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Case report

Hypersensitivity to chemoradiation in FANCA carrier with cervical carcinoma—A case report and review of the literature



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ABSTRACT

Objective: Compared to Fanconi anemia (FA) patients with homozygous defective two-alleles inheritance, there is a scarce or no evidence on one defective allele FANCA carriers, with respect to their cancer incidence, clinical and in vitro radiosensitivity and chemosensitivity. On that account, we report a case of a 30-year old FANCA mutation carrier woman with uterine cervix adenocarcinoma who was treated with chemoradiotherapy, in which unexpected acute toxicity and fatal late morbidity occurred.

Methods: We also report the results of an in vitro test for radiosensitivity, immunohistochemical examination with FANCA staining and human papillomavirus genotyping, and a review of the literature for FA carrier patients with respect to cancer incidence, clinical and in vitro response to chemo/radiotherapy, options of early heterozygosity detection, and methods of in vitro prediction of hypersensitivity to oncologic treatment.

Conclusion: Although there are no standard guidelines for management of FA carriers with malignancies and reports about chemo- or radiosensitivity in this population are scarce; patients with FA-A heterozygosity may have a high rate of complications from chemo/radiotherapy. Up to now, an optimum method for the prediction of radiosensitivity and the best parameter has not been found. Clinical radioresponsiveness is unpredictable in FA carriers and there is a pressing need of new rapid and predictive in vitro assays of

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radiation responses. Until then, the treatment of FA carriers with malignancies should be individualized, with respect to potential hypersensitivity to ionizing radiation or cross-linking agents.

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1. Introduction

Fanconi anemia (FA) is a rare autosomal recessive DNA repair disorder that causes chromosomal instability, cancer susceptibility, and radiation sensitivity. Two mutated alleles in FA genes are required to cause the disease. Fourteen FA corresponding genes have been identified (FANCA, A, B, C, D1/BRCA2, D2, E, F, G, I, J/BRIP1, L M, N/PALB2, and O/RAD51C). FANCA is the most frequent complementation group representing approximately two-thirds of FA patients.¹ The number of pathogenic variants described for the FANCA gene is very high considering the relatively low number of patients.^{2–7} The incidence of FA has been estimated at 1–5/million, with a carrier frequency of 1/150–300.^{8,9}

Clinical findings in FA include aplastic anemia and congenital abnormalities, such as microcephaly, short stature, radial ray bone abnormalities, abnormal skin pigmentation and gonads, malformations of the kidney and heart; developmental delay and mental retardation. FA patients usually develop solid tumors, such as carcinoma of the esophagus, oropharynx, cervix and vulva, but they tend to die more often from hematologic malignancies, such as leukemia or bone marrow failure.^{10–17} The relative risk of cancer in FA patients is at least 50-fold that of the general population.¹⁸ The cause of development of cancer in FA is thought to be attributable to a defect in maintaining the genome integrity, leading to increased chromosomal instability with defective DNA repair mechanism.¹⁹

FA patients are hypersensitive to radiotherapy (RT) and cytotoxic agents, although there has been a variable scale of radiosensitivity and chemosensitivity reported, from fulminant toxicities in lowest doses to excellent “high-dose” treatment toleration.^{13,14,20–26} Abnormal toxicity to RT is caused by defective FA pathway in the recognition of DNA damage and defective repair of DNA damage by homologous recombination. Radiosensitivity may represent the very first manifestation of FA in adult patients.^{12,27} In vitro, patients with FA are radiosensitive, when tested by colony survival assay or Comet assay; FA cells also exhibit hypersensitivity to chemotherapy and other DNA cross-linking agents such as cisplatin or mitomycin. Discrepancy between in vitro and in vivo sensitivity to RT has been reported, and may cause a problem in toxicity prediction.^{28–31}

Compared to FA patients, there is a scarce or no evidence on one defective allele FANCA carriers, with respect to their cancer incidence, clinical and in vitro radiosensitivity and chemosensitivity. On that account, we report a case of a young FANCA mutation carrier woman with uterine cervix carcinoma who was treated with definitive chemoradiation, in which unexpected acute toxicity as well as late morbidity occurred. We also report a review of the literature for FA

carrier patients with respect to cancer incidence, clinical and in vitro response to chemo/radiotherapy, options of early heterozygosity detection, and methods of in vitro prediction of hypersensitivity to oncologic treatment.

2. Case report

A 30-year old woman with cervical adenocarcinoma was referred to our department in September 2011. Her medical history was otherwise negative, except for nicotineism, 3 child-births and 2 miscarriages. Her father and two brothers of him had all died of lung carcinoma, all heavy smokers. Her mother was still alive, treated with early breast carcinoma. At the time of diagnosis, her 2 sisters and 1 brother were yet healthy, according to the patient.

Cervical biopsy revealed grade 1 adenocarcinoma of the cervix, with incipient parametrial invasion on MRI, without lymphadenopathy or distant metastases. Initial blood count, leukocyte differential, and chemistry results were all in tolerant ranges, except mild thrombocytopenia (123.000/µL) with slightly increased mean platelet volume (13.1 fL).

Because of parametrial invasion, the patient was decided for definitive pelvic chemoradiotherapy. Planned course of treatment consisted of 45 Gy in 25 fractions pelvic IMRT with weekly cisplatin of 40 mg/m² in 5 cycles and subsequent uterovaginal high-dose rate brachytherapy 5 times 6 Gy to the point A. After 10.8 Gy of radiotherapy and 2 cycles of cisplatin the treatment had to be interrupted due to severe pancytopenia, with protracted grade 4 thrombocytopenia (nadir <10.000/µL) with the need of repeated platelet transfusions. Other signs of toxicity comprised grade 2 anemia, grade 3 neutropenia, complete alopecia, grade 2 diarrhea and nausea (CTCAE v4.0). The treatment interruption lasted for 2 weeks, while we excluded any error in RT or chemotherapy mistaking. Then, with cisplatin held, the whole course of RT and brachytherapy were completed with moderate toxicity and intensive supportive care. The question of abnormal acute toxicity remained unanswered.

Six months after completion of chemoradiation, partial regression of primary tumor was evaluated, but still there was a residual biopsy-proven tumor isolated to cervix. Residual disease was followed by regular examination until there was MRI confirmed local progression isolated to the cervix. Salvage radical hysterectomy was performed with intention of bladder and rectum preservation. The microscopic examination of hysterectomy specimen revealed clear-cell adenocarcinoma of uterine cervix (Figs. 1 and 2).

Two months after surgery, vesico-vaginal fistula with vaginal cuff dehiscence occurred; treated with bilateral Bricker ureterostomy. Peroperatively, massive adhesions were found in the irradiated area corresponding clinically with chronic

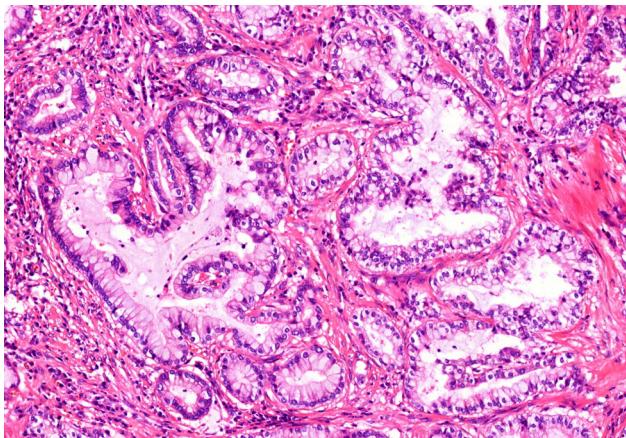


Fig. 1 – Tubulo-papillary arrangement of tumor cells (hematoxylin-eosin, original magnification 200x).

subileus, without clinical or pathological signs of recurrence. Massive vaginal bleeding occurred subsequently, with need of urgent endovascular internal iliac vessels embolization. One month later, jejunocutaneous fistula in right lower-abdomen region occurred, treated by operative fistula resection with terminal jejunostomy. Peroperatively, coeco-vesico-vaginal fistula was diagnosed as well and terminated, again without peroperative evidence of cancer recurrence. Simultaneously came progression of cachexia, malnutrition, short bowel syndrome, immobility and depression; necessitating permanent institutionalization, with parenteral alimentation and intensive medical and psychological support. She died of severe treatment consequences in September 2013, without evidence of disease progression.

2.1. Molecular/genetic examination

Until December 2012, there was no explanation both of acute toxicity and long-term treatment consequences available. At that time, her 17-year old brother was diagnosed with FA, manifested by progressive bone marrow failure

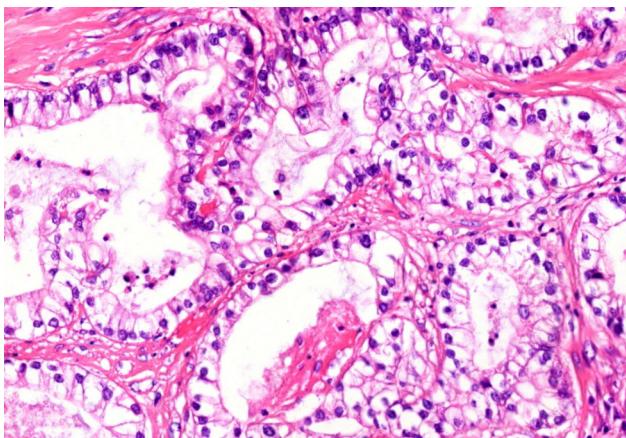


Fig. 2 – Polygonal tumor cells have enlarged nuclei and clear cytoplasm (hematoxylin-eosin, original magnification 400x).

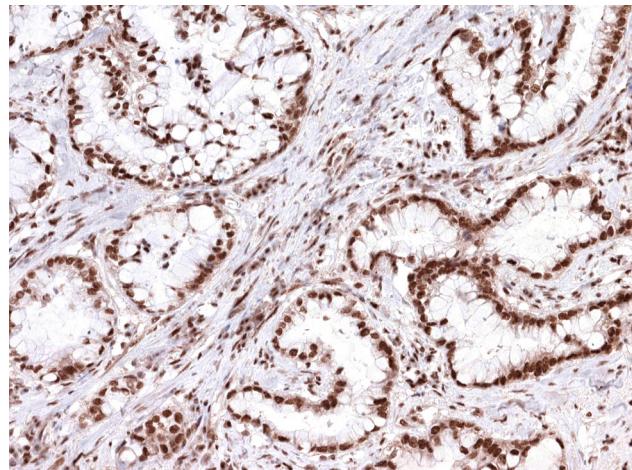


Fig. 3 – Strong nuclear expression of FANCA in tumor cells and in leukocytes and non-neoplastic fibroblasts of cervical stroma (original magnification 200x).

(with predominant thrombocytopenia); with characteristic microcephaly, hyperpigmentation, triphalangeal thumbs, reflux uropathy, mental retardation (since childhood), and ventricular septum defect. In him, molecular/genetic examination detected two causal FANCA mutations with composite heterozygosity for mutation c.3239G>T in exon 32 and c.3788_3790delTCT in exon 38. The laboratory diagnosis of FA was confirmed by functional examination of fibroblasts. On the grounds of these new findings, all family members including our patient were tested genetically. Molecular/genetic examination in our patient confirmed heterozygous mutation c.3788_3790delTCT in exon 38, proving her as a carrier of FANCA mutation. Following these results, in vitro testing of individual lymphocyte subpopulations radiosensitivity and immunohistochemical examination of hysterectomy material with focus on FA was performed; as well as genotyping for presence of human papillomavirus (HPV) deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA).

2.2. Immunohistochemical examination

The tissue specimens were routinely processed, embedded in paraffin and stained with hematoxylin eosin. Immunohistochemically, tumor cells showed diffuse expression of CK7, ARID1A and HNF-1 β . CEA was positive in isolated tumor cells. Expression of CK20, vimentin, ER, PR, p16, p53 and WT-1 was absent. Diffuse expression of FANCA was observed in both tumor cells and non-neoplastic cervical tissue of our patient (Fig. 3); which represents the products of “the healthy FA-A allele”. As a control for FANCA staining, we examined a trepanobiopsy specimen of her brother, which was negative in all bone marrow, fatty and muscle tissue, showing no production of FANCA protein at all (Fig. 4).

2.3. HPV genotyping

The Genotyping kit HPV GP (Diassay) was used for HPV polymerase chain reaction (PCR) genotyping according

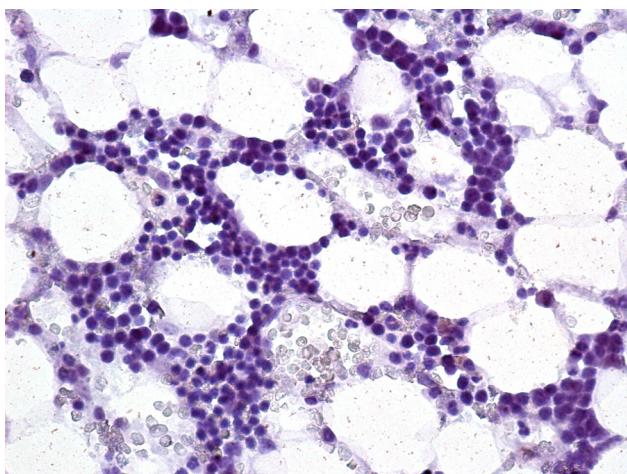


Fig. 4 – Absent FANCA expression in bone marrow cells in trephine biopsy of the patient's brother (original magnification 400x).

to manufacturer's protocol. The kit is an in vitro reverse hybridization strip assay using GP5+/6+ primers for the qualitative identification of the individual high risk types HPV16, 18, 26, 31, 33, 35, 39, 45, 51, 52, 53, 56, 58, 59, 66, 68, 73 and 82 in DNA extracted from clinical specimens. The beta-globin primers were provided to control for sample quality and the presence of inhibiting factors. As a result, we did not prove any presence of HPV-DNA; high-risk nor low-risk. This corresponds with negative p16 staining mentioned above.

2.4. In vitro radiosensitivity examination

Heparin-treated blood obtained from the patient and a control healthy volunteer was used for separation of peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMC) by centrifugation. Individual plates were sham-treated or irradiated by doses of 2 or 6 Gy of ^{60}Co with a rate of 1.29 Gy/min at a distance of 1.23 m. The plates were then cultivated for 24 and 48 h at 37°C; then harvested and centrifuged. Fluorochrome conjugated, human antigen-specific mouse monoclonal antibodies were used for multicolor immunophenotyping of PBMC in two cocktails. To eliminate differences in between individual blood donors, we have used the "irradiated versus non-irradiated ratio" (IVNIR) values as described elsewhere.³² Different radiosensitivity of individual lymphocyte subpopulations and subsets were found between patient's and control PBMC in vitro. Upon irradiation and subsequent cultivation, the most radiosensitive population of CD19+ B cells exerted a typical time- and dose-dependent decrease in the control sample, while patient's B cells appeared much more radioresistant, which was reflected by an invariant T/B IVNIR ratio (Fig. 5). In parallel, the most radiosensitive CD27+ subset of B cells did not decrease in a typical manner in the patient PBMC. CD3+ T cells and their CD4+, CD8+, Treg (CD4+ CD25hi+) and CD27+ subsets had similar radiosensitivity both in the patient and control individual.

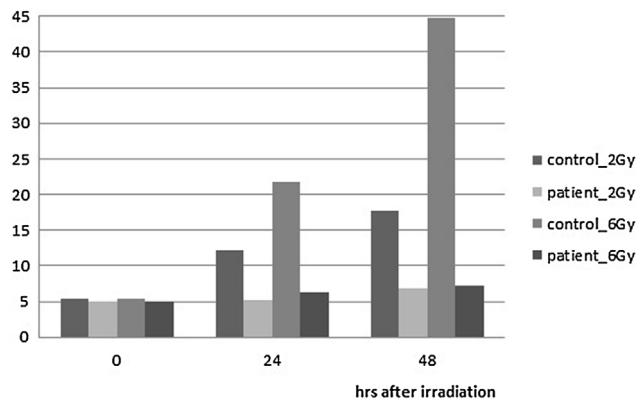


Fig. 5 – T-cell IVNIR/B-cell IVNIR in PBMC of the patient and control individual upon irradiation (2 and 6 Gy) and subsequent cultivation (24 and 48 h). The control sample behaved in a typical way when more radiosensitive B-cells decreased with dose and time of cultivation while patient's CD19+ B-cells were as radioresistant as their CD3+ counterparts.

3. Review of the literature

Although obligate heterozygous individuals from FA families have not been extensively researched, evidence suggests that these are free from major clinical symptoms and have a normal life expectancy.³³ Studies of cancer incidence in FA relatives have produced conflicting results. The largest study of FA families has not shown any difference in overall cancer risk in FA relatives.³⁴ Similarly, another registry study showed no suggestion of an increase in cancer incidence among FA relatives.³⁵ These are important studies for FA carriers, with correspondence to anticipated hypersensitivity to oncologic treatment.

Although severe adverse reactions to RT are rare, they are usually associated with individuals with DNA repair disorders. As many as 40 DNA repair defective disorders exist that are associated with radiosensitivity or sensitivity to DNA damaging agents used to treat cancer.²⁶ Many reports have been published to detail such circumstances. FA is associated with more than one-half of these reports; while most reported FA patients died within months of exposure.²⁴ The lowest radiation dose associated with a fatal outcome in FA patient reported is 8 Gy.²¹ In these reports, radiosensitivity was associated closely with the homozygous inheritance of defective proteins necessary for recognition and/or repair of DNA double strand breaks.³⁶ Radiosensitive individuals represent the greatest potential risk of accidental injury; although this includes a small number of primarily homozygotes with DNA repair disorders, it also includes a much greater number of likely heterozygotes for these same disorders, albeit at a greater threshold of radiosensitivity.

Evidence on FA carriers with respect to chemo/radiotherapy is limited. This may be caused particularly by under-diagnosis of FA heterozygosity in common patient population. One defective FA allele may cause abnormal reactions (with variable severity) in 1 of circa 300 patients treated worldwide

on the regular basis; however this is usually unrecognized, as other factors play role in individual treatment tolerance. For physician, it is entirely impossible to recognize FA carriers during the first contact with the patient, unless positive FA history in the family is present; however this would be rare situation (probability < 1:1000 depending on number of generations and family subjects available), according to FA prevalence.

Rapid methods for quickly screening patients before RT are not yet validated for clinical use. Colony survival assays can yield definitive results in 12 weeks, providing some advance warning of radiosensitivity in homozygous patients.³⁷ However, heterozygous carriers are not clearly identified by this method. The laboratory identification of heterozygosity for DNA repair disorders is in its infancy,³⁸ thus it has been difficult to search for correlations with clinical radiosensitivity. More sensitive and reliable assays are needed to identify this large segment of patients, which probably includes as much as 5% of the population.³⁹

Other in vitro tests of radiosensitivity to Colony survival assay may be helpful to recognize heterozygous carriers. E.g., cells of both FA homozygous and heterozygous patients exposed in vitro to X-radiation showed uniformly high initial DNA damage rates as assessed by the single-cell gel comet assay.⁴⁰ Moreover, the repair half-time parameters were significantly elevated both in FA patients and carriers in this study which concluded, that comet assay may be a useful adjunct for heterozygote detection in families of FA patients. Similarly, in the study of Mohseni, in vitro radiosensitivity in FA patients and heterozygotes was assessed using alkaline comet assay. In their study, the amount of residual DNA damage after irradiation could be used as a putative predictor of FA screening and cellular radiosensitivity.⁴¹ Other less frequent experimental techniques have been adopted to correlate the in vitro radiation sensitivity with the outcome of therapy.⁴² Western blot and foci immunofluorescence analysis give qualitative results, but lack correlation between in vitro results and in vivo radiation response.⁴³ In view of the conflicting data on radiosensitivity of FA cells, there is a pressing need for the development of new rapid and predictive assays of radiation responses.

We and others have previously shown that B-cells are the most radiosensitive lymphocyte population both in vitro and in vivo,^{43,44} while apparent radiosensitivity of NK cells strongly differs under in vivo and in vitro conditions where this population of phylogenetically oldest lymphocytes exerts the lowest and highest reduction in relative numbers, respectively.^{45,46} We have documented B-cells from our patient to be much more radioresistant than their counterparts in healthy individual in vitro. While control B-cells and their subsets characterized by the expression of CD21, CD27 and CD38 surface markers behaved as was expected, the usual depletion of B-cells and their subsets did not occur in the FA carrier. This finding indicates that irradiation-induced programmed cell death is impaired in the FA heterozygous individuals, which may affect the efficiency of the radiotherapy.

Data about in vitro hypersensitivity of FA heterozygotes to cytotoxic agents are scarce and controversial. Some experiments reported, that FA heterozygotes do not show an increased chromosomal sensitivity to chemotherapeutics and thus cannot be differentiated from the normal

population.^{47,48} Auerbach et al.⁴⁹ were the first to claim that it was possible to distinguish between controls and heterozygotes by using the diepoxybutane (DEB). Lately Marx et al. detected an increase in DEB sensitivity of lymphocytes of obligate carriers sufficient enough to differentiate them from controls.⁵⁰ Recently it has been recognized that the DEB test can give false-negative results in patients with somatic mosaicism⁵¹; moreover, the DEB test cannot be used reliably to distinguish between FA carriers and normal individuals. Mohseni et al. reported slightly higher induced aberrations by mitomycin-C (MMC) for obligate FA carriers than for controls. However, the difference was not statistically significant enough to allow accurate distinction between the two groups.⁵² Another study of in vitro exposure of cells to bleomycin proved significant difference in induced chromatid breaks between three FA heterozygotes and 11 controls.⁵³ This study supports our clinical observation of abnormal toxicity after cisplatin-based chemoradiation in our patient, with convincing hypersensitivity to cisplatin as complete alopecia could not be caused by RT alone.

Patients with FA who survive their adolescence typically develop solid squamous cell carcinomas (SCC) of the head-and-neck or the female genital tract.^{18,54,55} These malignancies are commonly associated with HPV infection, and are often multifocal in distribution. There are some reports on young FA patients with multiple HPV-associated SCC published⁵⁶; indicating possible relationship between HPV-associated malignancies and FA mutations.^{57,58} In 2009, Wang et al. reported some important findings, that also FANCA variants (in addition to FA mutations) may be an important host event involved in cervical carcinoma susceptibility, but not HPV infection persistence.⁵⁹ Likewise in our patient, adenocarcinoma of the cervix developed at the age of 30, with negative p16 staining and negative HPV-DNA PCR genotyping; showing no association with HPV infection in this case. This manuscript represents a piece of our investigation into cervical carcinoma genetics and prediction of response to chemo/radiation.^{60–64}

4. Conclusions

Although there are no standard guidelines for management of FA carriers with malignancies and reports about chemo- or radiosensitivity in this population are scarce; patients with FA-A heterozygosity may have a high rate of complications from chemoradiotherapy. Up to now, an optimum method for the prediction of radiosensitivity and the best parameter has not been found. Clinical radioresponsiveness is unpredictable in FA carriers and there is a pressing need of new rapid and predictive in vitro assays of radiation responses. Until then, the treatment of FA carriers with malignancies should be individualized, with respect to potential hypersensitivity to ionizing radiation or cross-linking agents.

Conflict of interest

None declared.

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