Folate-binding Protein Is a Marker for Ovarian Cancer

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ABSTRACT

We describe the isolation of a complementary DNA (cDNA) sequence encoding the ovarian cancer-associated antigen recognized by monoclonal antibody MOv18 and its identification as a high-affinity folate-binding protein (FBP). Functional cDNA clones were isolated using mRNA from the ovarian carcinoma cell line SKOV3 and colon carcinoma cell line HT29, by transient expression in WOP cells and selection of expressing cells by adhesion to antibody-coated magnetic beads. The cDNAs differed in the lengths of 5'- and 3'-noncoding regions, but they encoded identical peptides. A database search clearly showed them to be adult high-affinity FBP's with amino acid sequences identical with those isolated from normal placenta and several carcinoma cell lines. Reactivity of cell lines with MOv18 was quantitatively consistent with the expression of FBP mRNA. Southern hybridizations show evidence of a family of related genes and/ or pseudogenes and were mapped to chromosome 11q13.3-14.1 by fluorescent in situ hybridization using cosmid clones containing part of this region. Also identified were two PsiI polymorphisms of four and three alleles, respectively, and a two-allele MspI polymorphism. The folate-binding protein locus was not amplified in any of the 16 carcinoma cell lines tested and in only 1 of 10 serous adenocarcinomas, indicating that overexpression of FBP in ovarian cancer cannot, in general, be due to gene amplification.

INTRODUCTION

Ovarian cancer accounts for more than half of the deaths due to gynecological malignancy with a 5-year survival rate of only 20–30% (1). The poor prognosis in ovarian cancer is generally due to the advanced stage of the disease at the time of diagnosis. There is clear evidence that detection at an earlier stage results in a better prognosis, and this has prompted the search for tumor-associated antigens which can be used as targets for MAb's for both diagnostic and therapeutic purposes. One of the most useful MAb's to date is OC125 which recognizes approximately 80% of ovarian cancers and is used widely for diagnosis and for monitoring response to therapy (2). CA125, the antigen defined by OC125, is not truly specific to ovarian cancer because it can also be found in normal cervicovaginal and elevations of CA125 are also found in patients with other cancers and in those without malignant disease (3).

Recently, new MAb's have been developed in an attempt to achieve better specificities, but many still react with non-ovarian neoplastic tissue as well as normal tissue. The reason for this is that most MAb's directed against human cancer-associated antigens recognize epitopes consisting of carbohydrate or glycolipid and are associated with high Mr, glycoproteins or mucins of cell membranes (4). These high Mr, molecules are also expressed on normal tissue, and MAb's directed against epitopes on them often react with a diverse range of normal and tumor tissue (5). Miotti et al. (6) suggested that MAb's to these high

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1 To whom requests for reprints should be addressed.

2 The abbreviations used are: MAb, monoclonal antibody; FITC, fluorescein isothiocyanate; PBS, phosphate-buffered saline; FACS, fluorescence-activated cell sorter; FCS, fetal calf serum; SDS, sodium dodecyl sulfate; FBP, folate-binding protein; cDNA, complementary DNA; poly(A)+ RNA, polyadenylated RNA; SSC, standard sodium citrate; GPI, glycosyl-phosphatidylinositol.
containing the polyoma virus origin (32). Plasmid DNA was introduced between 4.5 and 5.5 ms. The cells were left at room temperature for 5 min and antibody treatment of transfected WOP cells and recovery of pulsed at 300 V with a capacitance of 250 µF. The time constant was transferred to 0.4-cm electroporation cuvettes (Bio-Rad 165-2088) and in HeBs containing 200 µg/ml sheared herring sperm DNA as carrier harvested at 50-75% confluence by treatment with trypsin/EDTA and into WOP cells by electroporation based on the method described by Aruffo and Seed (35).

Briefly, the antibody-plasmid DNA were carried out as described by Aruffo and Seed (35). Twenty-five micrograms of plasmid DNA were linearized with EcoRI and heat denatured. Twenty-five micrograms of plasmid DNA were added to 0.5 ml of WOP cells (10^6 cells/ml) cultured in complete medium with 100 µg/ml of actinomycin D. The DNA was purified by CsCl gradient centrifugation and used in the next cycle of transfection. After the third round of transfection, individual colonies were picked, and plasmid DNA from each of these was prepared and used to transfect WOP cells.

RNA and DNA Blot Analyses. Poly(A)^+ RNA was isolated from the cells lines using a commercial kit (Fast Track, Invitrogen) and 0.5 µg poly(A)^+ was loaded on a 1% agarose-2.2 M formaldehyde gel in 1× 4-morpholinoethanesulfonic acid buffer (37). The RNA was transferred in 0.05 M NaOH to Hybrid Bond^+ (Amersham). DNA was electrophoresed on 0.7% agarose gels and was transferred to Hybond N^+ with 0.4 M NaOH. Hybridization was carried out in 5× SSC-0.2% SDS-10% dextran sulfate with random primed [32P]dCTP-labeled DNA probes. The membranes were washed under high stringency conditions (0.1× SSC-0.1% SDS at 65°C; 1× SSC = 0.15 M NaCl-0.015 M sodium citrate).

Somatic Cell Hybrid Mapping. The somatic cell hybrid lines from which DNA was derived have been described (Table 2). The DNA from parental and hybrid cells was digested with BamH1 and analyzed in Southern blots.

In Situ Hybridization. Spreads of human metaphase chromosomes from peripheral blood lymphocytes were obtained by standard procedures. Cosmid DNA was biotinylated using the Bionick kit (BRL), purified through a Sephadex G-50 column, and then precipitated with salmon sperm DNA and Escherichia coli tRNA. In situ hybridization and detection were performed using a modification of the technique described by Pinkel et al. (46). Labeled probe DNA (80 ng) was combined with 2.5 µg of unlabeled genomic DNA (in order to block nonspecific sequences) and 20 ng of labeled centromere probe. Slides were mounted with Citifluor containing 0.5 µg/ml propidiodide color photographs were taken on a Fujicolor HG400 print film using a Zeiss photomicroscope III with a Zeiss filter set 9.

RESULTS

Isolation of a cDNA Encoding CaMOvlS Antigenic Determinant. The HT29 colon and SKOV3 ovarian carcinoma line cDNA libraries were introduced separately into WOP cells, and 48-72 h later CaMOvlS positive transfectants were selected with M0V18 antibody and sheep anti-mouse IgG antibody-coated magnetic beads. The CaMOvlS-enriched plasmid prepared from these cells was then transformed into bacteria, and the resulting colonies were pooled and used to prepare plasmid DNA for the next round of WOP cell transfection. This cycle was repeated until the end of the third round when plasmid DNA was prepared from 10 individual bacterial transformants from each library and transfected separately into WOP cells. Three of the 10 HT29 clones and 5 of the SKOVL3 clones showed surface expression of CaMOvlS as detected by indirect

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Cell line</th>
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<th>FACS a</th>
<th>FBP mRNA b</th>
<th>Ref.</th>
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<td>SKOV3</td>
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<td>++</td>
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a Relative fluorescence with MOvlS measured in arbitrary units. nt, not tested.
b Relative fluorescence with MOvlS measured in arbitrary units. nt, not tested.
2.5-; +++, (+-; ++-; +++; +; +++; ++++; ++; ++++; ++++; +++++; >++++.
2.5-; +++, (+-; ++-; +++; +; +++; ++++; ++; ++++; ++++; +++++; >++++.

Obtained from American Type Culture Collection, ATCC 238.
Obtained from Dr. A. Evans, Children's Hospital, Philadelphia, PA.

FBP IN OVARIAN CANCER

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immunofluorescence. Digestion of the resulting clones with XhoI and agarose gel electrophoresis showed inserts of 0.9 base pair open reading frame flanked by 5’- and 3’-noncoding with supercoiled DNA templates. The cDNA derived from and SKOV3 were sequenced using a chain-termination protocol the SKOV3 clones.

The cDNA nucleotide sequences have been reported for two classes of folate-binding proteins (49), a putative adult form, CaMoV 18 and a human high-affinity folate-binding protein. Similarity of CaMoV18 with Folate-binding Proteins. A database search revealed strong sequence identity between CaMoV18 and a human high-affinity folate-binding protein. The cDNA nucleotide sequences have been reported for two classes of folate-binding proteins (49), a putative adult form, isolated from epidermoid carcinoma (KB) cells (50), colon carcinoma cells Caco-2 (51), and placenta (52), and a putative fetal form also isolated from placenta (49). The nucleotide sequence comparison for cSKMOvlS with sequence from the KB cell FBP continued to the end of the sequence.

Screening for DNA Polymorphism. To identify restriction fragment length polymorphisms, DNA from 17-27 unrelated individuals were digested with a variety of enzymes and probed with cHTMOvl8. No polymorphisms were detected with BamHI, EcoRI and HindIII, and PvuII.

Two PstI polymorphisms were detected among 27 unrelated individuals. The first was a four-allele polymorphism with variable bands at 7.5 (allele A1), 6.8 (allele A2), 6.3 (allele A3), and 5.9 kilobases (allele A4) with frequencies of 0.04, 0.42, 0.5, and 0.04, respectively. The second was a three-allele polymorphism with variable bands at 4.2 (allele B1), 3.9 (allele B2), and 3.8 kilobases (allele B3) with frequencies of 0.61, 0.37, and 0.02, respectively. Numerous constant bands were also detected with this enzyme. An example blot is shown in Fig. 4A.

Mspl detected a two-allele polymorphism with fragment sizes of 4.5 (allele A1) or 3.2 kilobases (allele A2) as well as several constant bands (Fig. 4B). In some blots an additional band of 2.3 kilobases was observed but this was thought to be due to incomplete digestion. Among 22 unrelated individuals the allelic frequencies of A1 and A2 were 0.07 and 0.93, respectively. Mendelian codominant inheritance of the PstI and Mspl alleles was demonstrated in one three-generation family and one two-generation family.

Somatic Hybrid Mapping of Folate-binding Gene. In order to map the FBP gene(s) Southern blots of BamHI-digested DNAs

Table 2  FBP chromosome assignment with rodent/human somatic hybrids

| Ref.   | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | X | Y | FBP locus* |
|--------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|----------|
| CL21E  | 38 | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  |
| DUR4.3 | 39 | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  |
| SIP4A31| 40 | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  |
| CTP3MB4| 41 | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  |
| FIR S  | 42 | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  |
| B2     | 43 | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  |
| IB5    | 44 | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  |
| M11X   | 45 | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  |

* Presence of the FBP locus assessed by the presence of 22-, 7.8-, 6.4-, and 5.0-kilobase BamHI bands.
+++, presence of a particular chromosome. Origin of the hybrids is described in the references listed in column 2.
+1, presence of a particular chromosome. Origin of the hybrids is described in the references listed in column 2.
Fig. 1. Complete nucleotide sequence of the SKOV3 folate-binding protein cDNA clone, cSKMOv18, and its predicted amino acid sequence. Polyadenylation signal (AATAAA) is underlined. Nucleotide positions based on the AUG start codon are numbered above the sequence and show changes from the consensus sequence. The lowercase sequences in the 3'-noncoding region are present in cHTMOv1S but not cSKMOv1S. Nucleotides indicated above the main sequence indicate substitutions found in cHTMOv1S and below in the Caco-2 cell (SI) and KB cell (50) FBP sequences.

Fig. 2. Schematic presentation (not to scale) of the proposed alternative RNA splicing in FBP transcripts based on sequences from SKOV3 (this report), Caco-2 (51), and KB (50). Shaded boxes, cloned cDNA sequences; horizontal lines, proposed intron regions. Within the shaded boxes homologous sequences are aligned. Numbering is based on the AUG start codon.
DNA, which showed one intense band at 4.0 kilobases and three faint bands at 6.0, 4.5, and 2.5 kilobases. DUR4.3 was the only hybrid showing human FBP bands and from this limited panel were localized to chromosomes 10, 11, 12, 13, 20, 21, or 22. Hybridization of a second panel of hybrids containing single human chromosomes localized the FBP bands to chromosome 11 (not shown). To confirm this, three hybrids containing segments of chromosome 11 were analyzed (Fig. 5B). Apart from one weakly hybridizing BamH1 band of 14.7 kilobases, all the fragments visible in the normal human control were present in each of the chromosome 11 hybrids. The only shared region between these hybrids is 11p13–11q23.

Isolation of Genomic DNA FBP Clones and In Situ Hybridization. In order to locate the FBP gene(s) precisely by fluorescent in situ hybridization, genomic clones containing part of this region were isolated. A cosmid genomic library derived from HPB-ALL cell line in the vector COS202 was screened using the cHTMOv18 probe. Seven positives were identified and restriction analysis showed they fell into classes represented by G4.1 (2 clones), G2.2 (1 clone), and G53.3 (4 clones). Hybridization of BamH1 digests of these with cHTMOv18 showed all contained a 6.4-kilobase fragment. In addition G4.1 contained the 22.0- and 3.8-kilobase BamH1 bands, while G53.3 contained the 7.8- and 3.8-kilobase bands. The latter clone showed the strongest hybridization with cHTMOv18 and was chosen for use in the in situ hybridization. Chromosome 11 was identified by hybridization with centromere probe D11Z1 (53). The positions of paired signals along chromosome arm 11q were measured on both chromatids of 14 copies of chromosome 11 from 6 metaphases. Fig. 6 shows an example of a metaphase cell hybridized under these conditions. Analysis showed a mean fractional length relative to the distance from 11cen to 11qter of 0.3024 with ±SD confidence limits of 0.2417–0.3631, corresponding to a location of 11q13.3–q14.1. No signals at other locations were observed.

Expression of FBP in Cancer Cell Lines. To confirm that a FBP was indeed the antigen to which MOv18 was reactive and to assess how widespread was its expression, various cell lines were examined by FACS using MOv18 (Table 1) and by Northern blot analysis using the cHTMOv18 cDNA as probe (Fig. 2).
7). The intensity of mRNA signals above background were quantitated by laser densitometry and the data summarized in Table 1. Reactivity with MOv18 correlated quantitatively with the expression of FBP mRNA in all cases except HT29. In this case the mRNA signal obtained with the probe was greater than expected on the basis of the weak signal observed by FACS. A discrepancy in the binding of MOv18 and MOv19 to HT29 was observed by Miotti et al. (6). Even though both Mabs were shown to identify the same molecule, they reported that MOv19 reacted strongly to HT29, while MOv18 was unreactive by immunofluorescence (although weakly positive by radioimmun assay). Cloning of this antigen from HT29 has revealed only one species of FBP which when expressed in WOP cells is recognized by MOv18, suggesting that in HT29 posttranslational modification of the FBP results in the loss of the epitope recognized by MOv18 but not that of MOv19.

Among the colon carcinoma lines FBP expression was similar with five of the nine lines showing FBP expression either by FACS and/or Northern blotting. The 13 lines which expressed FBP displayed great variability in relative levels from the weak mRNA signal shown by the melanoma cell line DX3 to HeLa with a signal 100-fold greater than SKOV3 and >1000-fold above background.

Copy Number FBP Genes in Cell Lines and Ovarian Tumors. To determine whether the wide variation in levels of FBP expression among the cell lines was due to differences in DNA levels or rearrangements, genomic DNA from the cell lines was digested with BamHI and subjected to Southern analysis using the cHTMOv18 cDNA as probe (data not shown). The autoradiographs obtained were quantitated by laser densitometry and differences in DNA loading were corrected for by including chromosome 6 and/or 21 probes in the same hybridization. No amplification of the FBP locus was evident in any cell line. However, in HeLa and PE/01, differences in specific bands were observed. In HeLa cells, which express extremely high levels of FBP, one copy of the 7.8-kilobase BamHI was absent, while in PE/01, which has no detectable FBP expression, an
extra copy of the 22.0-kilobase fragment was apparent. The remaining BamHI fragments in these two lines were present in normal copy. The possible involvement of these rearrangements in FBP expression was not investigated further.

To accompany the studies above, genomic DNA from 10 ovarian carcinomas, one adenoma, one teratoma, and one normal ovary was prepared together with genomic DNA from peripheral blood lymphocytes from the same subjects. These samples were digested with PvuII, and an equal amount of DNA was loaded into each lane of an agarose gel. Southern blot analysis was performed with the cHTMOvl8 probe. No amplification was seen in the benign tumors. The FBP locus was amplified by approximately 50% in one of 10 serous adenocarcinomas. All the bands were amplified equally (data not shown). Further studies of these and other samples are underway, but it is clear that overexpression of FBP in ovarian cancer cannot, in general, be due to gene amplification.

DISCUSSION

We describe here the isolation of a cDNA sequence encoding the ovarian cancer-associated antigen recognized by MAb MOv18 and its identification as a high-affinity folate-binding protein. Functional clones were isolated from the ovarian carcinoma cell line SKOV3 and colon carcinoma cell line HT29 using the mammalian expression system first developed by Aruffo and Seed (35). The cDNA thus derived from SKOV3 and HT29 differed in the lengths of 5' and 3' non-coding regions but encoded identical peptides of 257 amino acids. A database search clearly showed it to be an adult high-affinity FBP with an amino acid sequence identical with FBPs isolated by different strategies from normal placenta, KB cells (50), and Caco-2 cells (51). MOv18 does not appear to be recognizing an altered form of FBP unique to ovarian cancer since strong reactivity is observed with some normal tissue such as the renal distal and proximal tubules and fallopian tubes (7). Furthermore, the surface expression of the MOv18 antigen among cell lines, as assessed by indirect immunofluorescence, correlated with FBP mRNA levels in all but one case. In this cell line, HT29, it appears that a posttranslational modification results in a form of FBP which is not recognized by MOv18.

In contrast to the percentage of ovarian cancers reported reactive with MOv18, it was demonstrated in only 4 of the 8 ovarian cancer cell lines. At least part of this discrepancy is probably due to down regulation of FBP expression in culture because of the high folate concentration in culture medium (20 μM). FBP expression is known to be regulated by internal and external folate levels (54, 55). Increases in FBP expression on the surface of cells grown in folate-deficient medium or at physiological concentrations (5–50 nM) can be 30- to 70-fold higher (55) with subsequent down regulation to "normal" levels when returned to normal culture medium (54). Expression of FBP among the colon carcinoma lines was similar to that of the ovarian lines and might indicate that in vivo expression may also be similar. In fact, in studies of 31 colon cancers MOv18 reactivity was seen in only 2 cases (8, 9). The reason for this discrepancy is not understood.

Folic acid plays an essential role in cellular biochemistry, and folate-binding proteins are crucial to the assimilation, distribution, and retention of this vitamin. Two classes of FBPs have been observed in a variety of normal and neoplastic tissue and body fluids (for reviews, see Refs. 56 and 57). High-affinity FBPs constitute the major class and are characterized by their affinities for folate in the nM range. They consist of a watersoluble form found in milk, umbilical cord serum, and at low levels in normal human serum and a membrane form found predominantly on the plasma membranes of tissues from placentae (49), kidney tubules (58), lactating mammary epithelium (56), and in some cultured cell lines (59–61). The membrane form of FBP mediates the transport of folates across plasma membranes via an endocytotic mechanism (62) and in vitro enables cells to proliferate in medium containing low folate concentrations (54, 55, 61, 63). The soluble form of FBP in milk probably serves to concentrate folates in milk and protect them from oxidation during ingestion by the infant. The presence of unsaturated FBP in the small intestine of milk-fed neonates has the additional effect of depriving intestinal flora of their source of folate (64). Serum folate-binding proteins have no clear function but are affected in vivo by both folate concentration and hormone levels (56).

A precursor-product relationship exists between the two forms of FBP (51). The membrane form is anchored to the cell membrane via a GPI linkage (51, 65), a fact recently confirmed for CaMOvl8 (66), and soluble FBP that is generated from membrane FBP by cleavage of this GPI link, as is the case for alkaline phosphatase (67). The attachment of FBP by a GPI link may be to facilitate the transport of folate via a novel endocytotic process reported by Rothberg et al. (62). Alternatively, the sensitivity of GPI links to specific phospholipases, particularly phospholipase D, which are abundant in plasma (68), may provide a means of controlling the expression of FBP at the surface of cells.

A second class of FBPs with affinities for folate in the μM range are present only on cell membranes and function in transport of folates across the cell membrane and are structurally unrelated to the high-affinity FBPs.

The role of high-affinity FBPs in ovarian cancer is intriguing. It is possible that the attachment of FBP by a GPI link may act not only as a means of controlling cell surface expression but may also be involved in cell activation or communication. Simultaneous with protein release by specific phospholipases would be the production of biologically active lipids such as 1,2-diacylglycerol and phosphatidic acid that could cross the plasma membrane and affect intracellular metabolism (67). A number of lymphocyte proteins that use GPI anchors have been shown to be capable of mediating mitogenic responses and have been implicated as a second messenger of insulin action (69). Another possibility is that folate levels in the ovary and the uterus are limiting and increased membrane FBP confers a metabolic advantage to cancer cells since they can sequester more folate from serum. Alternatively, its involvement in ovarian cancer may be purely nutritional, reflecting the increased folate requirement of rapidly growing cells.

If any of the above explanations are true, then it would be reasonable to expect overexpression of FBP to be a general phenomenon among many different cancers. In fact, the studies so far reported in the literature show that significantly elevated FBP levels predominate among ovarian carcinomas and to a lesser extent cervical cancers. What special conditions exist in these tissues that selectively elevate FBP expression or limit the bioavailability of folates? There is mounting evidence that hormonal levels affect FBP and folate levels. In the rat uterus cyclic variations in folate coenzymes normally occur during successive stages of the reproductive cycle (70, 71) and increased levels of serum FBPs and folic acid have been observed during pregnancy (72) and with oral contraceptive use (73). Also in

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breast cancer serum FBP levels are lower in estrogen receptor-positive cancers and higher in estrogen receptor-negative ones (74). A report by Butterworth et al. (75) demonstrated the beneficial effect of folate supplementation in cervical dysplasia in women receiving oral contraceptives. Although there was no evidence of systemic folate deficiency, oral folate supplementation resulted in restoration of a normal epithelium in a significant number of cases and led the authors to propose that chronic exposure of the cervix to contraceptive steroids might produce localized deficiencies in folic acid metabolism that may favor neoplastic transformation.

The mechanism by which FBP expression is elevated in vitro and in vivo does not, in general, involve gene amplification, although the rearrangements evident in HeLa and PE/01 cell lines may involve regions containing regulatory elements. It is noteworthy that the 5′-noncoding regions of all the FBP cDNA sequences so far reported are different and may have functional significance. Alternative processing of RNA is a mechanism used by eukaryotic cells to generate multiple transcripts from a single gene and allows several possibilities for modulation of gene expression. Untranslated 5′ regions may affect mRNA stability or the translational capacity of the transcript allowing for expression in a tissue-specific manner (76, 77). A control mechanism that may have particular relevance to FBP expression in ovarian cancer is that of the rat insulin-like growth factor in which transcripts containing one of three alternate 5′-untranslated regions are differentially regulated by growth hormone (78).

Although the role of FBP in ovarian cancer is unclear, it nevertheless provides a unique opportunity to target such cells not only by specific MAbs but also by virtue of the high affinity and high specificity of FBP for folates and folate analogues. Indeed, the small molecular size of such analogues compared to MAbs should also be of considerable advantage. Alternative therapies involving antifolate drugs which can utilize or interfere with the activity of high-affinity FBP may be useful in killing ovarian cancer cells which rely solely on these for folate acquisition. One such folate analogue, homofolate, has been used successfully in vitro and specifically inhibits the growth of cells utilizing the high-affinity FBPs but not those using other folate transport systems (79).

FBP may also be important in cellular responses to other chemotherapeutic agents such as the first-line treatment cisplatin (80). Studies of the effects of cisplatin on ovarian cancer cell lines (81, 82) suggest that elevated FBP may influence its chemotherapeutic agents such as the first-line treatment cisplatin. Indeed, the small molecular size of such analogues compared to MAbs should also be of considerable advantage. Alternative therapies involving antifolate drugs which can utilize or interfere with the activity of high-affinity FBP may be useful in killing ovarian cancer cells which rely solely on these for folate acquisition. One such folate analogue, homofolate, has been used successfully in vitro and specifically inhibits the growth of cells utilizing the high-affinity FBPs but not those using other folate transport systems (79).

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The location of the FBP locus on 11q13.3-14.1 places it near INT2, the human homologue of the murine mammary virus integration site (83). Preliminary studies have indicated that in breast cancers that are amplified for INT2 approximately 25% also have a 2-fold amplification of the FBP locus. Other oncogenes and putative tumor suppressor genes have been mapped to this region including the HST1 (heparin-binding secretory transforming factor) gene (84) and PPI1 (protein phosphatase) (85). Translocations involving 11q13 and 14q32.3 are frequently observed in several human pathologies and a rare folate-sensitive fragile site is located at 11q13.3 (86). Studies of this important region may benefit from the PstI and Mspl polymorphisms in the FBP loci we have identified.

Although many cancer-associated cell surface antigens have been identified by MAbs, most are poorly characterized. The isolation of cDNA clones for the MOv18 antigen represents a significant advance in the understanding of the nature and function of tumor markers and is one of only a few reports of genes for such antigens being cloned (87–89). The information thus provided should assist in elucidating the mechanism(s) of action and resistance to chemotherapeutic agents and also provides insight into devising alternative therapies. Further study of the genomic organization of the FBP genes is warranted in order to identify the factors that regulate FBP gene expression and to assess the possible involvement of alternative transcripts in the elevation of FBP expression in ovarian cancer.

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