CASE REPORT

Molecular biological analysis in a patient with multiple lung adenocarcinomas

Tomoshige Wakayama1*, Hirokuni Hirata1*, Shunsuke Suka1, Kozo Sato1, Masamitsu Tatewaki1, Ryosuke Souma1, Hideyuki Satoh1, Motohiko Tamura2, Yuji Matsumura2, Hiroki Imada3, Kumiya Sugiyama3, Masafumi Arima4, Kazuhiro Kurasawa4, Takeshi Fukuda5 & Yasutsugu Fukushima1

1 Department of Respiratory Medicine and Clinical Immunology, Dokkyo Medical University Saitama Medical Center, Saitama, Japan
2 Department of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery, Dokkyo Medical University Saitama Medical Center, Saitama, Japan
3 Department of Pathology, Dokkyo Medical University Saitama Medical Center, Saitama, Japan
4 Department of Rheumatology, Dokkyo Medical University, Tochigi, Japan
5 Tochigi Medical Center Shimotsuga, Tochigi, Japan

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Correspondence
Hirokuni Hirata, Department of Respiratory Medicine and Clinical Immunology, Dokkyo Medical University Saitama Medical Center, 2-1-50 Minamikoshigaya, Koshigaya-shi, Saitama 343-8555, Japan.
Tel: +81 48 965 1111
Fax: +81 48 965 1238
Email: hirokuni@dokkyomed.ac.jp

*Dr. Wakayama and Dr. Hirata contributed equally to this work.

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Abstract
The utility of molecular biological analysis in lung adenocarcinoma has been demonstrated. Herein we report a rare case presenting as multiple lung adenocarcinomas with four different EGFR gene mutations detected in three lung tumors. After opacification was detected by routine chest X-ray, the patient, a 64-year-old woman, underwent chest computed tomography which revealed a right lung segment S4 ground-glass nodule (GGN). Follow-up computed tomography revealed a 42 mm GGN nodule with a 26 mm nodule (S6) and a 20 mm GGN (S10). Histopathology of resected specimens from the right middle and lower lobes revealed all three nodules were adenocarcinomas. Four EGFR mutations were detected; no three tumors had the same mutations. Molecular biological analysis is a promising tool for the diagnosis of primary tumors in patients with multiple lung carcinomas of the same histotype, enabling appropriate treatment.

Introduction
Adenocarcinoma is the most prevalent histotype of primary lung cancer (PLC), accounting for approximately 60% of all lung cancer cases.1 Genetic abnormalities in pulmonary adenocarcinoma include ALK fusion genes, proto-oncogene tyrosine-protein kinase 1 fusion genes, and EGFR mutations.2 EGFR mutations are common in East Asians, women, and non-smokers.3 A 2015 large-scale meta-analysis conducted in Japan reported that 45% (range 21–68%) of Japanese patients with lung adenocarcinoma harbored EGFR mutations.4

In cases of multiple lung cancer of the same histotype, it can be difficult to determine the primary tumor. This report describes a rare case of multiple primary lung adenocarcinomas where different EGFR gene mutations were detected from three tumors in the same right lung field. This case highlights the utility of molecular biological analysis in multiple lung cancers of the same histotype.

Case report
A 64-year-old woman underwent chest computed tomography (CT) after opacification was detected on chest X-ray during a routine health check. CT revealed a 22 mm ground-glass nodule (GGN) in segment S4 of the right lung, but the nodule was monitored without intervention.
She was referred to our department when another routine chest X-ray in 2016 showed enlargement of the GGN. Chest CT revealed a 42 mm irregular part-solid GGN with well-defined margins adjacent to the interlobar region in the area where the right S4 GGN was detected two years earlier (Fig 1a). The right lung showed a new 26 mm solid nodule with pleural indentation in S6 (Fig 1b) and a new 20 mm GGN in S10 (Fig 1c) with no hilar or mediastinal lymphadenopathy.

The patient had no remarkable past medical or occupational history and no history of smoking. Adenocarcinoma was diagnosed based on transbronchial biopsy of the S4 GGN and S6 nodule. Positron emission tomography and head magnetic resonance imaging were performed to detect systemic metastases, and revealed no findings suggestive of extrapulmonary metastasis. These results could indicate triple lung cancer (cT2aN0M0), minimally invasive adenocarcinoma of the acinar and papillary type, and the S10 tumor as minimally invasive adenocarcinoma.5 We considered the possibility of using this classification (a modification of the WHO classification), as our diagnostic criteria for primary lung adenocarcinoma, so we screened for EGFR using specimens from each of the three tumors. Four EGFR mutations were detected, and no three tumors had the same mutations (Table 1). ALK fusion genes were not detected in any of the tumors by immunohistochemical (IHC) analysis. Each tumor had different EGFR mutations and each was


Table 1 Results of screening for EGFR mutations with PCR using surgical specimens from each of the three tumors

| EGFR mutations          | S4    | S6    | S10   |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Exon 18 6719X           | ND    | ND    | Detected |
| Exon 19 deletions       | ND    | Detected | ND    |
| Exon 20 57 681          | ND    | ND    | ND    |
| Exon 20 insertions      | ND    | ND    | ND    |
| Exon 20 T790M           | ND    | ND    | ND    |
| Exon 21 L858R           | Detected | ND    | ND    |
| Exon 21 L861Q           | ND    | ND    | Detected |

ND, not detected.

classified as a primary tumor. Tumors were staged individually according to the WHO Classification as pT2aN0M0 (stage IB S4 tumor), pT1bN0M0 (stage IA S6 tumor), and pT1aN0M0 (stage IA S10 tumor). Adjuvant chemotherapy was deemed necessary for the stage IB tumor according to postoperative treatment guidelines; oral tegafur/uracil was initiated. The cancer has not recurred 21 months after resection. Written informed consent for this publication was obtained from the patient.

**Discussion**

The most common type of EGFR mutation is exon 19 deletion, followed by codon 858 of exon 21 (L858R) point mutation. These two mutations account for 90% of all EGFR mutations observed. We detected these mutations in the S4 (exon 21 L858R) and S6 (exon 19 deletion) tumors in our case. Other rare mutations include codon 719 of exon 18 (G719X) point mutation, and exon 20 (S768I, insertion, T790M) and exon 21 L861Q insertions. We detected a rare compound EGFR mutation comprising exons 18 G719X and 21 L861Q in the S10 tumor in our case. Kobayashi et al. reported that 13.75% of 79 patients with non-small cell lung cancer with EGFR mutations had two EGFR mutations, and 1.25% had a compound mutation comprising exons 18 G719X and 21 L861Q. Few reports have described three lung tumors with four different EGFR mutations, as observed in the present case. Most recently, Rafael et al. detected seven bilateral adenocarcinomas, with genetic analysis of three right lung tumors revealing two different KRAS mutations in two of the tumors and EGFR mutation in the third. Yamazaki et al. reported the association of synchronous multiple lung cancer diagnosed as adenocarcinoma with EGFR mutation in 72.2% of cases, consistent with the present case. Important characteristics of driver mutations in lung adenocarcinoma have been reported. The majority of driver mutations described in lung adenocarcinoma are mutually exclusive clonal events. In our case, we think that the driver mutations were present at three places in the lung tissue almost simultaneously. Independently arising adenocarcinomas are expected to have different mutational profiles, whereas metastatic tumors are expected to share the same driver mutation. Many lung adenocarcinomas exhibit varying admixtures of histological features and are thus subclassified into histotypes.

The 2015 WHO Classification broadly classifies lung adenocarcinomas into preinvasive lesions, minimally invasive adenocarcinoma, invasive adenocarcinoma, and invasive adenocarcinoma variant. In our case, two tumors were minimally invasive adenocarcinomas (lepidic pattern predominant and acinar/papillary pattern predominant) and one was invasive adenocarcinoma (papillary pattern predominant). EGFR mutations occur more frequently in tumors with papillary and lepidic growth patterns, KRAS mutations in mucinous carcinomas, and ALK fusion genes in tumors with solid and acinar growth patterns with signet ring cell features. Lung adenocarcinoma is a highly heterogeneous disease, and comprehensive histologic subtyping cannot be used to reliably predict the underlying genetic differences among tumors. Thus, Stella et al. recommend extensive molecular profiling in cases with multiple lung cancers, as it might clarify the association between the lung lesions found. Several investigators have reported the utility of molecular biological analysis for diagnosis and treatment in multiple primary cancers, not only in lung cancer but also breast, gastric, hepatocellular, renal, and colorectal cancers. Thus, molecular biological analysis is necessary when multiple cancers of the same histotype are identified in the same tissue where there are multiple primary tumors.

In conclusion, when different genetic mutations are found in multiple lung tumors, molecular biological analysis enables diagnosis of the primary lung cancer and can also help to distinguish primary from metastatic lung cancer. In addition, analysis of a larger number of various genetic mutations will facilitate improved diagnosis and treatment. Molecular biological analysis appears to be a useful tool for the diagnosis of primary tumors in patients with multiple lung adenocarcinomas, enabling appropriate treatment.

**Disclosure**

No authors report any conflict of interest.

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