

are the main cell culture materials used to control the proliferation and differentiation of MSCs in tissue engineering and regenerative medicine, both in vitro and in vivo. Therefore, this review focuses mainly on the differentiation of MSCs cultured on biomaterials made of specific ECM proteins and on the biological and chemical interactions between these cells and proteins.

5.1. Chemical and Biological Interactions of ECM Proteins and Stem Cells

ECM proteins have chemical functional groups of carboxylic acid, amine, phosphate, and/or sulfonic acid. They also have aspects of polyelectrolytes and characteristic isoelectric points (IEPs).^{160–175} Table 6 shows the IEPs of some ECM proteins,

Table 6. Isoelectric Points of Some ECM Proteins, Growth Factors, And Polymers

| materials | isoelectric point | ref |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------|
| | ECM | |
| collagen type I | 4.7, 6.4, 6.78, 7.02, and 8.26 depending on preparation conditions | 172–174 |
| gelatin sol | 7.8, temp > 40, or increasing pH | 344 |
| gelatin gel | 4.7, temp < 15, or decreasing pH | 344 |
| fibronectin | 5.5–6.0 | 160 |
| vitronectin | 4.75–5.25 | 161 |
| laminin | 5.87, 4.89, and 5.08 | 162 |
| heparin | 3.4 | 163 |
| hyaluronic acid | 2.5 | 170 |
| | growth factor | |
| FGF-1 (aFGF) | 5.6 | 169 |
| FGF-2 (bFGF) | 9.6 | 169 |
| rhBMP-2 | 9 | 171 |
| insulin | 5.3 | 168 |
| PDGF | 9.8 | 165 |
| EGF | 4.0–5.0 | |
| TGF- β 1 | 9.5 | 164 |
| | polymer | |
| agarose | 5.5 | 166 |
| alginate | 5.4 | 175 |
| poly(lactic-co-glycolic acid) (PLGA) | 2.75 | 163 |
| poly(L-lysine) | 9.5 | 163 |
| chitosan | 8.7 | 167 |
| polyacrylamide | 5.7 | 166 |

natural biopolymers, and growth factors.^{160–172,174,175} IEPs are as follows: gelatin gel and collagen type I 4.7–8.3,^{172,174} fibronectin 5.5–6.0,¹⁶⁰ laminin 4.9–5.9,¹⁶² vitronectin 4.8–5.3,¹⁶¹ heparin 4.7,¹⁶³ hyaluronic acid 2.5,¹⁷⁰ agarose 5.5,¹⁶⁶ and alginate 5.4.¹⁷⁵ Most ECM proteins and natural biopolymers are negatively charged under physiological conditions. The IEP of some growth factors is <7 (e.g., 5.6 for FGF-1¹⁶⁹ and 5.3 for insulin¹⁶⁸), whereas for other growth factors, it is >7 (e.g., 9.6 for FGF-2,¹⁶⁹ 9.0 for BMP-2,¹⁷¹ 9.8 for PDGF,¹⁶⁵ and 9.5 for TGF- β 1¹⁶⁴). Some binding between ECM proteins and growth factors (e.g., collagen type I and BMP-2) is mainly due to electrochemical interactions.

The binding of ECM proteins to cells is mainly mediated by integrin receptors. Integrins comprise a large family of cell-surface receptors that bind and mediate adhesion to ECM components, organize the cytoskeleton, and activate intracellular signaling pathways.¹⁵⁹ Each integrin consists of two type-1 transmembrane subunits: α and β . In mammals, 18 α -

and 8 β -subunits associate in various combinations to form 24 integrin dimers that can bind to distinct subsets of ECM ligands.^{176,177}

Most ECM proteins have molecular weights of 10–1000 kDa but only a few integrin-binding domains. These integrin-binding domains have specific sequences of a few amino acids (3–10), e.g., RGD, DGEA, YIGSR, IKVAV, and GFOGER. Table 4 summarizes the integrin receptors and amino acid sequences that mediate cell–ECM associations that are important for MSC proliferation and differentiation, as well as normal cell culture.

Many members of the integrin family, including α 5 β 1, α 8 β 1, α IIb β 3, α V β 3, α V β 5, α V β 6, and α V β 8, recognize an Arg-Gly Asp (RGD) motif within fibronectin,^{16,18,109} fibrinogen,¹⁰⁹ vitronectin,¹⁸ von Willebrand factor, and other large glycoproteins. Collagen type I has a cell-binding domain of DGEA, which binds to integrin α 2 β 1.¹⁰³ Collagen type I is also bound by integrins α 1 β 1, α 3 β 1, and α V β 3.^{58,97} RGD in collagen type I is reported to associate with integrin α V β 3.⁹⁷ The large size of ECM proteins, compared to the small integrin-binding motifs, provides not only structural support but also conformational regulation of the cell-binding domains. The differences in conformation of the cell-binding domains lead to different associations with specific integrin receptors.^{178,179} MSC differentiation on culture materials composed of specific ECM and natural biopolymers is discussed in the following sections.

5.2. Collagen

Collagen is a typical ECM protein used in the culturing of MSCs, which is found in all animals, especially in the flesh and connective tissues of mammals.¹⁸⁰ Collagen is the main component of connective tissue and the most abundant protein in mammals,¹⁸¹ making up ~25–35% of the whole-body protein content. Elongated collagen fibrils are found in fibrous tissues, including skin, ligaments, and tendons. Collagen is also abundant in the cornea, cartilage, bone, blood vessels, gut, and intervertebral discs. Because of its abundance, collagen, especially collagen type I, is relatively inexpensive compared to other ECM proteins such as laminin, vitronectin, and fibronectin, which allows us to use it in large quantities to make scaffolds and hydrogels for stem cell culture.^{144,182–185}

To date, 29 types of collagen have been identified and described. The five most common types are (i) collagen type I (genes; COL1A1, COL1A2), which is the main component of bone and also found in skin and tendons; (ii) collagen type II (gene; COL2A), which is the main component of cartilage; (iii) collagen type III (gene; COL3A), which is the main component of reticular fibers; (iv) collagen type IV (genes; COL4A1, COL4A2, COL4A3, COL4A4, COL4A5, and COL4A6), which is found in basement membranes;¹⁸⁶ and (v) collagen type V (COL5A1, COL5A2, and COL5A3), which is found in placenta and hair.¹⁸⁷

Collagen undergoes many post-translational modifications, including extensive cross-linking. Defective cross-linking has been implicated in human syndromes (e.g., osteogenesis imperfecta and Ehlers-Danlos syndrome).¹⁸⁸ However, it was reported that the inhibition of cross-linking of collagen was not required for osteogenic differentiation of hMSCs, as shown by the expression of ALP and genome-wide gene-expression analysis, but it did enhance matrix mineralization.¹⁸⁸ Specific characteristics of collagen, such as stiffness, elasticity, degree of cross-linking, and origin (i.e., cow-, pig-, or fish-derived collagen

from fetal or adult animals), might affect stem cell fate when it is used in the culture materials and scaffolds for MSC differentiation.

Collagen can form gels or scaffolds without elaboration. To prepare collagen gel, the protein is dissolved in acetic acid solution, and the solution is diluted with phosphate-buffered saline. After adjusting the pH of collagen solution to 7.4 by the addition of NaOH, the collagen solution is chilled in an ice bath to prevent gelation. Cells are then added into the collagen solution at the desired density, and the cell solution is incubated at 37 °C to allow gel formation. Once the gel has set, extra culture medium is added to the top of the gels and the cultures are returned to the incubator.¹⁸⁹ Tables 7 and 8 summarize several types of collagen materials and scaffolds for MSC differentiation that have been reported in the literature.^{34,37,40,45,46,53,56,61,63,70,71,79,83,84,91,97,98,101,105,110,141,144,146,148,149,151,154,182–185,189–217}

5.2.1. Collagen Type I Scaffolds. Collagen sponges (scaffolds) can be fabricated by the conventional freeze-drying method followed by cross-linking.^{144,202} Collagen type I is frequently used for scaffolds and culture materials to promote osteogenic^{105,182,183,190,193,218} and chondrogenic¹⁸³ differentiation of MSCs.

Many reports have focused on the osteogenesis of MSCs cultured on collagen type I scaffolds,^{105,183} because collagen type I is a major organic component of bones.⁹¹ Activation of specific integrins ($\alpha1\beta1$ and/or $\alpha2\beta1$) by collagen type I was reported to mediate the osteogenic response of hBMSCs (human BMSCs).^{70,97,105,188,194}

The proliferation and differentiation of MSCs into osteoblasts on collagen type I-coated dishes and scaffolds are promising. It was reported that the tissue culture dishes coated with collagen type I, but not fibronectin, laminin, gelatin, or poly L-lysine, enhanced late cell proliferation and promoted osteogenesis by hBMSCs, as evidenced by an increase in Alizarin Red S staining, ALP activity, and mRNA levels of Runx2 and osteocalcin.¹⁹² Tsai et al. found that collagen type I coating induced the activation of extracellular signal regulated kinase (ERK) and Akt, but not FAK.¹⁹² Antibody blocking of $\alpha2\beta1$ integrin did not inhibit collagen type I-induced osteogenesis of hBMSCs.¹⁹² This result indicates that cell signaling via $\alpha2\beta1$ integrin is not required for osteogenesis of hBMSCs cultured on collagen type I.

Donzelli et al. reported osteogenic differentiation of rat MSCs in a commercially available collagen scaffold, Gingistat. MSC commitment to osteogenic differentiation was demonstrated by the expression of osteopontin and osteocalcin, as well as increased ALP activity. Nodular aggregates and Alizarin Red-stained calcium deposits were observed in MSCs induced toward osteogenic differentiation cultured in the collagen scaffold.¹⁸³

A honeycomb structure of collagen scaffold was reported to promote BMSC proliferation and differentiation.¹¹⁰ BMSCs on honeycomb collagen scaffolds were able to differentiate into osteoblasts even without osteogenic induction medium to some extent, as shown by ALP activity and observation of mineral deposition by von Kossa staining.¹¹⁰

In another study, collagen type I nanofibers were prepared by electrospinning and seeded with hBMSCs. The morphology, growth, adhesion, cell motility, and osteogenic differentiation of hBMSCs on nanosized fibers of varying diameters (50–200, 200–500, and 500–1000 nm) were examined. The cells on all the nanofibers had a more polygonal and flattened cell

Table 7. Some Research Studies for Stem Cell Differentiation on 2D Collagen Materials

| stem cell source ^a | material for stem cell culture | differentiation | ref |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|------------------|
| hBMSCs | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts | 97, 149, 190–192 |
| rat BMSCs | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts | 193 |
| rBMSCs | collagen I (2D culture, gel) | osteoblasts | 194 |
| mBMSCs | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts, adipocytes | 195 |
| hBMSCs | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts, adipocytes | 196 |
| hBMSCs | collagen I (2D culture, aligned collagen on dishes) | osteoblasts, adipocytes | 146 |
| hBMSCs | collagen I (2D culture, aligned heparin on collagen I matrix) | osteoblasts, adipocytes | 146 |
| pBMSCs | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts, adipocytes | 197 |
| hBMSCs | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts, chondrocytes | 61 |
| hADSCs | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | adipocytes | 53 |
| hESCs (TE03, TE06) | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | neural cells | 79 |
| hBMSCs | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | neural cells | 101, 154, |
| mESCs | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | neural cells | 198 |
| monkey ESCs | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | mesoderm cells, endoderm cells | 199 |
| mouse hepatic stem cells | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | hepatocytes | 200 |
| hBMSCs, hAFSCs | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | hepatocytes | 46 |
| human neural stem cells | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | oligodendrocytes | 37 |
| teratocarcinoma stem cells (F9) | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | visceral endoderm cells | 98 |
| hBMSCs | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | vascular smooth muscle cells | 141 |
| mESCs | collagen I (2D culture, coating on dishes) | lung epithelium | 201 |
| hBMSCs | collagen IV (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts | 97 |
| hADSCs | collagen IV (2D culture, coating on dishes) | adipocytes | 53 |
| hBMSCs | collagen IV (2D culture, coating on dishes) | neural cells | 101 |
| mouse hepatic stem cells | collagen IV (2D culture, coating on dishes) | hepatocytes | 200 |
| teratocarcinoma stem cells (F9) | collagen IV (2D culture, coating on dishes) | visceral endoderm cells | 98 |
| hBMSCs | collagen IV (2D culture, coating on dishes) | smooth muscle cells | 200 |

^aADSC's, adipose-derived stem cells; BMSCs, bone marrow stem cells; ESCs, embryonic stem cells; hBMSCs, human BMSCs; rBMSCs, rabbit BMSCs; mBMSCs, mice BMSCs; pBMSCs, porcine BMSCs; hADSCs, human ADSCs; hESCs, human ESCs; mESCs, mice ESCs; hAFSCs, human amniotic fluid-derived stem cells.

morphology than those on tissue culture polystyrene dishes (TCPSs). Moreover, hBMSCs grown on 500–1000 nm nanofibers had significantly higher cell viability than the TCPS control.¹⁸² Sefcik et al. also prepared collagen type I scaffolds by the electrospinning method.¹⁸⁴ Osteogenic genes (collagen type I, ALP, osteopontin, osteonectin, osteocalcin, and Runx2) were reported to be upregulated (>1-fold) in adipose-derived stem cells (ADSCs) cultured on nanofiber

Table 8. Some Research Studies for Stem Cell Differentiation on 3D Collagen Materials

| stem cell source ^a | material for stem cell culture ^b | differentiation | ref | stem cell source ^a | material for stem cell culture ^b | differentiation | ref |
|--------------------------------|---|---------------------------|----------|-------------------------------|--|-------------------|-----|
| rBMSCs | collagen I (3D culture, gel) | osteoblasts | 193 | hBMSCs | collagen I (3D culture, sponge) | chondrocytes | 208 |
| rat BMSCs | collagen I (3D culture, gel) | osteoblasts | 105 | rBMSCs | collagen I (3D culture, microsphere) | osteochondrocytes | 209 |
| hBMSCs | collagen I (3D culture, scaffold) | osteoblasts | 202 | hBMSCs | collagen I (3D culture, microsphere) | chondrocytes | 210 |
| rBMSCs | collagen I (3D culture, scaffold) | osteoblasts | 183 | hBMSCs | collagen I/alginate (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 91 |
| hBMSCs | collagen I (3D culture, cross-linked scaffold) | osteoblasts | 185, 190 | rBMSCs | collagen I/alginate (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 211 |
| hADSCs | collagen I (3D culture, electrospinning nanofiber) | osteoblasts | 184 | hBMSCs | collagen I/HA/PCL (3D culture, scaffold) | chondrocytes | 151 |
| hBMSCs | collagen I (3D culture, electrospinning nanofiber) | osteoblasts | 182, 203 | rat cardiac stem cells | collagen I/PLGA (3D culture, scaffold) | cardiomyocytes | 212 |
| rBMSCs | collagen I/PGA fiber (3D culture, sponge) | osteoblasts | 144 | mESCs | collagen I/Matrigel (3D culture, scaffold) | cardiomyocytes | 213 |
| rat BMSCs | collagen I/bioglass/PSN (3D culture, scaffold) | osteoblasts | 204 | mBMSCs | collagen I immobilized Sca-1 antibody (3D culture, scaffold) | cardiomyocytes | 40 |
| rBMSCs | collagen I/PGA (3D culture, sponge) | osteoblasts | 205 | hBMSCs | collagen type I/PLCL (3D, electrospinning nanofiber) | neural cells | 45 |
| hBMSCs | collagen I/HYA (3D culture, scaffold) | osteoblasts | 191 | neural stem cells | collagen I (3D culture, grafting on electrospinning mat) | neural cells | 214 |
| rBMSCs | collagen I/chitosan (3D culture, sponge) | osteoblasts | 206 | neural stem cells | collagen I (3D culture, gel) | neural cells | 189 |
| hBMSCs, Wharton's Jelly of UCB | collagen I/collagen III (3D culture, scaffold) | osteoblasts | 34 | rat neural stem cells | collagen I (3D culture, gel) | neural cells | 217 |
| rBMSCs | collagen I/chondroitin 6-sulfate (3D culture, scaffold) | osteoblasts, chondrocytes | 56 | mice neural stem cells | collagen I (3D culture, gel) | neural cells | 215 |
| hBMSCs | collagen I/HYA (3D culture, scaffold) | osteoblasts, chondrocytes | 70 | mice neural stem cells | collagen I/laminin (3D culture, gel), collagen I/fibronectin (3D culture, gel) | neural cells | 215 |
| pBMSCs | collagen I/PCL/TCP (3D culture, scaffold) | osteoblasts, adipocytes | 197 | rat stem cells | collagen I (3D culture, gel) | neuronal circuits | 216 |
| hBMSCs, hUCB-BMSCs | collagen I/collagen III (3D culture, gel) | osteoblasts, adipocytes | 34 | hBMSCs | fibroblast-embedded collagen I (3D culture gel) | epidermis | 84 |
| bBMSCs | collagen I (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 148 | hADSCs | collagen II (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 71 |
| hBMSCs | collagen I (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 63 | bBMSCs | collagen II/alginate (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 91 |
| hADSCs | collagen I (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 71 | rat BMSCs | atelocollagen (3D culture, honeycomb structure) | osteoblasts | 110 |
| mESCs | collagen I (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 207 | | | | |

^aADSCs, adipose-derived stem cells; BMSCs, bone marrow stromal cells; ESCs, embryonic stem cells; hADSCs, human ADSCs; gBMSCs, goat BMSCs; hBMSCs, human BMSCs; mBMSCs, murine BMSCs; hESCs, human ESCs. ^bPCL, poly(ϵ -caprolactone); HYA, hydroxyapatite; PEG, polyethylene glycol.

scaffolds compared to 2D collagen coatings by day 21.¹⁸⁴ Extensive synthesis of mineralized extracellular matrix was observed on the nanofiber scaffolds assessed on day 21 with Alizarin Red staining. The results demonstrate that 3D nanoscale morphology plays a critical role in regulating cell fate determination and in vitro osteogenic differentiation of ADSCs under serum-free conditions.¹⁸⁴

Chondrogenic differentiation of MSCs induced by collagen type I-based hydrogels has also been reported by several groups.^{63,210,211,219} Chang et al. compared chondrogenesis of immortalized hBMSCs embedded in collagen type I gel to those grown in pellet culture.²¹⁹ The hBMSCs in collagen scaffolds expressed more glycosaminoglycan than those in pellet culture. Expression of the chondrogenic genes Sox9, aggrecan, collagen type II, and collagen type I (which indicates dedifferentiation) increased over time in pellet culture. However, only collagen type II and aggrecan expression in hBMSCs in the collagen gels increased over time, whereas Sox9 expression remained unchanged and collagen type I expression decreased, which indicated that there was no dedifferentiation from the chondrogenic lineage. These results indicate that

chondrocytes differentiated from hBMSCs in collagen gel are superior to those generated in pellet culture because of their lower levels of dedifferentiation.

The regulation of ESCs in specific lineages of differentiation is a complex and technically challenging subject. Collagen type I microspheres encapsulated with mouse ESCs (mESCs) have been reported to be a suitable microenvironment for supporting mESCs and maintaining their undifferentiated state for a certain period.²⁰⁷ However, Yeung et al. reported that the proportion of undifferentiated mESCs in the microspheres gradually decreased, and the proportion of MSCs was increased at later time points.²⁰⁷ This result points to inductive properties of the collagen matrix for differentiating mESCs toward MSC lineages. It was reported that a lower initial collagen concentration facilitated the differentiation of mESCs into chondrogenic lineages, while mESCs differentiated into a more advanced stage of chondrocytes at a later time point using chondrogenic differentiation medium.²⁰⁷ The cultivation of hESCs and human iPSCs in hydrogels or scaffolds of collagen type I or other ECM proteins and natural biopolymers could yield efficient differentiation into MSC

lineages, including osteoblasts, chondrocytes, and cardiomyocytes. This strategy would provide a larger-scale source of MSC lineage cells, which at present is limited to autologous patients.

Bioengineering complex tissues, which consist of multiple tissue phases with different structures and functions, is extremely challenging. In particular, it is difficult to create biological interfaces between mechanically dissimilar tissues such as cartilage and bone. The formation of the osteochondral interface with proper zonal organization is quite difficult, although tremendous efforts have been devoted to the developing osteochondral plugs.^{209,220,221} An osteochondral interface is essential for preventing mechanical failure and maintaining normal function of cartilage.²⁰⁹

Cheng et al. demonstrated *in vitro* formation of a stem cell-derived osteochondral interface, with a calcified cartilage interface separating a noncalcified cartilage layer and an underlying bone layer, using BMSCs adhered to collagen type I microspheres.²⁰⁹ Rabbit BMSCs were entrapped in collagen microspheres composed of a self-assembled nonfibrous meshwork.²⁰⁹ BMSCs in the collagen microspheres were separated into two groups; one group was immersed in chondrogenic differentiation medium to drive differentiation into a chondrogenic lineage, whereas the other group was immersed in osteogenic differentiation medium and differentiated into an osteogenic lineage. Hundreds of cartilage-like and bonelike microspheres were aggregated to form chondrogenic and osteogenic layers, respectively.²⁰⁹ Layers of these functional subunits were brought into contact with a central undifferentiated BMSC–collagen layer in a trilayered configuration for 3D cocultures. By 5 weeks, a calcified cartilage interface was formed between the noncalcified cartilage layer and the underlying bone layer. The cells at the interface region were found to be hypertrophic chondrocytes, and the extracellular matrix in this region contained collagen type II and type X, as well as calcium deposition. The osteochondral interface was reported to successively resemble the native osteochondral interface, based on the presence of hypertrophic chondrocytes, calcium phosphate deposits, collagen type II and type X, GAGs, and vertically aligned collagen bundles.²⁰⁹ Thus, an osteochondral construct with proper zonal organization can be engineered using rabbit BMSCs and collagen *in vitro*.

Collagen type I hydrogels and scaffolds have also been used to promote differentiation of stem cells into neural cells. Ma et al. reported differentiation of central nervous system (CNS) mammalian stem cells into neuronal circuits in collagen type I hydrogels.¹⁸⁹ The proliferative capacity and differentiating potential of neural progenitors in 3D collagen gels suggest their potential use to promote neuronal regeneration.

5.2.2. Organic Hybrid Scaffolds of Collagen Type I.

The mechanical strength, swelling properties, and degradation behavior of scaffolds, as well as their biocompatibility, play crucial roles in the long-term performance of tissue-engineered stem cell/biomaterial constructs.^{206,222–226} The shrinkage and weak mechanical strength of scaffolds present a serious problem for the use of purely collagen scaffolds in tissue engineering. Therefore, synthetic polymers or natural biopolymers are commonly blended into collagen scaffolds or hydrogels to enhance their mechanical strength (Table 8). No shrinking was observed in the scaffolds or hydrogels prepared from collagen blended with synthetic or natural biopolymers seeded with MSCs. Synthetic biopolymers, such as poly(L-lactic acid)-*co*-poly(3-caprolactone) (PLCL), poly(lactic-*co*-glycolic acid) (PLGA), and poly(glycolic acid) (PGA), and natural

biopolymers of alginate, chitosan, and hyaluronic acid are blended with collagen for this purpose.

It should be noted that the contractile properties of skeletal cells are physiologically important, and the *in vivo* functions of contractility must be accounted for when developing tissue-formation strategies.^{70,227,228} It was reported that a reduction in contraction induced by altering the cross-linking method of collagen–glycosaminoglycan scaffolds resulted in delayed collagen type II synthesis by articular chondrocytes.²²⁹ Thus, malleable ECM proteins and synthetic biopolymers may provide environmental cues that direct cell differentiation, and these considerations should be included in scaffold design.

Fujita et al. prepared three kinds of scaffolds: a collagen type I sponge, a PGA–collagen type I sponge, and a PGA–collagen type I (UV) sponge seeded with rat BMSCs.²⁰⁵ The PGA–collagen type I (UV) sponge was cross-linked by irradiation with UV light.²⁰⁵ The collagen type I sponges with BMSCs shrank considerably, whereas PGA–collagen type I and PGA–collagen type I (UV) sponges maintained their original shapes. PGA–collagen type I sponges with and without cross-linking by UV induced high ALP activity (indicative of osteogenic differentiation) in medium containing the osteogenic supplement dexamethasone. The addition of bFGF together with dexamethasone promoted increased cell proliferation. However, extremely low osteogenic differentiation of BMSCs was found in collagen type I, PGA–collagen type I, and PGA–collagen type I (UV) sponges without osteogenic supplements in the culture medium.²⁰⁵

Osteoblasts were reported to maintain their phenotype and MSCs to undergo osteogenesis when cultured in ECMs containing collagen type I.^{91,230,231} The interaction between collagen type I and $\alpha 2\beta 1$ integrin in MSCs, which was the major collagen type I receptor, was responsible for the osteoblastic differentiation of MSCs.^{91,231}

Hybrid-type scaffolds made by a simple preparation method have also been reported. This collagen type I sponge can be formed in and on a mechanically strong PLGA knitted mesh. Dai et al. prepared three types of scaffolds (Figure 9): (i)

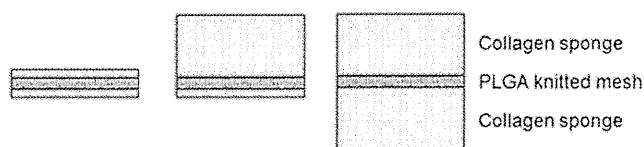


Figure 9. Schematic illustration of three structural designs of PLGA/collagen hybrid scaffolds. Black, PLGA knitted mesh; gray, collagen type I sponge. Modified with permission from ref 232. Copyright 2010 Elsevier Ltd.

collagen microsponges formed in the interstices of PLGA mesh; (ii) collagen microsponges formed on one side of PLGA mesh; (iii) collagen sponges formed on both sides of PLGA mesh.²³² All three groups of transplants showed homogeneous cell distribution, natural chondrocyte morphology, and abundant cartilaginous ECM deposition. Production of glycosaminoglycans and the expression of type II collagen and aggrecan mRNA were much higher in the collagen sponges formed on one or both sides of PLGA mesh than in the collagen sponges formed in interstices of the PLGA mesh. The engineered cartilage reached 54.8% (one side of PLGA mesh) and 49.3% (both sides of PLGA mesh) of the Young's modulus of native articular cartilage and 68.8% (one side) and 62.7%

(both sides) of the stiffness of the native tissue.²³² These scaffolds, therefore, could be used for the tissue engineering of articular cartilage with adjustable thickness. The design of the hybrid structures provides a potential strategy for the preparation of 3D porous scaffolds.

Hybrid scaffolds composed of collagen type I and natural biopolymers have also been studied for regeneration of bone, cartilage, and other tissues. Scaffolds composed of collagen type I and glycosaminoglycan have been developed for tissue engineering using stem cells by several researchers.⁵⁶ Farrell et al. prepared scaffolds composed of collagen type I and chondroitin 6-sulfate. Rat BMSCs underwent osteogenesis when grown on these scaffolds and stimulated with osteogenic factors (dexamethasone, ascorbic acid, and β -glycerophosphate), as evaluated by expression of collagen type I and osteocalcin and mineral deposition analyzed by Alizarin Red and von Kossa staining.⁵⁶ The stimulation by osteogenic factors was linked to activation of ECM-regulated protein kinase (ERK), which plays an important role in osteogenesis of MSCs.⁵⁶

Chitosan is a partially deacetylated derivative of chitin that is conducive to osteoblast growth.^{206,233} To improve the mechanical and biological properties of collagen scaffolds, Arpornmaeklong et al. prepared hybrid sponges composed of chitosan–collagen type I for osteogenic differentiation of rat BMSCs.²⁰⁶ The BMSCs attached successfully to the structure of the sponges. The expression of ALP and osteocalcin on collagen and chitosan–collagen type I composite sponges were greater than on chitosan sponges. A 1:1 chitosan–collagen sponge showed the highest compressive strength.²⁰⁶ Thus, combined chitosan–collagen matrixes promoted osteoblastic differentiation of BMSCs and improved their mechanical and physical properties.

5.2.3. Scaffolds Using Collagen Type II and Type III.

Whereas collagen type I is used for culture and scaffold materials that promote osteogenic differentiation of MSCs by mimicking the bone environment, collagen type II should be the ideal material for scaffolds that promote chondrogenic differentiation. However, only collagen type I has already been approved for clinical usage by the FDA, and collagen type I is much less expensive than collagen type II. Therefore, many investigators study chondrogenic differentiation of MSCs in collagen type I gels.

It is extremely difficult for MSCs to differentiate into chondrocytes in 2D monolayer cultures. Hanging-drop and pellet cultures of MSCs are the gold standards for chondrogenic differentiation of MSCs.²¹⁹ High seeding density promotes greater chondrogenic differentiation, indicating that cell–cell contact and autocrine growth factors are important in the chondrogenesis. The condensation of MSCs triggers the initiation of chondrogenesis during skeletal development,²³⁴ providing the rationale for chondrogenic high-density pellet cultures.^{70,235} The inhibition of *N*-cadherin, a cell–cell adhesion molecule transiently upregulated during chondrogenesis, was found to disrupt cell condensation and BMP-2/ β -catenin-mediated chondrogenic gene expression in vitro.^{70,236} In addition, cell morphology in hanging-drop and pellet cultures is round as opposed to spread, as it is in monolayer culture. Morphological regulation is another key factor that promotes chondrogenesis of MSCs.

Bosnakovski et al. investigated chondrogenic differentiation of bovine BMSCs in different hydrogels compared to tissue culture polystyrene plates (monolayer culture).⁹¹ BMSCs were

cultured in alginate, collagen type I, and collagen type II hydrogels. The chondrogenic differentiation marker genes Sox9, collagen type II, aggrecan, and cartilage oligomeric protein (COMP) were upregulated in collagen type I and collagen type II hydrogels. No significantly different expressions of these chondrogenic differentiation genes were found between the different collagen hydrogels, but the genes were expressed at extremely low levels by cells in monolayer cultures.⁹¹ Chondrogenic differentiation of BMSCs in both collagen type I and type II was superior to that in alginate gels, based on the expression of chondrogenic genes; however, chondrogenic differentiation in alginate was higher than that of monolayer cultures. This finding indicates that both collagen type I and type II are suitable biopolymers for chondrogenic differentiation of BMSCs. Interestingly, the expression of chondrogenic differentiation genes in BMSCs in collagen type I and type II hydrogels in normal expansion medium was not very different from that of cells chondrogenic medium (supplemented with TGF- β 1 and dexamethasone) in this study.⁹¹ Cells adopted a round, plump shape and could not spread out in hydrogels. Therefore, both the physical space effects that induce the round morphology of BMSCs and the biological interactions between cells and collagen promote chondrogenic differentiation of BMSCs.⁷¹ The expression of collagen type I gene is a marker of dedifferentiation of chondrocytes.⁹¹ The expression of collagen type I gene, which was relatively high in expansion medium, could be suppressed in BMSCs in collagen hydrogels using chondrogenic differentiation medium supplemented with TGF- β 1 and dexamethasone.⁹¹

In summary, BMSCs cultured solely in collagen type I scaffolds or hydrogels cannot be differentiated into osteoblasts without supplementation (dexamethasone, ascorbic acid, and/or BMP-2), whereas hydrogels composed of collagen type I and type II can induce chondrogenesis without supplements. Chondrogenic differentiation of BMSCs in collagen type II hydrogels seems to be better than in collagen type I. Collagen type II is the predominant component of hyaline cartilage. Chondrocytes bind to collagen type II through α 1 β 1, α 2 β 1, and α 10 β 1 integrins, which promote the formation of signaling complexes for differentiation, matrix remodeling, cell survival, and response to mechanical stimulation.^{91,237} Mitogen-activated protein kinase (MAPK) plays an important role in mediating the downstream signal from integrins, and it can regulate gene expression through activation of transcription factors such as NF κ B and AP-1.

Lu et al. investigated whether collagen type II favors chondrogenic induction by affecting cell shape through β 1 integrins and Rho A/Rock signaling using ADSCs entrapped into collagen type I and type II hydrogels.⁷¹ The following points were observed. (a) ADSCs in collagen type II hydrogels showed more efficient chondrogenic induction and higher expression of chondrocyte marker genes (collagen type II, collagen type X, Sox6, Sox9, and aggrecan) than those in collagen type I hydrogels, when cells were cultured in expansion medium and chondrogenic induction medium. (b) ADSCs in collagen type II hydrogels showed lower Rock 2 expression and a more round shape than those in collagen type I hydrogels in expansion medium. (c) β 1 integrin blocking not only reduced the differences in chondrogenic gene expression but also eliminated the differences in Rock 1 and Rock 2 gene expression and cell shape compared with ADSCs in collagen type I and type 2 hydrogels.⁷¹ It can be concluded that collagen

type II provides the inductive signal for chondrogenic differentiation in ADSCs by promoting a round cell shape through $\beta 1$ integrin-mediated Rho A/Rock signaling.⁷¹

A combination of collagen type I and type III, which are the most abundant proteins in the osteocyte environment, is osteoinductive, and hybrid scaffolds comprised of collagen type I and type III have been used for MSC culture materials.^{34,238–240} Schneider et al. investigated the osteogenic differentiation of BMSCs and perinatal MSCs from Wharton's jelly of the umbilical cord (UC-MSC) in hybrid scaffolds of collagen type I (90%) and type III (10%).³⁴ Because of their primitive state, UC-MSCs were expected to possess a higher differentiation potential than BMSCs, which lack the expression of embryonic stem cell markers (Oct4 and Nanog). However, UC-MSCs had a poor ability to differentiate into adipocytes in monolayer culture and in 3D culture.^{34,241,242} Furthermore, BMSCs exhibited the most robust osteogenic induction and extracellular mineralization when cultured under osteogenic conditions in a monolayer. However, UC-MSCs in hybrid scaffolds of collagen type I and type III exceeded BM-MSCs in ECM protein synthesis.³⁴ UC-MSCs and BMSCs displayed all the features needed for effective bone fracture healing in vivo. The expression of ECM proteins differed considerably in the two cell types, suggesting different mechanisms for bone formation.

5.2.4. Hybrid Collagen Scaffolds Using Inorganic Materials. The major components of human bone are inorganic hydroxyapatite (a natural ceramic) and organic collagen type I. In addition, there are small amounts of ground substances, such as glycoproteins, proteoglycans, and velum lipids, which have been demonstrated to play important roles in regulating bone regeneration and mineralization.^{204,243}

Natural bone is composed of nanosized carbonate substituted hydroxyapatite (nano-HYA) crystals within a collagen network. The generation of scaffolds closely resembling the composition and microstructure of collagen and nano-HYA in bone should be useful for osteogenic differentiation of BMSCs.⁷⁰ Several researchers have suggested that hydroxyapatite (HYA) promotes differentiation of MSCs into osteoblasts.^{191,244} Dawson et al. prepared collagen-HYA scaffolds as follows: HYA solution was added to a collagen solution, and the solution was frozen at -30 or -80 °C. Then, the frozen collagen-HYA solid was dehydrated. Critical point drying with liquid CO_2 resulted in dry porous scaffolds.⁷⁰ Primary hBMSCs were seeded onto collagen-HYA scaffolds and following 72 h of osteogenic induction were subcutaneously implanted into immunodeficient mice. After 4 weeks, the implanted cell-scaffold constructs were slightly compacted within the subcutaneous cavity and surrounded with host neovasculature.⁷⁰ The collagen-HYA scaffolds were fully integrated with the host tissue, and significant cell invasion into the scaffolds was observed. New osteoid matrix was evidenced by the characteristic appearance of cells embedded in lacunae within the matrix and the birefringence of organized collagen fibers under polarized light.⁷⁰ In addition, collagen-HYA scaffolds seeded with hBMSCs and cultured for 48 h in osteogenic conditions were implanted subcutaneously in immunodeficient mice on a devitalized mouse femur with a segmental "v"-shaped defect. Implanted cell-scaffold constructs demonstrated good integration with mouse femurs, as evidenced by large areas of deposited matrix surrounding the defect site and encapsulation of the femur edges. Thus, collagen-HYA scaffolds can support osteogenesis in vivo. Both

collagen and HYA enhance the osteogenic response in collagen-HYA scaffolds embedded with MSCs. It is proposed that collagen-hydroxyapatite or collagen-nanocrystalline hydroxyapatite scaffolds have better osteoconductive properties than hydroxyapatite or collagen alone.^{70,191,245,246}

Bioactive glasses (BGs) such as $\text{CaO-P}_2\text{O}_5\text{-SiO}_2$ are similar to natural inorganic components of bone and have been shown to stimulate the formation of calcium phosphates from physiological solutions, resulting in enhanced bone-matrix interface strength.^{204,247} Composite materials composed of a bioactive glass and collagen type I have been reported as bone tissue engineering scaffolds.^{204,248} Matrix vesicles, extracellular lipid bilayer-enclosed microstructures released by calcifying cells, have been reported to initiate mineral formation during bone formation.²⁴⁹ In particular, phosphatidylserine (PPS) has a high affinity for calcium ions and should be an important component of newly forming bone.^{250,251} Xu et al. prepared biomimetic composite scaffolds of bioglass-collagen-phosphatidylserine (BG-COL-PPS) using a freeze-drying technique.²⁰⁴ The BG-COL-PPS composite scaffolds consisted of 65 wt % inorganic components and 35 wt % organic components, where the organic component was composed of 80% collagen type I and 20% PPS. BMSCs in BG-COL-PPS composite scaffolds exhibited a higher degree of cell attachment, growth, and osteogenic differentiation than those on BG-COL scaffolds in vitro, which was determined by dsDNA content, ALP activity, osteogenic gene expression (ALP, osteopontin, and osteocalcin), and Alizarin Red staining.²⁰⁴

BG-COL-PPS scaffolds seeded with and without rat BMSCs were implanted in rat femur defects to investigate their in vivo biocompatibility and osteogenesis.²⁰⁴ BG-COL-PPS scaffolds exhibited good biocompatibility and extensive osteoconductivity with host bone. BG-COL-PPS with BMSCs dramatically enhanced the efficiency of new bone formation compared to BG-COL-PPS without BMSCs or BG-COL with BMSCs.²⁰⁴ This study demonstrates the usefulness of PPS in collagen-bioglass hybrid scaffolds for inducing enhanced bone formation.

5.2.5. Collagen Scaffolds Immobilized Antibody-Targeting Stem Cells. Although some stem cells are known to circulate in the body, mobilized stem cells cannot be specifically recruited into the injury sites in the body.⁴⁰ In heart disease, tissue-engineered cardiac patches made of ECM proteins have been used to treat heart failure, but myocardial repair was limited due to the low capacity for stem cell infiltration.^{40,252,253} A new approach, in which stem cells are recruited from circulation system using scaffolds with immobilized antibodies or ligands that bind specific stem cells, was reported by Shi et al.⁴⁰ (Figure 3e). They developed collagen scaffolds, and membranes covalently immobilized anti-Sca-1 monoclonal antibody using Traut's reagent and sulfosuccinimidyl-4-[*N*-maleimidomethyl] cyclohexane-1-carboxylate (sulfo-SMCC).⁴⁰ Sca-1 is a member of the Ly 6 family and is a common marker for adult murine hematopoietic stem cells. Furthermore, Sca-1-positive cells derived from skeletal muscle and heart were reported to be multipotent.²⁵⁴ Shi et al. attempted to enrich autologous stem cells at wound sites using a stem cell-capturing collagen scaffold conjugated with a Sca 1 monoclonal antibody in mice.⁴⁰ The antibody-conjugated scaffold was implanted in the hind leg muscles. Sca-1-positive cells were found to be enriched 3-fold in the scaffolds conjugated with anti-Sca-1 monoclonal antibody than in the scaffolds without antibody. When the functional collagen

scaffold was transplanted into mice as a cardiac patch to repair a surgical heart defect, more cells and capillaries infiltrated implants with immobilized anti-Sca-1 antibody.⁴⁰ Twelve weeks after surgery, the regeneration of cardiomyocytes was reported in antibody-conjugated cardiac patches, whereas collagen remodeling and tissue regeneration were retarded in control cardiac patches. Collagen scaffolds embedded with antibodies or ligands targeting specific stem cells represent another effective strategy for recruiting and maintaining stem cells at injury sites.

5.2.6. Differentiation into Ectoderm and Endoderm Lineages Using Collagen Scaffolds. Scaffolds and gels composed of collagen are mainly used in tissue engineering for osteogenic and chondrogenic differentiation of MSCs. However, collagen scaffolds have also been used for ectodermal and endodermal differentiation of MSCs.^{189,216,217}

Poly(L-lactic acid-co-3-caprolactone) (PLCL), which is a synthetic and biodegradable polymer and a nontoxic copolymer of poly(L-lactic acid) (PLLA) and PCL, has been investigated as a biomaterial for surgery and drug-delivery systems.^{45,255} Collagen, on the other hand, is a natural ECM protein with high cell-adhesion properties but weak mechanical strength. Prabhakaran et al. prepared electrospun nanofibers by blending collagen with PLCL, which improved its biocompatibility while preserving mechanical strength and providing a hydrophilic mesh with high porosity and small fiber diameters that are desirable for nerve tissue engineering.⁴⁵ MSCs differentiated on PLCL/collagen type I nanofibrous scaffolds showed neuronal morphology with multipolar elongations and expressed neurofilament (NF200) and nestin protein, as shown by immunofluorescent labeling.⁴⁵

The mammalian central system (CNS) has little capacity for self-repair after injury, and neurons do not proliferate. Therefore, neural tissue engineering using hydrogels seeded with neural stem cells may expand the options for treatment of damaged CNS tissues. Ma et al. prepared collagen type I gels seeded with neural stem cells isolated from embryonic rat cortical or subcortical neuroepithelium and cultured them in serum-free medium.¹⁸⁹ The collagen-entrapped stem cells expanded and efficiently generated neurons, which developed neuronal polarity, neurotransmitters, ion channels/receptors, and excitability.¹⁸⁹ The differentiation from BrdU⁺/Tuj1⁻ to BrdU⁻/Tuj1⁺ cells was accompanied by a shift in the expression of functional receptors for neurotransmitters from cholinergic and purinergic to GABAergic and glutamatergic.¹⁸⁹ Spontaneous postsynaptic currents were recorded by patch-clamping from stem cell-derived neurons. These results suggest that neural stem cells cultured in collagen gels recapitulate CNS stem cell development.

5.3. Gelatin

Gelatin is heat-denatured collagen, which is a mixture of peptides and proteins produced by partial hydrolysis of collagen extracted from the boiled bones, connective tissues, organs, and intestines of animals.²⁵⁶ Gelatin exists as a heterogeneous mixture of single- or multistranded polypeptides containing between 300 and 4000 amino acids. There are two general types of gelatin, type A and type B.²⁵⁶ Gelatin type A is extracted and processed by acidic pretreatment of collagen, whereas gelatin type B is obtained by alkaline pretreatment.²⁵⁶ The alkaline pretreatment converts glutamine and asparagine residues into glutamic and aspartic acids, respectively, which leads to a higher carboxylic acid content for gelatin type B than

for gelatin type A. Gelatin has several potential advantages over other natural proteins, such as its biological origin, biodegradability, commercial availability, and low cost.²⁵⁶ Gelatin melts to a liquid when heated and solidifies when cooled. Therefore, it is easy to prepare hydrogels and to entrap stem cells in gelatin. The chemical composition of gelatin is, in many respects, similar to that of its parent collagen. Table 9 summarizes several types of gelatin scaffolds or materials for MSC differentiation reported in the literature.^{99,192,256–263}

Table 9. Some Research Studies for Stem Cell Differentiation on Gelatin Materials in 2D and 3D Culture

| stem cell source ^a | material for stem cell culture | differentiation | ref |
|-------------------------------|---|---|-----|
| hBMSCs | gelatin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts | 217 |
| hBMSCs | gelatin/HA (2D culture, hydrogel particles) | osteoblasts | 99 |
| hBMSCs | gelatin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | pancreatic cells, neural cells, osteoblasts, adipocytes | 257 |
| rat BMSCs | gelatin (3D culture, scaffold) | osteoblasts | 258 |
| rat BMSCs | gelatin (3D culture, microparticles) | osteoblasts | 259 |
| hADSCs | gelatin (3D culture, scaffold) | chondrocytes | 262 |
| rBMSCs | gelatin/esterified HA (3D culture, scaffold) | chondrocytes | 260 |
| hBMSCs | gelatin (3D culture, scaffold) | cartilage | 261 |
| hADSCs | gelatin/PCL (3D culture, electrospinning mat), gelatin/collagen I/PCL (3D culture, electrospinning mat) | | 256 |

^aADSCs, adipose-derived stem cells; BMSCs, bone marrow stromal cells; hADSCs, human ADSCs; hBMSCs, human BMSCs; rBMSCs, rabbit BMSCs. ^bPCL, poly(ϵ -caprolactone); HA, hyaluronic acid.

5.3.1. Gelatin Scaffolds and Hydrogels. Ponticello et al. used a porous gelatin sponge, Gelfoam (used as hemostatic agent), as a delivery vehicle for hMSCs in cartilage-regeneration therapy. hMSC in Gelfoam produced a cartilage-like ECM containing sulfated glycosaminoglycans and collagen type II after 21 days of cultivation in vitro.²⁶¹ Gelfoam cylinders containing hMSCs were observed to be biocompatible, with no evidence of immune response or lymphocytic infiltration at the site of implantation in an osteochondral defect in the rabbit femoral condyle. Gelfoam resorbable gelatin sponges may be a promising candidate as a carrier matrix for hMSC-based cartilage-regenerative therapies.²⁶¹

Chondrogenic differentiation of human ADSCs (hADSCs) in gelatin scaffolds (Surgifoam) and in alginate and agarose hydrogels was investigated by Awad et al.²⁶² hADSCs in gelatin scaffolds showed more polygonal shapes, whereas cells encapsulated in alginate and agarose exhibited a spherical morphology. Significant cell-mediated contraction of the gelatin scaffolds (discs) was observed, with a reduction of up to 70% and 87% of their initial diameters under chondrogenic and control culture conditions, respectively, while alginate and agarose disks containing cells did not exhibit any contraction.²⁶² Protein and proteoglycan biosynthesis rates in the gelatin scaffolds were significantly higher than in agarose (31%) and alginate (68%) on day 1.²⁶² The number of cells in gelatin scaffolds was 37–51% greater than in agarose and alginate scaffolds on days 14 and 28. Sulfated glycosaminoglycan and

hydroxyproline content increased significantly (by 2.5- to 9-fold) between days 1 and 28 for all scaffolds containing cells grown in chondrogenic conditions.²⁶² Gel contraction was generated in the regions enriched in chondroitin sulfate and collagen type II, which indicate cartilage generation. The gelatin scaffolds and agarose hydrogels had shear moduli three times greater than alginate hydrogels. However, it should be noted that the compressive and shear moduli of these scaffolds and hydrogels were on the order of 5% or less than those of native cartilage.^{262,264,265} The increase in shear modulus was found to be significantly correlated with increases in sulfated glycosaminoglycan content and hydroxyproline content. Gelatin is an attractive biomaterial for scaffold of hMSCs or hADSCs. However, it is necessary to design gelatin-based scaffolds containing hMSCs or hADSCs that have similar compressive and shear moduli to native cartilage in future.²⁶²

Payne et al. investigated an injectable, in situ cross-linkable, degradable gelatin carrier for MSCs. MSCs were encapsulated in un-cross-linked gelatin microparticles with an average diameter of 630 μm , each containing ~ 53 cells.²⁵⁹ Gelatin microparticles were cross-linked to a shell thickness of 75 μm via exposure to dithiobis(succinimidylpropionate) (DSP) solution. MSCs survived in un-cross-linked and cross-linked gelatin microparticles and retained their proliferative potential and osteoblastic phenotype over 28 days.²⁵⁹ The encapsulation of cells in microparticles cross-linked with DSP holds promise for temporarily protecting cells from toxic local environments.²⁵⁹

MSCs are generated by plating cells from bone marrow (BM) or other sources in tissue culture polystyrene (TCPS) flasks and selecting plastic-adherent cells with fibroblastoid morphology. Battula et al. selected MSCs from BM and nonamniotic placenta (PL) by culturing Ficoll-selected cells in gelatin-coated flasks in serum-free medium containing bFGF, which was used for hESC expansion.²⁵⁷ MSCs generated in gelatin-coated flasks in hESC medium showed a 4- to 5-fold higher proliferation rate than conventionally prepared MSCs, which were grown in TCPS in serum-containing medium. In contrast, the colony-forming unit-fibroblast (CFU-F) number was only 1.5- to 2-fold increased in PL-MSCs and was not affected in BM-MSCs. PL-MSCs and BM-MSCs grown on gelatin-coated dishes in hESC medium showed increased expression of the pluripotent stem and progenitor cell markers SSEA-4, Oct-4, nanog-3, and nestin, as well as frizzled-9 (FZD-9). PL-MSCs expressed Oct-4, SSEA-4, and FZD-9 at higher levels than BM-MSCs.²⁵⁷ However, PL-MSCs and BM-MSCs cultured on TCPS expressed significantly lower levels of SSEA-4, Oct-4, and nestin than those cultured on gelatin-coated dishes. No expression of FZD-9 and nanog-3 was seen in BM-MSCs and PL-MSCs cultured on gelatin-coated dishes. The MSCs cultured on gelatin-coated dishes exhibited multilineage differentiation capacity, as demonstrated by their potential to give rise to cells of ectodermal (neuron-like) and endodermal (pancreatic-like) differentiation lineages, as well as mesodermal lineages (osteoblast, adipocytes).²⁵⁷ Notably, the CFU-F capacity of BM-MSC and PL-MSC was not significantly altered by the different culture conditions, suggesting that the stem cell pool of MSCs was not affected. Battula et al. proposed that FZD-9 might represent a marker of primitive MSCs, which could distinguish them from mature MSCs, and can be explained by the fact that Wnt-FZD9 signaling is important for stem cell renewal.²⁵⁷

The optimal ECM for selecting primitive MSCs by culturing bone marrow, amniotic fluid, and adipose tissue on ECM-coated or ECM-grafted substrates has not yet been determined and should be a key research topic for biomaterial researchers in future. Specific ECM-coated or ECM-grafted dishes might select cells with higher pluripotency and greater quantities of primitive MSCs compared with gelatin-coated dishes or TCPS.

Photoinitiated cross-linking of gelatin hydrogels incorporated with chondrocytes has also been reported.²⁶⁶ The gelatin molecule was modified with methacrylic acid (MA) to obtain cross-linkable gelatin, which formed a chemically cross-linked hydrogel by photoinitiated polymerization. The gelation time could be easily tuned and showed an inverse relationship with gelatin concentration. No detectable double carbon bonds were reported to be observed in the hydrogels from analysis of the hydrogen spectrum of high-resolution magic-angle spinning nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy.²⁶⁶ The storage modulus and loss modulus of the hydrogels were found to increase with increasing gelatin concentrations, whereas the swelling ratio and mesh size were reported to decrease.²⁶⁶ TGF- $\beta 1$ was also incorporated into the gelatin hydrogel to improve its bioactivity.²⁶⁶ In vitro chondrocyte culture showed that the gelatin hydrogel had excellent performance in supporting chondrocyte growth and maintaining the chondrocytic phenotype. Incorporation of TGF- $\beta 1$ was found to further improve the biological activity in terms of both ECM secretion and cell proliferation.²⁶⁶

5.3.2. Gelatin Hybrid Scaffolds. Gelatin is reported to be an excellent substrate for cell attachment, proliferation, and differentiation.^{260,267–269} However, the disadvantages of using gelatin as a scaffold in tissue engineering are its low biomechanical stiffness and rapid biodegradation.^{260,268} Esterified hyaluronic acids are longer-lived biomaterial matrices, and scaffolds prepared from esterified hyaluronic acids persist long enough to be a useful in vivo substrate for differentiation of MSCs and matrix formation. However, esterified hyaluronic acid-based surfaces can impede cell attachment,^{260,267} and MSCs on the surface are reported to (re)differentiate in vitro.²⁶⁰ Hyaff11, a pure hyaluronic acid benzyl ester, was reported to undergo degradation by spontaneous hydrolysis of the ester bonds in two months in vitro^{260,270} and in 3–5 months in vivo.^{260,271} Cell-loaded gelatin sponges were reported to dissolve after 10 days in culture because of collagenolytic activity of infiltrating cells^{260,271} and after 7–14 days in vivo.^{260,272}

Angele et al. investigated the ability of a composite scaffold made of esterified hyaluronic acid (Jaloskin, 70%) and gelatin (30%) to facilitate the differentiation of rabbit BMSCs to engineer cartilage and bone. The composite scaffolds were prepared by a salt-leaching method.²⁶⁰ The composite scaffolds had pores with two different size ranges, 50–150 μm and 250–500 μm in diameter, and contained mainly interconnected and a few blind-ended pores. Empty and cell-loaded composite scaffolds were cultivated for up to 28 days in the medium with and without TGF- $\beta 1$. A collagen type II-rich ECM was produced by cells loaded in the composite scaffolds and cultured in the presence of TGF- $\beta 1$.²⁶⁰ The composite scaffolds supported osteochondrogenic cell differentiation of rabbit BMSCs when they were implanted subcutaneously into immunodeficient mice, whereas no osteochondral differentiation was found in implanted composite scaffolds without cells.²⁶⁰ In vitro preculturing in a chondrogenic medium increased the percentage of osteochondral tissue in the

composite scaffolds after 3 weeks *in vivo*. These results indicate that these composite scaffolds might be useful for tissue engineering.²⁶⁰

Takahashi et al. fabricated biodegradable gelatin sponges incorporating various amounts of β -tricalcium phosphate (β TCP) (gelatin- β TCP)²⁶³ and investigated the *in vitro* osteogenic differentiation of MSCs isolated from rat bone marrow. The gelatin sponges incorporating β TCP had an interconnected pore structure with the average size of 180–200 μ m, irrespective of the amount of β TCP.²⁶³ The stiffness of the sponges became higher with increasing amounts of β TCP. When seeded by agitation, MSCs were homogeneously distributed throughout the sponge. The morphology of cells attached to the gelatin- β TCP became more spread with the greater amounts of β TCP.²⁶³ The rate of MSC proliferation depended on the amount of β TCP and the culture method: the more β TCP in the stirring culture, the higher was the proliferation rate. The extent of deformation of the gelatin- β TCP sponges was reduced with increasing amounts of β TCP. ALP activity and osteocalcin content, as markers of osteogenic differentiation, were greatest for the sponge with a β TCP amount of 50% (wt).²⁶³ ALP activity and osteocalcin content were found to be significantly higher in stirring cultures compared with those in static cultures. Thus, the attachment, proliferation, and osteogenic differentiation of MSCs are influenced by the composition of gelatin and β TCP sponges.

Electrospinning using natural ECM proteins is a promising technique for the fabrication of fibrous scaffolds for various tissue-engineering applications. One limitation of scaffolds electrospun from natural ECM proteins is the need to use a cross-linking agent for stability, which has been postulated to lead to many complications *in vivo*, including graft failure. Currently, glutaraldehyde has mainly been investigated as a cross-linking agent for electrospun collagen-based nanofibers.^{273–276} Glutaraldehyde was required for intermolecular cross-linking of the fibers in the scaffolds for cell culture to prevent dissolution in culture medium. The cross-linked scaffolds showed markedly thickened fibers that frequently merged into one another, and the porosity decreased dramatically, making them unsuitable scaffolds for 3D culture of stem cells. Furthermore, residual glutaraldehyde is significantly toxic to tissue and stem cells.²⁵⁶

Heydarkhan-Hagvall et al. prepared hybrid nanofiber scaffolds of gelatin and poly(ϵ -caprolactone) (PCL), as well as hybrid nanofiber scaffolds of collagen, elastin, and PCL, using electrospinning without a toxic cross-linking agent.²⁵⁶ Electrospun gelatin/PCL scaffolds showed a higher tensile strength compared to collagen/elastin/PCL constructs. PCL doping of the ECM protein solution as the electrospinning solution generated self-standing scaffolds in aqueous environment. It was necessary to increase the PCL concentration to at least 5% in the scaffolds to maintain their three-dimensional and porous structures without the use of glutaraldehyde.²⁵⁶ Both hybrid scaffolds were seeded with ADSCs to determine the effects of pore size on cell attachment and migration. Complete cell attachment was reported on the surfaces of both hybrid scaffolds. It was found that cell migration into the scaffold was predominantly observed in the gelatin/PCL hybrid.²⁵⁶ The combination of 10% PCL with 10% gelatin resulted in significantly higher tensile strength compared to gelatin or collagen and elastin alone, and this resulted in a uniform and pliant fiber mat.²⁵⁶ We can conclude that electrospinning of hybrid scaffolds with natural proteins and

synthetic polymers can be used to produce tissue-engineered scaffolds that better recapitulate key features of the native ECM, including its mechanical and biochemical properties. The combination of natural proteins and synthetic polymers to create electrospun fibrous structures results in scaffolds with favorable mechanical and biological properties.²⁵⁶

5.4. Laminin

Laminins are one of the major glycoproteins found in the basal lamina, which is critical for mediating a variety of cellular activities, including adhesion, proliferation, migration, and differentiation. Laminins are trimeric proteins that contain an α -chain, a β -chain, and a γ -chain, which have five, four, and three genetic variants, respectively.¹⁰⁰ Laminin molecules are named according to their chain composition, e.g., laminin-111 contains α 1, β 1, and γ 1 chains (Laminin-1) and laminin-332 contains α 3, β 3, and γ 2 chains (Laminin-5).²⁷⁷ Laminin is frequently used as coating for cell culture materials, and it promotes differentiation into osteoblasts,²⁷⁸ cardiocytes,^{83,279} and neural cells.^{76,79,101,215,280–282} Laminin is known to make direct contact with adult neural stem cells (hNSC's) via basal lamina-like extensions from blood vessels in the subventricular zone.²⁸³ Therefore, laminin is frequently used as a coating material on the dishes for the culturing of neural cells.²² Table 10 summarizes several types of laminin-coated scaffolds and dishes for MSC differentiation reported in the literature.^{37,43,53,76,79,83,97,101,102,149,192,198,200,201,278,279,284–286}

Yu et al. developed an efficient method to induce the generation of proliferative dopaminergic neurons from rat NSCs in the presence of bFGF, heparin, and laminin *in vitro* and *in vivo*.²⁸⁵ In their research, neurospheres of rat NSCs were cultured on dishes coated with 0.01% poly-D-lysine (PDL) and 1 μ g/cm² laminin in culture medium supplemented with bFGF and heparin. The majority of cells remained nestin positive, which indicates neural stem cells, for one day of differentiation. Neurons were derived from neurospheres, of which some were TH positive (TH⁺, dopaminergic) and a few cells were GFAP (glial fibrillary acidic protein) positive.²⁸⁵ After differentiation for 7 days, more neurons were found to have become dopaminergic positive cells. Cells primed by bFGF and heparin and cultured on dishes coated with PDL and laminin for 7 days *in vitro* were injected into ventral tegmental area (VTA) and medial forebrain bundle (MFB) region of lesioned rats to evaluate whether the NSCs could become dopaminergic neurons *in vivo*.²⁸⁵ TH⁺ cells were found mainly near the injection sites after grafting of 5×10^4 primed NSCs. It was suggested that combination of bFGF and heparin could induce the generation of dopaminergic neurons from rat NSCs cultured on dishes coated with PDL and laminin *in vivo* and *in vitro*.²⁸⁵

Oligodendrocytes are glial cells responsible for myelin formation and maintenance in the central nervous system (CNS), and they are depleted in many acute and chronic diseases [e.g., Pelizaeus-Merzbacher disease and multiple sclerosis (MS)]. NSCs derived from human cord blood cells were reported to undergo oligogliogenesis when cultured on dishes coated with laminin, but not with poly-L-lysine, collagen type I, or fibronectin.³⁷ The adhesion of NSCs to laminin promoted a 2.4-fold increase in the oligodendrocyte number (11.8% on laminin versus 4.9% in controls).³⁷ Matrix metalloproteinase (MMP) expression was also reported to increase 3.6-fold on dishes coated with laminin (3.6% on

Table 10. Some Research Studies for Stem Cell Differentiation on 2D and 3D Laminin Materials

| stem cell source ^a | material for stem cell culture ^b | differentiation | ref |
|-------------------------------|--|---------------------------|----------|
| hBMSCs | laminin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts | 149, 192 |
| hBMSCs | laminin-1 (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts | 97 |
| hBMSCs | laminin-5 (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts | 278, 284 |
| hBMSCs | laminin-5 (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts, chondrocytes | 102 |
| hADSCs | laminin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | adipocytes | 53 |
| hBMSCs | laminin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | smooth muscle cells | 83 |
| hADSCs | laminin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | cardiomyocytes | 279 |
| hESCs (TE03, TE06) | laminin/PDL (2D culture, coating) | neural cells | 79 |
| hBMSCs | laminin-1 (2D culture, coating on dishes) | neural cells | 101 |
| hBMSCs | laminin-10/11 (2D culture, coating on dishes) | neural cells | 101 |
| mESCs | laminin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | neural cells | 198 |
| rat neural stem cells | laminin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | dopaminergic neurons | 285 |
| human neural stem cells | laminin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | oligoglyocytes | 37 |
| mESCs | laminin-332 (2D culture, coating on dishes) | lung epithelium | 286 |
| mouse hepatic stem cells | laminin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | hepatocytes | 200 |
| mESCs | laminin-332 (3D culture, coating on PDDL, sheet) | lung epithelium | 286 |
| rat neural stem cells | laminin (3D culture, coating on PES fiber mesh) | neural cells | 43 |
| hBMSCs | laminin (3D culture, coating on PLGA microcarrier) | dopamin-secreting neurons | 76 |
| hBMSCs | laminin (3D culture, coating on PLLA sheet) | smooth muscle cells | 83 |

^aADSCs, adipose-derived stem cells; BMSCs, bone marrow stromal cells; ESCs, embryonic stem cells; hADSCs, human ADSCs; hBMSCs, human BMSCs; hESCs, human ESCs. ^bPDL, poly-D-lysine; PDDL, poly-DL-lactic acid; PES, polyethersulfone; PLGA, poly(lactic-co-glycolic acid); PLLA, poly-L-lactic acid.

laminin, 3.0% on fibronectin, 2.0% on poly-L-lysine and collagen type I, and 1% in controls), which suggested a link between ECM, especially laminin, and the activity of metalloproteinases in the cells.³⁷

Tate et al. investigated the transplantation of laminin- or fibronectin-based scaffolds containing neural stem cells into traumatically injured mouse brain.²¹⁵ Survival of neural stem cells was enhanced in the laminin-based scaffold compared to the fibronectin-based scaffold. The mice that received neural stem cells in the laminin-based scaffold performed significantly better than untreated mice on a spatial learning task. These findings support the idea that selecting the appropriate ECM for the scaffold loading neural stem cells can improve cell-transplantation therapy.²¹⁵

Ma et al. reported the effect of ECM proteins on neural differentiation of hESCs.⁷⁹ Embryoid bodies derived from hESCs were plated on dishes coated with PDL, PDL/fibronectin, PDL/laminin, collagen type I, and Matrigel and cultured in neural differentiation medium. Neural progenitors

and neuronal differentiation were observed to different degrees depending on the substrate on which the embryonic bodies were cultured. Neural progenitor generation, neuronal generation, and neural outgrowth were found to be significantly greater on dishes coated with laminin and laminin-rich Matrigel substrates than on other ECM protein-coated dishes.⁷⁹ Laminin stimulated hESC-derived neural progenitor expansion and neural outgrowth in a dose-dependent manner. The cells from embryoid bodies of hESCs interacted with laminin through $\alpha6\beta1$ integrin receptors, implicating the role of laminin/ $\alpha6\beta1$ integrin signaling in directing neural differentiation of hESCs.⁷⁹

Mruthyunjaya et al. investigated the neurite outgrowth induction potential of hBMSCs cultured on dishes coated with fibronectin, collagen type I, collagen type IV, laminin-1, and laminin-10/11 in the absence of growth factors and induction agents.¹⁰¹ All of ECM proteins evaluated were found to support adhesion of hBMSCs to different degrees, but only direct interaction with laminin-1 triggered sprouting of neurite-like processes. hBMSCs plated on dishes coated with laminin-1 exhibited neurites with contracted cell bodies and neuronal morphology and neurite outgrowth by 24 h.¹⁰¹ The interaction of hBMSCs with laminin-1 was mediated through $\alpha6\beta1$ integrin receptors and the MEK/ERK signaling pathway, as neurite outgrowth was suppressed by inhibiting these signals.¹⁰¹

Laminin-5 is known to be present in bone and is also expressed by hBMSCs.²⁷⁸ hBMSCs synthesize laminin-5 and adhere to exogenous laminin-5 through $\alpha3\beta1$ integrin. Laminin-5 contributes to the development of bone tissues by promoting proliferation and by suppressing the chondrogenic differentiation of hBMSCs.¹⁰²

Klees et al. reported that the adhesion of hBMSCs to laminin-5 activated ERK within 30 min and led to phosphorylation of the osteogenic transcription factor Runx2/CBFA-1 within 8 days.^{278,284} hBMSCs cultured on dishes coated with laminin-5 for 16 days expressed increased levels of osteogenic marker genes including ALP, osteocalcin, and osteopontin. Cells cultured for 21 days deposited a mineralized matrix, which indicated osteogenic differentiation.²⁷⁸ Addition of the ERK inhibitor PD98059 to the culture medium inhibited osteogenic differentiation of hBMSCs cultured on dishes coated with laminin-5 as well as of cells cultured on tissue culture plates in osteogenic induction medium. It was suggested that the contact of hBMSCs with laminin-5, but not with fibronectin, is sufficient to activate ERK and to stimulate osteogenic differentiation in hBMSCs in the absence of induction reagents (e.g., dexamethasone) in the culture medium.²⁷⁸

Salasznyk et al. also reported that contact of hBMSCs with laminin-5 was sufficient to induce osteogenic differentiation of hBMSCs through an ERK-dependent pathway.²⁸⁴ They further reported that FAK-mediated signaling pathways link integrin $\alpha3\beta1$ /laminin-5 binding and activation of ERK1/2 and that laminin-5 promoted osteogenic differentiation through this pathway.²⁸⁴

Cardiomyocyte differentiation of ADSCs cultured on laminin-coated, fibronectin-coated, and uncoated culture plates was reported by van Dijk et al.²⁷⁹ Expression of an early cardiomyocyte marker, myosin light chain-2a (MLC-2a), increased significantly in cells on all dishes after 1 week of cardiomyocyte induction, whereas the late cardiomyocyte marker SERCA2a was only significantly increased in ADSCs cultured on laminin-coated dishes after 5 weeks. The number of

desmin-positive cells (a late cardiomyocyte marker, a 52 kD protein that is a subunit of intermediate filaments in cardiac muscle tissue) was only significantly increased in ADSCs cultured on laminin-coated dishes. Thus, human ADSCs cultured on laminin-coated dishes can be effectively differentiated into cardiomyocytes, especially during the late differentiation period.²⁷⁹

ECM proteins also play a pivotal role in the phenotypic modulation of smooth muscle cells (SMCs). ECM proteins may contribute to the differentiation of MSCs into SMC lineages. Therefore, Suzuki et al. investigated whether hBMSCs could differentiate into smooth muscle cell (SMC) lineages for cardiovascular tissue engineering by culturing them on dishes coated with laminin, fibronectin, and collagen type IV, as well as noncoated dishes, in expansion medium lacking differentiation factors (such as TGF- β 1) for 7 days, and the expression of SMC-specific genes and proteins was evaluated.⁸³ The expression of SMC-specific genes and proteins (α -smooth muscle actin [ASMA] and h1-calponin [CALP]) in hBMSCs was significantly upregulated in cells plated on laminin but not on fibronectin and collagen type IV, whereas the number of hBMSCs was increased on dishes coated with collagen type IV, fibronectin, and laminin compared to noncoated dishes.⁸³ Laminin-coated biodegradable PLLA sheets seeded with hBMSCs were also subcutaneously implanted in rats. These cells showed significantly increased expression of ASMA and CALP proteins in vivo. The full differentiation marker of SMCs (smooth muscle myosin heavy chain, SM2) was expressed in hBMSCs on the laminin-coated sheets by 2 weeks after implantation.⁸³

Lung epithelial differentiation of mESCs cultured on TCPS and poly-DL-lactic acid (PDDLA) coated with collagen type I, laminin 332 (laminin 5), fibronectin, and Matrigel was investigated by Lin et al.²⁸⁶ Laminin-332- or Matrigel-coated surfaces induced enhanced surfactant protein C gene expression in differentiating mESCs, which indicates a direct indication of lung epithelial differentiation. The choice of the ECM protein coating on culture dishes can greatly affect the differentiation of ESCs as well as MSCs. In particular, laminin-332-coated PDDLA provides an ECM-degradable scaffold in combination with defined materials, which will be suitable for tissue engineering of lung tissue constructs.

5.5. Fibronectin

Fibronectin is a high-molecular-weight glycoprotein (~440 kDa) that binds to integrins²⁸⁷ and to extracellular matrix components of collagen, fibrin, and heparan sulfate proteoglycans (e.g., syndecans).²⁸⁸ Fibronectin exists as a protein dimer, consisting of two nearly identical monomers linked by a pair of disulfide bonds,²⁸⁷ and is reported to play a major role in cell adhesion, growth, migration, and differentiation. Its RGD sequence (Arg-Gly-Asp) is the site of cell attachment via α 5 β 1 and α V β 3 integrins. Fibronectin also contains a cell-adhesion domain of the connecting segment-1 (CS1, EILDVPST), which is mostly recognized by hematopoietic stem and progenitor cells. Table 11 summarizes several types of fibronectin scaffolds or fibronectin-coated dishes used for MSC differentiation reported in the literature.^{37,48,53,79,83,97,101,149,192,195,196,200,201,279,289,290}

The adhesion of hADSCs to fibronectin is reported to be mediated by β 1 integrin and heparin-binding domain based on inhibition experiments using an antibody against β 1 integrin and heparin-binding peptide (HBP), whereas the adhesion of

Table 11. Some Research Studies for Stem Cell Differentiation on 2D and 3D Fibronectin Materials

| stem cell source ^a | material for stem cell culture ^b | differentiation | ref |
|-------------------------------|---|--|--------------|
| hBMSCs | fibronectin/CP/HAP (2D culture, coating on HAP) | osteoblasts | 289 |
| hBMSCs | fibronectin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts | 97 |
| hBMSCs | fibronectin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts | 97, 149, 192 |
| hBMSCs | fibronectin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts adipocytes | 196 |
| mBMSCs | fibronectin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts, adipocytes | 195 |
| hADSCs | fibronectin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | adipocytes | 53 |
| hADSCs | fibronectin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | cardiomyocytes | 279 |
| hBMSCs | fibronectin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | smooth muscle cells | 83 |
| hBMSCs | fibronectin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | neural cells | 101 |
| hESCs (TE03, TE06) | fibronectin/PDL (2D culture, coating on dishes) | neural cells | 79 |
| human neural stem cells | fibronectin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | oligoglyocytes | 37 |
| mESCs | fibronectin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | lung epithelium | 286 |
| BMSCs | fibronectin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | hepatocytes | 48 |
| mouse hepatic stem cells | fibronectin (2D culture, coating on dishes) | hepatocytes | 200 |
| hESCs (H9) Fibronectin | fibronectin/PLGA+PLLA (3D culture, scaffold) | endoderm cells, ectoderm cells, chondrocytes | 290 |

^aADSCs, adipose-derived stem cells; BMSCs, bone marrow stromal cells; ESCs, embryonic stem cells; hADSCs, human ADSCs; hBMSCs, human BMSCs; mBMSCs, murine BMSCs; hESCs, human ESCs; and mESCs, murine ESCs. ^bCP, calcium phosphate; HAP, hydroxyapatite; PDL, poly-D-lysine; PLGA, poly(lactic-co-glycolic acid); PLLA, poly-L-lactic acid.

collagens and laminin seem to be solely mediated by β 1 integrin.⁵³ β 1 integrins are a common receptors on MSCs that mediate cell adhesion to collagen type I and type IV, fibronectin, and laminin.

Heparan sulfate proteoglycans are involved in cell adhesion of MSCs via the heparin-binding region of fibronectin, and they modulate the osteogenic differentiation of MSCs via bone morphogenetic protein pathways.^{291,292} hADSCs cultured on fibronectin-coated dishes differentiated into adipocytes to a greater extent than cells cultured on TCPS.⁵⁴ However, hADSCs cultured on fibronectin-coated dishes differentiated into adipocytes less than those on heparin-binding domain substrates⁵⁴ because the cells maintained a much rounder morphology when cultured on a heparin-binding domain substrate than on fibronectin-coated dishes and TCPS. Moreover, it has been reported that hMSCs differentiate into osteoblasts under culture conditions that maintain spread shapes, whereas rounded cells differentiate into adipocytes.⁵⁴

Chang et al. reported that a pellet suspension culture of hMSCs with the addition of fibronectin promoted differentiation of MSCs to pancreatic, insulin-producing cells, with increased insulin and Glut2 gene expression.²⁹³ A four-stage protocol that contains neuronal differentiation factor and insulin-producing cell (IPC)-conversion reagent (nicotina-

Table 12. Some Research Studies for Stem Cell Differentiation on Decellularized ECM Materials

| stem cell source | material for stem cell culture | differentiation | ref |
|------------------------------------|--|--|----------|
| mBMSCs | decellularized ECM from mBMSCs (2D culture) | pluripotency, osteoblasts, adipocytes | 195 |
| mESCs (E14 TG2a) | ECM from decellularized osteoblasts and nonosteogenic cells (2D culture) | osteoblasts | 308 |
| rat BMSCs | decellularized ECM on electrospinning fibers of poly(ϵ -caprolactone) from osteoblasts differentiated from rat BMSCs | osteoblasts | 318 |
| rat BMSCs | decellularized ECM from osteoblasts differentiated from rat BMSCs on titanium fiber mesh (3D culture) | osteoblasts | 307 |
| hBMSCs | decellularized bovine endosteum-derived particles (3D culture) | osteoblasts, chondrocytes, adipocytes | 62 |
| rBMSCs | decellularized ECM scaffold from porcine cartilage (3D culture) | chondrocytes | 72 |
| hBMSCs | decellularized ECM from chondrocyte-encapsulated collagen microspheres (3D culture) | chondrocytes | 306 |
| hADSCs | porous scaffold derived from decellularized articular cartilage (3D culture) | chondrocytes | 310 |
| hBMSCs | decellularized scaffolds on PLGA, which are derived from hBMSCs and chondrocytes | chondrocytes | 311, 322 |
| embryonic rat brain cortical cells | decellularized ECM from hBMSCs (2D culture) | neural cells | 309 |
| human urine-derived stem cells | decellularized small intestinal submucosa scaffold (3D culture) | urethral tissue composed of urothelial and smooth muscle cells | 28 |

mide) is generally used for derivation of IPCs from embryonic stem cells but was reported to be insufficient to induce MSCs to undergo IPC differentiation in monolayer cultures.²⁹³ However, pellet suspension culture of hMSCs with the addition of fibronectin enhanced pancreatic differentiation. The differentiated cells secreted insulin in response to elevated glucose concentrations, and this was regulated by reagents that increased cyclic AMP production and modified calcium influx.²⁹³ It was also reported that laminin-1 promoted the differentiation of fetal mouse pancreatic β -cells.^{293,294} Further investigation of the mechanisms by which ECM proteins mediate the promotion of IPC differentiation is needed.

Sogo et al. prepared hydroxyapatite (HYA) ceramic composites immobilized with fibronectin or collagen type I.²⁸⁹ The ECM proteins and the calcium phosphate precipitate formed a composite surface layer, and ECM proteins were not released completely for 3 days into a physiological salt solution.²⁸⁹ hMSCs cultured on the HYA ceramic composites with immobilized fibronectin showed higher ALP activity in osteogenic differentiation medium than those on the HYA ceramic composites immobilized with collagen type I, which indicates that hMSCs differentiated into osteogenic lineages on the HYA ceramic composites immobilized fibronectin only.²⁸⁹ No synergistic effect of hMSC differentiation into osteoblasts was observed on the HYA ceramic composites with both fibronectin and collagen type I. Thus, the fibronectin–HYA composite, but not the collagen type I–HYA composite, seems to be useful for the enhancement of osteogenic differentiation of hMSCs in vitro.

5.6. Vitronectin

Vitronectin is an ECM glycoprotein and is involved in the differentiation of diverse cell types in embryonic and adult tissues.^{295,296} Vitronectin is not commonly used for coating or scaffold materials, although it is abundant in serum. Only a few reports have described positive effects of vitronectin on differentiation of MSCs in 2D culture, hydrogels, and scaffolds.^{97,149,196,295}

Vitronectin was shown to promote the generation of spinal motor neurons by synergistically interacting with sonic hedgehog (Shh) both in explants and neuroepithelial cell cultures of chick embryo spinal cord.^{295,297} Oligodendrocytes and motor neurons were derived from a common pool of spinal cord progenitors.^{298,299} Vitronectin is therefore a possible

candidate to promote the differentiation of spinal cord oligodendrocytes as well as motor neurons.

Gil et al. found that the oligodendrocytic differentiation of hESCs was efficiently promoted by vitronectin.²⁹⁵ Salasznyk investigated osteogenic differentiation of hMSCs cultured on dishes coated with fibronectin, collagen type I, collagen type IV, vitronectin, and laminin-1.⁹⁷ hMSCs were found to adhere to ECM proteins in this order: fibronectin > collagen type I \geq collagen type IV \geq vitronectin \geq laminin-1. However, cells cultured on dishes coated with vitronectin and collagen type I differentiated into osteoblasts to a greater extent than cells on dishes coated with fibronectin or laminin-1, as shown by an evaluation of ALP activity, osteopontin expression, and mineral deposition.⁹⁷ The contact of hMSCs with vitronectin as well as with collagen type I seems to promote the osteogenic differentiation of hMSCs.

5.7. Decellularized ECM

The biological niche of cells in vivo dictates stem cell fate and guides MSCs to differentiate into specific lineages. It is rather difficult to reproduce biological niches using only pure ECM proteins, glycosaminoglycans, and other components in vitro. One idea to reproduce a biological niche in vitro is to use decellularized ECM.^{300–303} Decellularization is a technique for removing cellular components from native tissues and is usually achieved by a combination of physical, chemical, or enzymatic methods.^{304,305} This technique removes the allogenic or xenogenic cellular antigens, as well as cellular components, from the tissues, but preserves the ECM components.³⁰⁶ Several studies have focused on the decellularization of tissues and organs such as heart valve, heart, liver, lung, blood vessel, skin, and nerves.^{300–303} Decellularization is typically performed by freeze–thaw cycling or surfactant methods.^{28,62,195,306–310} The freeze–thaw cycling method is as follows. The scaffolds were thawed in a water bath at 37 °C for 10 min, rinsed with phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) to remove cellular debris, and frozen in liquid N₂ for 10 min. Subsequently, the scaffolds were left at room temperature for 1 h to melt. The scaffolds then underwent three freeze/thaw cycles under sterile conditions to ensure complete removal of the cellular components. After treating in NH₄OH aqueous solution and rinsing with PBS, scaffolds were allowed to air-dry before being seeded with cells.^{307,311} The typical surfactant method is as follows. Cells were treated with 0.1% Triton X-100 in water at room

temperature for 30 min. Cell lysates were carefully aspirated, and a solution of concentrated ammonium hydroxide diluted 1:100 in water was slowly added to the wells for 5–7 min. The wells were carefully washed twice with PBS and used immediately or stored in PBS at 4 °C.^{309,312} Acellular ECMs processed from allogenic or xenogenic tissues most closely approximate natural tissues and have been used as scaffolds for the tissue engineering of heart valves,^{313,314} vessels,³¹⁵ nerves,³¹⁶ tendons, and ligaments.^{306,317} Some landmark examples of MSC propagation and differentiation that are promoted by culture on decellularized ECM are summarized in Table 12.^{28,62,72,195,306–310,318}

Several studies have shown that ECM modulates neurogenesis and glial growth.^{309,319,320} However, little is known about effects of MSC-derived ECM on neural cells. Aizman et al. demonstrated that the ECM produced by MSCs could support neural cell attachment and growth *in vitro*. They compared the neurosupportive properties of MSCs to MSC derivative SB623 cells, which were being developed as a cell therapy for stroke.³⁰⁹ Embryonic rat brain cortical cells cultured for 3 weeks on hMSC- and SB623 cell-derived ECM exhibited about 1.5- and 3-fold higher metabolic activities, respectively, compared with cultures grown on PDL-coated dishes.³⁰⁹ The MSC- and SB623-derived ECMs protected neural cells from nutrient and growth factor deprivation, and supported the growth of neurons, astrocytes, and oligodendrocytes.³⁰⁹ Morphologically, neurons on cell-derived ECM formed more complex and extended neurite networks than those cultured on PDL-coated dishes. It was suggested that the cell-derived ECM could be a mediator of the neuroregenerative properties of the MSCs and SB623 cells observed *in vivo*.³⁰⁹

Cheng et al. investigated whether a scaffold derived from articular cartilage could induce chondrogenesis of hADSCs.³¹⁰ hADSCs were seeded on porous scaffolds derived from adult porcine articular cartilage and cultured in standard medium without exogenous growth factors. Chondrogenesis of hADSCs seeded within the scaffold was shown by quantitative reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) analysis of cartilage-specific ECM genes (collagen type II and aggrecan).³¹⁰ Histological and immunohistochemical examination showed abundant production of cartilage-specific ECM components (collagen type II) after 4 or 6 weeks of culture. The morphology of cells in the hADSC-seeded constructs resembled that of native articular cartilage tissue, with rounded cells residing in the glycosaminoglycan-rich regions of the scaffolds after 6 weeks of culture.³¹⁰ Biphasic mechanical testing showed that the aggregate modulus of the hADSC-seeded constructs increased over time, reaching 150 kPa by day 42, more than 3-fold higher than that of the unseeded controls.³¹⁰ These results suggest that a porous scaffold derived from articular cartilage has the ability to induce chondrogenic differentiation of hADSCs without exogenous growth factors, leading to synthesis and accumulation of ECM macromolecules and the development of mechanical properties approaching those of native cartilage.³¹⁰ These findings support the potential for a processed cartilage ECM as a biomaterial scaffold for cartilage tissue engineering.³¹⁰

Evans et al. investigated whether tissue-specific ECM influenced the differentiation of ESCs.³⁰⁸ They induced murine ESCs to differentiate by embryoid body formation, followed by dissociation and culture on ECMs prepared by decellularization of either osteogenic cell (MC3T3-E1) or nonosteogenic cell (A549) cultures, or on defined collagen type I matrix.³⁰⁸ The

osteogenic differentiation was evaluated by formation of mineralized tissue and osteogenic gene expression and was significantly greater on ECM matrices derived from osteogenic cells (MC3T3-E1) than on any other ECM matrix. The osteogenic effect of the MC3T3-E1 matrix was reduced by heat treatment and abolished by trypsin, suggesting that bioactive proteinaceous components secreted by MC3T3-E1 cells were the key factors that promoted differentiation of ESCs into the osteogenic lineage.³⁰⁸ These results demonstrate that decellularized, bone-specific ECM can promote the osteogenic differentiation of ESCs, incorporating tissue-specific ECM signals and stimulating stem cell differentiation.

Datta et al. investigated the effect of ECM laid down by osteoblastic cells on the osteoblastic differentiation of rat BMSCs.³⁰⁷ Primary rat BMSCs seeded in titanium (Ti) fiber scaffolds were differentiated into osteoblasts in static culture, and then the scaffolds were decellularized by rapid freeze–thaw cycling. Decellularized scaffolds were reseeded with rat BMSCs, and osteogenicity was determined by DNA, ALP, calcium, and osteopontin analysis. Calcium was deposited at a greater rate by cells grown on decellularized scaffolds than on control scaffolds by 16 days.³⁰⁷ The Ti/BMSC constructs showed negligible calcium content at 16 days, compared with 213 mg/construct for the Ti/ECM/MSC constructs cultured without any osteogenic supplements.³⁰⁷ These results indicate that bonelike ECM synthesized *in vitro* can enhance the osteoblastic differentiation of MSCs.

Wu et al. developed engineered urethral tissue from urothelial cells (UCs) derived from the differentiated urine-derived stem cells (USCs), which were seeded on a 3D porous scaffold prepared by decellularization of pig small intestinal submucosa (SIS).²⁸ Differentiated UCs and smooth muscle cells (SMCs) were seeded onto SIS scaffolds in a layered coculture process and cultured for 1 week. The seeded cells formed multiple uniform layers on the SIS and penetrated deeper into the porous matrix.²⁸ USC were induced to differentiate expressed UC markers (Uroplakin-III and AE1/AE3) or SMC markers (α -SM actin, desmin, and myosin) after implantation into athymic mice for 1 month.²⁸ Thus, UCs and SMCs derived from USCs could be maintained on 3D porous SIS scaffold. The dynamic culture system further promoted 3D cell-matrix ingrowth and development of a multilayer mucosal structure similar to native urinary tract tissue.²⁸ USCs may serve as an alternative cell source for cell-based tissue engineering for urethral reconstruction or other urological tissue repair.

Depending on the cells from which decellularized ECMs are isolated, the ECM can not only promote specific differentiation lineages of MSCs but also prevent MSC differentiation. Chen et al. reported that ECM produced by murine BMSCs facilitated the expansion of MSCs and prevented their differentiation into osteoblasts.¹⁹⁵ The differentiation ability of MSCs was progressively lost with extensive passaging when MSCs were cultured on TCPS.³²¹ This is because bone marrow micro-environment that facilitates retention of stem cell properties is missing in TCPS dish culture.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, the ability of BMSC-derived ECM to support the maintenance of the stemness of MSCs *in vitro* was evaluated. The BMSC-derived ECM was found to be made of collagen types I, III, and V, syndecan-1, perlecan, fibronectin, laminin, biglycan, and decorin, similar to the composition of the marrow ECM.¹⁹⁵ This ECM preparation promoted mesenchymal colony-forming unit (MCFU) replication, restrained their “spontaneous”

Table 13. Some Research Studies for Stem Cell Differentiation on ECM-Peptide Materials

| stem cell source ^a | material for stem cell culture containing ECM peptide ^b | differentiation | ref |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------|-----|
| hBMSCs | ECM-mimicking peptide (RGDS, DGEA, KRSR) amphiphile nanofiber (2D culture, coating on dishes) | osteoblasts | 130 |
| rat BMSCs | RGD peptides (2D culture, grafting on PEG gel) | osteoblasts, adipocytes | 153 |
| hADSCs | RGD, YIGSR, and IKVAV grafted PCL (2D culture, disk) | ADSC culture | 329 |
| rat neural stem cells | outer membrane protein A having ECM-peptide motif [RGDS, GTPGPQGIAGQRGVV (collagen I), PHSRN (fibronectin), MNYYSNS (collagen IV), YIGSR (laminin)] (2D culture, coating on dishes) | neural cells | 109 |
| neural stem cells | bacterial peptide (2D culture, coating on dishes) | neural cells | 331 |
| gBMSCs | PEODA (polyethylene glycol diacrylate) incorporated with YRGDS (3D culture, gel) | osteoblasts | 125 |
| gBMSCs | PEG hydrogel containing ECM-peptide motif (collagen mimetic peptide ([Pro-Hyp-Gly] ₇ -Tyr) (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 65 |
| hBMSCs | PEG hydrogel-containing ECM-peptide motif (CRGDSG, CPENFFGGRGDSC) (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 128 |
| mBMSCs | PEG hydrogel-containing matrix metalloproteinase-sensitive peptide (QPQLAK) and chondroitin sulfate A (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 129 |
| hBMSCs | PEG hydrogel-containing RGDS (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 126 |
| hESC-derived MSCs | PEG hydrogel-containing ECM-peptide motif (YRGDS) (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 127 |
| hBMSCs | elastin-like polypeptide [ELP, pentaoetide repeat (Val-Pro-Gly-Xaa-Gly)] hydrogel ^c (3D culture, gel) | chondrocytes | 155 |
| hBMSCs | silk scaffold bound GRGDS covalently (3D culture, scaffold) | osteoblasts | 328 |
| hBMSCs | collagen mimetic peptide (DGEA, P15 (GTPGPQIAGQAGVV), QAGVV, GFOGER) and GPenGRGDSPCA (3D culture, coating on HYA) | osteoblasts | 103 |
| no cell loading | collagen mimetic peptide (GGYGGGPC[GPP] ₅ , GFOGER[GPP] ₅ GPC) where O is hydroxyproline (3D culture, coating on PCL) | bone formation | 330 |
| murine neural stem cells | nanofiber scaffold of self-assembled peptide containing motif of laminin (YIGSR, IKVAV, PDSGR), collagen (DGEA, FPGERGVGPGP, PRGDSGYRGDS), fibronectin (RGDS), and bone marrow homing peptides (SKPPGTSS, PFSSTKT) (3D culture, scaffold) | neural cells | 116 |

^aADSCs, adipose-derived stem cells; BMSCs, bone marrow stromal cells; ESCs, embryonic stem cells; hADSCs, human ADSCs; gBMSCs, goat BMSCs; hBMSCs, human BMSCs; mBMSCs, murine BMSCs; hESCs, human ESCs. ^bPCL, poly(ϵ -caprolactone); HYA, hydroxyapatite; PEG, polyethylene glycol. ^cXaa is any naturally occurring amino acid with the exception of proline.

differentiation toward the osteoblast lineage, and preserved their ability to differentiate into osteoblasts or adipocytes, where MCFUs comprised MSCs and their transit-amplifying progeny.¹⁹⁵ The transplantation of MCFUs expanded on the BMSC-derived ECM into immunocompromised mice generated 5 times more bone and 8 times more hematopoietic marrow than MCFUs expanded in TCPS dishes.¹⁹⁵ On the basis of this study, ECM in BMSCs can be considered to play an important role in the maintenance of MSC stemness.

Lu, Chen, and co-workers prepared ECM scaffolds derived from MSCs and chondrocytes on PLGA mesh.³¹¹ Cell-ECM-PLGA constructs were decellularized by freeze-thaw techniques and subsequently immersed into aqueous Na₃PO₄ solution to remove the PLGA mesh template. The decellularized ECM scaffolds were reported to have a stronger stimulatory effect on chondrogenesis of MSCs compared with conventional pellet culture.³¹¹ In particular, decellularized ECM scaffolds prepared from MSCs showed higher promotion of MSCs into chondrogenesis than did those prepared from chondrocytes.³¹¹ This preparation method opens an avenue for efficiently creating autologous ECM (aECM) scaffolds by culturing autologous cells and decellularizing the resulting cell-ECM constructs.^{311,322} The use of ECM scaffolds and patient BMSCs are expected to elicit the desired responses for clinical application.^{311,322-325}

5.8. Biomaterials with ECM-Mimicking Oligopeptides

We have observed that MSCs on hydrogels or scaffolds with immobilized ECM proteins or dishes coated with ECM proteins can effectively promote the differentiation of MSCs into specific lineages. However, some technical challenges remain. We cannot store the hydrogels, scaffolds, and dishes containing ECM proteins at room temperature, and we should

store those containing ECM proteins in a refrigerator under sterile conditions. Furthermore, it is difficult to sterilize hydrogels, scaffolds, and dishes with immobilized ECM proteins because denaturation of ECM proteins should be avoided when immobilized ECM proteins are to be used in clinical applications. Including cell-adhesion peptides from ECM proteins, which are highly stable and have lower molecular weights than ECM proteins, in the design of hydrogels, scaffolds, and coating materials on dishes is a potentially useful strategy. ECM protein-derived peptides (ECM peptides) can be directly coated or grafted onto cell culture dishes for 2D culture of MSCs,^{85,326,327} and ECM peptides may be covalently or noncovalently incorporated into scaffolds or hydrogel networks for 3D culture.^{40,65,68,103,121,125-129,153,328-330} Furthermore, ECM peptides can generate nanofiber configurations by self-assembly.^{109,116,130}

Table 4 shows several cell-binding sites of ECM proteins, together with original ECM proteins from which they are derived and the binding sites of integrins, if they are known. Oligopeptides of RGD (binding to $\alpha 5 \beta 1$ integrin or VLA-5), DGEA (binding to $\alpha 2 \beta 1$ integrin), YIGSR, and IKVAV are frequently used for this purpose. The surface reaction of the grafting of the ECM-binding peptides was described in section 3.1, and the synthesis method of copolymerization with ECM peptides and acryloyl monomers was described in section 3.2. Table 13 summarizes some examples of research on MSC culture and differentiation in hydrogels or scaffolds with immobilized ECM peptides or on dishes coated (or grafted) with ECM peptides.^{65,103,109,116,125-130,153,155,328-331}

Santiago et al. prepared the poly(ϵ -caprolactone) (PCL) surfaces covalently attached with RGD, YIGSR, and IKVAV

peptide sequences derived from laminin and evaluated the attachment and proliferation of ADSCs.³²⁹ IKVAV-treated surfaces were found to have a significantly greater number of bound ADSCs at 2 and 3 days after cell seeding compared to other peptide sequences.³²⁹ Their results indicated that IKVAV is a suitable peptide sequence for use in surface-modification techniques aimed at improving the attachment of ADSCs to a tissue-engineered scaffold.³²⁹ However, several other groups have reported that other ECM peptides were as or more effective for stem cell attachment on dishes and scaffolds, depending on the base materials of dishes and scaffolds.^{65,103,125–128,130} The effect of ECM peptides in the hydrogels, scaffolds, or dishes with immobilized ECM peptides on differentiation ability of MSCs into specific lineages is discussed in the next sections.

5.8.1. MSC Differentiation on Self-Assembled ECM-Peptide Nanofibers. Self-assembled nanostructures in scaffolds are especially interesting because they mimic the hierarchical structure and self-assembled formation of native tissues. Peptide amphiphile (PA) is known to spontaneously generate self-assembled nanofibers above critical micelle concentrations.^{109,116,130} Anderson et al. prepared peptide amphiphile nanofibers inscribed with specific cellular adhesive ligands (i.e., RGDS, DGEA, and KRSR) and investigated whether they could direct osteogenic differentiation of hMSCs without osteogenic supplements.¹³⁰ The peptide amphiphile nanofibers existed as self-assembled 2D coatings on the dishes. hBMSCs cultured on the RGDS-containing peptide amphiphile nanofibers, but neither DGEA nor KRSR nanofibers, showed significantly greater ALP activity, indicating the early promotion of osteogenic differentiation, and showed a progressive shift toward osteogenic morphology and positive staining for mineral deposition.¹³⁰ The peptide amphiphile nanofibers, which mimic the native ECM in bone, were found to direct the osteogenic differentiation of hBMSCs without the aid of supplements to some extent and provided an adaptable environment that allowed different adhesive ligands to control cellular behaviors.¹³⁰

5.8.2. Osteogenic Differentiation on ECM-Peptide Immobilized Scaffolds and Dishes. Hennessy et al. evaluated the interaction between hBMSCs and hydroxyapatite (HYA) disks coated with the collagen-mimetic peptides DGEA, P15 (GTPGPQGIAGQRGVV), and GFOGER.¹⁰³ hBMSCs adhered equally well to disks coated with DGEA, P15, or collagen type I, and all three substrates, but not GFOGER, supported greater cell adhesion than uncoated HYA disks.¹⁰³ However, another study revealed that polycaprolactone scaffolds coated with GFOGER could promote bone formation in critically sized segmental defects in rats.³³⁰ The combination of specific ECM peptides and scaffold materials might also be important for controlling MSC differentiation.

When peptide-coated HYA disks were overlaid with proteins from serum or the tibial microenvironment, collagen mimetic-coated HYA disks did not inhibit hBMSC adhesion, whereas RGD peptide-coated HYA disks did.¹⁰³ However, they did not enhance adhesion either. Osteocalcin secretion and ALP activity from hBMSCs adhering to DGEA or P15-coated disks were promoted by activation of collagen-selective integrins, which stimulated osteogenic differentiation.¹⁰³ Both of these osteogenic markers were upregulated by DGEA and P15 in the presence or absence of differentiation-inducing media. Bone formation on HYA tibial implants was enhanced by the collagen mimetic peptides. Therefore, collagen-mimetic

peptides improve osteointegration of HYA disks, probably by stimulating osteoblastic differentiation, rather than adhesion, of MSCs.¹⁰³

Although RGD-peptide-coated HYA scaffolds did not promote osteogenic differentiation,¹⁰³ poly(ethylene glycol) diacrylate hydrogel-incorporated RGD peptides were reported to promote osteogenic differentiation of goat BMSCs.¹²⁵ RGD peptides helped BMSCs maintain cbfa-1 expression in the hydrogel. Soluble RGD was found to completely block the mineralization of BMSCs, as shown by quantitative calcium assay, phosphorus elemental analysis, and von Kossa staining.¹²⁵ This research demonstrated that RGD-conjugated hydrogels promoted the osteogenesis of BMSCs in a dosage-dependent manner, with 2.5 mM being the optimal concentration in their preparation of hydrogels.¹²⁵ The combination of ECM peptides and scaffold materials seems to affect MSC differentiation in the scaffolds and hydrogels.

Porous biodegradable silk scaffolds and hBMSCs were used to engineer bonelike tissue *in vitro*.³²⁸ Two different scaffolds with the same microstructure were studied: collagen (to assess the effects of fast degradation) and silk with covalently bound RGD sequences (to assess the effects of enhanced cell attachment and slow degradation).³²⁸ hMSCs were isolated, expanded in culture, and characterized with respect to the expression of surface markers and the potential for chondrogenic and osteogenic differentiation. Cells were then seeded on scaffolds and cultured for up to 4 weeks. Histological analysis and microcomputer tomography showed the development of up to 1.2 mm long, interconnected, and organized bonelike trabeculae with cuboid cells on the silk–RGD scaffolds, features that were present to a lesser extent on silk scaffolds and absent on the collagen scaffolds.³²⁸ The X-ray diffraction pattern of the deposited bone corresponded to hydroxyapatite in the native bone. Biochemical analysis showed increased mineralization on silk–RGD scaffolds compared with either silk or collagen scaffolds after 4 weeks.³²⁸ Expression of bone sialoprotein, osteopontin, and bone morphogenetic protein 2 was significantly higher in hMSCs cultured in osteogenic than control medium after 2 and 4 weeks in culture.³²⁸ These results suggest that RGD–silk scaffolds are particularly suitable for autologous bone-tissue engineering, presumably because of their stable macroporous structure, tunable mechanical properties matching those of native bone, and slow degradation.³²⁸

5.8.3. Chondrogenic Differentiation on ECM-Peptide-Immobilized Scaffolds and Dishes. Poly(ethylene oxide) diacrylate (PEODA) hydrogel provides 3D structural support for *in vitro* and *in vivo* chondrogenic differentiation of stem cells. However, PEODA gels are bioinert, as are most synthetic scaffolds, and nonadhesive to stem cells and proteins.^{158,332} Therefore, several researchers have designed PEODA scaffolds conjugated with ECM peptides, such as collagen mimetic peptides (CMPs)⁶⁵ and RGD peptide^{126–128} or chondroitin sulfate¹²⁹ for chondrogenic differentiation of BMSCs.

The collagen mimetic peptides (CMPs) are sequences of $-(\text{Pro-Hyp-Gly})_7-$, where Hyp is hydroxyproline, and they have a unique collagen-like triple helical conformation that has been shown to associate with collagen fibers via a strand-invasion process.^{333,334} Lee et al. showed that the CMP-mediated microenvironment enhanced the chondrogenic differentiation of goat BMSCs. BMSCs were photoencapsulated in the CMP-conjugated PEODA hydrogels.⁶⁵ Histological and biochemical analysis of the CMP-conjugated PEODA hydrogels revealed twice as much glycosaminoglycan and collagen

contents as in control PEODA hydrogels after 3 weeks.⁶⁵ BMSCs cultured in CMP-conjugated PEODA hydrogels exhibited a lower level of the hypertrophic markers *cbfa-1* and collagen type X than BMSCs in PEODA hydrogels by evaluation by gene expression and immunohistochemistry.⁶⁵ These results indicate that CMP-conjugated PEODA hydrogels provide a favorable microenvironment for encapsulated BMSCs and regulate their chondrogenic differentiation.⁶⁵

Hwang et al. investigated the chondrogenic capacity of hESC-derived MSCs in pellet culture and after encapsulation in PEODA hydrogels with exogenous extracellular biomolecules (hyaluronic acid and collagen type I) or conjugated with RGD peptides.¹²⁷ The hESC-derived MSCs exhibited growth factor-dependent matrix production in pellet culture but did not produce tissues with characteristic cartilage morphology. No significant cell growth or matrix production was observed in PEODA hydrogels containing exogenous hyaluronic acid or collagen type I.¹²⁷ In contrast, neocartilage with basophilic ECM deposition, cartilage-specific gene upregulation, and ECM production was observed within 3 weeks of culture for hESC-derived MSCs encapsulated in PEODA hydrogels conjugated with RGD peptide.¹²⁷ These findings suggest that precursor cells characteristic of a MSC population from differentiating hESCs through embryoid bodies can generate cartilage tissues using hydrogels conjugated with RGD peptide.¹²⁷

Betre et al. examined the potential of a genetically engineered elastin-like polypeptide (ELP) to promote chondrocytic differentiation of hADSCs without exogenous chondrogenic supplements.¹⁵⁵ ELPs have a repeated oligomeric pentapeptide motif composed of valine-proline-glycine-Xaa-glycine (Val-Pro-Gly-Xaa-Gly), where Xaa is termed the guest residue and can be any of the naturally occurring amino acids with the exception of proline.³³⁵ ELPs form aggregates in aqueous solution at a specific transition temperature, termed an inverse temperature phase transition (T_v). Below T_v , ELPs are structurally disordered, highly solvated, and, therefore, soluble in aqueous solutions. When the temperature is above T_v , ELPs undergo desolvation and form a gelatinous aggregate termed a coacervate.^{155,336} Encapsulation of hADSCs in ELP hydrogels can be easily prepared by ELP coacervate formation.

hADSCs were reported to be cultured in ELP hydrogels in either chondrogenic or standard medium at 5% O₂ for up to 2 weeks.¹⁵⁵ The ELP hydrogel containing hADSCs cultured in either medium exhibited significantly increased sulfated glycosaminoglycan and collagen production, where the matrix produced by hADSCs consisted mainly of collagen type II but not collagen type I.¹⁵⁵ The composition of the ELP hydrogels containing hADSCs cultured in either medium did not differ significantly.¹⁵⁵ The ELP hydrogels containing hADSCs were cultured in standard medium at either 5% or 20% O₂ for 7 days to evaluate the effect of oxygen tension on the differentiation of hADSCs in ELP hydrogels. These hADSCs showed upregulated SOX9 and collagen type II gene expression at both oxygen concentrations, and the gene expression of collagen type I was downregulated.¹⁵⁵ However, the ELP hydrogels containing hADSCs cultured in 20% O₂ had highly upregulated gene expression of collagen type X, indicating hypertrophic conditions, which was not detected in the 5% O₂ cultures.¹⁵⁵ The study suggests that ELP hydrogels can promote chondrogenesis of hADSCs in the absence of exogenous TGF- β 1 and dexamethasone, especially under low oxygen tension.

Hydrophobic polyhydroxyalkanoate (PHA) scaffolds were made of a copolymer of 3-hydroxybutyrate-co-hydroxyhexa-

noate (PHBHHx). Several amphiphilic proteins can be coupled to the surface of PHA granules in vivo, such as PHA synthase PhaC and PHA granule-associated proteins, PhaP.³³⁷ You et al. prepared PhaP-RGD fusion proteins by recombinant gene techniques.⁶⁸ hBMSCs on the PHA scaffolds coated with PhaP-RGD fusion proteins were cultured to evaluate the formation of articular cartilage derived from chondrogenic differentiation.⁶⁸ The scaffolds coated with PhaP-RGD fusion proteins induced more homogeneous spreading of cells, better cell adhesion, proliferation, and chondrogenic differentiation compared with those coated with PhaP or uncoated scaffolds in serum-containing medium.⁶⁸ In addition, more ECM protein was produced by the differentiated cells over 14 days on scaffolds coated with PhaP-RGD fusion proteins, which was evidenced by enhanced expression of chondrocyte-specific genes including SOX9, aggrecan, and collagen type II. This result indicated a positive effect of RGD on ECM production.⁶⁸ Furthermore, sulphated glycosaminoglycans (sGAG's) and total collagen content, which are cartilage-specific, were produced significantly more on the scaffolds coated with PhaP-RGD fusion proteins than on uncoated scaffolds or those coated with PhaP proteins.⁶⁸ Homogeneously distributed chondrocyte-like cells forming cartilage-like matrices were observed on the scaffolds coated with PhaP-RGD fusion proteins after 3 weeks.⁶⁸ These results can support engineered cartilage tissue.

It is challenging to generate a hierarchical tissue structure that mimics the highly organized zonal architecture of articular cartilage. The articular cartilage consists of four spatially distinct zones: the superficial, transitional (middle), deep, and calcified zones.¹²⁹ Each zone is characterized by unique ECM compositions, mechanical properties, and cellular organization. The cartilage-ECM is primarily composed of collagen type II and glycosaminoglycans (GAGs) whose relative concentrations vary spatially from the superficial to the deep zone, leading to varying mechanical properties.^{129,338} The superficial zone contains high levels of collagen type II and low levels of GAG.^{129,339} The transitional zone has lower collagen type II content and a higher GAG concentration.¹²⁹ The deep zone contains the highest concentration of GAGs and the lowest level of collagen type II fibers.^{129,340} The calcified cartilage zone contains high levels of collagen type X and integrates the cartilage to the subchondral bone.^{129,339,340}

Nguyen et al. showed that different combinations of synthetic and natural biopolymers created unique niches that could direct BMSCs to differentiate into the superficial, transitional, and deep zones of articular cartilage.¹²⁹ PEG hydrogels incorporated with chondroitin sulfate (CS) and matrix metalloproteinase-sensitive peptides (MMP-pep), PEG:CS:MMP-pep, induced high levels of collagen type II and low levels of proteoglycan expression, resulting in a low compressive modulus similar to the superficial zone.¹²⁹ PEG hydrogels incorporated with CS (PEG:CS) produced intermediate levels of both collagen type II and proteoglycans as in the transitional zone, whereas PEG hydrogels incorporated with hyaluronic acid (HA), PEG:HA, induced high proteoglycan and low collagen type II levels with a high compressive modulus, similar to the deep zone.¹²⁹ The compressive moduli of these zone-specific matrices following cartilage generation showed a similar trend to the corresponding zones of articular cartilage, with PEG:CS:MMP-pep having the lowest compressive modulus, followed by PEG:CS, and PEG:HA having the highest modulus.¹²⁹ These results illustrate the potential for composite scaffold structures incorporating biomaterial compo-

sitions and BMSCs to generate zonally organized and functional articular cartilage-like tissue.

5.8.4. Neural Differentiation on ECM-Peptide-Immobilized Scaffolds and Dishes. Cellular adhesive motifs can be engineered into the extracellular loops of outer membrane protein A (OmpA). Cooke et al. engineered outer-membrane proteins to form self-assembled monolayers (SAMs) on gold surface where the proteins were correctly oriented on a gold surface, enabling the presentation of the peptide in a highly controlled manner.¹⁰⁹ The cellular adhesive motifs used in their study were RGDS and PHSRN from fibronectin, P15 (GTPGPQGIAGQRGVV) from collagen type I, MNYYNSNS from collagen type IV, and YIGSR from laminin.^{109,121} Adult neural stem progenitor cells cultured on monolayers of OmpA inscribed with collagen type I (P15, GTPGPQGIAGQRGVV) and fibronectin (PHSRN) motifs differentiated into beta-III tubulin-positive cells, whereas the cells on OmpA inscribed with collagen type IV did not.¹⁰⁹ This study demonstrates how biomimetic protein surfaces presenting the active peptide domains of ECM proteins can regulate the neural differentiation of stem cells in vitro.

N-cadherin is a cell–cell-adhesion molecule and plays important roles in neural development. Yue et al. developed an artificial ECM to mimic N-cadherin-mediated cell adhesion.³⁴¹ They constructed a chimeric protein that contained extracellular domain of N-cadherin and Fc domain of immunoglobulin G (IgG), N-cad-Fc protein.³⁴¹ N-cad-Fc protein could stably adsorb to hydrophobic surfaces. Both P19 (embryonal carcinoma) and MEB5 (neural stem) cells cultured on N-cad-Fc protein-coated surfaces showed scattering morphologies without colony formation and higher proliferating capacity than conventional culture systems, with maintenance of their undifferentiated state.³⁴¹ Both cell lines cultured on an N-cad-Fc protein-coated surface also differentiated into neural cells at the single cell level when induced with proper conditions.³⁴¹ It was proposed that the N-cad-Fc protein may be used as an artificial ECM for stem cell culture.³⁴¹ A recombinant E-cadherin fusion protein with IgG Fc region, E-cad-Fc protein, was also prepared in the similar recombinant gene expression method by Haque et al.⁸⁵ ESCs cultured on dishes coated with E-cad-Fc protein could effectively differentiate into hepatocytes with characteristic single-cell morphologies. These recombinant ECMs could be effectively used as in vitro models for studying the mechanisms of early stages of liver development of ESCs at the single-cell level.⁸⁵

6. CONCLUSION

ECM proteins not only serve as supporting materials for stem cells but also act to regulate cellular functions, especially determination of stem cell fate.^{311,342} Furthermore, ECM proteins can modulate signal transduction activated by various bioactive molecules, including growth factors.^{311,343} The morphology of MSCs is regulated by controlling the adhesion of cells to ECM proteins, and cell morphology can, in turn, regulate cell differentiation. ECMs engineered in culture dishes or scaffolds can control MSC morphology and differentiation with high efficiency, which provides many possibilities for the application of stem cells in regenerative medicine.⁵³

The interaction between specific ECM proteins and MSCs can guide differentiation of MSCs into specific lineages. The most widely used ECM proteins that promote differentiation of MSCs into specific lineages are summarized in Figure 10.

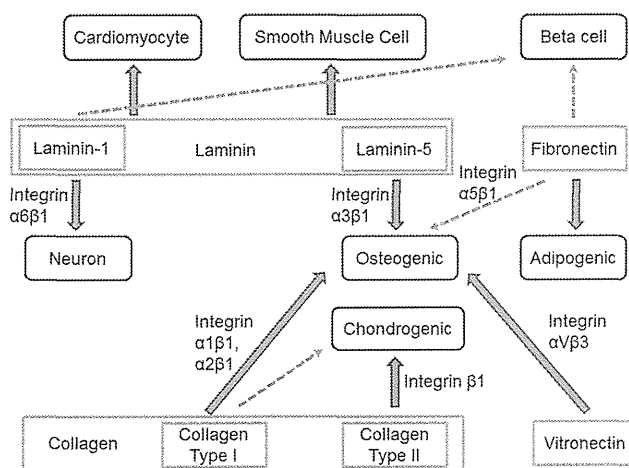


Figure 10. ECM proteins guide stem cell fate through integrin and nonintegrin binding.

Collagen type I, vitronectin, and laminin-5 promote MSCs into osteogenic differentiation.^{97,102,196} The binding of integrin receptors of MSCs differs depending on the ECM protein. Integrin $\alpha3\beta1$ mediates the adhesion of BMSCs to laminin-5,¹⁰² whereas integrin $\alpha1\beta1$ and $\alpha2\beta1$ mainly bind collagen type I.^{97,196} Integrin $\alpha V\beta3$ mediates binding between BMSCs and vitronectin.⁹⁷ Laminin promotes differentiation of BMSCs into cardiomyocytes and smooth muscle cells,^{83,279} whereas laminin-1 leads BMSCs into neural differentiation via integrin $\alpha6\beta1$.¹⁰¹ The differentiation of BMSCs into β -cells may be promoted by interactions between MSCs and fibronectin and/or laminin-1.^{76,290} Fibronectin seems to promote the differentiation of MSCs into adipocytes.⁵³

Decellularized ECM scaffolds are attractive biomaterials, as these scaffolds can potentially retain the architecture of the original tissue and reproduce biological niches more precisely than scaffolds prepared from single ECM proteins. Decellularized ECM scaffolds might be effective tools for the differentiation of MSCs into some difficult lineages, such as β -cells, dopamin-secreting cells, and hepatocytes.

Synthetic or natural polymers containing ECM peptides are promising biomaterials for hydrogels or scaffolds containing MSCs. A variety of material designs for hydrogels and scaffolds containing MSCs are possible using polymers that have ECM peptides, which allow cell adhesion, proliferation, and differentiation into specific lineages. However, it is currently difficult to summarize the direction of specific differentiation lineages from the interaction of specific ECM peptides and MSCs. The combination of base polymers and ECM peptides on scaffolds, as well as the chemical and physical characteristics of scaffolds, determines the differentiation of MSCs into specific lineages.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

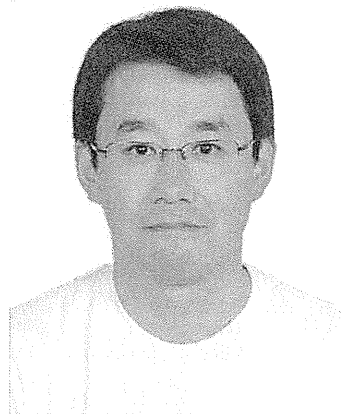
Corresponding Author

*Tel.: +866-34227151-34253. Fax: +866-3-2804271. E-mail: higuchi@ncu.edu.tw.

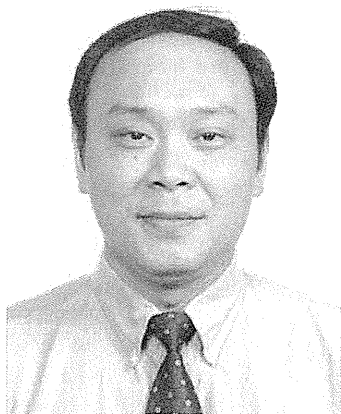
Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

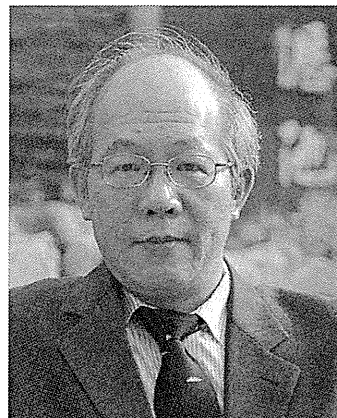
Biographies



Akon Higuchi is a Chair (Distinguished) Professor in Department of Chemical and Materials Engineering, National Central University. He was also jointed to Department of Reproduction, National Research Institute for Child Health and Development, and Cathay Medical Research Institute, Cathay General Hospital as a special researcher. He received his B.S. in Tokyo Institute of Technology in 1979, and his Ph.D. in Tokyo Institute of Technology in 1985. He was a Professor in Department of Materials & Life Science in Seikei University from 1993 to 2007. He received Sofue Memorial Award from Society of Fiber Science, Japan in 1994, and Seikei Academic Award from Seikei Alumni Association in 2003. He is interesting in the development of materials for stem cell research. He established purification method of hematopoietic stem cells and mesenchymal stem cells by filtration method through polymeric porous membranes. He is also developing culture materials for stem cells.



Qing-Dong Ling is a Senior Scientist and the director of the Cathay Medical Research Institute, Cathay General Hospital in Taipei, Taiwan. In 2006, he was joined to the Graduate Institute of Systems Biology and Bioinformatics, the National Central University as an adjunct associate professor. He received his B.S., DDS Degrees in Medical School, Zhejiang University in 1979 and Ph.D. Degree in Dental Medicine from Tokyo Dental College in 1996. He spent two and half years at the National Institute of Health as a visiting fellow from 1996 to 1999. Dr. Ling's research interests include cellular and molecular mechanisms in neuronal plasticity following neonatal inflammation; the gene expression in cancer and stem cells using microarray experiments; Signal Transduction and Systems Biology of Stem Cells.



Shih-Tien Hsu was born on December 17, 1955 in Taipei, Taiwan. He received a M.D. degree from China Medical University in 1982 and a MPH from Harvard School of Public Health in 1993. He receive residency training program in the Department of Internal Medicine in Chang-Gung Memorial Hospital from 1984 to 1987. Then, he joined the Taipei Hospital of Department of Health since 1987. Later, he completed the fellowship training of Department of Pulmonary Medicine and Critical Medicine in National Taiwan University Hospital in 1989. His research and interests were in the fields of Pulmonary Medicine, Geriatric Medicine, and Occupational Medicine, and Community Medicine. He has been to Tokyo University, Michigan University Hospital for study. He joined the Landseed Hospital since 1998, and currently the Vice-President of Landseed Hospital. Also, he is currently CIO of Landseed Medical Internal Group.



Akihiro Umezawa is a Department Head and Chairman in Department of Reproductive Biology at National Research Institute for Child Health and Development. He received his M.D. at Keio University School of Medicine in 1985, and his Ph.D. at Keio University Graduate School of Medicine in 1990. He served as an Associate Professor in Department of Pathology at Keio University School of Medicine until 2002. He also served as an adjunct Professor at Keio University and Seikei University. He received Henry Christian Memorial Award from American Federation for Clinical Research Foundation in 1993, and Kitasato Award from School of Medicine at Keio University in 1997. Dr. Umezawa's research focuses on stem cell-based therapy using induced pluripotent stem cells, embryonic stem cells, and mesenchymal stem cells.

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