Suppression of Tumorigenicity of Glioblastoma Cells by Adenovirus-mediated MMAC1/PTEN Gene Transfer

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Abstract

Mutated in multiple advanced cancers 1/Phosphatase and tensin homologue (MMAC1/PTEN) is a novel tumor suppressor gene candidate located on chromosome 10 that is commonly mutated in human glioblastoma multiforme and several other cancer types. To evaluate the function of this gene as a tumor suppressor, we constructed a replication-defective adenovirus (MMCB) for efficient, transient transduction of MMAC1 into tumor cells. Infection of MMAC1-mutated U87MG glioblastoma cells with MMCB resulted in dose-dependent exogenous MMAC1 protein expression as detected by Western blotting of cell lysates. In vitro proliferation of two glioma lines (U87MG and U178) harboring MMAC1 mutations but did not inhibit a third line (LN229) expressing wild-type endogenous MMAC1; mutant forms of exogenous MMAC1 had no detectable antitumor effect. In the present study, we sought to evaluate the effects of MMAC1 gene transfer in glioma cells using an in vivo tumorigenicity test. To avoid the potential difficulty of selectivity culturing cells expressing growth-inhibitory proteins, we used a replication-deficient recombinant adenovirus at doses sufficient to transiently transduce mass cell cultures without the need for further in vitro growth or selection.

Materials and Methods

Cell Lines. The MMAC1-mutated glioblastoma cell line U87MG was obtained from the American Type Culture Collection. Cells were maintained in culture medium (DMEM/10% fetal bovine serum/1% L-glutamine) in a humidified atmosphere containing 7% CO2 at 37°C. 293 embryonic kidney cells were also obtained from the American Type Culture Collection and were grown in culture medium as above.

RT-PCR Analysis. Total RNA was isolated from U87MG cells (Tri Reagent; Molecular Research Center) per manufacturer’s instructions. RNA was reverse transcribed using murine leukemia virus RT (RNA PCR kit, Perkin-Elmer), random hexamer, and other kit reagents, followed by PCR using primers MAC1.6f (5'-CTG CAG AAA GAC TTG AAC GCG TA-3') and MAC1.6r (5'-GCC CCG ATG TAA TAA ATA TGC GC-3') matching sequences in MMAC1 exons 2 and 5, respectively. Amplification conditions were 95°C for 1 min, 95°C for 15 min, and 55°C for 30 min for 25 cycles, followed by 72°C for 5 min. Products were cut out from agarose gels, purified (UltraClean, Mo Bio Labs), and directly sequenced using an automated sequencing system (ABI 373A; Perkin-Elmer Corp.).

Viruses. A recombinant Ad containing wild-type p53 (FTCB) was constructed as described previously (14). The genome of this vector has deletions of the E1 and E3 regions and protein IX gene and expresses its transgene under control of the human cytomegalovirus immediate-early promoter/enhancer. The MMAC1/PTEN vector MCBM was constructed in exactly the same manner, except that p53 was replaced with a cDNA encoding full-length MMAC1 (1). The control vector GFCB was constructed to match MCBM except for its transgene, enhanced green fluorescent protein (Clontech). Another matching control vector, ZZCB, was constructed without a transgene. The BCGA control vector expressing Escherichia coli LacZ driven by the cytomegalovirus promoter was constructed in a genome with partial E4 deletion in addition to deletions of E1, E3, and protein IX (15) because of packaging size constraints. All of the viruses were grown in 293 cells and purified by DEAE column chromatography as described (16). Virus particle concentrations were determined by Resource Q high-performance liquid chromatography (17), and the primary structure of all of the transgenes was verified by automated sequencing of viral DNA.

Immunodetection of MMAC1 Protein. Cell monolayers were infected for 24 h with GFCB or MCBM at various viral particle numbers/ml in culture...
medium. Virus-containing solutions were removed at 24 h, and cells were either harvested at this time or refed with growth medium and collected at later time points. Cells were harvested by scraping into cold PBS, centrifuged, and washed once more in cold PBS and then freeze-thawed and resuspended in lysis buffer (50 mM 3-(N-morpholino)propanesulfonic acid (pH 7.0), 150 mM NaCl, 1% NP-40, 5% glycerol, and 0.4 mM EDTA supplemented with 1 mM DTT and 1X Complete Protease Inhibitor Cocktail (Boehringer Mannheim)). Cell lysates were clarified by centrifugation at 10,000 × g for 15 min, and supernatants were normalized for protein content by the Bradford assay (BioRad). Samples were resolved by SDS-PAGE using precast 8% Tris-glycine gels (Novex) and then transferred to polyvinylidene difluoride membranes (Immobilon-P; Millipore) for Western blotting. Membranes were blocked with Tris-buffered saline containing 0.05% Tween and 5% skim milk and then blotted with anti-MMAC1 rabbit polyclonal antibody BL74,3 followed by donkey antirabbit IgG conjugated with horseradish peroxidase (Amersham). MMAC1 was detected by chemiluminescence (enhanced chemiluminescence kit; Pierce Chemical Co.) using Kodak XAR-5 film.

FACS Infectivity Assay. U87MG cells were plated at 2 × 10^5 cells/well in six-well plates and incubated overnight, and then they were infected with GFCB at concentrations ranging from 1 × 10^3 to 1 × 10^5 particles/ml for 24 h. Cells were harvested by trypsinization and assayed by flow cytometry (FACScan; Becton Dickinson) for green fluorescence (525-nm peak detection, filter FL-1). Cells were gated on forward and side scatter, and a cutoff of fluorescence intensity was established such that ~99% of uninfected cells were negative. The percentage of GFCB-infected cells with greater fluorescence than this cutoff was then determined, representing a minimum estimate of the percentage of infected cells.

[^3] Thymidine Incorporation Assay. Cells were plated at 5 × 10^3 cells/well in 96-well microtiter plates (Costar) and incubated overnight. Dilutions of ZZCB, GFCB, FTCB, and MCB in medium ranging from 1 × 10^3 to 1 × 10^8 particles/ml were added in triplicate to the cell monolayers and then incubated for 24 h. Virus-containing solutions were removed after 24 h and replaced with new tissue culture medium for another 24 h. Cells were treated with 1 μCi of [^3]H]thymidine per well 4 h prior to harvesting. Cells were harvested onto glass-fiber filters, and incorporation of[^3]H]thymidine was determined using liquid scintillation (Top Count; Packard).

Cell Count/Viability Assay. Subconfluent monolayers of U87MG cells were infected in triplicate with MMCB or GFCB Ad at 5 × 10^3 or 5 × 10^4 particles/ml for 24 h, after which supernatants were replaced with fresh medium for an additional 48 h. Cells were then harvested by trypsinization, and viable cells were counted by the trypan blue exclusion method using a hemocytometer.

Soft Agar Colony Formation Assay. U87MG cells (1 × 10^5) infected as described above with 5 × 10^5 or 5 × 10^6 particles/ml for 24 h were suspended in tissue culture medium containing 0.35% agar and layered in triplicate onto 35-mm tissue culture wells. Cultures were incubated in a humidified atmosphere containing 7% CO2 at 37°C. Additional 0.35% agar culture medium was added every 5 days. Colony growth was assessed at 14 days postinfection.

Tumorigenicity Assay. U87MG cells were plated at a density of 1 × 10^5 cells/S225 flask. After overnight incubation, cell monolayers were infected with 5 × 10^5 or 5 × 10^6 particles/ml of Ad GFCB, FTCB, BGCA, or MCB for 24 h. Infected or uninfected cells were harvested by trypsinization, washed in medium, counted in the presence of trypan blue, and injected s.c. (5 × 10^6 viable cells per flank) into athymic nu/nu female mice (Simonsen Laboratories). Mice were scored for tumors at 21 or 30 days; tumor diameters in three dimensions were measured with Vernier calipers, and tumor volumes were calculated as their product.

Results and Discussion

U87MG human glioblastoma cells (18) were chosen for study based on their reported MMAC1 mutation (1), soft agar colony-forming ability, and s.c. tumorigenicity in nude mice. Consistent with the gtm→gt mutation of the intron 3 splice donor site (1), RT-PCR products derived from U87MG RNA using primers in exons 2 and 5 (see “Materials and Methods”) were found to be smaller than expected (wild-type size, 317 bp), and the sequence of these products confirmed the absence of exon 3 (data not shown). Although this exon contains 45 bp (15 codons), and an in-frame readthrough product is possible, the missing residues encode a conserved α-helix in the native protein, and their loss ablated growth-inhibitory activity as measured by Furnari et al. (13).

Purified recombinant MMAC1-containing Ad (MMCB) was characterized for transgene expression in U87MG cells by Western blotting of cell lysates with a rabbit polyclonal antibody generated against a fusion protein (Fig. 1). Endogenous MMAC1 protein was not detected in uninfected or control virus-infected cells, but it was detected in a dose-dependent fashion in MMCB-infected cells by the Western blotting with antibody BL74. Infectivity of U87MG cells was assessed quantitatively by FACS analysis using GFCB, a recombinant Ad identical to MMCB except for its transgene, which encoded green fluorescent protein (Fig. 2). The expected sigmoidal infectivity curve was obtained, from which it was estimated that 85–90% of cells were infected at a viral dose of 5 × 10^7 particles/ml for 24 h. Of note is that our dosing parameters are not based on the plaque-forming unit or its derivative, multiplicity of infection, because we have previously shown that adenoviral concentration and infection time are the primary determinants of in vitro transduction (19).

*In vitro* proliferation of MMCB Ad versus control Ad-infected U87MG cells was measured by [^3]H]thymidine uptake over a wide range of viral concentrations (Fig. 3A). U87MG was differentially inhibited by MMCB compared to two control Ads (GFCB and ZZCB) over most viral doses; at high Ad concentrations (1 × 10^9 particles/ml), a nonspecific inhibitory effect predominated, as has been noted before in some cell lines (20). Inhibition of DNA synthesis by MMCB was comparable to that induced by adenoviral p53 gene transfer (FTCB; Fig. 3A). Growth inhibition was confirmed in a second *in vitro* assay by counting viable cells at 72 h after the start of infection


[^4]: D. Giroux, K. Watson, and P. Shabram, manuscript in preparation.
SUPPRESSION OF TUMORIGENICITY BY MMAC1/PTEN

Fig. 2. FACS infectivity assay. U87MG cells were infected with GFCB at the indicated concentrations for 24 h. The fraction of cells expressing green fluorescent protein was quantitated by flow cytometry.

![Graph showing FACS infectivity assay](image)

Tumorogenicity assays were performed with 5 × 10⁶ MMCB-infected U87MG cells per injection compared to the same number of cells infected by three different control Ads, GFCB, FTCB, and BGCA (Table 1). Differences between experiments 1 and 2 included the use of two dose levels versus one and termination at 21 versus 30 days, respectively. MMCB-infected U87 cells were completely nontumorigenic at 21 or 30 days with the exception of three very small tumors (~10 mm³) at the lower dose level in experiment 1. Tumors formed in all 39 mice injected with uninfected or control Ad-infected cells. Reporter gene-containing control Ads GFCB and BGCA had some activity in reducing average tumor size compared to buffer-treated cells, a nonspecific “adenoviral effect” previously noted by us.

![Graph showing tumor formation in nude mice](image)

Table 1 Tumor formation in nude mice injected with U87MG cells infected ex vivo with MMCB and control Ads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vector (No. of particles/ml)</th>
<th>Experiment 1, 21 days</th>
<th>Mean tumor volume (mm³) ± SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>443 ± 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BGCA (5 × 10⁶)</td>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>375 ± 61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BGCA (5 × 10⁷)</td>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>290 ± 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTCB (5 × 10⁷)</td>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>68 ± 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMCB (5 × 10⁶)</td>
<td>3/6</td>
<td>10 ± 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMCB (5 × 10⁷)</td>
<td>0/6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Experiment 2, 30 days

| None | 5/5 | 1461 ± 743 |
| BGCA (5 × 10⁷) | 5/5 | 435 ± 79 |
| FTCB (5 × 10⁷) | 5/5 | 696 ± 312 |

* Cells were infected for 24 h and then washed and prepared for injection. Mice were scored for tumor formation after the indicated number of days. BGCA, LacZ-expressing Ad; FTCB, p53-expressing Ad; GFCB, green fluorescent protein-expressing Ad; MMCB, MMAC1/PTEN-expressing Ad.
The p53-containing Ad had a more dramatic effect on average tumor size (~68 mm³), yet tumors still formed in six of six mice. These results are consistent with the growth-inhibitory effects of p53 Ad gene transfer in U87MG cells reported elsewhere, although these cells contain p53 alleles with the wild-type sequence (21, 22). In any case, these data indicate a gene-specific tumor suppression activity of MMCB in U87MG cells at moderate viral doses.

Using a recombinant adenoviral gene transfer system, we have shown an *in vitro* growth inhibition activity of MMAC1/PTEN in U87MG cells in agreement with Furnari et al. (13). However, the inherent limitations of *in vitro* growth assays and their uncertain relevance to *in vivo* tumorigenicity are well recognized. The use of a control procedure is indicated. Nonetheless, a specific tumor suppression activity of wild-type MMAC1 was clearly detected in the *in vivo* tumorigenicity assay. Biochemically characterized mutants of MMAC1, including those defective for its phosphatase activity (12), have been investigated separately using a retroviral transduction system. Our data support a role for MMAC1/PTEN inactivation in glioblastoma tumorigenesis and further suggest that MMAC1 transfer *in vivo* may be considered as a potential cancer therapy approach.

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References

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