Department of Medical Biochemistry and Biophysics

Exploring the potential of antiangiogenic strategies targeting the TGF-β family in the tumor microenvironment

AKADEMISK AVHANDLING
som för avläggande av medicine doktorsexamen vid Karolinska Institutet offentligen försvaras i Samuelsson salen, MBB

Torsdag den 29 november, 2012, kl 10.00

av
Sara Cunha

Huvudhandledare:
Professor Kristian Pietras
Lunds Universitet
Department of Laboratory Medicine
Center of Molecular Pathology

Bihandledare:
Professor Ulf Eriksson
Karolinska Institutet
Department of Medical Biochemistry and Biophysics
Vascular Biology division

Associate Professor Jonas Fuxe
Karolinska Institutet
Department of Medical Biochemistry and Biophysics
Vascular Biology division

Fakultetsopponent:
Associate Professor Yuval Shaked
Technion University
Rappaport Institute
Department of Molecular Pharmacology

Betygsämnd:
Associate Professor Rainer Heuchel
Karolinska Institutet
Department of Clinical Science, Intervention and Technology

Associate Professor Charlotte Rolny
Karolinska Institutet
Department of Oncology-Pathology

Professor Martin Bergö
Göteborgs Universitet
Department for Molecular Clinical Medicine
ABSTRACT

Members of the transforming growth factor (TGF)-β family exert their effect on virtually all cell types in the body, producing diverse and complex cellular responses. Additionally, TGF-β signaling is deregulated and hyperactive in many malignant conditions, making it an appealing target in the combat of cancer disease. The predominantly endothelial TGF-β receptors, ALK1 and endoglin, which are activated during neangiogenesis both during development and pathological conditions, pose attractive modulating opportunities to impair tumor vessel formation and cancer progression. However, the precise function of TGF-β family signaling in endothelial cells is difficult to predict, as it appears highly context dependent due to a myriad of ligands and receptors influencing the final outcome. Furthermore, TGF-β is involved in autocrine and intricate dynamic paracrine signaling events in the context of the tumor microenvironment. Pharmacological inhibitors for ALK1 and endoglin have been developed and will facilitate more comprehensive studies on the exact function of the TGF-β family in the tumor-associated endothelium. Here, we summarize the current knowledge on TGF-β signaling in the regulation of the vascular network as alternative targets to VEGF and incorporate our novel and promising findings in the field. Our two studies aiming at dissecting the independent role of ALK1 and endoglin resulted in very distinctive outcomes. While ALK1 suppression results in sustained tumor growth by affecting the tumor neovasculature, endoglin impairment generates a weakened and increasingly lenient vasculature to the passage of malignant cells to and from the bloodstream. Our both seemingly contradictory studies challenge the current view of a strong interconnection between ALK1 and endoglin in the vasculature.

The ongoing clinical trials of inhibitors affecting ALK1 and endoglin involvement in vascular formation during malignant progression will further clarify the valuable potential of targeting alternative pathways to VEGF.