Identification of \textit{Id1} in Acquired Middle Ear Cholesteatoma

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**Objectives:** To determine (1) the relationship between chronic inflammatory changes in the ossicular chain area (OCA) and the formation of cholesteatoma and (2) the correlates between aberrant gene expression and abnormal proliferation of cholesteatoma.

**Methods:** Two hundred sixty-four ears with chronic otitis media that had undergone ear surgery were included in this study for statistical analysis of the relationship between abnormalities in the OCA and cholesteatoma. Fourteen middle ear cholesteatoma specimens were collected for immunohistochemical analysis of candidate molecules involved in the abnormal proliferation of keratinocytes. A cell model was used for verification of candidate molecule involvement.

**Results:** The formation of cholesteatoma was accompanied by chronic inflammatory changes in the OCA, including granulated tissue, adhesion, and stagnating effusion. The inhibitor of the DNA-binding (\textit{Id1}) gene, which is involved in controlling cell cycle progression, was abundantly expressed in cholesteatoma epithelium. In vitro studies indicate that \textit{Id1} regulated the expression of nuclear factor H9260B, cyclin D1, proliferating cell nuclear antigen, and cell cycle progression of keratinocytes.

**Conclusions:** Chronic inflammation in the OCA is closely related to the formation of cholesteatoma. The \textit{Id1} nuclear factor H9260B/cyclin D1/proliferating cell nuclear antigen signaling pathway is involved in the abnormal proliferation of keratinocytes in acquired cholesteatoma.


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**CHOLESTEATOMA GROWS aggressively, destroys neighboring tissues or structures such as the ossicular chain and the middle ear cleft, and causes complications (eg, hearing loss, brain abscess, and facial palsy). Clinically, acquired cholesteatoma is frequently associated with chronic otitis media (OM), and it is believed that middle ear infection promotes aggressive growth of cholesteatoma epithelium through inflammatory cytokines and mediators. What would be the candidate factor committing to growth of keratinocytes in cholesteatoma? A recent study suggested that \textit{Id1} is one of the candidate factors involved in the growth of keratinocytes. More recent studies demonstrated that \textit{ld} messenger RNA transcripts were up-regulated in the middle ear mucosa of rats and that \textit{ld} transfection in the middle ear mucosa of rats resulted in epithelial cell metaplasia, suggesting that \textit{Id1} has a role in the growth and proliferation of middle ear epithelial cells, including cholesteatoma epithelial cells. If so, middle ear chronic infection, especially in the ossicular chain area (OCA), may trigger the development of cholesteatoma by stimulating growth and proliferation of keratinocytes in the external auditory canal. Inflammation in the OCA occurs frequently in chronic OM, accounting for 88% of cases, whereas the occurrence of cholesteatoma in the OCA is also common compared with other locations involving chronic OM in the middle ear. Experimental animal models have shown that perforation of the tympanic membrane in conjunction with a latex-induced inflammation in the middle ear can initiate the development of cholesteatoma, suggesting that middle ear inflammation has an important role in the induction of cholesteatoma.

In this study, we hypothesized that chronic inflammation alone in the OCA is a driving force for the development of cholesteatoma. To test this hypothesis, first we examined chronic inflammation in the OCA and formation of retraction pockets in clinical patients, in an attempt to determine the relationship between chronic inflammation in the OCA and formation of cholesteatoma in the pars flaccida and posterosuperior quadrant of the tympanic membrane. Second, we examined the expression of \textit{Id1} and its effectors in the middle ear cholesteatomas to evaluate the importance of this molecule and its effectors in the abnormal proliferation of cho-
lesteatoma. Finally, we conducted in vitro studies to confirm the importance of \textit{Id1} in the pathogenesis of cholesteatoma.

Formation of the retraction pocket in the pars flaccida and posterosuperior quadrant of the tympanic membrane in the clinical patients was accompanied by the chronic inflammatory changes in the OCA, including granulated tissue, adhesion, and stagnating effusion. \textit{Id1} and its effectors were abundantly expressed in the cholesteatoma epithelium. In vitro, \textit{Id1} stimulated the cell cycle progression and growth of cultured keratinocytes via the activation of nuclear factor \( \kappa B \) (NF-\( \kappa B \)), cyclin D1, and proliferating cell nuclear antigen (PCNA).

**PROCUREMENT OF SURGICAL SPECIMENS**

Clinical patients who had undergone ear surgery were recruited from the 2nd Department of Otolaryngology, School of Medicine, Xi’an Jiaotong University, Xi’an, China. The study was performed in compliance with institutional human subject study regulations. The study included 26 ears of clinical patients with chronic OM. Diagnosis of cholesteatoma was made clinically and confirmed pathologically after surgery. The criteria for retraction pocket and cholesteatoma are as follows: (1) a tympanic membrane fossa or a tympanic membrane that is profoundly concave toward the middle ear cavity, and (2) onionskin-like substances accumulated in the fossa or middle ear cavity. For the studies of cholesteatoma and inflammatory location, the middle ear cleft was divided into 3 areas: (1) the anterior hemimesotympanum area (AHMA, the area before vertical plane via the tympanic umbo); (2) the OCA, including the attic and posterosuperior part of the meatosympanum; and (3) the antrum-mastoid process area (AMPA). Special attention was paid to the relationship between the pathologic changes in the OCA and the formation of retraction pockets and cholesteatomas. The differences in pathologic changes among the above-mentioned 3 areas were evaluated by flow cytometry and cell cycle progression.

**CELL CYCLE PROGRESSION**

Human keratinocytes (Rhek-1A)\(^8\) were maintained in Eagle minimal essential medium (Invitrogen Corp, Carlsbad, California) supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum, penicillin/streptomycin (50 mg/mL), and 2 mM 1-glutamine (hereafter referred to as full-growth medium [FGM]) at 37°C in a 5% carbon dioxide air atmosphere. During transient transfection of cells, were cultured in T-75 flasks with FGM up to 60% confluence and then incubated with serum-free medium (Opti-MEM; Invitrogen Corp) supplemented with 6 µg/mL of hexadimethrine bromide (Polybrene; Invitrogen Corp) (hereafter referred to as transfection medium) for 16 hours, recovered in FGM for 24 hours, and harvested for evaluation of flow cytometry and cell cycle progression.

**CONSTRUCTION OF \textit{Id1} COMPLEMENTARY DNA**

Full-length \textit{Id1} complementary DNA (cDNA) was cloned into a protein-expressing vector (pEGFP; Clontech, Mountain View, California) using standard protocols. Briefly, the open reading frame of the \textit{Id1} gene was obtained by reverse transcription–polymerase chain reaction using the following primer pair (5’- AGCCAGTCGCAAGAATCATG-3’/5’-TTGCCCTTGG-GATGGCTGGG-3’) and cloned into the vector according to the manufacturer’s instructions. \textit{Id1} cDNA in the vector (hereafter referred to as \textit{Id1}) was confirmed by sequencing. An empty vector was used as a control.
progression assay by flow cytometer. Briefly, the cells were washed with PBS and incubated with propidium iodide at 1 mg/mL for 15 minutes. A total of 20,000 cells per sample were analyzed with the cell analysis software system (CellQuest Pro). Graphic data were analyzed as described in the “Flow Cytometry” section. The results are presented as the percentage of proliferating cells (G2/M phase) over total cells.

RESULTS

Histologic and immunohistochemical examinations were performed on the 14 surgical cholesteatoma tissue specimens from clinical patients. The epithelial layers of retraction pocket cholesteatoma specimens were positive for antibody to Id1 (Figure 1A) and keratin 10 (Figure 1B, top layer of cholesteatoma epithelium). To locate the expression positions relative to one another, double labeling was performed. It was demonstrated that Id1 was extensively expressed in the entire mucosal layer of middle ear cholesteatoma tissues and that keratin 10 was mainly located in the top mucosal layer (Figure 1C). Of the 14 specimens studied, 12 were positive for both Id1 and keratin 10 and 2 were positive for keratin 10 but negative for Id1 (the epithelial layer was missing and only the onionskinlike layer was visible). In normal middle ear mucosa specimens, the epithelial layer was negative for both Id1 and keratin 10 but the submucosal blood vessels were positive for Id1 (data not shown). In normal neck skin epithelium, Id1 was barely detectable in the basal cells, and Id1 signals were located in the nuclei (Figure 1F). Id1 also was coexpressed with activated p65 (a heterodimer of NF-κB, Figure 1I). Cyclin D1 and PCNA were expressed in the basal layer of cholesteatoma epithelium (Figure 1D and E).

Fluorescent-activated cell sorting demonstrated that Id1 cDNA was successfully transfected into the Rhek-1A cells, with approximately 63.4%±7.4% (mean±SD) cells (n=3) being positive for green fluorescent protein in Id1 cDNA- or empty vector–transfected cells. On cell cycle analysis, Id1 significantly increased the G2/M phase cells over controls (42.5%±3.4% vs 36.5%±3.7%, P<.05). Id1 transfection significantly increased activated NF-κB expression compared with empty vector transfection (66.8%±4.2% vs 5.9%±1.2%, P<.05), cyclin D1 expression compared with empty vector transfection (14.9%±2.1% vs 5.2%±1.3%, P<.05), and PCNA expression compared with empty vector transfection (9.5%±1.3% vs 5.2%±0.8%, P<.05). Id1 increased the coexpression of cyclin D1 and PCNA compared with empty vector transfection (8.3%±1.5% vs 1.6%±0.3%). Representative graphic data are presented in Figure 2.

Among the clinical patients, cholesteatomas were found in 33 ears (15 in the left ear, and 18 in the right ear; 19 men and 14 women). Cholesteatoma of the middle ear cavity occurred significantly more often in the OCA than in the AHMA (P<.05). The percentages of granulation and cholesteatoma tissue, respectively, in the 3 areas of the middle ear were as follows: AHMA, 0% and 15.1%; OCA, 81.8% and 100%; and AMPA, 60.4 and 90.9%. The ossicular chain was frequently destroyed or missing (>90%) or partially destroyed by cholesteatoma and...
granulation tissue in the OCA. In 264 ears of clinical patients with chronic OM, the percentages of persistent effusion and granulation tissue, respectively, in the 3 areas of the middle ear were as follows: AHMA, 11.0% and 0.8%; OCA, 83.7% and 90.5%; and AMPA, 91.3% and 93.3%; the incidence of persistent effusion and granulation tissue was much higher in the OCA than in the AHMA (P<.05).

Because of aggressive and expanding growth, cholesteatoma and granulation tissue simultaneously occupied the OCA, the AHMA, and the AMPA. Also, there was overlapping of effusion and granulation tissue in the 3 areas of the middle ear.

**COMMENT**

The chronic inflammatory changes in the OCA are more severe than those in the other 2 areas of the middle ear. It is difficult to drain the OCA owing to its structural features, so effusion tends to stagnate in that area. The anatomical drain passage from the OCA to the inferior meotympanum is narrow and readily blocked by the swelling and adhering mucosa due to the mucosal folding and the tympanic isthmus infrastructure in the OCA. Our early data indicate that granulation tissue develops only in the area where the effusion stagnates, suggesting that chronic inflammation in the OCA is irritating. In contrast, pathologic changes in the AHMA, such as congestion, edema, and effusion, are usually temporary and reversible, which explains why almost no cholesteatoma originates from the central area of the pars tensa of the tympanic membrane or from the mesotympanum. We believe that the inflammatory infiltration and irritation of the external squamous layer of the pars flaccida and posterosuperior quadrant of the tympanic membrane play an important role in the development of retraction pockets and subsequent cholesteatomas.

Chronic inflammation in the OCA may activate the expression of Id1 in the basal cells. Id1 then triggers the cellular growth and proliferation process of the basal cells via NF-κB/cyclin D1/PCNA signaling. In previous stud-
ies, it was shown that pneumococcal infection in the middle ear of rats induced the expression of Id1 messenger RNA transcripts and that Id1 transfection in the middle ear of rats induced epithelial cell hyperplasia. The in vitro data in the present study indicate that Id1 induced the expression of NF-κB, cyclin D1, and PCNA (Figure 2), thereby supporting the theory that chronic inflammation in the OCA stimulates the growth and proliferation of keratinocytes in the external auditory canal. Cyclin D1 is a cell cycle progression protein that promotes cells from the G0/G1 to the S phase, whereas PCNA is a protein that indicates cellular division. The expression of both cyclin D1 and PCNA in the Rhek-1A keratinocytes (Figure 2F) indicates that cells are in a proliferative state at the time they are studied. Cell cycle progression data (Figure 2B) confirm this.

Biologically, proliferating cells are usually migratory. Keratin 10, a protein that is frequently seen in the external stratified squamous epithelium, is expressed in these keratinocytes (Figure 2), thereby supporting the theory that chronic inflammation in the OCA stimulates the growth and proliferation of keratinocytes in the external auditory canal. Cyclin D1 is a cell cycle progression protein that promotes cells from the G0/G1 to the S phase, whereas PCNA is a protein that indicates cellular division. The expression of both cyclin D1 and PCNA in the Rhek-1A keratinocytes suggests that cells are in a proliferative state at the time they are studied. Cell cycle progression data (Figure 2B) confirm this.

In summary, chronic inflammatory changes in the OCA were accompanied by the formation of retraction pockets and cholesteatomas in which epithelial tissues were positive for the expression of Id1 protein, which is associated with NF-κB, cyclin D1, and PCNA. The in vitro studies indicate that Id1 regulates NF-κB, cyclin D1, and PCNA, which elicit cellular growth and proliferation of keratinocytes, suggestive of a disease mechanism for middle ear cholesteatoma in humans.

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