

Special Issue: Hematopoietic and Mesenchymal Stem Cells

# **Mini Review**

# Disease-associated iPS cell lines representing hematological and immunological disorders

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Induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) are potential cell sources for regenerative medicine and other clinical applications, such as cell therapies, drug screening, toxicology testing, and the investigation of disease mechanisms. Discovery of disease-associated iPSCs has led to the development of a new field of disease modeling, as they can provide somatic cells which cannot be directly obtained from each patient. In this review, we focus on the applications of disease-associated iPSCs for understanding human hematological and immunological disorders, while discussing the current state of hematopoietic differentiation and the findings of previous reports of disease-associated iPSCs in this field.

Rec.7/2/2012, Acc.8/13/2012, pp171-177

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Key words induced pluripotent stem cells, hematopoietic differentiation, hematological disorders, immunological disorders

### Introduction

Hematological and immunological disorders are abnormalities of the blood systems. Although elucidation of their cellular pathophysiology has been largely based on *in vitro* studies using patient-derived primary hematopoietic cells or animal models, these approaches have potential limitations. For example, patient-derived cells cannot be obtained in unlimited quantities, and their *in vitro* functions can be affected by *in vivo* conditions, such as the cytokine milieu or therapeutic agents. Furthermore, in the case of multisystem disorders, such as those associated with chromosomal abnormalities<sup>1)</sup>, defects in DNA repair<sup>2)</sup>, or metabolic disorders<sup>3)</sup>, obtaining patient-derived samples other than blood is difficult, hampering the analysis of affected cells or tissues. On the other hand, although murine models have provided important insights into various disorders, differences in the hematological and immunological development between mice and humans sometimes causes discrepancies in the resulting phenotypes.

Because of their pluripotency and capacity for self-renewal, human pluripotent stem cells (PSCs), such as embryonic stem cells (ESCs) and induced pluripotent stem



cells (iPSCs) are potential sources of cells for regenerative medicine and other clinical applications, such as cell therapies, drug screening, toxicology testing, and investigation of disease mechanisms<sup>4, 5)</sup>. iPSCs, first established by Takahashi and Yamanaka, are reprogrammed somatic cells with ESC-like characteristics that are generated by introducing certain transcriptional factors such as *OCT3/4*, *SOX2, KLF4* and *cMYC*<sup>6, 7)</sup>. These transcriptional factors can be delivered into the source cells by viral vectors, episomal vectors<sup>8)</sup>, piggybac transposon<sup>9)</sup> or modified synthetic RNA<sup>10)</sup>. Discovery of disease-associated iPSCs has led to the development of a new field of disease modeling, as they can provide somatic cells which cannot be directly obtained from each patient.

## Directed differentiation into hematopoietic cells from human PSCs

Although patient- or disease-specific iPSCs are an important resource for unraveling human hematological disorders, a robust and simple hematopoietic differentiation system that can reliably mimic in vivo hematopoiesis is necessary for this purpose. The leading methods of hematopoietic cell induction from PSCs employ two different systems: namely, monolayer animal-derived stromal cell co-culture and three-dimensional embryoid body (EB) formation. Both methods can produce hematopoietic cells from mesodermal progenitors, and combinations of cytokines can control, at least to some extent, the specific lineage commitment<sup>11-19</sup>. We recently established a robust and simple monolayer hematopoietic cell differentiation system from human PSCs<sup>20</sup>. Our system is free from xeno-feeder cells or serum, and can trace the in vitro differentiation of human PSCs into multiple lineages of definitive blood cells, such as functional erythrocytes and neutrophils.

Because human PSCs are feasible cell sources for various clinical applications, the scientific and medical communities have shown continuing interest in hematopoietic stem cell (HSC) induction from PSCs. Previous trials have indicated that murine ESC-derived hematopoietic cells overexpressing *HoxB4* resulted in long-term myelo-lymphoid reconstitution in the bone marrow of lethally irradiated recipient mice<sup>21)</sup>. However, the transduction of *HOXB4* was not sufficient to develop fully functional human HSCs<sup>22)</sup>, and it remains a challenge to develop *bona fide* human HSCs with bone marrow reconstitution activity at the singlecell level. Despite the recent advances, the directed differentiation of human PSCs into definitive hematopoietic cells *in vitro* is also still challenging. Most cultures develop into mostly nucleated erythrocytes with a primitive or definitive fatal type hemoglobin expression pattern ( $\alpha$ - and  $\gamma$ -globins), and the robust and effective derivation of enucleated adult type  $\alpha$ - and  $\beta$ -globin-expressing red blood cells from human PSCs remains elusive. The differentiation of lymphoid cells is also relatively difficult. While T-lymphocytes can be derived from human PSCs on OP9-DL1 feeder layers<sup>19</sup>, the terminal differentiation into B-lymphocytes remains to be accomplished, because it has so far not been possible to make cells go through the pre-B state<sup>23</sup>. Several groups have reported the derivation of functional natural killer cells from PSCs<sup>24, 25</sup>.

# Disease-associated iPSCs from patients with hematological or immunological disorders<sup>26-45)</sup>

A number of disease-associated iPSCs generated from patients with hematological or immunological disorders have been reported (Table 1). However, several papers just reported the establishment of iPSC clones, while discussing the potential usefulness of disease-associated iPSCs as a resource for disease analysis. The first report of disease-associated iPSCs derived from patients with a hematological disorder was iPSCs from Fanconi anemia (FA)<sup>27)</sup>. Raya et al. established FA patient-derived iPSC clones from Fanconi anemia patients after correcting genetic defects in the parental fibroblasts. Uncorrected fibroblast could not be reprogrammed into iPSCs, indicating that the Fanconi anemia pathway is requisite for reprogramming. The corrected iPSC clones could differentiate into hematopoietic cells normally. Recently, another group found that iPSCs from Fanconi anemia patients could be generated without complementation, although the efficiency was extremely low<sup>26)</sup>.

For  $\beta$ -thalassemia, one of the most common hereditary anemias<sup>46)</sup>, disease-associated iPSC studies have been mainly conducted towards proving that the iPSC technology could be used to generate gene-corrected cells with potential value for cell therapy. Wang et al., genetically corrected iPSCs from a  $\beta$ -thalassemia patient by homologous recombination, and differentiated them into hematopoietic progenitors<sup>29, 31)</sup>. When the cells were transferred to sub-lethally irradiated NOD/SCID mice, the hemoglobin



#### Table 1 Reported disease-associated iPS cell lines representing hematological and immunological disorders

Category	Name of disorder	Molecular defect	Author	Year	Reference
Bone marrow failure	Fanconi anemia	FANCA/FANCC	Muller	2012	26)
Bone marrow failure	Fanconi anemia	FANCA/FANCD2	Raya	2009	27)
Bone marrow failure	Swachman-Bodian-Diamond syndrome	SBDS	Park	2008	42)
Bone marrow failure	Dyskeratosis congenita	DKC	Batista	2011	43)
Chromosomal abnormality	Down syndrome	Trisomy 21	Park	2008	42)
Hemoglobinopathy	Sickle cell anemia	HBB	Sebastiano	2011	33)
Hemoglobinopathy	Sickle cell anemia	HBB	Mali*	2008	35)
Hemoglobinopathy	Sickle cell anemia	HBB	Zou*	2012	34)
Hereditary anemia	beta-thalassemia	HBB	Ye	2009	28)
Hereditary anemia	beta-thalassemia	HBB	Wang**	2009	29)
Hereditary anemia	beta-thalassemia	HBB	Papapetrou	2011	30)
Hereditary anemia	beta-thalassemia	HBB	Wang**	2012	31)
Hereditary anemia	beta-thalassemia	HBB	Fan	2012	32)
Hematological malignancy	Chronic myeloid leukemia	BCR/ABL	Hu	2011	38)
Hematological malignancy	Chronic myeloid leukemia	BCR/ABL	Carette	2011	39)
Hematological malignancy	Chronic myeloid leukemia	BCR/ABL	Kumano	2012	40)
Rare blood type	Rare ABO blood type (Bombey)	FUT1/FUT2	Seifinejad	2009	45)
Immunodeficiency	Chronic granulomatous disease	p47phox, qp91phox	Jiang	2012	36)
Immunodeficiency	Chronic granulomatous disease	gp91phox	Zou	2011	37)
Immunodeficiency	Severe combined immunodeficiency	ADA	Park	2008	42)
Immunodeficiency	Severe combined immunodeficiency	RAG1	Pessach	2010	44)
Immunodeficiency	Omenn syndrome	RAG1	Pessach	2010	44)
Immunodeficiency	Herpes simplex type 1 encephalitis	STATI	Pessach	2010	44)
Immunodeficiency	Herpes simplex type 2 encephalitis	LR3	Pessach	2010	44)
Immunodeficiency	Cartilage hair hypoplasia	RMRP	Pessach	2010	44)
Autoinflammatory syndrome	CINCA syndrome	NLRP3	Tanaka	2012	41)

\*, \*\* Reported by the same group.

level recovered efficiently. Papapetrou et al. showed that transduction of a lentivirally encoded  $\beta$ -globin transgene into genomic safe harbors enabled high expression of the transgene in  $\beta$ -thalassemia iPSC-derived erythroid progenitors<sup>30</sup>). Similar to  $\beta$ -thalassemia, two groups reported genetic correction using cells from patients with sickle cell anemia<sup>33-35</sup>).

Regarding immunological disorders, two groups recently established iPSCs from patients with chronic granulomatous disease (CGD)<sup>36, 37)</sup>, a primary immunodeficiency characterized by impaired phagocytic killing of microorganisms by neutrophils and macrophages<sup>47)</sup>. Both groups demonstrated that the differentiated neutrophils from disease-associated iPSCs lack the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) in response to proper stimulus. As a model for gene therapy, Zou et al. restored the neutrophil ROS production in X-linked CGD iPSCs by zinc finger nucleasemediated gene targeting of a single-copy gp91phox therapeutic minigene into one allele of the "safe harbor" *AAVS1* locus<sup>37</sup>.

Disease-associated iPSCs from patients with chronic myeloid leukemia (CML) have also been reported<sup>38-40)</sup>. The sources of iPSCs were a cell line, KBM7<sup>39)</sup>, primary bone marrow cells<sup>38)</sup>, and CD34+ cells<sup>40)</sup>. All iPSC clones bore the translocation of 9;22 breakpoints of the *BCR/ABL* fusion gene. Interestingly, although the parental cell lines were sensitive to the tyrosine kinase inhibitor imatinib, thus showing their dependency on *BCR/ABL* oncogene signaling, a loss of oncogene addiction was observed in the reprogrammed iPSC clones<sup>40)</sup>. The hematopoietic differen-



tiation of these iPSCs recovered their sensitivity to imatinib.

One of the interesting characteristics of iPSCs is that each iPSC clone originates from a single somatic cell<sup>48</sup>. By taking advantage of this, we have proposed that iPSC technology can be used to dissect and evaluate the genetically different somatic cells from an individual<sup>41)</sup>. In CINCA syndrome, an autoinflammatory syndrome caused by mutations of the NLRP3 gene, 30 to 40% of patients have mutations in NLRP3 in only a small number of somatic cells<sup>49, 50)</sup>, and it remains controversial whether the small fraction of NLRP3-mutated cells actually causes the strong autoinflammation in these patients, or if all cells carry an unknown mutation of another gene that causes the disease. To resolve this controversy, mutant and non-mutant iPSC lines were established from the CINCA patients with somatic mosaicism. By analyzing the disease-relevant characteristics of IL-1 $\beta$  secretion from the iPSC-derived macrophages, we demonstrated that mutant macrophages are mainly responsible for the disease phenotype in the mosaic patients, confirming the role of NLRP3.

### Limitations and unsolved issues for studies of disease-specific iPSCs

As discussed above, most of the previously reported disease-associated iPSC studies have been just "diseasemodeling" or proof-of-principle studies. To gain more insight into disease pathophysiology by using iPSC technology, several issues still need to be overcome. One of the most critical issues is to develop a method to obtain mature, fully functional hematopoietic cells, including HSCs. Another concern is that, even if iPSCs are obtained from an individual, the differentiation efficiency and/or functions of hematopoietic cells will show inter-clonal variation, which hampers the accurate estimation of the disease-associated phenotypes of patient-derived iPSCs. These variations may derive from inter-clonal genetic variations<sup>51)</sup>, epigenetic modifications<sup>52)</sup>, the source of iPSCs, residual transgenes of each iPSC clone, or, in female cases, the alteration of the status of X chromosome inactivation<sup>53, 54)</sup>. Additionally, fibroblasts obtained from patients with certain diseases, such as Fanconi anemia<sup>27)</sup> and dyskeratosis congenita<sup>43)</sup>, show extremely low reprogramming efficiency. For these types of diseases, a specific reprograming strategy, such as transient genetic complementation, may therefore be required.

#### Conclusion

Although disease-associated iPSCs are useful tools, their proper differentiation into functional hematopoietic cells is essential for elucidating the cellular pathophysiology of hematopoietic and immunological diseases. The establishment of suitable disease models that can represent the *in vivo* phenotype is also important. Rapid technological advances in iPSCs and their differentiation will open up a new horizon for studies that can aid in understanding human diseases.

#### **Acknowledgements**

This work was partly supported from a grant from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

#### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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