Fundamental Questions about γδT Cells

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Abstract: γδT cells is a minor subgroup of T lymphocytes expressing γδ-T Cell Receptor (TCR), with many subsets, dominated by Vδ2 and Vδ1. γδT cells recognize antigens independently of the context of MHC class I, MHC class II, or CD1 presenting molecules. However, this recognition requires the expression of the transmembrane Butyrophilin proteins by the presenting cells. Their activation is controlled by many surface receptors, namely, co-stimulatory receptors, cytokines receptors, NK receptors and inhibitory receptors. Once activated, γδT cells polarize into Th1, Th2, Th17, follicular T helper or Treg cells. They can play direct anti infectious and antitumor roles through perforin-granzyme molecules, FasL and Tumor-necrosis-factor Related Apoptosis Inducing Ligand (TRAIL), antibody-dependent cellular cytotoxicity and by IFN-γ and TNF-α cytokine’s release. They also exert an indirect antitumor activity by cooperating with B cells, dendritic cells, αβT cells and NK cells. Additionally, γδT cells can infiltrate solid cancers and display a selective cytolytic activity. Conversely, γδT cells might promote cancer progression either directly through IL17 and/or VEGF, or indirectly by impairing other antitumor immune cell activities. Given its complex functions, γδT cell-based immunotherapy seems efficient and well tolerated, yet needs to overcome many obstacles including those related to the tumor environment.

Keywords: γδT Cells, Antigens, Chemokines, Cytokines, Immunotherapy

Introduction

In 1984, a third chain (γ) of the TCR was accidentally discovered and in 1987 a new subgroup of T cells expressing TCR that contains γ and δ chains termed γδ T cell subsets were officially described (Zhao et al., 2018; Born et al., 1987). Along the last three decades, a plethora of studies has led to promising findings about these cells (Kabelitz, 2016). However, many aspects of γδT cells remain not clearly elucidated, especially their receptors, the antigens they can recognize, the antigen recognition process, their products, the functions of their various subsets and their involvement in infections and malignancies, as well as their utility as an immunotherapy modality. In this review, we attempt to answer some fundamental questions by highlighting the phenotypic characteristics of the main subsets of γδT cells, their main functions and their role in the pathomechanism of some diseases.

Methods

This review intended establishing through the available literature, the finest answers to fundamental questions about γδT cells. The search strategy aimed to access all accessible studies focusing on these cells and published by peer reviewing indexed journals. The initial search terms was “γδT cells”, “γδT cells + antigens”, “γδT cells + chemokines”, “γδT cells + cytokines”, “γδT cells + immunotherapy” “γδ T infiltrating lymphocytes” and “γδT cells + cancer”. We explored articles in English, preferentially indexed in
the following databases: Science Citation Index, Web of Science, Medline Cochrane Library Web search and Scopus. The choice emphasis on articles published in the last 10 years. When not found, we considered articles published earlier. In sum, we elected 177 articles containing 128 original research and 49 reviews, all published in 78 journals. Dates of publication correspond on four intervals [2010; 2018], [2000; 2009], [1990; 1999] and [1987; 1989], including 69, 70, 35 and 3 articles respectively.

Are γδT Cells Rare?

γδT cells correspond to a minority of T subpopulations (Zhao et al., 2018; Born et al., 1987). Like αβ T cells, they derive from multipotent CD4-CD8- precursors in the thymus (Porritt et al., 2004), but they typically range from 1 to 4% of all CD3+ T cells in the peripheral blood of healthy adults. Yet, their proportion largely varies according to age (Table 1) (Schatorjé et al., 2012).

The proportion of γδT cells relative to total number of T cells also varies according to the anatomic localization. For example, γδT cells are abundant in the gut mucosa and other epithelial surfaces of the intestine and the skin where they represent one of the first lines of defence (Vantourout and Hayday, 2013; De Rosa et al., 2004). Additionally, they respond prior to αβ T cells and may prime pro-inflammatory or anti-inflammatory response (Chien et al., 2014). The fluctuations of these cells in blood may reflect their changes and/or their altered circulation between different peripheral sites. However, the proportion of naïve cells in peripheral localizations is quit lower compared to the blood, due to a selective homing of memory and activated cells to those sites. γδT cells are also characterized by an earlier activation and conversion to memory cells compared to αβ T lineages (De Rosa et al., 2004).

How γδ-TCR is Assembled?

The human TCR γ and δ loci are localized in the short arm of chromosome 7 and the long arm of chromosome 14 respectively. During the maturation process of lymphocytes, the rearrangement of the encoding gene segments (V,D,J) generates a large spectre of receptors resulting on various amino-acid sequences and thus distinct molecular surfaces at their

Complementarity-Determining Regions (CDRs) (Fig. 1) (Kabelitz, 2016; Kazen and Adams, 2011; Allison and Garboczi, 2002). The δ locus is embedded inside the α-locus and only three Vδ genes are usually expressed (Vδ1, Vδ2 and Vδ3), but other Vα genes are rarely used in δ-chain rearrangement, specifically Vδ4 (Vα14), Vδ5 (Vα29), Vδ6 (Vα23), Vδ7 (Vα36) and Vδ8 (Vα38) (Thedrez et al., 2007). The Vγ repertoire is also small, with 12 Vγ genes; seven of them are functional: Vγ2, Vγ3, Vγ4, Vγ5, Vγ8, Vγ9 and Vγ11 while Vγ1, Vγ5P, Vγ6, Vγ7 and Vγ10 are pseudogenes (Thedrez et al., 2007; Kazen an Adams, 2011). The number of expressed Vγ and Vδ genes is smaller than αβ TCR (Kabelitz, 2016) and the limited number of J gene segments encoding for both δ and γ (four and five, respectively) reflects their low diversity (Kazen and Adams, 2011).

The γ and δ genes rearrange like the Immunoglobulin (Ig) genes to form models for numerous TCR protein molecules (Kazen and Adams, 2011; Haas et al., 1993). Despite the low number of Vγ and Vδ genes compared to IgV and TCRαβ V genes, the recombinatorial probabilities for producing γδ-TCRs are almost limitless, widely due to the unique capacity of the δ genes to rearrange D segments in tandem and to use all reading frames (Davis and Bjorkman, 1988). This rearrangement provides different γδ T cell subsets (Wu et al., 2014). Vδ2, Vγ8 and Vγ9 segments are the first rearranged subsets in the foetal liver and thymus (McVay and Carding, 1996). At birth, the range of γδT cells in cord blood is wide, with no preferred Vγ/Vδ tandem (Morita et al., 1994). Four to six months after birth, a shift in the TCR δ and TCR γ loci conducts to changes during the rearrangement and recombination processes of genes encoding Vγ2, Vγ3, Vγ4, Vγ5, Vγ8 and Vγ11 (Adams et al., 2015). Vδ1 and Vδ3 γδT cells have minor subsets of δ and γ TCR chains (Wu et al., 2014). Additionally, experimental studies focusing on the structure of CDRs showed a diversity of γδ-TCR that varies considerably over γ and δ loci and some gene segments show signatures of strong selection at the CDR1 and CDR2 loops encoding regions. The large diversity of the CDR3δ loop conditions the type of ligands recognized by the TCRs (Kazen and Adams, 2011; Allison and Garboczi, 2002; Adams et al., 2008).

| Population | Cord blood | 1 week-2 months | 2-5 months | 5-9 months | 9-15 months | 15-24 months | 2-5 years | 5-10 years | 10-16 years | >16 years |
|------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------|------------|------------|-------------|-----------|------------|-------------|-----------|
| % of γδT cells among total peripheral lymphocyte population | (0.58-5) | (0.27-15) | (1-7) | (0.82-10) | (1-10) | (1-13) | (0.92-38) | (2-24) | (2-17) | (0.83-11) |
Which Receptors Determine γδT Cell’s Functions?

The efficacy of γδT cells depends on their activation, expansion and differentiation into effectors that can eliminate infected or mutated cells. This process depends on γδT cells expressed receptors including γδ TCR, costimulatory, cytokine, NK and inhibitory receptors (Table 2) (Ribeiro et al., 2015).

T cell Receptor

The stimulation via γδ-TCR is crucial for γδT cell function (Bonneville et al., 2010). The structure of γδ-TCR corresponds to a complex containing γδ-TCR and many CD3 chains (Siegers et al., 2007). γδT cell development is directly determined by the assembly of a γδ-TCR complex in thymic progenitors. Depending on the strength of TCR signal, γδT cells likely adopt an IL-17-producing effector profile when there is a relatively weak TCR signal, whereas an intense TCR signal seems to promote an IFN-γ γδ-T cell profile (Jensen et al., 2008).

Co-Stimulatory Receptors

Co-stimulatory receptors reduce the activation thresholds of T cells and enhance their functions. They include two subsets according to their structure. The first subset is the super family of Immunoglobulin (Ig), namely, CD28 which is constitutively expressed on γδT cells and stimulates their own survival and proliferation through IL-2 production (Ribot et al., 2011). The second one is the Tumor Necrosis Factor Receptor (TNFR) super families, such CD27. In naïve mice, it was demonstrated that these receptors are selectively involved in the production of IFN-γ. According to CD27 phenotype, γδT cells polarize to either IFN-γ+ (CD27+) or IL-17+ (CD27−) profiles. Besides, the development of IFNγ producing γδT cells requires strong TCR signalling along with CD27 co-stimulation in the thymus (Ribot et al., 2009).

Cytokine Receptors

As demonstrated in murine model, the development and the homeostasis of γδT cells depend on IL-7, IL-15 and IL-2 cytokines (Malissen et al., 1997; Baccala et al., 2005). In the dermis, IL-7 supports the development and the survival of resident γδT cells and promotes the expansion of human and murine IL-17-producing γδT cells (Zhao et al., 2005). Concerning IL-15, it plays an important role in sustaining the intraepithelial γδ T cell group present in the gut (Casetti et al., 2005). In a study on human, γδT cells where Vδ1 represented more that 80% it was reported that IL-15 and IL-2 induce IFN-γ production in functionally immature γδ thymocytes. The same result was not reported with IL-7 (Yamaguchi et al., 1998).
Table 2: Co-receptors of γδT cells – extracellular ligands and intracellular signaling pathways (Ribeiro et al., 2015)

| Receptor | Ligands                  | Intracellular signaling initiators/adaptors | Downstream signaling pathway | Target molecules          |
|----------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| CD28     | B7.1 (CD80), B7.2 (CD86)| PI3K, ITK, Grb2                             | PI3K/AKT, Grb2/MEK/ERK      | IL-2, NF-κB, AP-1, Bcl-xL, NFAT |
| CD27     | CD70                     | TRAF2 TRAF5 Siva                            |                             | NF-κB, Ca2+, cyclinD2, Bcl2a1, Bcl-xL |
| IL-2R    | IL-2                     | Jak1, Jak3                                  | P13K/AKT, Jak/STAT4/STAT5, MEK/ERK/STAT1 | IFNγ, TNF-α, T-bet, eomesodermin |
| IL-15R   | IL-15                    | DAP10                                      | P13K/AKT, Grb2/VAV1/SOS1, PKCθ/Ca2+ | NF-κB, Bcl-xL, Bcl-2 |
| NKG2D    | MIC (A–B), ULBP (1–6), H60, MULT1, RAE1 |                       |                             |                           |
| PD-1     | PD-1L (B7-H1) PD-1L2 (B7-DC) | SHP-1, SHP-2                               | CK2/PTEN/P13K/AKT, MEK/ERK | GSK-3, Bcl-xLsmad3, Cdc25A, IFNγ, IL-2 |
| BTLA     | HVEM                     | SHP-1, SHP-2                               | Zap70/ERK                   | IL-17, TNF, IL-2          |

Similar findings were observed for peripheral γδT cells extracted from patients with cancer (Yamaguchi et al., 1998). It was also shown that IL-2 and IL-15 are highly required for the expansion of Vδ2 T cells in response to microbial phospho-Antigens (pAg) and Nitrogen-containing bisphosphonates (N-bis) (Casetti et al., 2005). Inflammatory cytokines, namely IL-12 and IL-18 are also significantly promoting effector γδ T-cell differentiation which stimulates the production of the IFN-γ, while, IL-1β and IL-23 induce production of IL-17 cytokine (Yin et al., 2000). On the other hand, the production of antibodies with high affinity against microbial infections is the result of the B-cell helper activity displaying a T follicular helper cell-like phenotype provided to human Vδ2 subset by IL-21 (Bansal et al., 2012).

**Natural Killer Receptors (NKR)**

γδT cell express NKR, which are essential for the recognition of some ligands. NKG2D is the most studied concerning γδT cells. Actually, this receptor modulates their antiviral and antitumor activity, benefitting from the overexpression of various extracellular ligands upon cellular stress induced by such circumstances (Hayday, 2000; Eagle and Trowsdale, 2007; Champaur and Lanier, 2010) specifically MHC class I chain-related protein A (MICA) and B (MICB) and HCMV UL-16-Binding Protein (ULBP) families. Inside the cell, NKG2D binds to DNAx-Activating Protein (DAP10). The complex of NKG2D/DAP10 may deliver T cells costimulatory signals that synergize with the ITAM based TCR/CD3 molecules (Long, 2002). The co-stimulatory action of NKG2D on Vδ2 T cells is possible by additional effects on TCR-mediated activation. However, it is still controversial whether NKG2D plays a primary stimulatory or co-stimulatory role (Correia et al., 2013; Das et al., 2001). Conversely, it was suggested that γδT cells could be activated by NKG2D signals without the TCR engagement (Rincon-Orozco et al., 2005). In addition, when blocked, NKG2D inhibits Vδ2 T-cell cytotoxicity against various types of blood cancers, which is not the same with TCR (Lanca et al., 2010).

**Inhibitory Receptors**

The return to the homeostasis is necessary after the activation of γδT cells. PD-1 or CTLA-4 as inhibitory receptors are necessary for this. Normally, PD-1 is absent or expressed only at low levels on circulating Vδ2 T cells, but it becomes rapidly overexpressed after activation (Iwasaki et al., 2011).

Once phosphorylated, Immunoreceptor Tyrosine based Inhibitory Motif (ITIM) and Immunoreceptor Tyrosine Switch Motif (ITSM) existing on the cytoplasmic tail of PD-1 engage inhibitors of Lck activity downstream the TCR complex (Kulpa et al., 2013). Furthermore, PD-1 captation impairs survival and proliferation of γδT cells, as well as IL-2 production through increasing the activity of the Protein Phosphatase and Tensin Homolog (PTEN) which inhibits PI3K/AKT signalling (Pedoeem et al., 2014). The engagement of PD-1 with Herpes Virus Entry Mediator (HVEM) inhibits Vδ2 T-cell proliferation in response to lymphoma cells (Gertner-Dardenne et al., 2013). It was also reported that the expression of PD-L1 on tumor cells inhibits Vδ2 T-cell cytotoxicity and the production of IFNγ (Iwasaki et al., 2011). γδT cells expresses another inhibitory receptor, namely B- and T- Lymphocyte Attenuator (BTLA), structurally related to PD-1 and CTLA-4 (Ribeiro et al., 2015).

**What Antigens can γδT Cells Recognize?**

Upon different stress signals, γδT cells recognize a diversity of antigens and ligands (Ribeiro et al., 2015; Witherden and Havran, 2012). But in contrast to conventional αβ T cells, they recognize also lipid antigens presented by CD1 molecules (CD1a, b, c) mainly expressed on the surface of professional Antigen Presenting Cells (APCs) and for which Vδ1 subset has a prominent reactivity, particularly to CD1c (Rincon-Orozco et al., 2005). Besides, γδT cells use multiple other pathways to recognize and clear tumor cells. Supporting this fact, MHC class I-related molecules (MICA and MICB) are recognized by intestinal derived human γδT cells. In addition, during infection, malignancy and other environmental...
challenges, Vγ4Vδ5 subset can recognize subtle quantitative and qualitative changes of self-molecules like endothelial protein C receptor that appear on cytomegalovirus-infected cells and tumor cells (Witherden and Havran, 2012; Wilcox et al., 2012). Independently of TCR, the NKG2D receptor intervene in the recognition of MHC class I related molecules, like MIC/A and UL16 Binding Protein (ULBP), frequently expressed by malignant cells, can trigger γδT cells cytotoxicity (Rincon-Orozco et al., 2005). Peripheral γδT cells may recognize molecules expressed by epithelial cells via Vδ1 subset. For instance, γδ infiltrating T cells in lung cancers can recognize the Monomorphic Laminin Receptor (MLR) expressed on tumor cells through Vδ1 (Ferrarini et al., 1996).

Additionally, Vδ2 TCR may recognize other surface proteins, for example F1-ATPase-related structure expressed by Daudi Burkitt’s lymphoma cells line (Scotet et al., 2005). Some soluble proteins are also considered as γδT cell ligands such as Tatanus toxoid, ESAT-6 (The 6 kDa early secretory antigenic target produced by Mycobacterium tuberculosis) and HSV glycoprotein-1 (Kozbor et al., 1990; Bitter et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 1992). Smaller peptides can also be recognized by γδT cells, e.g., the mycobacterial derived Heat Shock Protein-65 (HSP-65), which preferentially stimulates Vγ1 T cells (O’Brien et al., 1992). Along the same line of thought, a correlation has been reported between lung tumor cells’ HSP-72 expression and the presence of γδT Infiltrating Lymphocytes (TILs) belonging to the Vδ1 subset (Ferrarini et al., 1996). γδT cells also recognize natural non-peptidic antigens belonging to several mycobacteria such as TUBAg4 (Tanaka et al., 1994), Isopentenyl Pyrophosphate (IPP) (Tanaka et al., 1995) and the HMBPP (Hintz et al., 2001) a metabolite in the 2-C-methylD-erythritol-4-pathway for isoprenoid synthesis (Fox and Poulter, 2002). Other synthetic antigens like bisphosphonates and alkylamines (Kunzmann et al., 1999; Bukowski et al., 1999) can block Farnesyl Pyrophosphate Synthase (FPS) in the mevalonate pathway, thereby increasing cellular isopentenyl pyrophosphate IPP levels and indirectly stimulate γδT cells (Gober et al., 2003). IPP represents a eukaryotic homologue of microbial pAg that is accumulated during the mevalonate process activation and is specifically recognized by the Vδ2 TCR (Gober et al., 2003). For note, n-BP inhibits FPS, leading to the upstream accumulation of IPP (Li et al., 2009). Phospholipids represent another category of ligands that γδT cells can recognize, namely, cardiolipin that is detected by γδ-T-TCR in the context of CD1d (Dieüé et al., 2011). In addition, it has been reported that peripheral or nasal mucosa γδT cells derived from cypress pollen-sensitive patients was reactive to Phosphatidyl Ethanolamine (PE) after in vitro incubation with pollen. This immune reaction was dependent on CD1d molecule (Russano et al., 2006).

**How γδT Cells Recognize Antigens?**

As already discussed, γδT cells can recognize antigens independently of the context of MHC class I, MHC class II, or even CD1 presenting molecules (Morita et al., 1995) (Fig. 2). In presence of microbial or endogenous pAg, the activation of human γδT cells involves Butyrophilin (BTN) proteins (Harly et al., 2012). The type-1 transmembrane BTN proteins belong to the Immunoglobulin (Ig) superfamily. It is composed of an extracellular Ig-like domain, a transmembrane domain and an intracellular B30.2 signaling domain in some cases (Fig. 3) (Rhodes et al., 2016).

Immune cells and epithelial cells widely express BTN proteins that can elicit several immune-regulatory activities (Rhodes et al., 2016). On the other hand, the immune response against infections can be altered consecutively to genetic mutations in BTN genes (Ampuero et al., 2015). It was demonstrated that BTN3A (CD277) expressed on tumor cells could exert positive or negative co-stimulatory signals. Other authors showed that it could exert inhibitory effects on T-cell proliferation and cytokine production when over expressed on antigen-presenting cells (Cubillos-Ruiz et al., 2010). Facing microbial or tumor derived pAg, BTN3A or CD277 has a major role in driving Vδ2 subset activity. In fact, the presence of CD277 monoclonal Antibody (mAb) 20.1 promotes Vδ2 cells anti-tumoral cytotoxicity (Harly et al., 2012) while, in the presence of CD277 mAb 103.2 these cells are inhibited (Palakodeti et al., 2012). Other BTN family molecules have been described in murine intestinal epithelial cells such as BTN1L, BTN6L and BTN3A1. The two first molecules enhance the proliferative activity of intraepithelial Vγ7Vδ4 cells and the third one induces the maturation of mouse thymic Vγ5Vδ1 cells (Lebrero-Fernández and Bas-Forsberg, 2016; Boyd et al., 2008).

Two models are proposed to explain the molecular mechanism of BTN3A for the activation of human γδT cell by pyrophosphates (Fig. 4). The first is the ‘presenting mechanism’ where BTN3A1 extracellular domain serves as an antigen-presenting molecule of pAg that the human Vδ2 TCR can recognize (Fig. 4A) (De Libero et al., 2015). However, this mechanism has not been confirmed by other studies (Sandstrom et al., 2014). The second is the ‘pyrophosphate sensing mechanism’ where the cytosolic domain (B30.2) is involved. The latter can directly bind numerous γδT cell-stimulating pAg via a positively charged surface pocket, which, furthermore, would affect TCR engagement indirectly by changing membrane mobility and/or the structure of extracellular BTN3A1 domains (Sandstrom et al., 2014; Silva-Santos et al., 2015).
Actually, existing data confirm the pyrophosphate-sensing function of the cytosolic B30.2 domain. In this mechanism the liaison of pyrophosphate antigens to the BTN3A1’s cytosolic domain, which is in contact with periplakin and RhoB molecules, provokes spatial rearrangement of BTN3A1 and leads to TCR-dependent selective activation of γδT cell (Gu et al., 2015; Sebestyen et al., 2016) (Fig. 4B). The mystery of how signals are transmitted to T cells via BTN3A1 is still unsettled. In fact, BTN3A2 and BTN3A3 are other isoforms that are implicated in pAg-mediated γδT cells activation (Rhodes et al., 2015). This suggests the existence of other actors that might explain the whole mechanism of cell surface-rearranged BTN3A molecules and how pAg particularly activate human γδT cells (Kabelitz et al., 2017).

Fig. 2: Categories of receptors regulating the activation of human γδT cells (Kabelitz et al., 2017) NKG2D recognizes stress-inducible ligands, (ex. MICA-B and ULBP 1-6), inducing cytotoxic activity and cytokine production via the PI3K pathway. γδ TCR recognizes pAg in a BTN3A-dependent way. Human MutS Homolog 2 (hMSH2) or lipids bound to CD1d and endothelial protein C receptor (EPCR). TLR2 recognizes conserved microbial ligands such as acetylated lipids heterodimer and activate γδT cell via the NF-κB B cell pathway.

Fig. 3: Structure of BTN proteins (Kabelitz et al., 2017) The structure of BTN proteins corresponding to extracellular (immunoglobulin V (IgV) and IgC-like), transmembrane and a cytosolic (B30.2) domains. B30.2 domain and additional amino acids determine three BTN3A isoforms
How do γδT Cells Reach the Tumor Site?

In certain pathophysiological conditions, such as infection, inflammation and tumors, both circulating and resident γδT cells express various patterns of chemokines receptors. This allows their extravasation and migration to reach specific destinations (Kabelitz and Wesch, 2003). For example, the migration of γδT cells to the small intestine is guided by CCR9 and the local expression of the corresponding ligand CCL25 (Kabelitz and Wesch, 2003). Vδ2 T cells express multiple chemokines receptors, including CCR1, CCR5 and CXCR4 (Cipriani et al., 2000; Brandes et al., 2003). The expression of CXCR4 transiently increases following pAg stimulation (Brandes et al., 2003). On the other hand, a high production of CXCL12, ligand of CXCR4 by tumor-associated fibroblasts also stimulates Vδ2 T cells infiltration (Orimo et al., 2005). This chemokine is additionally involved in the migration of renal carcinoma-infiltrating Vδ2 T cells (Viey et al., 2008). The Vδ1 γδT cells, which correspond to the resident subset, preferentially express CXCR1, this suggest that its ligand IL-8 might preferentially act on this subpopulation (Glatzel et al., 2002; Roth et al., 1998).

In addition to chemokine receptors, the mobility of resident γδT cells also depends on related adhesion molecules. For example, those infiltrating lung tumors express N-Cellular Adhesion Molecules (N-CAM), which allows them to bind to endothelial cells and sub endothelial matrix (Zocchi and Poggi, 1993). In addition, N-CAM might facilitate the extravasation of circulating γδT cells and recirculation of resident γδ Tumor-Infiltrating Lymphocytes (TILs). Similarly, NK cell Receptor Protein 1A (NKRP1A), that may act as an adhesion molecule, is expressed selectively on Vδ2 T cells (Poggi et al., 1999). Thus, NKRP1A seems important to drive circulating γδT cells towards the tumor site. The recirculation of NKRP1A+ γδT cells in the damaged tissue is also modulated by IL-12 (Poggi et al., 1999; Ferrarini et al., 2002).

After activation by IPP, Vδ2 cells release large quantities of the β-chemokines MIP-1α and MIP-1β. The most robust and rapid response is observed or MIP-1β (Cipriani et al., 2000). In vitro, human MIP-1α and MIP-1β recruit different populations of T cells, with MIP-1α attracting mainly CD4+ T cells and MIP-1β inducing the chemotaxis of CD8+ T cells (Schall et al., 1993; Taub et al., 1993). MIP-1α activates CCR1, CCR5 and perhaps CCR4, whereas MIP-1β interacts more selectively with CCR5. Furthermore, MIP-1α has been shown to activate macrophages, eosinophils and basophils, whereas MIP-1β lacks this activity (Baggiolini et al., 1993). Taken together, the chemokines released by Vδ2 T cells significantly contribute to a pro-inflammatory microenvironment during infection or others diseases (Boismenu et al., 1996). Chemokines produced by activated Vδ2 T cells are also involved in T-cell recruitment and subsequently in their activation, as well as in the recruitment of other immune cells. Therefore, γδT cells have been considered as an interface between innate and adaptive immune responses (Cipriani et al., 2000).

What Effector Profiles do γδT Cells Polarize to?

Vδ2 T cells display various functional activities. Once activated and cultured in the presence of IL-2, naïve Vδ2 T cells (CD27+CD45RA+) can differentiate into central memory T cells (CD27+CD45RA−), effector memory T cells (CD27−CD45RA−) and terminally differentiated...
effector memory cells re-expressing CD45RA (CD27−CD45RA+γδ) cells. Moreover, depending on specific stimulations, Vδ2 T cells may polarize into Th1, Th2, Th17, follicular T helper (Thf), or regulatory T-cell (Treg) profiles (Dunne et al., 2010; Casetti et al., 2009) (Table 2). Upon pAg stimulation, in presence of IL-21 and IL-2, Vδ2 T cells polarize to Th1 with increased expression of CD56 and various cytokolytic molecules and then acquire a higher tumor-induced degranulation capacity (Theodre et al., 2009). Vδ2 T cells can also polarize into γδ Th17 cells. In neonates, IL-6, IL-1β and TGF-β are required to generate γδ Th17 cells, while in adults, they require the presence of IL-23, IL-1β and TGF-β (Wu et al., 2014). It was demonstrated in a colorectal cancer model that activated DCs polarize Vδ2 cells into γδ Th17 profile, with a release of high amount of IL-17, IL-8, TNF-α and Granulocyte Macrophage Colony-Stimulating Factor (GM-CSF) (Wu et al., 2014). γδ Th17 cells, especially in the cord blood, can also produce IL-22 (Ness-Schwickerath and Morita, 2011). Interestingly, Vδ2 T cells can secret IFN-γ when they polarize into Th1/Th17 cells. In fact, in neonates, γδ Th1/Th17 cells differentiation requires IL-6, IL-1β, IL-23 and TGF-β cytokine’s environment, while in adults, memory γδ Th1/Th17 cells need the same cytokines except IL-6 (Ness-Schwickerath et al., 2010). Wesch et al. (2001) reported that, once stimulated with IPP, Vδ2 T cells can polarize to Th1 profile in the context of Th1-priming conditions (IL-12) and to Th2-cell profile due to Th2-priming conditions (IL-4, anti IL-12 Ab). In contrast, it has been shown, that Vδ2 cells can polarize to FOXP3+γδ Treg cells (Hu et al., 2013) succeeding stimulation by TGF-β and IL-15 and exert a regulatory activity (Schall et al., 1993). Finally, IL-21 can stimulate the differentiation of Vδ2 T cells to a follicular T helper (Thf)-like phenotype. These cells express different molecules and receptors such as BCL-6 transcription factor, ICOS (Inducible T-cell costimulator), CD40-L, CXCR5, CD244, IL-21R, CXCL10 and CXCL13 to reach germinal centre lymph nodes. This polarization facilitates the maturation of B cells (Caccamo et al., 2011). It is important to know if this functional plasticity is a feature of all γδT cells population or it is restricted to Vδ2 subset, since this plasticity leads to either an anti-inflammatory profile or to a pro-inflammatory one (Yan and Huang, 2014) (Table 3).

What about γδT Cells Ambivalence in Cancer?

γδT cells may exert direct antitumor activity through multiple mechanisms like perforin-granzyme pathway (Niu et al., 2015), TRAIL (tumornecrosis-factor related apoptosis inducing ligand) and FasL (Hu et al., 2013), ADCC (Antibody dependent cellular cytotoxicity) (Todaro et al., 2009) and by secreting IFN-γ and TNF-α cytokines. These factors enhance antitumor immunity and inhibit cancer angiogenesis (Niu et al., 2015; Todaro et al., 2009; Fisher et al., 2014; Li et al., 2008). They can also interact with B, dendritic, T (γδ) and Natural killer cells and have an indirect antitumor effect in consequence. For instance, in non-immunized mice, Vγ4 and Vγ6 subsets can modulate B cells, hence the antibody synthesis (Caccamo et al., 2012). Following the same line of thought, after their co-culture with IPP (Caccamo et al., 2012) or HMB-PP (Bansal et al., 2012) and IL-21, the Vδ2 T cells polarize to follicular helper T (Thh) cells (Caccamo et al., 2012) that can secrete IL-4, IL-10 and CXCL13 and favours B cells antibodies production. γδT cells are also able to perform as APCs for μβ T-cell priming. In fact, after activation, γδT cells overexpress HLA-DR, a leukocyte activation receptor (CD69), as well as co-stimulatory and adhesion molecules (CD40, CD54, CD80 and CD86) (Kunzmann et al., 2000; Moser et al., 2005). Another indirect effect is the ability of γδT cells to activate DC maturation.

Table 3: γδT cells functional plasticity (Lafont et al., 2014)

| γδT cells subsets | TCR activation | Cytokines | Polarization transcription factors | Effector molecules |
|-------------------|----------------|-----------|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Adult blood Vγ9Vδ2 T cells + | IL-12 or IL-18 | Th1-like T-bet, eomesodermin | IFN-γ, TNF-α |
| Adult blood + | IL-4 | Th2-like GATA-3 |
| + | IL-15+ TGF-β | Treg-like Foxp3 |
| + | IL-6+ IL-23+ IL-1β+ TGF-β+ Ahr+ agonists | Th17-like RORγt |
| + | IL-23+ IL-1β+ TGF-β | Th17-like, RORγt Th1/17, like, RORγt, T-bet Th22, FOXO4 |
| Adult blood and tonsillar Vγ9Vδ2 T cells + | IL-2 | APC functions ND |
| + | IL-21 | Tfh-like Bcl6 |
| Th1 Vγ9Vδ2 T cells – | IFN type I | Th1-like ND |
| Th2 Vγ9Vδ2 T cells + | IL-6+ IL-1β+ TGF-β+ | Th17-like, RORγt Th22-like, FOXO4 |
| Human Vγ1+ and Vγ2+ thymocytes + | IL-2 or IL-15 | Th17 RORγt |
| Murine γδT cells – | IL-23+ IL-1β | Th17 RORγt |

DOI: 10.3844/ojbsci.2020.250.269

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Fig. 5: Antitumoral and protumoral functions of γδT cells (Zhao et al., 2018); Antitumor effect of γδT cells: Direct antitumor effects are mediated by perforin-granzyme pathway, inflammatory cytokines, cytotoxicity on Fas+ and TRAIL-R+ malignant cells and ADCC. Polarized γδ Tfh cells mediate an indirect antitumoral action of γδT cells. This stimulates the antibody production, the γδT cell antigen presentation to αβ T cell, the triggering of DC maturation and the activation of NK antitumor activity. Protumoral effect of γδT cells: γδT cells might polarize into FOXP3+ γδ Treg cells and γδ T17 cells. They can directly impair αβ T cells and DC antitumor functions. The γδT cells increase MDSC, SPM and neutrophil immunosuppressive functions. Conjointly, these effects enhance tumor angiogenesis, growth, proliferation, metastasis and immune escape.

This maturation is mostly mediated by TNF-α and IFN-γ, which can be provided by γδT cells (Conti et al., 2005). Finally, the interaction of CD137 and CD137L expressed successively on NK cells and γδT cells may induce solid NK cell-mediated antitumoral cytotoxicity (Kabelitz, 2016) (Fig. 5). However, γδT cells can also directly enhance cancer progression. Actually, through the secretion of IL-17, γδ Th17 cells play an immunosuppressive role; promoting the development of cancer. γδ Th17 cells promote angiogenesis through Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor (VEGF) production, which also helps cancer progression. Such phenomenon has been established in the progression of gallbladder and ovarian cancers (Patil et al., 2016). As demonstrated
in vitro, after the polarization of Vδ2 T cells into FOXP3+ via TGF-β and IL-15, they adopted an analogous function as ζδ Treg cells (Cassetti et al., 2009). Moreover, it was shown that Vδ1 Treg cells secrete the chemokine IP-10 and TGF-β in breast cancer (Ye et al., 2013a). When produced, TGF-β may provoke a transition from epithelial into mesenchymal fate, which encourages cancer immune escape. This results cancer invasiveness (Yang and Weinberg, 2008). The same subset of Vδ1 cells, specifically the peripheral ones, seems to have more effective regulatory action than ζδ Treg cells (CD4+ CD25+) (Van Acker et al., 2015). γδ T cells may also have an indirect pro-tumor effect through additional mechanisms.

One of them is due to an impairment of the function of antitumor immune cells. For example, infiltrating Vδ1 γδ T cells in human breast tumor may indirectly impair the activation of naïve ζδ T cells and their differentiation into effector T cells by inhibiting DC maturation and their APC function (Peng et al., 2007). Vδ1 γδ T cells in pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma were demonstrated to express important levels of PD-L1. This promote T cell suppression and then oncogenesis (Daley et al., 2016). It was also shown that tumor-derived γδ-Treg cells could inhibit T-lymphocytes cellular cycle and induce senescence in DC (Ye et al., 2013b). Another aspect of the pro-tumor activity of γδ T cells is IL-17 secretion. This cytokine represents a main chemo-attractant factor that recruits Myeloid-Derived Suppressor Cells (MDSCs) (Welte and Zhang, 2015). Thus, the innate γδ T17 cells might use MDSCs to transform cancer-elicited inflammation into immunosuppression in colorectal cancer (Wu et al., 2014). In a mouse ovarian cancer model, (Coffelt et al., 2015), demonstrated that small peritoneal macrophages (SPMs) are immobilized under the action of IL-17 secreted by γδ T cells phenotype which up-regulated pro-tumor and pro-angiogenic molecular mediators. This in turn enhanced the growth of ovarian cancer. In addition, the production of IL-1β and IL-17 by γδ T17 cells increases the expansion and polarization of neutrophils, which inhibits CD8+ cytotoxic T lymphocytes and promote metastasis (Sabbione et al., 2014) (Fig. 5).

How Tumor-Infiltrating γδ T Cells Influence Cancer Outcome?

Tumor-infiltrating leukocytes comprise myeloid cells (granulocytes, macrophages and myeloid-derived suppressor cells) and different lymphocyte subsets (T, B and NK cells). All of them might have an impact on tumor progression (Gooden et al., 2011). γδ T cells can infiltrate solid tumors and exhibit a selective antitumoral lytic activity (Haas et al., 1993). It was reported that γδ T cells belong to Tumor-Infiltrating Lymphocytes (TILs) in numerous cancers. Nevertheless, because of several controversies their clinical significance remains unclear. In a series of patients suffering from necrotizing choroidal melanoma, the Immunohistochemical (IHC) analysis showed that TILs are present in 76% of samples and that 52% of samples are infiltrated by Vδ1 γδ T cells (Bialasliewicz et al., 1999). In another series of primary melanoma cases, γδ T cells have been shown to be the main group of CD3+ T lymphocytes, equally distributed between Vδ1 and Vδ2. Additionally, Vδ2 subset correlated with an early stage melanoma but Vδ1 T cells did not correlate with melanoma prognosis (Cordova et al., 2012). In the context of breast cancer, an IHC study showed that γδ T cells were detected in 93% of cancer cases versus 3% in normal breast specimens (Ma et al., 2012). The authors, then, showed that the frequency of γδ T cell correlates positively with cancer in advanced stage, HER2 expression status and high lymph node metastasis, but correlates negatively with relapse-free and overall survival (Ye et al., 2013a). This allowed the authors to suggest that breast tumor infiltrating γδ T cells are the most significant prognostic factor in assessing the gravity of breast cancer. Along the same line, in breast cancer, Vδ1 TILs can inhibit the activation of CD4 and CD8 T cells and impair DC’s maturation and functioning and thus suppress immune responses (Peng et al., 2007). These T and dendritic cells switch to regulatory cells, thus intensifying immunosuppression (Ye et al., 2013a). It is worth mentioning that not the proliferation of resident regulatory Vδ1 who is responsible of their accumulation in the context of breast cancer but it is due to their attraction by IP-10 issued from breast cancer cells (Peng et al., 2007). Another study conducted on colon cancer samples, indicated that 80 and 20% of γδ Th17 cells corresponded to Vδ1 and Vδ2 subsets respectively. Based on these observations, the authors considered the infiltration of human colon cancer by γδ Th17 cell as a prognostic factor since it correlates with cancer stages and other pathological features (tumor size and infiltration, lymphatic and vascular invasion, lymph node metastasis and serum (Carcinoebmryonic Antigens (CEA) levels). On the other hand, among the tumor-infiltrating Vδ1 subset, γδ Th17 cells represent about 25% and secrete TNF-α, IL-8 and GM-CSF, which are responsible for the recruitment, the survival, the activation and the proliferation of MDSC, known to mediate immunosuppression and promote tumor growth (Wu et al., 2014).

On the contrary, other authors did not find any correlation between the presence of infiltrating γδ T cells and prognosis factors (Inman et al., 2008). The tumor type, as well as its localization, the specific γδ T cells profiles infiltrating the tumor and the tumor microenvironment perhaps condition the biologic effects
of γδT cells. Linked to some of these aspects, the ex vivo expanded colon, ovary, lung, breast, renal and pancreatic cancer derived γδT cells possess an efficient antitumor cytolytic effect and Vδ1 subset is generally considered more cytotoxic than Vδ2 one (Groh et al., 1999). Moreover, it was reported that infiltrating γδT cells selectively produce IL-17 but not IFN-γ on a transplantable mouse tumor model (Wakita et al., 2010). The lack of IL-17 generally avoids tumor growth, which correlates with reduced tumor angiogenesis and VEGF and Ang-2 expression in tumor cells. This shows that tumor-infiltrating γδ17 T cells enhance angiogenesis and therefore the tumor growth. The same effect was reported in a mouse model of hepatocellular carcinoma but has been attributed to the MDSC recruitment. Once at the tumor site, IL-17 induces the production of IL-1β and IL-23 by MDSC, which amplify the differentiation of γδ Th17 cells. Finally, this mechanism sustains immunosuppression and promotes tumor growth (Ma et al., 2014).

What are the Challenges for γδT Cell-Based Immunotherapy?

Clinical trials of γδT cell-Based Immunotherapy (γδT-BI) have been reported in multiple cancers with efficacy and good tolerance (Zhao et al., 2018; Zou et al., 2017). This immunotherapy depends either on the in vivo activation or the ex vivo expansion of γδT cells. The first approach consists on the stimulation of γδT cells by systemic administration of pAg or N-bis (Bennouna et al., 2008). The second one is based on their expansion using synthetic pAg or N-bis (mostly used as drug, ex: Zoledronate, pamidronate and alkylamine) before the administration of the cultured γδT cells (Zhao et al., 2018; Dieli et al., 2007). Interestingly, the capacity of γδT cells to be easily and specifically stimulated either by pAg (HMBPP and IPP) or by factors that induce IPP accumulation represent an important characteristic for their use in research (Dieli et al., 2007). Thus, in several clinical trials, γδT cells displayed an efficacy in diverse tumors, including renal cell carcinomas (Kobayashi et al., 2011), lung carcinomas (Johnson et al., 2003), melanomas (Body, 2006), breast cancer (Jemal et al., 2005) and many others (Zou et al., 2017). In a series of metastatic renal cell carcinoma that underwent γδT cells therapy, 60% of patients displayed a Stable Disease (SD) (Bennouna et al., 2008). A Complete Remission (CR) was observed in a patient with advanced renal cell carcinoma who underwent six monthly cycles of autologous γδ T cell therapy and was disease free for more than 3 years without supplementary treatment. In a second time, the authors proceeded to phases I/II clinical trial, using 2-methyl-3-butenyl-1-pyrophosphate associated to zoledronate and IL-2. The findings of the study revealed an increased “Tumor Doubling Time”, with 1, 5 and 5 cases of complete remission, stable disease and progressive disease respectively (Kobayashi et al., 2010). Numerous in vitro and in vivo experiments have demonstrated that γδT cells could be suitable for possible exploitation in the transplantation of Hematopoietic Stem Cells (HSCT). Indeed, there is a positive correlation between the allogeneic graft γδT cells and the disease-free survival (Lamb Jr et al., 1996; 1999; Godder et al., 2007). They are also unlikely to initiate Graft-Versus-Host Disease (GVHD), with an ability to attenuate the GVHD activity of αβ T cells (Drobyski et al., 1999; Ellison et al., 1995). Moreover, allogeneic transplantation studies give evidences that γδT cells may facilitate alloengraftment (Drobyski and Majewski, 1997; Kawanishi et al., 1997; Henslee et al., 1987).

However, γδ T-BI still encounters many obstacles linked to many factors:

- The difficulty to infiltrate tumors by Vδ2 T cells, which may explain the poor results in cancers (Olive et al., 1997). In fact, this infiltration is negatively impacted by the significantly low expression of adhesion molecules such as ICAM-1 and VCAM-1 on human tumors as well as the overexpression of the endothelin B Receptor (ETBR), which inhibits ICAM-1 expression on human endothelium (Buckanovich et al., 2008; Hamzah et al., 2008)
- The existence of inhibitory factors produced by cancer cells or their microenvironment, mainly TGF-β, Prostaglandin E2 (PGE2), tumor derived adenosine and NKG2D-L:
  - TGF-β alters Vδ2 T cell antitumor activity by inducing a Treg profile (Ribot et al., 2014; Li et al., 2006)
  - Prostaglandin E2 (PGE2) is also an important regulator of Vδ2 T cells since they highly express PGE2 receptors EP2 and EP4 and many human cancers express high levels of PGE2 due to up-regulation of COX 2 (a key enzyme of prostaglandin biosynthesis). This may explain the limited efficacy of Vδ2 T cell-based immunotherapy in patients with high levels of PGE2 or COX2 (Martinet et al., 2009; Kunzmann et al., 2009)
  - Increased production of tumor-derived adenosine, highly secreted in various types of tumors, may alter Vδ2 T cells cytotoxicity (Blay et al., 1997)
  - The potential limitation of Vδ2 T cells, because of the proteolysis and the shedding of NKG2D-L (MICA/B and ULBP1-4) from the surface of tumor cells (Rincon-Orozco et al., 2005; Groh et al., 2002; Doubrovina et al., 2003)
The γδ T-B1 may also face other challenges related to the activity of immunosuppressive cells. For instance, γδT cells antitumor immune responses are downregulated by Treg cells that act through IL-10, TGF-β and IL-35 (Strauss et al., 2007). Additionally, Tregs can also express high levels of perforin and granzyme B exerting a cytotoxic activity against γδT cells (Cao et al., 2007). Moreover, Mesenchymal Stem Cells (MSCs) can also display an important immunosuppressive effect on activated Vγ2 T cells (Krämpera et al., 2003; Prigione et al., 2009). This inhibition is mediated by their COX2-dependent production of PGE2. Additionally, MSCs have the ability to migrate towards different types of tumor in vivo including glioma (Sonabend et al., 2008), colon carcinoma (Hung et al., 2005), ovarian carcinoma (Komarova et al., 2006), breast carcinoma (Karnoub et al., 2007) and melanoma (Studeny et al., 2002). This is possible since several MSC chemokine- and chemokine-secreting factors are released from tumor cells and surrounding stromal cells, such as MCP-1 (Dwyer et al., 2007), SDF-1 (Menon et al., 2007), PDGF, EGF and VEGF (Beckermann et al., 2008). On the other side, it was noticed that neutrophils are able to suppress γδT cells impairing their antitumor activity. This suppression would be due to the release of vesicular components of the neutrophils (serine proteases, elastase, cathepsin G) which catalyse the shedding of IL-2 and IL-6 receptors on γδT cells (Bank et al., 1999; Bank and Ansorge, 2001). Neutrophils also inhibit γδT cells by producing Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS) and releasing arginase, provoking down regulation of TCRζ on γδT cells with a halt of their cell cycle in the G0-G1 phase. Consequently, the up regulation of PD-L1 expression on γδT cells is associated with interferon-dependent PD1-mediated γδ T-cell apoptosis (Sabbione et al., 2014; Leliefeld et al., 2015).

Conclusion

The current synthesis aims to provide global answers on central questions on γδT cells, specifically about their structure, their functions and their clinical applications. γδT cells are characterized by diverse subsets among which Vγ2 is the most prevalent and well studied with more clinical applications. The way these cells recognize various antigens—either directly or through antigen presenting cells—widens their contribution to both innate and adaptive immune responses. Functionally, these cells show an interesting plasticity to polarize to diverse immune profiles and then display an anti-inflammatory or a pro-inflammatory fate. Thanks to the diversity of their receptors, these cells play a potent role in both infections and malignancies. Additionally, their proven anti-tumoral potential has allowed γδT cells to enter the immunotherapy universe in some cancers, using multiple strategies. Namely, the use of antibodies to activate Fc receptor-dependent ADCC, the development of γδT cell-based cancer vaccines and the promotion of their IFNγ secretion and not IL-17, with encouraging results. However, some obstacles remain challenging to overcome, mainly due to poor infiltration of target tissues, soluble inhibitory molecules and immunosuppressive cells in the tumor microenvironment. In addition, current and future researches are focusing on the implication of γδT cell in infections particularly the identification of bacterial ligands they can recognize and their behaviour in viral infections especially with HIV and cytomegalovirus. Finally, after decades of investigations, γδT cells still hide many of their characteristics and much remains to be learned.

Author’s Contributions

Moulay Yassine Belghali and Brahim Admou: Design, writing and revision of the manuscript.

Saadia Ba-M’hamed: Writing and revision of the manuscript.

Mouna Khouchani: Revision of the manuscript.

Ethics

This article is original and contains unpublished material. The corresponding author confirms that all of the other authors have read and approved the manuscript and no ethical issues involved.

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