Spectrum of Autosomal Recessive Congenital Ichthyosis in Scandinavia: Clinical Characteristics and Novel and Recurrent Mutations in 132 Patients*

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Autosomal recessive congenital ichthyosis (ARCI) represents a heterogeneous group of rare disorders of cornification with 3 major subtypes: harlequin ichthyosis (HI), lamellar ichthyosis (LI) and congenital ichthyosiform erythroderma (CIE). A 4th subtype has also been proposed: pleomorphic ichthyosis (PI), characterized by marked skin changes at birth and subsequently mild symptoms. In nationwide screenings of suspected cases of ARCI in Denmark and Sweden, we identified 132 patients (age range 0.1–86 years) classified as HI (n=7), LI (n=70), CIE (n=17) and PI (n=38). At birth, a collodion membrane or similar severe hyperkeratosis was reported in almost all patients with HI and LI, and in nearly half of patients with CIE and PI. Persistent ectropion was more common in HI (85%) and LI (57%), than in CIE (35%) and PI (5%). Anhidrosis was a frequent problem in all 4 groups (58–100%). A scoring (0–4) of ichthyosis/erythema past infancy showed widely different mean values in the subgroups: HI (3.2/3.1), LI (2.4/0.6), CIE (1.8/1.6), PI (1.1/0.3). Novel or recurrent mutations were found in 113 patients: TGM1 (n=56), NIPAL4 (n=15), ALOXI1B (n=15), ABCA12 (n=8), ALOX3 (n=9), SLC27A4 (n=5), CYP4F22 (n=3), PNPLA1 (n=1) and ABHD5 (n=1). In conclusion, by performing a deep phenotyping and gene screening, ARCI can be definitely diagnosed in 85% of cases in Scandinavia, with a prevalence of 1:100,000 and >8 different aetiologies. Key words: ARCI; congenital ichthyosiform erythroderma; harlequin ichthyosis; lamellar ichthyosis; pleomorphic ichthyosis; collodion baby.

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Autosomal recessive congenital ichthyosis (ARCI) comprises a group of rare genetic disorders of cornification separate from syndromic ichthyoses, epidermolytic ichthyosis and the more common ichthyosis vulgaris (IV) and X-linked ichthyosis (XLI) which only rarely appear at birth (1). The rarest and most severe form of ARCI is harlequin ichthyosis (HI) caused by truncating mutations in the ABCA12 gene essential for normal functioning of the lamellar (Odland) bodies in the upper epidermis (2, 3). Lamellar ichthyosis (LI) and congenital ichthyosiform erythroderma (CIE) are moderately severe forms of ARCI with partially overlapping phenotypes, ranging from coarse to fine scaling and mild to severe erythema (1). Nine genes1 have so far been implicated in the aetiology of LI and CIE, all encoding epidermal enzymes and transport proteins, such as transglutaminase 1, ichthyin and lipoxygenases E3/12B (4–14), essential for the formation of a normal stratum corneum (SC) (see e.g. 15, 16).

A fourth type of autosomal recessive ichthyosis, interchangeably called non-LI/non-CIE (17) or pleomorphic2 ichthyosis (PI) (18), is characterized by marked cutaneous hyperkeratosis at birth followed by spontaneous improvement during infancy and subsequently mild skin symptoms. The suggested umbrella term PI encompasses several distinct conditions: self-improving collodion ichthyosis (SICI) (19), ichthyosis prematurity syndrome (IPS) (20), bathing-suit ichthyosis (BSI) (21), and congenital ichthyosis with fine/mild scaling (CIFS) (22). Many of these conditions have a known aetiology; for example: TGM1, ALOXI1B and ALOXE3 mutations in SICI and BSI (23, 24), and SLC27A4 (9q34.11) mutations in IPS (25). Although the latter condition is frequently associated with prematurity, neonatal asphyxia and atopy, recent evidence suggest...
that these features are only secondary to the cutaneous pathology\(^1\), implying that IPS is in fact non-syndromic and should be grouped together with other ARCIs, i.e. contrary to its current classification \((1)\).

Although there is some evidence for a genotype–phenotype correlation in ARCI \((1, 27)\), there has been little research into the full spectrum of all clinical and genetic variants in patients from a defined geographic area. Our study was initiated over a decade ago with the explicit aim of examining as many clinically suspicious cases of ARCI as possible in 2 neighbouring Scandinavian countries, Sweden and Denmark, with a combined population of 15 million. In an attempt to provide a full overview of the genotypic and phenotypic spectra of ARCI in Scandinavia, this paper now presents a compilation of our new data, together with some previously published results on the same cohort of patients \((20, 22, 25, 28–34)\).

**PATIENTS AND METHODS**

**Patients**

This study, which was approved by the ethics committees in Uppsala and Odense, involved patients with suspected ARCI and neonatal signs of ichthyosis as reported by the patients, parents or hospital files. Patients were referred to our diagnostic centres for genodermatoses established in the late 90ies at the university departments of Dermatology in Uppsala and Odense, respectively. All paediatric and dermatological departments in Denmark and Sweden, as well as 2 national patient organizations for ichthyosis, were informed about our study and invited to refer patients, who were at least one month old when investigated by us between 1997 and 2011. The inclusion criteria presented a compilation of our new data, together with some previously published results on the same cohort of patients \((20, 22, 25, 28–34)\).

**Mutation analysis**

Genomic DNA was extracted from white blood cells using standard procedures. The complete coding DNA including intron/exon boundaries of the following genes were sequenced either using Sanger sequencing or next-generation sequencing (NGS): TGM1, ABCA12, ALOXE3, ALOX12B, NIPAL4, CYP4F22, PNPLA1, CERS3, SLC27A4 and ABHD5. Sequence variants found by next NGS were verified by the Sanger technique.

NGS was performed using Agilent HaloPlex (Agilent Technologies; Santa Clara, CA, USA) with a custom-designed multi-gene panel containing 79 genes (Target Region Size: 224,563 kbp) associated in inherited skin diseases especially keratinization disorders (available on request). The sequencing was performed on an Illumina MiSeq\(^2\) sequencer (illumina; Ann Diego, CA, USA) using MiSeq Reagent Kit v2 (2×150 bp). The fraction of target bases with at least 50 reads was ~97%. Variant calling was performed using GATK (ver. 3.1-1-g07a4b118) and the variants were annotated using ANNOVAR \(^3\) (version date 2013-11-12).

\(^1\)In the position paper by Oji et al. \((1)\) the separation of syndromic and non-syndromic forms of ichthyosis is discussed; the conclusion was that when extracutaneous features, e.g. atopic diathesis, are secondary to a faulty skin barrier, such conditions should not be referred to as “syndromic ichthyosis”. However, this was not discussed for IPS, which at the time was considered a “true” syndrome and thus excluded from ARCI. In a recent study of 22 Norwegian patients with IPS, Khynkin et al. \((26)\) conclude that all extracutaneous symptoms are probably secondary to a massive scaling in utero and a subsequent skin barrier defect. Another argument for including IPS among the ARCIs is that at post-infancy the skin phenotype is almost indistinguishable from mild ichthyosis. Thus, when a patient with undiagnosed IPS is seen for the first time in late childhood (or adulthood) and no information is available about the neonatal events, this diagnosis can easily be overlooked. Indeed, 9 of the patients in Khynkin et al.’s study were not diagnosed until 2–40 years of age, and in an ongoing study of nearly 700 families with ichthyosis, including ~20 patients with IPS, one-third of patients with SLC27A4 mutations were reportedly diagnosed earlier as having mild ARCI (JF, unpublished data).

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*Acta Derm Venereol 96*
RESULTS

Clinical subtyping and severity scoring

Based on the investigators’ consensus decisions, 132 patients were classified into 4 major clinical subtypes; a majority (55%) belonged to the LI group, 27% to PI, 13% to CIE, and 5% to HI (Table I). Median age at examination ranged from 2 years in the HI group to 36 years in the CIE group, which precluded proper statistical comparisons between the groups. Ichthyosis and erythema scores were close to maximum in 3 patients with HI with malformed fingers and toes, alopecia, tight-sitting ears and abnormal shape of the head. Slightly lower scores and less pronounced malformations were noted in 4 patients with HI-like features, 2 of whom were described in a previous publication (29). The patients with LI and CIE had more variable combinations of moderate-severe ichthyosis and none-moderate erythema scores, whereas those with PI had generally low scores. The relationship between ichthyosis and erythema severity in the 4 groups of patients is schematically depicted in Fig. S1^4, with mapping circles partially overlapping for LI, CIE and PI, as opposed to HI, which is clearly separated from the others.

Despite the generally low score values observed in patients with PI at post-infancy, at least 50% of them were born with a collodion or massive hyperkeratosis membrane, i.e. consistent with the PI subtypes known as SICI, BSI and IPS. A similar frequency of collodion at birth was noted in the CIE group (53%), whereas 75–100% of the LI and HI patients had this neonatal phenotype (see Table I). More persistent skin problems, such as ectropion (35–85%) and palmoplantar keratoderma (70–100%), were common in the HI, LI and CIE groups, but rarer and milder in the PI group (5% and 32%, respectively). Anhidrosis was a common problem in all 4 groups (58–100%).

Thirteen (10%) of the patients (HI=2; LI=7; CIE=4) used oral retinoids (acitretin or isotretinoin) at the time of examination; this probably somewhat reduced the mean ichthyosis scores, but is unlikely to have affected the subgrouping of ARCI.

Mutation analysis

Novel or recurrent mutations were found in 113 (86%) patients; of these, 111 (84%) had bi-allelic mutations thus confirming the aetiology of ARCI (Tables I, II and Table SI^4). Patient no. 45 in Table SI^4 had only one recurrent TGM1 mutation, but complementary analysis disclosed a gene duplication as culprit. A further patient had a novel ABHD5 mutation (see Table II), but no signs of liver, muscle or central nervous system (CNS) involvement characteristic of Chanarin-Dorfman syndrome (1), which probably excludes this gene as the cause of the patient’s CIE.

The mutation details are highlighted in Tables II and SI^4, and are discussed below and in a footnote to Table SI^4 in relation to previous reports (4, 5, 8, 9, 24, 28, 31–45).

Table I. Clinical and genetic characteristics of 132 Scandinavian patients with ARCI classified as: harlequin ichthyosis (HI), lamellar ichthyosis (LI), congenital ichthyosiform erythroderma (CIE) or pleomorphic ichthyosis (PI). The mean scores of ichthyosis (IS) and erythema (ES), and the frequency of certain clinical features are shown. “Mutated gene” refers to mutations found in 113 cases; 112 of these were considered diagnostic (see Table SI^4).

| ARCI subtype | HI | LI | CIE | PI |
|--------------|----|----|-----|----|
| Total patients, n | 7 | 70 | 17 | 38 |
| Females, n | 3 | 40 | 12 | 23 |
| Danish patients, n | 1 | 21 | 10 | 8 |
| Families, n | 7 | 61 | 17 | 35 |
| Age, years, median (range) | 2 (0.1–39) | 31 (1–81) | 36 (5–67) | 15 (1–79) |
| Phenotypic score (0–4) | 3.23 (0.43) | 2.43 (0.82) | 1.83 (0.90) | 1.05 (0.39) |
| IS, mean (SD) | 3.10 (0.77) | 0.60 (0.50) | 1.55 (0.61) | 0.26 (0.40) |
| Other features, n (%) | 7 (100) | 52 (74) | 9 (53) | 19 (50) |
| Collodion or similar | 6 (85) | 40 (57) | 6 (35) | 2 (5) |
| Ectropion | 7 (100) | 57 (81) | 12 (70) | 12 (32) |
| Keratoderma | 7 (100) | 67 (96) | 14 (82) | 22 (58) |
| Retinoid therapy^c | 2 (29) | 7 (10) | 4 (23) | 0 |
| Mutated gene, n | 7 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| TGM1 | 0 | 48 | 3 | 5 |
| NIPAL4 | 0 | 10 | 3 | 2 |
| ALOX12B | 0 | 3 | 2 | 10 |
| ALOXE3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 8 |
| ABCA12 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| SLC27A4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| CYP4F22 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| PNPLA1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| ABHD5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

^cIncludes 3 typical HI and 4 HI-like cases. Two babies died within 5 weeks of age. ^pPI includes 18 patients with self-improving collodion ichthyosis (TGM1 (n=4), ALOX12B (n=9) and ALOXE3 (n=4)), 14 patients with congenital ichthyosis with fine scaling (ALOX12B (n=1), ALOXE3 (n=4), NIPAL4 (n=1) and ABCA12 (n=4)), 5 patients with ichthyosis-pregnancy syndrome due to SLC27A4 mutations, and one patient with bathing-suit ichthyosis due to TGM1 mutations. ^dRefers to ongoing oral acitretin or isotretinoin therapy at the time of examination. ^eThis patient was excluded from Table SI^4, but is included in Table II (novel mutation). She has CIE but no extracutaneous signs of Chanarin-Dorfman syndrome (see text). Whether or not her mono-allelic ABHD5 mutation contributes to the pathogenesis of CIE cannot yet be determined.
Table II. Novel mutations detected in the investigated ARCI genes of the Scandinavian patients* (For further information about allele pairs, clinical details, etc., see Table SI)

| Mutation       | Consequence               |
|----------------|---------------------------|
| **TGM1**       |                           |
| c.918C>G       | p.Asp306Glu                |
| c.1094A>G      | p.Tyr365Cys                |
| c.1163T>C      | p.Leu388Pro                |
| c.1389A>T      | p.Glu463His                |
| c.1438A>T      | p.Ile480Phe                |
| c.1686_1695delCCACGGCAGC | p.His563fs               |
| c.1927+1G>A    | splice site (intron 12)    |
| c.2150T>G      | p.Leu717Arg                |
| **ABHD5**     |                           |
| c.353-1G>C    | splice site (intron 3)     |
| **ABCA41**    |                           |
| c.1002_1004delAACinsT | p.Thr335fs            |
| c.1782G>A      | p.Glu594Glu                |
| c.4554G>A      | p.Trp1518Termc             |
| c.4896delG     | p.Ser1633fs                |
| c.6263T>C      | p.Leu2088Pro               |
| c.7137delG     | p.Met2380Fs                |
| c.7412G>A      | p.Glu2471Glu               |
| **CYP4F22**   |                           |
| c.59dupG       | p.Ile21fs                  |
| c.667C>T       | p.Glu2232Ternm             |
| c.727C>T       | p.Arg243Cys                |
| **ABHD5**     |                           |
| c.341G>T      | p.Arg1141Leu (carrier?)?   |
| **PNPLA1**    |                           |
| c.775+3A>T    | splice site (intron 5)?    |

*These mutations are either not in ExAC/dbSNP or have a minor allele frequency <0.008. "Silent mutation affecting a splice site in exon 14. c.4553G>A is previously reported. "No mutation was identified in the second allele by sequencing of the coding regions or by deletion/duplication analysis. "Immunohistochemistry showed deficient epidermal expression of the protein (result not shown).

DISCUSSION

This study, which describes the phenotypic and genotypic characteristics of an ethnically not completely homogenous cohort of 132 patients with ARCI living in 2 neighbouring countries (Sweden, population 9.5 million, and Denmark, population 5.5 million), represents one of the largest published so far. In our capacity as the national referral centres for ichthyosis in Denmark and Sweden, working in close alliance with existing patient organizations, we have reason to believe that our cohort represents > 90% of all patients with ARCI living in this region, yielding a prevalence figure of approximately 1:100,000 in the period 1997 to 2010. This figure is close to the estimates in many other countries, including a recent study from Spain (46).

Some notable features of our study are that: (i) all patients underwent a deep phenotyping and clinical sub-

minated the PI group, especially in patients subtyped as SICI or CIFS without proven birth as collodion baby, whereas SCL27A4 mutations were restricted to patients with IPS. Lastly, mutations in CYP4F22, PNPLA1 and (ABHD5) were associated with LI or CIE.

Although TGM1 mutations were primarily associated with the LI phenotype, their rare occurrence also in the CIE group and in occasional patients with BSI and SICI in the PI group is noteworthy. The association of TGM1 mutations with many different skin phenotypes is further illustrated by the previous finding of 2 different electron microscopy (EM) patterns in SC; type 1 (lipid droplets) and type 2 (cholesterol clefts) (22, 35, 49, 54). In contrast, NIPAL4 mutations are often associated with EM type 3 (bizarre membranes) (31) and can cause LI and CIE, but hardly any other ARCI phenotype. NIPAL4 mutations were the second most common cause of ARCI in Denmark (16%) and the third most common cause in Sweden (8%).

**ALOX12B** mutations are predominantly associated with the SICI subtype of PI (24, 55) and were more frequent in Swedish (13%) than in Danish (8%) patients, whereas **ALOX3** mutations were associated with both
ARCI-related genes. A comprehensive analysis of ichthyosis by including a large number of panels will open up the possibility of rapid diagnostic testing. The authors are grateful to the patients and families for their co-operation and the many Swedish and Danish dermatologists who have contributed to the study. Despite our extensive screening of 10 genes, we failed to establish a molecular diagnosis in approximately 15% of the patients (mainly in those cases with mild to moderate ichthyosis). This emphasizes the importance of recognizing other types of ichthyosis, such as IWC, IV and XLI, which especially in children could mimic ARCI, as illustrated by 6 excluded cases in our study (see Table II). Our finding of mutations in CYP4F22 and one in PNLP A1, in all cases associated with mild to moderate LI/CIE. No new SCL27A4 mutations causing IPS were identified in this study. The mutation details of the 5 included patients from Sweden and Denmark were discussed previously (25, 34), albeit then without providing any score data. A clustering of IPS in northern Sweden and Norway motivates its inclusion in the differential diagnosis of ARCI in Scandinavia, especially when examining adult cases with mild ichthyosis and no knowledge is available about the perinatal events (see footnote 3). It is also important to recognize other types of ichthyosis, such as IWC, IV and XLI, which especially in children might mimic ARCI, as illustrated by 6 excluded cases in our study (see Materials and Methods).

In conclusion, this study highlights how a deep phenotyping (clinical subtyping plus severity scoring) of ichthyosis and erythema can help clinicians and geneticists to preliminarily classify a case of ARCI and hence to decide which candidate genes should be prioritized in the search for a molecular diagnosis, i.e. the very basis for a proper genetic counselling and, presumably in the future, for a correct therapy. It is noteworthy that, despite our extensive screening of 10 genes, we failed to establish a molecular diagnosis in approximately 15% of the patients (mainly in those with the CIFS subtype of PI). This strongly suggests that new aetiologies remain to be discovered1. It is hoped that recent progress in NGS methods and gene panels will open up the possibility of rapid diagnostic analysis of ichthyosis by including a large number of ARCI-related genes.

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