

Expression of Phosphodiesterase 4B cAMP-Specific Gene in Subjects With Cryptorchidism and Down's Syndrome

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Cryptorchidism represents a risk factor for infertility and germ cell testicular neoplasia. An increased rate of cryptorchidism has been reported in subjects with Down's syndrome. Cyclic nucleotide phosphodiesterases (PDEs) are important messengers that regulate and mediate a number of cellular responses to extracellular signals, such as neurotransmitters and hormones. PDE4B, cAMP-specific (PDE4B) gene which maps to chromosome 1p31.3 appears to be involved in schizophrenia, chronic psychiatric illness, learning, memory, and mood disturbances. Expression of PDE4 enzymes have been studied in testes of cryptorchid rats. Expression of PDE4B protein examination showed marked degenerative changes in the epithelial lining of

Key words: cryptorchidism; Down's syndrome; PDE4B gene; qRT-PCR; mRNA expression

the seminiferous tubules. These findings led us to evaluate PDE4 mRNA expression in leukocytes of peripheral blood of five men with DS and cryptorchidism and eleven subjects with DS without cryptorchidism compared with healthy men (controls) by quantitative Real Time PCR (qRT-PCR). This study showed that the *PDE4B* gene was downexpressed in men with DS and cryptorchidism compared to normal controls and DS without cryptorchidism. A lower expression of the *PDE4B* gene may be involved in the neurological abnormalities in subjects with Down's syndrome. Moreover, *PDE4B* gene may be involved in the testicular abnormalities of men with DS and cryptorchidism. *J. Clin. Lab. Anal.* 30:196–199, 2016. © 2014 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

Cryptorchidism is the most frequent defect of the male urogenital tract at birth (1). It represents a risk factor for infertility whose rate is inversely proportional to the age when orchidopexy is carried out (1, 2). In addition, cryptorchidism increases the risk of developing germ cell testicular neoplasia by five to ten times (3). The molecular basis of these defects seem to relate to proapoptotic pathway activation (3). An increased rate of cryptorchidism has been reported in children with Down's syndrome (DS). In a proportion of them, testes are within the scrotum at birth, but may subsequently move to an ectopic position (4). The prevalence of undescended testes in DS is 6.5% (24/368), with 4.4% (16/368) being acquired undescended or ascending testes as reported in patients with trisomy 21 who underwent surgery for undescended

testes in two tertiary pediatric centers (4). These results suggest an increased prevalence of cryptorchidism in DS and, in particular, the presence of a significant proportion of acquired cryptorchidism (4). Different studies were performed on leukocytes of subjects with DS as, PCNT, KIF21A, RRP1B, and ADRB2, where there are alteration of expression of some genes in individuals with DS, compared with their respective controls (5, 6).

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Received 19 May 2014; Accepted 21 November 2014
DOI 10.1002/jcla.21835

Published online in Wiley Online Library (wileyonlinelibrary.com).

Cyclic nucleotide phosphodiesterases (PDEs) are important, these proteins regulate the intracellular concentrations of the cyclic nucleotides cAMP and cGMP, and thereby play a role in signal transduction of neurotransmitters and hormones (7). *PDE4B*, *cAMP-specific* (*PDE4B*) gene which maps to chromosome 1p31.3 (OMIM 600127), is a class IV cAMP-specific. It appears to be involved in schizophrenia, chronic psychiatric illness, learning, memory, and mood disturbances (8).

Expression changes of PDE4 enzymes have been studied in the abdominal and scrotal testes of cryptorchid rats. Histological examination has shown marked degenerative changes in the epithelial lining of the seminiferous tubules. These changes included degeneration of some spermatogonia, apoptosis of the secondary spermatocytes, and incomplete spermatogenesis (9).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of this study was to evaluate *PDE4B* mRNA expression in leukocytes of peripheral blood of five men with DS and cryptorchidism and in six DS men without cryptorchidism in comparison with 11 healthy noncryptorchid men (controls) by quantitative Real Time PCR (qRT-PCR).

The diagnosis of trisomy 21 was performed by karyotype analysis which showed a classical chromosome 21 trisomy in all of them. The patients were referred to the Division of Andrology and Endocrinology, University of Catania for the andrological work-up. Cases and controls were recruited after family and/or personal informed consent and the ethics committee of the endocrinology, andrology, and internal medicine section gave consent to conduct the research in question.

The diagnosis of undescended testis has been made by physical examination and confirmed by ultrasound scrotal scan. The karyotype analysis of controls resulted normal. The 11 subjects with DS and the 11 age- and sex-matched controls were enrolled after family or personal informed consents were obtained in a specialized referral centre for subjects with DS. All DS subject with cryptorchidism have been reported in a previous publication (10).

The differential expression of *PDE4B* mRNA between men with DS and cryptorchidism and controls was evaluated by qRT-PCR in peripheral blood leukocytes. Total RNA was extracted as previously reported (10). RNA quantity and purity were confirmed by spectrophotometry and agarose gel electrophoresis. To avoid any genomic DNA contamination during qRT-PCR, a brief incubation of the samples at 42°C with a specific Wipe-out buffer (QuantiTect Reverse Transcription Kit, QIAGEN Sciences, Germantown, PA) was carried out. Retrotranscription of 600 ng of total RNA from each samples was then performed in a final volume of 20 µl and gener-

ated cDNA was used as a template for real-time quantitative PCR analysis using gene expression products. For each sample qRT-PCR reactions were carried out in duplicate using 2.5 µl of cDNA and QuantiTect Probe PCR Master Mix Kit (QIAGEN Sciences, Germantown, PA) in a total volume of 50 µl. QRT-PCR experiments were performed using the ABI PRISM 7700 Sequence Detection System from Applied Biosystems. The target *PDE4B* gene (ID TaqMan Assay *PDE4B* 00963642-ml) and the reference gene glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase (*GAPDH*) (ID TaqMan Assay *GAPDH* Hs99999905-ml) assays were obtained from Applied Biosystems (Carlsbad, CA, USA). The thermal cycling conditions consisted of one cycle for 2 min at 50°C, one cycle of 15 min at 95°C and 40 cycles for 15 s at 94°C followed by 1 min at 60°C. The amplified transcripts were quantified using the comparative CT method and relative quantification analysis data were played using the comparative $\Delta\Delta C_t$ method. *PDE4B* gene expression level was normalized to *GAPDH* level and Target Mean Cp definition was used to indicate the mean normalized cycle threshold (10, 11). Results were analyzed by one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by the Duncan's multiple range test and the statistical significance was accepted when the *P*-value was lower than 0.05.

RESULTS

The five DS subjects with cryptorchidism had a mean (\pm SEM) age of 44.2 ± 1.16 years and the five matched controls were 43.4 ± 1.63 years old. The six DS men without cryptorchidism were 43.7 ± 0.99 years old and their six matched controls 43.2 ± 0.95 years old. No statistically significant difference resulted. DS patients with cryptorchidism had a mean total testicular volume of 19.6 ± 1.0 ml, significantly lower than that of their five matched controls (28.4 ± 1.2 ml), DS men without cryptorchidism (29.8 ± 0.89 ml), and their six matched controls (30.1 ± 1.0 ml). The *PDE4B* gene had a lower expression in men with DS and cryptorchidism compared to normal controls. Men with DS and cryptorchidism had a mean (\pm SEM) *PDE4B* expression of 0.55 ± 0.08 which resulted significantly lower compared to that of the five matched controls arbitrarily assumed to be 1 (Table 1) ($P < 0.001$). In contrast, DS subjects without cryptorchidism did not show a uniform pattern of *PDE4B* gene expression (mean \pm SEM: 2.75 ± 1.93) which did not result significantly different from that of their six matched controls (Table 1).

DISCUSSION

This finding obtained in a limited number of men with DS and cryptorchidism showed about 45% lower expression of the *PDE4B* gene compared to normal men.

TABLE 1. mRNA PDE4B Gene Expression in Subjects With Down's Syndrome (DS) and Cryptorchidism (CR), DS men Without Cryptorchidism, and Normal Controls (CTL)

Sample ID	Age (years)	PDE4B (target) gene (mean Cp)	GAPDH (reference) gene (mean Cp)	Normalized ratio
CTL 1	49	26.91	24.52	1.000
DS + CR 1	48	25.74	22.87	0.783
CTL 2	43	24.15	20.79	1.000
DS + CR 2	45	22.44	17.92	0.447
CTL 3	44	26.36	33.80	1.000
DS + CR 3	44	27.20	33.51	0.458
CTL 4	42	33.02	37.01	1.000
DS + CR 4	43	32.76	34.78	0.346
CTL 5	39	24.26	20.96	1.000
DS + CR 5	41	24.74	20.92	0.695
CTL 6	45	38.22	35.36	1.000
DS 6	47	33.63	28.92	0.276
CTL 7	44	35.70	31.00	1.000
DS 7	45	33.48	20.10	1.249
CTL 8	46	33.60	33.00	1.000
DS 8	44	35.24	31.06	0.669
CTL 9	43	37.81	32.41	1.000
DS 9	44	32.78	31.00	12.32
CTL 10	40	35.94	30.86	1.000
DS 10	42	37.03	30.67	0.410
CTL 11	41	36.32	30.63	1.000
DS 11	40	37.36	32.31	1.556

Cp: crossing points.

Functional variation of *PDE4B* gene expression may impact mitochondrial cAMP catabolism with a concomitant physiological and psychiatric outcome; it may also have a role in neuronal death through a not well known mechanism (8, 12, 13). Millar and colleagues (2005) provided primary evidence for *PDE4B* gene as a genetic susceptibility factor for schizophrenia. Indeed, a link between schizophrenia and *PDE4B* may occur at the molecular level of cAMP signaling system (8). Recent studies whose purpose was to characterize PDEs suggest that cAMP-dependent regulatory pathways are indeed involved in rat spermatogenesis. Moreover, PDE4 enzyme in cryptorchidism induces apoptosis of the germ cells (14, 15). Immunocytochemical examination in rat suggested that PDE4B was predominantly expressed in the testicular somatic cells (9). This is the first study reporting the presence of a correlation between an abnormal *PDE4B* gene expression and cryptorchidism in humans. In conclusion, we found that men with DS and cryptorchidism have a lower blood leukocyte *PDE4B* gene expression compared to men with DS but without cryptorchidism. These preliminary data suggest that the *PDE4B* gene may play a role in the onset of cryptorchidism in men with DS. However, more data are needed not only in DS subjects, but also in patients with cryptorchidism alone before any more definitive conclusion may be drawn.

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