Malignant Lymphomas

Inhibition of the mammalian target of rapamycin and the induction of cell cycle arrest in mantle cell lymphoma cells

Mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR) inhibitors represent a new class of potential anticancer agents. The mTOR inhibitor, rapamycin, inhibited proliferation in three mantle cell lymphoma (MCL) cell lines and reduced cyclin D3 expression while cyclin D1 levels remained unchanged. This finding was confirmed in cells from a MCL patient.

Mantle cell lymphoma (MCL) is a distinct subtype of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma which is characterized by a poor response to conventional chemotherapy with a mean overall survival of approximately 3 to 4 years. Recently, therapeutic approaches including stem cell transplantation and monoclonal-antibody based therapies have improved response rates but only minor effects on overall survival have been observed.

Therefore, new therapies are clearly needed for this still incurable disease. The hallmark of MCL is the translocation t(11;14), (q23, q32), which results in overexpression of cyclin D1 Prad1. Although the precise role of cyclin D1 overexpression in the progression of MCL remains controversial, the presence of cyclin D1 overexpression or the t(11;14) is considered to be a highly specific marker for the diagnosis of this lymphoma. In view of its altered cell cycle machinery, MCL seems to be an ideal candidate disease for targeted therapies directed at the cell cycle.

The mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR) pathway has only recently been recognized as a target for cancer therapy. mTOR is emerging as a central controller of eukaryotic cell growth and proliferation, sensing mitogens in mammalian cells and allowing progression through the cell cycle. By activating downstream pathways, mTOR controls the translation of mRNA that encode proteins important for cell cycle progression, including cyclin D1. Indeed, mTOR inhibition resulted in cell cycle arrest in a variety of cellular models and is considered to represent a promising new class of cytostatic anticancer agents.

In our current study, we analyzed the effect of mTOR inhibition on cell cycle progression in MCL cell lines carrying the translocation t(11; 14)(q23, q32). Culture conditions and experimental procedures including proliferation assays, separation methods and Western blots were as previously described. The cell lines Granta 519, NCEB-1 and Jeko-1 were kindly provided by Dr. Mark Raffeld, National Cancer Institute, NIH, Bethesda, USA.

Figure 1. Rapamycin induces cell cycle arrest in MCL cell lines. A. Cells were cultured in medium containing 20% fetal calf serum and rapamycin at the indicated concentrations. *H thymidine incorporation was measured after 2 days of culture in triplicate. One representative experiment out of three is shown. Data (mean±SEM) are presented as % proliferation [(thymidine incorporation in the presence of Rapamycin)/(thymidine incorporation in medium alone)*100]. B. To analyze cell cycle distribution, NCEB and Granta cells were cultured with or without rapamycin. Propidium iodide-staining was performed after 48 hours of culture. The percentage of cells in the S/G2/M phase of the cell cycle is given. These tests were repeated once with very similar results. C. To synchronize cells in the cell cycle better, Granta and NCEB cells were cultured for 36 hours in the absence of fetal calf serum. Afterwards they were cultured for up to 72 hours in medium containing 20% fetal calf serum with or without rapamycin 10 ng/mL. Cyclin, cdk and p27 expression was analyzed by immunoblotting with specific antibodies in total cell lysates (100 µg). Protein concentrations were normalized by the BioRad assay method. Two additional experiments gave very similar results.

Rapamycin while cyclin D1 expression was not significantly changed (Figure 1C). This interesting finding was confirmed in one additional MCL (Jeko-1) cell line (data not shown) and primary MCL cells (Figure 2) suggesting that cyclin D1 is not a target of mTOR inhibitors in MCL. In line with these data, we and others have identified cyclin D3 to be an important target of rapamycin in malignant and normal lymphocytes. It is very important from a clinical point of view that plasma concentrations of more than 15 ng/mL are easily achievable in patients treated with rapamycin.

In addition to cyclin D3 expression, cyclin A expression was strongly reduced in Rapamycin-treated NCEB and primary MCL cells but was only slightly downregulated in
In contrast to our findings in both cell lines as well as in freshly isolated MCL cells are strong arguments for further evaluation of mTOR inhibitors in this still incurable disease. Our future work will deal with potential strategies to combine these cytostatic agents with cytotoxic or targeted therapies to improve therapeutic efficacy.

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References


