Germline Fumarate Hydratase Mutations in Families with Multiple Cutaneous and Uterine Leiomyomata

Amalia Martinez-Mir*, Benjamin Glaser†, Gary S. Chuang*, Liran Horev‡, Arie Waldman§, Danielle E Engler*, Derek Gordon§§, Lynda J Spelman¶, Ioannis Hatzibougias#, Jack Green**, Angela M Christiano*,†† and Abraham Zlotogorski‡

1Department of Dermatology, Columbia University, USA
††Department of Genetics & Development, Columbia University, USA
§§Laboratory of Statistical Genetics, Rockefeller University, New York, New York, USA
§Endocrine & Metabolism Service, Hebrew University-Hadassah Medical Center, Jerusalem, Israel
2Department of Dermatology, Hebrew University-Hadassah Medical Center, Jerusalem, Israel
3Department of Dermatology, Haemek Medical Center, Afula, Israel
4Institute of Pathology, Thessaloniki, Greece
5Southeast Dermatology, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia
6Department of Dermatology, St. Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne, Australia

Correspondence: Abraham Zlotogorski MD, Department of Dermatology, Hadassah Medical Center, PO Box 12000, Jerusalem, Israel, 91120. Email: zloto@cc.huji.ac.il

Abstract

Germline mutations in the fumarate hydratase gene (FH) predispose to multiple cutaneous and uterine leiomyoma syndrome (MCL) and MCL associated with renal cell cancer. MCL is inherited in an autosomal dominant pattern, manifesting as skin leiomyoma and uterine fibroids in affected individuals. Fumarate hydratase, a component of the tricarboxylic acid cycle, acts as a tumor suppressor gene in the development of cutaneous and uterine leiomyoma and renal cell cancer in this syndrome. Here we report the clinical and mutational analysis of five families with MCL, with the identification of five new mutations affecting highly conserved residues of the FH protein. These results provide further evidence for the role of the FH gene in the pathogenesis of MCL.

Keywords: leiomyoma, renal cell cancer

Abbreviations: FH, fumarate hydratase gene; MCL, multiple cutaneous and uterine leiomyoma syndrome; MIM, Mendelian inheritance in man

Cutaneous leiomyomas are rare, benign tumors arising from the arrector pili muscle of hair follicles. Multiple cutaneous and uterine leiomyoma syndrome (MCL; MIM #150800), in which affected individuals develop associated skin and uterine leiomyomas, is a disorder inherited in an autosomal dominant pattern. The skin lesions usually appear between the early teens and the fourth decade of life. For the majority of affected women, uterine fibroids of early onset usually require hysterectomy or myomectomy (Stewart, 2001). In some families with MCL, the disease is associated with an additional predisposition to type II papillary renal cell carcinoma (Launonen et al., 2001).
The genetic locus for MCL was recently mapped to chromosome 1q42.3-43 (Alam et al., 2001; Kiuru et al., 2001; Martinez-Mir et al., 2002) and subsequently, mutations in the fumarate hydratase gene (FH) were identified (Tomlinson et al., 2002). The gene product for FH is fumarate hydratase, part of the tricarboxylic acid cycle involved in energy production for the cell. Dominant mutations in FH cause MCL in approximately 59.5% of affected individuals (Tomlinson et al., 2002). Based on its role in MCL, FH has been hypothesized to act as a tumor suppressor gene in sporadic tumors as well. However, two recent reports show a very low frequency of FH mutations in different types of tumors, including uterine and cutaneous leiomyomas, leiomyosarcoma, and renal cell carcinoma (Barker et al., 2002; Kiuru et al., 2002). Whether FH plays a role in sporadic tumorigenesis remains to be determined. Mutations in three different subunits of succinate dehydrogenase, another enzyme of the tricarboxylic acid cycle, also correlate with a high incidence of tumors, in particular, hereditary paragangliomas (Baysal et al., 2001). Interestingly, autosomal recessive mutations in the FH gene have been implicated in fumarate hydratase deficiency, which presents with progressive encephalopathy and developmental delay (MIM #606812). Accordingly, Tomlinson et al. (2002) reported a patient with fumarase deficiency whose mother, a carrier for an FH mutation, developed skin leiomyoma. How these two phenotypically distinct disorders are linked to different types and combinations of mutations in FH calls for further investigation.

In this study, we report the clinical and mutational analysis of five families with MCL. We have identified five new mutations in the FH gene, further supporting the role of FH in MCL.

Materials and methods

Human subjects

We have identified five families with dominantly inherited MCL, comprising 16 affected individuals available for this study. Blood samples were collected according to the local Institutional Review Board. Clinical features and pedigrees of four families were previously published in case reports (MCL-1, MCL-2, MCL-3, and MCL-5) (Lun and Spelman, 2000; Tsoitis et al., 2001; Alam et al., 2002; Martinez-Mir et al., 2002).

Mutation analysis

Genomic DNA was isolated from peripheral blood collected in EDTA-containing tubes using the PureGene DNA isolation kit (Gentra Systems, Minneapolis, MN). To screen for mutations in the human FH gene, all exons and splice junctions were PCR-amplified from genomic DNA. PCR primers are shown in Table I. PCR products were sequenced in an ABI Prism 310 automated sequencer, using the ABI Prism BigDye terminator cycle sequencing ready reaction kit (PE Applied
Biosystems, Foster City, CA), following purification in Centriflex gel filtration cartridges (Edge Biosystems, Gaitherburg, MD). Mutations were identified by visual inspection and comparison with control sequences generated from unrelated unaffected individuals.

To confirm the mutations identified, direct and mismatched PCR were used. The nonsense mutation Q142X and the missense H275Y and V351L were confirmed by digestion of the corresponding PCR products with BstNI, BspHI, and MaeIII, respectively. In the case of S115I, a reverse mismatched primer (5'-CCT AAC ATT TCA ATT GCT CTA TAA-3') was used to introduce an Alu I restriction site. Finally, the PCR product corresponding to frameshift mutation 1081del4 was run on a polyacrylamide gel and visualized by ethidium bromide staining.

All five DNA variants were tested in a mixed control population of 46–49 individuals. The missense variants S115I, H275Y, and V351L were tested in an additional sample of 32–43 control individuals.

Results

Clinical findings

The patients in the five families with MCL (Figure 1) originated in five different countries, namely, two Jewish families from Tunisia (MCL-1) and Ethiopia (MCL-4), Greece (MCL-2), Australia (MCL-3), and Puerto Rico (MCL-5). They comprised a total of 11 and 5 affected women and men, respectively. Skin leiomyomas were found in 14 individuals, 9 women and 5 men, ranging in age from 14 to 55 y. The affected patients reported sensitivity of the lesions to cold temperature and touch. Two of the female patients exhibited skin leiomyomas alone, without any uterine abnormality. The typical skin lesions are firm, skin colored to red, ranging from a few in number to approximately 100 in older individuals (Figure 2). The lesions range between 0.2 and 1.0 cm in diameter and cluster with time.

Of the 9 women with uterine leiomyoma, 7 had coexisting skin leiomyoma and 2 had uterine leiomyoma alone. Six of these patients with affected uteri eventually underwent hysterectomy or myomectomy.

Mutation analysis in the FH gene

We have analyzed five families with dominantly inherited MCL for FH mutations. All were found to carry heterozygous mutations in the FH gene (Table II). None of these mutations have been previously reported in patients with MCL or fumarate hydratase deficiency, and each of them was
unique to a single family. The fact that they have not been detected in the control population excludes them as common polymorphisms.

A C>T transition at nucleotide position 553, which results in the nonsense mutation Q142X (amino acid residue 185 in the mitochondrial isoform), was identified in family MCL-2, and a deletion of four nucleotides in exon 7 was found in family MCL-5. This frameshift mutant allele is the result of a 4-bp deletion starting at any position between nucleotides 1081–1083, creating a premature termination codon 12 amino acids downstream of the deletion site. Three missense mutations were also identified: a G>T transversion at nucleotide position 473 in exon 4, leading to the missense mutation S115I (mitochondrial amino acid residue 158; family MCL-4), a C>T transition at position 952 in exon 7 resulting in the missense mutation H275Y (mitochondrial amino acid residue 318; family MCL-1), and a G>C transversion at position 1180 in exon 8, creating the missense mutation V351L (mitochondrial amino acid residue 394; family MCL-3). Exon number and nucleotide positions are derived from the FH sequence (Accession No. 18549070). The amino acid position for the cytosolic isoform is given, for comparison with the previously reported mutations (Tomlinson et al, 2002; Table II).

Discussion

In this study, we have identified five new FH"mutations" in MCL families, further supporting the role of this housekeeping gene in tumorigenesis. The nature of these mutations, including nonsense, frameshift, and missense mutations, clearly supports the role of the FH gene in MCL. Nonetheless, the involvement of a housekeeping gene such as FH in tumorigenesis unveils new questions about the etiologic mechanism underlying MCL.

Our study has identified a heterozygous nonsense (Q142X) and a frameshift mutation (1081del4) in two of the families. The most likely fate of the mRNA of these mutant alleles would be nonsense-mediated mRNA decay, where the nonsense-bearing mRNA is recognized and degraded soon after transcription (Frischmeyer and Dietz, 1999). Unfortunately, mRNA samples from these families were not available for further testing and therefore other possible mechanisms such as translation into a truncated protein or exon skipping cannot be ruled out.

Regarding the three missense changes identified in our study, S115I (MCL-4), H275Y (MCL-1), and V351L (MCL-3), the possibility of these being rare polymorphisms cannot be completely excluded, because a mixed control population was used owing to unavailability of a sufficient number of ethnically matched controls. This is especially true for V531L, where both amino acids consist of hydrophobic side chains with only one carbon difference. It is noteworthy, however, that
7 of the 17 mutations reported by Tomlinson et al. (2002) were also missense mutations. The affected amino acid residues S115, H275, and V351 are conserved among human, pig, rat, and mouse FH.

Cosegregation between the mutations and the MCL phenotype was confirmed for families MCL-1 (H275Y) and MCL-3 (V351L), for which blood samples from several affected family members were available. These two missense variants show reduced penetrance for the skin and uterine lesions. H275Y was identified in family MCL-1 (Figure 1), in which we had previously performed linkage studies (Martinez-Mir et al., 2002). Restriction analysis in all family members showed that 12 individuals, 7 women and 5 men, were heterozygous for the mutation. Of the 7 carrier women, 4 presented with both skin and diagnosed or suspected uterine lesions (hysterectomy in III-17 and III-19, diagnosed myoma in IV-12, and menorrhagia in V-12), 2 presented with skin lesions alone (III-21 and IV-2), and 1 was an asymptomatic female (V-2). With the exception of V-17, all carrier men suffered from skin leiomyomata. Thus, only two young asymptomatic carriers were identified, V-2 (age 19) and V-17 (age 18). V-17 was reported to carry the disease-associated haplotype during our studies to refine the MCUL1 locus (Martinez-Mir et al., 2002). V-2, on the other hand, showed a key recombination event within the disease-associated haplotype (Martinez-Mir et al., 2002). Owing to the fact that V-2 was an unaffected individual and that the location and identity of the causative gene was still unknown at the time these studies were performed, her carrier status as an asymptomatic carrier or unaffected could not be established. With the identification of the FH gene by Tomlinson et al. (2002), we confirmed that V-2 did indeed carry the disease-associated haplotype and, as shown here, an FH mutation.

In family MCL-3 (Figure 1), on the other hand, the V351L missense substitution was present in three women, one of them with both uterine and skin involvement and the remaining two with only uterine myoma. The grandmother in this family, reported to have uterine polyps on a biopsy report, did not carry the mutation. For family MCL-2 (Q142X; Figure 1) the mutation was only present in the affected individual and his mother and absent in the unaffected father and sibling. Since no family history of MCL was reported for the affected member of this family, the carrier mother will be reexamined for skin and uterine lesions. The missense variant S115I in family MCL-4 was present in the affected family member only and absent in the remaining three unaffected siblings (Figure 1). The parents of these individuals were not available for the study. Finally, only one individual from family MCL-5 (Figure 1, Figure 2), an affected woman, was available for examination and was heterozygous for the frameshift mutation. None of the families studied here suffered from any other type of tumor, including papillary renal cell cancer.
In summary, of 11 female patients, 7 exhibited concurrent skin and uterine leiomyoma involvement. Of the remaining 4 affected female patients, 2 had skin lesions only and 2 had uterine leiomyoma alone. Patients from the same family may display different phenotypic expression of the disease. For example, in family MCL-3, a mother with uterine leiomyoma and no skin lesions had two daughters, one with both skin and uterine lesions and the other with uterine involvement only.

Seventeen of 42 families reported by Tomlinson et al (2002) did not display mutations in the FH gene. The rate of mutation detection in our study, on the other hand, reached 100%. Tomlinson et al (2002) performed single-strand conformation polymorphism and conformation-specific gel electrophoresis as mutation detection methods in some of their families versus direct sequencing in our study. This could account for the lower mutation rate in the original report. Overall, it still remains possible that the predisposition to MCL is genetically heterogeneous.

One of the implications of gene identification for inherited susceptibility to tumorigenesis is the possible role they may play in the more common sporadic presentation of the same type of tumors. Families with MCL present with benign skin and uterine leiomyomas, the latter being a major public health issue. In addition, the aggressive papillary renal cell carcinoma can also be associated with MCL, as well as leiomyosarcoma (Launonen et al, 2001). Based on this hypothesis, two groups have recently searched for mutations in the FH gene in different types of tumors. Kiuru et al (2002) have analyzed a total of 200 sporadic tumors, including uterine and cutaneous leiomyomas, leiomyosarcomas, and papillary renal cell carcinomas. However, only five FH mutations were identified. Barker et al (2002), on the other hand, studied 26 leiomyosarcomas and 129 uterine leiomyomas. In this case, no FH mutations were identified, although LOH for 1q and 1q42-43 was detected in 50 and 5% of leiomyosarcomas and leiomyomas, respectively. Collectively, these data suggests either that FH does not play a major role in the development of sporadic tumors or that the pathologic mechanism of FH in MCL involves events different from somatic mutations.

The identification of the particular FH mutation in each MCL family will allow for close follow-up of those individuals at risk for the development of the aggressive papillary renal cell cancer (Kiuru et al, 2001; Launonen et al, 2001). Establishing the etiologic mechanisms of MCL may facilitate development of new therapeutic options for affected patients.

References


Acknowledgments

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Figures

Figure I
Pedigrees with MCL. Black, gray, and empty symbols, affected, unknown, and unaffected family members, respectively. Asterisks, individuals whose blood samples were available, except in MCL-1 where blood samples for most family members were available.

**Figure II**

**Clinical picture of cutaneous leiomyoma.** Clustering of skin leiomyoma lesions can be observed on upper back (A) and arm (B).

**Tables**

**Table I.** PCR primers for amplification of the *FH* gene
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exon</th>
<th>Forward primer</th>
<th>Reverse primer</th>
<th>Size (bp)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CCCAGAAATTCTACCCAGC</td>
<td>AGGGCTGAAGGTACTGC</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>TGATCCCTGGGTCTTTCAAC</td>
<td>ATGAATAAGCCTACTTGC</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CCAAATAAATAACTCTCCATGC</td>
<td>ATGGGCTGAGGTATTAAAG</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>CTGTATTCAAACCTGTGCC</td>
<td>TTATAACCAAAACACGAAGC</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>GTTTTGTTGCCTCTGATTTAC</td>
<td>TGGCCATTTGTACCAAGCTC</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>GAGTAACTTGAAGCTATTAGG</td>
<td>AATGTACAGACCACGA</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>TAACCTTGTACCATCCAG</td>
<td>CTAGTCAAGTTTAGCTCAAC</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>TTAGTCTTTACTGTCCATTGG</td>
<td>TAATAAGGCTTTGTACAAAAC</td>
<td>212</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>ATGTATATTTACTGTCAACCAG</td>
<td>AAACACTGATGCCACTTGCTCT</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>CTGCTAACCATATGTCGTC</td>
<td>CGTCTTTAAAGAATGGGAGTCTG</td>
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</table>

Table II. Germline FH mutations in MCL families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Wild-type sequence</th>
<th>Mutant sequence</th>
<th>Amino-acid change$^a$</th>
<th>Exon</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MCL-4</td>
<td>AGC</td>
<td>ATC</td>
<td>S115I</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCL-2</td>
<td>CAG</td>
<td>TAG</td>
<td>Q142X</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCL-1</td>
<td>CAT</td>
<td>TAT</td>
<td>H275Y</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCL-5</td>
<td>GAAAATG-AACCA</td>
<td>GAAAACCA</td>
<td>4-bp del between amino acids 318 and 319</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCL-3</td>
<td>GTC</td>
<td>CTC</td>
<td>V351L</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ Amino-acid positions are derived from the cytosolic enzyme sequence (468 amino acids). The exon number corresponds to the entire gene; exon 1 encodes the 43 amino acids that form the mitochondrial signal peptide and the first amino acid of the cytosolic protein.