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Outcomes of Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation in 5 Patients with Autosomal Recessive RIPK1‑Defciency

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Abstract

Receptor Interacting Serine/Threonine Kinase 1 (RIPK1) is widely expressed and integral to infammatory and cell death responses. Autosomal recessive RIPK1-defciency, due to biallelic loss of function mutations in *RIPK1*, is a rare inborn error of immunity (IEI) resulting in uncontrolled necroptosis, apoptosis and infammation. Although hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT) has been suggested as a potential curative therapy, the extent to which disease may be driven by extra-hematopoietic efects of RIPK1-defciency, which are non-amenable to HSCT, is not clear. We present a multi-centre, international review of an additional 5 RIPK1-deficient children who underwent HSCT. All patients presented with very early onset infammatory bowel disease, 2 also sufered from infammatory arthritis. Median age at transplant was 3 years (range 1—5 years); 1 received matched sibling marrow, 1 matched unrelated peripheral blood stem cells (PBSC), 2 TCR $\alpha\beta$ / CD19-depleted PBSC from maternal-haploidentical donors, and 1 had TCRαβ/CD19-depleted PBSC from a mismatched unrelated donor. All received reduced-toxicity conditioning, based on treosulfan $(n=4)$ or busulfan $(n=1)$; 1 patient underwent a successful second transplant following autologous reconstitution. Four of fve patients (80%) survived; 1 child died due to multi-drug resistant pseudomonas infection and multi-organ failure. With a median duration of 14 months follow-up, 2 survivors were disease-free, and 2 had substantially improving enteropathy. These fndings demonstrated that HSCT is a potential curative therapy for RIPK1-deficiency.

Keywords Autosomal recessive receptor interacting serine/threonine kinase 1 defciency · hematopoietic stem cell transplant · primary immunodefciency · inborn error of immunity

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Introduction

Receptor-interacting serine/threonine-protein kinase 1 (RIPK1) is a key molecular mediator of apoptotic and necroptotic cell death and of inflammatory signalingpathways. Impairments of the scafolding and kinase-specifc functions of RIPK1, implicated in the pathogenesis of conditions which are characterised by severe immune dysfunction associated with cytokine dysregulation, have recently been reviewed [[1](#page-7-0), [2\]](#page-7-1).

Biallelic loss of function (LOF) mutations in *RIPK1* cause severe immunodefciency in humans, characterised by impaired T- and B-lymphocyte diferentiation, lymphocytopenia and diminished production of interleukin (IL)−6, tumour necrosis factor (TNF) and IL-12. Despite the defcit in these pro-infammatory cytokines, there is a severe inflammatory component to RIPK1-deficiency immunodeficiency with autoinflammation $[3]$, thought to be a function of enhanced activation of infammasomes and overproduction of IL-1 β [\[1](#page-7-0), [3–](#page-7-2)[6](#page-7-3)]. The resulting phenotypes of RIPK1-defciency have been summarised for 16 patients from among 13 families to date, and comprise infammatory bowel disease (IBD), recurrent viral, bacterial and fungal infections, and, in some cases, progressive, infammatory polyarthritis [[3,](#page-7-2) [7–](#page-7-4)[10\]](#page-7-5). In contrast, dominantly-inherited, heterozygous missense mutations in *RIPK1* generate a protein which resists caspase cleavage, promoting its ongoing activation and leading to recurrent fevers and lymphadenopathy – a condition known as cleavage-resistant RIPK1- Induced autoinfammatory disease (CRIA) [\[2](#page-7-1)].

While IL-1β blockade merits further evaluation in patients afected by LOF mutations leading to RIPK1 defciency [\[3](#page-7-2)], only hematopoietic stem cell transplant (HSCT) offers a potential cure $[1]$ $[1]$. The outcomes of 4 children who underwent HSCT for RIPK1-defciency, 3 of whom died, have been previously reported [\[3,](#page-7-2) [7\]](#page-7-4). To the best of our knowledge no patients with CRIA have yet been transplanted. To better understand the potential role of HSCT as a curative treatment for RIPK1-defciency, we report on the outcome of 5 additional patients with biallelic LOF mutations in *RIPK1*, transplanted between 2019 and 2021.

Patients and Methods

Patients were identifed from the Stem Cell Transplant for Primary Immune Defciencies in Europe (SCETIDE) Registry for patients. A standardized proforma was sent to respective transplant centres to retrieve relavant data for this study. Using the proforma the following data were extracted: patient demographics, *RIPK1* mutation, disease characteristics, treatments prior to HSCT, transplantation characteristics, transplant outcomes, long-term graft function and disease outcomes. Informed consent was obtained from legal guardians as per institutional practice.

Results

Patient Characteristics

We identifed 5 children (4 females) from 4 families transplanted in 3 centres between 2019 and 2021; 3 at The Great North Children's Hospital, United Kingdom (UK) (N1- N3), 1 at King Faisal Specialist Hospital & Research Centre, Saudi Arabia (N4), and 1 at Dmitry Rogachev National Medical Research Centre of Paediatric Haematology, Oncology and Immunology, Russia (N5). Patient characteristics are shown in Table [1](#page-2-0). The pre-HSCT course of N1 was featured in the earlier case series by Cuchet-Lourenço et al. [[3\]](#page-7-2). Several genetic variants were identifed as causing the biallelic LOF of *RIPK1,* all of which were previously reported as being pathogenic [[3,](#page-7-2) [8](#page-7-6)]. All patients presented with very-early onset IBD (VEOIBD); median age of onset was 1.5 months $(0.7 - 5.0 \text{ months})$; N1-N3 had recurrent infections and went on to develop infammatory arthrits by 2 years of age; N5 had one episode of bacterial lymphadenitis prior to transplant.

Prior to HSCT, all patients were immunosuppressed with combinations of sulfasalazine, azathioprine, infiximab, rituximab and steroids for their IBD, with minimal responses. N1 had several doses of anakinra, however repeat endoscopies revealed worsening ulceration following its introduction, with widespread candida detected in the upper and lower gastrointestinal tracts, hence the treatment was withdrawn. N2 (younger sister of N1) presented with infammatory enteropathy, which was particularly severe and proved impossible to control with steroids and infiximab. In the light of the experience with her sister however, treatment with anakinra was not attempted. N5 responded well to anakinra for her colitis, although she continued to have infammatory changes in the recto-sigmoid so treatment was continued throughout the peri-transplant period. All patients presented with growth failure and 4 required parenteral nutrition pre-HSCT. All except N4 received intravenous immunoglobulin replacement prior to transplant. N5 had direct antiglobulin-positive haemolytic anaemia pre-HSCT, which responded to rituximab.

Transplant Characteristics and Outcome

A detailed description of transplant characteristics is summarised in Table [2](#page-3-0). The median age at transplant was 2.6

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years (range 1.2 – 5.0 years). Median interval between presentation and transplant was 2.5 years (range $1.1 - 4.8$) years). Donor and stem cell sources were matched sibling donor (MSD) marrow $(n=1)$, matched unrelated donor (MUD) peripheral blood stem cells (PBSC) (*n*=1), TCRαβ/CD19–depleted maternal haploidentical donor PBSC $(n=2)$ and mismatched unrelated donor PBSC $(n=1)$.

All received reduced toxicity conditioning regimen, which varied accordingly to transplant. The 3 patients who were transplanted in the UK (N1-3) received fudarabinetreosulfan, with additional thiotepa, anti-thymocyte globulin (ATG) and rituximab in the TCRαβ/CD19–depleted haploidentical donor transplants [[11\]](#page-7-7), and alemtuzumab in the MUD transplant. N4 was conditioned with busulfan, fudarabine and ATG for MSD marrow transplant. N5 had fudarabine-treosulfan-cyclophosphamide with ATG and rituximab. The median times to neutrophil and platelet engraftment were 12 days (range 10–17) and 15 days (range 10–31) respectively. N1-N4 achieved full donor chimerism (>95% in all cell lines). Median duration of follow-up of surviving patients was 1.5 years (range 0.4–1.9 years).

N1's peri-transplant course was complicated by an *E. coli* bacteraemia and disseminated adenovirus infection (positive adenoviral PCR in blood, faeces and naspharyngeal aspirate), successfully treated with cidofovir and subsequently with brincidofovir. Complete disease resolution was achieved by 4 months post-transplant. At last available follow-up (1.8 years post transplant) she had full donor chimerism, was off all medication and was thriving on a normal diet. She has subsequently been lost to follow-up.

N2 (younger sister of N1) developed veno-occlusive disease on $Day + 6$ which resolved with defibrotide. Her recovery was complicated by perianal fstulating enteropathy, secondary to her severe colitis pre-transplant. Despite apparently robust immune reconstitution, she had a late readmission with sepsis, the focus of which was presumed to be gut translocation. At the most recent follow-up (5 months post-HSCT), she remained on intravenous immunoglobulin. N2 had some residual but quiescent perianal disease and, despite optimal enteral feeding support, remained below the 0.4th percentile weight-for-age. Like her sister, she has subsequently been lost to follow-up.

N3 developed a vesicular rash from Day + 39 which eluded histological diagnosis. No viruses were identifed and skin biopsy was suggestive of grade IV graft versus host disease (GVHD) or toxic epidermal necrosis. She died of multiorgan failure secondary to a multi-drug resistant pseudomonas septicaemia on Day+61 post-HSCT.

N4 was treated for cytomegalovirus and adenovirus viremias and his post-HSCT course was complicated by sepsis and pulmonary hemorrhage. However, at the most recent follow-up appointment, he had complete symptom resolution.

N5 developed secondary autologous reconstition at 6 months and required a second transplant from the same donor, with melphalan replacing cyclophosphamide in the conditioning regimen. Full donor chimerism was achieved by Day+30 after second transplant. At 1.7 years, she developed rash which was interpreted as late-onset aGVHD. This was sucesfully treated with ruxolitinib. At 1.9 years posttransplant, she had good lymphoid reconsitution with full donor chimerism and was off immunoglobulin replacement. She remained on mesalazine with low weight-for-height and mild fecal incontinence, but otherwise had no symptoms of active gut disease.

Discussion

We report transplant outcomes of 5 additional children with autosomal recessive RIPK1-deficiency, who underwent HSCT in 3 centers in UK, Saudi Arabia and Russia between 2019 and 2021. Similarly to previous reports of RIPK1 deficiency, the patients all presented with diarrhea and growth failure secondary to IBD and 3 of them also developed recurrent infections and arthritis by the time they were referred to a transplant center. Attempts at diseasemodifcation pre-HSCT with steroids, TNF-blockade and other biologics were largely inefective in our cohort.

There was no established treatment pathway for afected patients prior to transplant. We attempted IL-1 blockade with anakinra in 2 of our patients following descriptions of exaggerated IL-1 production by afected monocytes in previous reports [[3,](#page-7-2) [7\]](#page-7-4). Treatment at a dose of 6 mg/kg preceded deterioration in the colitis of N1, with ulceration and superadded candida infection, and was stopped after 6 weeks. There was no appreciable effect on joint inflammation. In contrast, anakinra was thought to have reduced the severity of gut disease in N5 at a dose of 7 mg/kg. A previous case study reported the use of anakinra (3 mg/kg) in a patient with RIPK1-defciency and refractory colitis but the response was not documented [[10](#page-7-5)]. Much higher doses of anakinra up to 10 mg/kg were efective in suppressing intestinal infammation in 2 patients with deleterious *IL10A* mutations, which raises the possibility of a dose-dependent efect which we did not achieve with the regimen we employed [[12\]](#page-7-8).

Patients from our series were transplanted between 1 and 5 years after initial presentation. Patient N3 died aged 5 years from overwhelming infection, 2 months after HSCT. The remaining 4 exhibited complete donor chimerism at last follow-up $(0.5 - 1.9$ years post-HSCT). Successful HSCT led to complete resolution of symptoms in 2 patients, and improvement in gut symptoms in the other 2. N2 had particularly severe fstulating IBD pre-transplant and continued to sufer with this problem at last follow-up, 4-months later. Other than confrming that she remains alive, it has not been possible to obtain further information about her condition at the time of writing, as she returned to her home country and has been lost to follow-up. A prolonged recovery period might be expected after such severe pre-existing tissue damage. Her sister (N1), by contrast, had complete resolution of disease-related symptoms at 1.8 years posttransplant. N5 still has some mild gut problems with suboptimal growth and takes mesalazine. She has good lymphoid reconstitution and has recently come off immunoglobulin replacement. She remains on prophylactic antibiotics, 1.9 years post-HSCT.

Cuchet-Lourenço et al. reported 3 children who had undergone HSCT by the time of publication in 2018 2 of whom were also transplanted at GNCH [[3\]](#page-7-2). While 1 underwent a successful transplant and was living a disease-free life, the other 2 children died from transplant-related complications. One developed capillary leak at Day −2 and multi-organ failure with encephalopathy from $Day +7$; he died on $Day +46$. The other child reactivated adenovirus and *Herpes simplex* on Day + 14 and Day + 29 respectively and died on Day + 33 from multi-organ failure and catastrophic pulmonary haemorrhage. In the other published report of a patient transplanted with RIPK1-deficiency, few details were given: the molecular diagnosis was made post-mortem; the patient was said to have been symptomatic with recurrent infections from birth and received a matched-family donor HSCT at 12 months of age; the graft failed and she was re-transplanted using the same donor at 3 years 2 months; she eventually died aged 19 years from chronic GVHD and 'pulmonary disease' [\[7](#page-7-4)].

Therefore, of 9 patients with RIPK1-deficiency known to have been transplanted to date, 4 have died (44%). Such high overall transplant-related mortality may in part reflect the uneven age-distribution of this small cohort, skewed by those older than 5 years in earlier reports, who are generally at higher risk of death post-HSCT. Other transplant series for IEI characterized by VEOIBD showed that older age was associated with inferior transplant survival, likely refecting more established pre-transplant organ damage and recrudescent viral infections [[13,](#page-7-9) [14\]](#page-7-10). Moreover, the proinfammatory nature of the condition, apparently resistant to steroids and biologic immuno-modulation pre-HSCT, is likely to increase the risks.

By replacing RIPK1-defcient host hematopoietic stem cells with healthy donor cells, it has already been shown that cytokine production and immune function can be normalized in HSCT survivors [[3](#page-7-2)]. However, it was unclear whether HSCT could resolve all the manifestations of RIPK1-defciency in all tissues or whether symptoms might relapse with non-canonical necroptosis in non-hematopoietic cells, or by dysregulated infammation in long-lived tissue-resident lymphoid cells, which had escaped pre-HSCT conditioning [[1\]](#page-7-0). This possibility was illustrated by recent transplant experience with Nuclear Factor κB Essential Modulator (NEMO) defects, in which HSCT appeared to correct the function of immune cells but not of intestinal epithelial cells, accounting for the persistence of colitis after transplant in some patients and the new onset of colitis post-HSCT in others [[12\]](#page-7-8). However, the evidence presented here suggests that such concerns may be misplaced in patients transplanted for RIPK1 deficiency. Moreover, this case series again demonstrates how graft manipulation in mismatched family or unrelated donors allows afected children to be successfully transplanted, when they otherwise lack a suitably matched donor [\[15](#page-7-11)]. Reduced toxicity conditioning using either treosulfan or busulfan was well tolerated despite multi-system organ damage prior to HSCT.

There are insufficient data with which to properly compare outcomes between those undergoing HSCT for RIPK1 defciency and those treated conservatively. Of 11 patients who had not been transplanted at the point that their cases were published, 3 are known to have died (27%) [[7,](#page-7-4) [8](#page-7-6)] while outcomes for another 2 were not clearly reported [[7,](#page-7-4) [9](#page-7-12)]. Of the rest, little clinical information was given about their clinical status beyond descriptions of unsuccessful treatment with various immuno-modulators for refractory IBD [\[7](#page-7-4), [8,](#page-7-6) [10](#page-7-5)]. The ages of surviving patients at last clinical follow-up are likewise unclear from these reports, however they were aged between 16 months and 10.5 years at molecular diagnosis and since they were diagnosed with a novel IEI, this was likely to have been shortly before publication [[7,](#page-7-4) [8,](#page-7-6) [10](#page-7-5)].

Conclusion

In conclusion, autosomal recessive RIPK1-defciency is characterized by severe VEOIBD, growth failure and recurrent infections with lymphopenia in most patients, while other features such as infammatory arthritis are more variable. The disease appears to be unresponsive to various forms of immunomodulation and carries a substantial risk of sepsis and death in childhood. On the other hand, the evidence provided by previous reports and now supported by this larger case series, suggests that successful HSCT is curative in 55.5% of patients (5/9) overall, and 80% (4/5) in our more recent series. Moreover, life expectancy and especially quality of life in children who survive transplant is likely to be much better than those who are treated conservatively [\[16](#page-7-13)], and this prognosis is also supported by the fndings from the current study at latest follow-up. On this basis, we propose that serious consideration be given to ofering HSCT to children with RIPK1 defciency, soon after diagnosis, ideally at a specialist center with experience transplanting the condition. However, we acknowledge that the overall risk of transplant-related mortality appears to be higher than for 'classical' primary immunodeficiency disorders (PID), as is also reported for other IEI with complex underlying pathophysiology, such as NEMO and the various Hyper IgE syndromes, making the decision to offer HSCT at diagnosis particularly difficult $[17]$ $[17]$. Therefore, the potential role of targeted anti-infammatory treatment such as IL-1 blockade in the pre-or peri-transplant period requires further study.

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Data Availability No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Declarations

Ethical Approval No formal ethical approval was obtained for this retrospective case study.

Consent to Participate Freely given written informed consent was obtained from participants/parents or legal guardians for data collection and participation as per institutional practice.

Consent for Publication Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study for publication as per institutional practice.

Competing Interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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