Simultaneous Blockage of Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor and Cyclooxygenase-2 in a Human Xenotransplanted Lung Cancer Model

Xiao-Yan Mu*, Xue-Li Dong, Jie Sun, Yu-Hua Ni, Zhang Dong, Xi-Li Li, Er-Lian Sun, Zhou Yi, Gao Li

Abstract

The effects of erlotinib combined with celecoxib in a lung cancer xenograft model were here explored with a focus on possible mechanisms. A xenotransplanted lung cancer model was established in nude mice using the human lung cancer cell A549 cell line and animals demonstrating tumour growth were randomly divided into four groups: control, erlotinib, celecoxib and combined (erlotinib and celecoxib). The tumor major axis and short diameter were measured twice a week and after 40 days tissues were collected for immunohistochemical analyses of Bel-2 and Bax positive cells and Western-blotting analyses for the epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR), P-EGFR, and cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2). Tumor size in the combined group was smaller than in the others (p<0.01) and the percentage of Bel-2 positive cells was fewer in most cases (p<0.01), while that of Bax positive cells was greater than in the erlotinib and celecoxib groups (p>0.05). Western blotting showed decreased expression of P-EGFR and COX-2 with both erlotinib and celecoxib treatments, but most pronouncedly in the combined group (p<0.05). Simultaneous blockage of the EGFR and COX-2 signal pathways exerted stronger growth effects in our human xenotransplanted lung cancer model than inhibition of either pathway alone. The anti-tumor effects were accompanied by synergetic inhibition of tumor cell apoptosis, activation of p-EGFR and expression of COX-2.

Keywords: Lung cancer - erlotinib - celecoxib - combination therapy

Introduction

Molecular targeted cancer therapy has been payed more and more attention recently for the patients with cancer. The therapy targeting epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) has become relatively mature. So far, the small-molecular EGFR inhibitor such as EGFR-TKI, gefitinib and erlotinib have been approved successively by American FDA for applying to non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) treatment followed by the failed chemotherapy (MH Cohen et al., 2003; FA Shepherd et al., 2005). Nevertheless, as tumor happens in different steps and levels, and interactive affects exist in different signal path, it might be less effective if only a single targeted spot is blocked and multi-targets blocking is a tendency for the future treatment. In the recent years, it was discovered that cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2) is over expressed in several different kinds of tumors including NSCLC and it is related to tumor malignancy, lymph nodes metastasis and clinical stages (Chan et al., 1999; Renkonen et al., 2002; Dannenberg et al., 2003). It might also indicate another potential targeted spot for tumor treatment. More and more evidence shows that there is interaction between EGFR and COX-2 signal paths, and they share to affect the tumor gene transcription regulation, proliferation of tumor cell, apoptosis resistance, angiogenesis and metastasis etc (Gerber 2008; Katzel et al., 2009). Lots of in vitro experiments also demonstrate the effect of synergetic anti-tumor by signal paths of EGFR and COX-2 being blocked simultaneously. Through blocking these two independent targeted spots, EGFR and COX-2 via celecoxib and Erlotinib, this experiment aims to study whether this kind of treatment on lung cancer and transplantation tumor of nude mouse could lead to coordinate repression and its possible mechanism.

Materials and Methods

Material

Twenty-four SPF male nude mouth BALB/C (4-6week old, 20g) are purchased from Peking HuafuKang Biotech...
Co., Ltd with certificate No. (sexk Jing 2009-0004); Erlotinib 0.15 g (trade name: TAREVA) and Celecoxib 0.2 g (trade name: Xi Le Bao) are donated by Shanghai Roche Group Co., Ltd and Huirui Pharmaceutical Co.Ltd respectively. Rabbit anti-human Bel-2 (sc-492) polyclonal antibody, Rabbit anti-human Bax (sc-6236) polyclonal antibody, Rabbit anti-human EGFR polyclonal antibody (sc-03), Rabbit anti-human p-EGFR polyclonal antibody (sc-101666) are purchased from Santa Cruz Co., Rabbit anti-human COX-2 polyclonal antibody (CST4842) is purchased from Cell Signaling Technology Co. Mice SP second antibody kit is purchased from Zhongshan Goldenbridge Biotechnology Co., Ltd; BCA protein titer kit is purchased from Shanghai Shenneng Biocolor Technology Co.Ltd.

Detection of the expression of the EGFR, p-EGFR and COX-2 in transplantation tumor tissue through Western blot method
Take out 100 ug tissue cryopreserved in liquid nitrogen from each group required by kit instruction, and test their total protein concentration respectively. Add 1/4 buffer solution and 100 °C denatured protein, and use 10% separation gel for protein electrophoresis, with loading amount of 50ug, then transfer the protein onto FVDF membrane by wet prints, add 5% milk and store it for about 1h within room tempreture. 4 °C primary antibodies overnight, second antibody for 1 h within room temperature, enhanced chemiluminescence method for imaging, gel imager/LAS4000 system for reading, then follows grey value analysis, relative protein content =β-actin, divided by interest protein. This experiment goes triplicate.

Statistical methods
Statistical analysis is carried out by statistical software SPSS11.0. t-test method is applied for pairwise comparison, intra-class comparison is applied to analysis of variance, there is statistical significance of the difference if P<0.05.

Results
Tumor in nude mouse come into being for about 7 days, and tumor formation rate is 100%. No death was found during experiment session and they were in fine condition. When they were put to death, no metastasis was detected within other organs.

Development of transplantation tumors in each treatment group
Until the end of the experiment, we can see that the volum of tumor in combined drug group was much smaller than that of control group, as well as erlotinib group and celecoxib group (P<0.01) (Figure 1). Tumor volum changes were presented in Table 1.

Bcl-2 and Bax expression in each group
Under the light microscope, it is observed that there is structural disorder in the transplantation tumor tissue, tumor cells are roundness and oval, with large and uneven dyeing nucleus. As for the dye: Bcl-2’s positive
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**Table 1. The Volume of the Cancer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Begin volume (mm³)</th>
<th>End volume (mm³)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.792±0.062</td>
<td>661.208±203.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erlotinib group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.719±0.037</td>
<td>223.708±38.934*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celecoxib group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.490±0.089</td>
<td>450.958±114.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combine group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.375±0.047</td>
<td>187.833±26.389**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05 VS control group; **p<0.05 VS erlotinib group, celecoxib group and control group

**Table 2. ???**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Rate of Bcl-2 expression (%)</th>
<th>Rate of Bax expression (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>73.15±17.39</td>
<td>11.27±3.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celecoxib</td>
<td>29.45±12.13*</td>
<td>20.28±7.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celecoxib</td>
<td>71.43±19.35</td>
<td>18.39±4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combine</td>
<td>10.03±2.98**</td>
<td>23.79±13.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05 VS control group; **p<0.05 VS erlotinib group, celecoxib group and control group

Protein expression of P-EGFR, EGFR and COX-2 within each group

Figure 3 and Figure 4 shows the protein expression among each group. Grey value shows there was no statistical significance of EGFR among each treatment group (P>0.05). p-EGFR’s expression in combined drug group was reduced compared with that of control group and erlotinib group (P<0.05), but no statistical significance compared with that of celecoxib (P>0.05). COX-2’s expression in combined drug group was reduced obviously compared with that of control group as well as celecoxib group (P<0.05), but no statistical significance compared with that of erlotinib group (P>0.05).

Discussion

NSCLC occupies 80% of total lung cancer, most of which are discovered advanced stage with unsatisfactory prognosis. For NSCLC, stage IIIB, there is only 3% to 7% of survival rate within 5 years, and even less than 1% when it comes to stage IV (Jemal et al., 2008). Operation and conventional platinum-based chemotherapy are regarded as the major option for NSCLC but with much side effect. Chemotherapy comes into a stagnation because of problems such as acquired drug-resistance. Molecular targeting treatment for lung cancer becomes a tendency for its strong specificity and less side effect, and its long-term development value.

EGFR and its ligand (TGF-α, EGF, and amphiregulin etc.) shows overexpression within different epithelial tumors. Activation of EGFR, is closely related to various activities such as tumor cell apoptosis and differentiation, as well as vascularization (Katzel et al., 2009). EGFR is a transmembrane surface receptor with endogenous
tyrosine kinase (TK) activity, and is of erbB family. And being integrated with its ectoenzyme area, its ligands could launch homodimerization of receptor or heterodimerization with other erbB members, which lead to activation of the TK, launching a series of inferior signal paths, which controls cell growth as well as cell division. While erlotinib belongs to TKI and could achieve specific binding with intracellular tyrosine domain of EGFR through cell membrane, which will repress the activation of TK, then the inferior signal paths that cause tumor growth and metastasis will be repressed thereafter, all of them share to repress tumor. Erlotinib was approved by American FDA for NSCLC treatment in Nov, 2004 (Shepherd et al., 2005).

Stimulated by inflammation, mitogenic factor etc., COX-2 will catalyze arachidonic acid and result to prostaglandin. It is discovered in recent years that COX-2 have overexpression in various tumors and it has been proved that COX-2 inhibitor could reduce tumor growth, transfer and vascularization within multiple tumor cells and xenograft model (Choe et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2005; Jailili et al., 2008). Nowadays, lots of evidence show that signal paths mediated by EGFR and COX-2 have overlapped field and they join together for the occurrence and development of tumor. Researches show that EGFR combined with its ligand such as TGF-α, EGF etc. It could modify COX-2 expression and its catalysed PGE2 accumulation in either transcriptional or translational level. While combining PGE2 generated by EGFR and GPCRs could facilitate EGFR’s lignon separation from the surface of cell membrane, which leads to more activation about EGFR. And the intersective activation of the two signal paths offers theoratical foundations for combined targeted therapy.

It was first reported in 2000 by Torrance CJ etc. that the combined application of sulindac and EKI-569 (EGFR-TKI) had successfully restrained the occurrence of familial intestinal polyposis (Torrance et al., 2000). And Zhang and his members (Jailili et al., 2008) used celecoxib, the inhibitor of COX-2, combined with gefitinib, the inhibitor of EGFR, to deal with head and neck squamous cell carcinoma of nude-mouse transplanted transplantation tumor cell. After this blocking, contents of COX-2 and EGFR have obvious reduced, compared with that of single drug group, while EGFR stayed still among each treatment group, which indicates that blocking COX-2 signal path by celecoxib could reduce the activation of EGFR while blocking EGFR signal path by erlotinib could reduce the expression of COX-2, and there is an interactive activation among signal paths between COX-2 and EGFR. So blocking two target spots of COX-2 and EGFR could effectively avoid this kind of intersective activation, then synergetic anti-tumor effect can be achieved. Within their dosage parameter of clinical application, erlotinib and celecoxib can be less side-effect and softer for patients tolerance. Besides, they have different side-effect mechanisms, so there wont be overlapping side-effect when they are combined together, which largely enhances the curative effect as well as the safety. All of that provide the possibility for combined targeted treatment of lung cancer, but this kind of combined treatment for lung cancer needs to go through a stricted clinical trial stage.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported in whole or in part, by Shandong Province scientific and technological projects (2010GSF10253), Natural Science Foundation of Shandong Province (ZR2009CM125). The sponsor or funding organization had no role in the design or conduct of this research.

References


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