発表

Noninvasive In Vivo Delivery of Transgene via Adeno-Associated Virus into Supporting Cells of the Neonatal Mouse Cochlea. Iizuka T, Kanzaki S, Mochizuki H, Inoshita A, Narui Y, Furukawa M, Kusunoki T, Saji M, Ogawa K, Ikeda K.

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H. 知的財産権の出願・登録状況 なし

厚生労働科学研究費補助金(再生医療実用化研究事業) 分担研究報告書

内耳への幹細胞移植法および遺伝子導入法の開発 5 Connexin26 欠損マウス蝸牛組織へのウイルスベクターを用いた遺伝子治療法の検討

研究協力者 岡田弘子 順天堂大学医学部耳鼻咽喉科学教室 研究分担者 飯塚崇 順天堂大学医学部耳鼻咽喉科学教室助教研究分担者 池田勝久 順天堂大学医学部耳鼻咽喉科学教室教授

研究要旨

先天性高度難聴児は幼少児期に末梢平衡器官にも障害を伴う頻度が極めて高いことが知られている。近年、内耳への遺伝子導入に関して多くの報告が有る。我々は現在まで難聴の治療を目的として内耳への遺伝子導入に関する研究を行ってきており、この経験を基にマウス前庭組織へのウイルスベクターによる遺伝子導入を試みた。

A. 研究目的

近年、内耳の遺伝子治療を目的として実験動物内耳への遺伝子導入法の検討は以前よりも多く報告されているが、前庭障害を標的とした内耳遺伝子治療法の検討は非常に少ない。我々はこれまで難聴の治療を目的として内耳への遺伝子導入に関する研究を行ってきており、主に蝸牛への遺伝子導入に焦点を当ててきた、本研究ではこの基礎データを基にマウス前庭組織へのウイルスベクターによる遺伝子導入を試みた。

B. 研究方法

前庭への遺伝子導入を目的として、アデノウイルスベクター(AdV)とアデノ随伴ウイルスベクター(AAV)を、微細ガラス管を用い、正円窓と半規管を通じて生後2

週の野生型マウス内耳に注入した。AdV および AAV は緑色蛍光タンパク質(GFP)の遺伝子を組み込まれたものを使用した。聴覚機能と平衡機能への侵襲を評価するため、聴性脳幹反応(ABR)とバランステストを術前および術後 2 週間で行った。その後内耳を摘出し、凍結切片を作成し、免疫染色を施行して導入遺伝子の発現を観察した。

C. 研究結果

いずれの群においても、膨大部および卵 形嚢において、有毛細胞および前庭支持細 胞への GFP の発現が認められた。また、AAV 注入群においては、線維細胞にも GFP の発 現が多数みられたが、AdV 注入群において はみられなかった。 ABR 測定の結果では、 正円窓経由に AdV を注入した群で軽度の聴 力閾値上昇がみられたが、半規管経由に AAV を注入した群では聴力閾値の変化が見られなかった。術後2週間のバランステストにおいて、いずれの群でも異常はみられなかった。

D. 考察

今回の実験では半規管経由でAAVを注入する方法が、安全でかつ有用であることが示唆された。遺伝子導入を最適化するため、各手法・各ベクターによる導入効率を評価する必要があると考えられる。この低侵襲の前庭への遺伝子導入法は、今後ヒトの平衡異常の治療の開発に繋がる可能性がある。

E. 結論

半規管経由でAAVの投与法により、聴力 の低下を伴わずに前庭の有毛細胞、支持 細胞、線維細胞への遺伝子導入に成功し、 安全かつ効率的な前庭遺伝子治療法が開 発された。

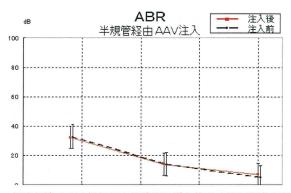
G. 研究発表

1. 論文発表

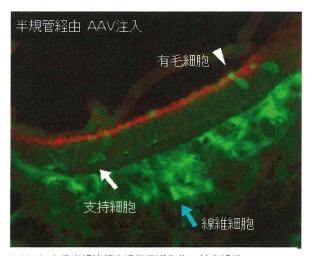
Hiroko Okada, Takashi Iizuka, Hideki Mochizuki, Tomoko Nihira, Kazusaku Kamiya, Ayako Inoshita, Hiromi Kasagi, Misato Kasai, Katsuhisa Ikeda, Gene transfer targeting mouse vestibule using adenovirus and adeno-associated virus vectors

Otology & Neurotology, 2012 33:655-6592. 学会発表 なし

H. 知的財産権の出願・登録状況 なし



経半規管 AAV 投与による遺伝子導入後の ABR 閾値の変化 AAV 投与による聴力の低下は見られず、AAV の経半規管 投与法の安全性が確認された。



AAVによる半規管経由遺伝子導入後の前庭組織 多くの有毛細胞(矢頭)、支持細胞(白矢印)、および線維 細胞への遺伝子導入に成功した。

別紙4

研究成果の刊行に関する一覧表

雑誌

発表者氏名	論文タイトル名	発表誌名	巻号	ページ	出版
神谷和作	幹細胞ホーミング機構を 応用した遺伝性難聴に対 する内耳細胞治療法の開 発 Cell therapy for hereditary hearing loss with stem cell homing factors	日本薬理学雑誌 (Folia Farmacol. Jpn.) 特集・革新的難聴治療 の夜明け	141(4)	191~194	2013
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Minekawa A, Abe T, Inoshita A, Iizuka T, Kakehata S, Narui Y, Koike T, Kamiya K, Okamura HO, Shinkawa H, Ikeda K	Cochlear outer hair cells in a dominant-negative connexin26 mutant mouse preserve non-linear capacitance in spite of impaired distortion product otoacoustic emission	Neuroscience	164		2009
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Iizuka T, Kanzaki S, Mochizuki H, Inoshita A, Narui Y, Furukawa M, Kusunoki T, Saji M, Ogawa K,Ikeda K	Noninvasive In Vivo Delivery of Transgene via Adeno-Associated Virus into Supporting Cells of the Neonatal Mouse Cochlea	Human Gene Therapy	19(4)	384–390	2008
Kamiya K, Fujinami Y, Hoya N, Okamoto Y, Kouike H, Komatsuzaki R, Kusano R, Nakagawa S, Satoh H, Fujii M, Matsunaga T	Mesenchymal Stem Cell Transplantation Accelerates Hearing Recovery through the Repair of Injured Cochlear Fibrocytes	American Journal of Pathology	171(1)	214-226	2007



遺伝性難聴への内耳細胞治療法開発

幹細胞ホーミング機構を応用した遺伝性難聴に対する 内耳細胞治療法の開発

神谷 和作



要約: 難聴の原因は多岐にわたるが, 近年の遺伝子改 変動物開発技術の向上や多種のモデル動物の開発によ り多くの病態メカニズムが解明に近づいている. 全て の先天性疾患の中でも頻度の高い遺伝性難聴において は、難聴家系や突然変異難聴マウスの遺伝子解析によ って多くの遺伝性難聴原因遺伝子が同定されている. しかし遺伝性難聴の根本的治療法は未だ開発されてい ない. 特に哺乳類の有毛細胞は再生能力を持たないた め多能性幹細胞移植による有毛細胞修復が近年試みら れている. 多能性幹細胞移植は薬物治療や遺伝子治療 と異なり細胞導入後の病変部への侵入や増殖・分化に よる病態に応じた修復が期待できる. しかし特殊なり ンパ液で充たされた内耳の構造的特徴から、聴力を温 存しつつ標的部位に前駆細胞を到達させ分化させるこ とは非常に難しい. 動物実験においても幹細胞を内耳 病変部にて適切に分化させ、機能を回復させた報告は いまだ少ない. 近年有毛細胞以外にも蝸牛線維細胞な どの機能異常が単独で難聴病態の引き金となることも 明らかとなっており、多様な細胞種による治療戦略が 求められている. 多能性幹細胞の損傷部への組織誘導 (ホーミング)機構や組織環境(ニッシェ. niche)に よる分化誘導を十分に解明し、これを応用すれば細胞 治療は内耳組織の変性や遺伝子異常に対する永続的治 療に有効となる可能性が高い. 我々は遺伝性難聴モデ ルとしてのコネキシン26等の遺伝子改変動物を用い、 骨髄間葉系幹細胞や人工多能性幹細胞(iPS細胞)等 の多能性幹細胞の分化制御や組織誘導の促進によって 効率の高い内耳細胞治療法の開発を進めてきた.

1. 遺伝性難聴

先天性難聴は 1000 出生に 1 人と先天性疾患のうちでも最も頻度の高い疾患の 1 つである。そのうち半数

が遺伝性とされており、聴覚と言語発育の著しい障害を引き起こす極めて高度な QOLの低下をもたらす.特にコネキシン 26 (Cx26)をコードする GJB2 遺伝子の変異は日本人の遺伝性難聴の 20~30%を占め、世界でも最も高頻度に出現する難聴原因遺伝子として知られている.

内耳イオン輸送機構・K⁺リサイクリングシステム

Cx26 は他のコネキシン (Cx30 等) とギャップジャ ンクションを構成し、内耳イオンの受動輸送体として 重要な機能を担っている. これらは Na⁺/K⁺ATPase 等の能動輸送体とともに蝸牛管を充たす内リンパ液 (endolymph) のイオン組成を常に一定に保つことに より聴覚シグナルの機械的振動を神経シグナルに変換 することを可能としている.内リンパ液は常に高K⁺濃 度(150 mM)と高電位(+80 mV)が維持されてい る.後者を蝸牛内リンパ電位 (endocochlear potential: EP) と呼ぶ、内リンパ液に面している有毛細胞は EP があるために音の振動から聴毛に存在する機械電気変 換 (mechanoelectrical transduction: MET) チャネル の開口によるイオン流入で有毛細胞が脱分極し、神経 伝達物質を放出する. この EP を維持するために重要 な役割を担っているのが有毛細胞を取り巻く蝸牛支持 細胞、蝸牛線維細胞と血管条細胞であり、これらはコ ネキシンで構成されるギャップジャンクション, Na⁺,K⁺-ATPase, Na⁺,K⁺,2Cl⁻共輸送体などによって イオン輸送を行い内リンパ液の高 K⁺状態を維持して いる(1,2). このイオン輸送システムは K⁺リサイクリ ングシステムと呼ばれ、これが正常に機能しなければ EP は低下し、たとえ有毛細胞機能が正常であっても イオン流入・脱分極は起こらず聴覚系神経の活動電位

キーワード: 内耳幹細胞治療,内耳幹細胞ホーミング機構,骨髄間葉系幹細胞,蝸牛線維細胞,蝸牛有毛細胞順天堂大学 医学部 耳鼻咽喉科学講座(〒113-8421 東京都文京区本郷 2-1-1)

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は発生しない.

3. 内耳イオン輸送に障害を持つ遺伝性難聴モデル

1999 年、Minowa らはヒト非症候性遺伝性難聴因子 Brn-4 の遺伝子欠損マウスの作成に成功しこの機能解析を報告した(3). この研究ではヒト非症候性遺伝性難聴である DFN3 の原因が有毛細胞ではなくラセン靭帯の線維細胞の変性にあることが初めて証明された。さらに内リンパ電位の形成に線維細胞が不可欠であるという新しい内耳の生理学的知見を明らかにした. この線維細胞やコルチ器の支持細胞等に強く発現し内耳イオン輸送体として重要な機能を担うのが Cx26 だが, 2003 年、Cx26 遺伝子で初の遺伝子改変難聴モデルが開発されると(4)、コルチ器の形成不全・機能障害など新たな分子病態が明らかとなった(5,6). 最近、内耳特異的 Cx26 遺伝子欠損マウスが新規に開発され、有用な難聴モデル動物としてさらなる新規分子病態が明らかとなっている.

4. 蝸牛線維細胞を標的とした内耳細胞治療法

我々は新規治療法開発を目的として、蝸牛線維細胞のみに限局的な損傷を持つ聴覚障害モデルを開発し(7,8)、半規管からの外リンパ液還流法による骨髄間葉系幹細胞移植により聴力回復を促進させることに初めて成功した(9). それまで幹細胞導入によって蝸牛内の損傷を修復し聴力回復に成功した例はなく、蝸牛線維細胞をターゲットとした骨髄間葉系幹細胞の移植法は今後有効な治療手段となり得ることが証明された.この方法では細胞移植後の拒絶反応も少なく他家移植としての有用性も示され、遺伝子変異細胞を正常細胞に置換する方法としても十分応用可能であることが示された.

5. 人工多能性幹 (iPS) 細胞からの内耳前駆細 胞の樹立

2010年, iPS 細胞, ES 細胞から in vitro で内耳有毛細胞を作製する画期的技術が Oshima らにより発表され, 作製された細胞が音の振動を感知できる有毛細胞特有の MET 機能を有することが明らかとなった(10). 2012年には ES 細胞からの内耳前駆細胞の新規作製法と実験動物への応用が報告された(11). これにより内耳有毛細胞を体外で人工的に増殖・分化させることが可能であることが示された. 新規手法をもとに様々な分化状態の内耳前駆細胞を樹立し, 内耳移植に最も適した分化度の細胞を選抜することが可能であると考え

られる. これらの報告では,未分化細胞から外胚葉細胞,内耳前駆細胞へ,段階的に分化を進めており,これを応用して段階的に細胞の分離を行えば,難聴の原因となる全ての内耳構成細胞(有毛細胞,支持細胞,線維細胞,血管条細胞,ラセン神経節細胞)への分化能を持つ前駆細胞を in vitro にて作製し,標的細胞に応じた移植細胞を選抜することが可能となる.

我々の研究でもこの方法を応用することにより iPS 細胞から Myosin7a 発現とアクチン巨大繊毛を有する 有毛細胞前駆細胞, コネキシン 26 発現細胞等が得られており, 移植用幹細胞としての応用研究を進めている.

6. 新たな成体内耳幹細胞

最近,間葉系細胞への過剰ストレス負荷に耐性を持つ細胞から新たな多能性幹細胞が発見された(12).同手法では遺伝子導入もなく安定的に増殖し間葉系幹細胞同様安全性が確保された幹細胞が得られると考えられる。我々はこの幹細胞樹立法を応用し成体内耳から初めて有毛細胞マーカーを発現する多能性幹細胞を樹立した。同細胞は一部に内耳有毛細胞のマーカーMyosin7aと共に細胞頂部に巨大繊毛様のアクチン重合を顕著に示す。この細胞は通常の間葉系幹細胞より増殖が二倍ほど遅く培養容器への強い接着を示すため、iPS細胞等から内耳前駆細胞への分化を誘導するためのフィーダー細胞としても適していた(未発表).

7. 蝸牛標的組織への幹細胞の誘導

体外で内耳細胞を作製する技術は大きく進展してい るが、作製された細胞を蝸牛組織へ直接的アプローチ にて挿入することは蝸牛の構造上非常に困難である. Chen らの報告ではスナネズミの ES細胞より分化誘導 したラセン神経節細胞の前駆細胞を直接蝸牛軸へ注入 し、神経細胞として機能させることに成功している (11). 蝸牛軸にガラス管等を挿入し細胞注入する導入 方法は難易度が高く侵襲も高い. さらに齧歯類だけで も種間の解剖学的構造の差が大きく、人への臨床応用 として安全性と有効性を確保することは困難なアプロ ーチであると考えられる. 感覚上皮である蝸牛有毛細 胞とその支持細胞へのアプローチはさらに細胞構成が 複雑なため困難が予想され、個体への生着と分化に成 功した報告はいまだない。しかし適切な箇所に前駆細 胞を挿入できる細胞誘導システムを開発すれば、低侵 襲で安全かつ有効な技術が開発できると考えられる. 筆者らは後半規管および外側半規管に小孔を開け、片 側から微小チューブを挿入し細胞液で外リンパ液を還



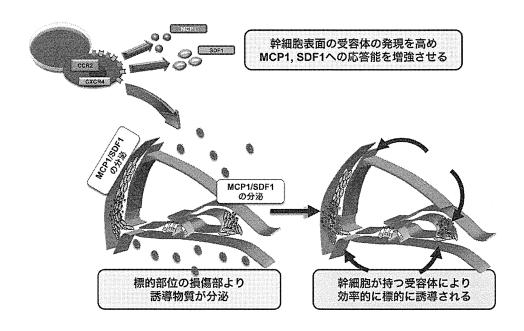


図1 幹細胞ホーミング機構を応用した内耳細胞治療法

培養シャーレ上で幹細胞(骨髄間葉系幹細胞等)にホーミング因子(MCP1, SDF1)を作用させそれらの受容体(CCR2, CXCR4)の発現を増強させる。移植前に薬物処置により蝸牛外側壁中心部にホーミング因子の発現を惹起させておき、外リンパ液中に上記前処置細胞を投与。この方法により蝸牛組織への幹細胞導入効率が大きく上昇する。

流する経半規管外リンパ液還流法を用いている(13). 同手法では手術による聴力低下はほとんど見られず, 大量の細胞を外リンパ液中に導入することができるため,安全性を考慮した際の内耳細胞治療に適した投与 法であると思われる. 我々は細胞液環流後に骨髄間葉 系幹細胞の細胞塊を半規管の小孔に挿入することにより,術後のリンパ液の漏出を防ぎ,細胞生着にも良好 な結果を得ている.

8. 内耳幹細胞ホーミング機構を応用した効率 的細胞誘導法の開発

実用可能な内耳幹細胞治療法の開発のためには有毛細胞やその支持細胞および内リンパ液に接する血管条細胞, 蝸牛線維細胞など適切な箇所に幹細胞を導入しその微小環境(niche, ニッチ,ニッシェ)に応じて分化させることが必要である。そのためには適切な幹細胞ホーミング(標的組織へ遊走し微小環境に生着)の分子機構を理解し応用することが重要であると考えられる。

マックスプランク研究所の報告では、心筋虚血後に骨髄由来間葉系幹細胞が瘢痕層へ効率的にホーミングされるには走化性因子 MCP1、SDF1 とその受容体 CCR2、CXCR4 およびその下流において細胞遊走を制御している FROUNT による分子経路が重要な役割を担うことが明らかにされた(14).

内耳におけるホーミングに関し、Tan らは音響障害を与えた蝸牛に多くの骨髄由来細胞が誘導され、走化性因子として SDF1 が機能していることを示している (15). 特に損傷後1週間で最も多くの骨髄由来細胞が蝸牛に誘導され、らせん靭帯の蝸牛線維細胞 II型周囲での SDF1 の発現と共に同部位への細胞誘導が示された。 SDF1 が幹細胞ホーミング因子として組織損傷部への幹細胞誘導とその適応分化に関与するとの報告は多く (16)、内耳においても同因子がホーミングに重要な役割を担うと考えられる.

我々は上記のホーミング機構を応用し内耳での自然 細胞誘導・修復機構を人為的に増強することにより, 移植幹細胞の前処置によって MCP1, SDF1 の受容体 である CCR2, CXCR4 の発現を効率的に上昇させるこ とに成功した. 同細胞を MCP1, SDF1 の発現を局所 的に高めた蝸牛へ投与することにより蝸牛への幹細胞 導入効率を約4倍に上昇させることが可能となった (図1). さらに上記 Cx26 遺伝子欠損難聴モデルにお ける Cx26 ギャップ結合を再構築させることに成功し た (未発表). 同方法を最適化することにより大量の 前駆細胞を内耳標的部位に導入し聴力回復に寄与でき ると考えられる.

9. おわりに

遺伝性難聴の治療においては人工内耳の有用性も報

告されているが、本来の聴覚機能を回復させる根本的治療法は未だ存在しない.遺伝性難聴の第一次的な原因細胞は有毛細胞以外にも蝸牛線維細胞や支持細胞であることが明らかとなっているが、この多様な異常変異細胞を修復するには新たな治療戦略として多能性幹細胞を用いた効率的細胞治療法の開発が必須であると考えられる.内耳における幹細胞ホーミング機構を理解し、自然細胞誘導・修復機構を人為的に分子制御することにより、様々な多能性幹細胞を蝸牛目的部位へ導入することが可能となり、安全性と有効性の高い新規細胞治療法の開発が期待できる.

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◇東北大応用動物学科卒、東大獣医学専攻実験動物学教室にて学位取得後、理研脳センター、東京医療センター、マイアミ大学、パスツール研究所を経て'08 年現職、◇趣味:ラグビー、◇研究テーマ:内耳幹細胞治療法の開発.



Gene Transfer Targeting Mouse Vestibule Using Adenovirus and Adeno-Associated Virus Vectors

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Hypothesis: The present study assessed how to inject a gene into the mouse vestibule and which is the optimum gene to the mouse vestibule adenovirus (AdV) vector or adeno-associated virus (AAV) vector.

Background: Loss of vestibular hair cell is seen in various balance disorder diseases. There have been some reports concerning gene delivery to the mouse vestibule in recent years. To effectively induce transgene expression at the vestibule, we assessed the efficiency of inoculating the mouse inner ear using various methods.

Methods: We employed an AdV- and AAV-carrying green fluorescent protein using a semicircular canal approach (via a canalostomy) and round window approach.

Results: AAV injection via canalostomy induced gene expression at the hair cells, supporting cells, and fibrocytes at the vestibular organs without auditory or balance dysfunction, suggesting it was the most suitable transfection method. This method is thus considered to be a promising strategy to prevent balance dysfunction.

Conclusion: AAV injection via canalostomy to the vestibule is the noninvasive and highly efficient transfection method, and this study may have the potential to repair balance disorders in human in the future. **Key Words:** Gene therapy—Vestibule—Virus vector

Otol Neurotol 33:655-659, 2012.

The loss of vestibular cells is seen in various balance disorders such as aging, aminoglycoside toxicity, and herpes zoster otitis (1-3), and it is known that many children with congenital deafness have a disorder in the vestibular function. In such cases, bilateral vestibular loss results in permanent chronic balance dysfunction. The vestibular system is an especially important target for hair cell regeneration because no clinical treatments are currently available for patients that have lost all vestibular function. Animal models with genetic balance disorder were discovered and generated mostly in mouse, such as shaker-1 or waltzer mice, a mouse model for Usher syndrome. There have many reports about gene delivery to the mouse inner ear in recent years. Several investigators reported that gene transfer using adenovirus-based vectors results in vestibular hair cell regeneration, recovery of balance function (4), and

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vestibular hair cell preservation from aminoglycosides (5). However, it is difficult to use adenoviruses because they would be used for only short-term treatment (6). Therefore, we compared the effect of adenovirus (AdV) vectors with recombinant adeno-associated viral (rAAV) vectors, which has the advantages in causing long-term gene expression compared with AdV (7). Moreover, we assessed how to inject a gene into the mouse inner ear. Three main routes of gene delivery are possible, namely, scala media approaches (via a cochleostomy), semicircular canal approaches (via a canalostomy), and round window approaches (8,9). Hearing loss by the method of cochleostomy has been reported in some studies (9,10). Thus, in this study, the delivery of AdV and rAAV via semicircular canal or round window was investigated to elucidate the implications for hearing and balance function and cellular specificity of the transgene expression in the mouse vestibule.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Animals

Healthy C57BL/6 male mice were used at p14. All experimental protocols were approved by the Institutional Animal

Care and Use Committee at Juntendo University and were conducted in accordance with the U.S. National Institutes of Health Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals.

Vectors

A replication-deficient vector (human AdV, serotype 5) was used to encode the green fluorescent protein (GFP) driven by the cytomegalovirus (CMV) promoter. The virus was designated AD5.CMV-GFP (3 $\times\,10^{11}$ pfu/ml). The E1 and E3 regions were deleted. The vectors were purchased from Arist Company, Osaka, Japan. Viral suspensions in 10 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5, 1 mM MgCl₂, and 10% glycerol were kept at –80°C until thawed for use.

The plasmid DNA pAAV-MCS (CMV promoter; Stratagene, La Jolla, CA, USA) carrying the GFP gene was constructed as reported previously (11). The plasmid DNA pAAV-GFP was cotransfected with plasmids pHelper and Pack2/1 into HEK-293 cells using the standard calcium phosphate method (12). After 48 hours, the cells were harvested, and crude rAAV vector (serotype 1) solutions were obtained by repeated freeze-thaw cycles. After ammonium sulfate precipitation, the virus particles were dissolved in phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) and applied to an OptiSeal centrifugation tube (Beckman Coulter, Fullerton, CA, USA). After overlaying with an OptiPrep solution (Axis-Shield PoC, Oslo, Norway), the tube was processed with a Gradient Master (BioCpmp Instruments, Fredericton, NB, Canada) to prepare the gradient layer of the OptiPrep. The tube was then ultracentrifuged at 13,000 r.p.m. for 18.5 hours. The fractions containing high-titer rAAV vectors were collected and used for injection into animals. The number of rAAV genome copies was semiquantified using polymerase chain reaction (PCR) within the CMV promoter region using primers 5'-GACGTCAATAATGACGTATG-3'

and 5'-GGTAATAGCGATGACTAATACG-3'. The final titer was $1.4\times10^{13}~\text{vp/ml}.$

To compare the infectious efficiency of the 2 vectors, the same volume (0.5 μ l) of AdV-GFP and AAV-GFP from the same lots used in the present cochlear injection were administered in 60-mm dish with confluent HEK293 cells and observed in 24 hours after the infection.

Surgical Procedures

C57BL/6 male mice were anesthetized with ketamine (100 mg/kg) and xylazine (4 mg/kg) by intraperitoneal injection. Glass capillaries (Drummond Scientific, Broomall, PA, USA) were drawn with a PB-7 pipette puller (Narishige, Tokyo, Japan) to achieve an approximately 10-µm outer tip diameter. A polyethylene tube (Atom Medical, Saitama, Japan) was connected to the glass micropipette. After making a left postauricular incision, the vector was injected following either of the 2 routes.

Round window approach: for injection via the round window, the left otic bulla was opened, and the glass micropipette was inserted into the round window up to the scala tympani, and the vectors were injected using the micropipette. The injection volume of the viral vector was regulated to approximately 0.1 μ l/min for 5 minutes using a syringe connected to the polyethylene tube. To allow the vector to spread throughout and stabilize in the inner ear, the glass micropipette was left in place for 1 minute after the injection. The opening region of the otic bulla was sealed with connective tissue.

Semicircular canal approach: for injection via canalostomy, after anesthesia, the posterior and lateral semicircular canals were identified, and a small hole was made in each canal. Next, the glass pipette was inserted into the hole of the posterior semicircular canal, and the vectors were injected in the same manner as with the round window approach.

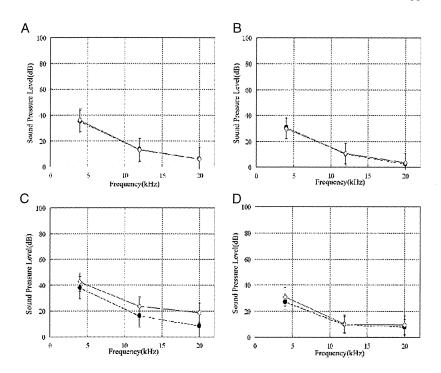
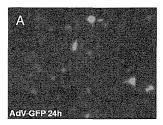


FIG. 1. Hearing results at 14 days after virus vector injection. The ABR thresholds of postoperation (*hollow squares*) did not differ from the preoperative results (*solid circles*) of AAV injection via the round window (A) and via canalostomy (B) and the AdV injection via canalostomy (B). At AdV injection via the round window, statistical significance was seen at 20 kHz(C). (*P < 0.05).

Otology & Neurotology, Vol. 33, No. 4, 2012



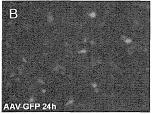


FIG. 2. The same volume (0.5 μl) of AdV-GFP (A) and AAV-GFP (B) from the same lots used in the present cochlear injection were administrated in 60-mm dish with confluent HEK293 cells and observed in 24 hours after the infection. GFP signals showed approximately same infection rates. Images were represented by GFP fluorescent overlaid on phase contrast image.

Measurements of Auditory Brainstem Response

To assess the safety of the gene transfer strategy, we assessed the auditory brainstem response (ABR) preoperatively and 14 days after the operation at the virus-injected ear (left side). ABR measurements were performed as previously reported in our laboratory (13). Thresholds were determined for frequencies of 4, 12, and 20 kHz from a set of responses at various intensities with 5-dB intervals, and the electrical signals were more than 512 repetitions.

Assessment of Vestibular Function

We assessed the vestibular function by observation of the head tilt, reaching response, and swimming test at 14 days after operation. For the reaching response, the mouse was held by the tail above a flat surface, and it was noted whether the forepaws were stretched out to make contact with the surface. For the swimming test, the animals were placed in a container filled with 30 cm of comfortably warm water for no longer than 60 seconds.

Sample Preparation, Histology, and Immunohistochemical Analysis

At 14 days after injection, the mice were anesthetized and perfused intracardially with PBS, followed by 4% paraformaldehyde (PFA) in phosphate buffer. The whole inner ear structures were excised and fixed with PFA and then decalcified in 0.12M ethylenediamine tetra-acetic acid. Specimens were cryoprotected in 30% sucrose in PBS, embedded, frozen, and sectioned at 10 µm. Immunofluorescence analysis was performed as previously reported (10) using anti-GFP antibodies, rhodamine-phalloidin, and 4'6-diamidino-2-phenylindole (DAPI). Images of sections were captured with a Carl Zeiss Axioplan 2 microscope (Carl Zeiss, Oberkochen, Germany), KEYENCE VB-G25 (KEYENCE, Osaka, Japan), and Carl Zeiss LSM510 META (Carl Zeiss, Oberkochen, Germany).

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using Student's *t*-test for the ABR data in StatMate IV for Windows. Differences were considered to be significant if p < 0.05.

RESULTS

Functional Evaluation

The ABR thresholds at frequencies of 4, 12, and 20 kHz are shown in Figure 1. The ABR thresholds 14 days

after virus vector injection did not differ from the preoperative results in the rAAV injection (Fig. 1, A and B) and AdV injection via canalostomy groups (Fig. 1D). With AdV injection via the round window (Fig. 1C), the ABR threshold at 20 kHz was significantly elevated postoperatively (Fig. 1C) (*p < 0.05). For vehicle control, a sham treatment using sterile normal saline through the round window or semicircular canal had been done without hearing loss (data not shown).

No abnormalities were observed in the vestibular functional tests (head tilt, reaching response, and swimming test) in any animal 14 days after the operation.

The Infectious Efficiency of the 2 Vectors

GFP signals showed approximately same infection rates, suggesting that these 2 lots of virus had the same titer level. Images were represented by GFP fluorescent overlaid on phase contrast image (Fig. 2).

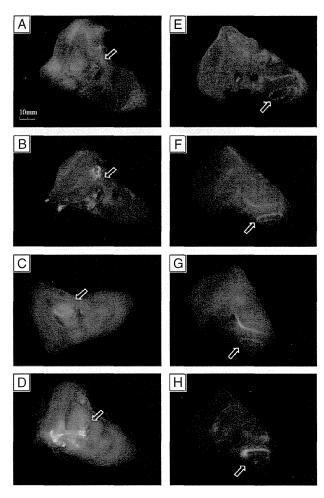


FIG. 3. Photomicrographs of whole inner ear images after dissection with a fluorescence stereoscopic microscope. AAV injected inner ear via the round window (A, E), AAV injected via canalostomy (B, F), AdV injected via the round window (C, G), and AdV injected via canalostomy (D, H).

Otology & Neurotology, Vol. 33, No. 4, 2012

Whole Inner Ear Observation

To confirm the infection of the inner ear, we observed the whole inner ear without staining using a fluorescence stereoscopic microscope. GFP signals were observed in the vestibular organs (Fig. 3, A–D) and the cochlea (Fig. 3, E–H) with all the methods.

Expression of GFP

We observed the immunostained frozen sections of the vestibular organs with a fluorescence microscope to

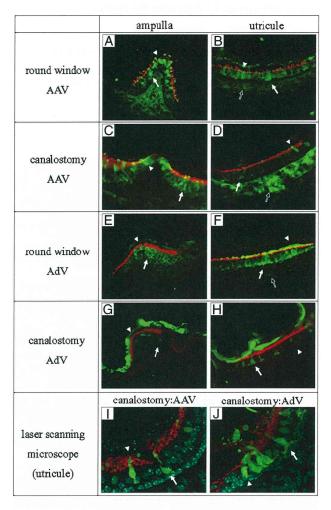


FIG. 4. Distribution of GFP expression after the AAV and AdV injection. A, C, E, and G are ampulla and B, D, F, and H are utricle. GFP expression could be seen in vestibular hair cells (arrowheads), supporting cells (white arrows) and fibrocytes (outlined arrows) in the inner ear tissue after AAV injection via the round window (A, B). Expression of GFP also was seen in hair cells and supporting cells in the ampulla and utricule, and higher GFP expression observed in the fibrocytes compared with the other methods (C, D). With AdV injection via the round window (E, F) and canalostomy (G, H), transgene expression is detected in the ampulla and utricle, including the hair cells and supporting cells. I and J are the images using a laser scanning microscope. GFP expressions were observed in vestibular hair cells (arrowheads) and supporting cells (white arrows) with the methods of AAV injection via canalostomy (/) and AdV injection via canalostomy (J).

Otology & Neurotology, Vol. 33, No. 4, 2012

TABLE 1. Expression of green fluorescent protein in the vestibular organ

	Ampulla		Utricule			
	HC	SC	HC	SC	Fibrocyte	
AAV-RW injection	++	+	++	+	+	
AAV-canalostomy	++	++	+	+	++	
AdV-RW injection	+	+	+	+	+	
AdV-canalostomy	+	+	+	+	+	

The number of infected cells in one section is 0 (-), $1\sim5$ (+), and $6\sim10$ (++).

HC indicates hair cell; RW injection, transgene via the round window membrane; SC, supporting cell.

assess the cellular specificity of the transgene expression of the virus vectors and the numbers of infected cells. No pathologic changes were observed in the vestibular organs. GFP expression could be seen in vestibular hair cells (arrowheads), supporting cells (white arrows), and fibrocytes (outlined arrows) in the inner ear tissue after rAAV injection via the round window (n = 4; Fig. 4, A and B). After rAAV injection via canalostomy, the expression of GFP also was seen in hair cells and supporting cells in the ampulla and utricule, and higher GFP expression was observed in the fibrocytes as compared with the other methods (n = 6; Fig. 4, C and D). After AdV injection via the round window (n = 4; Fig. 4, E and F) and canalostomy (n = 5; Fig. 4, G and H), transgene expression was detected in the ampulla and utricule, corresponding to the hair cells and supporting cells.

For the purpose of identifying GFP-expressing cells, the sections were observed and image-stacked using a confocal laser scanning microscope. After rAAV injection via canalostomy (Fig. 4I) and AdV injection via canalostomy (Fig. 4J), the expression of GFP occurred in supporting cells, organizing a single layer, and hair cells in the shape of flask or column form.

Comparison of the Number of the Infected Cells by Injection Method

We assessed the cellular specificity by counting the numbers of cells expressing GFP (Table 1). In the hair cells in the ampulla, there were more transfected cells by rAAV injection than by AdV injection. In the supporting cells of the ampulla, the rAAV injection by canalostomy showed the most cells with GFP expression. In the utricule, rAAV injection via the round window showed the most cells with GFP expression of all methods. For vestibular fibrocytes, rAAV injection by canalostomy showed the most transfected cells.

DISCUSSION

The present study is the first report comparing the gene expression at the vestibule between round window and canalostomy approaches. Most of our methods were shown to be safe in terms of hearing function and vestibular function because no ABR threshold shift or balance

abnormality was observed in our study. Especially, the strategy to inject the virus in the ear by canalostomy has no risk of causing hearing impairment because of the surgical manipulation. In the comparison of the number of transfected cells by the injection methods, rAAV injection by canalostomy was demonstrated to have the most and was safe for transgene infection into the vestibular hair cells and other functional cells in the vestibule.

At present, AdV vectors are commonly used in animal experiments of gene therapy for the inner ear. Staecker et al. (4) demonstrated that math1 gene transfer using AdV results in vestibular hair cell regeneration and recovery of the balance function. Moreover, Pfannenstiel et al. (5) demonstrated that bcl-2 gene transfer using AdV preserved vestibular hair cells after exposure to aminoglycosides. The expression time of AAV may be more useful for therapeutics requiring long time expression, whereas AdV would be used for short-term treatments (6).

Kawamoto et al. (9) reported that no significant ABR threshold shift appeared after the injection of AdV vectors into the mouse inner ear. On the other hand, our study showed that the injection of AdV vectors via the round window significantly elevated the ABR threshold postoperatively at 20 kHz. AdV vectors may cause an inflammatory response in the inner ear because higher titers of AdV and rAAV were used in the present study than in the reports by Kawamoto et al.

Because the titer of rAAV was different from that of AdV, we could not compare the efficiency of AdV with AAV. Although the ABR threshold was significantly elevated after the AdV injection via the round window, it was not elevated after the AAV injection. In addition, the infected hair cells, supporting cells and fibrocytes of the ampulla by AAV injection were greater in number than those by AdV. Thus, rAAV vectors are more suitable than AdV for the purpose of gene therapy to the vestibule.

With AdV injection via a canalostomy, transgene expression was reported to be limited to the perilymphatic space (9). In our study, both AdV and rAAV injection via canalostomy showed transgene expression in vestibular hair cells and supporting cells. Our results differ from those of a previous study (9) and may be explained by the use of the fine glass capillary, which maintains the structure and function of the membraneous labyrinth.

Our noninvasive and highly efficient transfection method could enable transgene infection into the vestibule and may have the potential to repair balance disorders in human in the future.

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Prevalence of *GJB2* causing recessive profound non-syndromic deafness in Japanese children

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ABSTRACT

Objective: GJB2 (gap junction protein, beta 2, 26 kDa: connexin 26) is a gap junction protein gene that has been implicated in many cases of autosomal recessive non-syndromic deafness. Point and deletion mutations in GJB2 are the most frequent cause of non-syndromic deafness across racial groups. To clarify the relation between profound non-syndromic deafness and GJB2 mutation in Japanese children, we performed genetic testing for GJB2.

Methods: We conducted mutation screening employing PCR and direct sequencing for GJB2 in 126 children who had undergone cochlear implantation with congenital deafness.

Results: We detected 10 mutations, including two unreported mutations (p.R32S and p.P225L) in GJB2. We identified the highest-frequency mutation (c.235delC: 44.8%) and other nonsense or truncating mutations, as in previous studies. However, in our research, p.R143W, which is one of the missense mutations, may also show an important correlation with severe deafness.

Conclusion: Our results suggest that the frequencies of mutations in GJB2 and GJB6 deletions differ among cohorts. Thus, our report is an important study of GJB2 in Japanese children with profound non-syndromic deafness.

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1. Introduction

People with any degree of sensory impairment may encounter problems such as discrimination within the education system or when looking for work, and a reduced life expectancy. Sensorineural hearing loss (SNHL) is the most common sensory impairment in developed societies [1,2], where one child in 1000 presents at birth with severe or profound deafness [3].

Recent advances in human genetics have indicated that more than half of congenital SNHL cases involve a genetic factor [4]. In 75–80% of genetic cases, SNHL is the result of autosomal recessive inheritance, and both parents have normal hearing [5]. Mutations of GJB2 are the most frequent cause of autosomal recessive nonsyndromic deafness. Indeed, previous studies have shown that GJB2 mutations account for up to 50% of non-syndromic deafness cases [6]. Hearing-impaired subjects with biallelic GJB2 mutations range widely but most commonly follow a severe to profound and non-progressive pattern [7–9]. About 100 different GJB2 muta-

tions have been reported globally [the Connexin-Deafness homepage: http://davinci.crg.es/deafness/], and these mutations show a relatively high local dependence (founder effect). A high prevalence of c.35delG has been found among Caucasians; c.235delC among Eastern Asians, including Japanese [10-13]; c.167delT among Ashkenazi Jews [14]; p.R143W among certain Africans [15]; and p.W24X among Indians [16,17] and European Gypsies [18-20]. Some recent reports have indicated a genotypephenotype correlation: children with two truncating mutations, such as c.35delG or c.235delC, are profoundly deaf, while children with a truncating and missense mutation, or two missense mutations, show better hearing [9,21,22]. Since improved speech performance after cochlear implantation in early childhood is usually observed in hearing-impaired subjects with GIB2 mutations [23], the genetic testing of newborn babies will provide useful prognostic information when selecting appropriate treatment for such children.

In the present study, to clarify the frequency and genotypephenotype correlation of *GJB2* mutations in children with profound non-syndromic deafness, we performed genetic testing for *GJB2* mutations involving 119 Japanese children who had undergone cochlear implantation with congenital deafness.

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2. Materials and methods

2.1. Subjects

We enrolled 119 Japanese children, who were unrelated to each other, with non-syndromic deafness for genetic analysis. Of these, 107 were sporadic cases (with only one affected individual in the family); the remaining 12 patients were autosomal recessive cases (with normal hearing parents and at least two affected children). The study sample consisted of 70 males (58.8%) and 49 females (41.2%). All of their hearing impairment levels were severe (71–95 dB) to profound (>95 dB); impairments were detected between 0 and 3 years old. All children had undergone cochlear implantation at Tokyo Medical University School of Medicine.

All cases underwent otoscopic examination and audiometric testing. Subjective tests of hearing acuity were assessed based on the auditory brain-stem response (ABR) and auditory steady-state response (ASSR) in infants and children. Behavioral observation audiometry (BOA) was used as a subsidiary measure to ABR and ASSR. A detailed history was taken to exclude other possible causes of deafness (such as neonatal complications, bacterial meningitis or other infections, use of ototoxic medication, or head trauma). Extended pedigrees were elicited from each family to exclude interfamilial relations. Temporal bone computed tomography was used in children to exclude any anomalies. The control group was carefully chosen to determine the carrier frequency, and consisted of 150 unrelated individuals with normal hearing.

Informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians when necessary, and these were approved by the Ethical Committees of Juntendo University School of Medicine.

2.2. Genetic analysis

All samples from the children and normal controls were extracted from peripheral blood using the QIAamp DNA Blood Mini Kit (QIAGEN, Germantown, MD, USA). The coding region of GJB2 was amplified from DNA samples by the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) using the primers GJB2-F 5'-GTGTGCATTCGTCTTTTCCAG-3' and GJB2-R 5'-GCGACTGAGCCTTGACA-3'. PCR products were sequenced using the PCR primers and sequence primers GJB2-A 5'-CCACGCCAGCGCTCCTAGTG-3' and GJB2-B 5'-GAAGATGCTGCT GCTTGTGTAGG-3'. The sequencing reaction products were electrophoresed on an ABI Prism 310 Analyzer (Applied Biosystems). When no mutation or a single heterozygous mutation in GJB2 was confirmed, we performed the multiplex PCR assay and direct sequencing for the coding region of GJB6. Multiplex PCR was carried out according to the method of Del Castillo et al. [24] to confirm the presence of the del(GJB6-D13S1830) and del(GJB6-D13S1854) deletions in GJB6.

Samples with no mutation or a single heterozygous mutation in *GJB2* and *GJB6* were analyzed for the gene dosage using real-time quantitative PCR (qPCR) to detect exon rearrangements in *GJB2* and *GJB6*. qPCR was performed with TaqMan Gene Expression Assays (Hs00269615_s1 for *GJB2*, and Hs00272726_s1 for *GJB6*, Applied Biosystems) and the 7500 Fast Real-Time PCR System (Applied Biosystems).

We obtained blood samples from the family which had one of two unreported mutations, pP225L, and the unreported one was confirmed as follows. The samples were subjected to mutation screening by PCR and direct sequencing for GJB2. The PCR product was subcloned into pCR 2.1 vecto-TOPO by TOPO TA cloning (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA), and independent subclones were sequenced employing M13forward (5_-TTGTAAAACGACGGCCAG) and reverse (5_-ACACAGGAAACAGCTATG) primers. The sequence data using in this study have been submitted to the GenBank

databases under accession numbers X65361, AB098335, NM_000816, and NM_001037.

2.3. Statistical analysis

A Z-test was used to calculate the difference in the allele frequency. In all statistical analyses, P-values of 0.01 or less were considered significant.

3. Results

3.1. Mutation screening of GJB2

GJB2 mutations were found in 45 of the 119 affected individuals, and, of these, 35 patients were homozygous or compound heterozygous (29.4%). GJB2-related deafness patients, who had two GJB2 mutant alleles, were found in 7 of 12 familial cases (58.3%), and there were 28 of 107 sporadic cases (26.2%). Eight mutations, including two unreported ones (p.R32S and p.P225L), were identified in these patients (Table 1). Three mutations were truncating mutations [one was a nonsense mutation (p.Y136X), and two were frameshifts (c.235delC and c.176-191del)]. The remaining five were missense mutations (p.R143W, p.G45E, p.T86R, p.R32S, and p.P225L). Among these mutations, c.235delC was the most frequent. The c.235delC mutation accounted for 52.9% (37 of 70) of the GJB2-mutated alleles (Table 1).

We identified 10 subjects who had three or more mutations. All of them had p.G45E and p.Y136X, including one homozygous child. TA cloning and sequencing of subcloned PCR products revealed that all subjects had both mutations in the same allele (data not shown). G45E accompanied with Y136X has been reported as a pathogenic mutation in previous reports, especially in Japanese patients [11,25], although it remains unclear which mutation is more related to the pathogenicity.

We compared the allele frequency for each mutation with that in Ohtsuka's study [25] (Fig. 1). The frequency of c. 235delC and three mutations (p.R143W, p.G45E/Y136X, and c.176-191del) in this study were significantly different from that in Ohtsuka's study (P < 0.01). While the p.V37I mutation was reported to be the second most frequent autosomal recessive deafness allele in Asian countries [11,12], the present subjects did not follow this pattern.

In one subject, we identified a missense mutation, p.P225L, which has not previously been reported (Fig. 2). The sister and father of the proband had this mutation, while they showed a normal hearing function. The mother, with a normal hearing function, showed no mutation at this site, while she revealed only heterozygous p.G45E/Y136X mutation as a known pathogenic mutation of GJB2. The sequencing results of TA cloning further confirmed the existence of the pP225L nonsense mutation in this patient. We also identified another unreported mutation, p.R32S, in another subject. The patient had p.R32S/p.G45E/Y136X mutations. The amino acid positions of two unreported mutations

Table 1Mutations identified in the Cx26 gene, GJB2 (NG_008358.1), in child cases of congenital deafness.

Nucleotide change	ocleotide change — Amino acid change	
c.235delC	p.Leu79CysfsX3	37 (52.9)
c.427C>T	p.Arg143Trp(p.R143W)	15 (21.4)
c,134G>A/c.408C>A	p.Gly45Glu/p.Tyr136X(p.G45E/Y136X)	10 (14.3)
c.176_191del	p.Gly59AlafsX18	4 (5.7)
c.257C>G	p.Thr86Arg(p.T86R)	2 (2.9)
c.94C>A	p.Arg32Ser3(p.R32S)	1 (1.4)
c.674C>T	p.Pro225Leu³(p.P225L)	1 (1.4)
Total mutations		70 (100)

^a Novel mutations detected in this study.