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# BRCA1 and BRCA2 analysis in breast cancer families from Sardinia: Identification of two BRCA2 founder mutations with their clinical and pathological implications

M. Pisano<sup>1</sup>, G. Palomba<sup>1</sup>, A. Cossu<sup>2</sup>, G. Palmieri<sup>1</sup>, M. Ibba<sup>2</sup>, M. Sarobba<sup>3</sup>, M. Dedola<sup>4</sup>, M. Satta<sup>1</sup>, M. Pirastu<sup>1</sup>, F. Tanda<sup>2</sup>. <sup>1</sup>Institute of Molecular Genetics, C.N.R., Alghero, Italy; <sup>2</sup>University of Sassari, Institute of Pathology, Sassari, Italy; <sup>3</sup>University of Sassari, Department of Medical Oncology, Sassari, Italy; <sup>4</sup>University of Sassari, Department of Radiotherapy, Sassari, Italy

**Background:** Genetically homogeneous Sardinian population can be helpful in defining the molecular basis of cancer. To evaluate the incidence of disease-causing mutations in breast cancer (BC) families from Sardinia we screened the two major BC susceptibility genes, BRCA1 and BRCA2, and correlated the presence of mutations with clinicopathological parameters.

**Patients and Methods:** Fifty BC families with at least three affected members, apparently unrelated and originated from the northern-central part of Sardinia were selected. Mutation screening was performed on DNA from blood samples (informed consent was obtained for each family member) by a combination of different techniques: haplotype analysis, DHPLC-based analysis, and, mostly, nucleotide sequencing.

**Results:** No mutation was found in BRCA1 gene. Two founder BRCA2 mutations, 8765delAG and I3412V, were detected in 7 and 1 (14% and 2%, respectively) families; considering the total number of BC cases per family, all BRCA2 mutations were registered in the 15 (53%) families with >5 BC cases. Frequency of these mutations were then investigated in unselected BC patients from the same area of Sardinia: 8765delAG was found in 7/498 (1.4%) cases [all positive patients belonged to BC families (6 of them showing >5 BC cases)], whereas none of the 61 BC cases analyzed presented the I3412V mutation. Altogether, 14 families with BRCA2 mutations were identified. Pathological (grading, proliferation rate, estrogen receptor status) as well as clinical (DFS and OS) parameters are being evaluated in these two groups (BRCA2+ and non-BRCA1/2 families).

**Conclusion:** Although families studied here showed a clear predisposition to BC, majority of them have remained negative for mutations in BRCA1/2, suggesting that other mechanisms or genes are involved. However, BRCA2 mutations seem to be strongly correlated to breast cancer development among Sardinian families with high recurrence of cases.

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# Somatic BRCA1 tumorigenesis in sporadic breast and ovarian cancer

M.J.W. Van der Looij<sup>1</sup>, J. Papp<sup>1</sup>, P. Devilee<sup>2</sup>, E. Oláh<sup>1</sup>. <sup>1</sup>National Institute of Oncology, Department of Molecular Biology, Budapest, Hungary; <sup>2</sup>Leiden University Medical Center, Department of Human and Clinical Genetics, Leiden, The Netherlands

**Purpose:** Over 80% of BRCA-associated breast/ovarian cancers in Hungary are due to five founder mutations (Ramus et al., 1997a,b; Van der Looij et al., 2000a). Despite the presence of allele loss (LOH) at the BRCA1 locus, somatic mutations are rarely observed in sporadic breast tumors. We have investigated whether large somatic BRCA1 deletions occur in these tumors and have thus far been missed by conventional PCR-based mutation screening. Further, we investigated whether in addition to LOH, also microsatellite instability (MSI) is associated with BRCA1 in these tumors.

**Methods:** A total of 122 breast and 41 ovarian tumors were analyzed for somatic BRCA1 mutations by HDA/SSCP (exons 2, 5, 20) or Southern Analysis (exons 6-24). Tumors were assayed for genome wide MSI (10 markers) and for LOH at the BRCA1 locus (6 markers).

**Results:** For the first time we report the presence of somatic BRCA1 mutations in sporadic breast tumors (1%) due to large genomic rearrangements. Specific BRCA1 mutations were detected in 12% of ovarian and 2% of breast tumors, all of germ-line origin. LOH was detected in 49% of BRCA1 negative and 40% of BRCA1-positive tumors. MSI was found in 14% of ovarian tumors all of which were BRCA1-negative.

**Conclusion:** we conclude that i) a significant fraction of sporadic Hungarian breast/ovarian cancer patients carry inherited founder BRCA1 mutations; ii) a small portion of sporadic breast tumors are due to somatic BRCA1 genomic instabilities (Van der Looij et al., 2000b); iii) MSI detected in ovarian tumors is not BRCA1-associated and may reflect inactivation of DNA mismatch repair genes (Van der Looij et al., 2001).

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# Distinct role of the cyp19 del3(TTTA)7 allele in the susceptibility to premenopausal and postmenopausal breast cancer

E. Imyanitov<sup>1</sup>, E. Susptsin<sup>1</sup>, M. Grigoriev<sup>1</sup>, A. Togo<sup>1</sup>, K. Pozharisski<sup>1</sup>, O. Chagunava<sup>2</sup>, C. Theillet<sup>3</sup>, L. Bernstein<sup>1</sup>, K. Hanson<sup>1</sup>. <sup>1</sup>NN Petrov Institute of Oncology, St.-Petersburg, Russia; <sup>2</sup>Center of Mammology, St.-Petersburg, Russia; <sup>3</sup>Centre de Recherche en Cancerologie, Montpellier, France

**Purpose:** The CYP19 gene encodes for the enzyme called aromatase, which plays a key role in the conversion of androgens to estrogens. CYP19 intron 4 (TTTA)<sub>n</sub> polymorphism has been reported to be associated with breast cancer (BC) risk, although conflicting evidence has also been published.

**Methods:** Here we employed a non-traditional, highly demonstrative design of molecular epidemiological study, where the comparison of BC cases and healthy middle-aged female donors was supplemented by the analysis of the groups with extreme characteristics of either BC risk (bilateral breast cancer (biBC) patients) or cancer tolerance (tumor-free elderly women aged more than 75 years).

**Results:** None of the (TTTA)<sub>n</sub> polymorphic variants was overrepresented among the affected women as compared to any of the control groups. However, a 3 bp deletion/insertion CYP19 polymorphism, which is located in the same intron approximately 50 bp upstream to the (TTTA)<sub>n</sub> repeat, was evidently associated with the menopausal status in both BC and biBC cohorts. In particular, the del3(TTTA)7 allele occurred significantly more frequently in premenopausal than in postmenopausal BC patients (65/172 (37.8%) vs. 67/310 (21.6%); P = 0.0001; OR = 2.20 (1.46; 3.32)), while the perimenopausal cases demonstrated an intermediate value (9/34 (26.5%)). In the biBC cohort, women who developed both tumors in premenopausal period had significantly higher prevalence of the del3(TTTA)7 than patients with postmenopausal onset of the bilateral disease (16/46 (34.8%) vs. 8/50 (16.0%); P = 0.035; OR = 2.80 (1.08; 7.23)); those biBC patients, whose tumors diagnoses were separated by the cessation of menses, displayed intermediate occurrence of the del3(TTTA)7 allele (7/32 (21.9%)). Moreover, the overrepresentation of this allele in premenopausal patients and its underrepresentation in postmenopausal BC remained statistically significant when the cases were compared to the age-adjusted non-affected controls.

**Conclusions:** The del3(TTTA)7 appears to be related with the increased risk of premenopausal breast cancer but may protect against the postmenopausal disease. Similar tendencies in del3(TTTA)7 allele distribution in BC and biBC patients suggest that its association with the menopausal status of the patients is truly non-random and thus deserves further detailed investigation.

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# BRCA1, BRCA2 and TP53 mutations among breast cancer families from upper silesia in poland

H. Zientek<sup>1</sup>, A. Jasinska<sup>2</sup>, M. Rusin<sup>1</sup>, P. Kozlowski<sup>2</sup>, A. Sikorska<sup>2</sup>, E. Kwiatkowska<sup>2</sup>, E. Kalinowska<sup>1</sup>, K. Sobczak<sup>2</sup>, W. Krzyzosiak<sup>2</sup>, E. Grzybowski<sup>1</sup>. <sup>1</sup>Institute of Oncology, Department of Tumor Biology, Gliwice, Poland; <sup>2</sup>Institute of Bioorganic Chemistry, Polish Academy of Science, Laboratory of Cancer Genetics, Poznan, Poland

**Purpose:** Current genetic testing for mutations in breast cancer susceptibility genes BRCA1 and BRCA2 are the basis for estimating disease risk for women with a strong family history of breast and ovarian cancer. There is also a need for data regarding BRCA1, BRCA2 and TP53 mutation frequencies among carcinoma cases not specifically ascertained on the basis of extreme family history profiles.

**Method:** We screened BRCA1, BRCA2 and TP53 mutations in population of patients from Upper Silesia in Poland. We analysed the BRCA1, BRCA2

and TP53 coding regions in 90 unrelated probands with strong family history or early-onset breast cancer cases with or without family history, 50 sporadic breast cancer cases and 23 bilateral breast cancer patients without family history of breast and ovarian cancer.

As the observed distribution of mutations favour routine pre-screening using a simple and cost-effective test we used allele specific oligonucleotide PCR-based assays (ASO) followed by reamplification and sequencing on ABI377 automated sequencer.

**Results:** We found five different disease predisposing mutations in BRCA1 gene (185delAG, 300T/G, 4174delA, 5382insC, 5528del1+IV22-6), four mutation in BRCA2 gene (6174del, 6886del5, 9599A/T, 9631delC) and one mutation in TP53 (1095del8) which is the largest mutation ever detected in this gene. Five mutations detected in our study (9599A/T, 9631delC, 6886del5 in BRCA2; 5528del1+IV22-6 in BRCA1; 1095del8 in TP53) were not reported previously and may be specific to the southern Polish population while the others were recurrent. Mutation prevalence was substantially higher in cases with strong family history. Of the 90 women with family history 33 carried a germ-line mutation in BRCA1 (26 of these cases were 5382insC mutation carries) and 6 carried mutations in BRCA2. We have also identified a family with mutations in both genes BRCA1 and BRCA2 (185delAG BRCA1 and 6174delT BRCA2). Our results are in agreement with the idea that mutations in BRCA1 and BRCA2 significantly contribute to familial breast cancer risk and their contribution to sporadic breast cancer and bilateral breast cancer without family history of breast and ovarian cancer is much lower.

**Conclusion:** Further studies will be necessary to estimate more accurately the risk of the BRCA1, BRCA2 and TP53 mutations among breast and ovarian cancer patients in Polish population.

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### Gene expression profiling of estrogen-responsive genes in human breast cancer: development of a DNA microarray system for monitoring hormone therapy

S. Hayashi<sup>1</sup>, A. Inoue<sup>1,5</sup>, N. Yoshida<sup>1,2</sup>, Y. Omoto<sup>1,3</sup>, S. Oguchi<sup>4,5</sup>, R. Kiyama<sup>5</sup>, <sup>1</sup>Saitama Cancer Center, Division of Endocrinology, Saitama, Japan; <sup>2</sup>University of Tokyo School of Medicine, Department of Internal Medicine, Tokyo, Japan; <sup>3</sup>Nagoya City University Medical School, Department of Surgery II, Nagoya, Japan; <sup>4</sup>InfoGenes Co. Ltd, Tsukuba, Japan; <sup>5</sup>National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology, Molecular and Cell Biology, Tsukuba, Japan

**Purpose:** Estrogen plays an important role in carcinogenesis and development of human breast cancer. However, the essential downstream molecular targets of estrogen-signals in cancer have not been clarified hitherto. Moreover, along with the recent improvement of hormone therapy, accurate therapeutic prediction of breast cancer is desired earnestly.

**Methods & Results:** We first comprehensively analyzed the gene expression profiles for estrogen responsiveness among four estrogen receptor (ER)-positive cancer cell lines, MCF-7, MCF-7c9, T47-D and Ishikawa cells, using large-scale cDNA microarray technique. Approximately 4% of 9000 genes showed significant estrogen responsiveness, classified as the induction or repression types, among these cells. Many of the genes in the induction type were found to be growth-associated or tumor-associated genes, while tumor suppressor-related genes were found in the repression type. Based on the obtained information, a total of 138 genes, which showed high induction or repression in expression by estrogen stimulation, were selected and provided for custom microarrays. The results obtained from the custom microarray analysis of the cell lines were consistent with those from large-scale microarray analysis. The time course study of these 138 genes using the custom microarrays revealed that they were clearly categorized into the early- or late-response types. Furthermore, the custom microarray analysis of ER positive breast cancer tissues also showed similar but not identical profiles to those obtained with the cell lines.

**Conclusion:** Further analysis of these genes categorized into subgroup by custom microarray may provide new clues for elucidation of estrogen-dependent growth mechanisms of cancer. These observations indicate the usefulness of the custom microarrays for assessment of response by estrogen-agonists and antagonists in the human breast cancer. This custom microarray may be applicable for prediction of effectiveness of anti-hormone therapy for breast cancer.

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### Shifts in phenotype of dendritic cells (DC) in healthy BRCA1 mutation carriers and in patients with early breast cancer

C. Kichler-Lakomy<sup>1</sup>, A.C. Budinsky<sup>1,5</sup>, R. Möslinger<sup>3</sup>, T. Wagner<sup>3</sup>, R.M. Wolfram<sup>1</sup>, C. Wilschke<sup>1</sup>, T. Brodowicz<sup>1</sup>, H. Viernstein<sup>4</sup>, C.C. Zielinski<sup>1,2,5</sup>, <sup>1</sup>Clinical Division of Oncology, Department of Medicine I, Vienna, Austria; <sup>2</sup>Chair of Medical Experimental Oncology, Department of Medicine I, Vienna, Austria; <sup>3</sup>Clinical Division of Special Gynaecology, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Vienna, Austria; <sup>4</sup>Department of pharmaceutical Technology, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Developments, Vienna, Austria; <sup>5</sup>Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, Clinical Experimental Oncology, Vienna, Austria

**Rationale:** Investigations originating from our laboratory have reported deficiencies in antigen presentation and functionality of monocytes derived from patients with early breast cancer (EBC), but not from healthy women with germline mutations of BRCA1. We have now expanded our investigations to dendritic cells (DC), only insufficiently studied in patients with EBC in general and in BRCA1 mutant carriers in particular.

**Objective:** DC derived from patients with EBC, healthy women with BRCA1 germline mutations as well as EBC patients with BRCA1 mutations were analysed for the expression of CD1a, CD11c, CD83, CD80, CD86, CD54 and CD14. Antigen presentation by DC was evaluated by a T-cell proliferation assay.

**Methods:** Peripheral blood was obtained from 36 patients with EBC, 7 healthy women with germline mutations of BRCA1, 4 patients with EBC with BRCA1 mutations and 26 healthy age-matched control persons. PBMC were prepared for ex vivo DC generation using GM-CSF, IL4 and TNF-alpha according to standard procedures. DC phenotype was examined by FACS.T cell proliferation in response to TTX-pulsed DC was measured by (3H)thymidine assay.

**Results:** Phenotypically, DC derived from patients with EBC presented with a significantly reduced expression of CD1a, CD83, CD80, CD86, CD54, compared to DC from healthy control females. Moreover, DC derived from healthy women with BRCA1 germline mutations showed a significant increase in CD54 and CD80 antigens, as compared to DC derived from healthy control persons. Finally, DC derived from EBC patients with germline mutations of BRCA1 showed not only a higher expression of CD1a and CD83, but also of CD86 and CD54, compared to DC from patients with EBC without BRCA1 mutations.

Functionally, T cell-proliferation in response to TTX-pulsed autologous DC was significantly decreased in patients with EBC.

**Conclusions:** DC derived from patients with EBC had not only an immature phenotype, but also a functional impairment in antigen presentation. Our results showed, furthermore, that differences in DC phenotype preceded the clinical manifestation of breast cancer and shifts in antigen expression were also present in BRCA1 germline mutation carriers persisting throughout the development of EBC. These results suggested the presence of a characteristic phenotype in individuals with BRCA1 germline mutations.

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### Comparative genomic hybridization in phyllodes tumors of the breast

K.J. Jee, G. Gong, S. Ahn, J. Park, S. Knuutila, <sup>1</sup>Haartman Institute, University of Helsinki, Medical Genetics, Helsinki, Finland; <sup>2</sup>University of Ulsan, College of Medicine, ASAN Medical Center, Pathology, Seoul, South Korea; <sup>3</sup>University of Ulsan, College of Medicine, ASAN Medical Center, General Surgery, Seoul, South Korea; <sup>4</sup>University of Ulsan, College of Medicine, ASAN Medical Center, Diagnostic Radiology, Seoul, South Korea

**Purpose:** Phyllodes tumors are a rare neoplasm of the breast and it is not easy to predict their clinical behavior, for instance, recurrence and metastasis. The aim of this study was to search for specific alterations of genes associated with various phyllodes tumor grades.

**Methods:** To analyse genetic alterations, we used the comparative genomic hybridization (CGH) method in 25 cases of archival paraffin embedded materials which were classified into 3 histological categories as benign, borderline and malignant.

**Results:** Chromosomal aberration was identified in 11 cases (44%) but it was difficult to identify a sequential DNA copy number change associated with histological type. However, the most interesting finding was the gain of the long arm in chromosome 1 that was shown in 9 cases. Gain of 1q was significantly associated with recurrences. Other changes were the loss of 4q, 6q, 9p and 13q and the gain of chromosomes 17, 19, and 20.