Differences in pO₂ Peaks of a Murine Fibrosarcoma between Carbon-ion and X-ray Irradiation

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pO2 profile/Reoxygenation/HIMAC/Fibrosarcoma.

We measured and compared the oxygen partial pressure (pO_2) profiles in experimental tumors after irradiation with carbon ions and with X-rays. The NFSa fibrosarcomas grown in the hind legs of C3H male mice received isoeffect single doses of carbon ions or X-rays. Coaxial oxygen microelectrodes of high spatial resolution were inserted into the tumor with 20 µm steps by a computerized micromanipulator. The number of pO_2 peaks that reached 15 mmHg were at least 0.45 per 3,000 µm in unirradiated tumors and significantly increased to 1.55 per 3,000 µm as early as day 1 of carbon-ion irradiation (p < 0.001). The tumors that received X-ray irradiation also significantly increased pO₂ peaks, but as late as day 3. The time course of pO₂ peak appearance in the present study coincides with a previous report where reoxygenation was measured by paired growth delay assay. The pO₂ peaks appeared selectively in peripheral regions of X-ray irradiated tumors, but they appeared rather homogeneously in the tumor after carbon-ion irradiation. It is concluded that carbon-ion irradiation reoxygenated the NFSa fibrosarcomas earlier in time and deeper in space than the Xray irradiation did.

INTRODUCTION

Oxygen is one of the most important factors in determining tumor response to radiotherapy. The hypoxic cells are radioresistant to photon.^{1,2)} The hypoxic tumor cells result from a combination of an inadequate blood supply, such as decreased vascular density and aberrant blood flow, and a greater oxygen demand because of relatively high proliferation rates.³⁾

One strategy against the hypoxic tumor cells is to use heavy particles that depend less on the tissue pO_2 than on photons to kill tumor cells.⁴⁾ The clinical trial of heavy ion therapy using carbon ions started at the National Institute of Radiological Sciences (NIRS) Japan in 1994⁵⁾ and at Gesellschaft für Schwerionenforschung (GSI) Germany in 1997.⁶⁾

The reoxygenation that hypoxic cells become oxygenated after irradiation⁷⁾ is also important for carbon-ion therapy

because the OER (oxygen enhancement ratio) of carbon ions clinically used is larger than 1.0.⁸⁾ A few papers refer to any difference of reoxygenation between high and low LET (linear energy transfer) irradiation and report that reoxgenation after carbon ions is faster than photon irradiation in some tumors.^{9,10)} Ando *et al.*¹⁰⁾ compared the time course of the reoxygenation, which is measured by tumor growth delay assay in NFSa fibrosarcomas after γ -ray, with those after carbon-ion irradiation and report that although the tumor growth delay is the same between both groups, reoxygenation in the NFSa fibrosarcomas is observed earlier after irradiation with carbon ions compared with γ -rays. They have investigated neither the change of oxygen tension in tumors, nor the mechanism of the accelerated reoxygenation after carbon-ion irradiation.

The correlations between the reoxygenation and the change of oxygen tension have been investigated in many experimental tumors after the low LET irradiation.^{11–14)} Numerous researches using the oxygen electrodes have reported an increase of the mean and/or median pO₂ values or a decrease of the percentage frequency of pO₂ below either 2.5 or 5 mmHg in tumors after irradiation.^{11,12,15)} However, the values such as mean (and/or median) pO₂ and the percentage frequency of pO₂ below 2.5 mmHg present no microregional information of a tumor. Taking into account the microregional heterogeneity of oxygen delivery,^{16–18)} we directly measured the pO₂ profiles in tumors by using a high spatial

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304

T. Fukawa et al.

resolution microcoaxial oxygen electrode and compared the change of the oxygen tension in tumors between carbon-ion and X-ray irradiation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Mice and tumor

C3H/HeMsNrsf male mice aged 12–18 weeks were used for this study. They were produced and maintained in the specific pathogen-free facilities at NIRS. The tumor was a syngeneic NFSa fibrosarcoma, and its 16th generation was used. Single-cell suspensions were prepared by enzymatically digesting tumors and then transplanted intramuscularly into the right hind leg of mice 7 through 8 days before irradiation.^{19,20)} Thirty mice for each group (untreated, X-ray and carbon-ion irradiation) were used for pO₂ measurement experiments. Tumor diameters in the three orthogonal directions (a, b, and c) were measured daily with calipers. Tumor volume was calculated with this the formula: tumor volume = $(abc\pi)/6$. Relative tumor volume was calculated as a ratio of the concerned tumor volume to the tumor volume at day 0.

Irradiation

The carbon ions were accelerated by the HIMAC synchrotron at NIRS up to 290 MeV/u. Irradiation was conducted by the use of horizontal carbon beams of 74 keV/µm in LET with a 6 cm width spread-out Bragg peak (SOBP).²¹⁾ The irradiation field was produced by the simultaneous use of an iron collimator and a brass collimator. The dose rate was approximately 3 Gy/min.¹⁰⁾ X-rays were used as a reference beam. They were produced by a 200 kVp X-ray unit (PANTAK 320S, Shimadzu, Kyoto, Japan) of 20 mA with a filtration of 0.5 mm Cu and 0.5 mm Al at a dose rate of 2.4 Gy/min. With pentobarbital anesthesia (50 mg kg⁻¹) and taping, the mice were immobilized on a Lucite plate to place their right hind legs in the irradiation field, and then they received single-dose irradiation. The tumor diameter was 7.5 ± 0.5 mm (mean and range). A tumor growth delay of 8 days was selected here as the isoeffect because this isoeffect was previously used to study reoxygenation in the NFSa fibrosarcoma.¹⁰⁾ The isoeffect doses were 16 Gy and 25.5 Gy for 74 keV/µm carbon ions and X rays, respectively.

pO_2 measurements

We measured the tumor pO_2 by using the coaxial oxygen microelectrode fabricated in our laboratory following the procedure described by Baumgärtl and Lübbers.²²⁾ The recessed Pt cathode and the Ag/AgCl anode separated by the glass capillary were placed closely together, and the tip diameter of the electrode was within less than 10 µm. The microelectrode in 0.9% saline at 37°C and at a polarization voltage of -0.65 V provided a linear relationship between oxygen concentration and an oxygen current at the oxygen concentration ranging from 0.1 to 100%.²²⁾ The oxygen sensitivities of the microelectrode were 3–6 pA/mmHg O₂, and the response time of the microelectrode to achieve 90% of the final reading was 0.47 ± 0.02 s (mean \pm SD).

After pentobarbital anesthesia (50 mg kg^{-1}) and taping, the skin over the tumor was punctured with a 26-gauge needle, and the tumor surface was immediately covered with 0.9% saline solution. Rectal temperature was kept at 37°C by a thermostatically controlled heating pad during pO2 measurements. The number of electrode tracks evaluated in each tumor was 2 to 3, and a total of pO_2 profiles of 20–25 were obtained in 10 tumors per day. The inserted microelectrode was controlled by a computerized micromanipulator (ME-71, Narishige, Tokyo, Japan) and moved toward the tumor center with a step width of 20 µm. The microelectrode was moved once 40 µm forward, then pulled 20 µm backward, which minimized the compression artifact of the current caused by the penetration of the microelectrode. The local reduction current was measured by an electrometer (R8340A, Advantest, Tokyo, Japan) during 1.0 s after the back motion.

The electrodes were calibrated by using a buffered 0.9% saline solution equilibrated with air and with 100% nitrogen at 37°C before and after the pO_2 measurements in tumor tissues. All electrode currents were converted to pO_2 in the tumor by using the formula:

$pO_2 = pO_2(saline)/(K_{tumor}/K_{saline}).$

All electrode currents were once converted to $pO_2(saline)$ by use of the calibration curve made under the saline buffer. The $pO_2(saline)$ was then divided by the ratio of Krogh's diffusion coefficient for tumor tissue (K_{tumor}) to that for saline buffer (K_{saline}). This division is necessary because the steepness of the calibration curve is proportional to the oxygen conductivity (Krogh's diffusion coefficient) of the medium.²²⁾ The K_{tumor} used here was 1.9×10^{-5} mlO₂/cm/min/atm²³⁾, and Krogh's diffusion coefficient for water (4.7×10^{-5} mlO₂/cm/ min/atm)²⁴⁾ was substituted for K_{saline} .

Statistical analysis

Statistical comparisons of data were performed by nonparametric analysis by use of the Mann-Whitney U-test. A significant criterion of p < 0.05 was used.

RESULTS

We measured the tumor diameters after a single irradiation with 16 Gy of 74 keV/ μ m carbon ions and 25.5 Gy of X-rays (Fig. 1). The unirradiated tumor grew at a relatively uniform rate, and the radiation with either X rays or carbon ions identically delayed tumor growth by 8 days. We selected tumors between day 1 and day 8 of irradiation for pO₂ measurements.

The pO₂ at the tumor surface was almost equal to the partial pressure of oxygen in the air, i.e., 150 mmHg (Fig. 2). The pO₂ decreased rapidly when the microelectrode moved from the tumor surface toward the center and reached the hypoxic/anoxic region (pO₂ < 5 mmHg) at a depth ranging from 600 to

pO2 Profiles after Carbon Ions





Fig. 1. Volume changes of the NFSa fibrosarcomas after irradiation. Closed circles, closed triangles, and open squares are untreated, X-ray, and carbon-ion irradiated tumors, respectively. The symbols and bars are the mean and SEM calculated from five mice each.

Fig. 3. Time course of the number of pO_2 peaks after irradiation The average number of pO_2 peaks was calculated from 20–25 pO profiles per day for each group. The striped, white, and black bars are untreated, X-ray, or carbon-ion irradiated tumors, respectively. The error bars indicate SEM. The statistical significance (*p < 0.05) was obtained between untreated and irradiated tumors.



Fig. 2. pO_2 profiles in the NFSa fibrosarcomas after irradiation. (a) and (c) are profiles obtained for a single tumor 1 or 5 days after carbonion irradiation, respectively, and (b) and (d) are profiles for another single tumor 1 or 4 days after X-ray irradiation, respectively. The pO_2 profile was collected toward the center from the tumor surface.

1,000 μ m. We counted the number of pO₂ peaks that satisfied the following two conditions: (1) 15 mmHg or higher; (2) appearing within the range of 600–3,000 μ m depth from the tumor surface. The typical pO₂ profiles after irradiation are shown in Fig. 2. At day 1 of radiation, the number of pO₂ peaks after carbon ions was 3 at the depths of 1,600, 2,000, and 2,520 μ m (Fig. 2a), but there were no pO₂ peaks after Xrays (Fig. 2b). One pO₂ peak at 1,100 μ m was detected in a tumor that received X-rays 4 days before (Fig. 2d), and the carbon-ion irradiated tumor had 3 pO₂ peaks at 1,500, 1,800, and 2,300 μ m (Fig. 2c).

The number of pO₂ peaks was 0.45 in untreated tumors (Fig. 3). One day after irradiation with carbon ions, the number of pO₂ peaks significantly increased to 1.55 (p < 0.001, vs. untreated tumors). The increase in the number of pO₂ peaks after carbon-ion irradiation was observed till day 8. For X-ray irradiation, the number of pO₂ peaks increased to 0.92 (p < 0.05, vs. untreated tumors) at day 3, and the increase was

305

306



Depth from Tumor Surface (μm)

Fig. 4. pO_2 peak distributions in the NFSa fibrosarcomas after irradiation. (a) and (b) are for tumors irradiated with carbon ions or X rays, respectively. A total of 179 (carbon ions) or 175 (X-rays) pO_2 profiles obtained from day 1 to day 8 after irradiation were used for the distributions.



Fig. 5. Time course of the percentage frequency of pO_2 values lower than 2.5 mmHg after irradiation. The closed triangles and open squares are X-ray or carbon-ion irradiated tumors, respectively. The broken line represents the percentage frequency of pO_2 values lower than 2.5 mmHg in untreated tumors. The percentage frequency of the symbols and bars are the mean and SEM calculated from 20–25 pO_2 profiles per day for each group.

detectable till day 7. The number of pO_2 peaks decreased to 0.15 at day 10, a value indistinguishable from untreated tumors (data not shown).

T. Fukawa et al.

The spatial position of pO₂ peaks in tumors irradiated with carbon ions was deeper than that irradiated with X rays (p < 0.0001) (Fig. 4). The depth of the pO₂ peak after carbon ions and X-rays was 1,805 ± 45 and 1,445 ± 55 µm (mean ± SEM), respectively, from the tumor surface. The median depth of the pO₂ peak was 1,720 µm after carbon-ion irradiation, but it was 1,280 µm after X-ray irradiation.

Figure 5 shows the percentage frequency of pO₂ values lower than 2.5 mmHg after irradiation. This frequency was calculated from 120 pO₂ values per pO₂ profile within a range of 600–3,000 µm depth from the tumor surface, and a total of 20–25 profiles per day were obtained in 10 tumors. The percentage frequency of pO₂ values lower than 2.5 mmHg in untreated tumors was $42.3 \pm 6.8\%$ (mean \pm SEM). There was no statistically significant change in the percentage frequency of pO₂ readings lower than 2.5 mmHg (p > 0.05), nor was there any statistically significant change lower than 5 mmHg (data not shown). The mean and median pO₂ also did not change statistically (data not shown).

DISCUSSION

The unirradiated NFSa tumors were under low-oxygen condition so that the percentage of pO_2 below 2.5 mmHg was about 40% (Fig. 5). Using electron paramagnetic spectroscopy, Halpern *et al.* have measured and reported that mean pO_2 is about 3 mmHg for 0.25 g NFSa tumor.²⁵⁾ Ando *et al.*²⁶⁾ report the radiological hypoxic cell fraction of the NFSa tumors as 0.1 for the same tumor size as used in the present study. The relationship between the percentage frequency of pO_2 below either 2.5 or 5 mmHg and the hypoxic fraction assessed by radiological assays is not established.^{27,28)} It is difficult to distinguish between measurements made in clonogenic vs. nonclonogenic cells when polarographic oxygen electrodes are used.

Because our results are similar to the calculated pO₂ profiles using Krogh's cylinder model,²⁹⁾ the pO₂ peaks detected in the present study are probably produced when the oxygen electrode passes over the vicinity of the functional blood vessel. In the present study, the microcoaxial electrode we used had a high spatial resolution that was materialized by (1) closely placing the working and reference electrode coaxially, and (2) employing a small-tip electrode. Previous studies using the oxygen electrodes have detected no pO₂ peaks in tumors. This is because their spatial resolution is too low to detect the heterogeneities in tumor vascular configuration³⁰⁾ and HbO₂ saturations.¹⁸⁾ The microregional variability of oxygen delivery is also reported in an experimental tumor model using a dorsal window chamber.^{16,17)} The presence of pO₂ peaks means that oxygen tension in the NFSa tumor is heterogeneous and microregionally variable.

The pO_2 distribution of tumors after irradiation was different between carbon ions and X rays. Carbon-ion irradiation increased pO_2 peaks faster in time and deeper in space than X-

ray irradiation, even though tumor growth after irradiation was the same between the two radiation qualities. The oxygen tension of tumors changes after single or fractionated doses of photon radiation to tumors in experimental animals^{11,12,15)} and in patients,^{31,32)} which is usually assessed by polarography oxygen electrodes. Most of the experimental studies using microelectrodes measure pO2 at one or two times after irradiation, and use the percentage frequency of pO_2 below either 2.5 or 5 mmHg in tumors as a cutoff determining the hypoxic fraction (HF_{pO2}). Vaupel et al.¹¹⁾ and Koutcher et al.¹²⁾ reported a marked reduction of the HFpO2 in mouse mammary carcinomas a few days after irradiation with single doses from 30 to 60 Gy, which indicates reoxygenation. In contrast, Zewietz et al.¹⁵⁾ report that the HF_{pO2} rather increases with radiation doses of more than 45 Gy, which indicates a promotion of hypoxia. In the present study, the HF_{pO2} did not change significantly after irradiation regardless of radiation qualities (Fig. 5).

The time of increase in the pO₂ peaks was earlier for carbon ions than for X-rays (p < 0.05) (Fig. 3). Ando *et al.*¹⁰ have showed that the NFSa tumors reoxygenate 4 days after 30 Gy of gamma rays, but they reoxygenate at 1 day after a 74 keV/ μ m carbon-ion dose of 16 Gy. The time course of pO₂ peak appearance in the present study coincides with that of reoxygenation reported by Ando *et al.* Oya *et al.*⁹ report that the reoxygenation occurs more rapidly after carbon-ion than Xray irradiation for SCCVII and SCCVII-variant-1 tumors, whereas a quite similar reoxygenation is observed for the EMT6 tumors after X-ray and carbon-ion irradiation.

Several possible mechanisms of reoxygenation have been suggested. They include reduced oxygen consumption by radiation-damaged cells,³³⁾ cell loss leading to tumor shrinkage,⁷⁾ migration of hypoxic cells to oxygenated areas⁷⁾ and improved microcirculation.¹⁾ The increase in pO2 peaks after irradiation (Fig. 3) support the assumption that the reoxygenation is caused by increased functional blood vessels.³⁴⁾ The pO₂ peaks appeared selectively in peripheral regions after Xray irradiation, but rather homogeneously in the tumor after carbon-ion irradiation (Fig. 4). The pO_2 is reported higher in the periphery than in the center of the mouse mammary adenocarcinomas MTG-B.¹³⁾ The interstitial fluid pressure (IFP) is also higher in the center than in the periphery, and it increases with the size of the tumor.³⁵⁾ Tozer et al.³⁵⁾ report that the blood flow in untreated tumors is heterogeneous and decreases toward the center. Numerous papers report the changes of oxygen delivery in normal tissues³⁶⁾ and tumor tissues³⁷⁾ after radiation. After photon irradiation, IFP significantly decreases at the tumor center,³⁸⁾ and blood flow tends to increase toward the center.³⁵⁾ Because cell killing by carbon ions depends less on oxygen than by photons, the distribution of radiation-induced cell death would be more homogeneous for carbon ions than for photons. The carbon ions may reduce the IFP regardless of tumor periphery or center, but X-rays may reduce the IFP preferentially in tumor periphery. The IFP reduction would open any nonfunctional or compressed

vessels, resulting in an increased tumor blood flow and pO_2 peaks.

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308

T. Fukawa et al.

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