Neutralizing Antibody to Interleukin 4 Induces Systemic Protection and T Helper Type 1-associated Immunity in Murine Candidiasis

By Luigina Romani, Antonella Mencacci, Ursula Grohmann, Simonetta Mocci, Paolo Mosci, Paolo Puccetti, and Francesco Bistoni

From the Department of Experimental Medicine and Biochemical Sciences, University of Perugia, Perugia 06100, Italy

Summary

An interleukin 4 (IL-4)-specific monoclonal antibody (mAb) was administered to mice infected systemically with the yeast \textit{Candida albicans}, and the animals were monitored for mortality, development of delayed-type hypersensitivity, production of antibodies of different isotypes, release of IL-2, IL-4, IL-6, and interferon \(\gamma\) (IFN-\(\gamma\)) in vitro by splenic CD4\(^+\) lymphocytes, and levels of IL-4 and IFN-\(\gamma\) mRNA in these cells. Neutralization of IL-4 by three weekly injections of mAb in several independent experiments resulted in an overall cure rate of 81% versus 0% of controls. Cure was associated with efficient clearance of the yeast from infected organs and histologic evidence of disease resolution, detection of strong T helper type 1 (Th1) responses, and establishment of long-lasting protective immunity. Soon after infection, and as a result of the first or second injection of mAb, there was a decrease in IL-4 mRNA in CD4\(^+\) cells, which was accompanied by an increase in the levels of IFN-\(\gamma\)-specific transcripts. Our data thus indicate that the production of IL-4 by Th2 cells may limit Th1-associated protective immunity in murine candidiasis.

Recent evidence indicates that, early after exposure of mice, innate defense mechanisms are the primary means by which proliferation and growth of \textit{Candida albicans} are held in check in the absence of underlying immunity, whereas later in the course of infection, clearance of the yeast is regulated, at least in part, by T cell–mediated immune responses (1). Long-term colonization of adult mice in the absence of immunosuppressive and antimicrobial treatment has been achieved by intragastric colonization of infant (2) or germ-free (3) mice, or by systemic infection with attenuated yeast cells of variant strains (4, 5). These studies have demonstrated that both specific cell-mediated immunity (6–8) and phagocytic cell activity (4, 9, 10) are instrumental in the optimal expression of acquired anti-\textit{Candida} resistance. In particular, in a systemic \textit{C. albicans} infection model, evidence has been obtained that preferential production of Th1 or Th2 cytokines may underlie the development of protective vs. nonprotective immunity, respectively, as elicited by concomitant chronic infection with attenuated yeast cells (11).

The role of cytokines in cutaneous lesions of murine leishmaniasis has been demonstrated by experiments in vivo, in which cytokine activities were blocked by administration of anticytokine mAbs. Anti-IFN-\(\gamma\) treatment in vivo will block the effector functions mediated by endogenous IFN-\(\gamma\) in immunized mice (7) and Th2 cells may be activated and functionally interact with Th1 lymphocytes in candidal infections (11), we have investigated the effect of administration of anti-IL-4 mAb on antifungal resistance of systemically infected mice. Anti-IL-4 therapy initiated at the time of infection resulted in cure of a high percentage of mice with establishment of protective immunity. Cure was associated with the detection of Th1 responses, including strong delayed-type footpad reactions and low serum IgE. There were also early and remarkable changes in Th1 and Th2 cytokine production in vitro by CD4\(^+\) cells and cytokine mRNA expression in these cells.

Materials and Methods

\textbf{Mice.} Hybrid (BALB/cCr \hspace{1em} DBA/2Cr)F\(_1\) (CD2F\(_1\)) and inbred BALB/c mice were obtained from Charles River Breeding
Laboratories (Calco, Milan, Italy). Mice of both sexes, ranging in age from 2 to 4 mo, were used.

Yeast and Infections. The origin, characteristics, and growth conditions of the highly pathogenic C. albicans (CA-6) strain used in this study have already been described in detail (6, 7). For infection, yeast cells were harvested by low-speed centrifugation (1,000 g), washed twice in PBS, and diluted to the desired density to be injected intravenously into mice in a volume of 500 μl. Quantification of yeast cells in organs of infected mice was performed by a plate dilution method, using Sabouraud dextrose agar (6, 7), and results (means ± SEM) were expressed as the number of CFU per organ. For histology, tissues were fixed in formalin, sectioned, and stained with periodic acid-Schiff's reagent or hematoxylin/eosin.

Treatment of Mice with anti-IL-4 mAb. The 11B11 hybridoma line, producing rat IgG1 anti-IL-4 mAb (15), was grown as ascites in pristane-primed irradiated BALB/c mice, and the ascites fluid was passed over a desalting column (10DG; Bio-Rad Laboratories, Richmond, CA) before antibody purification by means of affinity chromatography with protein A-Sepharose CL-4B (Pharmacia, Uppsala, Sweden). Protein concentration was determined by measuring the OD at 280 nm. Beginning 2 d before infection, mice received 1 mg purified 11B11 mAb in 250 μl PBS intraperitoneally once per week for 3 wk. Control mice received equivalent amounts of affinity-purified rat IgG1 (Zymed Laboratories, San Francisco, CA).

Delayed-type Hypersensitivity (DTH) Assay. A direct assay system for measuring the DTH response to cell surface antigens was employed (6) in which heat-inactivated CA-6 cells (2 x 10⁶/40 μl of pyrogen-free saline) were inoculated into the footpads of control or yeast-infected mice. The DTH reaction was recorded 24 h later by weighing the footpad as a measure of swelling, and the results were expressed as the increase in footpad weight (right hind) over that of the saline-injected (left hind) counterpart. Data are the means ± SEM of six to eight mice per group.

Selection of CD4⁺ Cells. Production of Culture Supernatants Containing Cytokine Activity, and Cytokine Assays. CD4⁺ lymphocytes were positively selected from pools of spleen cells by means of a panning procedure using anti-murine CD4 mAb GK1.5, which resulted in a >95% pure population on FACS® analysis (Becton Dickinson & Co., Mountain View, CA) (6, 7). Supernatants from mixed lymphocyte Candida cultures were obtained by culturing CD4⁺ lymphocytes in the presence of yeast cells and accessory macrophages (6, 11). Source and characteristics of the anticytokine antibody reagents used in IFN-γ, IL-2, IL-4, and IL-6 assays were as described (6, 7, 11). Briefly, cell supernatants were tested for their concentration of IFN-γ by two-site ELISA using rat anti-murine IFN-γ mAb R4-6A2 as the primary antibody and biotinylated monoclonal AN-18.17.24 as the secondary antibody. IL-2 and IL-4 were measured using the HT2 T lymphocyte line that proliferates in response to either of these cytokines (16). mAbs S4B6 (anti-IL-2) and 11B11 (anti-IL-4), at neutralizing concentrations, were used to establish monospecificity. IL-6 activity was determined by its capacity to support the growth of the murine IL-6-dependent cell line 7TD1 (17). Proliferation was assayed using the tetrazolium-based colorimetric assay. All cytokine titers were expressed as units per milliliter, calculated by reference to standard curves constructed with known amounts of the recombinant cytokines (Genentech, Inc., South San Francisco, CA).

Antibody Assay. A micro-ELISA procedure was used to quantify specific antibodies in the sera of yeast-infected mice (11). The assay involved coating the microtiter plate wells with heat-killed CA-6 cells, addition of appropriate dilutions of test antisera (from a pool of two to three mice per group), and a further reaction with alkaline phosphatase–conjugated rabbit anti-mouse IgG, IgGl, and IgG2a (Zymed Laboratories), or with biotinylated rat monoclonal anti-mouse IgG (Sanbio by Biological Products, Uden, The Netherlands) followed by an avidin–alkaline phosphatase conjugate (Vector Laboratories, Burlingame, CA). After addition of the substrate solution, the OD of triplicate samples was read with an ELISA reader, using a 405-nm filter.

Results

Effect of In Vivo Neutralization of IL-4 on the Course of Inoculation Candidiasis. In six independent experiments, CD2F1 mice received three weekly injections of anti-IL-4 (11B11) or control antibodies starting 2 d before intravenous challenge with different numbers (5–50 x 10⁶) of CA-6 blastospores. While all control mice developed progressive, disseminated fatal candidiasis with median survival times of 5–18 d depending on challenge dose, the overall survival rate of anti-IL-4-treated mice (totalling 54) was 81%. The results of three representative experiments are summarized in Table 1. In experiments not reported here, we also found that the beneficial effects of IL-4 depletion were essentially lost when the size of the challenge inoculum was such (e.g., 10⁶ cells or more) as to result in animals' death within the first 24–96 h of infection. However, once cured by anti-IL-4 treatment, survivor mice would consistently resist challenge with 10⁶ CA-6 cells as performed 12 wk after primary infection (Table 1).

Quantitative cultures of kidneys and brains from control and anti-IL-4-treated mice were established 6 h and 1, 2, or 3 wk after injection of 7.5 x 10⁶ CA-6 cells. Fig. 1 summarizes the results of one experiment representative of three, and shows that mAb treatment was associated with a dramatic reduction in fungal load in the organs of infected mice. At 3 wk, when no survivors were found in the control group (median survival time of 14.5 d), mice on anti-IL-4 therapy had almost completely cleared yeast cells from their organs. Examination of the kidneys from these mice provided histologic evidence of disease resolution (Fig. 2).
Table 1. Effect of Anti-IL-4 Treatment on Mouse Resistance to Inoculation Candidiasis

| Challenge dose | Treatment | MST | D/T |
|---------------|-----------|-----|-----|
| $5 \times 10^6$ | None      | 5.5 | 8/8 |
| $5 \times 10^6$ | Rat IgG1  | 5.5 | 8/8 |
| $5 \times 10^6$ | mAb 11B11 | >60 | 3/9*|
| $10^6$         | None      | 10  | 8/8 |
| $10^6$         | Rat IgG1  | 10  | 10/10|
| $10^6$         | mAb 11B11 | >60 | 2/10|
| $5 \times 10^4$ | None      | 16.5| 8/8 |
| $5 \times 10^4$ | Rat IgG1  | 15  | 8/8 |
| $5 \times 10^4$ | mAb 11B11 | >60 | 0/8*|

Mice challenged with various doses of CA-6 cells received anti-IL-4 (11B11) or control (rat IgG1) treatment. Median survival times (MST) and number of dead mice at 60 d over total animals tested (D/T) were recorded.

* Survivors resisted subsequent challenge with $10^6$ yeast cells (see text).

Effect of Anti-IL4 Treatment on Footpad Reaction to the Yeast. To assess the possible effect of anti-IL-4 treatment on development of DTH, mice challenged with $7.5 \times 10^4$ CA-6 cells, and treated with control or 11B11 antibodies, were injected intra-footpad with heat-inactivated blastospores 1, 2, or 3 wk after infection. The increase in footpad weight was measured 24 h later (Fig. 3A). Only mice receiving anti-IL4 therapy and surviving CA-6 challenge developed significant footpad responses to the yeast. In addition, purified CD4+ lymphocytes from cured mice could adoptively transfer DTH reactivity to naive mice challenged intra-footpad with CA-6 cells 24 h after lymphocyte transfer (Fig. 3B). Upon systemic challenge with viable CA-6, enhanced clearance of the yeast from infected organs could be documented in the adoptively transferred mice (data not shown).

Effect of Anti-IL4 Treatment on Serum Levels of Candida-specific Antibodies. We next measured the levels of yeast-specific antibody levels in sera of mice infected with C. albicans and treated with control or 11B1 antibodies. At 1, 2, and 3 wk after infection of $7.5 \times 10^6$ CA-6 cells, sera were collected and assayed for their contents of total IgG, Ig2a, IgG1, and IgE. Fig. 4 shows that, in the 2 wk preceding their death, control mice exhibited higher IgG1 levels and lower IgG2a levels in comparison with IL-4-depleted animals. Significant levels of IgE were also found. However, anti-IL-4 treatment of infected mice resulted in complete suppression of IgE production.

Effect of Anti-IL4 Treatment on Cytokine Production In Vitro. To assess the effect of IL-4 depletion on cytokine release in vitro by purified CD4+ lymphocytes from infected mice, mixed lymphocyte yeast cell cultures were established in the presence of accessory cells at 1, 2, and 3 wk after injection of $7.5 \times 10^6$ CA-6 cells. Appropriate controls included CD4+ cells from intact donors and yeast-primed CD4+ lymphocytes cultured with accessory cells but no fungal antigen. After 24 h of incubation, culture supernatants were assayed for their contents of IFN-γ, IL-2, IL-4, and IL-6. Fig. 5 shows that anti-IL-4 treatment resulted in enhanced production of Th1 cytokines throughout the 3-wk observation period. In contrast, mice treated with control antibodies predominantly produced IL4 and IL-6 during the 2 wk preceding their death.

Expression of IL4 and IFN-γ Genes in IL-4-depleted Mice. To examine the patterns of cytokine gene transcription in IL-4-depleted mice, we extracted total RNA from CD4+ cells recovered at different times after infection, reverse transcribed the polyadenylated mRNA to obtain cDNA, and detected cDNA by PCR with IL-4- and IFN-γ-specific primers. PCR products were verified by probing samples transferred to a nylon membrane with a 32P-labeled internal oligonucleotide. To provide meaningful comparisons between control and IL-4-depleted mice, the cDNA samples were normalized to the β-actin PCR product, a marker for all cells. Fig. 6 shows the results obtained with RNA preparations from two independent experiments, each involving challenge of control and anti-IL-4-treated mice with $7.5 \times 10^6$ yeast cells, and harvest of CD4+ lymphocytes 3 and 10 d after infection. Although the PCR products were not quantitated, the results apparently indicate that decreased IL-4 mRNA levels were present in IL-4-depleted mice starting from 3 d postinfection, the decrease representing a manifold difference on day 10 (after the second mAb injection). A reciprocal increase in IFN-γ-specific transcripts was apparently observed as a result of IL-4 depletion, with substantially higher levels of message on day 10.

Discussion

Although superficial and systemic mycoses in humans are associated with different predisposing conditions (20), one...
feature common to all forms of candidiasis is that the intrinsic candidacidal activity of granulocytes and macrophages (the major effector cell types) is rather limited (I), and that full expression of their function is contingent upon augmentation by cytokines released by antigen-specific and nonspecific cells (21, 22). In addition, both specific and nonspecific modulation of immune responses have been reported as a consequence of C. albicans infection in mice. Garner et al. (23) showed that mannan administered intravenously to naive mice induced a population of suppressor T lymphocytes that, when transferred to immunized mice, suppressed antigen-specific DTH responses. Ashman (24) suggested that active down-regulation of protective immunity might occur in mice that are genetically susceptible to candidiasis and are characterized by high antibody levels and poor DTH responses. Our laboratory has recently found that activation of Th2 cells occurs in mice infected with variants of the yeast that establish persistent colonization yet do not elicit protective immunity, and CD4+ cells from these mice were found to suppress Candida-specific DTH responses (11).

In the present study we administered an anti-IL-4 mAb during the course of an otherwise lethal infection with the yeast. Provided the challenge inoculum did not result in short-term mortality, a vast majority (~80%) of the anti-IL-4-treated mice began to actively eliminate yeast cells from their organs, resolved their infections, and demonstrated Th1 responses. In contrast, mice treated with control antibody experienced progressive, disseminated fatal candidiasis, and were characterized by weak or absent footpad responses, and higher IgG and IgE levels. The protective effect of anti-IL-4 treatment required the antibody to be given within approximately the first 2–3 d after infection, under which conditions a single antibody injection was almost as effective as the weekly administration regimen employed in this study (Romani et al., manuscript in preparation). Splenic CD4+ lymphocytes from infected and IL-4-depleted mice harvested at 1, 2, and
Figure 3. DTH in yeast-infected mice treated with anti-IL-4 mAb (A) or in mice adoptively transferred with CD4+ lymphocytes from these animals (B). (A) At different times after CA-6 challenge, mice receiving 11B11 (■) or control (□) antibodies were injected intra-footpad with inactivated yeast cells 24 h before measurement of their footpad response. As a negative control, uninfected mice (c) were assayed. (B) Prospective recipients of an intra-footpad yeast challenge received an intravenous injection of 10^7 CD4+ lymphocytes from 2-wk-infected mice treated with 11B11 (■) or control (□) antibodies. CD4+ cells from intact mice (c) were also transferred. *Significant difference (p < 0.01) from value obtained in control mice (c), as determined by Student's t test. Essentially the same results were obtained in two additional experiments.

3 wk postinfection produced high IFN-γ and IL-2 levels, and substantially reduced amounts of Th2 cytokines, IL-4, and IL-6. At 3 and 10 d postinfection, CD4+ cells from mice treated with anti-IL-4 mAb exhibited reciprocal changes in IL4 and IFN-γ mRNA expression that represented mani-

Figure 4. Serum Ig levels in yeast-infected mice treated with 11B11 (■) or control (□) antibodies. At 1, 2, and 3 wk after injection of 7.5 × 10^4 CA-6 blastospores, sera were assayed for total IgG or IgG2a, IgG1, and IgE titers. Values represent the means ± SEM of three experiments. Specific antibody levels in uninfected mice were negligible or undetectable.

Figure 5. Th1 and Th2 cytokine production in yeast-infected mice treated with 11B11 (■) or control (□) antibodies. Mixed CD4+ lymphocyte yeast cell cultures were established at 1, 2, and 3 wk postinfection, and supernatants were assayed for IFN-γ, IL-2, IL-4, and IL-6 contents. Each value represents the mean ± SEM of four to six separate experiments, each involving replicate measurements. Cytokine production in control cultures (see text) was consistently negligible.

Figure 6. IL-4 and IFN-γ mRNA expression in CD4+ cells revealed by PCR normalized to β-actin. RNA was isolated from lymphocytes of control (C) or 11B11 mAb-treated mice at 3 and 10 d after infection, and the resulting cDNA was used in the PCR with cytokine-specific primers. After amplification, 10 µl of the reaction mix was removed, analyzed by 1.5% agarose gel electrophoresis, and visualized by ethidium bromide staining. The assay was performed with two different RNA preparations, and a second assay with the same RNA preparations gave analogous results. m, marker track (kilobase ladder consisting of pBR322 DNA cut with HaeIII); N, no DNA added to the amplification mix during PCR.
fold differences with respect to control lymphocytes on day 10 postinfection.

In murine cutaneous leishmaniasis, the early and permanent conversion of nonhealer into healer mice induced by antí-IL-4 treatment (13, 25), and the reversion of the effect by anti-IFN-γ (14), indicates that the alteration of the disease outcome is primarily the consequence of changes in the basic nature of the T cell response, with a shift from a predominant Th2 to a Th1 response. A similar mechanism of anti-IL-4 activity might apply to mouse infection with C. albicans, although in the present study we have not examined the role of T cell–derived IFN-γ in the efficacy of anti-IL-4 therapy. The striking difference in IL-4 mRNA observed at 10 d could indicate that IL-4 depletion leads to blockade of Th2 cell expansion. Because IL-4 is required for maturation of CD4+ precursors to the Th2 phenotype, neutralization of this factor would be expected to block both Th2 expansion and the subsequent formation of Th2-derived factors, such as IL-4 and IL-10, that limit protective Th1 responses (14, 26). In addition, the increase in IFN-γ mRNA might indicate, and favor, the development of Th1 reactivity, as IFN-γ is crucially involved in the initial phases of Th responses in vivo (27). Finally, neutralization of IL-4 could further benefit the infected host by blocking the adverse effects of IL-4 on macrophage activation (28) and killing of phagocytosed yeast cells.

Elevated IgE, IgA, and IgG responses to the yeast show an inverse relationship with delayed skin responses in atopics (29), in women suffering from recurrent Candida vaginitis (20, 30), and in patients with chronic mucocutaneous candidiasis (20). This suggests that humoral and cell-mediated immune responses to Candida in humans may be reciprocally regulated. Our present data that neutralization of endogenous IL-4 has therapeutic value in a murine model of systemic candidiasis could provide a means for improving our understanding of the host/parasite relationship, and also could offer the basis for attempting new strategies in the treatment of human candidiasis.

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Address correspondence to F. Bistoni, Section of Microbiology, Department of Experimental Medicine and Biochemical Sciences, Via del Giochetto, University of Perugia, Perugia 06100, Italy.

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