Allelic Deletion Analysis of the FHIT Gene Predicts Poor Survival in Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer


Abstract

The fragile histidine triad (FHIT) gene at chromosome 3p14.2 is a candidate tumor suppressor gene linked to cancers of the lung, breast, colon, pancreas, and head and neck. Reports of frequent allelic deletion and abnormal transcripts in primary lung tumors plus recent evidence that it is targeted by tobacco smoke carcinogens suggest that it plays an important role in lung carcinogenesis. Non-small cell lung carcinoma still maintains a poor 5-year survival rate with the stage of disease at presentation as a major determinant of prognosis. We examined for allelic deletion at the FHIT locus in a series of 106 non-small cell lung carcinomas for which a full clinical, epidemiological, and 5-year survival profile was available. We found an allelic deletion frequency of 38% at one or two intragenic microsatellites. Allelic deletion of FHIT was related to tumor histology with 4 of 20 adenocarcinomas (20%) displaying loss of heterozygosity (LOH) compared with 12 of 22 (55%) nonadenocarcinomas (P = 0.03). We found that 63% of tumors with LOH of FHIT also had p53 missense mutations whereas only 26% with LOH had wild type p53 negative sequence (P = 0.02). We also found a significant trend toward poorer survival in patients with LOH of at least one locus of the FHIT gene (log rank, P = 0.01). This survival correlation is independent of tumor stage, size, histological subtype, degree of differentiation, and p53 mutation status. Our data support the hypothesis that the loss of the FHIT gene contributes to the molecular pathogenesis of human lung cancer and is an indicator of poor prognosis.

Introduction

The presence of a tumor suppressor gene(s) on the short arm of chromosome 3, important in the development of lung carcinoma, is intimated by the high frequency of allelic deletions involving this chromosomal region (1–5). The recent cloning of the fragile histidine triad (FHIT) gene at 3p14.2 by Ohta et al. (6) and the subsequent reports demonstrating frequent allelic deletion, aberrant FHIT transcripts in primary and cultured lung cancers (7, 8), and evidence that FHIT suppresses tumorigenicity in cancer cells (9) support the contention that FHIT is a tumor suppressor gene. This, together with the recent observation by Sozzi et al. (10) that there is more FHIT allelic loss in carcinomas from smokers than nonsmokers, strengthens its involvement in the multistage development of lung carcinoma. The FHIT gene is expressed at a low level in all human tissues tested and encodes a 1.1-kb mRNA (6, 11). The FHIT gene contains 10 exons, 5 of which (exons 5–9) constitute the open reading frame encoding a 16.8-kDa protein (6, 11), which, as a member of the histidine triad superfamily, behaves like a typical 5',5″-P1-P3-triphosphate hydrolase (Ap3A; Ref. 12). The gene resides in a fragile site, FRA3B, which is commonly targeted for cancer cell-specific homozygous deletions as well as the 13q8 translocation identified in familial renal cell carcinoma (Refs. 6, 11; Fig. 1). Tumor suppressor activity was shown recently by Siprashvili et al. (9), who demonstrated that the expression of the FHIT protein in xenotransplanted human tumor cells suppressed their tumorigenicity in athymic nude mice although the mechanism for this tumor suppressor activity remains unknown. Deletions of 3p occur in bronchial progenitor lesions (5), and Tornielli et al. (13) postulated that the loss of FHIT might be useful as a genetic marker. Furthermore, it has also been suggested that deletions of 3p in primary small cell lung carcinomas represent an unfavorable prognostic marker (14). NSCLC still maintains a poor 5-year survival, and many cases are at an advanced stage when diagnosed. We examined 106 cases of primary NSCLC for which a full clinical, epidemiological, and 5-year survival profile was available and assessed the significance of allelic deletion for the FHIT gene in primary resected tumors with particular emphasis on its predictive value as a prognostic indicator.

Materials and Methods

Patients and Tissue Samples. Matched primary NSCLCs and normal tissues were obtained from 106 consecutive surgically treated patients at the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota. These samples were collected between 1991 and 1992, and the survival data of at least 5 years are available on all patients. Histological subtypes included 29 SCCs, 55 ADCAs, and 22 large cell carcinomas. For the purposes of the study, two tumors with more than one component (i.e., adenosquamous) were classified according to the predominant histological component (i.e., ADCA). A full epidemiological profile including demographics, family history, occupational exposure, and medical history was available on each patient (15, 16). The study population consisted of 63 males and 43 females; 102 of the 106 cases had a history of smoking, and a detailed profile of each smoking history was available. Because the study population consisted of surgically treated patients, the majority of the tumors were in the stage 1 and stage 2 categories. Because this study is an ongoing research project, data from other genetic markers and cell cycle proteins were available for analysis including: (a) p53 (15) and K-ras mutations; (b) expression of cyclin D1, p21WAF1/CIP1 (17), C-erbB-2 (15), TGF-β, Bax/Bcl-2 (18); and (c) genetic polymorphisms of CYP1A1, CYP2E1, and GSTM1 (19).

Allelic Deletion Analysis. Fifty-μm sections from ethanol-fixed and paraffin-embedded tissue were dewaxed and microdissected. After microdissection of the tumor section, genomic DNA was isolated from tumor and normal tissue by proteinase K and phenol chloroform extraction using standard protocols.

Received 3/12/98; accepted 4/30/98.

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2 The abbreviations used are: NSCLC, non-small cell lung cancer; LOH, loss of heterozygosity; SCC, squamous cell carcinoma; ADCA, adenocarcinoma; nt, nucleotide.

3 Manuscript in preparation.
Allelic deletion was detected in 22 of 73 (30%) informative cases at one or more loci examined when complete data from all five microsatellites were included (Fig. 3). The allelic deletion status for each locus is detailed in Table 1. When only two intragenic microsatellites, D3S1300 and D3S1234, are considered, 16 of 42 (38%) informative tumors had LOH at one or both sites. Our rates of allelic loss at all examined markers are lower than the 76% and 45-88% reported in two previous studies (Refs. 7, 8; Table 1). These differences cannot be attributed to our nonisotopic method because we performed a validation study of nine pairs of NSCLC tumor and nontumor samples that were analyzed by routine isotopic methods and generously provided by Dr. G. Sozzi. We analyzed two microsatellites (D3S1300 and D3S1234); our results were completely concordant at D3S1300, 78% concordant at D3S1234 alone, and 89% concordant overall when both markers were combined. We conclude that the data represent an accurate rate of allelic deletion in this series of NSCLCs from American smokers.

Allelic deletion at D3S1300 and D3S1234 correlated with non-ADCA histology. Previous studies have shown that the loss of 3p14.2 is more common in SCCs than in ADCAs (1, 20). Our data are consistent with this association because 12 of the 16 cases with LOH at one or both sites were of a histological subtype other than ADCA \( (P = 0.03) \); 6 cases were SCCs, and 6 were large cell carcinomas. Although we did not find a positive association of FHIT LOH with smoking history in our series of 102 smokers and 4 nonsmokers, this histological segregation does suggest a dose effect associated with tobacco carcinogens inasmuch as the more centrally located tumors (e.g., SCCs) are exposed to greater concentrations than the more peripherally located ADCAs. The lack of correlation between FHIT LOH and smoking history are divergent to that of Sozzi et al. (10); however, there is no clear explanation for the difference. Allelic deletion of FHIT did not correlate with age, sex, tumor size, stage, grade, or family history of cancer including lung cancer. We did not detect a statistical relationship between allelic deletion at FHIT and additional biological markers previously analyzed in this series: p53 and K-ras mutations, cyclin D1, p21^{waf1/cip1}, C-erb-2, TGF-β, Bax, Bcl-2, CYP1A1, CYP2E1, and GSTM1 (15, 18, 19).

Although the statistical power of this study of only 106 cases was limited, allelic deletion at D3S1300 and D3S1234 was associated with p53 missense mutations \( (P = 0.02) \). However, the association between p53 missense mutations and FHIT LOH was independent of histological subtype. This relationship was not statistically significant when nonmissense p53 mutations were included and there was no correlation with the mutation spectrum such as the G:C→T:A transversions that are associated with the amount of cigarette smoking (21;
Our studies have possible clinical implications inasmuch as we observed a statistically significant trend toward poorer survival in patients with loss of one allele of the FHIT gene that was independent of tumor stage, size, grade, histological subtype, and p53 mutation status \( (P = 0.01, \text{Fig. 4}) \). Although the biochemical mechanism by which FHIT exerts its tumor suppressor activity remains to be elucidated, our data linking it to poor survival, p53 missense mutation, and non-ADCA histology provide additional evidence of its role in the molecular pathogenesis of human lung cancer.

Acknowledgments

We thank Dr. G. Sozzi (Instituto Nazionale Tumori, Milan, Italy) for providing DNA samples for the protocol validation study.

References


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