Genome-wide Association Study Identifies *TNFSF15* and *POU2AF1* as Susceptibility Loci for Primary Biliary Cirrhosis in the Japanese Population

Minoru Nakamura,[1,2,3,30,*] Nao Nishida,[4,5,30] Minae Kawashima,[4] Yoshihiro Aiba,[1] Atsushi Tanaka,[6] Michio Yasunami,[7] Hitomi Nakamura,[1] Atsumasai Komori,[1] Makoto Nakamuta,[2] Mikio Zeniya,[8] Etsuko Hashimoto,[9] Hiromasa Ohira,[10] Kazuhide Yamamoto,[11] Morikazu Onji,[12] Shuichi Kaneko,[13] Masao Honda,[13] Satoshi Yamagiwa,[14] Kazuhiko Nakao,[15] Takafumi Ichida,[16] Hajime Takikawa,[6] Masataka Seike,[17] Takeji Umemura,[18] Yoshiyuki Ueno,[19] Shotaro Sakisaka,[20] Kentaro Kikuchi,[21] Hirotoshi Ebinuma,[22] Noriyo Yamashiki,[23] Sumito Tamura,[24] Yasuhiko Sugawara,[24] Akira Mori,[25] Shintaro Yagi,[25] Ken Shirabe,[26] Akinobu Taketomi,[26] Kuniaki Arai,[13] Kyoko Monoe,[10] Tatsuki Ichikawa,[15] Makiko Taniai,[9] Yasuhiro Miyake,[11] Teru Kumagi,[12] Masanori Abe,[12] Kaname Yoshizawa,[2,18] Satoru Joshita,[18] Shinji Shimoda,[27] Koichi Honda,[17] Hiroki Takahashi,[8] Katsuji Hirano,[16] Yasuaki Takeyama,[20] Kenichi Harada,[28] Kiyoshi Migita,[1] Masahiro Ito,[1] Hiroshi Yatsuhashi,[1] Nobuyoshi Fukushima,[2] Hajime Ota,[2] Tatsuji Komatsu,[2] Takeo Saoshiro,[2] Jinya Ishida,[2] Hirotsugu Kouno,[2] Hirotaka Kouno,[2] Michiyasu Yagura,[2] Masakazu Kobayashi,[2] Toyokichi Muro,[2] Naohiko Masaki,[2] Keiichi Hirata,[2] Yukio Watanabe,[2] Yoko Nakamura,[2] Masaaki Shimada,[2] Noboru Hirashima,[2] Toshiki Komeda,[2] Kazuhiro Sugi,[2] Michiaki Koga,[2] Keisuke Ario,[2] Eiichi Takesaki,[2] Yoshihiko Maehara,[26] Shinji Uemoto,[25] Norihiro Kokudo,[24] Hirohito Tsubouchi,[29] Masashi Mizokami,[5] Yasuni Nakanuma,[28] Katsushi Tokunaga,[4] and Hiromi Ishibashi[1]

For the identification of susceptibility loci for primary biliary cirrhosis (PBC), a genome-wide association study (GWAS) was performed in 963 Japanese individuals (487 PBC cases and 476 healthy controls) and in a subsequent replication study that included 1,402 other Japanese individuals (787 cases and 615 controls). In addition to the most significant susceptibility region, human leukocyte antigen (HLA), we identified two significant susceptibility loci, *TNFSF15* (rs4979462) and *POU2AF1* (rs4938534) (combined odds ratio [OR] = 1.56, $p = 2.84 \times 10^{-14}$ for rs4979462, and combined OR = 1.39, $p = 2.38 \times 10^{-8}$ for rs4938534). Among 21 non-HLA susceptibility loci for PBC identified in GWASs of individuals of European descent, three loci (*IL7R*, *IKZF3*, and *CD80*) showed significant associations (combined $p = 3.66 \times 10^{-8}$, 3.66×10^{-9}, and 3.04×10^{-9}, respectively) and *STAT4* and *NFKB1* loci showed suggestive association with PBC

[1]Clinical Research Center, National Hospital Organization (NHO) Nagasaki Medical Center, and Department of Hepatology, Nagasaki University Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Omura, Nagasaki 856-8562, Japan; [2]Headquaters of Primary Biliary Cirrhosis Research in the NHO Study Group for Liver Disease in Japan, Clinical Research Center, NHO Nagasaki Medical Center, Omura, Nagasaki 856-8562, Japan; [3]Headquaters of the gp210 Working Group in Intractable Liver Disease Research Project Team of the Ministry of Health and Welfare in Japan, Department of Hepatology, Nagasaki University Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Omura, Nagasaki 856-8562, Japan; [4]Department of Human Genetics, Graduate School of Medicine, The University of Tokyo, Tokyo 113-0033, Japan; [5]The Research Center for Hepatitis and Immunology, National Center for Global Health and Medicine, Ichikawa 272-8516, Japan; [6]Department of Medicine, Teikyo University School of Medicine, Tokyo 173-8605, Japan; [7]Department of Clinical Medicine, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Nagasaki University, Nagasaki 852-8523, Japan; [8]Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Tokyo Jikei University School of Medicine, Tokyo 105-8461, Japan; [9]Department of Medicine and Gastroenterology, Tokyo Women's Medical University, Tokyo 162-8666, Japan; [10]Department of Gastroenterology and Rheumatic Diseases, Fukushima Medical University, Fukushima 960-1295, Japan; [11]Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Okayama University Graduate School of Medicine, Dentistry, and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Okayama 700-8558, Japan; [12]Department of Gastroenterology and Metabology, Ehime University Graduate School of Medicine, Matsuyama 791-0295, Japan; [13]Department of Gastroenterology, Kanazawa University Graduate School of Medicine, Kanazawa 920-0942, Japan; [14]Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Niigata University Graduate School of Medical and Dental Sciences, Niigata 951-8510, Japan; [15]Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Nagasaki University Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Nagaski 852-8501, Japan; [16]Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Juntendo University Shizuoka Hospital, Shizuoka 410-2295, Japan; [17]First Department of Internal Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Oita University, Oita 879-5593, Japan; [18]Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Department of Medicine, Shinshu University School of Medicine, Matsumoto 390-8621, Japan; [19]Division of Gastroenterology, Tohoku University Graduate School of Medicine, Sendai 980-8575, Japan; [20]Department of Gastroenterology and Medicine, Fukuoka University School of Medicine, Fukuoka 814-0180, Japan; [21]Deprtment of Internal Medicine, Teikyo University Mizonokuchi Hospital, Kawasaki 213-8507, Japan; [22]Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Department of Internal Medicine, Keio Graduate School of Medicine, Tokyo 160-8582, Japan; [23]Organ Transplantation Service, The University of Tokyo, Tokyo 113-8655, Japan; [24]Hepatobiliary and Pancreatic Surgery Division and Artificial Organ and Transplantation Division, Department of Surgery, Graduate School of Medicine, The University of Tokyo, Tokyo 113-8655, Japan; [25]Division of Hepato-pancreato-biliary Surgery and Transplantation, Department of Surgery, Graduate School of Medicine, Kyoto University, Kyoto 606-8507, Japan; [26]Department of Surgery and Science, Kyushu University Graduate School of Medical Sciences, Fukuoka 812-8582, Japan; [27]Department of Medicine and Biosystemic Science, Kyushu University Graduate School of Medical Sciences, Fukuoka 812-8582, Japan; [28]Department of Human Pathology, Kanazawa University Graduate School of Medicine, Kanazawa 920-0942, Japan; [29]Department of Digestive and Lifestyle-Related Disease, Kagoshima University Graduate School of Medical and Dental Science, Kagoshima 890-8520, Japan
[30]These authors contributed equally to this work
*Correspondence: nakamuram@nmc.hosp.go.jp
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ajhg.2012.08.010.

(combined $p = 1.11 \times 10^{-6}$ and 1.42×10^{-7}, respectively) in the Japanese population. These observations indicated the existence of ethnic differences in genetic susceptibility loci to PBC and the importance of TNF signaling and B cell differentiation for the development of PBC in individuals of European descent and Japanese individuals.

Primary biliary cirrhosis (PBC, MIM 109720) is a chronic and progressive cholestatic liver disease, presumably caused by autoimmune reactions against biliary epithelial cells, leading to liver cirrhosis and hepatic failure.[1] The incidence and prevalence of PBC range from 0.33 to 5.8 and from 2 to 40 per 100,000 inhabitants, respectively, in different geographical areas.[2] This may indicate the contribution of environmental or genetic factors in the development of PBC, whereas the clinical profiles of PBC are thought to be similar between different ethnicities and/or different geographical areas, including European-descent and eastern Asian populations. The high concordance rate in monozygotic twins compared to dizygotic twins[3] and familial clustering of individuals with PBC indicate the involvement of strong genetic factors in the development of PBC; however, the pathogenesis of PBC is still poorly understood. Previous genome-wide association studies (GWASs) and subsequent meta-analyses have identified *HLA* and 21 non-HLA susceptibility loci (*IL12A* [MIM 161560], *IL12RB2* [MIM 601642], *STAT4* [MIM 600558], *IRF5* [MIM 607218], *IKZF3* [MIM 606221], *MMEL1* [MIM 120520], *SPIB* [MIM 606802], *DENND1B* [MIM 613292], *CD80* [MIM 112203], *IL7R* [MIM 146661], *CXCR5* [MIM 601613], *TNFRSF1A* [MIM 191190], *CLEC16A* [MIM 611303], *NFKB* [MIM 164012], *RAD51L1* [MIM 602948], *MAP3K7IP1* [MIM 602615], *PLCL2* [MIM 614276], *RPS6KA4* [MIM 603606], *TNFAIP2* [MIM 603300], 7p14, and 16q24) to PBC in individuals of European descent,[4–7] indicating the important role of several autoimmune pathways (i.e., IL12A signaling, TNF/TLR-NF-κB signaling, and B cell differentiation) in the development of PBC. However, GWASs for PBC have never been reported for ethnicities other than European descent, limiting our knowledge of the genetic architecture of PBC. Here, we conducted a GWAS for PBC in the Japanese population to identify host genetic factors related to PBC, which would not only expand our knowledge of pathogenic pathways in PBC but also lead to the development of rationale for therapies in the future.

Samples from 2,395 individuals (1,295 cases with PBC and 1,100 healthy volunteers working at the National Hospital Organization (NHO) in Japan as a medical staff who declared having no apparent diseases, including chronic liver diseases and autoimmune diseases [healthy controls]) were collected by members of the Japan PBC-GWAS Consortium, which consists of 31 hospitals participating in the NHO Study Group for Liver Disease in Japan (NHOSLJ) and 24 university hospitals participating in the gp210 Working Group in Intractable Liver Disease Research Project Team of the Ministry of Health and Welfare in Japan. Most of the case and control samples were collected from the mainland and the neighboring islands of Japan (Honshu, Kyushu, and Shikoku). Previous studies have shown that there is little genetic heterogeneity in resident populations in these areas.[8] In fact, the genetic inflation factor was close to 1.00, and only a small portion of the samples were identified as outliers in the principal component analysis. The cases were diagnosed with PBC if they met at least two of the following internationally accepted criteria:[9] biochemical evidence of cholestasis based mainly on alkaline phosphatase elevation, presence of serum anti-mitochondrial antibodies, histological evidence of non-suppurative destructive cholangitis, and destruction of interlobular bile ducts. The demographic details of PBC cases are summarized in Table S1, available online. Of the 487 PBC cases in the GWAS, 57 were male and 430 were female, ages ranged from 33 to 90 years, the median age was 66 years, 320 cases had early-stage PBC (a stage without any signs indicating portal hypertension or liver cirrhosis), 110 had late-stage PBC without jaundice (a stage with signs of portal hypertension or liver cirrhosis but without persistent jaundice), and 57 were at the late stage with jaundice (persistent presence of jaundice [total bilirubin >2 mg/dl]). Of the 476 healthy controls in the GWAS, 170 were male and 306 were female, ages ranged from 25 to 87 years, and the median age was 40. Of the 808 PBC cases in the replication set, 120 were male and 688 were female, ages ranged from 24 to 85 years, the median age was 61 years, 646 had early-stage PBC, 121 had late-stage PBC without jaundice, and 39 were at the late stage with jaundice. Of the 624 healthy controls in the replication set, 271 were male and 353 were female, ages ranged from 24 to 74 years, and the median age was 33 years. Concomitant autoimmune diseases are also shown in Table S1. As for inflammatory bowel diseases such as Crohn disease (CD, MIM 266600) and ulcerative colitis (UC, MIM 266600), only one out of 1,274 PBC cases had UC, but none had CD. DNA was extracted from whole peripheral blood with the QIAamp DNA Blood Midi Kit (QIAGEN, Tokyo).

For the GWAS, we genotyped 1,015 samples (515 Japanese PBC cases and 500 Japanese healthy controls) using the Affymetrix Axiom Genome-Wide ASI 1 Array, according to the manufacturer's instructions. After excluding three PBC samples with a Dish QC of less than 0.82, we recalled the remaining 1,012 samples (512 cases and 500 controls) using the Genotyping Console v4.1 software. Here, Dish QC represents the recommended sample quality control (QC) metric for the Axiom arrays.[10] Of the 600,000 SNPs embedded in the array, samples with an overall call rate of less than 97% were also excluded. As a result, 508 cases and 484 controls were subjected to further analysis. All samples used for GWAS passed a heterozygosity check, and no duplicated and related samples were identified in identity by descent testing. Moreover, principal component analysis found 29 outliers to be excluded via the Smirnov-Grubbs test

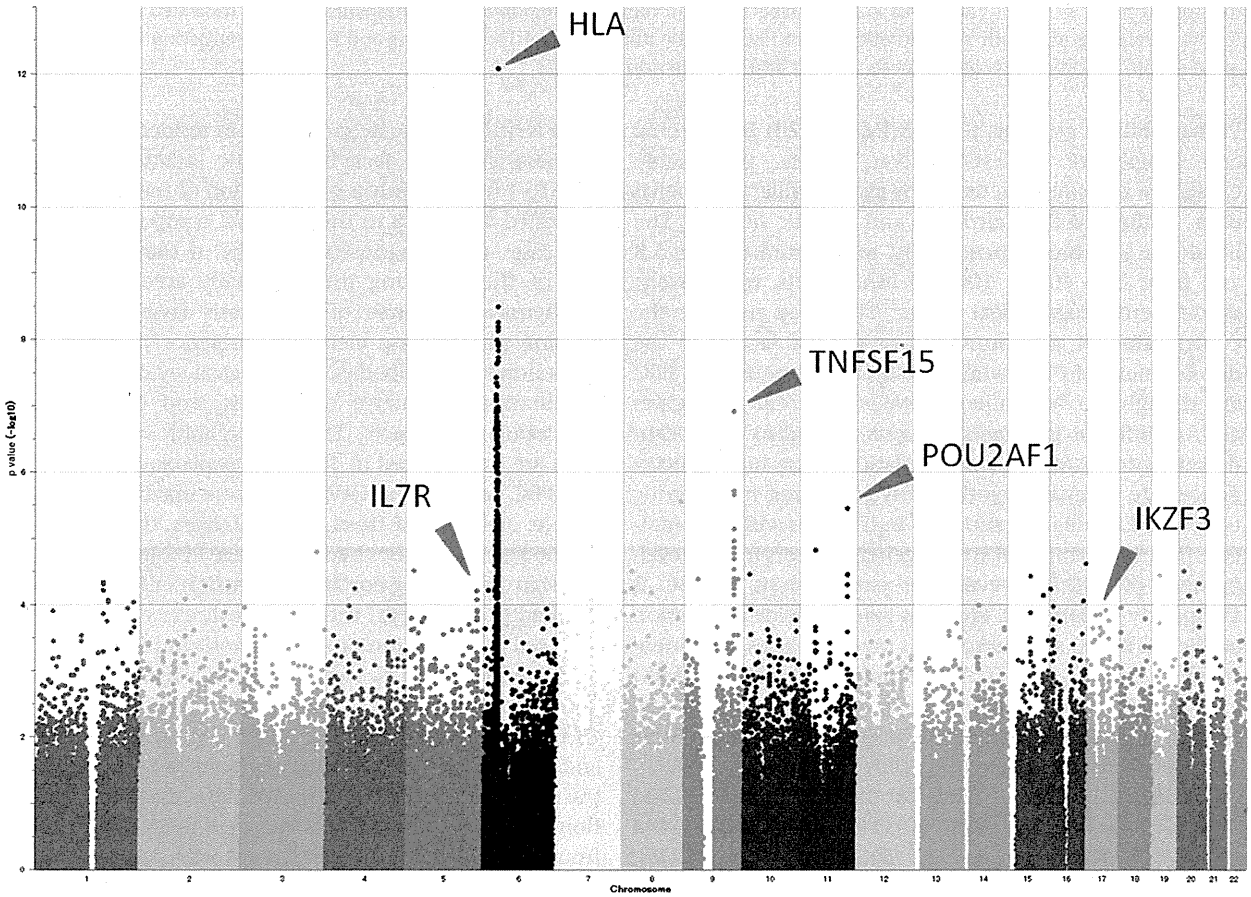

Figure 1. GWAS Results
From 963 samples (487 Japanese PBC cases and 476 Japanese healthy controls), p values were calculated with a chi-square test for allele frequencies among 420,928 SNPs.

and finally showed that all PBC cases (n = 487) and healthy controls (n = 476) formed a single cluster together with the HapMap JPT (Japanese in Tokyo from the CEPH collection), but not with CHB (Han Chinese in Beijing) samples (Figure S1, Table S2). These results indicate that the effect of population stratification was negligible. The average overall call rates of the remaining 487 PBC cases and 476 healthy controls were 99.38% (97.15–99.80) and 99.27% (97.01–99.81), respectively.[11] We then applied the following thresholds for SNP quality control during the data cleaning: SNP call rate ≥95%, minor allele frequency ≥5% in both PBC cases and healthy controls, and Hardy-Weinberg Equilibrium (HWE) p value ≥0.001 in healthy controls.[12] Of the SNPs on autosomal chromosomes and in the pseudoautosomal regions on the X chromosome, 420,928 and 317 passed the quality control filters and were used for the association analysis, respectively (Table S3). A quantile-quantile plot of the distribution of test statistics for the comparison of genotype frequencies in PBC cases and healthy controls showed that the inflation factor lambda was 1.039 for all the tested SNPs, including those in the HLA region, and was 1.026 when SNPs in the HLA region were excluded (Figures S2A and S2B). Table S4 shows the 298 SNPs with $p < 0.0001$ in the GWAS. All cluster plots for the SNPs with a $p < 0.0001$ from a chi-square test of the allele frequency model were checked by visual inspection, and SNPs with ambiguous genotype calls were excluded. For the GWAS and replication study, a chi-square test was applied to a two-by-two contingency table in an allele frequency model.

Figure 1 shows a genome-wide view of the single-point association data, which are based on allele frequencies. We found that the *HLA-DQB1* locus (MIM 604305) had the strongest association with susceptibility to PBC (rs9275175, odds ratio [OR] = 1.94; 95% confidence interval [CI] = 1.62–2.33, $p = 8.30 \times 10^{-13}$) (Figure 1 and Table S4); this finding was consistent with findings from previous studies.[4–7] In addition to the HLA class II region, loci *TNFSF15* and *POU2AF1* showed evidence indicative of association with PBC (rs4979462, OR = 1.63; 95% CI = 1.36–1.95, $p = 1.21 \times 10^{-7}$ for *TNFSF15*; rs4938534, OR = 1.53; 95% CI = 1.28–1.83, $p = 3.51 \times 10^{-6}$ for *POU2AF1*).

In a subsequent replication analysis, 27 SNPs with $p < 0.0001$ in the initial GWAS were also studied, in addition to SNPs at the *TNFSF15* and *POU2AF1* loci. Tagging SNPs were selected from the regions surrounding *TNFSF15* and

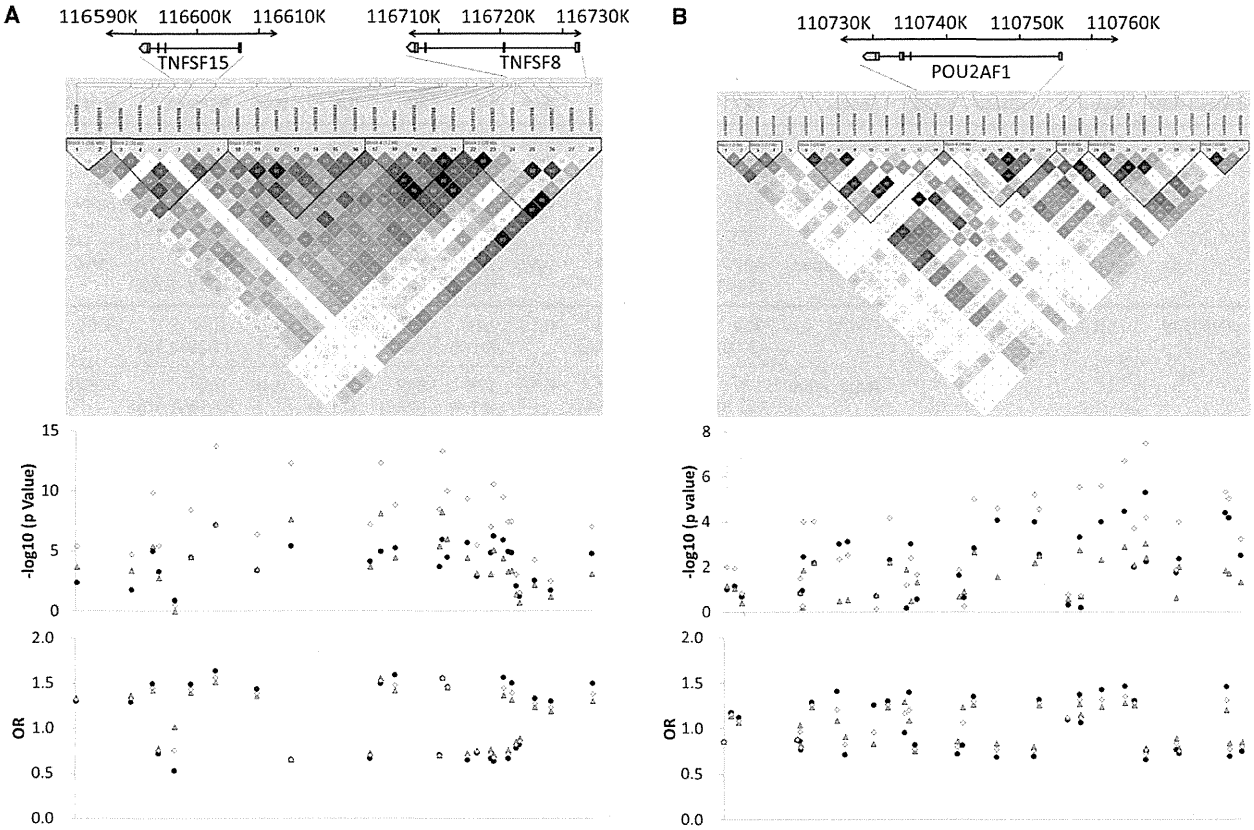

Figure 2. LD Structure, p Values, and OR Plots in the Association Analysis
LD maps (A) around *TNFSF15* (chr9: nucleotide position: 116561403–116733452; build 36.3) and (B) around *POU2AF1* (chr11: nucleotide position: 110684600–110802128; build 36.3). The middle panels show estimates of pairwise r^2 for (A) 28 SNPs and (B) 33 SNPs in the high-density mapping with a total of 2,365 samples used. The bottom panels show p values and OR-based chi-square tests for the allelic model for the left panels of 963 samples in the GWAS (●), the right panels of 1,402 samples in the replication study (▲), and the combined analysis (◇).

POU2AF1 (28 and 33, respectively) for high-density association mapping (Table S5, Figures 2A and 2B). For this follow-up replication analysis, an independent set of 1,402 samples (787 Japanese PBC cases and 615 Japanese healthy controls) and the original set of 963 samples (487 PBC cases and 476 healthy controls) were genotyped with the DigiTag2[13] and custom TaqMan SNP genotyping assays (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA) on the LightCycler 480 Real-Time PCR System (Roche, Mannheim, Germany). The strongest associations identified in the initial GWAS were replicated in the independent set of 1,402 samples (OR = 1.52, $p = 5.79 \times 10^{-8}$ for rs4979462; OR = 1.29, $p = 9.32 \times 10^{-4}$ for rs4938534, Table 1). The combined p values were 2.84×10^{-14} (OR = 1.56; 95% CI = 1.39–1.76) for rs4979462 and 2.38×10^{-8} (OR = 1.39; 95% CI = 1.24–1.56) for rs4938534 (Table 1), both of which reached the genome-wide significance level of $p < 5 \times 10^{-8}$. In contrast, the other 27 weakly associated SNPs identified in the initial GWAS (p values <0.0001) were not found to have significant associations with PBC (Table S5). Moreover, no strongly associated SNPs were observed when comparing PBC cases between the early and late stages (Table S5).

A haplotype analysis of the *TNFSF15* and *POU2AF1* regions was conducted with the use of the genotype data from all 2,365 samples (1,274 PBC cases and 1,091 healthy controls). Linkage disequilibrium (LD) blocks were analyzed with Gabriel's algorithm,[14] and five blocks were observed in the *TNFSF15* region and seven blocks in the *POU2AF1* region (Figures 2A and 2B). There were no differences in the LD blocks between PBC cases and healthy controls. The risk haplotypes in each region showed a lower level of association than did the individual SNPs ($p = 8.26 \times 10^{-14}$ for *TNFSF15* and $p = 1.00 \times 10^{-4}$ for *POU2AF1*) (Tables S6 and S7).

Next, we focused on data from our initial GWAS in 21 loci that are reportedly associated with susceptibility to PBC in populations of European descent.[4–7] We found that three such loci (*IL7R*, *IKZF3*, and *STAT4*) had p values of less than 0.001 and eight other such loci (*RAD51L1*, *CXCR5*, *PLCL2*, *IL12RB2*, *NFKB1*, *CD80*, *DENND1B*, and 7p14) showed evidence of marginal associations ($p < 0.05$) in the initial GWAS in 487 Japanese PBC cases and 476 Japanese healthy controls (data not shown). We genotyped three SNPs (rs6890503 for *IL7R*, rs9303277 for *IKZF3*, and rs7574865 for *STAT4*) in an independent set

Table 1. *TNFSF15* SNP rs4979462 and *POU2AF1* SNP rs4938534 Associated with Susceptibility to PBC

dbSNP rsID	Nearest Gene	Risk Allele	Allele (1/2)	Stage	PBC Cases				Healthy Controls				OR[a]	
					11	12	22	RAF	11	12	22	RAF	95% CI	p Value[b]
rs4979462	*TNFSF15*	T	T/C	GWAS	154 (31.8)	244 (50.4)	86 (17.8)	0.57	98 (20.7)	230 (48.5)	146 (30.8)	0.45	1.63 (1.36–1.95)	1.21×10^{-7}
				Replication	253 (32.3)	390 (49.7)	141 (18.0)	0.57	131 (21.6)	305 (50.3)	170 (28.1)	0.47	1.52 (1.30–1.76)	5.79×10^{-8}
				Combined	407 (32.1)	634 (50.0)	227 (17.9)	0.57	229 (21.2)	535 (49.5)	316 (29.3)	0.46	1.56 (1.39–1.76)	2.84×10^{-14}
rs4938534	*POU2AF1*	A	G/A	GWAS	114 (23.6)	229 (47.3)	141 (29.1)	0.53	151 (31.8)	247 (52.0)	77 (16.2)	0.42	1.53 (1.28–1.83)	3.51×10^{-6}
				Replication	179 (22.8)	391 (49.8)	215 (27.4)	0.52	179 (29.4)	299 (49.2)	130 (21.4)	0.46	1.29 (1.11–1.50)	9.32×10^{-4}
				Combined	293 (23.1)	620 (48.9)	356 (28.1)	0.52	330 (30.5)	546 (50.4)	207 (19.1)	0.44	1.39 (1.24–1.56)	2.38×10^{-8}

Parenthetical numbers indicate the percentage of allele 11, 12, or 22 among total alleles in PBC cases or healthy controls. The following abbreviations are used: PBC, primary biliary cirrhosis; RAF, risk allele frequency; and GWAS, genome-wide association study.
[a]Odds ratio (OR) of minor allele from the two-by-two allele frequency table.
[b]p value of Pearson's chi-square test for the allelic model.

of 1,402 samples (787 Japanese PBC cases and 615 Japanese healthy controls) and the original set of 963 samples (487 PBC cases and 476 healthy controls) using the DigiTag2[13] and custom TaqMan SNP genotyping assays. Two SNPs, rs6890853 and rs9303277 located in loci *IL7R* and *IKZF3*, respectively, showed significant associations and the *STAT4* locus (rs7574865) showed suggestive association with PBC in 2,365 Japanese samples (1,274 PBC cases and 1,091 healthy controls) (rs6890853, combined p value = 3.66×10^{-8}, OR = 1.47 for *IL7R*; rs9303277, combined p value = 3.66×10^{-9}, OR = 1.44 for *IKZF3*; rs7574865, combined p value = 1.11×10^{-6}, OR = 1.35 for *STAT4*) (Tables S5 and S8).

Moreover, we genotyped 16 additional associated SNPs, all of which were the same SNPs as identified in previous studies,[4–7] and revealed that six out of 16 SNPs (located on *CXCR5*, *NFKB1*, *CD80*, *DENND1B*, *MAP3K7IP1*, and *TNFAIP2*) were replicated ($p < 0.05$) in 2,365 Japanese samples (Table S8). The SNP rs2293370, located in the *CD80* locus, showed a significant association and the *NFKB1* locus (rs7665090) showed a suggestive association with PBC in the Japanese population (rs2293370, combined p value = 3.04×10^{-9}, OR = 1.48 for *CD80*; rs7665090, combined p value = 1.42×10^{-7}, OR = 1.35 for *NFKB1*). Although further study for determining the primary SNP at each locus is necessary, the remaining ten loci (*RAD51L1*, *PLCL2*, *IL12RB2*, *IRF5*, *SPIB*, *RPS6KA4*, *CLEC16A*, *TNFRSF1A*, *IL12A*, and *MMEL1*) did not show significant association ($p < 0.05$) with PBC in the Japanese population (Table S8).

In the current GWAS in the Japanese population, we identified two significant susceptibility loci for PBC, *TNFSF15* (rs4979462) and *POU2AF1* (rs4938534), which had not been identified in the previous GWAS in populations of European descent. In addition, of the 21 PBC susceptibility loci that have been identified in populations of European descent, three loci (*IL7R*, *IKZF3*, and *CD80*) showed significant associations and two loci (*STAT4* and *NFKB1*) showed suggestive associations with PBC in the Japanese population. Eight other loci (*RAD51L1*, *CXCR5*, *PLCL2*, *IL12RB2*, *DENND1B*, *MAP3K7IP1*, *TNFAIP2*, and 7p14) also showed marginal associations with PBC in the Japanese population. These results indicate the presence of additional important disease pathways (via TNFSF15 and POU2AF1)—differentiation to T helper 1 (Th1) cells (via IL7R and STAT4), B cell differentiation (via IL7R and IKZF3), T cell activation (via CD80), and NF-κB signaling—in addition to the previously reported disease pathways in the development of PBC in Japanese populations.

TNFSF15 is a newly described member of the TNF superfamily that interacts with death receptor 3 (*DR3* [MIM 603366], also known as *TNFRSF25*) not only to promote effector T cell expansion (i.e., Th1 and Th17 cells) and cytokine production (i.e., interferon-γ [IFN-γ, MIM 147570]) at the site of inflammation, but also to induce apoptosis in cells that overexpress DR3.[15] Interestingly, genetic polymorphisms in *TNFSF15* are associated with susceptibility to CD, UC, ankylosing spondylitis (AS, MIM 106300), and leprosy (MIM 609888)[16–20] (Table S8). Strong association of five SNPs (rs3810936, rs6478108, rs6478109, rs7848647, and rs7869487) in the *TNFSF15* region with CD was first reported for a Japanese population,[16] and the finding was replicated in an independent Japanese population and in European-descent and Korean populations.[21–25] Another SNP within *TNFSF15* (rs4263839) is also associated with susceptibility to CD in populations of European descent.[17,20,26] In addition, the risk alleles of the SNPs were significantly associated with *TNFSF15* mRNA expression in peripheral blood.[27,28] Given that there exists strong LD among SNPs in *TNFSF15*, including those in the promoter region (rs6478109 and

rs7848647) and introns (rs4263839 and rs4979462), it is very probable that the PBC susceptibility haplotype containing rs4979462 also influences *TNFSF15* mRNA expression. Additionally, TNFSF15 signaling via DR3 synergizes with interleukin-12 (IL-12) and IL-18 to promote IFN-γ production.[15] The IL-12 signaling pathway includes *IL12A* and *IL12RB* (MIM 601604), variants of which have been identified as PBC susceptibility loci in previous GWASs of peoples of European ancestry, and has been implicated as a key player in the pathogenesis of PBC.[4–7] STAT4 is essential for IL-12 signal transduction via the IL-12 receptor (IL12R) for IFN-γ production and Th1 polarization.[29] Thus, the evidence that *TNFSF15* and *STAT4* were identified and confirmed as PBC susceptibility loci in the present study might indicate that the IL-12 signaling pathway via IL12R is also operative in PBC pathogenesis in Japanese populations, as it is in populations of European descent.

POU2AF1 is a B cell-specific transcriptional factor that coactivates octamer-binding transcriptional factors *POU2F1* (MIM 164175) and *POU2F2* (MIM 164176) on B cell-specific promoters; thus, *POU2AF1* is essential for B cell maturation and germinal center formation.[30] The E-twenty six transcription factor *Spi-B* was recently identified as a direct target of the coactivator *POU2AF1*.[31] *Spi-B* is an important mediator of both B cell receptor signaling and early T cell lineage decisions.[32,33] *Spi-B* also induces IL7R-induced CD40 (MIM 109535, MIM 300386) expression.[34] Given that *Spi-B* has been identified as a PBC susceptibility gene in previous GWASs of peoples of European ancestry,[6,7,35] variation of *POU2AF1* might function along with *Spi-B* in this pathway of B cell signaling and differentiation. The lack of *POU2AF1* reportedly prevents the development of autoimmunity in *Aiolos* (also known as *IKZF3*) mutant mice, which have a systemic lupus erythematosus (MIM 152700)-like phenotype, and in MRL-lpr mice.[36,37] *IKZF3* and *IL7R* were both replicated and confirmed as PBC susceptibility loci in this study; *IKZF3* functions as a transcription factor that participates in the generation of high-affinity bone marrow plasma cells responsible for long-term immunity, and *IL7R* participates in pre-B cell expansion.[38,39] Collectively, these results strengthen the notion that the B cell signaling pathway is involved in the development of PBC.

In conclusion, *TNFSF15* and *POU2AF1* were identified as significant susceptibility loci for PBC in a Japanese population. Our results provide further evidence for the presence of (1) ethnic differences in genetic susceptibility loci (i.e., *TNFSF15*, *IL12A*, and *IL12RB2*), (2) a new autoimmune pathway (i.e., TNFSF15 signaling) shared with other autoimmune diseases (CD, UC, and AS), and (3) common pathogenic pathways such as B cell differentiation (i.e., *POU2AF1*, *IKZF3*, and *SPIB*), IL-12 signaling (i.e., *IL12A*, *IL12RB2*, and *STAT4*), and T cell activation (i.e., *CD80*) for the development of PBC in individuals of European descent and Japanese individuals (Table S8). Functional analysis of these genetic loci, as well as the identification of additional susceptibility loci associated with PBC in eastern Asian populations, should facilitate the analysis of the pathogenesis of PBC worldwide and aid the development of rationale for therapies in the future.

Supplemental Data

Supplemental Data include two figures, eight tables, and Supplemental Acknowledgments and can be found with this article online at http://www.cell.com/AJHG/.

Acknowledgments

The study was approved by the ethics committees of Nagasaki Medical Center and all institutes and hospitals throughout Japan that participated in this collaborative study. All participants provided written informed consent for participation in this study. This study was supported by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (#20590800, #23591006) to M.N., by a Grant-in-Aid for Clinical Research from the NHO to M. Nakamura, by a grant from the Research Program of Intractable Disease provided by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare of Japan to H.I., and by a grant for Scientific Research on Innovative Areas (Genome Science) from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology of Japan (MEXT) to K.T. We thank Yoriko Mawatari, Megumi Sageshima, Yuko Ogasawara, Natsumi Baba, and Rieko Hayashi (University of Tokyo) for technical assistance. We also thank Shinya Nagaoka and Seigo Abiru (NHO Nagasaki Medical Center, Omura, Japan) and Shigeki Hayashi, Hiroshi Mano, Yukio Ohara, Haruhiro Yamashita, Kouki Matsushita, Takeaki Sato, Tsutomu Yamashita, Masahiko Takahashi, Tetsuo Yamamoto, Hironori Sakai, Michio Kato, Fujio Makita, Hitoshi Takaki, and Hideo Nishimura (members of NHOSLJ) for collecting clinical data and blood samples and for obtaining informed consent from PBC cases.

Received: April 15, 2012
Revised: June 3, 2012
Accepted: August 8, 2012
Published online: September 20, 2012

Web Resources

The URLs for data presented herein are as follows:

MEXT Integrated GWAS Database, https://gwas.biosciencedbc.jp/cgi-bin/gwasdb/gwas_top.cgi
Online Mendelian Inheritance in Man (OMIM), http://www.omim.org

References

1. Kaplan, M.M., and Gershwin, M.E. (2005). Primary biliary cirrhosis. N. Engl. J. Med. *353*, 1261–1273.
2. Boonstra, K., Beuers, U., and Ponsioen, C.Y. (2012). Epidemiology of primary sclerosing cholangitis and primary biliary cirrhosis: a systematic review. J. Hepatol. *56*, 1181–1188.
3. Selmi, C., Mayo, M.J., Bach, N., Ishibashi, H., Invernizzi, P., Gish, R.G., Gordon, S.C., Wright, H.I., Zweiban, B., Podda, M., and Gershwin, M.E. (2004). Primary biliary cirrhosis in monozygotic and dizygotic twins: genetics, epigenetics, and environment. Gastroenterology *127*, 485–492.

4. Hirschfield, G.M., Liu, X., Xu, C., Lu, Y., Xie, G., Lu, Y., Gu, X., Walker, E.J., Jing, K., Juran, B.D., et al. (2009). Primary biliary cirrhosis associated with HLA, IL12A, and IL12RB2 variants. N. Engl. J. Med. *360*, 2544–2555.
5. Hirschfield, G.M., Liu, X., Han, Y., Gorlov, I.P., Lu, Y., Xu, C., Lu, Y., Chen, W., Juran, B.D., Coltescu, C., et al. (2010). Variants at IRF5-TNPO3, 17q12-21 and MMEL1 are associated with primary biliary cirrhosis. Nat. Genet. *42*, 655–657.
6. Liu, X., Invernizzi, P., Lu, Y., Kosoy, R., Lu, Y., Bianchi, I., Podda, M., Xu, C., Xie, G., Macciardi, F., et al. (2010). Genome-wide meta-analyses identify three loci associated with primary biliary cirrhosis. Nat. Genet. *42*, 658–660.
7. Mells, G.F., Floyd, J.A., Morley, K.I., Cordell, H.J., Franklin, C.S., Shin, S.Y., Heneghan, M.A., Neuberger, J.M., Donaldson, P.T., Day, D.B., et al.; UK PBC Consortium; Wellcome Trust Case Control Consortium 3. (2011). Genome-wide association study identifies 12 new susceptibility loci for primary biliary cirrhosis. Nat. Genet. *43*, 329–332.
8. Yamaguchi-Kabata, Y., Nakazono, K., Takahashi, A., Saito, S., Hosono, N., Kubo, M., Nakamura, Y., and Kamatani, N. (2008). Japanese population structure, based on SNP genotypes from 7003 individuals compared to other ethnic groups: effects on population-based association studies. Am. J. Hum. Genet. *83*, 445–456.
9. Lindor, K.D., Gershwin, M.E., Poupon, R., Kaplan, M., Bergasa, N.V., and Heathcote, E.J.; American Association for Study of Liver Diseases. (2009). Primary biliary cirrhosis. Hepatology *50*, 291–308.
10. Hoffmann, T.J., Kvale, M.N., Hesselson, S.E., Zhan, Y., Aquino, C., Cao, Y., Cawley, S., Chung, E., Connell, S., Eshragh, J., et al. (2011). Next generation genome-wide association tool: design and coverage of a high-throughput European-optimized SNP array. Genomics *98*, 79–89.
11. Nishida, N., Koike, A., Tajima, A., Ogasawara, Y., Ishibashi, Y., Uehara, Y., Inoue, I., and Tokunaga, K. (2008). Evaluating the performance of Affymetrix SNP Array 6.0 platform with 400 Japanese individuals. BMC Genomics *9*, 431.
12. Miyagawa, T., Nishida, N., Ohashi, J., Kimura, R., Fujimoto, A., Kawashima, M., Koike, A., Sasaki, T., Tanii, H., Otowa, T., et al. (2008). Appropriate data cleaning methods for genome-wide association study. J. Hum. Genet. *53*, 886–893.
13. Nishida, N., Mawatari, Y., Sageshima, M., and Tokunaga, K. (2012). Highly parallel and short-acting amplification with locus-specific primers to detect single nucleotide polymorphisms by the DigiTag2 assay. PLoS ONE *7*, e29967.
14. Gabriel, S.B., Schaffner, S.F., Nguyen, H., Moore, J.M., Roy, J., Blumenstiel, B., Higgins, J., DeFelice, M., Lochner, A., Faggart, M., et al. (2002). The structure of haplotype blocks in the human genome. Science *296*, 2225–2229.
15. Meylan, F., Richard, A.C., and Siegel, R.M. (2011). TL1A and DR3, a TNF family ligand-receptor pair that promotes lymphocyte costimulation, mucosal hyperplasia, and autoimmune inflammation. Immunol. Rev. *244*, 188–196.
16. Yamazaki, K., McGovern, D., Ragoussis, J., Paolucci, M., Butler, H., Jewell, D., Cardon, L., Takazoe, M., Tanaka, T., Ichimori, T., et al. (2005). Single nucleotide polymorphisms in TNFSF15 confer susceptibility to Crohn's disease. Hum. Mol. Genet. *14*, 3499–3506.
17. Barrett, J.C., Hansoul, S., Nicolae, D.L., Cho, J.H., Duerr, R.H., Rioux, J.D., Brant, S.R., Silverberg, M.S., Taylor, K.D., Barmada, M.M., et al.; NIDDK IBD Genetics Consortium; Belgian-French IBD Consortium; Wellcome Trust Case Control Consortium. (2008). Genome-wide association defines more than 30 distinct susceptibility loci for Crohn's disease. Nat. Genet. *40*, 955–962.
18. Zhang, F.R., Huang, W., Chen, S.M., Sun, L.D., Liu, H., Li, Y., Cui, Y., Yan, X.X., Yang, H.T., Yang, R.D., et al. (2009). Genomewide association study of leprosy. N. Engl. J. Med. *361*, 2609–2618.
19. Zinovieva, E., Bourgain, C., Kadi, A., Letourneur, F., Izac, B., Said-Nahal, R., Lebrun, N., Cagnard, N., Vigier, A., Jacques, S., et al. (2009). Comprehensive linkage and association analyses identify haplotype, near to the TNFSF15 gene, significantly associated with spondyloarthritis. PLoS Genet. *5*, e1000528.
20. Latiano, A., Palmieri, O., Latiano, T., Corritore, G., Bossa, F., Martino, G., Biscaglia, G., Scimeca, D., Valvano, M.R., Pastore, M., et al. (2011). Investigation of multiple susceptibility loci for inflammatory bowel disease in an Italian cohort of patients. PLoS ONE *6*, e22688.
21. Kakuta, Y., Kinouchi, Y., Negoro, K., Takahashi, S., and Shimosegawa, T. (2006). Association study of TNFSF15 polymorphisms in Japanese patients with inflammatory bowel disease. Gut *55*, 1527–1528.
22. Tremelling, M., Berzuini, C., Massey, D., Bredin, F., Price, C., Dawson, C., Bingham, S.A., and Parkes, M. (2008). Contribution of TNFSF15 gene variants to Crohn's disease susceptibility confirmed in UK population. Inflamm. Bowel Dis. *14*, 733–737.
23. Yang, S.K., Lim, J., Chang, H.S., Lee, I., Li, Y., Liu, J., and Song, K. (2008). Association of TNFSF15 with Crohn's disease in Koreans. Am. J. Gastroenterol. *103*, 1437–1442.
24. Michelsen, K.S., Thomas, L.S., Taylor, K.D., Yu, Q.T., Mei, L., Landers, C.J., Derkowski, C., McGovern, D.P., Rotter, J.I., and Targan, S.R. (2009). IBD-associated TL1A gene (TNFSF15) haplotypes determine increased expression of TL1A protein. PLoS ONE *4*, e4719.
25. Thiébaut, R., Kotti, S., Jung, C., Merlin, F., Colombel, J.F., Lemann, M., Almer, S., Tysk, C., O'Morain, M., Gassull, M., et al. (2009). TNFSF15 polymorphisms are associated with susceptibility to inflammatory bowel disease in a new European cohort. Am. J. Gastroenterol. *104*, 384–391.
26. Wang, K., Baldassano, R., Zhang, H., Qu, H.Q., Imielinski, M., Kugathasan, S., Annese, V., Dubinsky, M., Rotter, J.I., Russell, R.K., et al. (2010). Comparative genetic analysis of inflammatory bowel disease and type 1 diabetes implicates multiple loci with opposite effects. Hum. Mol. Genet. *19*, 2059–2067.
27. Kakuta, Y., Ueki, N., Kinouchi, Y., Negoro, K., Endo, K., Nomura, E., Takagi, S., Takahashi, S., and Shimosegawa, T. (2009). TNFSF15 transcripts from risk haplotype for Crohn's disease are overexpressed in stimulated T cells. Hum. Mol. Genet. *18*, 1089–1098.
28. Zucchelli, M., Camilleri, M., Andreasson, A.N., Bresso, F., Dlugosz, A., Halfvarson, J., Törkvist, L., Schmidt, P.T., Karling, P., Ohlsson, B., et al. (2011). Association of TNFSF15 polymorphism with irritable bowel syndrome. Gut *60*, 1671–1677.
29. Lleo, A., Gershwin, M.E., Mantovani, A., and Invernizzi, P. (2012). Towards common denominators in primary biliary cirrhosis: the role of IL-12. J. Hepatol. *56*, 731–733.
30. Strubin, M., Newell, J.W., and Matthias, P. (1995). OBF-1, a novel B cell-specific coactivator that stimulates immunoglobulin promoter activity through association with octamer-binding proteins. Cell *80*, 497–506.

31. Bartholdy, B., Du Roure, C., Bordon, A., Emslie, D., Corcoran, L.M., and Matthias, P. (2006). The Ets factor Spi-B is a direct critical target of the coactivator OBF-1. Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA *103*, 11665–11670.
32. Garrett-Sinha, L.A., Su, G.H., Rao, S., Kabak, S., Hao, Z., Clark, M.R., and Simon, M.C. (1999). PU.1 and Spi-B are required for normal B cell receptor-mediated signal transduction. Immunity *10*, 399–408.
33. David-Fung, E.S., Yui, M.A., Morales, M., Wang, H., Taghon, T., Diamond, R.A., and Rothenberg, E.V. (2006). Progression of regulatory gene expression states in fetal and adult pro-T-cell development. Immunol. Rev. *209*, 212–236.
34. Nguyen, V.T., and Benveniste, E.N. (2000). Involvement of STAT-1 and ets family members in interferon-gamma induction of CD40 transcription in microglia/macrophages. J. Biol. Chem. *275*, 23674–23684.
35. Hirschfield, G.M., Xie, G., Lu, E., Sun, Y., Juran, B.D., Chellappa, V., Coltescu, C., Mason, A.L., Milkiewicz, P., Myers, R.P., et al. (2012). Association of primary biliary cirrhosis with variants in the CLEC16A, SOCS1, SPIB and SIAE immunomodulatory genes. Genes Immun. *13*, 328–335.
36. Sun, J., Matthias, G., Mihatsch, M.J., Georgopoulos, K., and Matthias, P. (2003). Lack of the transcriptional coactivator OBF-1 prevents the development of systemic lupus erythematosus-like phenotypes in Aiolos mutant mice. J. Immunol. *170*, 1699–1706.
37. Zuo, J., Ge, H., Zhu, G., Matthias, P., and Sun, J. (2007). OBF-1 is essential for the generation of antibody-secreting cells and the development of autoimmunity in MRL-lpr mice. J. Autoimmun. *29*, 87–96.
38. Cortés, M., and Georgopoulos, K. (2004). Aiolos is required for the generation of high affinity bone marrow plasma cells responsible for long-term immunity. J. Exp. Med. *199*, 209–219.
39. Mackall, C.L., Fry, T.J., and Gress, R.E. (2011). Harnessing the biology of IL-7 for therapeutic application. Nat. Rev. Immunol. *11*, 330–342.

Journal of Medical Virology 85:449–458 (2013)

Model Incorporating the *ITPA* Genotype Identifies Patients at High Risk of Anemia and Treatment Failure With Pegylated-Interferon Plus Ribavirin Therapy for Chronic Hepatitis C

Masayuki Kurosaki,[1] Yasuhito Tanaka,[2] Nao Nishida,[3] Naoya Sakamoto,[4] Nobuyuki Enomoto,[5] Kentaro Matsuura,[2] Yasuhiro Asahina,[6] Mina Nakagawa,[6] Mamoru Watanabe,[6] Minoru Sakamoto,[5] Shinya Maekawa,[5] Katsushi Tokunaga,[3] Masashi Mizokami,[7] and Namiki Izumi[1]*

[1]*Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Musashino Red Cross Hospital, Tokyo, Japan*
[2]*Department of Virology, Liver Unit, Nagoya City University Graduate School of Medical Sciences, Nagoya, Japan*
[3]*Department of Human Genetics, Graduate School of Medicine, University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan*
[4]*Department of Gastroenterology and Hematology, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan*
[5]*First Department of Internal Medicine, University of Yamanashi, Yamanashi, Japan*
[6]*Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Tokyo Medical and Dental University, Tokyo, Japan*
[7]*Research Center for Hepatitis and Immunology, International Medical Center of Japan Konodai Hospital, Ichikawa, Japan*

This study aimed to develop a model for predicting anemia using the inosine triphosphatase (*ITPA*) genotype and to evaluate its relationship with treatment outcome. Patients with genotype 1b chronic hepatitis C (n = 446) treated with peg-interferon alpha and ribavirin (RBV) for 48 weeks were genotyped for the *ITPA* (rs1127354) and *IL28B* (rs8099917) genes. Data mining analysis generated a predictive model for anemia (hemoglobin (Hb) concentration <10 g/dl); the CC genotype of *ITPA*, baseline Hb <14.0 g/dl, and low creatinine clearance (CLcr) were predictors of anemia. The incidence of anemia was highest in patients with Hb <14.0 g/dl and CLcr <90 ml/min (76%), followed by Hb <14.0 g/dl and *ITPA* CC (57%). Patients with Hb ≥14.0 g/dl and *ITPA* AA/CA had the lowest incidence of anemia (17%). Patients with two predictors (high-risk) had a higher incidence of anemia than the others (64% vs. 28%, $P < 0.0001$). At baseline, the *IL28B* genotype was a predictor of a sustained virological response [adjusted odds ratio 9.88 (95% confidence interval 5.01–19.48), $P < 0.0001$]. In patients who achieved an early virological response, the *IL28B* genotype was not associated with a sustained virological response, while a high risk of anemia was a significant negative predictor of a sustained virological response [0.47 (0.24–0.91), $P = 0.026$]. For high-risk patients with an early virological response, giving >80% of the planned RBV dose increased sustained virological responses by 24%. In conclusion, a predictive model incorporating the *ITPA* genotype could identify patients with a high risk of anemia and reduced probability of sustained virological response. ***J. Med. Virol. 85:449–458, 2013.***

KEY WORDS: hemolytic anemia; ribavirin; creatinine clearance; antiviral therapy

INTRODUCTION

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection is a leading cause of cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma worldwide [Kim, 2002]. The rate of eradication of HCV by pegylated interferon (PEG-IFN) plus ribavirin (RBV), defined as a sustained virological response, is around 50% in patients with HCV genotype 1 [Manns et al., 2001; Fried et al., 2002]. Failure of treatment is attributable to the lack of a virological response or relapse after completion of therapy. Genome-wide association studies and subsequent cohort studies

Grant sponsor: Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, Japan.
Conflicts of interest and financial disclosures: None reported.

*Correspondence to: Namiki Izumi, MD, PhD, Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Musashino Red Cross Hospital, 1-26-1 Kyonan-cho, Musashino-shi, Tokyo 180-8610, Japan. E-mail: nizumi@musashino.jrc.or.jp

Accepted 19 November 2012
DOI 10.1002/jmv.23497
Published online 7 January 2013 in Wiley Online Library (wileyonlinelibrary.com).

have shown that single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) located near the *IL28B* gene are the most important determinant of virological response to PEG-IFN/RBV therapy [Ge et al., 2009; Suppiah et al., 2009; Tanaka et al., 2009; Rauch et al., 2010]. On the other hand, among patients with a virological response, the probability of a sustained virological response decreases when the patients become intolerant to therapy because of RBV-induced hemolytic anemia and receive a reduced dose of RBV [McHutchison et al., 2002; Kurosaki et al., 2012]. Genome-wide association studies have shown that variants of the inosine triphosphatase (*ITPA*) gene protect against hemolytic anemia [Fellay et al., 2010; Tanaka et al., 2011]. These variants are associated with a reduced requirement for an anemia-related dose reduction of RBV [Sakamoto et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2010a; Kurosaki et al., 2011d; Seto et al., 2011]. However, factors other than the *ITPA* gene also contribute to the risk of severe anemia or RBV dose reduction [Ochi et al., 2010; Kurosaki et al., 2011d] and the results of studies on the impact of the *ITPA* genotype on treatment outcome are inconsistent [Ochi et al., 2010; Sakamoto et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2010a, 2011; Kurosaki et al., 2011d].

Data mining is a novel statistical method used to extract relevant factors from a plethora of factors and combine them to predict the incidence of the outcome of interest [Breiman et al., 1980]. Decision tree analysis, a primary component of data mining analysis, has found medical applications recently [Averbook et al., 2002; Miyaki et al., 2002; Baquerizo et al., 2003; Leiter et al., 2004; Garzotto et al., 2005; Zlobec et al., 2005; Valera et al., 2007] and has proven to be a useful tool for predicting therapeutic efficacy [Kurosaki et al., 2010, 2011a,b,c, 2012] and adverse events [Hiramatsu et al., 2011] in patients with chronic hepatitis C treated with PEG-IFN/RBV therapy. Because the results of data mining analysis are presented as a flowchart [LeBlanc and Crowley, 1995], they are easily understandable and usable by clinicians lacking a detailed knowledge of statistics.

For the general application of this genetic information in clinical practice, this study aimed to construct a predictive model of severe anemia using the *ITPA* genotype, together with other relevant factors. This study also aimed to analyze the impact of the risk of anemia on treatment outcome, after adjustment for the *IL28B* genotype. These analyses were carried out at baseline and during therapy, when the early virological response became evident.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Patients

Data were collected from a total of 446 genotype 1b chronic hepatitis C patients who were treated with PEG-IFN alpha and RBV at five hospitals and universities throughout Japan. The inclusion criteria were: (1) infection by hepatitis C genotype 1b; (2) no co-infection with hepatitis B virus or human immunodeficiency virus; (3) no other causes of liver disease such as autoimmune hepatitis and primary biliary cirrhosis; and (4) availability of DNA for the analysis of the genetic polymorphisms of *IL28B* and *ITPA*. Patients received PEG-IFN alpha-2a (180 μg) and 2b (1.5 μg/kg) subcutaneously every week and a daily weight-adjusted dose of RBV (600 mg for patients weighing <60 kg, 800 mg for patients weighing 60–80 kg, and 1,000 mg for patients weighing >80 kg) for 48 weeks. Dose reduction or discontinuation of PEG-IFN and RBV was primarily based on the recommendations on the package inserts and the discretion of the physicians at each university and hospital. The standard duration of therapy was set at 48 weeks. No patient received erythropoietin or other growth factors for the treatment of anemia. Written informed consent was obtained from each patient, and the study protocol conformed to the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the institutional ethics review committees.

Laboratory Tests

Blood samples obtained before therapy were analyzed for hematologic data, blood chemistry, and HCV RNA. Genetic polymorphisms in SNPs of the *ITPA* gene (rs1127354) and the *IL28B* gene (rs8099917) were determined using ABI TaqMan Probes (Applied Biosystems, Carlsbad, CA) and the DigiTag2 assay, respectively. Baseline creatinine clearance (CLcr) levels were calculated using the formula of Cockcroft and Gault [1976]: for males, CLcr = [(140 − age in years) × body weight in kg] ÷ (72 × serum creatinine in mg/dl) and for females, CLcr = 0.85 × [(140 − age in years) × body weight in kg] ÷ (72 × serum creatinine in mg/dl). The stage of liver fibrosis was scored according to the METAVIR scoring system: F0 (no fibrosis), F1 (mild fibrosis: portal fibrosis without septa), F2 (moderate fibrosis: few septa), F3 (severe fibrosis: numerous septa without cirrhosis), and F4 (cirrhosis). A rapid virological response was defined as undetectable HCV RNA by qualitative PCR with a lower detection limit of 50 IU/ml (Amplicor, Roche Diagnostic Systems, Pleasanton, CA) at week 4 of therapy and a complete early virological response was defined as undetectable HCV RNA at week 12. A sustained virological response was defined as undetectable HCV RNA at 24 weeks after completion of therapy. Severe anemia was defined as hemoglobin (Hb) <10 g/dl.

Statistical Analysis

Database for analysis included the following variables: age, sex, body mass index, serum aspartate aminotransferase (AST) levels, alanine aminotransferase (ALT) levels, gamma-glutamyltransferase (GGT) levels, creatinine levels, CLcr, Hb, platelet count, serum levels of HCV RNA, and the stage of liver fibrosis

TABLE I. Patients' Baseline Characteristics

Age (years)	58.6	(9.6)
Gender: male (n, %)	185	(42%)
Body mass index (kg/m^2)	23.1	(3.7)
AST (IU/L)	59.9	(53.8)
ALT (IU/L)	69.8	(53.8)
GGT (IU/L)	48.5	(41.6)
Creatinine (mg/dl)	0.7	(0.2)
Creatinine clearance (ml/min)	89.5	(23.0)
Hemoglobin (g/dl)	14	(1.4)
Platelet count (10^9/L)	154.5	(52.1)
HCV RNA > 600,000 IU/ml (n, %)	354	(79%)
Liver fibrosis: F3-4 (n, %)	108	(24%)
Initial ribavirin dose (n, %)		
600 mg/day	300	(67%)
800 mg/day	138	(31%)
1,000 mg/day	9	(2%)
Pegylated interferon (n, %)		
alpha2a 180 mcg	58	(13%)
alpha2b 1.5 mcg/kg	388	(87%)
ITPA rs1127354: CC (n, %)	317	(71%)
IL28B rs809917: TT (n, %)	311	(70%)

AST, aspartate aminotransferase; ALT, alanine aminotransferase; GGT, gamma-glutamyltransferase.
Data expressed as mean (standard deviation) unless otherwise mentioned.

(Table I). Based on these data set, a model for predicting the risk of developing severe anemia was constructed by data mining analysis using the IBM-SPSS Modeler 13 as described previously [Kurosaki et al., 2010, 2011a,b,c; Hiramatsu et al., 2011]. Briefly, the software was used to explore the database automatically to search for optimal predictors that discriminated most efficiently patients with severe anemia from those without. The software also determined the optimal cutoff values of each predictor. Patients were divided into two groups according to the predictor and each of the two groups was repeatedly divided in the same way until no significant factor remained or 20 or fewer patients were in a group.

The incidence of severe anemia, the total dose of RBV, and treatment outcome were compared between groups with high and low risks of anemia. On univariate analysis, Student's *t*-test was used for continuous variables, and Fisher's exact test was used for categorical data. Logistic regression was used for multivariate analysis. P values of <0.05 were considered significant. SPSS Statistics 18 was used for these analyses.

RESULTS

Predictive Model of Severe Anemia

The incidence of severe anemia in the whole cohort was 49% (Fig. 1). The best predictor of severe anemia was the baseline Hb concentration. Patients with a low baseline Hb concentration (<14 g/dl) were more likely to develop severe anemia (67%) than those with a higher Hb (>14 g/dl) (34%). The second best predictor for those patients with a baseline Hb <14.0 g/dl was CLcr. Patients with a CLcr below 90 ml/min had the highest incidence of severe anemia (76%). In those with a CLcr above >90 ml/min the incidence of severe anemia was 57% in patients with the CC allele of the *ITPA* gene while it was 37% in patients with the CA or AA allele. On the other hand, the second best predictor for those patients with a baseline Hb concentration above 14 g/dl was the *ITPA* genotype. Patients with the AA or AC allele had the lowest incidence of anemia (17%). For those with the *ITPA* CC allele, CLcr was the third best predictor; the optimal cutoff value was 85 ml/min for this group. The incidence of severe anemia was 49% in patients with a CLcr below 85 ml/min while it was 32% in those with a CLcr above 85 ml/min.

Following this analysis, the patients were divided into six groups, with the incidence of severe anemia ranging from 17% to 76%. Three groups with two predictors, having an incidence of anemia >40%, were defined as the high-risk group and the remainder were defined as the low-risk group. The incidence of severe anemia was higher in the high-risk group than the low-risk group (65% vs. 28%, $P = 0.029$) (Fig. 2). Comparison of the *ITPA* genotype and the predictive model showed that the sensitivity for the prediction of severe anemia was similar (75.9% vs. 76.4%) but the specificity of the predictive model was greater (33.6% vs. 59.3%).

The Risk of Anemia Impacts on Sustained Virological Responses by Patients Who Achieved an Early Virological Response

The impact of *IL28B* genotype, *ITPA* genotype, and risk group of anemia on the rate of sustained virological response was studied at baseline and week 12. At baseline, patients with the TT allele of the *IL28B* gene had a significantly higher rate of sustained virological response than those with the TG or GG allele (43% vs. 10%, $P < 0.0001$), the high-risk group for anemia had a significantly lower rate of sustained virological response than the low-risk group (28% vs. 40%, $P = 0.011$), and the *ITPA* genotype was not associated with a sustained virological response (Fig. 3A–C). At week 4, patients with rapid virological response had a high rate of sustained virological response, irrespective of the *IL28B* genotype (TT vs. TG/GG; 97% vs. 100%, $P = 1.000$), the *ITPA* genotype (CC vs. CA/AA; 95% vs. 100%, $P = 1.000$), and the risk of anemia (high vs. low; 95% vs. 100%, $P = 1.000$). Among the patients who did not achieve a rapid virological response, those with the *IL28B* TT allele had a significantly higher rate of sustained virological response than those with the TG or GG allele (38% vs. 8%, $P < 0.0001$), and the high-risk group for anemia had a significantly lower rate of sustained virological response than the low-risk group (24% vs. 35%, $P = 0.015$). At week 12, in patients who achieved a complete early virological response, the *IL28B* genotype was not associated with a sustained virological response, while the high-risk group for anemia had a

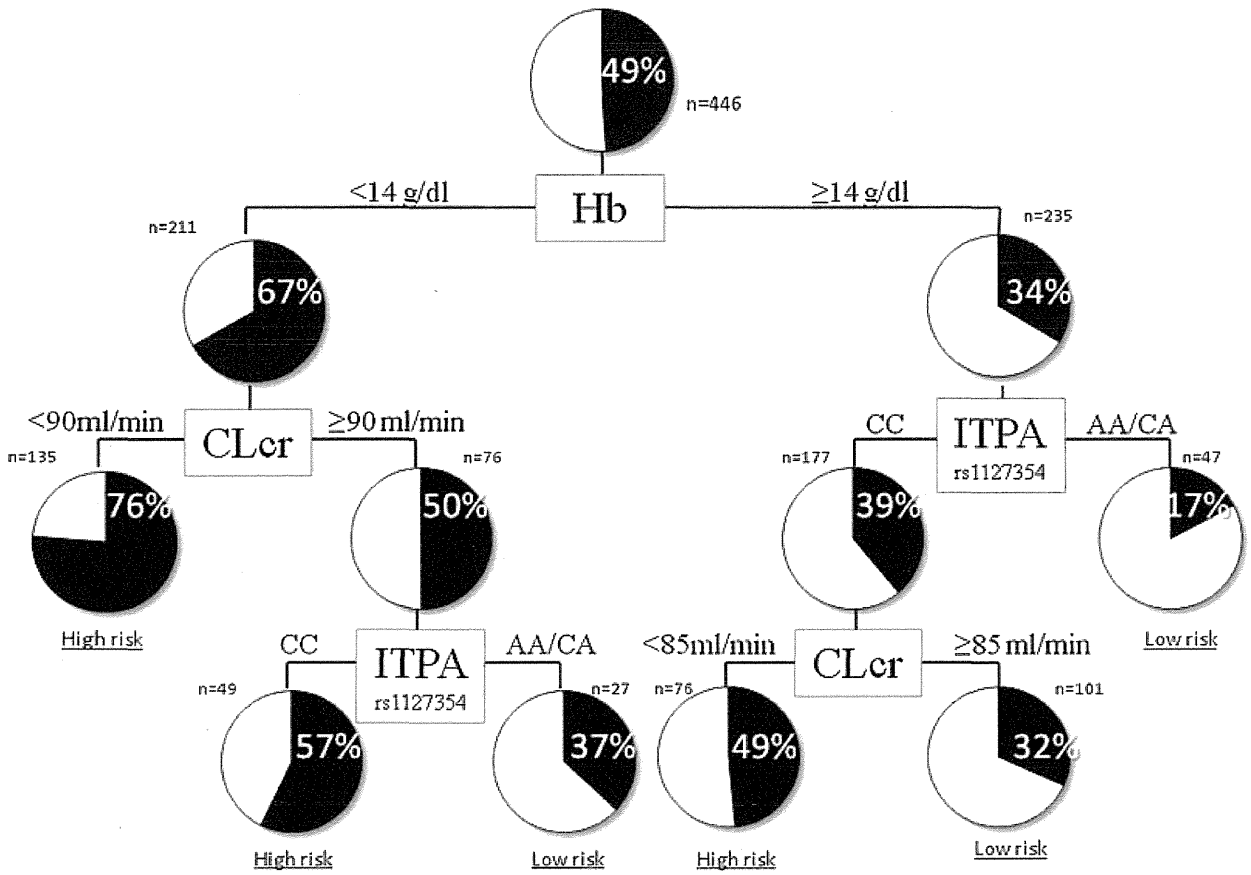

Fig. 1. The predictive model for severe anemia. The boxes indicate the factors used to differentiate patients and the cutoff values for the different groups. The pie charts indicate the rate of severe anemia (Hb <10.0 g/dl) for each group of patients, after differentiation. Terminal groups of patients differentiated by analysis are classified as at high risk if the rate is >40% and low risk if the rate is <40%. *ITPA*, inosine triphosphatase; CLcr, creatinine clearance; Hb, hemoglobin.

significantly lower rate of sustained virological response than the low-risk group (59% vs. 76%, $P = 0.013$) (Fig. 3D–F). In patients who did not achieve a complete early virological response, the *IL28B* genotype was a significant predictor of a sustained virological response (TT vs. TG/GG; 14% vs. 2%, $P < 0.0001$) but a high risk for anemia was not (high vs. low; 10% vs. 6%, $P = 0.361$).

From multivariate analysis (Table II), the *IL28B* genotype was the most important predictor of a sustained virological response at baseline [adjusted odds ratio 9.88 (95% confidence interval 5.01–19.48), $P < 0.0001$], along with female sex [0.42 (0.26–0.68), $P < 0.0001$], platelet count [1.09 (1.04–1.15), $P < 0.0001$], advanced fibrosis [0.49 (0.27–0.91), $P = 0.024$], and baseline HCV RNA load [4.14 (2.27–7.55), $P < 0.0001$]. At week 4, in patients without a rapid virological response, the *IL28B* genotype remained the most important predictor of a sustained virological response [7.16 (3.60–14.25), $P < 0.0001$], along with female sex and platelet count. At week 12, in patients with a complete early virological response, the risk of anemia was an independent and significant predictor of a sustained virological response [0.47 (0.24–0.91), $P = 0.026$], together with the platelet count and HCV RNA load, but the *IL28B* genotype was not associated with a sustained virological response. In patients without a complete early virological response, the *IL28B* genotype was a predictor of a sustained virological response [9.13 (2.02–41.3), $P = 0.004$] along with the platelet count. Thus, *IL28B* was a significant predictor of a sustained virological response at baseline and among virological non-responders at weeks 4 and 12. On the other hand, once a complete early virological response was achieved, the *IL28B* genotype was no longer associated with a sustained virological response but the risk of anemia was an independent predictor of a sustained virological response.

The Risk of Anemia, RBV Dose, and Treatment Outcome in Patients With a Complete Early Virological Response

Patients who achieved a complete early virological response were stratified according to adherence to

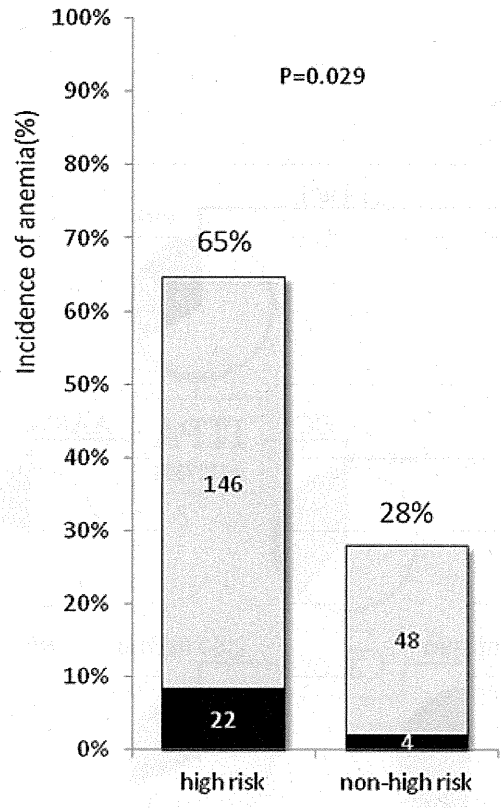

Fig. 2. The incidence of severe anemia stratified by risk of anemia. The incidence of anemia during therapy is shown for each group of patients at high and low risk of anemia. The black and white bars represent the percentages of patients with Hb concentrations below 8.5 g/dl and above 10 g/dl, respectively.

RBV (≤40%, 41–60%, 61–80%, and >80%), which showed that patients with a high risk of anemia were predominantly in subgroups with a lower adherence to RBV (≤40%, 41–60%, and 61–80%), whereas patients with a low risk of anemia were predominantly in subgroups with a higher adherence to RBV (>80%) (Fig. 4, upper panel). The percentage of patients who received >80% of the planned dose of RBV was significantly higher in the low-risk group for anemia than in the high-risk group (74% vs. 55%, $P < 0.0001$).

Within the groups with high and low risks of anemia, there was a stepwise increase in the rate of sustained virological response according to the increase in adherence to RBV (Fig. 4, lower panel). The rate of sustained virological response was higher in patients who received >80% of the planned dose of RBV than those who received less, for both high-risk patients (71% vs. 47%, $P = 0.016$) and low-risk patients (81% vs. 60%, $P = 0.072$). Within the same subgroup of RBV adherence, however, the rate of sustained virological response did not differ between patients with a high risk and a low risk of anemia. Taken together, these results suggest that patients with a high risk of anemia have a disadvantage because they are likely to be intolerant to RBV, leading to reduced adherence to RBV throughout the 48 weeks of therapy and a reduced rate of sustained virological response. However, if >80% adherence to RBV could be obtained, the rate of sustained virological response would increase by 24%.

DISCUSSION

This study confirmed previous reports that the *IL28B* genotype is the most significant predictor of a sustained virological response to PEG-IFN plus RBV therapy in chronic hepatitis C patients at baseline [Ge et al., 2009; Suppiah et al., 2009; Tanaka et al., 2009; Rauch et al., 2010; Kurosaki et al., 2011c] and at week 4 [Thompson et al., 2010b], but it had no impact on the rate of sustained virological response among those patients who achieved a complete early virological response [Thompson et al., 2010b; Kurosaki et al., 2011c]. In contrast, the risk of anemia, assessed by the combination of the *ITPA* genotype, baseline Hb concentration, and baseline CLcr, was found to be associated with a sustained virological response in patients who achieved a complete early virological response. Generally, a complete early virological response is the hallmark of a high probability of a sustained virological response, but the rate of sustained virological responses in patients who achieved a complete early virological response and had a high risk of anemia was as low as 59%. This reduced rate of sustained virological response in these patients was attributable to poor adherence to RBV throughout the 48 weeks of therapy. Because administration of >80% of the planned RBV dose increased the rate of sustained virological response by 24%, it may be postulated that personalizing the treatment schedule to achieve a sufficient dose of RBV, such as extension of treatment duration, may improve sustained virological response rates in these patients. Clearly, this postulate needs to be confirmed in future study. Thus, the findings presented here may have the potential to support selection of the optimum, personalized treatment strategy for an individual patient, based on the risk of anemia.

The degree of hemolytic anemia caused by RBV varies among individuals. A reduction of the Hb concentration early during therapy predicts the likely development of severe anemia [Hiramatsu et al., 2008, 2011] but there are no reliable predictors at baseline. A breakthrough came from the results of a genome-wide association study that revealed that variants of the *ITPA* gene are protective against hemolytic anemia [Fellay et al., 2010]. The *ITPA* genotype has been shown repeatedly to be associated with the degree of hemolytic anemia and dose reduction of RBV [Fellay et al., 2010; Sakamoto et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2010a; Seto et al., 2011; Tanaka et al., 2011; Kurosaki et al., 2011d]. However, factors other than the *ITPA* gene, such as baseline Hb concentrations [Ochi et al., 2010; Kurosaki et al., 2011d], platelet counts [Ochi

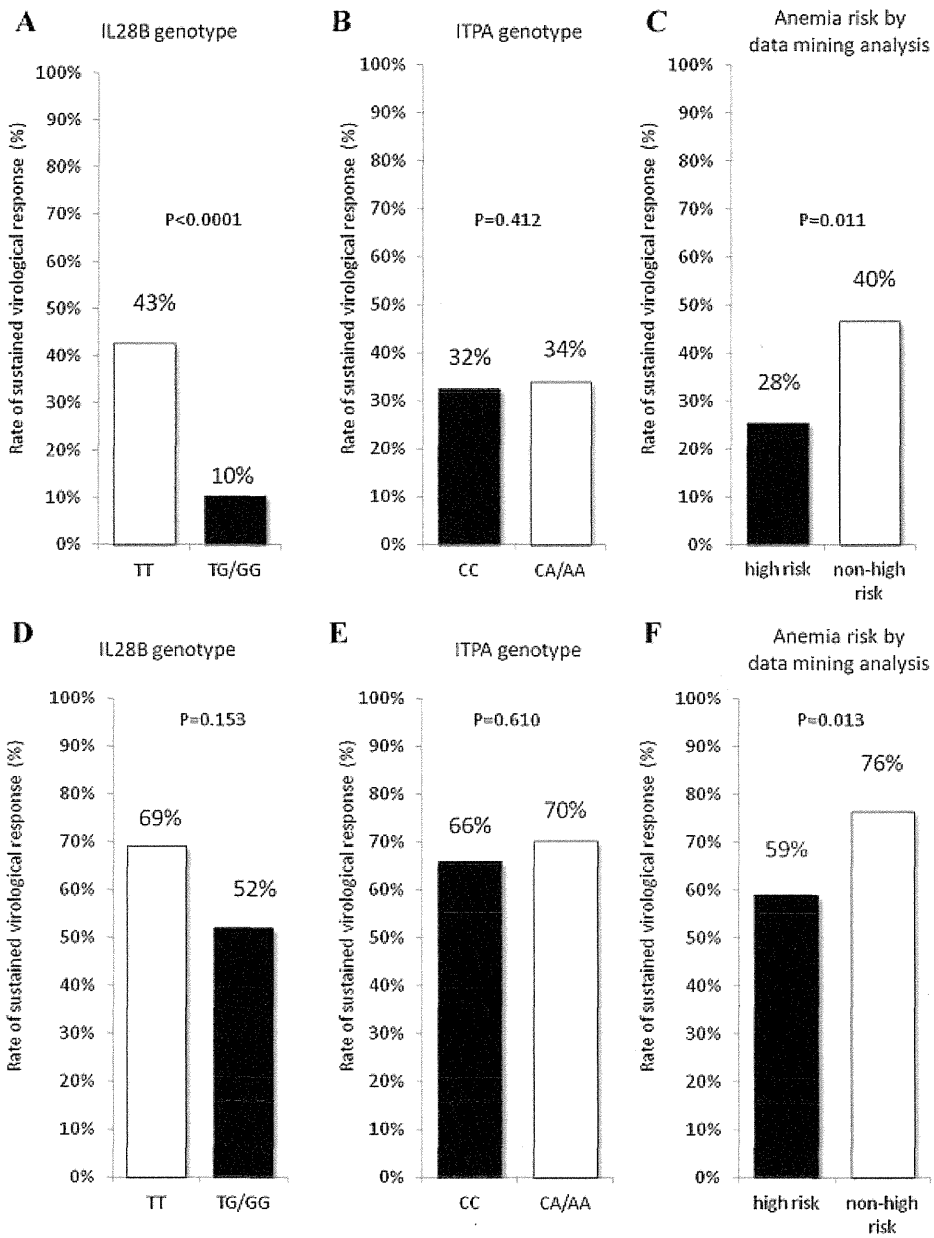

Fig. 3. Rates of sustained virological responses at baseline and among those with a virological response at week 12. The impacts of *IL28B* genotype, *ITPA* genotype, and risk group of anemia on the rate of sustained virological response were studied at baseline (**A–C**) and among those with complete early virological responses (defined as undetectable HCV RNA at week 12) (**D–F**). At baseline, those with the TT allele of the *IL28B* gene had a significantly higher rate of sustained virological response than those with the TG or GG allele and the group at high-risk of anemia had a significantly lower rate of sustained virological response than the low-risk group. Among patients with complete early virological responses, the *IL28B* genotype was not associated with a sustained virological response, while the group at high-risk of anemia had a significantly lower rate of sustained virological response than the low-risk group.

et al., 2010], and CLcr [Kurosaki et al., 2011d], also contribute to the risk of severe anemia or RBV dose reduction. In the present study, the predictive model of anemia based on the data mining analysis selected the *ITPA* genotype, baseline Hb concentration, and baseline CLcr as predictive factors and identified six subgroups of patients with a variable rate of severe anemia, ranging from 17% to 76%. The specificity of the prediction of severe anemia was improved by 25.7% in the predictive model, compared to *ITPA*

TABLE II. Logistic Regression Analysis for Factors Associated With Sustained Virological Response at Baseline, Week 4 and Week 12

	Multi-variable		
	Odds	95% CI	*P*-value
Pre-treatment			
Sex: female	0.42	0.26–0.68	<0.0001
Platelet (10^9/L)	1.09	1.04–1.15	<0.0001
Fibrosis: F3-4	0.49	0.27–0.91	0.024
HCV RNA: <600,000 IU/L	4.14	2.27–7.55	<0.0001
IL28B rs8099917: TT	9.88	5.01–19.48	<0.0001
At week 4			
Non-RVR patients			
Sex: female	0.45	0.28–0.72	0.001
Platelet (10^9/L)	1.10	1.05–1.16	0.000
IL28B rs8099917: TT	7.16	3.60–14.25	<0.0001
At week 12			
cEVR patients			
Platelet (10^9/L)	1.09	1.02–1.17	0.015
HCV RNA: <600,000 IU/L	3.21	1.39–7.55	0.007
High-risk of anemia[a]	0.47	0.24–0.91	0.026
At week 12			
Non-cEVR patients			
Platelet (10^9/L)	1.11	1.02–1.21	0.017
IL28B rs8099917: TT	9.13	2.02–41.3	0.004

RVR: rapid virological response, defined as undetectable HCV RNA at week 4.
cEVR: complete early virological response, defined as undetectable HCV RNA at week 12.
[a]High-risk of anemia defined by decision tree analysis includes the following groups: (1) baseline hemoglobin <14.0 g/dl and creatinine clearance <90 ml/min, (2) baseline hemoglobin <14.0 g/dl, creatinine clearance ≥90 ml/min and ITPA rs1127354 genotype CC, and (3) baseline hemoglobin ≥14.0 g/dl, ITPA rs1127354 genotype CC, and creatinine clearance <85 ml/min.

genotyping alone. Because hemolytic anemia induced by RBV is one of the major adverse events leading to premature termination of therapy [Fried et al., 2002], a method to predict the risk of severe anemia before treatment is important clinically. A predictive model of anemia may have the potential to support individualized treatment strategies; patients at high risk of anemia may be tested intensively for anemia or may be candidates for erythropoietin therapy, whereas those with a low risk of anemia may be treated with a higher dose of RBV. Prediction of anemia will remain important in the era of direct antiviral agents for chronic hepatitis C, because these newer therapies still require RBV and PEG-IFN in combination, and the degree of anemia complicating these therapies may be even greater than with the current combination therapy [McHutchison et al., 2009; Kwo et al., 2010].

Studies of the impact of the *ITPA* genotype on treatment outcome have produced conflicting results. Previous studies of American [Thompson et al., 2010a] and Italian [Thompson et al., 2011] cohorts did not find any association between the *ITPA* genotype and treatment outcome, whereas a marginal difference was observed in a report from Japan [Ochi et al., 2010]. Moreover, with a subgroup analysis of Japanese patients, the variant of the *ITPA* gene was associated with a sustained virological response in patients with the *IL28B* major genotype [Kurosaki et al., 2011d], in patients infected with HCV other than genotype 1[Sakamoto et al., 2010], and in patients with pre-treatment Hb concentrations between 13.5 and 15 g/dl [Azakami et al., 2011]. These inconsistent results may be because the impact of anemia may be greater on a cohort of aged patients, such as in Japan. Another reason may be that the *ITPA* genotype is not the sole determinant of anemia; the *ITPA* genotype alone was not associated with treatment outcome in the present study but a high-risk of anemia, defined by the combination of the *ITPA* genotype, baseline Hb concentration, and baseline CLcr, was associated with sustained virological responses by patients with complete early virological responses, even after adjustment for the *IL28B* genotype and other relevant factors. This is in contrast to the finding that the *IL28B* genotype is an independent and significant predictor at baseline of a sustained virological response by patients without a rapid virological response and those without a complete early virological response, but not those with a complete early virological response. These results indicate that the *IL28B* genotype could be used to predict a sustained virological response at baseline or during therapy in patients in whom HCV RNA has not yet become undetectable, but it has no predictive value in patients in whom HCV RNA has become undetectable. The risk of anemia may be used to predict sustained virological responses in a selected subgroup of patients who achieve a complete early virological response.

Patients who received more than 80% of the planned dose of PEG-IFN or RBV had a higher rate of sustained virological responses than those who received a lower cumulative dose [McHutchison et al., 2002; Davis et al., 2003]. Patients who achieve a complete early virological response usually have a good chance of a sustained virological response and the treatment duration is not extended beyond 48 weeks. However, reduced adherence to drugs in these patients was related to relapse after the completion of 48 weeks of therapy [Hiramatsu et al., 2009; Kurosaki et al., 2012]. In the present study, the rate of sustained virological response was 59% in patients who achieved a complete early virological response but had a high risk of anemia, 17% lower than in patients with a low risk of anemia. However, there was a stepwise increase in the rate of sustained virological response according to the increase in adherence to RBV, and the rate of sustained virological response was higher in high-risk patients who received >80% of the planned dose of RBV (71% vs. 47%). This 24% increase in sustained virological response was observed among the patients in the present study who received 48 weeks of treatment. These findings suggest that receiving a sufficient RBV dose is essential for patients with a complete early virological response to attain a sustained virological response and that the treatment strategy should be personalized for patients with a

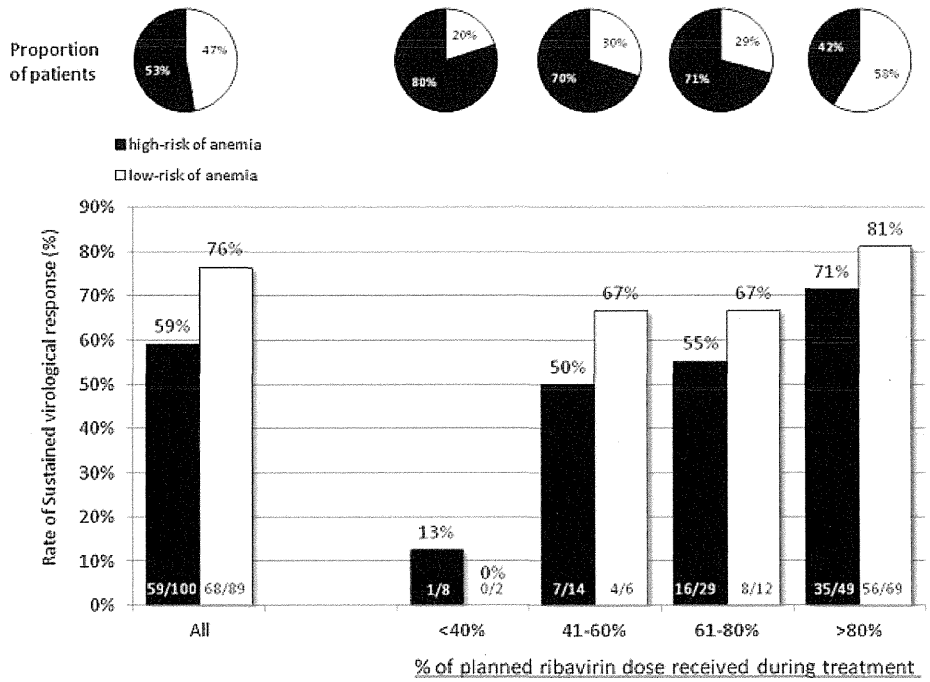

Fig. 4. The impact of risk of anemia and RBV dose on treatment outcome after a complete early virological response. Patients with complete early virological responses were divided into subgroups according to their adherence to RBV: ≤40%, 41–60%, 61–80%, and >80%. For each subgroup, the proportion of patients with a high risk and a low risk of anemia is shown in the upper panel by pie charts, and the rates of sustained virological responses, stratified by high risk and low risk of anemia, are shown in the lower panel by bar graphs. The black and white bars or charts represent patients with high and low risks of anemia, respectively.

high risk of anemia to extend the duration of treatment, even those patients with a complete early virological response, to obtain >80% adherence to RBV.

In conclusion, the combination of the *ITPA* genotype, baseline Hb concentration, and baseline CLcr could be used as a pre-treatment predictor of anemia. The risk of anemia thus identified is associated with adherence to RBV and impacts on the treatment outcome of patients who achieve a complete early virological response. This is in contrast to the major role of the *IL28B* genotype in the prediction of sustained virological responses at baseline and among non-responders at weeks 4 and 12. Patients who achieve a complete early virological response generally have a high probability of a sustained virological response but those who have a high risk of anemia have a high rate of relapse because of reduced adherence to RBV. To improve the rate of sustained virological responses in these patients, it may be postulated that the treatment schedule may be personalized to obtain >80% adherence to RBV. Clearly, this postulate needs to be confirmed in a future study.

REFERENCES

Averbook BJ, Fu P, Rao JS, Mansour EG. 2002. A long-term analysis of 1018 patients with melanoma by classic Cox regression and tree-structured survival analysis at a major referral center: Implications on the future of cancer staging. Surgery 132:589–602.

Azakami T, Hayes CN, Sezaki H, Kobayashi M, Akuta N, Suzuki F, Kumada H, Abe H, Miki D, Tsuge M, Imamura M, Kawakami Y, Takahashi S, Ochi H, Nakamura Y, Kamatani N, Chayama K. 2011. Common genetic polymorphism of ITPA gene affects ribavirin-induced anemia and effect of peg-interferon plus ribavirin therapy. J Med Virol 83:1048–1057.

Baquerizo A, Anselmo D, Shackleton C, Chen TW, Cao C, Weaver M, Gornbein J, Geevarghese S, Nissen N, Farmer D, Demetriou A, Busuttil RW. 2003. Phosphorus ans an early predictive factor in patients with acute liver failure. Transplantation 75:2007–2014.

Breiman LJH, Friedman RA, Olshen CJ, Stone CM. 1980. Classification and regression trees. Calif: Wadsworth.

Cockcroft DW, Gault MH. 1976. Prediction of creatinine clearance from serum creatinine. Nephron 16:31–41.

Davis GL, Wong JB, McHutchison JG, Manns MP, Harvey J, Albrecht J. 2003. Early virologic response to treatment with peginterferon alfa-2b plus ribavirin in patients with chronic hepatitis C. Hepatology 38:645–652.

Fellay J, Thompson AJ, Ge D, Gumbs CE, Urban TJ, Shianna KV, Little LD, Qiu P, Bertelsen AH, Watson M, Warner A, Muir AJ, Brass C, Albrecht J, Sulkowski M, McHutchison JG, Goldstein DB. 2010. ITPA gene variants protect against anaemia in patients treated for chronic hepatitis C. Nature 464: 405–408.

Fried MW, Shiffman ML, Reddy KR, Smith C, Marinos G, Goncales FL, Jr., Haussinger D, Diago M, Carosi G, Dhumeaux D, Craxi A, Lin A, Hoffman J, Yu J. 2002. Peginterferon alfa-2a plus ribavirin for chronic hepatitis C virus infection. N Engl J Med 347:975–982.

Garzotto M, Park Y, Mongoue-Tchokote S, Bledsoe J, Peters L, Blank BH, Austin D, Beer TM, Mori M. 2005. Recursive partitioning for

risk stratification in men undergoing repeat prostate biopsies. Cancer 104:1911–1917.

Ge D, Fellay J, Thompson AJ, Simon JS, Shianna KV, Urban TJ, Heinzen EL, Qiu P, Bertelsen AH, Muir AJ, Sulkowski M, McHutchison JG, Goldstein DB. 2009. Genetic variation in IL28B predicts hepatitis C treatment-induced viral clearance. Nature 461:399–401.

Hiramatsu N, Kurashige N, Oze T, Takehara T, Tamura S, Kasahara A, Oshita M, Katayama K, Yoshihara H, Imai Y, Kato M, Kawata S, Tsubouchi H, Kumada H, Okanoue T, Kakumu S, Hayashi N. 2008. Early decline of hemoglobin can predict progression of hemolytic anemia during pegylated interferon and ribavirin combination therapy in patients with chronic hepatitis C. Hepatol Res 38:52–59.

Hiramatsu N, Oze T, Yakushijin T, Inoue Y, Igura T, Mochizuki K, Imanaka K, Kaneko A, Oshita M, Hagiwara H, Mita E, Nagase T, Ito T, Inui Y, Hijioka T, Katayama K, Tamura S, Yoshihara H, Imai Y, Kato M, Yoshida Y, Tatsumi T, Ohkawa K, Kiso S, Kanto T, Kasahara A, Takehara T, Hayashi N. 2009. Ribavirin dose reduction raises relapse rate dose-dependently in genotype 1 patients with hepatitis C responding to pegylated interferon alpha-2b plus ribavirin. J Viral Hepat 16: 586–594.

Hiramatsu N, Kurosaki M, Sakamoto N, Iwasaki M, Sakamoto M, Suzuki Y, Sugauchi F, Tamori A, Kakinuma S, Matsuura K, Izumi N. 2011. Pretreatment prediction of anemia progression by pegylated interferon alpha-2b plus ribavirin combination therapy in chronic hepatitis C infection: Decision-tree analysis. J Gastroenterol 46:1111–1119.

Kim RW. 2002. Global epidemiology and burden of hepatitis C. Microbes Infect 4:1219–1225.

Kurosaki M, Matsunaga K, Hirayama I, Tanaka T, Sato M, Yasui Y, Tamaki N, Hosokawa T, Ueda K, Tsuchiya K, Nakanishi H, Ikeda H, Itakura J, Takahashi Y, Asahina Y, Higaki M, Enomoto N, Izumi N. 2010. A predictive model of response to peginterferon ribavirin in chronic hepatitis C using classification and regression tree analysis. Hepatol Res 40:251–260.

Kurosaki M, Sakamoto N, Iwasaki M, Sakamoto M, Suzuki Y, Hiramatsu N, Sugauchi F, Tamori A, Nakagawa M, Izumi N. 2011a. Sequences in the interferon sensitivity-determining region and core region of hepatitis C virus impact pretreatment prediction of response to PEG-interferon plus ribavirin: Data mining analysis. J Med Virol 83:445–452.

Kurosaki M, Sakamoto N, Iwasaki M, Sakamoto M, Suzuki Y, Hiramatsu N, Sugauchi F, Yatsuhashi H, Izumi N. 2011b. Pretreatment prediction of response to peginterferon plus ribavirin therapy in genotype 1 chronic hepatitis C using data mining analysis. J Gastroenterol 46:401–409.

Kurosaki M, Tanaka Y, Nishida N, Sakamoto N, Enomoto N, Honda M, Sugiyama M, Matsuura K, Sugauchi F, Asahina Y, Nakagawa M, Watanabe M, Sakamoto M, Maekawa S, Sakai A, Kaneko S, Ito K, Masaki N, Tokunaga K, Izumi N, Mizokami M. 2011c. Pretreatment prediction of response to pegylated-interferon plus ribavirin for chronic hepatitis C using genetic polymorphism in IL28B and viral factors. J Hepatol 54:439–448.

Kurosaki M, Tanaka Y, Tanaka K, Suzuki Y, Hoshioka Y, Tamaki N, Kato T, Yasui Y, Hosokawa T, Ueda K, Tsuchiya K, Kuzuya T, Nakanishi H, Itakura J, Takahashi Y, Asahina Y, Matsuura K, Sugauchi F, Enomoto N, Nishida N, Tokunaga K, Mizokami M, Izumi N. 2011d. Relationship between genetic polymorphisms of the inosine triphosphatase gene and anemia or outcome after treatment with pegylated-interferon and ribavirin. Antivir Ther 16:685–694.

Kurosaki M, Hiramatsu N, Sakamoto M, Suzuki Y, Iwasaki M, Tamori A, Matsuura K, Kakinuma S, Sugauchi F, Sakamoto N, Nakagawa M, Yatsuhashi H, Izumi N. 2012. Age and total ribavirin dose is an independent predictor of relapse among early virological responders to peg-interferon plus ribavirin therapy in chronic hepatitis C revealed by data mining analysis. Antivir Ther 17:35–43.

Kwo PY, Lawitz EJ, McCone J, Schiff ER, Vierling JM, Pound D, Davis MN, Galati JS, Gordon SC, Ravendhran N, Rossaro L, Anderson FH, Jacobson IM, Rubin R, Koury K, Pedicone LD, Brass CA, Chaudhri E, Albrecht JK. 2010. Efficacy of boceprevir, an NS3 protease inhibitor, in combination with peginterferon alfa-2b and ribavirin in treatment-naive patients with genotype 1 hepatitis C infection (SPRINT-1): An open-label, randomised, multicentre phase 2 trial. Lancet 376:705–716.

LeBlanc M, Crowley J. 1995. A review of tree-based prognostic models. Cancer Treat Res 75:113–124.

Leiter U, Buettner PG, Eigentler TK, Garbe C. 2004. Prognostic factors of thin cutaneous melanoma: An analysis of the Central Malignant Melanoma Registry of the German Dermatological Society. J Clin Oncol 22:3660–3667.

Manns MP, McHutchison JG, Gordon SC, Rustgi VK, Shiffman M, Reindollar R, Goodman ZD, Koury K, Ling M, Albrecht JK. 2001. Peginterferon alfa-2b plus ribavirin compared with interferon alfa-2b plus ribavirin for initial treatment of chronic hepatitis C: A randomised trial. Lancet 358:958–965.

McHutchison JG, Manns M, Patel K, Poynard T, Lindsay KL, Trepo C, Dienstag J, Lee WM, Mak C, Garaud JJ, Albrecht JK. 2002. Adherence to combination therapy enhances sustained response in genotype-1-infected patients with chronic hepatitis C. Gastroenterology 123:1061–1069.

McHutchison JG, Everson GT, Gordon SC, Jacobson IM, Sulkowski M, Kauffman R, McNair L, Alam J, Muir AJ. 2009. Telaprevir with peginterferon and ribavirin for chronic HCV genotype 1 infection. N Engl J Med 360:1827–1838.

Miyaki K, Takei I, Watanabe K, Nakashima H, Omae K. 2002. Novel statistical classification model of type 2 diabetes mellitus patients for tailor-made prevention using data mining algorithm. J Epidemiol 12:243–248.

Ochi H, Maekawa T, Abe H, Hayashida Y, Nakano R, Kubo M, Tsunoda T, Hayes CN, Kumada H, Nakamura Y, Chayama K. 2010. Inosine triphosphate pyrophosphatase polymorphism affects ribavirin-induced anemia and outcomes of therapy—A genome-wide study of Japanese hepatitis C virus patients. Gastroenterology 139:1190–1197.

Rauch A, Kutalik Z, Descombes P, Cai T, Di Iulio J, Mueller T, Bochud M, Battegay M, Bernasconi E, Borovicka J, Colombo S, Cerny A, Dufour JF, Furrer H, Gunthard HF, Heim M, Hirschel B, Malinverni R, Moradpour D, Mullhaupt B, Witteck A, Beckmann JS, Berg T, Bergmann S, Negro F, Telenti A, Bochud PY. 2010. Genetic variation in IL28B is associated with chronic hepatitis C and treatment failure: A genome-wide association study. Gastroenterology 138:1338–1345.

Sakamoto N, Tanaka Y, Nakagawa M, Yatsuhashi H, Nishiguchi S, Enomoto N, Azuma S, Nishimura-Sakurai Y, Kakinuma S, Nishida N, Tokunaga K, Honda M, Ito K, Mizokami M, Watanabe M. 2010. ITPA gene variant protects against anemia induced by pegylated interferon-alpha and ribavirin therapy for Japanese patients with chronic hepatitis C. Hepatol Res 40: 1063–1071.

Seto WK, Tanaka Y, Liu K, Lai CL, Yuen MF. 2011. The effects of IL-28B and ITPA polymorphisms on treatment of hepatitis C virus genotype 6. Am J Gastroenterol 106:1007–1008.

Suppiah V, Moldovan M, Ahlenstiel G, Berg T, Weltman M, Abate ML, Bassendine M, Spengler U, Dore GJ, Powell E, Riordan S, Sheridan D, Smedile A, Fragomeli V, Muller T, Bahlo M, Stewart GJ, Booth DR, George J. 2009. IL28B is associated with response to chronic hepatitis C interferon-alpha and ribavirin therapy. Nat Genet 41:1100–1104.

Tanaka Y, Nishida N, Sugiyama M, Kurosaki M, Matsuura K, Sakamoto N, Nakagawa M, Korenaga M, Hino K, Hige S, Ito Y, Mita E, Tanaka E, Mochida S, Murawaki Y, Honda M, Sakai A, Hiasa Y, Nishiguchi S, Koike A, Sakaida I, Imamura M, Ito K, Yano K, Masaki N, Sugauchi F, Izumi N, Tokunaga K, Mizokami M. 2009. Genome-wide association of IL28B with response to pegylated interferon-alpha and ribavirin therapy for chronic hepatitis C. Nat Genet 41:1105–1109.

Tanaka Y, Kurosaki M, Nishida N, Sugiyama M, Matsuura K, Sakamoto N, Enomoto N, Yatsuhashi H, Nishiguchi S, Hino K, Hige S, Itoh Y, Tanaka E, Mochida S, Honda M, Hiasa Y, Koike A, Sugauchi F, Kaneko S, Izumi N, Tokunaga K, Mizokami M. 2011. Genome-wide association study identified ITPA/DDRGK1 variants reflecting thrombocytopenia in pegylated interferon and ribavirin therapy for chronic hepatitis C. Hum Mol Genet 20:3507–3516.

Thompson AJ, Fellay J, Patel K, Tillmann HL, Naggie S, Ge D, Urban TJ, Shianna KV, Muir AJ, Fried MW, Afdhal NH, Goldstein DB, McHutchison JG. 2010a. Variants in the ITPA gene protect against ribavirin-induced hemolytic anemia and decrease the need for ribavirin dose reduction. Gastroenterology 139:1181–1189.

Thompson AJ, Muir AJ, Sulkowski MS, Ge D, Fellay J, Shianna KV, Urban T, Afdhal NH, Jacobson IM, Esteban R, Poordad F,

Lawitz EJ, McCone J, Shiffman ML, Galler GW, Lee WM, Reindollar R, King JW, Kwo PY, Ghalib RH, Freilich B, Nyberg LM, Zeuzem S, Poynard T, Vock DM, Pieper KS, Patel K, Tillmann HL, Noviello S, Koury K, Pedicone LD, Brass CA, Albrecht JK, Goldstein DB, McHutchison JG. 2010b. Interleukin-28B polymorphism improves viral kinetics and is the strongest pretreatment predictor of sustained virologic response in genotype 1 hepatitis C virus. Gastroenterology 139:120–129 e118.

Thompson AJ, Santoro R, Piazzolla V, Clark PJ, Naggie S, Tillmann HL, Patel K, Muir AJ, Shianna KV, Mottola L, Petruzzellis D, Romano M, Sogari F, Facciorusso D, Goldstein DB, McHutchison JG, Mangia A. 2011. Inosine triphosphatase genetic variants are protective against anemia during antiviral therapy for HCV2/3 but do not decrease dose reductions of RBV or increase SVR. Hepatology 53:389–395.

Valera VA, Walter BA, Yokoyama N, Koyama Y, Iiai T, Okamoto H, Hatakeyama K. 2007. Prognostic groups in colorectal carcinoma patients based on tumor cell proliferation and classification and regression tree (CART) survival analysis. Ann Surg Oncol 14:34–40.

Zlobec I, Steele R, Nigam N, Compton CC. 2005. A predictive model of rectal tumor response to preoperative radiotherapy using classification and regression tree methods. Clin Cancer Res 11:5440–5443.

OPEN ACCESS Freely available online

PLoS one

Genome-Wide Association Study Confirming Association of HLA-DP with Protection against Chronic Hepatitis B and Viral Clearance in Japanese and Korean

Nao Nishida[1,2]*, Hiromi Sawai[2], Kentaro Matsuura[3], Masaya Sugiyama[1], Sang Hoon Ahn[4], Jun Yong Park[4], Shuhei Hige[5], Jong-Hon Kang[6], Kazuyuki Suzuki[7], Masayuki Kurosaki[8], Yasuhiro Asahina[8], Satoshi Mochida[9], Masaaki Watanabe[10], Eiji Tanaka[11], Masao Honda[12], Shuichi Kaneko[12], Etsuro Orito[13], Yoshito Itoh[14], Eiji Mita[15], Akihiro Tamori[16], Yoshikazu Murawaki[17], Yoichi Hiasa[18], Isao Sakaida[19], Masaaki Korenaga[20], Keisuke Hino[20], Tatsuya Ide[21], Minae Kawashima[2], Yoriko Mawatari[1,2], Megumi Sageshima[2], Yuko Ogasawara[2], Asako Koike[22], Namiki Izumi[8], Kwang-Hyub Han[4], Yasuhito Tanaka[3], Katsushi Tokunaga[2], Masashi Mizokami[1]

1 Research Center for Hepatitis and Immunology, National Center for Global Health and Medicine, Ichikawa, Chiba, Japan, **2** Department of Human Genetics, The University of Tokyo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, Japan, **3** Department of Virology and Liver Unit, Nagoya City University Graduate School of Medical Sciences, Nagoya, Aichi, Japan, **4** Department of Internal Medicine, Yonsei University College of Medicine, Seoul, South Korea, **5** Department of Internal Medicine, Hokkaido University Graduate School of Medicine, Sapporo, Japan, **6** Department of Internal Medicine, Teine Keijinkai Hospital, Sapporo, Japan, **7** Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Iwate Medical University, Morioka, Japan, **8** Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Musashino Red Cross Hospital, Tokyo, Japan, **9** Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Saitama Medical University, Saitama, Japan, **10** Department of Gastroenterology, Kitasato University School of Medicine, Sagamihara, Kanagawa, Japan, **11** Department of Medicine, Shinshu University School of Medicine, Matsumoto, Japan, **12** Department of Gastroenterology, Kanazawa University Graduate School of Medicine, Kanazawa, Japan, **13** Department of Gastroenterology, Nagoya Daini Red Cross Hospital, Nagoya, Japan, **14** Molecular Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine, Kyoto, Japan, **15** Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, National Hospital Organization Osaka National Hospital, Osaka, Japan, **16** Department of Hepatology, Osaka City University Graduate School of Medicine, Osaka, Japan, **17** Second Department of Internal Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Tottori University, Yonago, Japan, **18** Department of Gastroenterology and Metabology, Ehime University Graduate School of Medicine, Ehime, Japan, **19** Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Yamaguchi University Graduate School of Medicine, Yamaguchi, Japan, **20** Division of Hepatology and Pancreatology, Kawasaki Medical College, Kurashiki, Japan, **21** Division of Gastroenterology, Department of Medicine, Kurume University School of Medicine, Fukuoka, Japan, **22** Central Research Laboratory, Hitachi Ltd., Kokubunji, Tokyo, Japan

Abstract

Hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection can lead to serious liver diseases, including liver cirrhosis (LC) and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC); however, about 85–90% of infected individuals become inactive carriers with sustained biochemical remission and very low risk of LC or HCC. To identify host genetic factors contributing to HBV clearance, we conducted genome-wide association studies (GWAS) and replication analysis using samples from HBV carriers and spontaneously HBV-resolved Japanese and Korean individuals. Association analysis in the Japanese and Korean data identified the *HLA-DPA1* and *HLA-DPB1* genes with $P_{meta} = 1.89 \times 10^{-12}$ for rs3077 and $P_{meta} = 9.69 \times 10^{-10}$ for rs9277542. We also found that the *HLA-DPA1* and *HLA-DPB1* genes were significantly associated with protective effects against chronic hepatitis B (CHB) in Japanese, Korean and other Asian populations, including Chinese and Thai individuals ($P_{meta} = 4.40 \times 10^{-19}$ for rs3077 and $P_{meta} = 1.28 \times 10^{-15}$ for rs9277542). These results suggest that the associations between the *HLA-DP* locus and the protective effects against persistent HBV infection and with clearance of HBV were replicated widely in East Asian populations; however, there are no reports of GWAS in Caucasian or African populations. Based on the GWAS in this study, there were no significant SNPs associated with HCC development. To clarify the pathogenesis of CHB and the mechanisms of HBV clearance, further studies are necessary, including functional analyses of the HLA-DP molecule.

Citation: Nishida N, Sawai H, Matsuura K, Sugiyama M, Ahn SH, et al. (2012) Genome-Wide Association Study Confirming Association of HLA-DP with Protection against Chronic Hepatitis B and Viral Clearance in Japanese and Korean. PLoS ONE 7(6): e39175. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0039175

Editor: Anand S. Mehta, Drexel University College of Medicine, United States of America

Received February 1, 2012; **Accepted** May 16, 2012; **Published** June 21, 2012

Funding: This work was supported by Grants-in-Aid from the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare of Japan (H22-kanen-005, H23-kanen-005), the Japan Science and Technology Agency (09038024), and the Miyakawa Memorial Research Foundation. Partial support by Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists (B) (22710191) from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology is also acknowledged. The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

Competing Interests: AK is an employee of the Central Research Laboratory, Hitachi Ltd. There are no patents, products in development or marketed products to declare. This does not alter the authors' adherence to all the PLoS ONE policies on sharing data and materials, as detailed online in the guide for authors.

* E-mail: nishida-75@umin.ac.jp

Introduction

Overall, one-third of the world's population (2.2 billion) is infected with hepatitis B virus (HBV), and about 15% of these are chronic carriers. About 75% of the chronic carriers live in the east-south Asia and east pacific area, and there are 1.3–1.5 million chronic carriers living in Japan [1]. Of chronic carriers, 10–15% develop liver cirrhosis (LC), liver failure and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), and the remaining individuals eventually achieve a state of nonreplicative infection, resulting in hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) negative and hepatitis B core antibody (anti-HBc) positive, i.e. HBV-resolved individuals [2–3]. In Japan, although the major route of HBV transmission was perinatal transmission and horizontal transmission in early childhood, infant HBV carriers have successfully been reduced since 1986 through a selective vaccination policy by the Japanese government [4–7]. However, the prevalence of HBV genotype A in acute HBV (AHB) infection has increased markedly since 2000, reaching approximately 52% in 2008 due to the lack of a universal HB vaccination, and around 10% of AHB cases could be persistent infection [8–9]. Viral factors, as well as host factors, are thought to be associated with persistent HB infection.

In 2009, significant associations between chronic hepatitis B (CHB) and a region including *HLA-DPA1* and *HLA-DPB1* were identified using 786 Japanese individuals having CHB and 2,201 control individuals through a two-stage genome-wide association study (GWAS) [10]. The same group was also subjected to a second GWAS using a total of 2,667 Japanese persistent HBV infection cases and 6,496 controls, which confirmed significant associations between the *HLA-DP* locus and CHB, in addition to associations with another two SNPs located in the genetic region including the *HLA-DQ* gene [11]. The associations between *HLA-DP* variants with HBV infection were replicated in other Asian populations, including Thai and Han Chinese individuals [10,12–13]. With regard to HBV clearance, the association between the human leukocyte antigen (HLA) class II allele and clearance of HBV was confirmed by the candidate gene approach in African, Caucasian and Asian populations [14–18]. However, in a previous GWAS using samples of Japanese CHB and control individuals, the clinical data on HBV exposure in the control individuals were unknown, and this may have led to bias. Moreover, there have been no reports of GWAS using samples from HBV carriers and HBV-resolved individuals to identify host genetic factors associated with HBV clearance other than HLA class II molecules.

Here, we performed a GWAS using samples from Japanese HBV carriers, healthy controls and spontaneously HBV-resolved individuals in order to confirm or identify the host genetic factors related to CHB and viral clearance. In the subsequent replication analysis, we validated the associated SNPs in the GWAS using two independent sets of Japanese and Korean individuals. In our study, healthy controls were randomly selected with clinically no evidence of HBV exposure, therefore, HBV-resolved individuals were prepared to clearly identify the host genetic factors related with CHB or HBV clearance.

Results

Protective Effects Against Chronic Hepatitis B in Japanese and Korean Individuals

In this study, we conducted a GWAS using samples from 181 Japanese HBV carriers (including asymptomatic carriers (ASC), CHB cases, LC cases and HCC cases, based on the criteria described in Materials and Methods) and 184 healthy controls in order to identify the host genetic factors related to progression of CHB. All samples were genotyped using a genome-wide SNP typing array (Affymetrix Genome-Wide Human SNP Array 6.0 for 900 K SNPs). Figure 1a shows a genome-wide view of the single point association data based on allele frequencies using the SNPs that met the following filtering criteria: (i) SNP call rate ≥95%; (ii) minor allele frequency (MAF) ≥1% for HBV carriers and healthy controls; and (iii) no deviation from Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium (HWE) $P \geq 0.001$ in healthy controls. We identified significant associations of protective effects against CHB with two SNPs (rs3077 and rs9277542) using the allele frequency model, both of which are located in the 3′ UTR of *HLA-DPA1* and in the sixth exon of *HLA-DPB1*, respectively (rs3077, $P = 1.14 \times 10^{-7}$, and rs9277542, $P = 5.32 \times 10^{-8}$, respectively). The association for rs9277542 reached a genome-wide level of significance in the GWAS panel (Bonferroni criterion $P < 8.36 \times 10^{-8}$ (0.05/597,789)).

In order to validate the results of GWAS, a total of 32 SNPs, including the associated two SNPs (rs3077 and rs9277542), were selected for replication in two independent sets of HBV carriers and healthy controls (replication-1:256 Japanese HBV carriers and 236 Japanese healthy controls; and replication-2:344 Korean HBV carriers and 151 Korean healthy controls; Table 1). The associations for the original significant SNP (rs9277542) and marginal SNP (rs3077) on GWAS were replicated in both replication sets [replication-1 (Japanese); rs3077, $P = 2.70 \times 10^{-8}$, OR = 0.48 and rs9277542, $P = 3.33 \times 10^{-6}$, OR = 0.54; replication-2 (Korean); rs3077, $P = 2.08 \times 10^{-6}$, OR = 0.47 and rs9277542, $P = 8.29 \times 10^{-5}$, OR = 0.54, Table 2]. We conducted meta-analysis to combine these studies using the DerSimonian Laird method (random effects model) to incorporate variation among studies. As shown in Table 2, the odds ratios were quite similar across the three studies (GWAS and two replication studies) and no heterogeneity was observed ($P_{het} = 0.80$ for rs3077 and 0.40 for rs9277542). P_{meta} values were 4.40×10^{-19} for rs3077 (OR = 0.46, 95% confidence interval (CI) = 0.39–0.54), and 1.28×10^{-15} for rs9277542 (OR = 0.50, 95% CI = 0.43–0.60). Among the remaining 30 SNPs in the replication study, 27 SNPs were successfully genotyped by the DigiTag2 assay with SNP call rate ≥ 95% and HWE *p*-value ≥ 0.01. Two SNPs (rs9276431 and rs7768538), located in the genetic region including the *HLA-DQ* gene, were marginally replicated in the two sets of HBV carriers and healthy controls with Mantel-Haenszel *P* values of 2.80×10^{-7} (OR = 0.56, 95% CI = 0.45–0.70) and 1.09×10^{-7} (OR = 0.53, 95% CI = 0.42–0.67), respectively, when using additive, two-tailed Cochran Mantel-Haenszel (CMH) fixed-effects model with no evidence of heterogeneity ($P_{het} = 0.67$ for rs9276431 and 0.70 for rs7768538) (Table S1).

Meta-analysis using the random effects model across 6 independent studies, including 5 additional published data, showed $P_{meta} = 3.94 \times 10^{-45}$, OR = 0.55 for rs3077, $P_{meta} = 1.74 \times 10^{-21}$, OR = 0.61 for rs9277535 and $P_{meta} = 1.69 \times 10^{-15}$, OR = 0.51 for rs9277542, with the SNP rs9277535 being located about 4-kb upstream from rs9277542 and showing strong linkage disequilibrium of $r^2 = 0.955$ on the HapMap JPT (Table S2). As shown in Table S2, the odds ratio was very similar among the 6 studies, and heterogeneity was negligible with $P_{het} > 0.01$.

Moreover, based on GWAS using samples from 94 chronic HBV carriers with LC or HCC and 87 chronic HBV carriers without LC and HCC, we found no significant SNPs associated with CHB progression (Figure S1).