GSTT1 as a prognosticator for recurrence and progression in patients with non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer

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Abstract. Although polymorphisms in glutathione S-transferase (GST) have been associated with the risk of bladder cancer (BC), few reports provide information about the development of BC. The aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of homozygous glutathione S-transferase-µ (GSTM1) and glutathione S-transferase-φ (GSTT1) deletions as prognostic markers in non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer (NMIBC). A total of 241 patients with primary NMIBC were enrolled in this study. GSTM1 and GSTT1 polymorphisms were analyzed by multiplex polymerase chain reaction (PCR) using blood genomic DNA. The results were compared with clinicopathological parameters. The prognostic significance of the GSTs was evaluated by Kaplan-Meier and multivariate Cox regression model. A statistically significant association between genotype and histopathological parameter was not observed. The patients with the GSTT1-positive genotype had significantly reduced recurrence- and progression-free survival than those with the GSTT1-null genotype (log-rank test, \( p < 0.05 \), respectively). Recurrence- and progression-free survival were not related to the GSTM1 genotypes. In multivariate regression analysis, the GSTT1-positive genotype was the independent predictor for recurrence [hazard ratio (HR), 1.631; \( p = 0.043 \)] and progression (HR, 3.418; \( p = 0.006 \)). These results suggested that the GSTT1 genotype could be a useful prognostic marker for recurrence and progression in NMIBC.

Keywords: Urinary bladder neoplasms, polymorphism, biological tumor markers, prognosis

1. Introduction

Bladder cancers (BC) are characterized by containing a mixture of heterogeneous cell populations, and numerous factors are likely to be involved in disease recurrence, progression and survival [1]. The prediction of disease recurrence and progression in non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer (NIMBC) is a major clinical issue for urologists. The identification of the aggressive features of the cancer in patients with NMIBC is very important for the adequate management of this disease [2]. Although conventional histopathological variables and diverse biological markers have been proposed to help in the assessment of the prognosis of NMIBC [3,4], useful markers that can predict the accurate clinical course of NMIBCs have not yet been identified.

BC has been known to be associated with exposure to chemical carcinogens and cigarette smoking [5,6]. Moreover, various enzymes such as N-
acetyltransferase 2 (NAT2), glutathione S-transferase-μ (GSTM1), glutathione S-transferase-φ (GSTT1), and human 8-oxoguanine DNA glycosylase 1 (hOGG1) and others, as well as cytokines and the gene repair system, may be involved in bladder carcinogenesis [7]. The GSTM1-null genotype has attracted attention due to its association with BC, but the risk of BC in the GSTM1-null type is inconsistent among the different ethnic groups [6,8,9]. Reports describing the GSTT1-null type as a risk factor in BC are rare and still controversial [10–12]. Despite numerous single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) studies in relation to BC, only a few genetic polymorphisms have provided valuable information about the clinicopathologic characteristics of BC and the prognosis of BC patients [13,14].

Several environmental factors and the activities of detoxified enzymes have been associated with tumor development in BC, and they could also affect the clinical course of this disease. The putative reasons for this hypothesis are that the patients must be exposed to similar environmental conditions and have the same enzyme activities affected by genetic polymorphisms in even a well-controlled organ-confined cancer. To date, there are no published reports describing the prognostic value of homzygous deletions of GSTM1 and GSTT1 as markers of disease prognosis in primary NMIBC patients with long-term follow-up. The aim of this study is to assess the prognostic value of the GSTM1 and GSTT1 genotype for tumor recurrence and progression in primary NMIBC patients.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Study population

A total of 282 patients whose blood samples were eligible to use with transitional cell carcinoma of the urinary bladder were recruited between 1995 and 2008 at our institute. To make the study population more homogeneous, patients with concomitant carcinoma in situ (CIS), short term follow-up period (less than 6 months) and incomplete data collection were excluded. A total of 241 patients with primary NMIBC were included in the study. A blood sample of 5 ml was collected from each patient into 0.1 ml EDTA, frozen in liquid nitrogen, and stored at −80°C until use. A questionnaire structured to obtain a detailed smoking history was administered to each subject by well-trained interviewers. The collection and analysis of samples were approved by the local institutional review board and informed consent was obtained from each subject.

Tumors were staged according to the 2002 TNM classification and the 1973 WHO grading system [4,15]. A second TUR was performed 2–4 weeks after the initial resection when a bladder cancer specimen did not include proper muscle or when a high-grade was detected [4]. Patients who had multiple tumors, large tumors (≥ 3 cm in diameter), or high grade NMIBC received one cycle of intravesical treatment (Bacillus Calmette–Guérin (BCG) or mitomycin-C) [4,16]. Response to treatment was assessed by cystoscopy and urinary cytology. Patients who were free of disease within 3 months after treatment were assessed every 3 months for the first 2 years and every 6 months thereafter [4,16]. We defined recurrence as the relapse of primary NMIBC with a lower or equivalent pathologic stage and progression as disease with a higher TNM stage when relapsed.

2.2. Genotype assays

Genomic DNA was extracted from human whole blood using a genomic DNA purification kit (Promega, Wisconsin), followed by precipitated with isopropanol samples were washed using 70% ethanol and the quality of DNA was assessed by agarose gel electrophoresis. Genomic DNA samples were stored at −20°C until use. A multiplex polymerase chain reaction (PCR) method was applied to detect the presence or absence of the GSTM1 and GSTT1 genes in genomic DNA samples, as described previously [17]. In brief, the primers used in the PCR were sense (5’- GAA CTC CCT GAA AAG CTA AAG C- 3’) and anti-sense (5’- GTT GGG CTC AAA TAT ACG GTG G - 3’) for GSTM1; sense (TTA GCT GAC CTC GTA GCC AT - 3’) and anti-sense (5’- GAA GTC CTT GGC CTT CAG AA- 3’) for GSTT1; and sense (5’- GAA GAG CCA AGG ACA GGT AC-3’) and anti-sense (5’- CAA CTT CAT CCA CGT TCA CC - 3’) for β-globin (β-globin). DNA (200ng) was amplified in a total volume of 20 μL, containing 10 pmol of each primer, 0.5 unit of Taq polymerase, 2.5 mM dNTP and 10X PCR buffer. Following an initial denaturation step at 94°C for 5 min, 40 cycles of amplification were carried out at 94°C for 60 s, 63°C for 60 s, 72°C for 60 s and a final extension step at 72°C for 10 min. The amplified products were electrophoresed on a 2% agarose gel, and their sizes were 219 bp for GSTM1, 372 bp for GSTT1 and 268 bp for β-globin. Both positive and negative samples were analyzed in each experiment, and GSTM1 and GSTT1 genotypes were not scored unless the internal reference gene (β-globin) product was evident.
Table 1
Clinical and pathological features of non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer

| Variables          | Number of patients (%) |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| Age-yr (mean)      | 62.7 ± 14.3            |
| Gender             |                        |
| Male               | 197 (81.7)             |
| Female             | 44 (18.3)              |
| Stage              |                        |
| Ta                 | 92 (38.2)              |
| T1                 | 149 (61.8)             |
| Grade              |                        |
| G1                 | 87 (36.1)              |
| G2                 | 121 (50.2)             |
| G3                 | 33 (13.7)              |
| Tumor size         |                        |
| <3 cm              | 144 (59.8)             |
| ≥ 3 cm             | 97 (40.2)              |
| Number of tumors   |                        |
| Single             | 148 (61.4)             |
| Multiple           | 93 (38.6)              |
| Median follow-up – months (Range) | 44.9 (6.1–207.8) |

3.2. Relationship between GSTM1 and GSTT1 genotype, and histopathological parameters according to smoking status

There were no significant associations between smoking status and histopathological parameters such as tumor stage and grade. After stratification by smoking status, no association between GSTM1, GSTT1 genotypes and histopathological features of NMIBC were found (Table 2).

3.3. Genotype of GSTM1 and GSTT1, and prognosis for NMIBC

Kaplan-Meier estimates revealed significant differences in time to tumor recurrence and progression according to the GSTT1 genotype. The patients with the GSTT1-positive genotype had significantly reduced recurrence- and progression-free survival than those with the GSTT1-null genotype (log-rank test, \( p = 0.034 \) and \( p = 0.001 \), respectively, Fig. 1A and B). However, recurrence- and progression-free survival were not related to the GSTM1 genotypes.

Univariate Cox regression analysis revealed that T1 stage [hazard ratio (HR), 1.806; 95% confidence interval (CI), 1.072–3.042; \( p = 0.026 \)] and GSTT1-positive genotype [HR, 1.646; 95% CI, 1.035–2.617; \( p = 0.035 \)] showed a significant impact on recurrence of bladder cancer. On multivariate analysis, however, the GSTT1-positive genotype [HR, 1.631; 95% CI, 1.015–2.621; \( p = 0.043 \)] was the only independent predictor of bladder tumor recurrence (Table 3). Moreover, Univariate analysis showed that elder age [HR, 1.052; 95% CI, 1.014–1.091; \( p = 0.007 \)], bigger sized tumor [HR, 2.821; 95% CI, 1.183–6.727; \( p = 0.019 \)], grade G3 [HR, 6.449; 95% CI, 1.879–22.133; \( p = 0.003 \)] and GSTT1-positive genotype [HR, 3.733; 95% CI, 1.579–8.826; \( p = 0.003 \)] were the risk factors for progression of bladder cancer. However, the GSTT1-positive genotype [HR, 3.418; 95% CI, 1.420–8.227; \( p = 0.006 \)] was the only independent predictor of bladder cancer progression on multivariate analysis (Table 4).
4. Discussion

The activities of specific enzymes can change with genotype. Specific enzymes that are known to be important in carcinogenesis can also play a critical role in disease recurrence and progression after initial treatment. The results of the present study demonstrated that the GSTT1 genotype was a strong indicator for predicting recurrence and progression in patients with primary NMIBC. The majority of published studies addressing GSTT1 genotype have been focused on the development of BC as a risk or as protective factor [10, 11, 18–22]. However, studies of the associations between GSTT1 genotype and the development of BC have reported controversial results. We previously reported that the GSTT1-null genotype was significantly associated with the development of BC, and that a GSTT1-null genotype was not a risk factor but a protective factor of BC [11]. The findings of the present study support our previous data.

Although the GSTM1-null genotype has been associated with increased risk of BC in previous reports [23–25], the current study revealed that GSTM1 genotype was not associated with histopathologic pa-
rameters or with the prognosis for NMIBC. After stratification by smoking status, no associations were detected between GSTM1 genotype and clinical outcomes. Cigarette smoking has been associated with the development of BC in many epidemiologic studies [6,8]. Some studies reported that genetic polymorphism relevant to BC could only be detected in smokers [6,14]. Since GSTs are related to the metabolism of hazardous chemicals or cigarette smoking, those previous reports seemed to have the causal relationship [6,14]. However, the results of other studies indicated that smoking was not a significant risk factor for BC [9,26]. These discrepancies might reflect differences among ethnic groups or heterogeneous study populations. The current data do not represent results of a case-control study designed to identify factors associating smoking status and the development of BC. In the present study, smoking status related to GSTM1 genotype was not associated with recurrence and progression in NMIBC patients.

Few studies have analyzed the prognostic value of genetic polymorphisms for different types of cancers including BC. A study by Song et al. reported that the NAT2 slow-acetylator genotype presented a significant risk for high grade and stage in BC [14]. Castillejo et al. found that the transforming growth factor-beta receptors (TGFBR1) rs868 allele was strongly and independently associated with disease-specific mortality among patients with muscle invasive bladder cancer (MIBC) [27]. In their study, other polymorphic variants analyzed were not found to be associated with an increased risk of BC, but the TGFBR1 rs868 allele was identified as a prognostic marker. Among patients with non-small-cell lung cancer, the functional Y/X polymorphism of the innate-immunity gene mannose-binding lectin (MBL) 2, as well as MBL2 haplotypes and diplotypes, was found to be associated with lung cancer-specific survival among caucasian patients [28]. In another study including patients diagnosed with breast cancer, genetic variations in signal-induced proliferation-associated gene 1 (SIPA1) were not related to breast cancer metastasis or survival [29]. In the current study, GSTT1 genotype was found to be a strong prognostic factor for tumor recurrence.
(HR, 1.631) and progression (HR, 3.418) in primary NMIBC. The results obtained in the present study are strengthened by certain aspects of the study design, such as the inclusion of a relatively large-scale population that consisted only of patients with NMIBC and the long-term follow-up (median follow-up, 44.9 months).

GSTs have been studied for their role in detoxification through the conjugation of a wide variety of potentially toxic and carcinogenic electrophiles with glutathione [30]. The exact mechanisms by which GSTT1 affects the progression of BC, however, remain to be elucidated. To further investigate this mechanism, our group is currently performing tissue genotype analysis and evaluating the expression levels of GSTM1 and GSTT1 in BC tissues.

Although various diagnostic markers for BC development, recurrence, and progression have been reported, adequate indicators able to predict the prognosis of most BCs have not been found yet. The present study shows that the GSTT1 genotype could be a better prognostic indicator for the progression of NMIBC than previously described markers, mostly due to the method of blood sampling, which was easier to carry out than examination based on tissue samples. The use of the GSTT1 genotype as a prognostic indicator, independent of traditional pathologic prognostic parameters, could potentially enable the separation of heterogeneous NMIBC patients into good and poor prognostic groups, and may enable individualized evaluation and design of treatment strategies.

In conclusion, the present study showed that the GSTT1 genotype may play an important role in the prognosis of NMIBC in the clinical setting.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Basic Science Research Program through the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2010-0001730).

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