Correlation of tumor grading and cellular proliferation in colorectal adenocarcinomas

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Problem/Background: Several values including patient status, tumor biomarkers and molecular aspect are used as predictors in the patient follow-up and management of colorectal cancer. Tumor grading or differentiation is a prognostic factor which is practically identifiable in routine histologic sections. However, decision making of histologic grade in some cases is difficult.

Objective: To study the correlation between cell proliferation, using Ki67 immunohistochemical staining, and grading of colorectal adenocarcinoma.

Design: Retrospective analytic study.

Setting: Department of Pathology, Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University

Materials and Methods: One hundred and sixty-two cases, first diagnosed as colorectal adenocarcinoma, were recruited in our study. Tumor grading was classified into well-differentiated, moderately-differentiated, poorly-differentiated and undifferentiated type, reviewing on hematoxylin and eosin stained slides in each case, according to the World Health Organization’s criteria 2000. Neoplastic cell proliferation is determined by Ki67 immunostain. The correlation was analyzed by means of the Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient.
**Results**: Correlation between neoplastic cell proliferation and tumor differentiation of colonic carcinoma was found statistically significant ($P = 0.014$).

**Conclusions**: This study demonstrated a significant correlation between cell proliferation and differentiation of colorectal cancer. The poorer tumor differentiation is, the higher is the proliferation rate. The Ki67 may have a role in some tumors, which are difficult to grade in routine histologic sections.

**Keywords**: Cellular proliferation, Colorectal cancer, Tumor differentiation.

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เหตุผลของการทำการวิจัย: ค่าต่าง ๆ ไม่ว่าจะเป็นสาระของผู้ป่วย รวมถึงตัวชี้วัดทางชีวภาพและชีวภาพมุก ลูกฝักมาใช้เพื่อศึกษาผลการรักษาผู้ป่วยมะเร็งลำไส้ใหญ่เพื่อกำหนดและประเมินได้ผลผู้ป่วยอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ หรือการเปลี่ยนแปลงของมะเร็งกับลูกฝักมาใช้ในการทำนายโรคด้วยชีวภัณฑ์โดยอาศัยกระบวนการวิเคราะห์สถิติเพื่อศึกษาในเนื้อเยื่อบางรายก็เป็นการมากที่จะตัดสินใจในการให้การรักษาของมนุษย์

วัตถุประสงค์: เพื่อศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างตัวชี้วัดการเปลี่ยนแปลงของมะเร็งกับการเปลี่ยนแปลงของมะเร็งผู้ป่วยที่ได้รับการรักษา

รูปแบบการวิจัย: การศึกษาเชิงวิเคราะห์กลุ่มตัวอย่าง

สถานที่ทำการวิจัย: ภาควิชาพยาธิวิทยา คณะแพทยศาสตร์จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

ตัวอย่างและวิธีการศึกษา: อาศัยชิ้นเนื้อจากผู้ป่วยมะเร็งลำไส้ใหญ่จำนวน 162 ราย โดยแบ่งครอสคอร์relationships between changes in serum marker and cancer progression.

ผลการศึกษา: พบความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างตัวชี้วัดการเปลี่ยนแปลงของเนื้อเยื่อบางรายกับการเปลี่ยนแปลงของเนื้อเยื่อบางรายมีค่า p = 0.014

สรุป: การวัดการแปลงตัวชี้วัดของมะเร็งลำไส้ใหญ่ การเปลี่ยนแปลงของมะเร็งลำไส้ใหญ่ที่ใช้ได้มาก ในการจำแนกจำแนกการแปลงตัวชี้วัดของมะเร็งลำไส้ในเนื้อเยื่อบางรายที่มีการเปลี่ยนแปลง reckless.

คำสำคัญ: การแปลงตัวชี้วัดของมะเร็งลำไส้ใหญ่, การเปลี่ยนแปลงของมะเร็งลำไส้ใหญ่
The distribution of colorectal cancer is worldwide; between 20% and 50% of patients with colorectal cancer will pass away within five years after their diagnosis, generally because of extensive metastasis.\(^1\) During the past decade this malignancy has been studied in various facets, e.g., epidemiology, etiology or pathogenesis.\(^2\) One of the most significant influent factors for predicting the patient outcome is biological markers of neoplastic behavior.\(^3,4\) Apart from conventional stage and grading system, according to tumor differentiation, the proliferation factors at biomolecular levels have an important role in patient management and biological classification of tumors.\(^4\)

Neoplastic cellular proliferation will act autonomically without control. Ki67 is a cell cycle associated antigen of nuclear protein which expresses in all cell growth phases except the resting phase (\(G_0\)).\(^5,6\) The number of cells stained positively for monoclonal Ki67 antibody correlates with tissue proliferation rate and degree of tumor differentiation.\(^7\)

Our study is designed to prove this concept and to evaluate the utility of Ki67 as a prognostic biomarker of colorectal adenocarcinoma.

**Materials and Methods**

One or two paraffin blocks per case from 162 cases, first diagnosed as colorectal adenocarcinoma at the King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital from 2002 to 2003 were selected. Representative blocks always comprised the deep invasive portion and in the majority of cases superficial parts of the tumor were also included. Subjects who have had a history of polyposis syndrome, recurrent tumor and previous treatment, either chemotherapy or radiation, were excluded from the study. Four-micrometer-thick haematoxylin and eosin stained slides were reviewed and classified the tumor differentiation, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) histological classification of tumors of the colon and rectum. They consisted of well-differentiated (grade 1), moderately-differentiated (grade 2), poorly-differentiated (grade 3) and undifferentiated (grade 4) where glandular structures occurred >95%, 50–95%, 5–50% and <5%, respectively. In addition some variants, composed of mucinous adenocarcinoma and signet-ring cell carcinoma, were classified as poorly differentiated whereas medullary carcinoma was classified as undifferentiated. Those specimens were noted the depth of tumor penetration, number of regional lymph node metastasis and distant organ spreading, according to TNM staging as well as their location, including ascending, transverse, descending and rectosigmoid regions.

In the determination of neoplastic cell proliferation, formalin-fixed, paraffin wax-embedded blocks were deparaffinized in xylene, rehydrated through graded alcohols and employed Ki67 antibody (mouse antihuman, clone MIB1, 1/300 dilution; Dako), a biotin-conjugated secondary antibody, avidin-horseradish peroxidase, and the chromogen diaminobenzidine tetrahydrochloride (DAB) as a detection agent on the tumor tissue sections. Ki67 immunohistochemical stains were evaluated semiquantitatively and counted the number of positive cells expressing nuclear brown stain among the neoplastic cells. Field selection used highest Ki67 expression areas (hot spots) by lower power scanning and scored as: negative, <10%; 1+, 10 - 25%; 2+, 26 - 50%; 3+, 51-75%; and 4+, >75%.
Discussion

Colorectal carcinoma still remains a leading cause of cancer death in most countries without evidence of any decline in its incidence.\(^{(1,2)}\) Regardless of surgical resection, which is the principle management, most oncologists need effective marker for patient follow-up and predicting the outcome. Recently, there is not only one ideal marker, but it is used as a panel and its reliability remains varied among different geographic areas.\(^{(3,4,8)}\)

Similar to other malignancies, tumor grade or degree of differentiation is depended on tumor molecular kinetic and considered to be an important independent prognostic factor besides the staging system.\(^{9}\) Differentiation of colorectal adenocarcinomas are usually graded into, namely: well-differentiated (grade 1), moderately-differentiated (grade 2) and poorly-differentiated (grade 3), when glandular architectures appear >95 %, 50 - 95 % and 5 - 50 %, respectively, and the colonic tumor is classified as undifferentiated type (grade 4) when glandular formation occurs <5 %, according to the WHO classification.\(^{9}\)

However, histologic grading is subjective. Some authors have recommended a five-grade system, including well, well to moderately, moderately, moderately to poorly and poorly differentiated in order to complete the spectrum.\(^{(10)}\) On the other hand, some authors have suggested that colonic tumor should be divided simply into low-grade, consisting of well and moderately-differentiated adenocarcinomas, and high-grade, including poorly-differentiated and undifferentiated carcinomas. The reason for this classification is that in multivariate analyses there is no difference between well and moderately differentiated tumors.\(^{(9)}\)

Therefore, grading is problematic in some situations.\(^{(10)}\) When a carcinoma possesses variegated differentiation, grading should be based on the least differentiated element and avoided the advancing edge.\(^{(10,11)}\) Small foci of less differentiated are common at the deepest part, but this feature is insufficient to classify the tumor as poorly differentiated.\(^{(12)}\) However, another way is to assess the growing tumor edge separately from the overall grade because this tumor fraction is considered to be most aggressive and more related tumor behavior.\(^{(13)}\) In addition, in case of tiny biopsy specimen, gradation is difficult to report and tumor grades may not represent the whole tumor.

Ki67 is the antibody for detecting the intranuclear matrix protein, correlating with cell proliferation. In tumorigenesis turnover rate of malignant cells is significantly higher than normal because reversible G₁-G₀ pathway is mostly skipped.\(^{(5,7)}\) Then Ki67 expression in malignancy is higher than in normal.\(^{(14-18)}\) Backus HH and colleagues have found that the progression of primary colonic adenocarcinoma to liver metastasis is associated with an increased proliferation rate, using Ki67 measurement.\(^{(17)}\)

In the present study, we found that the higher Ki67 is, the worse is the neoplastic differentiation. This result is statistically significant. Pathologists may add Ki67 as a prognostic biomarker, particularly in problematic cases such as heterogeneous differentiation of the tumor. For adenocarcinoma of the colon, there is a literature, that has prove it; according to which the result of Ki67 expression is similar between the central and peripheral parts of the tumor.\(^{(14)}\)
In conclusion, Ki67 immunostain for determining cell proliferation is related to tumor differentiation or tumor grading in colorectal adenocarcinoma. This marker is sensitive and can probably be used for monitoring and predicting the stage of the disease and therefore helps planning the therapy.

References
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