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Letter to the Editor

Expression of the FMC7 Antigen in Cases of B-Lymphoproliferative Diseases

ALBERTO ORFAO, MARCOS GONZALEZ, JESUS F. SAN MIGUEL, ANTONIO LOPEZ-BORRASCA
Department of Haematology, Hospital Clinico Universitario, Salamanca 37007, *Spain*

WE HAVE read with interest the recent paper of Drexler *et al.* [1]. In a larger analysis including 318 patients—15 null, common or pre-B acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL) cases; 3 B-ALL; 2 Burkitt lymphomas; 172 B-chronic lymphocytic leukaemias (B-CLL); 5 prolymphocytic leukaemias (B-PLL); 11 hairy cell leukaemias (HCL); 61 B-lymphomas; 12 Waldestrom macroglobulinaemias (WM); and 38 multiple myeloma (MM) patients—we did not completely agree regarding the results shown by Drexler *et al.* with the FMC7 monoclonal antibody (McAb).

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Correspondence to: Alberto Orfao, Department of Haematology, Hospital Clinico Universitario, Paseo de San Vicente, s/n, Salamanca 37007, Spain.

In B-CLL we observed a lower reactivity (20% of positive cases), similar to that reported in other series [2, 3]. Moreover, the expression of the FMC7 McAb correlated ($P < 0.001$) with the degree of B-cell differentiation assessed by the surface immunoglobulin (sIg) heavy chain isotype (5%, 23%, 34% and 45% of FMC7-positive cases in the sIg-negative, μ^+, $\mu^+\delta^+$ and other isotype groups, respectively).

In addition, a lower expression of the FMC7 antigen was observed in the B-lymphomas. Nevertheless the histopathologic type of lymphoma was not reported to ascertain the real degree of discrepancy. Finally, the 3 B-ALL cases included were FMC7-negative. In this sense, our results suggest that this McAb defines a differentiation antigen that is negative in the more immature stages of B-

Table 1. *Analysis of FMC7 antigen expression*

Disease	No. positive cases/studied cases (% positive cases)		Percentage positive cells (mean ± S.D.)
Null/common/pre-BALL	0/15	(0%)	
B-ALL	0/3	(0%)	
Burkitt lymphoma	1/2	(50%)	84
B-CLL	34/172	(20%)	49 ± 16
B-PLL	5/5	(100%)	62 ± 17
HCL	11/11	(100%)	74 ± 10
WM	8/11	(73%)	44 ± 15
MM	0/38	(0%)	

Positive cases: > 10% of positive cells.
*Results expressed as mean ± S.D. of reactive cells in the positive cases.

cell differentiation (common ALL, pre-B ALL, B-ALL); it displays a weak reactivity in B-CLL and becomes strongly positive in B-PLL, HCL and WM, and is again negative in the last step of B-cell maturation—the plasma cell [4]. The findings of Zola *et al.* [5] regarding the relationship between the FMC7 McAb and the receptor for the late-acting B-cell differentiation factor would support such a hypothesis.

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