CYTOGENETICS OF MALIGNANT EPITHELIAL CELLS AND
LYMPHOBLASTOID CELL LINES FROM NASOPHARYNGEAL
CARCINOMA

S. FINERTY, J. E. JARVIS, M. A. EPSTEIN, P. A. TRUMPER,
G. BALL AND B. C. GIOVANELLA*

From the Department of Pathology, University of Bristol Medical School, University Walk,
Bristol BS8 1TD, UK, and the *Cancer Research Laboratory, St Joseph Hospital, Houston
Texas 77002, USA

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Summary.—The malignant epithelial cells of nasopharyngeal carcinoma (NPC) and
cells of lines derived from the lymphoid cells which infiltrate this tumour have been
investigated cytotgenetically. Chromosome spreads of lymphoblastoid cells of lines
established from 7 different NPC biopsy specimens were examined after banding
staining. Banding was also applied to the epithelial tumour cells of 5 further biopsy
specimens freed from non-malignant infiltrating cells by passage through nude mice;
epithelial cell spreads were obtained by in vivo spindle arrest.

Five of the lymphoblastoid lines were found to be diploid, and 2 tetraploid; the
karyotypes were essentially normal. The squamous epithelial nature of the cells in
the nude-mouse-grown NPC tumours was established by light and electron-
microscopy, and 3 tumours were found to be near-triploid, and 2 near-diploid. The
cells of the near-triploid tumours contained grossly abnormal chromosomes but
those of the near-diploid tumours showed only relatively minor changes. Although
abnormalities were observed which were specific for cells from each individual
tumour, no discernible change was common to cells from all the tumours.

The cells of African Burkitt’s lymphoma (BL) are well known to carry the EB
viral genome (zur Hausen et al., 1970; Nonoyama et al., 1973) and both the
tumour cells and cultured cell lines derived from them show, in the large
majority of cases, a No. 14 chromosome abnormality (Manolov and Manolova,
1972). In contrast EB virus-carrying lymphoblastoid lines of non-malignant
origin (from blood of infectious-mononucleosis patients and normal seropositive
individuals, or after in vitro transformation by the virus of lymphocytes from sero-
negative donors) do not possess such a chromosome change (Jarvis et al., 1974;
Zech et al., 1976).

The epithelial tumour cells of undifferentiated nasopharyngeal carcinoma (NPC)
likewise carry the EB viral genome (Wolf, zur Hausen and Becker, 1973; Klein et al.,
1974). In addition, biopsy samples of this
tumour can give rise to EB virus-contain-
ing lymphoblastoid lines in vitro (de-Thé
et al., 1969, 1970; Epstein, Achong and
Mansell, 1971) which are derived from
the non-malignant lymphocytes invariably
present amongst the tumour cells (Shan-
mugaratnam, 1971). This material is
clearly suitable for cytogenetic analysis.
However, until quite recently it was not
possible to obtain the epithelial tumour
cells of NPC free of non-malignant
infiltrating cells for similar cytogenetic
studies.

It has now been shown that infiltrating
cells can be eliminated by passing NPC
biopsy samples through athymic nude
mice, in which only the malignant cells
will grow (Klein et al., 1974). Therefore,
preparations of human chromosomes from such material must come from NPC epithelial cells.

In view of the presence of the EB virus genome in NPC tumour cells it was considered of interest to look for any consistent pattern of abnormalities in their chromosomes, or changes similar to those of the EB virus-containing malignant cells of BL. It was also considered that the chromosomes of NPC-derived, lymphoblastoid cells should be studied in parallel in a similar manner.

The present paper reports cytogenetic observations on nude-mouse-grown malignant epithelial cells and on cultured lymphoblasts from NPC.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Passage of tumours in nude mice

Biopsy samples of NPC were transplanted into outbred nude mice backcrossed with Swiss high-fertility-strain breeders, as described elsewhere (Klein et al., 1974). Details of the various tumours are given in Table I. NPC-bearing mice were flown from Houston for the examination of chromosomes in the grafted tumours; where necessary the tumours were maintained by further passages in outbred nude mice backcrossed with inbred C3H/He-mg mice (originally provided by the MRC Laboratory Animals Centre, Carshalton, Surrey).

Lymphoblastoid cell lines

Origin.—Seven lymphoblastoid cell lines derived from NPC were kindly supplied by Dr Guy Blaudin de-Thé, International Agency for Research on Cancer, Lyon, France. The lines were established by methods already described (de-Thé et al., 1970) and their designation and origin are shown in Table I.

Cell culture.—The cells were grown in Eagle’s MEM with non-essential amino acids, 0·08% sodium bicarbonate, 10% foetal calf serum, and 100 u/ml penicillin and streptomycin added, in stoppered conical flasks at 37°C.

Preparation of chromosomes

Nude-mouse-grown tumours. —Tumour-bearing mice were given i.p. 4 μg/g body wt Colcemid solution (CIBA Laboratories, Horsham, Sussex) to induce in vivo spindle arrest (Visfeldt, Povlsen and Rygaard, 1972). The tumours were removed 3½ h later and were finely chopped in phosphate-buffered saline containing 0·125% trypsin (Wellcome Reagents Ltd, Beckenham). The chopped tumour material in the trypsin was then gently rocked at 37°C for 30 min to give a cell suspension, after which the trypsin was inactivated by adding an equal volume of medium with 20% foetal calf serum. Dry metaphase spreads were prepared and banded from the cell suspension as in earlier work (Jarvis et al., 1974).

Lymphoblastoid cell lines.—Chromosome spreads were prepared and banded in the

| Mouse-grown | Designation | Source   | Ref. No. | Sex | Patient's age | Tumour site    |
|-------------|-------------|----------|----------|-----|---------------|----------------|
| NPC         | HW          | Kenya    | 95410    | ♂   | 55            | Secondary cervical node |
| NPC         | MM          | Kenya    | 61764    | ♂   | 20            | Recurrent right orbit |
| NPC         | JG          | Kenya    | 81457    | ♂   | 51            | Primary          |
| NPC         | NM          | Kenya    | 67480    | ♂   | 12            | Secondary cervical node |
| NPC         | LOL         | Kenya    | —        | ♂   | 55            | Primary          |
| NPC-derived lymphoblasts | LY11       | Hong Kong | 69/297    | ♂   | 40            | Primary          |
| NPC-derived lymphoblasts | LY26       | Hong Kong | 69/702    | ♂   | 72            | Primary          |
| NPC-derived lymphoblasts | LY28       | Hong Kong | 69/943    | ♂   | 38            | Primary          |
| NPC-derived lymphoblasts | LY38       | Hong Kong | 69/1460   | ♂   | 27            | Primary          |
| NPC-derived lymphoblasts | LY61       | Hong Kong | 71/1381   | ♂   | 37            | Primary          |
| NPC-derived lymphoblasts | LY64       | Hong Kong | 71/496    | ♂   | 51            | Primary          |
| NPC-derived lymphoblasts | LY123      | Morocco  | IGR 13    | ♂   | 46            | Primary          |
same way as the nude-mouse-grown tumour-cell suspensions (Jarvis et al., 1974).

Examination of chromosomes

Some difficulty was encountered in obtaining large numbers of satisfactory spreads of nude-mouse-grown NPC epithelial tumour cells and it was therefore not possible to examine more than a maximum of 16 spreads from each NPC (Table II). For the lymphoblastoid lines, as many spreads as possible up to a maximum of 25 were examined from each (Table II).

All spreads were analysed for ploidy, chromosome rearrangements, and, in particular, for the presence or absence of abnormalities involving the No. 14 chromosome.

Light microscopy

Histological preparations of tumours were stained with haematoxylin and eosin.

Electronmicroscopy

Fragments of tumours removed from the nude mice were cut up into 1 mm cubes in 4% iced glutaraldehyde and were then post-fixed in osmium tetroxide, dehydrated in graded alcohol solutions, and embedded in epoxy resin. Sections were cut on a Porter-Blum microtome, contrast stained with uranyl acetate, and examined in a Philips 201 electron microscope.

Table II.—Cytogenetic Findings on Nude-mouse-grown Epithelial Tumour Cells and on Cultured Lymphoblastoid Cells from NPC

| Designation | No. of spreads examined | Modal No. | Chromosomal abnormalities |
|-------------|-------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| Epithelial cells |
| HW         | 15                      | 64        | Gross: several major translocations |
| MM         | 10                      | 40        | Minor |
| JG         | 5                       | 42        | Analysis not possible |
| NM         | 15                      | 76        | Gross: two long abnormal acrocentric chromosomes in all cells |
| LOL        | 1                       | 44        | Minor |
| Lymphoblastoid cells |
| LY11       | 15                      | 46        | Consistent secondary constriction near centromere of both No. 1 |
| LY26       | 7                       | 92        | One spread with one abnormal No. 14 having extra subterminal band |
| LY28       | 25                      | 46        | None |
| LY38       | 25                      | 92        | None |
| LY61       | 15                      | 46        | None |
| LY64       | 15                      | 46        | None |
| LY123      | 15                      | 46        | One spread with one abnormal No. 14 having extra light-staining terminal region |

RESULTS

General observations

The nude-mouse-grown NPC tumours examined in sections in the light microscope were found to consist almost entirely of epithelial-like tumour cells, with only minimal evidence of supporting stroma; infiltrating lymphocytes were not present (Fig. 1). Electronmicroscopy of tumour material confirmed the epithelial nature of the cells, which showed desmosomes and cytoplasmic bundles of keratin fibrils varying in amount from tumour to tumour (Fig. 2).

Cytogenetics

Epithelial tumour cells.—The chromosome spreads from JG were unsatisfactory and although chromosome numbers could be counted, analysis was not possible.

As regards ploidy, 2 tumours were found to be near-diploid (Table II, JG and MM) with the remainder near-triploid apart from one near-diploid cell in NM (Table II). This NM cell was abnormal, with some chromosomes missing and others of uncertain origin (Fig. 3). The near-diploid cells composing MM did not give high quality spreads, but were clearly without gross abnormalities.

The near-triploid cells from NM, HW,
and LOL were all highly complex, with major abnormalities of uncertain origin. In the case of NM, a constant abnormality in the form of 2 long acrocentric chromosomes was observed (Fig. 4) but this, of course, was absent from the single near-diploid spread mentioned above. In addition, some near-triploid NM cells contained chromosome fragments and various “C group” chromosomes which could not be assigned a specific number. HW spreads were considerably more abnormal, with several gross translocations (Fig. 5); clear D-group chromosomes were sparse. Major abnormalities in the LOL spreads included 2 regular, unidentifiable, grossly abnormal chromosomes (Fig. 6), fragments in every cell, and translocations giving long chromosomes in some cells.

No characteristic abnormality of the No. 14 chromosome was found in any analysable spread from the epithelial tumour cells, nor was there any other abnormality consistently shared by cells from the various different tumours.
Fig. 3.—Spread of the near-diploid NM cell. The No. 14 chromosomes (arrows) are clearly normal. ×1850.

Fig. 4.—Near-triploid NM cell. Two long abnormal acrocentric chromosomes are indicated. ×1000.

Fig. 5.—Spread of an HW cell. Several gross translocations typical of this tumour can be seen (arrows). ×1000.
Fig. 6.—Spread of a LOL cell. Two abnormal chromosomes (arrows) were found consistently in this tumour. ×1450.

Fig. 7.—Spread of the cell from the diploid lymphoblastoid LY123 line showing one No. 14 chromosome with lightly stained extra region after the terminal band (arrow). ×1700.
Lymphoblastoid cells.—Line LY26 was difficult to investigate since it invariably gave poor-quality spreads; only 7 spreads out of the large number examined were suitable for analysis.

A diploid cell population was found in the majority of the lines, with only 2 lines (LY26, LY38) composed of tetraploid cells (Table II). With the exception of one line, most cells showed a normal karyotype; the chromosomal abnormalities and deletions present in rare cells did not follow a consistent pattern. The exceptional line (LY11) had a secondary constriction near the centromere of both No. 1 chromosomes in every cell. In addition, one tetraploid spread in LY26 showed an abnormal D14 chromosome with an extra subterminal band, with the other D14 chromosomes being normal, and a further single spread in the diploid LY123 line contained a D14 chromosome with an extra lightly stained region beyond the terminal band, again accompanied by a normal D14 chromosome (Fig. 7). The No. 14 chromosomes of all other cells were normal.

DISCUSSION

The characteristic abnormality in the No. 14 chromosome of Burkitt lymphoma cells in biopsy samples and after culture (Manolov & Manolova, 1972) seems to be unrelated to EB virus, since it has been shown to be lacking in EB virus-carrying lymphoid cells from other sources (Jarvis et al., 1974; Zech et al., 1976). This concept has been confirmed by studies of somatic cell hybrids made between mouse cells and EB virus-carrying human lymphoid cells, which have shown that after the preferential loss of some human chromosome expression of the EB virus nuclear antigen (EBNA) (Reedman and Klein, 1973) was lost despite the continuing presence of the human D14 chromosome, indicating that the viral genome was not associated with this particular chromosome (Glaser et al., 1975).

It is now known that abnormalities of the No. 14 chromosome, identical or similar to that seen in BL, are present in the tumour cells of a variety of different lymphoid malignancies (Zech et al., 1976; Wurster-Hill et al., 1973; Prigogina and Fleishman, 1975; Fukuhara, Shirakawa and Uchino, 1976; Kaiser-McCaw et al., 1977) and it would seem that No. 14 chromosome abnormalities are quite commonly related to neoplastic change in lymphoid cells in vivo in a general way.

This view is supported by studies on ataxia telangiectasia, in which it was possible in one patient to trace a clone of cells containing a No. 14 chromosomal abnormality from a pre-malignant to a malignant state (Kaiser-McCaw et al., 1975, 1977).

In view of the correlation of No. 14 chromosome abnormalities with lymphoid malignancy rather than with the presence of the EB viral genome, it is not surprising that such abnormalities have not been found in the NPC epithelial tumour cells studied here (Table II). Indeed this observation provides further confirmation that the abnormality is not directly related to EB virus-associated malignancy.

When the above conclusions are considered together with the results of earlier studies showing an absence of a No. 14 chromosome abnormality in lymphoid cells of non-malignant origin, despite the presence of the EB viral genome (Jarvis et al., 1974; Zech et al., 1976), it is also not surprising that the cells of the NPC-derived lymphoblastoid lines lacked a consistent No. 14 chromosome abnormality (Table II). For the lymphocytes in NPC tumours have been clearly recognised as non-malignant infiltrating cells (Shanmugaratnam, 1971). As regards the origin of the lymphoblastoid lines from non-malignant infiltrating cells, although many of these are known to be T cells, B lymphocytes are also present (Yata et al., 1974; Jondal and Klein, 1975). These must include a few carrying the EB viral genome as a latent infection, since such cells occur in seropositive individuals (see Epstein and Achong, 1977); It is these latently infected cells which, when re-
moved in NPC biopsy material and cultured, give rise to the virus-carrying lymphoblastoid lines (de-Thé et al., 1970; Epstein et al., 1971) as occurs with EB viral genome-containing lymphocytes from any other source (see Epstein and Achong, 1977).

The rare changes which were observed here in No. 14 chromosomes of lymphoid cells (Table II) are not considered to be significant, since they were only found in one cell of each of 2 lines, and differed both from one another and from the more consistent abnormalities of lymphoid tumours (Manolov and Manolova, 1972; Zech et al., 1976; Wurster-Hill et al., 1973; Prigogina and Fleischman, 1975; Fukuhara et al., 1976). They should perhaps be regarded as further examples of the general instability of the No. 14 chromosome in human lymphoid cells, since other No. 14 chromosome changes have been rarely found in such cells after culture in vitro (Welch and Lee, 1975; Beatty-DeSana, Hoggard and Cooleged, 1975; Hecht et al., 1975).

Apart from the absence of No. 14 chromosome changes in the epithelial cells, the chromosomal abnormalities found in these cells were clearly more complex in the near-triploid than in the near-diploid tumours (Table II). It is not possible to say for either group whether the abnormalities were present in the original material taken from the patient, or whether they arose during passage in the nude mice. However, it seems likely that the gross changes found in the near-triploid cells arose during progression from diploidy to triploidy, since the single near-diploid cell of NM was less abnormal than the NM near-triploid cells (Table II). Progression from diploidy to polyploidy is often associated with the acquisition of chromosomal abnormalities, for example long-established BL cell lines tend to give near-tetraploid spreads with a number of chromosome changes, whereas newly established lines are generally near-diploid with few chromosomal rearrangements (Jarvis et al., 1974).

In any event, the present findings demonstrate that nude-mouse-grown NPC epithelial tumour cells of whatever ploidy do not clearly show a characteristic marker-chromosome change, and that the varied gross abnormalities of the near-triploid cells (HW, NM and LOL, Table II) do not present any consistent pattern. In addition, no apparent correlation has been seen with the present small series of tumours between the number of chromosome rearrangements and the origin of the material in question from either a primary or a secondary tumour (Tables I and II).

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