

Hydration of surfactant-modified and PEGylated cationic cholesterol-based liposomes and corresponding lipoplexes by monitoring a fluorescent probe and the dielectric relaxation time

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ABSTRACT

For the optimization of plasmid DNA (pDNA)-cationic lipid complexes and lipoplex delivery, proper indexes of the physicochemical properties of lipoplexes are required. In general, the characteristics of lipoplexes are defined by particle size and zeta-potential at various mixing ratios of cationic liposomes and pDNA. In this study, we characterized the hydration level of surfactant-modified and PEGylated cationic cholesterol-based (OH-Chol) liposomes and their lipoplexes by monitoring both the fluorescent probe lauridan and the dielectric relaxation time. Fluorescence measurement using lauridan detected hydration of the headgroup of lipids in surfactant-modified liposomes and PEGylated DOTAP-liposomes, but hardly any fluorescence was detected in PEGylated OH-Chol-liposomes because the PEG layers may extend and cover the fluorescent maker. On the other hand, the measurement of dielectric relaxation time of water molecules revealed total hydration, including hydration of the PEG layer and the headgroup of cationic lipids. Furthermore, we found an inverse correlation between hydration level and cellular uptake of PEGylated lipoplexes ($R=0.946$). This finding indicated that the dielectric relaxation time of water molecules provides an important indicator of hydration of liposome and lipoplexes along with the fluorescence intensity of lauridan.

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1. Introduction

Plasmid DNA (pDNA) is now widely employed in gene therapeutic applications. However, a major obstacle to the clinical application of pDNA is its inefficient cellular uptake. One promising clinical delivery strategy involves the use of pDNA-cationic liposome complexes, known as lipoplexes, in which negatively charged pDNA binds electrostatically to cationic lipids, such as OH-Chol and DOTAP, in liposomes. Such lipoplexes form when cationic liposomes, frequently containing a neutral co-lipid as a helper lipid, such as DOPE, at a 1:1 molar ratio, are mixed with pDNA (Yang and Huang, 1997). Furthermore, to enhance gene delivery, surface modification of the liposomes with surfactants and polymers has been reported. We and Inoh et al. (Inoh et al., 2001; Igarashi et al., 2006)

have reported previously that biosurfactant mannosylerythritol lipid-A (MEL-A)-modified liposomes increased gene transfection efficiency *in vitro*. In *in vivo* gene delivery, poly(ethylene glycol) (PEG) polymer coating, PEGylation, has been reported frequently because colloidal particles, such as liposomes may be completely lost because of the capture of liposomes by macrophages in the liver and spleen (Blume and Cevc, 1990; Klivanov et al., 1990). PEGylation reduces the extent of uptake by macrophages and enhances the circulation time of liposomes in blood (Woodle et al., 1992; Allen et al., 1995). The underlying mechanism of the stabilization has been explained mainly through hydrated PEG chains on the surface.

In the optimization of lipoplex delivery, indexes of the physicochemical properties of lipoplexes are required. In general, the characteristics of lipoplexes are defined by particle size and zeta-potential at various mixing ratios of cationic liposome and pDNA. The hydration level of surface-modified and PEGylated liposomes has rarely been reported. A semi-quantitative approach for determining changes in the generalized polarization (GP) of lauridan was recently used successfully to characterize changes in hydration at lipid–water interfaces (Meidan et al., 2000). Measurement of dielectric relaxation time provides information on the structure of the hydration layer of colloids that interact with water

Abbreviations: OH-Chol, cholesteryl-3 β -carboxyamindoethylene-*N*-hydroxyethylamine; DOPE, dioleoylphosphatidylethanolamine; DOTAP, dioleoyl-3-trimethylammonium propane; DSPE, distearoylphosphatidylethanolamine; DSPE-PEG2000, DSPE-polyethyleneglycol molecular weight 2000; MEL-A, mannosylerythritol lipid-A.

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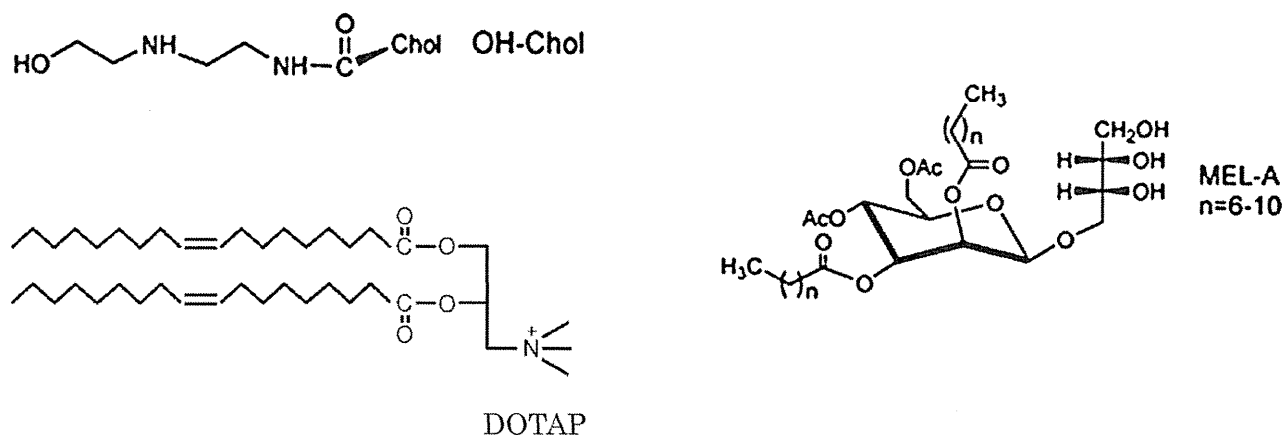


Fig. 1. Chemical structures of cholesteryl-3 β -carboxyaminoethylamine-*N*-hydroxyethylamine (OH-Chol), dioleoyl-3-trimethylammonium propane (DOTAP) and mannosylerythritol lipid-A (MEL-A).

(Sato et al., 2007). In addition, the interactions of polar probe molecules with different environments present in such systems can be investigated. The process of dipolar relaxation may be related to the number of water molecules around the fluorescent moiety of laurdan. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to characterize the hydration of surfactant-modified and PEGylated cationic cholesterol-based liposomes and lipoplexes by measurement of dielectric relaxation time and to make a comparison with the GP value.

In this study, liposomes (~130 nm diameter) composed of either OH-Chol/DOPE/MEL-A (molar ratio 1:1:1) or OH-Chol/DOPE/Tween 80 (molar ratio 1:1:0.5) were employed as a model of surfactant-modified cationic cholesterol-based liposomes. PEGylated liposomes (~140 nm diameter) composed of OH-Chol/DOPE/DSPE/DSPE-PEG2000 (molar ratio 1:1:*x*:0.1–*x*) or DOTAP/Chol/DSPE/DSPE-PEG2000 (molar ratio 1:1:*x*:0.4–*x*) were employed as a model of PEGylated cationic cholesterol-based liposomes.

The present study aimed to examine the impact of surfactant-modification and PEGylation on the hydration of liposome and their lipoplexes by both monitoring lipid hydration level by the emission characteristics of the fluorescent probe laurdan included in the lipid bilayer and measurement of the dielectric relaxation time. Furthermore, the relationship between hydration of PEGylated lipoplexes, cellular association and transfection efficiency was investigated.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Materials

OH-Chol was synthesized as reported previously (Fig. 1) (Takeuchi et al., 1996; Hattori et al., 2005). DOPE, Tween 80, DSPE and DSPE-PEG2000 (DSPE-PEG) were obtained from NOF Co., Ltd. (Tokyo, Japan), and MEL-A was purified as reported previously (Kitamoto et al., 1998) (Fig. 1). 6-Dodecanoyl-2-demethylaminonaphthalene (laurdan) was purchased from Lambda (Graz, Austria). DOTAP was purchased from Avanti Polar Lipids, Inc. (Alabaster, AL, USA) (Fig. 1). Plasmid DNA (pDNA), encoding the luciferase gene was constructed as described previously (Igarashi et al., 2006). A protein-free preparation of pDNA was purified following alkaline lysis using Maxiprep columns (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany). Fluorescein-labeled pDNA (FITC-DNA) was synthesized using pDNA and a fluorescein labeling kit (Mirus, Madison, WI, USA). Lipofectamine 2000 (Lipofectamine) was purchased from Invitrogen Corp. (Carlsbad, CA, USA).

2.2. Preparation of liposomes and lipoplexes

OH-Chol was formulated into liposomes with DOPE at a molar ratio of 1/1, and MEL-A or Tween 80 as a surfactant (OH-Chol/DOPE/surfactant = 1:1:1 or 1:1:0.5, respectively), which were prepared by a modified ethanol injection method (Hattori et al., 2005) with a cationic lipid concentration of 4.5 mM. The formulations were as reported previously (Ding et al., 2009a). Two kinds of PEGylated liposomes were formulated with OH-Chol or DOTAP as cationic lipids and designated OH-Chol-liposomes (OH-Chol/DOPE/DSPE/DSPE-PEG = 1:1:*x*:0.1–*x*) and DOTAP-liposomes (DOTAP/Chol/DSPE/DSPE-PEG = 1:1:*x*:0.4–*x*, molar ratio), respectively, prepared by a dry film method with a cationic lipid concentration of 4.5 mM. DSPE was used to compensate for changes in lipid membrane fluidity and electric charge by the addition of PEG-DSPE. The size of liposomes was adjusted by sonication with bath-typed sonicator. Here, unspecialized cationic liposomes indicate OH-Chol-liposomes.

To measure the hydration level of the liposomal surface, 0.2% (molar % to total lipids) laurdan was incorporated into the lipids. Lipoplexes at a charge ratio (+/–, amine in cationic lipids/pDNA phosphate ratio) of 3 or 5 were prepared by adding an aliquot of pDNA to each liposome mix and standing at room temperature for 5 min.

The size and zeta-potential of liposomes and lipoplexes were measured using an ELS-Z2 (Otsuka Electronics Co., Ltd., Osaka, Japan) in Milli Q water (water) (Elix[®] equipment, Millipore, MA, USA) or 1/10 phosphate-buffered saline (pH 7.4, 1/10 PBS).

2.3. Generalized polarization (GP) measurement

Twenty microliters of 0.2 mol% laurdan-labeled liposomes were diluted to 2 mL with PBS to a cationic lipid concentration of 0.045 mM. Lipoplexes were prepared by adding 40.8 μ L liposomes to 59.2 μ L pDNA (20 μ g/mL of pDNA) and incubating for 5 min. After 20 μ L of lipoplexes were diluted to 2 mL with PBS or water to a cationic lipid concentration of 0.0186 mM with 0.2 μ g/mL of pDNA, laurdan fluorescence was measured by scanning emission wavelengths between 440 and 490 nm with an excitation wavelength of 340 nm (bandwidth 5 nm) at 25 °C in a Shimadzu RF-5300PC, as reported previously (Ding et al., 2009a). Cationic lipid concentrations of liposome (0.019–0.045 mM) increased GP values slightly with the increase in lipid concentration. Spectra were obtained at 0 min (not specially described) and at 30 min after dilution of the lipoplex mix with water or PBS. Laurdan is a membrane probe highly sensitive to environmental polarity, and it displays a large

red shift in emission in polar solvents with respect to nonpolar solvents (Parasassi et al., 1991). It is possible to follow the interfacial water changes in the cationic liposomes upon their complexation with pDNA by means of the spectral variations of laurdan (Parasassi et al., 1991) and by calculating the GP value as follows:

$$GP = \frac{(I_{440} - I_{490})}{(I_{440} + I_{490})} \quad (1)$$

wherein I_{440} and I_{490} are the emission intensities at wavelengths of 440 nm and 490 nm, respectively, with an excitation wavelength of 340 nm (Parasassi et al., 1991; Hirsch-Lerner and Barenholz, 1999). A higher GP value represents a lower hydration level (dehydration) on the liposomal surface. GP values were calculated from the absolute values of fluorescence intensity from one measurement, which was run in the same day with strictly controlled conditions. The repeated experiments showed different values, but with a similar trend.

The effect of pDNA on the GP value for various cationic liposomes is described as

$$\Delta GP = GP \text{ of lipoplex} - GP \text{ of liposome} \quad (2)$$

2.4. Dielectric relaxation time measurement

Dielectric relaxation time of water molecules was measured using a digitizing oscilloscope (model 54120B, Agilent Technologies) at 25 °C in water as reported previously (Yoshioka et al., 1995). At total lipid concentrations of 10–30 mg/mL, dielectric relaxation time did not change (data not shown); therefore, a total lipid concentration of 11.2 mg/mL, corresponding to 9 mM cationic lipid, was used.

2.5. Transfection protocol and luciferase activity measurement

The human lung adenocarcinoma A549 cell line was kindly provided by OncoTherapy Science. The cells were maintained in RPMI-1640 medium supplemented with 10% FBS and kanamycin (100 mg/mL) at 37 °C in a 5% CO₂ humidified incubator. Cells at a confluence level of 70% in a 22-mm culture dish were transfected with each lipoplex. For transfection, the prepared lipoplexes with 1 µg of pDNA were diluted in 500 µL of culture medium and then incubated with the cells for 24 h. For transfection with Lipofectamine as a control, 2.5 µL of Lipofectamine was used for 1 µg of pDNA to form a complex in Opti-MEM, in accordance with the manufacturer's protocol. Luciferase expression in A549 cells was measured as counts per second (cps)/µg protein using the luciferase assay system (Picagene, Tokyo Ink Mfg. Co., Ltd., Tokyo, Japan) and the cps value was normalized to the protein concentration, as determined using a bicinchoninic acid protein assay (Pierce, Rockford, IL, USA).

2.6. Flow cytometry

A549 cells were prepared by plating in a 35-mm culture dish 24 h prior to each experiment. Each liposome was mixed with 2 µg of FITC-DNA at a charge ratio (+/–) of 3:1, and then diluted in 1 mL of PBS. Cells were incubated with the lipoplexes at 37 °C for 2 h. After incubation, the cells were washed two times with PBS and detached with 0.05% trypsin and centrifuged at 1500 rpm for 3 min. The supernatant was discarded and the cell pellets were resuspended with PBS containing 0.1% BSA and 1 mM EDTA. The suspended cells were introduced directly into a FACSCalibur flow cytometer (Becton Dickinson, CA, USA). Data for 10,000 fluorescent events were obtained by recording forward scatter (FSC), side scatter (SSC), and green fluorescence. Mean intensity values of FITC inside cells were calculated to compare the uptake amount of lipoplexes.

2.7. Statistical analysis

The statistical significance of differences between mean values was determined using Welch's *t*-test. Multiple comparisons were evaluated by analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey's multiple comparison test. *P*-values less than 0.05 were considered significant. All experiments were repeated at least two times.

3. Results and discussion

Previously we reported that lipoplexes of MEL-A-modified liposomes (OH-Chol/DOPE/MEL-A = 1:1:0.5) and Tween 80-modified liposomes showed higher gene transfection efficiency at a charge ratio of (+/–) 3 than at a charge ratio of 5 (Ding et al., 2009b). In addition, the GP value of MEL-A-modified liposomes (OH-Chol/DOPE/MEL-A = 1:1:1) was slightly higher compared with that of liposomes with a lower MEL-A ratio (OH-Chol/DOPE/MEL-A = 1:1:0.5) (Ding et al., 2009a). Therefore, in this study, we used MEL-A-modified liposomes with a 1:1:1 (OH-Chol/DOPE/MEL-A) composition. To examine the hydration levels of MEL-A-modified, Tween 80-modified and PEGylated liposomes, and their lipoplexes, at charge ratios of (+/–) 3 and 5, GP values and dielectric relaxation times were measured and compared.

3.1. Surfactant-modified liposomes and lipoplexes

3.1.1. Size and zeta-potential

The mean particle size of non-modified liposomes and MEL-A- and Tween 80-modified liposomes in water was approximately 130 nm, which was adjusted by sonication. An increase in the charge ratio (+/–) from 3 to 5 increased the zeta-potential of all lipoplexes. In lipoplexes at charge ratios of (+/–) 3 and 5, MEL-A-modified liposomes exhibited a slightly decreased zeta-potential compared with non-modified lipoplexes, but Tween 80 increased it in water (Fig. 2A). These trends were also observed in lipoplexes in 1/10 PBS, although the each zeta-potential was decreased (Fig. 2B). The change in zeta-potential of lipoplexes suggested that the cationic part of OH-Chol was affected by modification of MEL-A and Tween 80.

3.1.2. Hydration monitoring fluorescent probe

The GP value depends mainly on changes in hydration of the bilayer headgroup region either because of changes in the ratio between the less hydrated gel phase and the more hydrated liquid-crystalline phase and gel phase, or because of dependency on the pH in the range 4–10 and the type of polar headgroup (Lerner and Barenholz, 2007).

Fluorescence measurements were undertaken before and after addition of appropriate amounts of pDNA to laurdan-labeled liposomes at charge ratios of (+/–) 3 and 5. The results showed that the mean GP value for liposomes was 0.395 (at a cationic lipid concentration of 0.019 mM) (Fig. 3A). The corresponding values for MEL-A- or Tween 80-modified liposomes were 0.420 and 0.327, respectively (Fig. 3A). MEL-A dehydrated the liposomal surface, while Tween 80 hydrated it, corresponding well with a previous report (Ding et al., 2009a). Because Tween 80 possesses twenty oxyethylene residues in the hydrophilic region, and MEL-A possesses only three hydroxyl groups, the water molecules bound per Tween 80 would be much higher than those per MEL-A (Ding et al., 2009a). Interestingly liposomes and lipoplexes showed the same trend for changes in GP values after surfactant modification.

After pDNA addition, the ΔGP value for the three systems was investigated. Lipoplexes at a charge ratio of (+/–) 3 demonstrated positive ΔGP values, but at a charge ratio of (+/–) 5, lipoplexes showed small negative ΔGP values (Fig. 3B). Positive

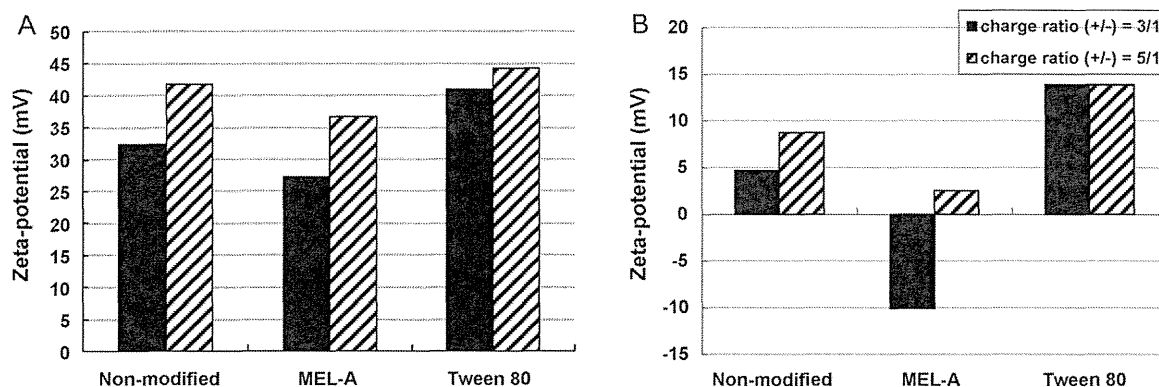


Fig. 2. Zeta-potential of surfactant-modified lipoplexes at charge ratios of (+/-) 3 and 5 in water (A) and 1/10 PBS (B). Each value represents the mean (n=2).

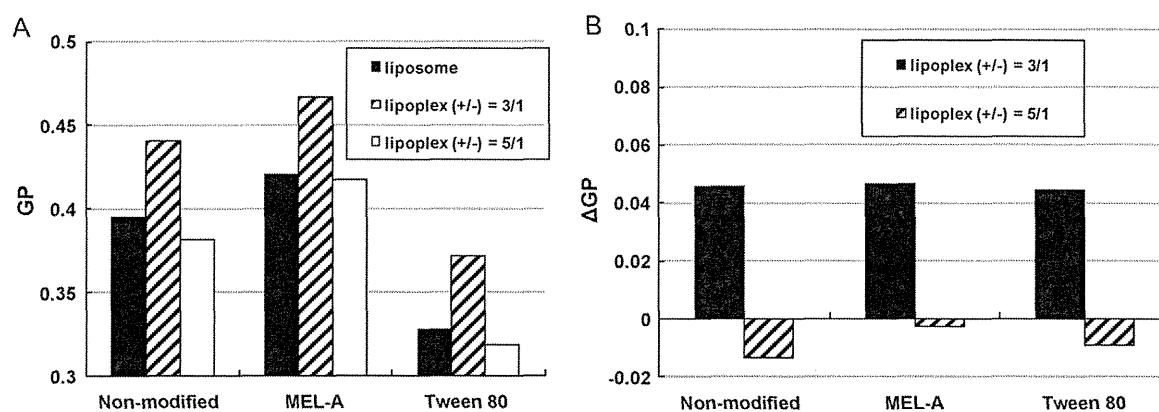


Fig. 3. The change of surface hydration of surfactant-modified liposomes and lipoplexes at charge ratios of (+/-) 3 and 5 as monitored by laurdan generalized polarization (GP) (A) and ΔGP (B) values in PBS. Each value represents the mean (n=2).

values of ΔGP indicate lower hydration levels than the corresponding liposome formulations (Hirsch-Lerner and Barenholz, 1999; Meidan et al., 2000), i.e. the interaction of cationic lipids with pDNA reduced hydration at the water–lipid interface (Luciani et al., 2007). Negative values of ΔGP indicate that the free headgroups of cationic lipids projected outside of the lipoplex and were hydrated, which indicates excess cationic liposomes. These findings support the increased zeta-potentials of MEL-A- and Tween 80-modified lipoplexes with the increase in charge ratio of (+/-) from 3 to 5. In other words, more positively charged MEL-A- or Tween 80-modified lipoplexes with a charge ratio of (+/-) 5 were more hydrated than those with a charge ratio of (+/-) 3. Hereafter we focus on lipoplexes with a charge ratio of (+/-) 3, where liposomes interact minimally with pDNA.

3.1.3. Hydration monitoring dielectric relaxation time

The result of dielectric relaxation time of water molecules in the liposome suspensions revealed that MEL-A-modified liposome exhibited significantly decreased dielectric relaxation times (10.32 ± 0.08 ps) compared with non-modified liposomes (10.87 ± 0.05 ps), and Tween 80-modified liposomes slightly increased it (11.1 ± 0.19 ps) (Fig. 4), indicating dehydration and hydration of liposomes, respectively, compared with non-modified liposomes. Lipoplexes at a charge ratio of (+/-) 3 showed similar trends for dielectric relaxation times compared with liposomes alone. The dielectric relaxation times between liposomes and lipoplexes cannot be compared directly, because hydration of the polar groups of pDNA, such as deoxyribose, is considered to contribute to the dielectric relaxation time of water molecules in lipoplex suspensions.

These findings for GP value and dielectric relaxation time of surfactant-modified liposomes and lipoplexes showed similar trends, indicating that the hydrated outer layer was associated with headgroups of OH-Chol, and pDNA interacts with this part. The change in GP values of liposomes and lipoplexes at a charge ratio of (+/-) 3 indicated that water was excluded from the lipid head-group region when heterogeneous condensation of cationic lipids by pDNA took place.

As reported previously (Ding et al., 2009a), in terms of the cellular association of surfactant-modified liposomes, the relation of hydration level and zeta-potential to the cellular uptake was not

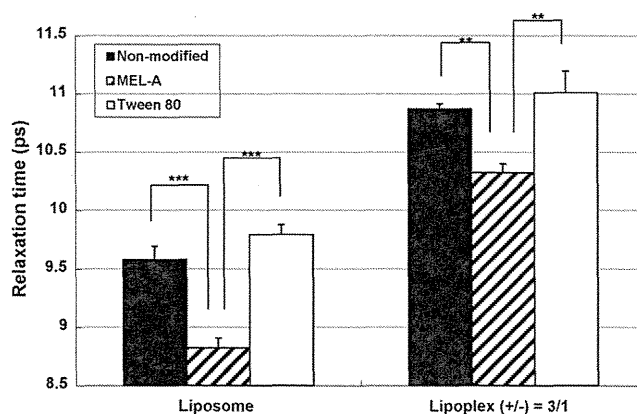


Fig. 4. Dielectric relaxation time of surfactant-modified liposomes and lipoplexes at a charge ratio of (+/-) 3 in water. Data represent mean \pm S.D. (n=3). * $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$.

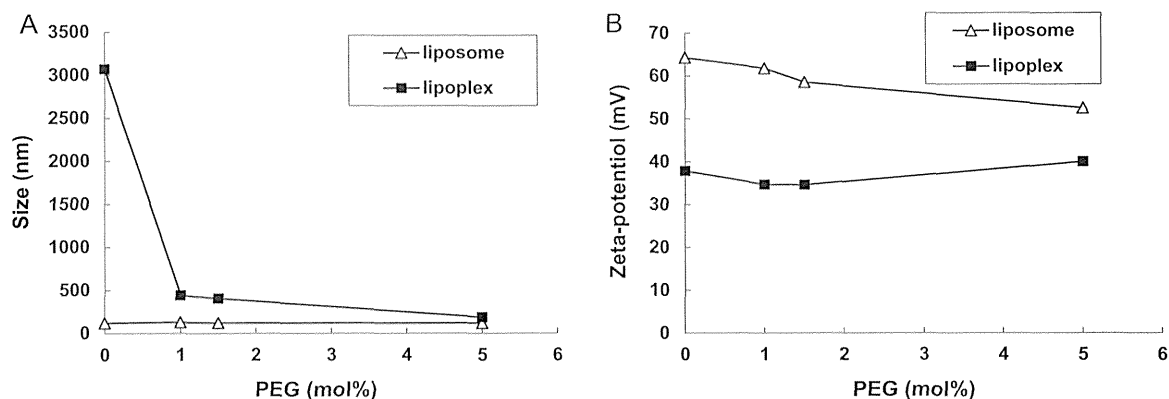


Fig. 5. Size (A) and zeta-potential (B) of PEGylated OH-Chol-liposomes at a charge ratio of (+/-) 3 in water. Each value represents the mean ($n=2$).

clear for incubation with PBS for 2 h. The ions in PBS might interact with cationic charge on the relatively outer surface of the liposomes even covered with surfactants.

3.2. PEGylated liposomes and lipoplexes

3.2.1. Size and zeta-potential

The particle size and zeta-potentials of OH-Chol-liposomes were 121.9 nm and 64.3 mV, respectively in water (Fig. 5A and B). Without PEGylation, lipoplexes were likely to aggregate. Increasing the amount of PEGylation greatly decreased the lipoplex sizes (Fig. 5A) and did not largely change the zeta-potential of lipoplexes (Fig. 5B). Because the cationic lipid concentration was constant, this change in size is attributed to the packing effects of PEG chains into vesicle structures (Garbuzenko et al., 2005; Sato et al., 2007).

3.2.2. Hydration monitoring fluorescent probe

Next, to examine the effect of PEGylated cationic lipids on GP values, we measured GP values of PEGylated DOTAP-liposome (Fig. 6) and PEGylated OH-Chol-liposome (Fig. 7A). The particle size and zeta-potentials of DOTAP-Chol-liposomes from 0 to 20 mol% were 105.8 ± 1.3 – 142.7 ± 22.5 nm and 38.3 ± 1.3 – 45.7 ± 3.0 mV, respectively in water. The fluorescence of liposomes was recorded in PBS. A large decrease in GP values of liposomes at 5 mol% PEG, which are often used for PEGylation of liposomes. From these results, we focused on modification below 5 mol% PEG.

The fluorescence of OH-Chol-liposomes in PBS and lipoplexes was recorded GP and GP (0 min and 30 min) after dilution with PBS, respectively (Fig. 7A). Unlike with PEGylated DOTAP-liposomes, the values of PEGylated OH-Chol-liposome did not decrease largely

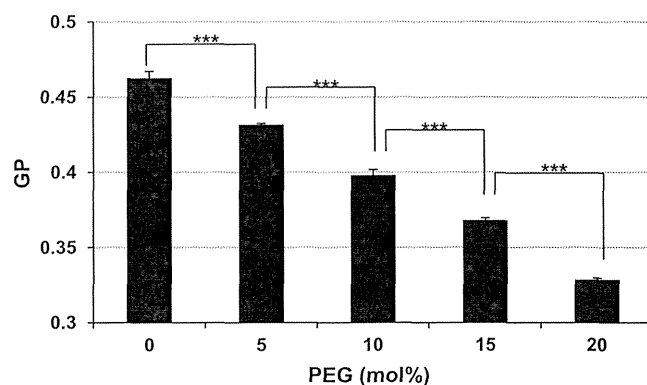


Fig. 6. The change of surface hydration of PEGylated DOTAP-liposome by PEGylation amount as monitored by laurdan generalized polarization (GP) in PBS at a charge ratio of (+/-) 3. Data represent mean \pm S.D. ($n=3$). *** $P < 0.001$.

at 5 mol% PEG. The GP values of OH-Chol-liposomes were higher than those of DOTAP-liposomes for all degrees of PEGylation. That is, PEGylated OH-Chol-liposomes were less hydrated, and PEGylated DOTAP-liposomes were more hydrated, corresponding with a previous report in which cholesterol induced the dehydration of lipid bilayers (Hirsch-Lerner and Barenholz, 1999; Meidan et al., 2000). Stepniewski et al. (2011) reported that PEG penetrates the lipid core of the membrane for the case of a liquid-crystalline membrane but is excluded from the tighter structure of the gel membrane. Because DOTAP-liposomes have more fluid membrane than OH-Chol-liposomes, the difference of changes in GP values by PEGylation may be as a result of the different structures of PEG

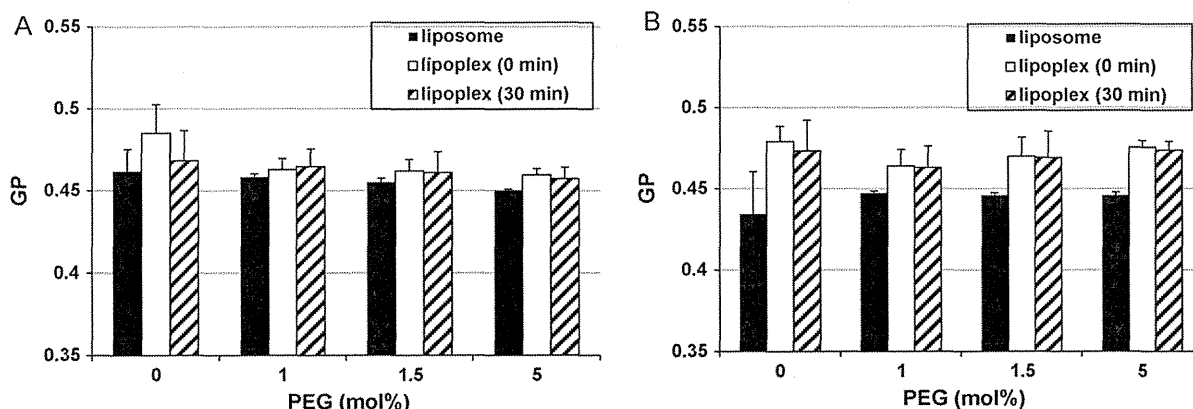


Fig. 7. The change of surface hydration of PEGylated OH-Chol-liposomes and lipoplexes at a charge ratio of (+/-) 3 as monitored by laurdan generalized polarization (GP) 0 min or 30 min after dilution with PBS (A) or water (B). Data represent mean \pm S.D. ($n=3$).

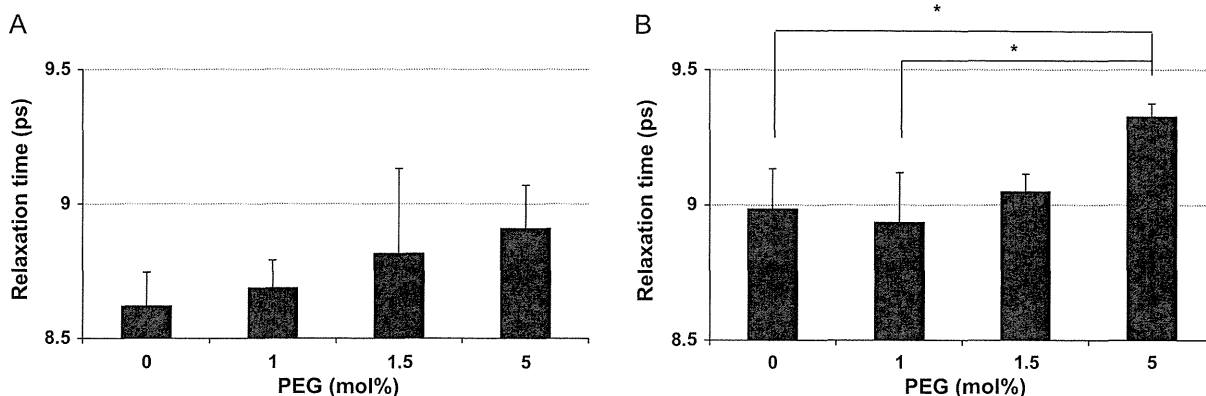


Fig. 8. Dielectric relaxation times of PEGylated OH-Chol-liposomes (A) and lipoplexes (B) at a charge ratio of (+/-) 3 in water. Data represent mean \pm S.D. ($n=3$). * $P<0.05$.

on the liposomal membrane. PEG layers may cover and extend the fluorescence of laurdan at the headgroups of OH-Chol.

To examine the effect of the solvent on GP values, we also measured GP values of the same liposomes and lipoplexes in water. The GP values of PEGylated OH-Chol-liposomes and lipoplexes in water were similar to those in PBS (Fig. 7B). The GP (0 min and 30 min) values of lipoplexes at a charge ratio of (+/-) 3 hardly changed between PBS and water. The degrees of PEGylation were not reflected change of GP values.

3.2.3. Hydration monitoring dielectric relaxation time

Unlike the GP values, the dielectric relaxation times of PEGylated OH-Chol-liposome were longer with increasing amounts of PEG in water, indicating the hydrated PEG layer (Fig. 8A). In addition, the dielectric relaxation times of lipoplexes were significantly longer than those of non-PEGylated and 1 mol% PEGylated lipoplexes (Fig. 8B). These findings indicated that PEGylated liposomes and PEGylated lipoplexes were hydrated with increasing amounts of PEG.

In the present study, we measured dielectric relaxation time in a frequency range between 0.1 GHz and 20 GHz. A dielectric loss peak at approximately 10 GHz was observed for all the suspensions of surface-modified cationic liposomes and lipoplexes studied. The loss peak is considered to be because of the dielectric relaxation of bulk water and the relaxation of water hydrated to PEG and the headgroups of cationic lipid. For PEG and DSPE-PEG solutions, the relaxation time of hydrated water has been reported to be 5–6 times longer than that of bulk water (Sato et al., 2007). In the present study, the dielectric loss peak was not separated into each relaxation process because of the limitations of the measuring frequency of the instrument used (<20 GHz). Therefore, the relaxation time

measured in the present study reflected both relaxation processes, and the longer relaxation time indicates a higher contribution of hydrated water of PEG with longer relaxation time than that of bulk water.

The influence of the surface-modification of cationic liposomes by surfactants and PEG-lipid on the hydration level of liposomes and the corresponding lipoplexes were examined by measurement of GP values of a fluorescent marker and of dielectric relaxation. In surfactant-modified liposomes, GP values and dielectric relaxation times demonstrated that liposomes modified with MEL-A and the corresponding lipoplexes were more dehydrated, but liposomes with Tween 80 were more hydrated compared with unmodified liposomes. In PEGylated liposomes, changes in GP values of liposome and lipoplexes were hardly observed at a charge ratio of (+/-) 3. Dielectric relaxation times in water demonstrated that more highly PEGylated liposomes and lipoplexes were more hydrated.

3.2.4. Cellular association and transfection efficiency of PEGylated lipoplexes

Finally to clarify the relationship between PEGylation and transfection levels, we examined the cellular association of lipoplexes using FITC-DNA in A549 cells incubated 2 h by flow cytometry. In Fig. 9A, with the presence of PEG-lipid in the lipoplexes, a significant decrease of cellular uptake was in each step from 159.9 ± 7.6 with non-PEGylated lipoplexes to 36.0 ± 0.6 with 5 mol% PEGylated lipoplexes. In accordance with this, the luciferase activity was decreasing roughly 150-fold from 75,444 cps/ μ g protein with non-PEGylation to 494 cps/ μ g protein with 5 mol% PEGylated lipoplexes (Fig. 9B).

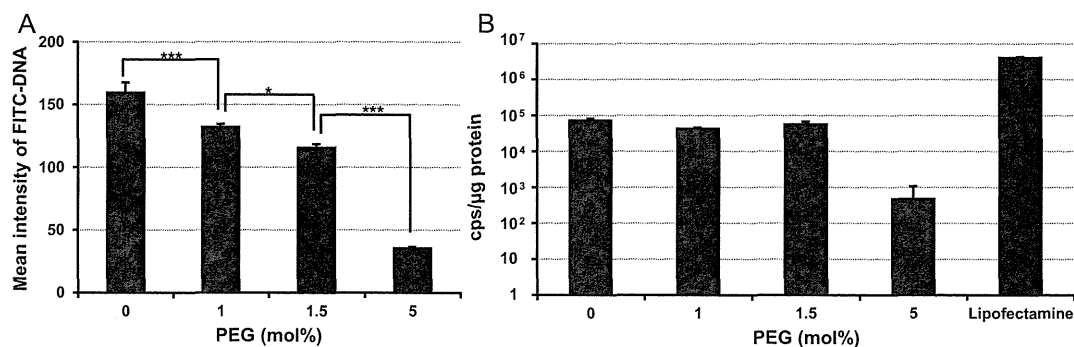


Fig. 9. Cellular association of FITC-DNA (A) and transfection efficiency (B) of PEGylated OH-Chol-liposomes at a charge ratio of (+/-) 3. Lipoplexes were incubated with A549 cells for 2 h in PBS measured by flow cytometry (A) and for 24 h in culture medium for gene transfections (B). Each result represents the mean \pm S.D. ($n=3$). *** $P<0.001$ and * $P<0.05$.

We found an inverse correlation between the amount of PEGylation in the lipoplexes and uptake in A549 cells. PEGylation significantly decreased the association of the lipoplexes at 2 h from the FITC intensities, corresponding with the result of DOTAP/cholesterol lipoplexes (Gjetting et al., 2010). The decreased cellular association of lipoplexes by PEGylation was probably caused by the steric barrier of PEG layers where the zeta-potential was not greatly changed by PEGylation between 34.57 and 39.98 mV (Fig. 5B). It was suggested that PEG layers may be projected out of the solid liposomes. In other words, the hydration level of PEG-lipid on liposomes by measurement of dielectric relaxation may reflect the projection level of PEG layers out of liposomes. Transfection efficiencies were not consistent with the result of cellular uptake except for 5 mol% PEGylation. Other factors might affect transfection efficiency more than cellular uptake. Until now, it has been speculated that there is a negative relationship between hydration ratio by PEGylation and cellular uptake of lipoplexes. This is the first study to measure hydration ratio of PEGylated lipoplexes and demonstrate that there is a correlation between hydration level and cellular uptake of PEGylated lipoplexes ($R=0.946$). This indicates that PEGylation of liposomes may be attributed to hydration more than the cationic headgroups, which were monitored by dielectric relaxation times. Thus, the hydration of lipids is the proper index to evaluate the quality of PEGylated lipoplexes.

4. Conclusions

Fluorescence measurements with laurdan detected the hydration of headgroups of lipids in surfactant-modified OH-Chol-liposomes, but could not monitor the hydration in PEGylated OH-Chol-liposomes because PEG layers may cover and extend the fluorescence of laurdan in the headgroups of cationic lipids. On the other hand, the measurement of dielectric relaxation time detected the hydration of both surfactant-modified OH-Chol-liposomes and PEGylated OH-Chol-liposomes because the dielectric relaxation time of water revealed total hydration including hydration of the PEG layer and the headgroups of cationic lipids. This is the first report that dielectric relaxation time is a useful parameter for analysis of the hydration of liposomes and lipoplexes. These findings will help to select and provide optimal lipid formulations and surface modifications of liposomes, as well as optimal charge ratios of cationic liposomes and pDNA with fewer in vitro experiments.

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遺伝子治療臨床試験の現状

Current status of gene therapy clinical studies

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1 はじめに

遺伝子治療は遺伝子または遺伝子導入細胞を用いた治療と定義される。画期的な次世代医療として1990年に米国で開始されて以降大きな期待を集めたが、2000年前後に遺伝子治療が原因となる重篤な副作用が相次いで明らかになり、遺伝子治療は一時停滞した。しかし、技術の進歩や経験の蓄積により最近では遺伝性難病を中心に早期臨床試験の成功例が相次いで報告され、欧州で遺伝子治療薬の承認勧告が初めて出されるなど、本格的な実用化も間近である。本稿では、希少疾患等のアンメット

メディカルニーズに対応するニッチバスターとしての実用化が期待される遺伝子治療の臨床試験の現状を紹介する。

2 海外の遺伝子治療の現状

遺伝子治療臨床試験はこれまでに世界で1800件以上実施されている。遺伝子治療薬が承認されているのは中国、フィリピン、ロシアのみだが、今年、欧州で初めての承認勧告が家族性リポ蛋白リパーゼ欠損症という先天性希少疾患に対する遺伝子治療薬 Glybera に対して出さ

表1 既承認遺伝子治療薬及び後期臨床試験の例

製品名・開発名	ベクターの種類	治療用遺伝子	適応症	開発段階
Gendicine	アデノウイルス	P53	頭頸部がん	承認 (中国 2002)
Rexin G	レトロウイルス	cyclin G1	固形がん	承認 (フィリピン 2006)
Oncoline	腫瘍溶解性アデノウイルス	—	がん	承認 (中国 2006)
Neovasculgen	プラスミド	VEGF	末梢血管疾患	承認 (ロシア 2011)
Glybera	アデノ随伴ウイルス	リポ蛋白リパーゼ (LPL)	LPL 欠損症	承認勧告 (EU 2012)
コラテジェン	プラスミド	HGF	重症下肢虚血	承認申請 (取下げ)
Allovectin-7	プラスミド /DMRIE : DOPE 複合体	HLA-B7/β2 ミクログロブリン	転移性メラノーマ	Phase III
Generx	アデノウイルス	FGF-4	冠動脈疾患	Phase III
OncoVEX	腫瘍溶解性ヘルペスウイルス	GM-CSF	メラノーマ	Phase III
TK-DLI	レトロウイルス	HSV-TK/ΔLNGFR	白血病 (GVHD 予防)	Phase III
Reolysin	腫瘍溶解性レオウイルス	—	頭頸部がん	Phase III
CG0070	腫瘍溶解性アデノウイルス	GM-CSF	膀胱がん	Phase III
GSK2696273	レトロウイルス	アデノシンデアミナーゼ (ADA)	ADA 欠損症	Phase III
AAV2-hRPE65v2	アデノ随伴ウイルス	RPE65	レーバー先天性黒内障	Phase III

れた(表1)。現在、後期臨床試験が実施されているのはがんや血管疾患を対象とするものが多い。がん細胞で特異的に増殖して細胞を破壊する腫瘍溶解性ウイルスも、複数のPhase IIIが実施されている。

3 遺伝子治療臨床試験の成功例

早期臨床試験では、染色体組込型のレトロウイルスベクターやレンチウイルスベクターを用いて、正常遺伝子を導入した自己造血幹細胞を移植する造血幹細胞遺伝子治療や、神経・筋肉などの非分裂細胞で長期間の遺伝子発現が可能なアデノ随伴ウイルス(AAV)ベクターを用いる遺伝子治療で成功例が報告されている。

造血幹細胞遺伝子治療は、アデノシンデアミナーゼ(ADA)欠損症やX連鎖重症複合免疫不全症などの原発性免疫不全症、遺伝性神経難病の副腎白質ジストロフィー、血液疾患のサラセミアなどで有効性が示されている。原発性免疫不全症の遺伝子治療では、ベクターの染色体への挿入変異により複数の患者で白血病が発症し、安全性が問題視された。しかし、白血病の発症は特定の対象疾患に限られ、1例以外は治癒したこと、1回の遺伝子治療で効果が10年も持続し、ミスマッチ造血幹細胞移植より治療成績がよいことも確認された。このため、移植ができない患者ではリスク・ベネフィットを考慮して遺伝子治療を積極的に行う方向にあり、安全性の確保は、安全性を高めたベクターの利用や、患者の長期フォローアップなどにより行われている。希少疾患の治療薬は企業による開発が行われにくいのが、企業の社会的責任としての取り組みも始まっている。ADA欠損症遺伝子治療薬は現在GSK社がPhase IIIを実施中であり、実用化が期待される。

AAVベクターでは、レーバー先天性黒内障(LCA)という先天性網膜疾患で12名全員の視力回復という画期的な効果が報告された。欧州で承認勧告されたGlyberaもAAVベクターであり、血友病やパーキンソン病でも有効性が認められている。現在LCA遺伝子治療はPhase IIIが行われ、血友病の遺伝子治療薬はBaxter社が臨床試験を来年開始予定とされる。

がん遺伝子治療でも昨年初めて有望な成果が報告され

た。抗腫瘍免疫の主役を担う細胞傷害性T細胞(CTL)を、特定のがん抗原特異的CTLに遺伝子改変して用いる養子免疫遺伝子治療が最近増加しているが、難治性B細胞腫瘍の遺伝子治療で、遺伝子改変CTLの投与により3例中2例が完全寛解という顕著な効果が得られており、今後が注目される。

これら早期臨床試験の成功を受け、米国遺伝子細胞治療学会は5~7年以内に遺伝子治療の実用化が可能な10疾患(Target 10)を今年公表して研究を推進している。対象疾患の多くは希少疾患である(表2)。

表2 実現可能な遺伝子治療薬の対象疾患 Target 10

- レーバー先天性黒内障(LCA)
- アデノシンデアミナーゼ(ADA)欠損症
- 血友病
- X連鎖重症複合免疫不全症(X-SCID)
- パーキンソン病
- 加齢黄斑変性(AMD)
- 副腎白質ジストロフィー(ALD)
- サラセミア
- EBウイルス関連リンパ腫
- メラノーマ

4 日本の遺伝子治療臨床試験の現状と規制

日本で遺伝子治療は臨床研究または薬事法に基づく治験として実施されている。これまで約30件の臨床試験が実施されているが、大半は臨床研究で治験は5件のみである。臨床試験は最近増加傾向にあるが、欧米と比べてまだ少ない。海外からのプロトコール導入も多いが、センダイウイルスベクターや腫瘍溶解性ウイルスG47Δなどの日本独自開発のベクターや、がん抑制遺伝子REIC/Dkk-3などの独自の導入遺伝子を用いた臨床研究も増え、遺伝子改変CTLを用いる養子免疫療法も独自の抗原が利用されている。先天性疾患を対象とする臨床研究はADA欠損症のみであったが、慢性肉芽腫症(原発性免疫不全症)に対する造血幹細胞遺伝子治療の臨床研究も今年承認された。治験では、コラテジェン(HGF発現プラスミド)が閉塞性動脈硬化症を適応として2008年に国内で初めて承認申請された。本申請は取

り下げられたが、国際共同治験 Phase III が準備中とされるほか、原発性リンパ浮腫を適応とする治験が予定されている。これまで臨床研究から治験への移行例はコラジェンのみであるが、今後は医師主導治験も含め臨床研究から治験へ、さらに実用化に至るものが増えることが望まれる。

日本では、遺伝子治療を臨床研究として行う場合、「遺伝子治療臨床研究に関する指針」に従い、施設内審査委員会だけではなく大臣承認が必要とされる。治験の場合は「遺伝子治療用医薬品の品質及び安全性の確保に関する指針」に従い、治験薬の品質及び安全性の大臣承認を求めることが必要とされる。臨床研究に国の審査が行われているのは遺伝子治療臨床研究とヒト幹細胞を用いる臨床研究だけであり、治験前に確認申請が必要なのは遺伝子治療薬のみである。さらに、ウイルスベクターはカルタヘナ法の「遺伝子組換え生物等」に該当するため、臨床使用には第一種使用規程の大臣承認が必要である。遺伝子導入細胞を用いる場合は細胞治療・再生医療関連の規制がかかる場合もあり得る。このように遺伝子治療は一般的な臨床研究や治験と比べて手続きが複雑で複数の審査が必要とされ、これが欧米と比べて臨床試験の実施件数が少ない理由の一つと考えられている。また、遺伝子治療の両指針の基本原則や品質・安全性確保の要件等は 1995 年頃作成された当時のままであり、技術的進歩や経験の蓄積に応じた見直しが必要となっている。筆者も参画した 2010 年度の厚生労働科学特別研究島田班では「遺伝子治療臨床研究に関する指針」の見直しを行い、国内外の規制動向も考慮して改正原案を作成した。改正案では品質・安全性の確保とともに審査の効率化が図られており、指針改正により我が国の遺伝子治療研究が活性化し、迅速な臨床応用が可能になると期待される。指針改正のための作業委員会は未だ開始されていないが、早急な検討が望まれる。

なお、国内の遺伝子治療の実施状況一覧は紙幅の関係で割愛したが、国立医薬品食品衛生研究所遺伝子細胞医薬部ホームページ (<http://www.nihs.go.jp/cgtp/cgtp/home-j.html>) に関連指針とともに掲載している。参照いただければ幸いである。

