Nasal and Nasal-type Natural Killer (NK)/T-cell Lymphoma: Immunophenotype and Epstein-Barr Virus (EBV) Association

S C Peh, FRCPath, Q W Danielle Quen, BSc

Department of Pathology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur

Summary

Epstein-Bart virus (EBV) is believed to have a pathogenic role in lymphomas of the upper-aerodigestive tract. This study aims to elucidate the virus association pattern in nasal and nasal-type NK/T-cell lymphomas, and in sequential biopsies of these tumours. A total of 31 cases of previously diagnosed as lethal midline granuloma, Stewart's granuloma, nasal T-cell non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (T-NHL) and NK/T-cell lymphomas from all anatomical sites were retrieved from the files for the study. Reviews of these cases confirm 8 nasal T-NHL, 19 nasal and 4 extranasal lymphomas of NK/T-cell phenotype from 10 Malays, 18 Chinese, 2 Indian and 1 Kadazan. The male: female ratio was 2.4: 1. All T- and NK/T-cell lymphomas strongly expressed TIA-1 and 63% expressed CD2. The majority of NK/T-cell lymphoma occurred in Chinese (13/23), of which 12/13 (92%) of these cases were associated with EBV. Of the 15 nasal and 9 tonsillar B-cell lymphomas included for a comparison study, only 3 (20%) of the nasal cases were associated with EBV (1 male Chinese, 1 female Chinese and 1 male of other ethnic group). Eight cases of NK/T-cell tumours with sequential biopsies show persistence of EBV, irrespective of the interval and sites of subsequent presentations. This study confirms the cytotoxic nature of NK/T-cell tumour and that EBV is strongly associated with the disease regardless of the anatomical site of presentation and However, nasal and paranasal lymphomas of all phenotypes appear to show higher ethnicity. predilection of EBV association in the ethnic Chinese when compared to non-Chinese.

Key Words: Epstein-Barr virus, Nasal, Nasal-type, NK/T-cell lymphoma

Introduction

Nasal lymphoma accounts for 4% - 7% of all lymphomas in Asian populations in Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, China and Malaysia ¹⁻⁶, and approximately 90% of these show natural killer (NK)/T-cell phenotype ⁷⁸. A high frequency of nasal lymphomas (8%) with a demonstrable NK/T-

cell phenotype of 88% is also seen in the native American in Peru and Mexico⁸. In contrast, the Western populations show an estimation of only 1.5% of all non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL) occuring in the nasal and paranasal area ^{5,9,10}. The majority of lymphomas of the nasal and paranasal areas in Western populations have been shown to

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Corresponding Author: S C Peh, Department of Pathology, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur.

express B-cell phenotype ^{5,11,12}. This finding suggests an ethnic and/or geographical predisposition for the disease.

The atypical cells in nasal NK/T-cell lymphom a frequently express the NK-cell-associated CD56 (neural cell adhesion) molecule, and other markers such as CD57 and CD16 are generally not expressed ¹³. CD2 is often but not always expressed. In most cases, these tumour cells do not express surface CD3, but show the presence of cytoplasmic epsilon chain of CD3 molecule. Cytolytic granule proteins such as T-cell intracellular antigen-1 (TIA-1), granzyme B, and perforin are also highly expressed 14,15 Genotypically, these tumours lack T-cell receptor (TCR) gene rearrangement, and this supports the notion that these tumours are derived from NK cells 13,15,16.

Lymphomas with NK/T phenotype are not restricted to the nasal or midline facial presentations. Tumours with identical phenotype and genotype as nasal NK/T-cell lymphoma has been reported in other extranasal sites, such as the skin and soft tissue, lung, testis, upper respiratory tract, gastrointestinal tract and central nervous system ^{7,13,17-22}. The term *'nasal-type'* has been adopted to recognise this group of lymphomas. Lymph node involvement is rare in both clinical progression and presentation of nasal and nasal-type NK/T-cell lymphoma ^{7,23}.

Studies report consistent presence of Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) in nasal NK/T-cell lymphoma and the virus was demonstrated to be clonal ²⁴. These findings strongly support the pathogenic role of EBV ¹⁵, although the mechanism of malignant transformation remains undefined. Nasopharyngeal carcinoma, another cancer in a similar anatomical region is also associated with EBV. Hence, it strongly suggests that perhaps the anatomic site is important for the development of EBV-related neoplasms ²⁵.

This study aims to demonstrate the cytotoxic nature and elucidate the association of EBV in

lymphomas of upper-aerodigestive tract, the nasal and nasal-type NK/T cell lymphomas, and the status of the virus in sequential biopsies of these tumours.

Materials and Methods

Biopsy material/ Case selection

The archival material of all cases previously diagnosed and confirmed as lethal midline granuloma, Stewart's granuloma, nasal T-cell non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL) and NK/T-cell lymphomas from all sites were retrieved from the files in the Department of Pathology, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur in a period of 20 consecutive years. A total of 41 formalin-fixed and paraffin-embedded biopsy tissues from 31 patients were available for further study. In addition, 15 nasal and 9 tonsillar B-cell lymphomas from the same period were retrieved for comparison study.

Immunobistochemistry

Paraffin-embedded sections were stained with haematoxylin and eosin and a panel of antibodies (names are shown in parentheses). Briefly, 4µmthick paraffin sections were mounted on salinized slides, deparaffinization in xylene and rehydration in alcohol was performed, followed by microwave treatment for antigen retrieval. The sections were first incubated with the primary antibodies, then with biotinvlated rabbit anti-mouse or biotinvlated anti-rabbit immunoglobulins swine for monoclonal and polyclonal antibodies The monoclonal antibodies used respectively. were: CD20cy clone L26 (DAKO, Denmark), CD2, CD56 (Novocastra, Newcastle, UK), TIA-1 (ImmunoTech) and CD57 (Leu-7 Becton Dickinson, Mountain View, CA). Polyclonal T-cell specific antigen CD3 (DAKO, Denmark) antibody was used for confirmation of T-phenotype. Three, 3'-diaminobenzidine tetrahydrochloride (DAB) chromogens (Dako, Denmark) were employed for colour development for most of the antibodies except CD56 and TIA-1, where ENVISION* system was applied. A tumour was categorized as NK/T phenotype when both CD3 and CD56 expression were present in the tumour cells.

In situ hybridisation

The presence of EBV was detected by in situ hybridization technique, (ISH) using fluoroisothiocynate (FITC)-conjugated EBV oligonucleotide probe (NCL-EBV, Novocastra, Newcastle, UK) for EBV early RNAs (EBER). Alkaline phosphatase-conjugated rabbit anti-FITC was then added followed by introduction of a substrate, 4-nitro-blue-tetrazolium chloride/ 5bromo-4-chloro-3-indolyl-phosphate (NBT/BCIP). The tissues were counterstained with Meyer's haematoxylin. **EBV-positive** Α known nasopharyngeal carcinoma was used as an external positive control.

Results

Of the 31 patients' material studied, 8 are nasal T-NHL, 19 are nasal and 4 nasal-type lymphomas of NK/T-cell phenotype. The latter were tissue obtained one each from the pleura, testes, jejunum, and colon. These cases were from 22 male and 9 female patients (male: female = 2.4: 1). Their ages ranged from 8 to 77 years (mean age is Among the 19 nasal NK/T cell 46.1 years). lymphomas, there are 7 Malays, 11 Chinese, 1 Kadazan and in the group of nasal-type NK/T cell lymphoma, there are 1 Malay, 2 Chinese and 1 Indian (Table I). The ethnic distribution of T-NHL are 2 Malay, 5 Chinese and 1 Indian. The majority of the NK/T-cell lymphoma cases were in Chinese males (10/23, 43%), followed by Malay males (4/23, 17%), Malay females (4/23, 17%), and Chinese females (3/23, 13%). There are 9 males and 6 females in the group of nasal B-cell NHL (Table II), from 6 Malay, 6 Chinese, 1 Indian, and 2 of other ethnic origin. In the group of tonsillar B-

cell NHL, there are 6 males and 3 females, from 3 Malay and 6 Chinese patients.

All nasal and nasal-type NK/T-cell lymphoma cases expressed CD3 (Figure 1A) and CD56 (Figure 1B) in a large number of the tumour cells. CD57 expression was observed only in 1 case (Figure 1C). Of the nasal NK/T-cell lymphoma cases, 12/19 (63%) express CD2 (Figure 1D), but none in the 3 cases of nasal-type NK/T-cell lymphoma. There was insufficient tissue from the 4th case of the latter group for immunostaining. TIA-1 is equally and strongly expressed by all of the nasal, nasal-type and T-cell NHL cases (Figure 1E).

EBER is detected in 18/19 (95%) of the nasal NK/Tcell lymphoma (Figure 1F), 2/4 (50%) of the nasaltype and 2/8 (25%) of nasal T-NHL (Table I). In the nasal B-cell lymphomas group, 3/15 (20%), from 2 Burkitt's and 1 diffuse large B-cell type, also express EBER (Table II). There is higher EBV association rate in Chinese cases, with frequencies of 11/11 (100%), 1/2 (50%), 2/5 (40%) and 2/3 (67%) for nasal, nasal-type, T-cell and B-cell NHL respectively, whereas for the non-Chinese, the frequencies are 7/8 (88%), 1/2 (50%), 0/3 (0%) and 1/3 (33%). The EBV association rate of nasal and paranasal lymphomas of all phenotypes combined appeared to be higher in the ethnic Chinese (15/22, 68%) than that for non-Chinese (8/20, 40%). However, this difference is statistically not significant (p-value = 0.127). Eight cases (6 nasal, 1 nasal-type NK/T-cell and 1 T-cell NHL) with sequential biopsies show persistence of EBV, irrespective of the interval and sites of subsequent presentations (Table III).

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		n	CD3 ⁺	L26⁺	CD56⁺	CD57⁺_	CD2⁺	TIA-1+	EBER (%)
T-cell NH	IL .								
Males :	Malay	1	1	0	-	-	-	-`	0/1 (0)
	Chinese	4	4	0	0	0	-	4	2/4 (50)
	Indian	1	1	0	0	0		1	0/1 (0)
	Others	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	0/0 (0)
Females : Malay		1	1	0	0	0	-	1	0/1 (0)
	Chinese	1	1	0	0	0	-	1	0/1 (0)
	Indian	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	0/0 (0)
	Others	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	0/0 (0)
Total		8	8	0	0	0	-	8	2/8 (25)
Nasal NI	K <u>/T- cell</u>								
Males :	Malay	3	3	0	3	0	3	3	2/3 (67)
	Chinese	8	8	0	8	0	4	8	8/8 (100)
	Indian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0/0 (0)
	Others	1	1	0	1	. 1	1	1	1/1 (100)
Females:	Malay	4	4	0	4	0	2	4	4/4 (100)
	Chinese	3	3	0	3	0	2	3	3/3 (100)
	Indian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0/0 (0)
	Others	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0/0 (0)
Total		19	19	0	19	1.	12	19	18/19 (95)
Nasal-typ	oe NK/T-cell								
Males :	Malay	1	1	0	1	0		-	1/1 (100)
	Chinese	2	2	0	2	0	0	2	1/2 (50)
	Indian	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0/1 (0)
	Others	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0/0 (0)
Total		4	4	0	4	0	0	3	2/4 (50)

Table I : Expression of CD3, L26, CD56, CD57, CD2, TIA-1 and EBER in nasal, nasal-type NK/Tand T-cell non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL).

- = Not done

Table II : Expression of EBER in nasal B-cell lymphoma and tonsils of B-cell type

	EBER (%)				
	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others	Total
Nasal B-cell NHL					
Male	0/4 (0)	1/3 (33)	0/0 (0)	1/2 (50)	2/9 (22)
Female	0/2 (0)	1/3 (33)	0/1 (0)	0/0 (0)	1/6 (17)
Total	0/6 (0)	2/6 (33)	0/1 (0)	1/2 (50)	3/15 (20)
Tonsils B-cell NHL					
Male	0/3 (0)	0/3 (0)	0/0 (0)	0/0 (0)	0/6 (0)
Female	0/0 (0)	0/3 (0)	0/0 (0)	0/0 (0)	0/3 (0)
Total	0/3 (0)	0/6 (0)	0/0 (0)	0/0 (0)	0/9 (0)

Age/Sex/Race	Biopsy				
	Site of biopsy	Month/Year			
Nasal NK/T-cell lymphoma					
38/m/M	Nasal septum	05/91	+		
	Pleural	06/94	+		
	Right maxilla sinus	07/94	+		
48/m/C	Inferior turbinate	02/93	+		
	Nose	02/94	+		
34/m/C	Lateral wall of Nose	02/94	+		
	Nose	06/94	+		
56/f/M	Nose	03/99	+		
	Nose	04/99	+		
40/f/M	Maxilla	07/97	+		
	Left post-nasal space	03/98	+		
58/f/C	Inferior turbinate	09/82	+		
	I		1		

Nasopharynx

Lymph Node

Tonsil ulcer

Epiglottis

Epiglottis

Bowel

Table III : Expression of EBER in nasal-, nasal-type NK/T- and T-cell NHL cases with sequential biopsies.

*m = male, f = female, M = Malay, C = Chinese

Nasal-type NK/T-cell lymphoma

48/m/C

<u>T-cell NHL</u> 38/m/C

+

05/83

09/96

11/96

04/92

07/92

09/92

Nasal and Nasal-type Natural Killer (NK)/T-cell Lymphoma



A: CD3



C: CD57







B: CD56



D: CD2



F: EBER

Fig. 1: Immunophenotypic expressions of NK/T-cell lymphoma: A) CD3+ (600X) B) CD56+ (600X) C) CD57+ (400X) D) CD2+ (400X) E) TIA-1+ (600X). F) In situ hybridisation for EBER (600X).

Discussion

Nasal NK/T-cell lymphoma is a unique tumour. Terms such as polymorphic reticulosis, lethal midline granuloma, angiocentric lymphoma and angiocentric immunoproliferative lesions have been used to describe this type of lymphoma 26-28 because morphologically, this lymphoma often shows histologic features of polymorphic cellular angiocentricity infiltration, necrosis, and angioinvasion. The tumour cells express NK-cell phenotype. NK-cells are related to T-cells, but at some point in the differentiation process, they branch off to form a separate lineage 29 and are characteristically cytotoxic, by using effector mechanisms of killing their target via the release of cytotoxic proteins such as TIA-1, a 15-kd cytotoxic granule-associated RNA-binding protein 30. All (28/28) of the T- and NK/T-cell lymphomas express TIA-1 in this series, concurring with other observations 8,14,15,31,32. Chiang et al, 1997 32 also demonstrated by using dual labelling of TIA-1 and EBER that the protein granules were localised in the neoplastic cells. In contrast, TIA-1 cytotoxic proteins are not expressed in B-cell tumours in the same anatomic region as seen in this series, and also reported by Chiang et al, 1997 32. The universal expression of cytotoxic proteins in nasal lymphomas, irrespective of T- or NK-cell lineage argues for a selection for cytotoxic transformation of lymphocytes in this region. It is plausible that cytotoxic lymphocytes generated during the cellular immune response to primary EBV infection or subsequent re-activation at the nasal region themselves become targets for EBV infection and subsequent transformation, since they are the primary effector cells in host immune surveillance. Tao et al, 1996 33 and Chiang et al, 1997 ³²have observed that normal nasal and nasopharyngeal mucosal tissues frequently harboured EBV-infected B- and T- lymphocytes, and can act as reservoirs for the virus. Hence this may provide a local setting for the emergence of EBV-associated tumours.

In our study, all, but 1, of the nasal NK/T-cell lymphoma are EBV infected whereas only 50% of

nasal-type and 25% of nasal T-cell NHL cases demonstrated EBV-positive tumour cells. Tao et al (1995) reported the localisation of EBER RNA in all the nasal lymphoma cases of NK- and T-cell phenotype in their study, confirming an association between the virus and this disease ³⁴. Many other reports have documented EBV infection in NHLs in the nasal area 9.25,35-39, and particularly in nasal NK/T-cell lymphomas 7-8, 13,16,32,40-⁴². On the other hand, only 3 (20%) of the nasal Bcell lymphoma in our study is EBV-associated. This lower EBV association rate when compared to Tor NK/T-cell lymphoma is supported by Chiang et al, 1997 ³². The only one nasal NK/T-cell lymphoma case which is not EBV-infected is from a non-Chinese patient. Hence, concurring with findings from previous studies that reported the predilection of EBV-associated nasal and paranasal lymphomas of T-phenotype in Chinese is higher when compared to non-Chinese ^{6,43}.

The reason for the East-West difference in the frequency of nasal NK/T-cell lymphomas is still not entirely clear. The more frequent occurrence of T- and NK-cell neoplasms in less developed countries, where EBV infection tends to occur at an earlier age ⁹ may explain the differences observed between the Eastern and Western series. However, irrespective of ethnicity and geography, EBV is consistently observed to be highly associated with this group of tumours, and also in the sequential biopsies as confirmed in this study. This overwhelming association is strongly suggestive of the involvement of virus in tumour formation, and that it is not a mere innocent passenger. It appears likely that the virus can enter cells of diverse lineages and, by conferring some growth advantage, lead to their clonal expansion 34

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