Characterizing an Ectopic Secreting Carcinoid with Indium-111-DTPA-D-Phe-Pentetreotide

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This report describes a technique that increases the specificity of 111In-pentetreotide as evaluated in a patient with ectopic Cushing syndrome. **Methods:** Two separate SPECT studies were performed with different pharmacologic protocols, both including treatment with cold octreotide. The imaging protocol provides acquisitions at 4 and 24 hr after injection. The quantitative approach was based on the ROI activity (manually designed) of an area of pathological lung uptake (ROI-T) versus background (ROI-NT). Histological, histochemical and specific mRNA measurements confirmed the presence of an SSR2 receptor carcinoid in the lung. **Results:** The time course of ROI-T/ROI-NT is a linear increase between 4 and 24 hr. Washout with cold octreotide diminished the ROI-T activity content and the saturation protocol increased ROI-T/ROI-NT, confirming the specific nature of the uptake. **Conclusion:** Displacement and saturation protocols in 111In-pentetreotide imaging demonstrated the specificity of tumor binding.

**Key Words:** somatostatin receptors; indium-111-pentetreotide; octreotide; ectopic Cushing syndrome

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The use of 111In-DTPA-D-Phe-pentetreotide in the scintigraphic diagnosis of well-differentiated neuroendocrine tumors has been reported (1,2), but a model-based approach and/or the use of pharmacological interventions have not been used to increase the specificity of the imaging procedure, which is hampered by false-positive results due to unspecified binding in the tumor.

We have tried to characterize the in vivo distribution of 111In-pentetreotide with a combined kinetic uptake study and the use of displacement doses of nonlabeled octreotide, and we have evaluated the results of this novel approach with a biological model of the in vivo behavior of labeled pentetreotide as a receptor ligand. This report describes an individual patient where the results of the study had a significant influence in clinical management.

**CASE REPORT**

A 31-yr-old woman was admitted to the endocrinology unit at the University of Florence for suspected Cushing's syndrome. The presence of the syndrome was confirmed by high levels of urinary free cortisol, plasma cortisol and plasma ACTH, absence of circadian rhythm in cortisol secretion, absence of cortisol and ACTH response to insulin-induced hypoglycemia and absence of suppression in plasma cortisol and ACTH after 2 mg of oral dexamethasone.

An ACTH-dependent Cushing's syndrome due to an ectopic secretion was suspected because plasma cortisol and ACTH were not suppressed after administration of 8 mg oral dexamethasone and did not increase after 100 µg intravenous human CRF.

MRI of the pituitary showed a slight bulging of the superior profile of the gland, which was considered a possible indirect sign of the presence of a pituitary microadenoma. However, peroral venous sampling on both sides failed to demonstrate any ACTH gradient before and after stimulation with CRF (Table 1). An abdominal CT scan showed normal adrenal glands. Plasma ACTH was not suppressed by the administration of 100 µg intravenous octreotide. A second multiple venous sampling along the main venous tree (from the superior vena cava to the iliac veins) was performed and again no ACTH gradient was found (Table 2).

Chest MRI and a second abdominal CT scan, performed in an attempt to reveal the ectopic source of ACTH, failed to show significant findings. Therefore, despite the lack of ACTH suppres-
sion after acute octreotide administration, a series of scintigraphic studies with labeled pentetreotide was performed. These studies demonstrated the presence of an intense uptake region in the anterior lower portion of the right lung. A pulmonary lesion, less than 2 cm in diameter, was confirmed by a selective CT scan (Fig. 1).

During surgery, a 1.5-cm nodule was found. Histological examination revealed the presence of a carcinoid tumor that was intensely positive for ACTH at immunocytochemistry. The presence of SSR2 in the neoplastic tissue was confirmed by the detection of SSR2 mRNA by RT-PCR and Southern blot analysis (Fig. 2).

After surgery, the patient’s plasma ACTH and cortisol concentrations fell to undetectable levels and it was necessary to provide a short course of corticosteroid replacement therapy.

**SPECT Acquisition Protocol**

All SPECT studies were performed with a single-head rotating camera in 64 frames (45 sec each). The matrix dimension was 64 × 64 pixels. Reconstruction was performed with filtered backprojection (Butterworth filter 0.25 cutoff, order 10). ROIs were manually extracted on the transaxial slices delineating the area with pathologic uptake in the right lung (ROI₂) and a symmetrical region with normal uptake in the left lung (ROI₃). Count content was normalized for ROI pixel number.

**Study Protocol**

The patient was studied on two separate sessions. First, a wash-out study, consisted of the injection of the tracer (111 MBq ¹¹¹In-pentetreotide) and the acquisition of two SPECT studies at 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTH</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior vena cava</td>
<td>ng/liter</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>0 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior vena cava</td>
<td>ng/liter</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>0 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peripheries</td>
<td>ng/liter</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>0 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right jugular vein</td>
<td>ng/liter</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>0 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left jugular vein</td>
<td>ng/liter</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>0 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right sinus</td>
<td>ng/liter</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>0 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left sinus</td>
<td>ng/liter</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>0 hr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 2**

ACTH Multiple Venous Sampling and Baseline Levels of Plasma ACTH, Testosterone, DHEA-S and Cortisol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Withdrawal seat</th>
<th>Values (µg/liter)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left brachiophalic trunk</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right jugular vein</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior vena cava (origin)</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior vena cava (right supravasc.)</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior vena cava (distal vs. atrium)</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right atrium</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferior vena cava (D10)</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferior vena cava (D11-D12)</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferior vena cava (L1-L2)</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferior vena cava (L2-L3)</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferior vena cava (L4)</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Baseline values**

| ACTH | 232 µg/liter | DHEA-S | 1.92 µg/liter | Testosterone | 2.6 nm/liter | Cortisol | 464 nm/liter |

**FIGURE 1.** (A) Transaxial SPECT section and (B) corresponding CT slice obtained after administration of ¹¹¹In-pentetreotide.

**FIGURE 2.** Total RNAs extracted from the neoplastic tissue or from a human neuroblastoma cell line (CHP 404, which overexpresses SSR2) were subjected to RT-PCR using oligonucleotide primers derived from sequence of set₁ cDNA. A chemically modified nucleotide (digoxigenin-11-dUTP) was included in the PCR mixture. The PCR products were electrophoresed in agarose gel, blotted into a nylon membrane and detected by an immunoenzymatic procedure (9). Lane 1: DNA mole weight marker VI; lane 2: negative control (no RNA); lane 3: CHP 404; lane 4: lung ACTH-secreting tumor. The arrow indicates the bp PCR product, specific for set₁.
and 24 hr after injection. Subsequently, a slow intravenous infusion of 0.5 mg of octreotide in 100 ml of saline was given. A SPECT was acquired 2 hr later.

For the steady-state study, performed 2 wk later, the patient received 0.3 mg per day of subcutaneous octreotide and an intravenous dose of 0.2 mg (intravenous bolus injection) 4 days before SPECT was performed. SPECT acquisitions were performed 4 and 24 hr after tracer injection.

Data Evaluation
The results of the first phase of the washout study were evaluated under the following three assumptions: the activity in ROI_{NT} is due to tracer binding to the SSR2 receptor of normal tissue; the quantity of SSR2 receptor in normal tissue is constant; and the activity retained in ROI_{T} and ROI_{NT} at 4 and 24 hr is due only to receptor-bound tracer.

Under the above assumptions, if the activity in ROI_{T} is due to the overexpression of SSR2 receptor, the ROI_{T}/ROI_{NT} ratio should increase between the 4-hr and 24-hr SPECT images. On the contrary, if the activity in ROI_{T} at 4 hr is due to nonspecific uptake, the ROI_{T}/ROI_{NT} ratio should be stable or decrease between 4 and 24 hr.

The pharmacologic interventions with cold octreotide were performed to further assess the specific nature of the uptake in ROI_{T}.

RESULTS
The time course of the ratio ROI_{T}/ROI_{NT} is reported in Figure 3, and it shows a straight increase between 4 and 24 hr. The washout with octreotide abruptly diminished the ROI_{T} activity content, thus confirming the specific nature of the uptake in ROI_{T}. Interestingly, the steady-state study showed an increase of the ROI_{T}/ROI_{NT} ratio, which was explained by the different affinity for the ligand of the SSR2 receptor of the tumor and of the normal tissue (Fig. 4). The overexpression of SSR2 receptor in the tumor was confirmed ex vivo by immuno-cytochemistry and specific m-RNA measurement (PCR).

DISCUSSION
Scintigraphic localization of tumor with \textsuperscript{111}In-pentetreotide depends on the presence of somatostatin binding sites in the tumor at a higher density and affinity than that of the surrounding normal tissues. Consequently, SPECT with pentetreotide can be considered an in vivo method to biologically characterize tumors originating from the neural crest. Unfortunately, the tumor activity also can be due to nonspecific uptake because of modification of tumor vasculature and extravascular spaces and contents. Results are often difficult to interpret (4).

This report describes an evaluation of the SPECT scan with pentetreotide based on analysis of the biological model of SSR2 receptor content of the tumor and normal tissue. The pharmacologic interventions that have been performed are a method of identifying the model and validating the results.

Indeed, pharmacologic interventions are a common practice in studying brain receptors, and both displacement (5) and saturation (6,7) protocols have been proposed. We applied a similar approach to the study with pentetreotide and demonstrated the specificity of tumor binding on the basis of increased ROI ratios, between 4 and 24 hr. In accordance, tumor activity exhibited a significant reduction after injection of a displacement dose of cold octreotide.

The ex vivo demonstration of a significant band of the mRNA for somatostatin receptors in the tumor finally confirmed the correctness of the diagnosis.
The most interesting result is that the same information also could be obtained with the model-based interpretation of the SPECT scan, thus avoiding the cumbersome and expensive pharmacologic protocol described above. Indeed, assuming the receptor model is used, the simple observation of the temporal behavior to the ROIm/ROIc ratio gives strong evidence that tumor uptake was specific.

Therefore, we suggest pentetreotide can be extended beyond its use as a tumor detection agent to that of a tumor characterizing agent, which increases the clinical importance of the scintigraphic data and may provide direction for therapeutic management. This aim probably will be best fulfilled by true quantitative approaches (8), but the simplicity of the method we propose can represent a reasonable trade-off in clinical management. Future developments of SSR2 receptor tracers, labeled with more favorable isotopes (9) and with high-resolution SPECT instrumentation, can further increase the value of the biological in vivo characterization of SSR2-expressing tumors.

REFERENCES


Influence of Chemotherapy on FDG Uptake by Human Cancer Xenografts in Nude Mice

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This study evaluated the use of PET with 18F-2-deoxy-2-fluoro-D-glucose (18F-FDG) for monitoring chemotherapy effects, using a human cancer xenograft (poorly differentiated human gastric cancer) in vivo model. Methods: Tumor 18F-FDG uptakes and sizes were measured after administrating mitomycin (MMC), cisplatin (CDDP) and Adriamycin (ADR) to xenograft-bearing nude mice and compared with 18F-FDG tumor uptake and tumor size in a non-therapy group. The correlation between the uptake and size was also assessed. Results: The largest reduction in tumor size after chemotherapy occurred in the MMC administered group, followed by the CDDP case, with no reduction in the ADR group as compared to the controls. Fluorine-18-FDG tumor uptake after chemotherapy was also decreased in the MMC and CDDP groups, in that order, but not in the ADR case. With MMC and CDDP, size reduction became significant on Days 8 or 11, whereas 18F-FDG tumor uptake had already decreased on Days 3 or 7. Conclusion: Fluorine-18-FDG uptake decreases in parallel to the efficacy of antitumor agents and correlates with subsequent morphologic changes. We conclude that 18F-FDG PET tumor images are indeed useful for monitoring the effects of cancer chemotherapy.

Key Words: fluorine-18-FDG; human cancer xenograft; PET; chemotherapy


With cancer chemotherapy, it is important to choose the most effective chemotherapeutic agents for individual patients. There have been several attempts to develop in vitro (1–6) and in vivo (7,8) systems that would predict the response of a tumor, in an individual patient, to a particular chemotherapeutic agent, but the results have been far from satisfactory. In clinical practice, the chemotherapist chooses chemotherapeutic agents on the basis of his experience and by monitoring morphological changes of tumors by physical examination, radiograph studies, endoscopy, CT, US or MRI, in a continuous decision-making process.

The development of PET has made it possible to study the metabolism of cancer tissues. The positron-labeled compound 18F-2-deoxy-2-fluoro-D-glucose (18F-FDG) is widely used in PET as a tracer for glucose metabolism (9) because it is phosphorylated by hexokinase but essentially cannot be further metabolized, becoming preferentially trapped in the cells (10). As enhanced glycolysis is one of the best-documented characteristics of malignant tumors (11), 18F-FDG PET has been used for successful imaging of various kinds of human neoplasms (12–19).

Theoretically, 18F-FDG PET should also be suitable for follow-up after cancer treatment, since its uptake relates to the number of viable tumor cells (20). The response of tumors to chemotherapy might, therefore, be recordable earlier and more exactly in terms of 18F-FDG uptake than from morphological changes. Several clinical studies using 18F-FDG have been performed to evaluate therapeutic response in malignant tumors (14–17, 21–24) and there also have been reports of experimental studies concerned with the relationship between treatment efficacy and 18F-FDG uptake (25,26). However, detailed experimental in vivo studies on the correlation between morphologic alterations and 18F-FDG uptake in tumors caused by chemotherapy have been lacking.

In this study we compared the relationship between tumor