Growth of Sinclair Swine Melanoma as a Function of Age, Histopathological Staging, and Gonadal Status

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ABSTRACT

We have analyzed the association between host hormonal status and growth rate of congenital exophytic melanomas of Sinclair swine. The growth of multiple exophytic lesions during the first year of life of intact males, orchectomized males, intact females, and ovariectomized females was quantitated using a proliferative index which assigned a numerical value to fixed increments of gains or losses in tumor volume. The proliferative index from 6 wk (gonadectomy at 6 wk) to 52 wk of age of each treatment group was statistically increased from \( P < 0.01 \) except that of gonadectomized females. The proliferative indices from lesions in gonadectomized females were significantly lower than those from intact males, intact females, and gonadectomized males. A total of 93 exophytic tumors from 63 swine were biopsied and histopathologically staged according to the degree of progression or regression and analyzed as a function of animal age. There were no Stage I and only two Stage II lesions at the time biopsies were taken. Twenty-six of 32 (81.2%) Stage III tumors were found in swine of both sexes less than 26 wk of age of which 71.8% were found <10 wk of age, while 20 of 29 (68.9%) were Stage IV, and only 3 of 3 (9%) were Stage V lesions present in this age group (\( P < 0.001 \), \( T \)). Only 20.7% of Stage IV tumors were present prior to 6 wk of age. Preliminary results suggest that castration of either sex also altered tumor histopathology. Our data suggest that a reduction in gonadal steroid secretion was associated with a decrease in exophytic tumor growth rate and regression in animals of both sexes during the first year of life in Sinclair swine. The effect in female swine was due to significant reduction in the proliferative index over the first 6 mo of age.

INTRODUCTION

SSCM presents a unique model for investigating melanoma growth, metastasis, and the phenomenon of spontaneous regression. Initial reports describing the biology of these tumors suggested an overall tumor incidence of 20 to 85% (1–3) with no sex or site preference (4). A significant number of swine present with multiple, congenital, primary lesions which exhibit significantly different growth rates (4). At various stages of postpartum development, these lesions are histopathologically similar to human junctional and compound nevi and malignant cutaneous melanoma (5, 6). A significant number of swine exhibit metastasis to regional lymph nodes, liver, and lungs (Footnote 4; Ref. 6). Approximately 35% of all primary lesions have been reported to regress following puberty, which can be accompanied by the appearance of a halo nevus and a generalized vitiligo (5, 6).

Five histopathologically distinct stages (I to V) of tumor development and regression have been described (5). Stages I to III are associated with progressive lesions and have previously been reported to be present during the first 6 mo of life. Latter stage tumors (IV and V) are initially associated with an invasion of pigment-laden macrophages and a decline of tumor cells (Stage IV) followed by an increase in keratinocytes and fibroblasts which is often associated with depigmentation (Stage V). The regression in Sinclair swine melanoma which has been reported to be accompanied by significant decreases in tumor volume apparently occurs in close proximity to puberty (5), although the hormonal events which characterize puberty in these animals are just beginning to be described.2 Observations made on the Sinclair swine herd maintained at Texas A&M University indicate that, if metastasis occurs, it does so just prior to or immediately after weaning at 6 wk of age. These significant changes in tumor dynamics, potentially coincident with major changes in the hormonal status of the developing animal, led us to consider the hypothesis that gonadal steroid hormones may influence the natural history of SSCM.

Results from the present series of experiments suggest an association between swine age, histopathological stage, and gonadal steroids in the natural history of exophytic malignant melanoma of Sinclair swine.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Black male and female Sinclair swine with a history of exophytic melanomas were mated. All animals were maintained on 14% hog chow (Producers Coop, Bryan, TX) and water ad libitum. Standard vaccinations and routine veterinary health care were provided. At 6 wk of age (weaning), piglets of both sexes were either bilaterally gonadectomized or sham gonadectomized and placed in groups of ten animals each. In these miniature swine, there was no difference in growth rate between intact and gonadectomized animals.

Tumor Volume. Immediately after farrowing, all piglets were checked for the presence of exophytic lesions and width, length, and depth measured on individual tumors. All tumors of each animal placed in a treatment group were measured at 2-wk intervals for 52 wk, and tumor volumes were calculated (7). The wide variation in tumor volumes within and between animals, irrespective of sex, which has confronted tumor biologists working with Sinclair swine, was solved by assigning a numerical value to fixed increments of gains or losses in individual tumor volumes. This value was termed the PI (Table I). Tumor volume obtained at 6 wk of age (weaning or gonadectomy when appropriate) was used as the initial or base-line value. The subsequent volume of individual tumors measured at biweekly intervals was expressed as a percentage of the 6-wk (initial) value and an appropriate PI assigned. Biweekly PIs were then analyzed as a function of swine chronological age, and regression coefficients were calculated for each group within specific time frames over the first year of life.

Histopathological Staging. Histopathological staging as a function of age was achieved by analyzing biopsy specimens of additional tumors that were not incorporated into growth studies. These tumors were...
RESULTS

The proliferative indices obtained over the first year of life of the four groups yielded the following slopes: IM = 0.0175; IF = 0.0158; GDXM = 0.0142; and GDXF = 0.0009 (Table 2; overall $R^2 = 0.57$). The slope of the Pls of IM, IF, and GDXM were significantly different from zero ($P < 0.01$), while that of GDXF was not. The slope of the PI of GDFX was significantly different from the other three groups ($P < 0.001$). Inspection of individual tumor volumes and PI suggested that tumor growth became static or diminished in all groups after 26 wk, irrespective of sex. Growth data were, therefore, reanalyzed using half-year time frames, i.e., from 6 to 26 wk and from 26 to 52 wk at biweekly intervals. Tumor volume at 6 wk was again used as the initial value for each analysis.

Analysis of the PI over the first 26 wk yielded the same patterns as the analysis over wk 6 to 52; however, the slopes of the regression lines were greater within each treatment group (Table 2) with an overall $R^2 = 0.66$. Although the relative rankings of the slopes of the Pls were similar to that calculated for growth over 6 to 52 wk of age, the Pl of GDFX was again significantly different from IF ($P < 0.01$) and IM ($P < 0.05$).

The PI observed from wk 28 to 52, however, was quite different (Table 2). The slopes of PI from wk 28 to 52 of IM, GDXM, and GDFX were significantly different from zero ($<0.005$), but none was significantly different from each other. The rate of decline of the PI slowed in IM, IF, and GDXM, whereas the PI of the GDFX remained essentially static.

Histopathological staging (II to V) of biopsies of 93 exophytic melanomas from 63 swine during the first year of life (Table 3) revealed that Stage III and IV tumors were observed primarily before 26 wk of age (81.2% and 68.9%, respectively), whereas Stage V tumors were found in animals greater than 26 wk of age (90.6%) ($\chi^2; P < 0.001$ for both Stage III versus Stages V and IV versus Stage V). Two additional tumors present at birth were classified as Stage II. Additional analysis of histopathological stage as a function of age (Table 4) suggested a definite tendency toward regression very early post weaning. Whereas Stage III lesions were uniformly distributed during the first 10 wk of life (<6 wk, 37.5%; 7 to 10 wk, 34.3%), there was a 2-fold increase in the number of Stage IV lesions with age in swine of both sexes less than 6 wk of age (20.7%) compared to swine 10 wk of age (44.8%). As noted, the majority (90.6%) of Stage V lesions appeared after 6 mo of age. A histogenetic analysis (as related to volume) as a function of treatment has recently been completed in swine between 10 and 16 wk of age. The histopathological stage of lesions from subjects >26 wk of age was determined in intact and castrated swine of both sexes and is illustrated in Table 5. Although the numbers of gonadectomized animals are small, in swine older than 26 wk of age, there was a 60% increase in the percentage of Stage IV lesions in gonadectomized pigs of both sexes (40%) compared to intact swine (24%) with only a slight decrease in the total incidence of Stage V lesions (48% GDX versus 54% intact) in swine of both sexes. It would appear that two components contribute to this increase. GDFX show a reduction in Stage V lesions with little change in Stage III tumors. However, in castrated male swine the incidence of Stage III lesions decreases (68%), while that of Stage V lesions remains the same. This suggests that castration at 6 wk may alter the histopathological course of the disease in male and female swine and that this appears to be inversely related.

DISCUSSION

The usefulness of SSCM as a model of human disease depends, in part, upon the identification of similar tumor-responsive perturbations in both species. Clinical and epidemiological evidence suggests that host endocrine status may influence the natural history of human melanoma (9–20).

Whereas there are studies which suggest that the overall frequency of human melanoma (10, 11) does not appear sex related, others provide evidence for frequency differences between pre- and postmenopausal women (12). Additional studies indicate a significantly improved survival rate of women compared to men (13–18). One large study found that women, irrespective of age, level of invasion, lesion site, etc., survived longer than men and suggested the difference reflected the effect

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of a different steroid environment (17). Sex consistently appears as an independent, positive, prognostic variable for survival (12), particularly in women with extremity lesions (17, 18). This apparent estrogenic effect on melanoma may be receptor mediated as a receptor for estrogen in melanoma appears to be an independent, positive, prognostic variable for survival (12), particularly in women with extremity lesions (17, 18).

We have shown that gonadectomy of females at 6 wk of age significantly decreased the PI when compared to that of the other three groups. The effect was most apparent during the first 26 wk of life of females during which time the decrease in tumor PI was highly significant. A similar phenomenon has been reported for hamster MM1 melanoma (25).

SSCMs are histopathologically similar to human cutaneous malignant melanoma (1, 5, 6, 26). In the SMS-TAMU, the vast majority of SSCMs are present as exophytic lesions at birth which either grow, metastasize and kill the host, or regress. Regression appears to be the major response of the lesion in this animal model. Interestingly, regression results in a quantitative increase in tumor PI which is associated with lymphocytic and macrophage infiltration and progression to Stage IV and V lesions during the first year of life. The initial events of regression appear to occur earlier than previously reported (5, 27), and initial signs may be present in a small number of tumors that are present at birth. An initial report of a major and minor variant, with respect to the morphological development of SSCM, depending upon the age of onset suggested the majority of progressive lesions comprising the first three histologic stages (I to III) arose over the first 6 mo of age, with the majority of regressing tumors (Stages IV and V) appearing by age 8 mo of age (5). The “minor variant” pattern appears to be expressed in the majority of swine in the Texas A&M University herd, suggesting that the progression of the tumor through Stages I to III may be occurring in utero. Therefore, the signal(s) triggering growth, development, and regression may be elaborated very early in the postnatal period or even in utero.

Of importance in analyzing the role of the steroid milieu on SSCM regression are the observations that (a) there is a significant decrease in PI (tumor growth) following ovariohysterectomy but not orchiectomy in prepubertal swine and (b) a retardation in the progression of tumors from Stage IV to Stage V occurs in gonadectomized female swine, but an enhancement of the progression from Stage III to Stage IV occurs in gonadectomized male swine. Although gonadectomy leads to an increase in Stage IV lesions in both sexes, the mechanism(s) by which this occurs appears to be different. This may reflect the significant effect of castration on PI in female swine and absence of effect in males. In summary, it would appear that the changes in PI following gonadectomy of prepubertal females and the apparent retardation of regression associated with changes in the steroid hormone environment suggest gonadal steroids may play a role in the natural history of SSCM.

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