Out of the darkness and into the light: bright field in situ hybridisation for delineation of ERBB2 (HER2) status in breast carcinoma

Aaron M Gruver, Ziad Peerwani, Raymond R Tubbs

ABSTRACT
Assessment of ERBB2 (HER2) status in breast carcinomas has become critical in determining response to the humanised monoclonal antibody trastuzumab. The current joint College of American Pathologists and the American Society of Clinical Oncology guidelines for the evaluation of HER2 status in breast carcinoma involve testing by immunohistochemistry and fluorescence in situ hybridisation (FISH). However, neither of these modalities is without limitations. Novel bright field in situ hybridisation techniques continue to provide viable alternatives to FISH testing. While these techniques are not limited to evaluation of the HER2 gene, the extensive number of studies comparing bright field in situ hybridisation techniques with other methods of assessing HER2 status allow a robust evaluation of this approach. Analysis of the literature demonstrates that, when used to assess HER2 gene status, bright field in situ hybridisation demonstrates excellent concordance with FISH results. The average percentage agreement in an informal analysis of studies comparing HER2 amplification by chromogenic in situ hybridisation with FISH was 96% (SD 4%); k coefficients ranged from 0.76 to 1.0. Although a much smaller number of studies are available for review, similar levels of concordance have been reported in studies comparing HER2 amplification by methods employing metallography (silver in situ hybridisation) with FISH. A summary of the advancements in bright field in situ hybridisation, with focus on those techniques with clinical applications of interest to the practicing pathologist, is presented.

INTRODUCTION
Historical perspectives on in situ hybridisation
At the time of Watson and Crick’s published description of DNA structure in 1955, Tjio and Levan had yet to publish the first reliable determination of the normal human chromosome complement. Much discovery was still needed before early knowledge of DNA technology could be applied to the field of cytogenetics. Although the technique of DNA–DNA hybridisation had been introduced in 1961, it was not until 1969 that successful attempts using radiographically labelled DNA and RNA to identify chromosomal targets of cytological preparations were made. These early studies relied upon a tritium-labelled RNA probe, derived from mixtures of Xenopus 28S and 18S RNA, and alkaline denaturation of extrachromosomal rDNA from Xenopus oocytes. Hybridised sequences were detected by autoradiography. Although limited by the resolution of the radiographic detection method employed, Gall and Pardue were able to demonstrate that RNA, and soon after DNA, can be hybridised specifically to target sequences under conditions that ‘preserve the morphological integrity of the nucleus’. Furthermore, the ability of this in situ technology to quantify relative amounts of target sequence was suggested by the detection of a low level gene amplification in preneoplastic oogonia. Additional successes were soon reported in employing autoradiographic detection of rRNA and DNA hybrids in tissue sections and in cytological specimens.

Over the years, much improvement has been made in the processes with which probes are developed and labelled, including the introduction of random primer labelling, nick translation reaction and PCR-based labelling. Revolutionary discoveries were reported in 1982 by two groups who performed hybridisation experiments with probes labelled either fluorometrically or cytchemically, rather than with radioisotopes. These fluorescent labels provided many advantages to the in situ hybridisation technique, including improvements in the easy and safety of use, increases in resolution, and the possibilities of simultaneously identifying multiple targets within the same nucleus. This new technique, fluorescence in situ hybridisation (FISH), could be accomplished using a probe labelled either directly or indirectly with a fluorochrome, and the basic principles of these labelling techniques have been recently reviewed. Briefly, direct labelling is the process of incorporating fluorescently labelled nucleotides into the nucleic acid probe; indirect labelling often involves complexing the probe with an intermediary hapten (eg, digoxigenin) that is subsequently detected with a labelled antibody to identify the target sequence of interest.

By 1985, another milestone in the in situ hybridisation technique was achieved when Landegent et al demonstrated localisation of the human thyroglobulin gene to a specific chromosome band using a probe constructed from cosmid subclones of the 3' region of the thyroglobulin gene. By the turn of the century, further refinement of the FISH technique lead to routine localisation of DNA targets as small as 10 kb and the ability to localise segments as small as 1 kb. Technical advancements through the years have spawned a variety of FISH technologies, and many of these experimental achievements are considered among the most significant milestones in the field of cytogenetics and molecular pathology. FISH has been particularly successful for mapping single-copy and repetitive DNA sequences using metaplaste and
interphase nuclei, for detecting targeted chromosome translocations, and for localising large repeat families to aid in chromosome identification and karyotype analysis. The research application of this technology is vast; clinically, FISH has proved invaluable in the diagnosis, prognostication and pharmacogenomic assessment of many diseases.

Despite the advantages of FISH, the technique is not without drawbacks. Often cited limitations to the routine implementation of conventional FISH include the requirements of a dedicated fluorescence imaging system and well-trained personnel with specific expertise. Furthermore, FISH studies provide relatively limited morphological assessment of overall histology, reduced stability of the fluorescent detection signal(s), and overall higher cost of testing. These limitations have prompted new achievements in the arena of in situ hybridisation detection. The purpose of this review is to summarise the advancements in bright field in situ hybridisation in use today with a focus on those techniques with clinical applications of interest to the practicing pathologist.

Clinical applications of bright field in situ hybridisation: the HER2 story and beyond

The continuous evolution of our understanding of the molecular pathogenesis of disease is perpetually altering our clinical decision making and therapeutic strategies. These changes have placed pressure upon clinical laboratories to provide adequate testing platforms to provide insight into the status of the disease of an individual patient. For many neoplastic processes, tissue microscopic morphology is the foundation to a diagnosis being made, and paraffin-embedded tissue provides an abundant source of archived material for molecular testing. As the need for molecular testing has increased, multiple techniques have been created or incorporated into the clinical laboratory to provide these necessary results. The various in situ hybridisation techniques meld a focused genetic technique upon the histology slide platform. Nonetheless, the amount of architectural information available for review depends on the type of in situ hybridisation procedure used. Bright field in situ hybridisation is particularly beneficial in this regard, as the majority of the morphological detail present on routine H&E-stained sections is preserved. Although in situ hybridisation can be used to assess a myriad of different molecular genetic aberrations, investigation of the HER2 gene status in breast carcinoma has been a major impetus for the development of bright field in situ hybridisation techniques.

As one of the five leading causes of cancer deaths worldwide, The World Health Organization recently projected that breast cancer will cause 630,000 deaths in 2015. This disease burden necessitates efficient use of limited healthcare resources. The ability to target specific genetic aberrations that are susceptible to a specific therapy is becoming a best clinical practice for treating a variety of diseases, particularly neoplasia. Discovery of the role of HER2 in breast cancer, and subsequent discovery of a viable corresponding gene-specific therapy, highlights the central role of a specific genetic aberration in some breast cancers, the ability to create therapeutics that target these specific aberrations, and the crucial necessity to identify the molecular genetic status of an individual’s breast cancer to personalise the clinical management. The experience with HER2 in breast carcinoma exemplifies the melding of a specific laboratory test with a specific therapy, pharmacogenomics, and the important role of in situ technology in clinical practice.

HER2 (ERBB2) is a proto-oncogene that encodes for a 185 kDa protein that is a member of the ERB family of transmembrane tyrosine kinase receptors. This receptor exists in a dimerisation-ready conformation, and does not require ligand binding to form functional dimers. Although it can form homodimers, it rarely does. Rather, it preferentially forms heterodimers with the remaining members of its family, particularly HER3. Depending upon the heterodimer, various signalling pathways are activated. This results in HER2 playing a role in different cellular functions, including the promotion of cell division and survival, while inhibiting apoptosis. These various functions reflect its potential to produce an oncogenic effect following HER2 gene amplification.

In 1987, Slamon et al published the first study identifying the role of HER2 in a subset of breast cancers. The authors demonstrated that HER2 amplification by Southern blotting was an independent variable linked to inferior overall survival and progression-free survival in multivariate analysis. During this same time period, Greene et al provided evidence that monoclonal antibodies against the p185 product of HER2 inhibited HER2-transformed cell lines implanted in nude mice. These studies, among others, laid the foundation for the development of a targeted therapy in breast cancer: trastuzumab.

Trastuzumab, or Herceptin, is a humanised monoclonal antibody against the 185 kDa protein of HER2. Its effect upon HER2-positive breast cancer is not limited to the immune response upon antibody binding. Rather, its effects are diverse and include the inhibition of dimerisation, induction of apoptosis, decreased cellular proliferation, and the modulation of signal transduction pathways. In 2001, the first phase III clinical trial of trastuzumab was published by Slamon et al. This prospective study examined the effect of trastuzumab on overall and progression-free survival in a cohort of women with metastatic breast cancer. A significant improvement in progression-free survival was demonstrated when trastuzumab was added to the chemotherapeutic protocols. Later studies, with a longer follow-up period, confirmed a significant improvement in overall survival when trastuzumab was added to the treatment of women with metastatic breast cancer. In 2007, the HERA international multicentre randomised trial reported on the use of trastuzumab in patients with HER2-amplified early stage breast cancers. A 2-year follow-up of the study showed a significant improvement in overall survival when trastuzumab was used in conjunction with standard therapeutic regimens. Currently, trastuzumab is used in the adjuvant setting for treatment of early stage breast cancer as well as metastatic breast cancer. Although the role of trastuzumab as neoadjuvant therapy is still being investigated, preliminary studies have demonstrated a significantly better pathological complete response in patients receiving neoadjuvant trastuzumab in combination with other agents. Throughout these studies, the drug toxicity of trastuzumab has been a concern, particularly the cardiac side effects. These ranged from mild left ventricular dysfunction to severe congestive heart failure. The severity of side effects further emphasised the clinical imperative to use trastuzumab only in the subset of patients whose clinical benefit would outweigh the risk of treatment side effects.

The clinical utility of trastuzumab, juxtaposed with the potential for drug toxicity, mandates the use of this therapy in the select group of patients who demonstrate HER2 amplification. This creates a clinical laboratory imperative to provide accurate and precise testing when assessing the HER2 status in breast cancer patients. In 2007, the American Society for Clinical Oncology and the College of American Pathologists (ASCO/CAP) published a joint guideline to standardise HER2 testing in the USA. The panel provided testing algorithms and test interpretation guidelines. The concern of equivocal or false positive results by immunohistochemistry is illustrated in the
interpretation guidelines. The panel redefined 2+ immunohistochemical staining for the HER2 gene product as equivocal, rather than positive. This change reflects two features previously identified of this category of test results. First, a large proportion of cases that stain 2+ fail to show gene amplification by FISH. Considering that FISH has a high concordance with Southern blotting, it was decided that 2+ scoring was equivocal with regards to HER2 status rather than positive. Second, up to 15% of cases assessed using immunohistochemistry (IHC) fall within the equivocal category. Their recommendation requires that cases that are equivocal by IHC be retested using a validated assay for the HER2 gene status. Specific guidelines for interpretation of bright field in situ hybridisation results were also provided by the panel.

These pressures provide impetus to further develop laboratory tests to fulfill this testing requirement. Although an armamentarium of strategies to detect HER2 status in research and clinical laboratories exists, including Southern blotting, PCR, IHC and FISH, the limitations of each of these have been documented. More specifically, although FISH is a robust test, its complicated procedure coupled with high technical expertise requirements precludes its use except in laboratories equipped and staffed to perform and interpret this highly complex testing. Over the last decade, the development of bright field in situ hybridisation techniques attempts to address the difficulties limiting widespread FISH testing.

Although bright field in situ hybridisation has gained much attention through the need to develop an accurate test of HER2 status that can be performed efficiently and cost effectively in many clinical laboratories, the application of this technology is not confined to assessment of HER2 status in breast carcinomas. Several other gene targets have been under investigation, and the implications of testing for these have been reported. Recently, published studies have used chromogenic in situ hybridisation as a means of assessing platelet-derived growth factor receptor A in gliomas, determining amplification of the epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) gene in anal squamous lesions, and correlating the EGFR gene copy number with therapy response in colorectal cancers.

Furthermore, the use of silver-enhanced in situ hybridisation to evaluate EGFR status in human glioblastomas has demonstrated strong concordance with FISH and gene expression data. The principles of various bright field technologies in use today, along with their benefits and limitations, are described below.

A NEW DAWN APPROACHES

Chromogenic in situ hybridisation

The basic principles of in situ hybridisation are straightforward and can be simplified as: use of a DNA probe complementary to a target sequence of interest followed by detection of the bound probe. Generation of the probe, method of labelling, condition of hybridisation, and strategy for detection are all areas of nuance that depend upon the type of in situ hybridisation technique employed. Chromogenic in situ hybridisation (CISH) was first described by Tanner et al in 2000 as an alternative to FISH detection of HER2 amplification in archival breast tissue. In that study, paraffin-embedded tissue sections were pretreated and subsequently hybridised with a digoxigenin-labelled DNA probe. The probe was detected by use of antidigoxigenin fluorescein antibody plus an anti-fluorescein isothiocyanate horseradish peroxidase (HRP). After addition of hydrogen peroxide, an enzyme digestion. The detection system used was an antidigoxigenin-fluorescein isothiocyanate antibody plus an anti-fluorescein-isothiocyanate horseradish peroxidase conjugate. This original HER2 CISH procedure involved single-colour detection of one probe, similar to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved FISH testing for HER2 available at the time. Comparison of CISH detection of HER2 to that of FISH correlated well in the series of 157 breast cancers examined (93.6% concordance).

Since the study by Tanner et al, additional variations of CISH technology have been evaluated. In general, the CISH technique employs either antibodies or other proteins (e.g., avidin) conjugated to an enzyme (e.g., horseradish peroxidase) in order to produce a chromogenic, rather than a fluorometric, reaction. Unlike FISH, chromogenic in situ hybridisation performs best when indirect labelling of the probe is used. Examples of the staining quality that is achievable through the CISH technique are demonstrated in figure 2. Although a large variety of commercial probes are available for testing by FISH, a relatively limited number of probes are available for CISH. However, reliable protocols to generate probes for chromogenic and fluorescence in situ hybridisation have been described.

Our informal analysis comparing CISH with FISH for detection of the HER2 gene in breast cancers demonstrates that the average percentage agreement in the examined studies comparing HER2 amplification by CISH and FISH is 96% (SD=4%) (table 1). Although not always performed, κ coefficients ranged from 0.76 to

Figure 1  Conceptual schematic of single-colour chromogenic in situ hybridisation demonstrating bright field detection of a digoxigenin-labelled probe. The probe is recognised by an antidigoxigenin fluorescein isothiocyanate primary antibody followed by detection with an anti-fluorescein-isothiocyanate horseradish peroxidase (HRP). After addition and oxidation of diaminobenzidine, a dark brown signal is deposited at the target site.
In 2004, Isola et al reported a study of paired CISH/FISH results from 192 breast cancers. Similar to previously published studies, the authors demonstrated excellent concordance between CISH and FISH (93.8%), κ coefficient 0.875. After careful analysis of 12 cases that displayed discordance between the two testing modalities, it was determined that 7 of the 12 could have been resolved by having chromosome 17 information when performing the CISH evaluation, and the other five discrepant cases were due to histological features that were difficult to identify in the sampled tumour. The authors concluded that CISH is an accurate and feasible alternative to the FDA-approved FISH test (Vysis PathVysion; Abbott Molecular, Des Plaines, Illinois, USA).

In 2006, two groups independently published studies comparing HER2 status determined by FISH and CISH. The two studies analysed 200 or more breast cancers. Hanna and Kwok examined tumour samples by CISH and FISH in three groups based upon HER2 status, as determined by IHC. Out of groups with either 0/1+ or 3+ staining by IHC, concordance between CISH and FISH was 97% and 98% respectively. Only 3 of 119 cases demonstrated discordance by these two methods. From the group with 2+ staining by IHC methodology, 9 of 115 cases demonstrated discordance between CISH and FISH (93% concordance). Discordant cases were of tumours displaying very low or borderline amplification with FISH. Scoring of samples with low-level FISH amplification is known to be difficult due in part to the high level of interobserver variability with these samples. Overall, the authors conclude that evaluation of HER2 by CISH may be a viable alternative to FISH analysis in the testing algorithm.

Saez et al examined 200 cases of invasive breast cancer to compare the status of HER2 as determined by CISH and FISH. The examined breast cancer cases were routinely examined by IHC, and during a 4-year period 95 cases with 0/1+ staining, 45 cases with 2+ staining, and 62 cases with 3+ staining, were collected for the study. A tissue macroarray of these cases was generated, and 174 of the cases were available for evaluation by CISH and FISH. Overall, a concordance of 94.8% was found between CISH and FISH. Eight breast cancers demonstrated amplification by CISH (two cases with low level amplification), but no amplification by the FISH technique. In 2007, van de Vijver et al published an international validation ring study involving five pathology laboratories who undertook CISH assessment of HER2 in breast cancer cases. A total of 211 invasive breast carcinomas were analysed by CISH, and the results compared with data generated by FISH testing. Of the 76 cases with high levels of HER2 amplification (HER2/CEP17 ratio >4), 96% tested positive for amplification by CISH. A concordance rate of 94% was achieved when testing 100 FISH-negative cases. However, in cases with low-level HER2 amplification by FISH (HER2/CEP17 ratio 2.0–4.0), only a 57% concordance rate was achieved (20/35 CISH scores indicated amplification). In addition to the difficulty in assessing low amplification cases by FISH, part of this discordance was thought to be due to assessment of only the HER2 locus by CISH, without normalisation for the chromosome 17 copy number in tumour samples. Although these cases pose difficulty for evaluation by CISH alone, it was proposed that counting signals from additional cells and using an additional CISH probe for chromosome 17 on an additional slide would be helpful. Even though it was estimated that the number of clinical breast cancers that fall into the category of borderline amplification of HER2 by FISH is 1–5%, practical solutions to the level of discordance in the
van de Vijer study are needed. The overall conclusion of the study by van de Vijer et al was that CISH and FISH have very high concordance, and that CISH is a viable alternative to FISH for assessment of HER2 in breast cancer cases.

The study by van de Vijer et al was not the first to identify that assessment and interpretation of HER2 cases with very low level of amplification (6–10 signals per cell) benefit from inclusion of the chromosome 17 probe. Inclusion of the chromosome 17 probe in such cases had proved to be robust and reproducible between other laboratories. A correlation of 100% was found between CISH and FISH in one study in which samples scoring more than two signals per nucleus were controlled using a chromosome 17 CISH and FISH in one study in which samples scoring more than two signals per nucleus were controlled using a chromosome 17

discrete spots of metallic silver deposition, from the enzymatic silver in situ hybridisation (SISH). This advancement produced an excellent review of metallographic bright field techniques, such as CISH, have potential to be used as an alternative to FISH testing in the assessment of HER2 status in breast cancers. In general, CISH is thought to offer several advantages over the FISH technique including: the ability to archive CISH prepared material indefinitely, the use of a conventional bright field microscope to interpret staining, the simultaneous assessment of morphology and gene copy number in the same slide, and the identification of tumour heterogeneity using low-level magnification. In addition, CISH is CE marked and FDA approved. Many of these same advantages are possible through use of another type of bright field in situ hybridisation based on metallographic, rather than chromogenic, probe detection.

Metallographic in situ hybridisation

Unlike CISH, enzyme metallographic in situ hybridisation utilises an enzymatic reaction to facilitate the deposition of metal directly from solution to identify the target site. In addition to the advantages offered by chromogenic bright field in situ hybridisation, metallographic in situ hybridisation provides higher sensitivity and resolution for both amplified and non-amplified genes. An excellent review of metallographic bright field in situ hybridisation modalities was recently published; discussion herein will be focused on describing the principles, practicalities and relative utility of this technology.

Due to limitations of early Nanogold-silver enhancement procedures that made them cumbersome for routine use, a simplified gold-enhanced Nanogold-streptavidin method, termed gold-facilitated in situ hybridisation (GOLDFISH) was developed to assess HER2 gene status (figure 5). This technique, initially developed as a simplified way to qualitatively identify confluent amplification signals in tissue sections rather than a quantitative assessment of discrete dots, demonstrated much initial promise. The first generation gold-facilitated metallographic bright field in situ hybridisation displayed good interobserver interpretative reproducibility in an examination of a series of 66 breast carcinomas; however, the need to differentiate cases with chromosome 17 aneusomy or polysomy from those with low-level HER2 amplification necessitated use of a quantitative interpretation method.

It was subsequently discovered that horseradish peroxidase can be used to selectively deposit metal from solution in the absence of a particulate nucleating agent such as Nanogold. The basic principles of this new technology, EnzMet, are presented in figure 4A. As commercialised enzyme metallography is known as silver in situ hybridisation (SISH). This advancement produced discreet spots of metallic silver deposition, from the enzymatic action of peroxidase on silver acetate in the presence of hydroquinone, at the target site, allowing a superior quantitative assessment of gene copy number. Results of the staining achieved by this method are demonstrated in figure 4B.C. The EnzMet Gene Pro assay, a form of SISH that incorporates concomitant protein detection, has demonstrated excellent interobserver reproducibility, and several studies have now
been published that compare HER2 gene status in breast carcinomas as determined by SISH and FISH (table 2).

To date, the published studies examining HER2 gene copy number by SISH have evaluated relatively small series of usually less than 100 breast cancers each. In 2007, Dietel et al reviewed a series of 99 invasive breast carcinomas by automated SISH and FISH. The results were analysed using the ASCO/CAP guidelines. Overall concordance was 96%. Discrepant cases were usually attributable to the presence of intratumoral heterogeneity of HER2 amplification. The authors concluded that SISH was as reliable as FISH in determining HER2 amplification.

One year later, Carbone et al published a multicentre study that examined the staining and interpretative reproducibility of the HER2 SISH assay (Ventana Medical Systems, Tucson, Arizona, USA) from 89 breast carcinomas using multiple techniques. The reproducibility and efficacy of HER2 SISH staining was excellent (median K_w value 0.91). Overall concordance between positive and negative SISH and FISH results was also superb (93–100%). However, concordance between SISH and FISH was lower (50%) for a group of eight cases in which the HER2/CEP17 ratio was between 1.5 and 3.0. These results suggest that the low-level or intermediate category of amplification poses challenges for the SISH, as well as the CISH, method of testing. This specific question has not been systematically addressed for FISH to our knowledge.

In 2009, Sousha et al published an evaluation of HER2 amplification in 55 breast cancers by automated SISH and FISH. In 94% of the cases examined, SISH and FISH results were identical using scoring criteria provided by the manufacturer. Two of the breast cancers were negative for HER2 amplification by SISH and positive by FISH. Another breast cancer was scored negative by FISH and positive for amplification by SISH. The authors agreed with the conclusion reached by Dietel et al in stating that automated SISH detection of HER2 in excised breast cancers compares very favourably with FISH analysis.

A recent study examining 230 breast cancers with a rapid SISH scoring technique determined a very high concordance (99.6%) with FISH testing. The authors employed a ‘SISH quick-score’ when evaluating HER2 status by SISH. Similar to the FDA-approved assessment of HER2 status with a single CISH probe, the SISH quick-score relies upon the number of stain dots present in tumour cell nuclei. With dots from an epithelial or fibroblast cell used as a reference signal, the scorers evaluated HER2 status as: non-amplification, aneusomy, polysomy, and low-level or high-level amplification. The two evaluators in this study were 100% concordant in their interpretation using the SISH quick-score technique. In addition to confirming the ability of automated SISH to accurately assess HER2 status in breast cancers, the data of the study suggest that the use of SISH quick-score is of additional utility in that it combines the resolution of SISH with straightforward interpretation style of the CISH scoring method.

In sum, the studies available for review suggest that SISH is a reliable substitution for FISH in the determination of HER2 status in invasive breast carcinoma. Similar to FISH, SISH allows enumeration of HER2 and chromosome 17 signals enabling generation of a HER2/CEP17 ratio. The published ASCO/CAP guidelines, including the equivocal range of HER2 gene amplification (HER2/CEP17 ratio of 1.8–2.2), are also readily applied to this bright field in situ hybridisation. The benefits of SISH detection of HER2 include: very high sensitivity with high resolution and signal separation, accurate quantitation of gene amplification, excellent visualisation of tissue morphology, and adaptability for automation. SISH is currently CE marked but has not yet been FDA approved. While assessment of HER2 using currently available commercial technology opens up the benefits of the CISH and SISH platforms to laboratories not able to perform FISH, additional advances in bright field in situ hybridisation technologies are currently under development.
THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT

Dual-colour FISH is considered the 'gold standard' for in situ assessment of gene copy number, in part because of the superior spatial resolution offered by this technique and the FDA approval status of Vysis PathVysion. However, dual colour FISH has the same disadvantages as single-colour FISH and the additional limitation that probes producing more intense signal may lead to the interpretation of biased ratios favouring the brighter probe. Despite some limitations, the ability to directly assess both and multiple targets in the same nucleus simultaneously is highly desirable. Although studies evaluating multicolour detection procedures for bright field microscopy using chromosome specific probes had been reported in the past, development of dual-colour CISH using probes for HER2 and chromosome 17 was reported more recently using single-colour detection of a digoxigenin-labelled HER2 probe and a biotin labelled chromosome 17 probe. The results of dual-coloured CISH and FISH in that study showed high concordance (91%, \(\kappa\) coefficient 0.82), and the contrast provided by the two colours allowed for immediate distinction between HER2 amplification and chromosome 17 aneuploidy. Additional reports of dual-colour CISH for the assessment of HER2 gene status found excellent concordance when respectively compared with FISH results (98.6% and 94.6%). Additional advancements in bright field in situ hybridisation are aiming to provide assessment of both HER2 and chromosome 17 through techniques to identify both targets either

Table 2  Comparison of HER2 status using SISH and FISH methodologies

| Reference | Sample size | No. of test sites | Concordance (%) | \(\kappa\) coefficient* |
|-----------|-------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Sinczak-Kuta | 63         | 1                | NS              | 0.38                  |
| Dietel et al | 99         | 5                | 96.0            | 0.75                  |
| Carbone et al | 89         | 5                | 98.9            | NS                    |
| Shousha et al | 53        | 1                | 94.0            | NS                    |
| Collins et al | 230       | 2                | 99.6            | NS                    |
| Bartlett et al | 45        | 7                | 96.0            | NS                    |

FISH, fluorescence in situ hybridisation; SISH, silver in situ hybridisation; NS, not specified.

*95% confidence level unless otherwise specified, coefficients rounded to two decimal places.

†Weighted averages were calculated in some instances.

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT

Dual-colour FISH is considered the 'gold standard' for in situ assessment of gene copy number, in part because of the superior spatial resolution offered by this technique and the FDA approval status of Vysis PathVysion. However, dual colour FISH has the same disadvantages as single-colour FISH and the additional limitation that probes producing more intense signal may lead to the interpretation of biased ratios favouring the brighter probe. Despite some limitations, the ability to directly assess both and multiple targets in the same nucleus simultaneously is highly desirable. Although studies evaluating multicolour detection procedures for bright field microscopy using chromosome specific probes had been reported in the past, development of dual-colour CISH using probes for HER2 and chromosome 17 was reported more recently using single-colour detection of a digoxigenin-labelled HER2 probe and a biotin labelled chromosome 17 probe. The results of dual-coloured CISH and FISH in that study showed high concordance (91%, \(\kappa\) coefficient 0.82), and the contrast provided by the two colours allowed for immediate distinction between HER2 amplification and chromosome 17 aneuploidy. Additional reports of dual-colour CISH for the assessment of HER2 gene status found excellent concordance when respectively compared with FISH results (98.6% and 94.6%). Additional advancements in bright field in situ hybridisation are aiming to provide assessment of both HER2 and chromosome 17 through techniques to identify both targets either
simultaneously or consecutively (figure 5). Examples of the staining produced by such techniques are demonstrated in figure 6. Recently, automated bright field double in situ hybridisation (BDISH) applications have been described. In the study by Nitta et al, high consensus concordance was demonstrated between FISH and BDISH methods. Future versions of this approach will use simultaneous hybridisations with dual haptens allowing dual colour detection (DISH) of HER2 and chromosome 17. Depending on the scoring criteria used (historical versus ASCO/CAP) and whether FISH equivocal cases were included, the concordance percentages ranged between 95.7% and 100% (κ coefficients 0.89–1.0). Since publication of that study, the utility of this technology has become apparent, and it has been suggested that the BDISH automated technique might be used in replacement of manual dual-colour FISH methods in the future. Alternatively, techniques combining IHC and BDISH methods may become the new preferred method of HER2 assessment.

In conclusion, the constant elucidation of the molecular pathogenesis of disease requires that detailed genetic information guide clinical decision making and therapeutic strategies. This demand has placed pressure upon clinical laboratories to provide testing platforms capable of accurately assessing genomic signatures. In situ hybridisation techniques are, and should continue to be, an important part of the pathologist’s role in the movement towards personalised medicine. The bright field in situ hybridisation techniques presented offer a glimpse at where the state of diagnostics and pharmacogenomic testing is headed in terms of accurately assessing the morphological status and molecular status of a tumour cell simultaneously.

**Take-home messages**

- Bright field in situ hybridisation is a molecular technique that enables visualisation of cellular target DNA using chromogenic (eg, chromogenic in situ hybridisation) or enzyme metallographic (eg, silver in situ hybridisation) methods of detection with conventional light microscopy.
- Benefits to bright field in situ hybridisation include: the ability to archive prepared material indefinitely, the use of a conventional bright field microscope to interpret staining, the simultaneous assessment of morphology and gene copy number on the same slide, and the identification of tumour heterogeneity using low-level magnification.
- An informal analysis of the literature demonstrates excellent concordance among published comparisons of bright field in situ hybridisation and fluorescence in situ hybridisation assessment of ERBB2 (HER2) gene status in breast carcinoma.
- Current American Society for Clinical Oncology and College of American Pathologists interpretation guidelines for FISH detection of ERBB2 (HER2) gene status in breast carcinoma are readily applied to bright field in situ hybridisation techniques.
- Effective advocacy, use and interpretation of bright field in situ hybridisation can be an important part of the role of the pathologist in the movement towards personalised medicine.

**Interactive multiple choice questions**

This JCP review has an accompanying set of multiple choice questions (MCQs). To access the questions, click on BMJ Learning: Take this module on BMJ Learning from the content box at the top right and bottom left of the online article. For more information please go to: http://jcp.bmj.com/education Please note: the MCQs are hosted on BMJ Learning—the best available learning website for medical professionals from the BMJ Group. If prompted, subscribers must sign into JCP with their journal’s username and password. All users must also complete a one-time registration on BMJ Learning and subsequently log in (with a BMJ Learning username and password) on every visit.
Acknowledgements The authors thank Dr Jorma Isola, Dr Hiroaki Nitta, the American Society for Investigative Pathology, and Elsevier, for providing access to examples of bright field in situ hybridization techniques.

Funding This work was supported by federal grants to Nanoprobes and The Cleveland Clinic (NIH 1R41CA83618-01, NIH/NCI 1R41CA83618-02, NIH 1R43GM062571-11, NIH/NIAMS 1R43GM062570-01 and NIH R43 CA111162-01) and an Industry sponsored grant from Ventana Medical Systems to RRT.

Competing interests The senior author of the manuscript receives research support and honoraria for speaking on behalf of Ventana Medical Systems.

Provenance and peer review Commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

REFERENCES
1. Watson JD, Crick FH. Molecular structure of nucleic acids: a structure for deoxyribonucleic acid. Nature 1953;171:737–8.
2. Tjio JH, Levan A. The chromosome number of man. Hereditas 1956;42:1–6.
3. de Jong H. Visualizing DNA domains and sequences by microscopy: a fifty-year history of molecular cytogenetics. Genome 2003;46:943–6.
4. Schildkraut CL, Mammij J, Doty F. The formation of hybrid DNA molecules and their use in studies of DNA homologies. J Mol Biol 1961;3:565–67.
5. Gall JG. Pardue ML. Formation and detection of RNA–DNA hybrid molecules in cytological preparations. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A 1969;63:378–83.
6. Pardue ML, Gall JG. Molecular hybridization of radioactive DNA to the DNA of cytological preparations. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A 1969;64:640–4.
7. Buongiorno-Nardelli M, Amaldi F. Autoradiographic detection of hybrid molecules between RNA and DNA in tissue sections. Nature 1970;225:946–8.
8. John HA, Birnstiel ML, Jones KW. RNA–DNA hybrids at the cytological level. Nature 1969;223:562.
9. Langer-Safer PR, Levine M, Ward DC. Immunological method for mapping genes on Drosophila polytene chromosomes. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A 1982;79:4931–5.
10. Van Prooijen-Knegt AC, Van Hoek JF, Baumgarten JA, et al. In situ hybridization of DNA sequences in human metaphase chromosomes visualized by an indirect fluorescent hybridization technique. Exp Cell Res 1982;141:397–407.
11. Trask BJ. Human cytogenetics: 46 chromosomes, 46 years and counting. Hum Genet 2002;109:769–78.
12. Lambros MB, Natrajan R, Reis-Filho JS. Chromogenic and fluorescent in situ hybridization in breast cancer. Hum Pathol 2007;38:1105–22.
13. Landegent JE, Jansen in de Wal N, van Ommen GJ, et al. Chromosomal localization of a unique gene present in a patient with hereditary nonlysosomal storage disease. Nature 1985;317:7–11.
14. Volpi EJ, Bridger JM. FISH glossary: an overview of the fluorescence in situ hybridization technique. BioTechniques 2008;45:385–6, 388, 390 passim.
15. Keen-Kim D, Nouria F, Rao PN. Cytogenetic biomarkers for human cancer. Front Biosci 2006;10:5920–49.
16. Mathers ED, Loncar D. Projections of global mortality and burden of disease from 2002 to 2030. PLoS Med 2008;5:e442.
17. Measner MM. The oncogene HER2: its signaling and transforming functions and its role in human cancer pathogenesis. Oncogene 2007;26:6406–7.
18. Slamon DJ, Clark WH, Wong SG, et al. Human breast cancer: correlation of relapse and survival with amplification of the HER-2/neu oncogene. Science 1987;235:177–82.
19. Drebushuk JA, Link VC, Greene MI. Monoclonal antibodies reactive with distinct domains of the HER-2/neu protein and their use in the detection of HER-2/neu positive breast cancer. J Natl Cancer Inst 2001;93:748–59.
20. Smith I, Proctor M, Gelber RD, et al. 2-year follow-up of trastuzumab after adjuvant chemotherapy in HER2-positive breast cancer: a randomised controlled trial. Lancet 2007;369:29–36.
21. Madaras NY, Trudeau M, Franke JA, et al. Adjuvant/neoadjuvant trastuzumab therapy in women with HER-2/neu-overexpressing breast cancer: a systematic review. Cancer Treat Rev 2008;34:539–57.
22. Buzdar AU, Ibrahim Y, Francis DS, et al. Significantly higher pathologic complete remission rate after neoadjuvant therapy with trastuzumab, paclitaxel, and epirubicin chemotherapy: results of a randomized trial in human epidermal growth factor receptor 2-positive operable breast cancer. J Clin Oncol 2005;23:3676–85.
23. Buzdar AU, Valero V, Ibrahim NK, et al. Neoadjuvant therapy with paclitaxel followed by 5-fluorouracil, epirubicin, and cyclophosphamide chemotherapy and concurrent trastuzumab in human epidermal growth factor receptor 2-positive operable breast cancer: an update of the initial randomized study population and data of additional patients treated with the same regimen. Clin Cancer Res 2007;13:228–33.
24. Sikov WM, Dixon DS, Stroner R, et al. Frequent pathologic complete responses in aggressive stage II to III breast cancers with 4-week carboplatin and weekly paclitaxel with or without trastuzumab: A Brown University Oncology Group Study. J Clin Oncol 2009;27:4693–700.
25. Bird BR, Swain SM. Cardiac toxicity in breast cancer survivors: review of potential contributing factors. Oncol Clin Res 2008;14:14–24.
26. Wolff AC, Hammond ME, Schwartz JN, et al. American Society of Clinical Oncology/College of American Pathologists guideline recommendations for human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 testing in breast cancer. Arch Pathol Lab Med 2007;131:18–43.
65. Loring P, Cummins R, O’Grady A, et al. HER2 positivity in breast carcinoma: a comparison of chromogenic in situ hybridization with fluorescence in situ hybridization in tissue microarrays, with targeted evaluation of intratumoral heterogeneity in breast carcinoma. Appl Immunohistochem Mol Morphol 2005;13:194–200.

66. Saez A, Andreu FJ, Segui MA, et al. HER-2 gene amplification by chromogenic in situ hybridization (CISH) compared with fluorescence in situ hybridization (FISH) in breast cancer: A study of two hundred cases. Breast 2006;15:519–27.

67. Hanna WM, Kwok K. Chromogenic in situ hybridization: a viable alternative for fluorescence in situ hybridization in the HER2 testing algorithm. Mod Pathol 2006;19:481–7.

68. van de Vijver M, Bilous M, Hanna W, et al. Chromogenic in situ hybridisation for the assessment of HER2 status in breast cancer: an international validation ring study. Breast Cancer Res 2007;9:R68.

69. Ceyre A, Mishellany F, Lagarde N, et al. Comparison of different commercial kits for HER2 testing in breast cancer: looking for the accurate cutoff for amplification. Breast Cancer Res 2007;9:R64.

70. Sinczak-Kuta A, Tamaszewska R, Rudnicka-Sosin L, et al. Evaluation of HER2/neu gene amplification in patients with invasive breast carcinoma. Comparison of in situ hybridization methods. Pol J Pathol 2007;58:41–50.

71. Di Palma S, Collins N, Faulkes C, et al. Chromogenic in situ hybridisation (CISH) should be an accepted method in the routine diagnostic evaluation of HER2 status in breast cancer. J Clin Pathol 2007;60:1067–8.

72. Carbone A, Botti G, Gloghini A, et al. Delineation of HER2 gene status in breast carcinoma by silver in situ hybridization is reproducible among laboratories and pathologists. J Mol Diagn 2008;10:527–36.

73. Di Palma S, Collins N, Bilous M, et al. A quality assurance exercise to evaluate the accuracy and reproducibility of chromogenic in situ hybridization for HER2 analysis in breast cancer. J Clin Pathol 2008;61:757–60.

74. Pothis A, Piasstra K, Plaetris A, et al. Comparison of chromogenic in situ hybridisation with fluorescence in situ hybridisation and immunohistochemistry for the assessment of her-2/neu oncogene in archival material of breast carcinoma. Acta Histochem Cytochem 2008;41:59–64.

75. Gong Y, Sweet W, Duh YJ, et al. Chromogenic in situ hybridization is a reliable method for detecting HER2 gene status in breast cancer: a multicenter study using conventional scoring criteria and the new ASCO/CAP recommendations. Am J Clin Pathol 2009;131:990–7.

76. Pedersen M, Rasmussen BB. The correlation between dual-color chromogenic in situ hybridization and fluorescence in situ hybridization in assessing HER2 gene amplification in breast cancer. Diagn Mol Pathol 2009;18:96–102.

77. Hyun CL, Lee HE, Kim KS, et al. The effect of chromosome 17 polysomy on HER-2/neu status in breast cancer. J Clin Pathol 2008;61:317–21.

78. Bartlett JM, Campbell FM, Mellon EA. Determination of HER2 amplification by in situ hybridization: when should chromosome 17 also be determined? Am J Clin Pathol 2008;130:920–6.

79. Powell RD, Pettay JD, Powell WC, et al. Metallographic in situ hybridization. Hum Pathol 2007;38:1145–59.

80. Tubbs RR, Pettay J, Skacel M, et al. Gold-facilitated in situ hybridization: a bright-field metallographic alternative to fluorescence in situ hybridization for detection of Her-2/neu gene amplification. Am J Pathol 2002;160:1589–95.

81. Tubbs RR, Pettay J, Hicks D, et al. Novel bright field molecular morphology methods for detection of HER2 gene amplification. J Mol Histol 2004;35:589–94.

82. Tubbs RR, Skacel M, Pettay J, et al. Interobserver interpretative reproducibility of G0/D/FISH, a first generation gold-facilitated metallographic bright field in situ hybridization assay for HER-2/neu amplification in invasive mammary carcinoma. Am J Surg Pathol 2002;26:908–13.

83. Patel RM, Downs-Kelly E, Weiss SW, et al. Dual-color, break-apart fluorescence in situ hybridization for EWS gene rearrangement distinguishes clear cell sarcoma of soft tissue from malignant melanoma. Mod Pathol 2005;18:1585–90.

84. Downs-Kelly E, Pettay J, Hicks D, et al. Analytical validation and interobserver reproducibility of EnzMet GenePro: a second-generation bright-field metallography assay for concomitant detection of HER2 gene status and protein expression in invasive carcinoma of the breast. Am J Surg Pathol 2005;29:1505–11.

85. Dietel M, Ellis IO, Hofler H, et al. Comparison of automated silver enhanced in situ hybridisation (SISH) and fluorescence ISH (FISH) for the validation of HER2 gene status in breast carcinoma according to the guidelines of the American Society of Clinical Oncology and the College of American pathologists. Virchows Arch 2007;451:19–25.

86. Shousha S, Pison D, Arm-Takyi B, et al. Evaluation of automated silver-enhanced in situ hybridization (SISH) for detection of HER2 gene amplification in breast carcinoma excision and core biopsy specimens. Histopathology 2009;54:248–53.

87. Collins N, Faulkes C, Ping B, et al. A fast, accurate and robust alternative interpretation technique for evaluation of HER2 status in breast cancer using silver in situ hybridisation (SISH). J Clin Pathol. In press.

88. Bartlett JM, Campbell FM, Ibrahim M, et al. Chromogenic in situ hybridization: a multicenter study comparing silver in situ hybridization with FISH. Am J Clin Pathol 2009;132:514–20.

89. Kerstens HM, Poddige PJ, Hanselaege AG. Double-target in situ hybridization in brightfield microscopy. J Histochem Cytochem 1994;42:1071–7.

90. Speel EJ, Jansen MP, Ramaekers FC, et al. A novel triple-color detection procedure for brightfield microscopy, combining in situ hybridization with immunocytochemistry. J Histochem Cytochem 1994;42:1299–307.

91. Hopman AH, Claessens S, Speel EJ. Multi-colour brightfield in situ hybridisation on tissue sections. Histochim Cell Biol 1997;108:291–8.

92. Laasko M, Tanner M, Ilosa J. Dual-colour chromogenic in situ hybridization in testing for HER-2 oncogene amplification in archival breast tumours. J Pathol 2008;210:3–9.

93. Shipley J. Putting the colours into chromogenic in situ hybridization (CISH). J Pathol 2009;210:1–2.

94. Mayr D, Heim S, Wevrauch K, et al. Chromogenic in situ hybridization for Her-2/neu oncogene in breast cancer: comparison of a new dual-colour chromogenic in situ hybridization with immunohistochemistry and fluorescence in situ hybridization. Histopathology 2009;55:716–3.

95. Nitta H, Hatakeyama H, Lehrkamp M, et al. Development of automated brightfield double In Situ hybridization (BDISH) application for HER2 gene and chromosome 17 centromeres (CEN 17) for breast carcinomas and an assay performance comparison to manual dual color HER2 fluorescence In Situ hybridization (FISH). Diagn Pathol 2008;3:41.

96. Kurosumi M. Recent trends of HER-2 testing and trastuzumab therapy for breast cancer. Breast Cancer 2009;16:283.

97. Walk EE. The role of pathologists in the era of personalized medicine. Arch Pathol Lab Med 2009;133:605–10.