Identification of a nonsense mutation in TNNI3K associated with cardiac conduction disease and dilated cardiomyopathy

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BMC Medical Genetics  BMC Series

Jiang Liu  
central south university

Da Liu  
central south university

Muzheng Li  
central south university

Keke Wu  
central south university

Na Liu  
central south university

Chenyu Zhao  
central south university

Xiaoliu Shi  
central south university

qiming liu  qimingliu@csu.edu.cn  
central south university  
Corresponding Author
ORCID: 0000-0002-5213-2668

DOI: 10.21203/rs.2.18398/v1

SUBJECT AREAS  Medical Genetics
KEYWORDS

conduction disease; dilated cardiomyopathy; nonsense mutation; TNNI3K
Abstract

Background Cardiac conduction disease (CCD) and dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) are two common cardiovascular diseases which can lead to life-threatening conditions. The importance of heredity in these two diseases has been realized in recent years. Several casual genes have been found to be implicated in CCD and DCM such as LMNA, SCN5A, TTN, TNNI3K and so on. Rare genetic mutations in TNNI3K have been identified to be in connection with CCD and DCM.

Methods Next generation sequencing (NGS) was carried out in order to identify the underlying disease-causing mutation in a Chinese family with CCD and DCM. The mutations were validated by Sanger sequencing.

Results A nonsense mutation in TNNI3K (NM_015978.2: g.170891C>T, c.1441C>T) was identified in this family and validated by Sanger sequencing.

Conclusions This study described a Chinese family with CCD and DCM caused by a nonsense TNNI3K mutation. TNNI3K harboring the mutation (c.1441C>T) possibly implicated a loss-of-function pathogenic mechanism with an autosomal dominant inheritance pattern. This research enriches the phenotypic spectrum of TNNI3K mutations, casting a new light upon the genotype-phenotype correlations between TNNI3K mutations and cardiovascular diseases.

Background

Cardiac conduction disease (CCD) refers to the impaired completeness of conduction system which can be serious and potentially life-threatening. Based on part upon the site of conduction block, CCD is recognized, namely, sick sinus syndrome, Intra-atrial block, atrioventricular block and intraventricular conduction delay. More than 50 genes have been found to be relevant with CCD such as
SCN5A, TRPM4, NKX2.5, TBX5, PRKAG2, and LMNA[1]. CCD continues to be the major cause for pacemaker (PM) implantation irrespective of its diverse underlying pathophysiological mechanisms[2, 3]. Dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM), characterized by ventricles dilation and impaired contraction without abnormal loading conditions or coronary artery disease sufficient to explain the abnormalities[4, 5], remains to be a principal cause of death worldwide. The prevalence of DCM was estimated to be 36 cases per 100,000 population[6]. Over 100 genes have been implicated in harboring rare variants that cause DCM, containing genes that encode cytoskeletal, sarcomere, nuclear envelope proteins and so on[7, 8]. Up to now there have been over 30 genes confirmed to lead to both CCD and DCM.

TNNI3K, located in chromosome 1(1p31.1), encodes a dual-function kinase (both tyrosine and serine/threonine kinase activity) with biased expression in heart (OMIM #616117)[7, 8]. It contains four domains as follow: a N-terminal coiled coil domain, ankyrin (ANK) repeats, protein kinase domain and a C-terminal serine-rich domain. Interaction partners of TNNI3K embody cardiac troponin I (cTnI), anti-oxidant protein 1 (AOP-1) and p38, which make TNNI3K an important factor in cardiovascular diseases[11, 12]. TNNI3K were related with heart failure and hypertrophy, ischemia/reperfusion injury, cardiac conduction, and heart regeneration[13–19]. To date there are only four mutations that have been found to be relevant with cardiovascular diseases, including three missense mutations and one splicing mutation[20–23]. Here, we found that a nonsense variant in TNNI3K (NM_015978.2:c.1441C > T), which was not seen in the human gene mutation database (HGMD), may be the cause of cardiac abnormalities.

Methods
Patients and Ethics

A Chinese family with cardiovascular diseases was enrolled in our studies. Parents of the proband are not related biologically. The pedigree of the family is shown in Fig. 1A.

Next generation sequencing

Whole exome sequencing (WES) was performed on the proband (III-10) in this family. The next generation sequencing (NGS) and basic bioinformatics analysis were finished in the Novogene Bioinformatics Institute (Beijing, China). Platform for high-throughput sequencing was Illumina novaseq. The reads data were mapped to the human reference genome 19 (UCSC hg19) using BWA. Single-nucleotide variants (SNVs) and insertion-deletion variants (INDELs) were annotated by ANNOVAR. Eliminate low-quality data (cover depth <= 20X) and high-frequency mutation sites [minor allele frequency (MAF) > 0.001 in ExAC, ESP6500, 1000 Genome Project, and gnomAD] in general population from raw data. SIFT, PolyPhen-2, MutationTaster, and provean were used for predicting pathogenicity of mutations. Interpretation of mutations pathogenicity was guided by American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics guideline (ACMG) [24]. The filter strategies is shown in Fig. 1B and Table 1. The validation of potential mutations from NGS was done by means of Sanger sequencing. Primer 3 was used to design the primer pairs (we'll offer the primers sequences upon request). ABI 3730 sequencer (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA) was used for Sanger sequencing.

Table 1

| CHR | POS   | RB | AB | Gene       | AAChange | SIFT  | PolyPhen-2 | MutationTaster |
|-----|-------|----|----|------------|----------|-------|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1   | 74834917 | C  | T  | TNNI3K     | NM_015978:exon15:c.C1441T | 1.000,D | 0,D         | 1.000,D         |
| 1   | 8      |     |     | RYR2       | NM_001035:exon90:c.T12706G | 0.5,T    | 0.257,B     | 1.000,D         |
| 2   | 17942554 | C  | T  | TTN        | NM_00126750:exon326:c.G85316A | 0,D       | 0.701,P     | 1.000,D         |
| 12  | 2788847 | C  | T  | CACNA1C    | NM_000719:exon42:c.C5329T | 0.002,D   | 0.999,D     | 1.000,D         |
| 14  | 32319403 | A  | C  | NUBPL      | NM_001201573:exon8:c.A605C | 0.23,T    | 0.002,B     | 0.764,N         |
| 18  | 3164344 | C  | A  | MYOM1      | NM_003803:exon10:c.G1433T | 0.31,T    | 1.000,D     | 0.764,N         |

CHR = Chromosome, POS = Position, RB = Reference sequencing base, AB = Alternative base identified, D = Disease-causing, T = Tolerated, B = Benign, N = Neural.

Results

Clinical data

The index case (III-10) is a 56-year-old man from China with the clinical
manifestation of chest tightness. The electrocardiogram (ECG) showed complete right bundle branch block (CRBBB) and third-degree atrioventricular block (Fig. 1C). The 24-hour holter indicated an average heat beat of 46 bpm, maximum RR interval of 5.26 seconds, complete atrioventricular block and CRBBB. His Echocardiography displayed enlargement of left atrial (LA = 40 mm), thickened left ventricular posterior wall (LVPW = 13 mm) and interventricular septum (IVS = 14 mm) (Fig. 1D). His father and uncles (II-5, II-7, II-9, and II-11) were also suffered from third-degree atrioventricular block and were treated with pacemaker therapy among their 50 s. Results of echocardiography were all normal before their pacemakers implantation. Cardiac enlargement of one of his uncles (II-7) emerged after a period of pacemaker implantation (left ventricle from 54 mm to 62 mm, left atrial from 38 mm to 42 mm, right ventricle from 28 mm to 39 mm and right atrial from 27 mm to 37 mm). The proband’s aunt (II-14) was died from heart disease at her 30 s recalled by him (no more details available). Owing to the implantation of PM, cardiac magnetic resonance is not performed in this family (Table 2).
### Table 2
Clinical Characteristics and Phenotype of Family Members

| Subject | Sex | Age (years/old) | Age of PM Implantation (years/old) | UCG | Manifestation |
|---------|-----|----------------|------------------------------------|-----|---------------|
| III − 10 Proband | M | 56 | 56 | LA = 40mm, LV = 46mm, IVS = 14mm, LVPW = 13mm, EF = 65% | 3rd – degree AVB, CRBBB, PVC |
| II − 5 Uncle | M | 91 | 55 | LA = 38mm, LV = 55mm, RA = 37mm, RV = 37mm, EF = 55% | 3rd – degree AVB |
| II − 7 Uncle | M | 89 | 50 | LA = 42mm, LV = 62mm, RA = 37mm, RV = 39mm, EF = 40% | 3rd – degree AVB, PVC |
| II − 9 Father | M | 86 | 59 | LA = 38mm, LV = 50mm, RA = 34mm, RV = 35mm, EF = 54% | 3rd – degree AVB, PVC |
| II − 11 Uncle | M | 84 | 55 | Normal | 3rd – degree AVB |
| III − 12 Sister | F | 52 | — | Normal | None |
| IV − 1 Daughter | F | 26 | — | Normal | None |

PM: pacemaker; UCG: ultrasonic cardiography; LA: left atrial; LV: left ventricle; RA: right atrial; RV: right ventricle; IVS: interventricular septum; LVPW: left ventricular posterior wall; EF: ejection fraction; AVB: atrioventricular block; AT: atrial tachycardia; DCM: dilated cardiomyopathy; CRBBB: complete right bundle branch block; PVC: premature ventricular contraction

### Genetic testing

A nonsense mutation in TNNI3K (c.1441C > T, p.R481*), was found through WES and confirmed by Sanger sequencing (Fig. 1E). This variant produces a truncated protein with 481 amino acids which is significantly shorter than the wild-type protein (835 amino acids). It is a rare mutation with MAF of 0.0017% (2/119514 alleles) in ExAC database. In addition, this mutation was not seen in our 200 local control cohorts [25]. The c.1441C > T mutation in the TNNI3K gene co-segregated with the clinical phenotype in this family. Thus, we believed that these mutation seem to be the causative mutation of cardiac abnormalities in this family.

### Discussion

Herein, using NGS we have identified a nonsense mutation of the TNNI3K gene
associated with CCD and DCM. Cardiovascular disease caused by the TNNI3K mutation is an autosomal dominant disease, which means individuals will have the disease if only one chromosome carries the mutant allele. In our study, the nonsense mutation (c.1441C > T) is co-segregated with the affected ones.

The gene TNNI3K holds a place in cardiac physiology. A preponderance of evidence suggested that TNNI3K is associated with a broad spectrum of cardiac phenotypes including CCD, DCM, and supraventricular tachycardia. Only four disease-causing mutations (c.1577G > A, c.1615A > G, c.333 + 2T > C and c.2303G > A) in TNNI3K, namely, three missense mutations and one splicing mutation, have been reported so far (Fig. 1F). Among them, one locates in ANK repeats domain, one in serine-rich domain, and the rest two in kinase activity domain. Our study reported the first nonsense mutation that was linked with cardiovascular diseases, located in kinase activity domain. This mutation results in the early appearance of stop codon which is anticipated to produce truncated protein lacking partial protein kinase domain along with the C-terminus. For all we know, a premature termination codon (PTC) may result in loss of function (LOF) through activating a process called nonsense-mediated mRNA decay (NMD) [26, 27]. Indeed, LOF is the mechanism for TNNI3K mutation leading to DCM and CCD proved by previous research. Therefore, we hold the opinion that this nonsense mutation is the likely pathogenic variant in the family. Truncated mutation have larger effects in protein function in comparison with other mutation types. Therefore, it is anticipated to have more serious phenotype than missense mutation in most instances. CCD of TNNI3K mutation carriers in our study seems to be more serious than previous reported cases based on the fact that all of them were highly PM-dependent. Cardiac enlargement was aggravated by time in follow-up period in our research. However, the extent of...
cardiac enlargement in our patients is not more serious than previous cases. Considering the oldest patient in this family is 93, one would expect that loss of function in TNNI3K without detriment to life expectancy. In conclusion, more studies will need to be identified to draw clear genotype-phenotype relationships of TNNI3K.

However, there are several limitations in our research. This study lacks direct evidence in elucidating the underlying pathways between TNNI3K and cardiac abnormalities. We could not confirm the stability of mutant TNNI3K mRNA/protein in the cells derived from affected members in the absence of the patients’ consent. An animal model harboring specific mutation will be needed to elucidate the underlying signaling pathways.

Conclusions

We successfully identified a rare variant in TNNI3K(c.1441C > T) that was associated with CCD and DCM. This mutation may affect the expression of TNNI3K through NMD. Altogether, we reported the first nonsense mutation associated with cardiovascular disease in this gene, paying the way for genetic diagnosis for CCD and DCM.

Abbreviations

ACMG
American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics guideline
ANK
ankyrin
CCD
cardiac conduction disease
CRBBB
complete right bundle branch block
DCM
dilated cardiomyopathy
ECG
electrocardiogram
HGMD
human gene mutation database
INDELs
insertion-deletion variants
IVS
interventricular septum
LA
left atrial
LOF
loss of function
LV
left ventricle
LVPW
left ventricular posterior wall
MAF
minor allele frequency
NGS
next generation sequencing
NMD
nonsense-mediated mRNA decay
PM
pacemaker
PTC
premature termination codon
RA
right atrial
RV
right ventricle
SNVs
Single-nucleotide variants
UCG
ultrasonic cardiography
WES
whole exome sequencing

Declarations

**Ethics approval and consent to participate**

Written informed consent was obtained from each individual and the investigation was approved by the Ethics Committee of The Second Xiangya Hospital of Central South University.

**Consent for publication**

All participants have provided informed written consent to genetic and biochemical analysis and to publication of all identifying images.

**Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Availability of data and materials**

All data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article and its supplementary information files.

Acknowledgements

Thank you for all study participants.
**Funding**

The whole course of this study including the study design, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation and manuscript preparation were mainly supported by National Natural Science Foundation of China (#81570310 and #81770337).

**Author contributions**

Q-M L and JL conceived the design and performed the study. JL and DL analysed the data. JL wrote the original manuscript. Q-M L, DL, K-K W, M-Z L, NL, C-Y Z and X-L S revised the article. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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Figures
Figure 1

Pedigree, clinical data, sequencing data in our study. A: Pedigree. WES was performed on the proband (III-10).

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with the primary manuscript. Click to download.
sequencing data.xls