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Association of linear growth impairment in pediatric Crohn's disease and a known height locus: a pilot study

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SUMMARY

The etiology of growth impairment in Crohn's disease (CD) has been inadequately explained by nutritional, hormonal, and/or disease-related factors, suggesting that genetics may be an additional contributor. The aim of this cross-sectional study was to investigate genetic variants associated with linear growth in pediatric-onset CD.

We genotyped 951 subjects (317 CD patient-parent trios) for sixty-four polymorphisms within 14 CD-susceptibility and 23 stature-associated loci. Patient height-for-age Z-score < -1.64 was used to dichotomize probands into growth-impaired and nongrowth-impaired groups. The transmission disequilibrium test (TDT) was used to study association to growth impairment. There was a significant association between growth impairment in CD (height-for-age Z-score < -1.64) and a stature-related polymorphism in the dymeclin gene *DYM* (rs8099594) (OR=3.2, CI [1.57-6.51], p=0.0007). In addition, there was nominal over-transmission of two CD-susceptibility alleles, 10q21.1 intergenic region (rs10761659) and *ATG16L1* (rs10210302), in growth-impaired CD children (OR=2.36, CI [1.26-4.41] p=0.0056 and OR=2.45, CI [1.22-4.95] p=0.0094, respectively).

Our data indicate that genetic influences due to stature-associated and possibly CD risk alleles may predispose CD patients to alterations in linear growth. This is the first report of a link between a stature-associated locus and growth impairment in CD.

Keywords

height; growth retardation; inflammatory bowel disease; DYM; dymeclin

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INTRODUCTION

Growth impairment is a major complication of pediatric-onset Crohn's disease (CD) and occurs in 19-35% of affected children (Motil et al., 1993, Puntis et al., 1984, Markowitz & Daum, 1994, Kirschner, 1993, Hildebrand et al., 1994, Griffiths et al., 1993). Growth impairment in CD has traditionally been attributed to nutritional, hormonal, and diseaserelated factors, such as inflammation, disease severity, and the use of corticosteroids. However, a recent study suggests that growth delay persists for at least 2 years after the diagnosis in many pre-pubertal children with CD despite improved disease activity and the frequent use of immunomodulators and biologics (Pfefferkorn et al., 2009). A previous study of growth in Crohn's disease patients revealed that those who were not growth impaired at diagnosis did not subsequently develop growth impairment during a 3-year follow up (Motil et al., 1993). Identifying early those individuals who will suffer from permanent growth impairment would allow physicians to formulate an individualized therapy to preserve the patient's linear growth. Accordingly, such children might benefit from non-traditional therapy, such as first-line anti-TNF- α antibody, aggressive nutritional therapy, and/or growth hormone supplementation (Borrelli et al., 2004, Knight et al., 2005, Heyman et al., 2008, Walters et al., 2007).

There exists a clear role for genetic predisposition in CD, which exhibits familial clustering and a significantly higher concordance rate in monozygotic compared to dizygotic twins (Tysk et al., 1988). Early age at diagnosis is associated with more complicated disease (Van Limbergen et al., 2008) and a greater likelihood of having affected family members (Polito et al., 1996). Moreover, offspring of affected CD parents develop CD at an earlier age (Polito et al., 1996, Lee et al., 1999, Grandbastien et al., 1998). These findings suggest that pediatric-onset CD represents a sub-phenotype of the disease, which may result from susceptibility variants that have a larger effect size. Over the past decade, more than 40 CD-susceptibility genetic loci have been identified and replicated through linkage and genomewide studies in adult and pediatric patients (Barrett et al., 2008, Kugathasan et al., 2008, Imielinski et al., 2009, Essers et al., 2009). Except for *NOD2* and *ATG16L1* mutations (Russell et al., 2005, Prescott et al., 2007), the impact of these susceptibility loci have not yet been directly associated with specific phenotypes.

Height is a highly heritable trait (Preece, 1996), and multiple genetic variants associated with stature have already been reported in the general population (Weedon et al., 2007, Lettre et al., 2008, Sanna et al., 2008, Weedon et al., 2008, Weedon & Frayling, 2008, Lettre, 2009). In CD, published studies have investigated genetic variants associated with growth impairment: patients with an OCTN1/2 haplotype had lower height at diagnosis (Russell et al., 2006); patients with IL-6-174 GG genotype had lower height Z-scores compared to those with GC or CC genotypes (Sawczenko et al., 2005); and patients carrying *TNF-* α promoter polymorphisms with loss of function had higher mean height z-scores (Levine et al., 2005). However, the association of these genetic variants with growth impairment has not yet been confirmed. We hypothesized that, in addition to inflammation and nutrition, growth impairment often seen in CD children is modulated by CDsusceptibility and/or stature-associated alleles that affect the general population. Accordingly, our aims of the present pilot study were to (1) compare the difference in transmission of known CD-susceptibility and stature-associated alleles in growth-impaired and nongrowth-impaired children with CD; and (2) determine if genetic variants previously reported to affect linear growth in European CD populations also affect the U.S. children with CD.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Subjects

This was a cross-sectional pilot study investigating genetic variants related to linear growth impairment in pediatric-onset CD. We recruited 317 Caucasian patients (60.8% males) diagnosed with CD between the ages 1-18 and their biological parents from two tertiary care pediatric centers, Children's Hospital Boston and Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. Of the recruited trios, 166 were from Boston and 151 from Wisconsin. Inclusion criteria included verification of CD diagnosis using clinical, endoscopic, histopathologic, and radiographic studies prior to enrollment (Silverberg et al., 2005).

Description of the study visit

On the day of the study visit, we measured heights of all subjects using a wall-mounted Holtain stadiometer either at Children's Hospital Boston or Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. We also obtained clinical information pertaining to CD from patients and families, which we verified using the medical record. Height at diagnosis was not available for all patients since some were diagnosed elsewhere prior to being referred to our tertiary care centers. As a result, we also recorded all available retrospective heights measured in the same fashion during clinic visits at these two institutions, and calculated mean height for each patient. Tanner stage was not available for most patients, and therefore, was not included. The mean heights were converted into standard deviation scores (Z-scores) for all patients using the National Center for Health Statistics reference values. For those subjects whose heights were measured after 18 years of age, their heights were converted to the same Z-scores calculated for gender-matched persons who are 17.9 years of age. Presence of growth impairment was defined as a mean height-for-age Z-score < -1.64 (equivalent to < 5^{th} percentile on the growth curve). We also collected peripheral venous blood, from which lymphocytic DNA was extracted according to the manufacturer's instructions using the Gentra Puregene Blood Kit (Qiagen, Inc. USA).

Genotyping

We selected for genotyping loci associated with CD risk and adult height variation at the time we designed this experiment in 2007. This list includes 14 confirmed CD and 23 known stature-associated loci selected from prior publications by others (Potocnik et al., 2004, Lettre et al., 2008, Duerr et al., 2006, Hampe et al., 2007, Rioux et al., 2001, Peltekova et al., 2004, Rioux et al., 2007, Libioulle et al., 2007, Parkes et al., 2007, Wellcome Trust Case Control Consortium, 2007, Weedon et al., 2007, Hugot et al., 1996, Browning et al., 2007, Stoll et al., 2004). Thirty-three SNPs from 14 CD-susceptibility genes or nearby genes of interest, and one SNP from each stature-associated locus were included. For some of the CD-susceptibility loci, we included more than one SNP if prior genomewide association studies reported multiple SNPs within or near the variant. However, we chose only one SNP per stature-associated locus as previously published (Lettre et al., 2008). In addition, we included 8 SNPs within the OCTN 1/2, IL-6, and TNF- α promoter regions that have been reported to be associated with growth retardation in CD patients in prior studies (Levine et al., 2005, Russell et al., 2006, Sawczenko et al., 2005). The complete list of 64 SNPs genotyped in this study is listed in Supplementary Table 1. Genotyping was performed using the platform iPLEX Sequenom MassARRAY system (Sequenom, Inc., San Diego, CA).

Statistical Methods

We dichotomized patients into one of two groups: growth-impaired and nongrowthimpaired, based on their mean height-for-age Z-scores. We used two-sample *t*-tests and

Wilcoxon rank sum tests to assess differences in demographic and clinical characteristics of the two groups. The SPSS statistics package version 17.0 (SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL) was used for phenotypic analysis. In order to assess generalizability, we analyzed our cohort for association with known CD-susceptibility loci by transmission disequilibrium testing (TDT) using the PLINK statistical package, http://pngu.mgh.harvard.edu/purcell/plink/ (Purcell et al., 2007). The TDT avoids the possibility of spurious associations due to population stratification. Differences in genotype frequency were analyzed using the χ^2 test. Subsequently, each CD-susceptibility and stature-related SNP was analyzed for association with the presence or absence of growth impairment, also using the TDT. We performed Benjamini-Hochberg false discovery rate analysis to account for multiple hypothesis testing (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995). Then, we calculated heterogeneity p-values to assess whether transmission of the risk alleles is significantly different between growth-impaired and nongrowth-impaired CD patients.

Ethical Considerations

The institutional review boards (IRB) at Children's Hospital Boston and Children's Hospital of Wisconsin approved the study protocol. Prior to enrollment into the study, informed consent was obtained from subjects who were at least 18 years old, and parental consent was obtained from subjects who were 17 years or younger.

RESULTS

Patient characteristics

A total of 951 subjects, or 317 CD affected child-parent-parent trios, were enrolled into our study. All patients in this cohort identified themselves as descendents of European ancestry. The median age at diagnosis of IBD was 12.0 years (interquartile range (IQR) 10-14). Sixty-five patients (20.5%) met the criteria for growth impairment based on mean height-for-age Z-score < -1.64. These data are similar to ours and other studies (Lee et al., 2010, Motil et al., 1993, Griffiths et al., 1993). Except for the difference in mean height Z-scores, the remaining demographic data are similar between the two growth groups (Table 1).

As shown in Supplementary Table 2, the majority of patients in both growth groups had ileocolonic disease with or without upper gastrointestinal involvement (Montreal Classification disease location L3 or L3+L4) and non-stricturing and non-penetrating disease behavior (Montreal Classification disease behavior B1 or B1p) as previously reported (Van Limbergen et al., 2008). Due to the pilot nature of this study, attempts to calculate prevalence or absence of growth impairment for specific disease-related phenotype was not possible. However, our previously reported cohort representing a similar patient population demonstrated no significant relationship between persistent growth impairment and disease-associated factors (Lee et al., 2010).

Genetic Analyses

Our data met the quality control measures, including genotyping rate \geq 98% and Mendelian inheritance error of 0.1%. Deviation from Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium was not observed for any of the 64 SNPs. Our primary aim focused exclusively on association between the growth impairment phenotype and presence or absence of CD-susceptibility and/or stature-related SNPs. We did not intend to correlate phenotypes relating to disease location and behavior with genotypes due to the small sample size.

As shown in Table 2, the TDT confirmed an association between CD phenotype and many of the already-validated CD SNPs previously described by others, including *NOD2*, 10q21.1 intergenic region, *IL23R*, *OCTN1/2*, and *ATG16L1* (Hugot et al., 1996,Rioux et al.,

2001,Peltekova et al., 2004,Rioux et al., 2000,Duerr et al., 2006,Rioux et al., 2007,Hampe et al., 2007,Wellcome Trust Case Control Consortium, 2007). The *IL23R* SNP, rs11209026, was also found to be protective in our cohort as previously reported (OR=0.43, CI [0.24-0.78], p=0.0039) (Duerr et al., 2006). None of the height-related SNPs were associated with the diagnosis of CD in the absence of stratification according to height.

We then looked at the association between growth impairment in CD and transmission of CD-risk and stature-related loci. As shown in Table 3, we observed over-transmission of the stature-related SNP in the dymeclin gene *DYM* (rs8099594) from the heterozygous parents to growth-impaired children with CD (height-for-age Z-score < -1.64) compared to those who were not growth impaired (OR=3.2, CI [1.57-6.51], p=0.0007). The Benjamini-Hochberg false discovery rate for *DYM* was 0.04, and the heterogeneity p-value was 0.0026, suggesting that the over-transmission of the short-stature-associated allele was largely limited to patients with growth impairment. However, it should be noted that the most conservative Bonferroni correction of the 2-sided heterogeneity p-value would result in loss of significance (p= 0.1664). Hence, it would be important to validate our preliminary finding in another larger independent cohort.

The two CD-risk alleles, 10q21.1 intergenic region (rs10761659) and *ATG16L1* (rs10210302), were also shown to be over-transmitted in growth-impaired CD children (OR=2.36, CI [1.26-4.41] p=0.0056 and OR=2.45, CI [1.22-4.95] p=0.0094, respectively), but not those without growth impairment (OR=1.32, CI [1.01-1.74] and OR=1.22, CI [0.92-1.61], respectively). However, the false discovery rates for these SNPs were higher than *DYM*, 0.18 for rs10761659 and 0.20 for rs10210302, and the heterogeneity statistics on these SNPs were not significant; hence, a future study with a larger sample size will be needed to validate these findings. The previously reported SNPs in *OCTN1/2*, *IL-6*, and the *TNF-a* promoter region that were implicated in linear growth in CD patients (Russell et al., 2006, Sawczenko et al., 2005, Levine et al., 2005) were not significantly associated with growth impairment in our cohort (Supplementary Table 3).

DISCUSSION

In this study we found a 20.5 percent prevalence of growth impairment in the 317 children who comprised our cohort; this is similar to that reported over a decade ago from our institution using the same definition (Motil et al., 1993). The fact that no significant change in the prevalence of growth impairment despite advances in therapy and nutrition suggests a genetic contribution to growth impairment in CD. Indeed, we observed over-transmission of the risk allele in a stature-related locus in the growth-impaired compared to the nongrowthimpaired CD children. Both the growth-impaired and nongrowth-impaired groups exhibited similar disease location and behavior, reducing disease severity as a major confounder. Despite the relatively small sample size, our cohort exhibited the previously confirmed CDsusceptibility variants selected for this analysis (Duerr et al., 2006, Wellcome Trust Case Control Consortium, 2007). This is the first study to report a possible association between a stature-related locus and growth impairment in children with CD. In addition, our data showed a trend for over-transmission of a risk allele from heterozygous parents to growthimpaired CD children for two known CD-susceptibility genes, 10q21.1 intergenic region and ATG16L1. These observations provide initial evidence for a genetic contribution to growth impairment in CD. Potentially, genetic influences due to a combination of CD-risk alleles and stature-associated loci that affect the general population may predispose CD patients to alterations in linear growth.

Stature is known to be strongly heritable, and twin and family studies have confirmed the role of genetics in up to 90% of the variation in height within populations (Preece, 1996,

Silventoinen et al., 2003). Accordingly, subsequent studies have identified 47 genetic loci associated with stature in the general populations (Weedon et al., 2008, Weedon et al., 2007, Lettre et al., 2008, Sanna et al., 2008, Weedon & Frayling, 2008, Lettre, 2009). Many of these loci were also studied in our cohort, but only DYM was found to be significantly associated with growth impairment. This could be due to small sample size limiting our ability to detect associations, statistical fluctuation, including a "winner's curse" effect at DYM, or to a stronger effect of the DYM variant on growth impairment. Mutations in the DYM gene, which encodes dymeclin, have been linked to Dyggve-Melchior-Clausen syndrome and Smith-McCort dysplasia, rare autosomal-recessive skeletal dysplasias with and without mental retardation, respectively (Neumann et al., 2006, El Ghouzzi et al., 2003). The DYM mutations in Dyggve-Melchior-Clausen syndrome have been associated with loss of function, whereas those in Smith-McCort dysplasia have been mostly missense mutations. Despite DYM's associations with these syndromes, only recently has its function become better characterized. The DYM-mutated murine model displays defects in endochondral bone formation. Available data also suggest that dymeclin participates in the traffic of proteins and vesicles into and out of the Golgi, which may play an important role in postnatal bone formation since transport defects could affect the synthesis, processing, secretion, or uptake of growth factors, and interactions with extracellular matrix (Osipovich et al., 2008). It has also been recently reported that dymeclin, widely expressed in primary chondrocytes and osteoblasts, is a peripheral, not transmembrane, protein of the Golgi apparatus (Dimitrov et al., 2009). Hence, compromised function of intracellular transport in the Golgi apparatus may serve as a mechanism underlying growth impairment in patients with CD. It should be noted that in our cohort the risk allele was found in both the heterozygous and homozygous state, but none of the patients had syndromic features of DYM mutations.

This is the largest study to date investigating CD-risk and stature-related loci associated with growth-impaired phenotype in pediatric CD. Prior smaller studies have reported an association of OCTN1/2, IL-6, and TNF- α promoter polymorphisms with linear growth (Russell et al., 2006, Sawczenko et al., 2005, Levine et al., 2005). Two hundred children from the United Kingdom (U.K.) with CD were reported to have lower growth indices, including height, when they carried the TC haplotype of the OCTN1/2 variant (Russell et al., 2006). Sawczenko et al. reported that 153 English and Swedish CD children with IL-6 GG genotype were shorter at diagnosis than those with GC or CC genotypes (Sawczenko et al., 2005). However, we were unable to replicate these findings in our US cohort, which may be due to different genetic pools studied and/or the different criteria selected for the growthimpaired phenotype. By contrast, genotyping of 87 Israeli CD patients revealed a correlation between presence of TNF 238 G/A polymorphism and increased height Z-scores, suggesting its protective effect on height retardation (Levine et al., 2005). Our data also demonstrated a similar trend on height of children carrying the same polymorphism (OR=0.75), but this was not statistically significant. As reported by Wine et al., we also did not observe a correlation between the presence of NOD2 polymorphisms and growth impairment (Wine et al., 2004). Our study suggests that linear growth in CD could be partially modulated by the interplay of various genetic variants, some of which may be at DYM and CD-risk alleles.

One of the limitations of our study is its small sample size, which could overestimate the effect of *DYM*. Since growth impairment occurs in 10-40% of CD patients, we will need a much larger cohort for the validation of transmission of risk alleles to growth-impaired children. Furthermore, it will be valuable to incorporate mid-parental heights into the calculation of height deficit, and to study the genetics of those who remain permanently growth impaired as adults. A very large multi-center study including a more comprehensive analysis of CD-risk alleles and stature-related allele will likely further elucidate the contribution of genetics to growth impairment; such a study is in the planning phase.

In conclusion, our pilot study has identified a possible association between *DYM* and growth impairment in children with CD. Further studies to validate this association and to investigate other stature and CD-susceptibility variants are needed.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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Table 1

Demographic and clinical characteristics of patients based on growth status

	Growth-impaired (N=65)	Nongrowth-impaired (N=252)
Males (%)	41 (63.1)	155 (61.5)
Median age of diagnosis [IQR]	11.0 [9.0, 13.0]	12.0 [9.5, 14.5]
Mean height Z-score (SD)	-2.36 (0.62)	-0.19 (0.96)

IQR, interquartile range; SD, standard deviation

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P-value

0.0008 0.0008 0.0113 0.0119 0.0130

0.0054

0.0039

Chr	Gene	SNP	Risk Allele	т	U	OR [CI]
16q12	NOD2	rs2066845	С	35	12	2.92 [1.51-5.62]
10q21.1	intergenic	rs10761659	IJ	174	117	1.49 [1.18-1.88]
1p31	IL23R	rs11209026	А	16	37	0.43 [0.24-0.78]
1p31	IL23R	rs7517847	Т	166	119	1.39 [1.10-1.77]
5q31	OCTN1/2	rs17622208	А	173	129	1.34 [1.07-1.69]
16q12	NOD2	rs2066844	Т	38	19	2.00 [1.15-3.47]
3p21	BSN	rs9858542	А	164	122	1.34 [1.06-1.70]
5p13	PTGER4	rs4495224	А	157	116	1.35 [1.06-1.72]
2q37	ATG16L1	rs2241880	IJ	168	126	1.33 [1.06-1.68]
бр	$TNF-\alpha$	rs1799724	Т	4	70	0.63 [0.43-0.92]
1p31	IL23R	rs11805303	Т	142	104	1.37 [1.06-1.76]
2q37	ATG16L1	rs10210302	Т	159	121	1.31 [1.04-1.66]
5q31	OCTN1/2	rs1050152	Т	176	136	1.29 [1.04-1.62]
5q31	OCTN1/2	rs11739135	С	163	127	1.28 [1.02-1.62]
16q12	NOD2	rs17221417	IJ	146	113	1.29 [1.01-1.65]
5q33	IRGM	rs1000113	Т	70	48	1.46 [1.01-2.11]

0.0143 0.01490.0154

0.0131

ed; U, untransmitted; OR, odds ratio; CI, confidence interval.

0.0428

0.0235 0.0345 0.0403

0.0232

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Table 3

TDT of the CD-susceptibility and stature-associated alleles in growth impaired and non-growth impaired CD patients

						ū	Growth-impaired CD	0		Nong	Nongrowth-impaired CD	D	
Chr	Chr Gene CD/H ^a	CD/H ^a	SNP	Risk Alleleb T U	T	n	OR [CI] ^c	P-value	Т	U	OR [CI] ^c P-value T U OR [CI] ^d P-value	P-value	Heterogeneity p-value ^e
18q21	DYM	Н	rs8099594	IJ	32	10	3.20 [1.57-6.51]	0.0007	110	106	32 10 3.20 [1.57-6.51] 0.0007 110 106 1.04 [0.79-1.36] 0.7855	0.7855	0.0026
10q21.1	0q21.1 intergenic	8	rs10761659	IJ	33	14	33 14 2.36 [1.26-4.41] 0.0056 119	0.0056	119	90	1.32 [1.01-1.74]	0.0449	0.0942
2q37	2q37 ATG16L1	9	rs10210302	Т	27	11	11 2.45 [1.22-4.95]	0.0094	111	91	1.22 [0.92-1.61]	0.1594	0.0656
3p21	BSN	8	rs9858542	А	31	15	2.07 [1.12-3.83]	0.0183	116	92	31 15 2.07 [1.12-3.83] 0.0183 116 92 1.26 [0.96-1.66]	0.0961	0.1483
2q37	2q37 ATG16L1	8	rs2241880	IJ	28	13	2.15 [1.12-4.16]	0.0192	118	93	28 13 2.15 [1.12-4.16] 0.0192 118 93 1.27 [0.97-1.67] 0.0852	0.0852	0.1426
Chr, chron	tosome; SNP,	single nuc	leotide polymo	rphism; T, transr	nitted;	U, ur	Chr, chromosome; SNP, single nucleotide polymorphism; T, transmitted; U, untransmitted; OR, odds ratio; CI, confidence interval	dds ratio; C	I, confi	dence j	interval.		
CD, CD-ri	CD, CD-risk SNP; H, stature-associated SNP.	ature-assoc	iated SNP.										
Risk allele	refers to CD-1	risk allele	for 10q21.1 inte	ergenic region, A	TG16	<i>.1</i> , an	Risk allele refers to CD-risk allele for 10q21.1 intergenic region, $ATGI6LI$, and BSN , and shorter height allele for DYM .	height allel	e for D	YM.			

à

 $^{\rm C}$ OR reflects the odds of transmitting the risk allele to the growth-impaired CD patients.

 $^d\mathrm{OR}$ reflects the odds of transmitting the risk allele to the non-growth impaired CD patients.

 e Heterogeneity p-value reflects whether the OR are different for the growth-impaired and non-growth impaired groups.