Angiogenesis measured by expression of CD34 antigen in lymph nodes of patients with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma

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Abstract: Angiogenesis is important in development, maintenance and progression of haematological malignancies. Some clinical observations have indicated that in non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma (nHL) tumour microvessel density (MVD) may correlate with tumour staging and outcome. The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between MVD as a parameter of tumour angiogenesis measured by expression of CD34 and the grade of nHL histological malignancy as determined by REAL classification. 40 lymph node samples of patients with newly diagnosed nHL (17 women, 23 men; aged 48-70 yrs, median age 64 yrs; stage III and IV) and treated at the Department of Haematology, Wroclaw Medical University in 1999-2002 were fixed in 10% buffered formalin and embedded in paraffin. In all the studied cases, sections were incubated with antibodies against CD34. The slides were stained with hematoxylin and eosin and evaluated histopathologically. Patients were divided into two groups according to histological malignancy: indolent nHL (19 patients) and aggressive nHL (21 patients). Mean MVD measured by expression of CD34 in aggressive and indolent nHL groups amounted to 19.45±11.24 vessels/0.375 mm² and 21.7±12.4 vessels/0.375 mm², respectively. Statistical analysis of microvessel staining demonstrated no correlation between tumour MVD and grade of histological malignancy in lymph nodes of nHL patients. Nevertheless, angiogenesis observed in nHL provides rationale for use of angiogenesis inhibitors in lymphoma therapy.

Key words: Angiogenesis - Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma - Microvessel density

Introduction

In recent years, the role of angiogenesis (neovascularisation) in neoplastic diseases, especially in growth of solid tumours, has been increasingly studied. There are some data that neovascularisation may be important in development, maintenance and progression of haematological malignancies. Some clinical observations have indicated that tumour microvessel density (MVD) measured by CD34, CD31 antigen or von Willebrand factor (vWF) expression is increased in lymphoproliferative disorders and correlate with tumour staging and outcome [1, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 18, 21]. Higher microvascular density and increased serum levels of proangiogenic factors such as vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) or basic fibroblasts growth factor (bFGF) have been reported in chronic lymphocytic leukemia, multiple myeloma and non-Hodgkin B-cell lymphomas (nHL) [10, 19]. nHL are heterogenous group of malignant neoplasms with different origin and clinical characteristics. In terms of clinical aggressiveness nHLs may be divided in two groups: aggressive and indolent lymphomas.

The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between MVD as a parameter of tumour angiogenesis measured by expression of CD34 and the grade of nHL histological malignancy as determined by REAL classification.

Materials and methods

Angiogenesis was measured in 40 randomly selected adult patients with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma diagnosed and treated at the Department of Haematology, Wroclaw Medical University in 1999-2002. The patients with nHL included 17 women and 23 men, aged 48-70 yrs (median 64 yrs). All patients had active disease at stage III and IV. Clinical data are shown in Table 1. Clinical staging was done according to the Ann Arbor classification system [9]. Histological classification was not reviewed in conjunction with the present study, but 19 lymphomas had been classified as indolent and 21 as aggressive nHL according to the REAL classification [6] by a pathologist with a profound experience in lymphomas. Samples of the
studied lymphomas were fixed in 10% buffered formalin and embedded in paraffin. The slides were stained with hematoxylin and eosin and evaluated histopathologically.

Deparaffinised sections were boiled in citrate buffer to unmask antigenic determinants. In all studied cases sections were incubated with antibodies against CD34 (Class II, Clone QBEnd 10, DAKO, Denmark). The DAKO Fast Red Substrate System was used as a substrate and chromogen in immunocytochemical staining procedures utilizing alkaline phosphatase. In each case the control was included, in which the specific antibody was omitted. For the evaluation of microvessel density (MVD), slides were scanned in the light microscope at \( \times 40 \) magnification and three areas of maximal MVD, so-called "hot spots" were identified. In each hot spot, microvessels (capillaries and small venules) were counted at \( \times 400 \) magnification by two investigators (each field representing an area of 0.375 mm\(^2\)). For each slide, the mean number of microvessels from these three areas, including results obtained by two investigators, per 0.375 mm\(^2\) was calculated. Statistical analysis was made using the Mann-Whitney U-test. Differences were considered statistically significant at \( p<0.05 \).

**Results and discussion**

The immunocytochemical reactions demonstrated a variable intensity of staining in individual tumours. CD34 showed both the membrane and cytoplasmic localisation (Fig. 1). Mean MVD in aggressive and indolent nHL groups amounted to 19.45±11.24 vessels/0.375 mm\(^2\) and 21.7±12.4 vessels/0.375 mm\(^2\), respectively. Statistical analysis showed no significant differences between both nHL groups.

Angiogenesis plays a key role in tumour growth, invasiveness and progression. After tumours switch from the prevascular to the vascular and invasive phase, they stimulate growth of new capillary blood vessels to guarantee an adequate supply of oxygen and nutrients to their proliferating cells. CD34, a myeloid progenitor cell antigen also present in endothelial cells, is detectable in all types of endothelium [5]. The monoclonal antibody against CD34 reacts with endothelium of arteries and venules, and has been found to stain more intensely capillary endothelium [4]. It has been used for the diagnosis of vascular tumours and detection of small vessel proliferation representing angiogenesis [17]. In this study, we used data obtained from CD34 staining, since this procedure was highly sensitive for endothelium and produced the lowest background staining.

There are some clinical observations indicating that tumour MVD and expression of vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) correlate with tumour staging and outcome in solid cancers and lymphoid neoplasms. High pretreatment serum VEGF concentration is associated with poor outcome in nHL patients [16]. Ribatti *et al.* reported increased capillary proliferation in the lymph node biopsies of high grade nHL. MVD has been shown to correlate with the biological behaviour in nodal B-cell nHL and the frequency of nHL tissue microvessels increases simultaneously with pathological progression [13, 14, 19]. On the other hand, according to Ridell and Norrby [15] MVD is higher in the involved lymph nodes of patients with small lymphocytic lymphoma but the number of blood vessels does not correlate with the grade of tumour. There was no correlation between tumour MVD and response to chemotherapy in patients with diffuse large B-cell lymphoma [3]. Arias *et al.* [2] found a statistically significant difference in MVD

**Table 1. Clinical data of patients with non-Hodgkin lymphoma (nHL) according to REAL classification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>nHL classification</th>
<th>number of patients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGGRESSIVE nHL</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffuse large B cell</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follicular grade 3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mantle cell</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDOLENT nHL</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small lymphocytic</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lymphoplasmocytoid</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal zone</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follicular grade 1, 2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 1.** Microvessels in lymph node of patient with nHL highlighted by antibodies against CD34: a - \( \times 200 \); b - \( \times 400 \).
measured by immunostaining with anti-Factor VIII antibody between low and high grade nHL, when classified in either the Working Formulation (WF) or the Kiel Classification. However, the same authors found no differences between WF of high and intermediate lymphomas.

Our data demonstrate that there is no correlation between tumour MVD revealed by CD34 staining and grade of histological malignancy in lymph nodes of nHL patients classified according to REAL classification. It must be emphasised that the degree of angiogenesis may vary between patients, over time, and in relation to the disease status of the site biopsied [20]. Nevertheless, angiogenesis observed in nHL provides rationale for the use of angiogenesis inhibitors in lymphoma therapy.

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References

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