Case report

The YPEL5–PPP1CB fusion transcript is detected in different hematological malignancies and in normal samples

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1. Introduction

Chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) is the most frequent leukemia in Western adults. It was suggested that transcripts from a reciprocal trans-splcing event between YPEL5 and PPP1CB were present exclusively in CLL patients (more than 90%). Here we show that the YPEL5–PPP1CB fusion is not specific for CLL but is also detected in other hematological malignancies such as chronic myeloid leukemia, monoclonal B cell lymphocytosis or acute leukemia and also in normal samples. As such, it is unlikely that the YPEL5–PPP1CB fusion is a good drug target in CLL or a suitable target to monitor disease.

1.1. Materials and methods

1.1.1. Samples

Diagnostic or follow-up blood and bone marrow samples from patients with CLL, MBL, AML, CML and ALL were collected from February 2012 to September 2013 in the course of normal treatment. Diagnosis was based on the World Health Organization 2008 criteria. Permission to use left-over samples was obtained from the ethical committee of Ghent University Hospital and all samples were treated according to the Declaration of Helsinki. White blood cells were isolated by erythrocyte lysis. RNA was isolated using the RNeasy kit (Qiagen) according to the manufacturer's instructions.

1.1.2. cDNA synthesis

cDNA was made using SuperScript II or SuperScript III (Life Technologies) according to the manufacturer's instructions. Briefly, 1 μg RNA was reverse transcribed in a total volume of 40 μL (SuperScript II) or 50 μL (SuperScript III).

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lrr.2015.07.001
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2.3. qPCR

For the NuPCR (Illumina; product discontinued), primers and MNAsyme were designed with the DesignStudio. YPEL5-PPP1CB and PPP1CB-YPEL5 PCRs (both with FAM-labeled probe) were performed in two multiplex PCRs, each in combination with anABL1 PCR (HEX-labeled probe). The primers used are: 5′-TAAACCTGAGACTCCGGTG-3′ and 5′-CTTCTCTGACAGCCTCTCGTA-3′ for YPEL5-PPP1CB and 5′-AGTCTGCGACACAGTCGC-3′ and 5′-TCAACTTGAAGACGCACTGA-3′ for PPP1CB-YPEL5. The expression of ABL1 was normalized to the expression of YPEL5 and PPP1CB transcript. All PCRs included proper negative controls, which never showed amplification.

For the EvaGreen qPCR, we used the published SYBR Green assay primers [5] for YPEL5-PPP1CB and 5′-GACGGGAGAACATACAGACG-3′ and 5′-CAAGTCCATCTCGCTGA-3′ for ABL1 in combination with the SsoFast EvaGreen Supermix (Bio-Rad). For the PCR, 5 μL cDNA was used in a 20 μL total reaction volume using 300 nM primers. Cycling was done on a CFX96 cycler (Bio-Rad) following this protocol: 95 °C 2 min, 40 cycles of 95 °C for 15 s, 50 °C for 30 s and 72 °C for 30 s.

For the NuPCR strategies, expression of YPEL5-PPP1CB was normalized to the expression of ABL1. All PCRs included proper negative controls, which never showed amplification. Samples were analyzed for tumor-specific markers (e.g. BCR–ABL1 expression in CML samples) to confirm their identity as non-CLL samples.

3. Results and discussion

The apparent frequent and exclusive occurrence of the splicing of YPEL5 and PPP1CB in CLL [5] could be a good target for directed therapy and molecular monitoring of this disease. To maximize the sensitivity and specificity in the detection of this fusion transcript, we used the recently introduced NuPCR technique [6]. The combination of two specific primers and a specific MNAsyme ensures a high specificity of the PCR in combination with a sensitive detection method (Fig. 1).

Initially, we tested four samples of CLL patients for the expression of both YPEL5–PPP1CB and PPP1CB–YPEL5 transcripts. In all samples, we observed low expression of the YPEL5–PPP1CB transcript. In contrast, the PPP1CB–YPEL5 transcript was not detected in any sample (data not shown). Therefore, we focused on the YPEL5–PPP1CB transcript in our further analyses. The panel of primary diagnostic CLL samples was expanded and in total, we detected variable expression of the YPEL5–PPP1CB transcript in 17/18 CLL samples (94%) (Fig. 2A – black bars), confirming the recurrent expression of the YPEL5–PPP1CB transcript in CLL [5].

To test the specificity of the expression of YPEL5–PPP1CB, we tested diagnostic samples of patients with AML (n = 3), ALL (n = 4), MBL (n = 7), CML (n = 3), different hematological cell lines (n = 10; data not shown) and samples from healthy individuals (n = 3) with the NuPCR for YPEL5–PPP1CB. All patient samples and three cell lines (ME-1, Kasumi-1, and MonoMac-6) tested positive, albeit at different levels (Fig. 3A – black bars), showing that the presence of YPEL5–PPP1CB is not specific for CLL. The expression levels in the different sample types were highly variable, but correspond to the levels observed in primary CLL samples. To investigate the discrepancy between the NuPCR and the results obtained by Velusamy et al. [5], we repeated the analysis on the same samples with the primers from the published SYBR Green assay [5] (Fig. 1; further referred to as EvaGreen method). After the PCR, one melting peak was obtained and sequence analysis confirmed the identity of the YPEL5–PPP1CB fusion (Supplementary Fig. S1). The patient samples showed similar expression with the EvaGreen method as obtained by the NuPCR (Figs. 2A and 3A – white bars). This confirmed the wide expression in non-CLL samples, disproving the statement that the YPEL5–PPP1CB is specific for CLL. Globally, the expression level was comparable regardless of the PCR technique used (Figs. 2B and 3B).

A report on high-throughput mRNA sequencing in CLL patients [7] also described a low-level expression of the YPEL5–PPP1CB transcript, both in normal and cancer samples. Although the expression level was below the threshold set by the authors, this finding is concordant with our results.

The discrepancy between our results and the results from Velusamy et al. [5] is potentially explained by the recent finding that incubation-induced gene dysregulation affects the expression level and splicing of numerous genes in leukemic samples [8]. As the expression level of YPEL5–PPP1CB is very low, even small differences in splicing efficiency, as a result of different sample processing times, could make the difference between being able to detect the transcript or not.

To conclude, we find that the YPEL5–PPP1CB transcript is not exclusively present in CLL samples and its usability as a molecular marker and the relevance for CLL therapeutics should be scrutinized thoroughly before taking steps in the development of target-specific drugs.

Authors’ contributions

KV: designed the study, performed experiments, drafted the manuscript, approved the final version.

JP, BD: designed the study, revised the manuscript, approved the final version.

Fig. 1. Location of primers and probes. The chimeric transcript starts with the first exon of YPEL5 (black) and is followed by the second exon of PPP1CB (gray). The primers used in the analyses are shown as arrows.
Fig. 2. Expression of YPEL5–PPP1CB in diagnostic samples of CLL patients. (A) Diagnostic CLL samples \((n=17)\) were analyzed for YPEL5–PPP1CB expression using two different PCR strategies (NuPCR (black) and EvaGreen (white)). The relative expression is highly variable but shows overall a good comparison between the two techniques used. Only positive samples with quantifiable results are shown. The expression in the sample CLL1 was set to 1 and all other samples are shown relative to this sample. (B) Scatter plot comparing the results from the NuPCR with the EvaGreen PCR. A correlation coefficient of 0.9676 was obtained.

Fig. 3. Expression of YPEL5–PPP1CB in diagnostic and remission samples of patients with different hematological malignancies. (A) Diagnostic AML \((n=3)\), ALL \((n=4)\), CML \((n=3)\), and MBL \((n=7)\) samples, and normal bone marrow samples \((n=3)\) were analyzed for YPEL5–PPP1CB expression using two different PCR strategies (NuPCR (black) and EvaGreen (white)). CLL1 and CLL2 samples are reproduced from Fig. 2 for comparison. All samples show expression levels in the same range as the CLL samples. The expression in the sample CLL1 was set to 1 and all other samples are shown relative to this sample. (B) Scatter plot comparing the results from the NuPCR with the EvaGreen PCR. A correlation coefficient of 0.6945 was obtained.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by a grant from Ghent University Hospital (Grant no. KW/1294/LBK/003/001) (Klinisch Onderzoeksfonds).

Appendix A. Supplementary information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lrr.2015.07.001.
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