Original

Morphological Study for the Osteocytes in Podoplanin-Conditional Knockout Mice

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Abstract: We generated podoplanin-conditional knockout mice where the floxed podoplanin exon3 was deleted by the Dmp1-driven Cre (Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ) and investigated the cell process elongation of podoplanin-deficient mouse osteocyte in vitro and in vivo. The expression of podoplanin is found in odontoblasts while not observed in odontoblasts of Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice, indicating that the conditional knockout of podoplanin in Dmp1-Cre-expressing cells in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice is successful. There were no differences in the growth of wild-type and Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice, and no differences in calcification and alkaline phosphate activity in cultured calvarial osteoblasts of the wild-type and Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice, in total this suggests that the podoplanin-cKO has no effect on generation of the bone. The cell process elongation was suppressed in cultured calvarial osteoblasts of Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice compared with wild-type mice. In the electron microscopic study, there were no morphological differences in bone matrix formation and osteocyte distribution in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ and wild-type mice, whereas the cell process formation was sparser and the network with neighboring cells was more deficient in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice than in wild-type mice. In the quantitative analysis, the number and thickness of the cell processes were significantly smaller and thinner in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice than in wild-type mice. This could suggest that podoplanin plays a role in the formation of the osteocyte network created by the cell process elongation.

Key words: Podoplanin, cKO, Osteocyte

Introduction

Podoplanin is a mucin-like O-glycosylated transmembrane protein strongly negatively charged by sialic acid. Multiple terms corresponding to podoplanin have been reported by researchers for different areas like for the kidneys, lungs, bone, lymphatic vessels, and for cancer1-3). The OTS-8 is the earliest report for podoplanin DNA4). The OTS-8 is produced by the stimulation of the tumor promoter 12-O-tetradecanoylphorbol-13-acetate as the early response protein in the mouse osteoblast-like MC3T3-E1 cells. The gp38 is reported as the 38 amino acid sequence of the mouse thymic epithelial epitope recognized by a hamster anti-podoplanin monoclonal antibody produced from the clone 8.1.1.5). The gp38 closely resembles OTS-8 and human podoplanin gp36. The E11 is a podoplanin antigen recognized by a monoclonal antibody to the rat osteosclerotic osteosarcoma cell line ROS17/2.86,7). The E11 has been extensively researched as a mature late osteoblast and osteocyte marker in dendrites other than dentin matrix protein 1 (DMP-1) and sclerostin in mature osteoblast/ostecytes and expression increases in the MC3T3-E1 and human osteoblast-like MG63 cells in calcification medium. The MLO-Y4 and IDG-SW3 are the osteocyte-like cells which the expression amounts of podoplanin are more strongly than MC3T3-E1 in the mouse long bone8-15).

Podoplanin is a ligand to the platelet transmembrane C-type lectin-like receptor CLEC-2 and is able to bind platelets by the functional residues including O-glycosylated Thr5216-18). Podoplanin binds CLEC-2 and induces the association of podoplanin cytoplasmic parts with CD44 on podoplanin-positive cells via the assembly of ezrin-radixin-moesin (ERM)19-20). The cell shape and cytoskeleton arrangement are controlled by the ERM-actomyosin assembly formation via podoplanin expression on the cell membrane and binding of podoplanin with CLEC-2 induces the separation of the ERM-actomyosin assembly. For example, in lymph nodes fibroblastic reticular cells contract cell processes dependent on the property of podoplanin which induces ERM phosphorylation. The phospho-ERM induces the rearrangement of actomyosin and elongates cell process in fibroblastic reticular cells. The lymph node expansion causes by the reduction of podoplanin-mediated contraction in inflamed lymph nodes where mature dendritic cells interact with fibroblastic reticular cells via podoplanin-CLEC-2 binding21-26). There is a detailed report on the expression of podoplanin in bone cells27). It shows that the CD44-podoplanin binding contributes to the osteoblast differentiation in the remodeling sites but not in modeling sites of bone. Taken together, podoplanin may function in the osteocyte cell shape formation via osteoblastic differentiation. This study aims to investigate the cell process formation of osteocytes in the bones of podoplanin-cKO mice by an electron microscopic study.

Materials and Methods

The goal of animal use in the present study was to clarify the forma-
tion of osteocyte cell processes in mice where podoplanin alleles are inactivated in osteocytes and odontoblasts. The manuscript was prepared following the ARRIVE guidelines. All procedures of animal care and use were performed according to the applicable international, national and institutional guidelines and regulations. We obeyed ethical standards of the institutional and national research committees, and 1964 Helsinki declaration, and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards described elsewhere. The animal experimental protocol was approved by the Animal Experiment Committee of Fukuoka Dental College (No. 17018). All animal maintenance and experiments were conducted in the Fukuoka Dental College Animal Center following the conditions and procedures described elsewhere. The health check was daily assessed by humane endpoints. Mice with humane endpoints of lost ability to ambulate (inability to access food or water) were promptly euthanized by induction anesthesia with intraperitoneal injections of sodium pentobarbital and cervical dislocation. All data of mice employed were involved in the experimental and control data without exclusions.

**Animals**

The procedures are described elsewhere. For breeding, the studies here used 4-week-old three type mice (2 pairs in each): C57BL/6N wild-type mice with normal podoplanin alleles purchased from a commercial vendor (Kyudo, Fukuoka, Japan), C57BL/6.FVB-Tg (Dmp1-Cre) 1Jqfe/BwdJ purchased from a commercial vendor (Jax Strain #023047), and C57BL/6N with floxed Pdpn exon3 alleles (Pdpnfl/fl). We finally acquired Pdpnfl/fl x Dmp1-Cre mice with Pdpnfl/fl alleles in Dmp1 expressing cells (Pdpnfl/fl) and used mice with three type podoplanin alleles (wild-type, Pdpnfl/fl, Pdpnfl/fl). The animal maintenance and experiments were healthily performed with normal feeding under a conventional 100% controlled atmosphere passed an examination for bacteria in a room of the Fukuoka Dental College Animal Center. Mice were maintained in two/cage with an inverse 12-hr day-night cycle with lights on from 7:00 p.m. The temperature was controlled at 22°C with a-55% humidity. All specimens were collected from mice euthanized. The induction of anesthesia was performed by the 2% isoflurane (1/min) mixed with 30% oxygen and 70% nitrous oxide followed by cervical dislocation and intraperitoneal injections with sodium pentobarbital (150 mg/kg; Sumitomo Dainippon Pharma Co., Ltd., Tokyo, Japan) at the end of the designated period of the experiments. In summary, 6 mice in each group of the wild-type, Pdpnfl/fl and Dmp1-Cre;Pdpnfl/fl mice were used to investigate the characteristics of cultured odontoblasts isolated from one-week-old mouse calvaria for the in vitro study and of osteocytes in 23-week mouse femur for the microscopic study.

**Generation of knockout mice**

The method to generate mice carrying the homozygous floxed podoplanin allele (Pdpnfl/fl) is described elsewhere. Briefly, the Pdpn floxed ES cells having the genetic background of C57BL/6N-A^tm1a(EUCOMM)Wtsi were used with the Pdpn targeting vector HTGR03003_Z_2_G05 (EUCOMM) to generate knockout first. The targeted allele with the gene trap cassette (Pdpnfloxed) is used as a conventional knockout-first allele to disrupt the targeted Pdpn splicing in C57BL/6N embryonic stem (ES) cells. The construct was knocked into the Pdpn locus (GenelD: 14726, chromosome 4) by homologous recombination. The Pdpn gene sandwiched by loxP is ENSEMBLE000000180432 in the Ensemble database, and exon3 in NM_010329 in the NCBI database. The generation of Pdpn gene knockout-first allele (Pdpnfl/fl) were achieved from chimeric mice with the Pdpn-targeted ES cells in which the genetic background is C57BL/6N.Cbj. The promoter-driven targeting cassette is flanked by flippase (Flp) recognition target FRT sites and the removal of the targeting cassette by Flp generates a Pdpn conditional knockout (cKO) allele including loxP sites flanking exon 3 (Pdpnfl/fl, floxed exon 3). All transcript variants of Pdpn have exon3 and the deletion of exon 3 causes a frameshift mutation leading to premature stop codon. The exon 3 deletion stops prematurely by forming a stop codon near the 5’ end of exon 4 or 5 depending on splicing variants, thereby disrupting translation of the Pdpn (Pdpnfl/fl). Mice expressing Pdpnfl/fl allele heterozygously were mated with mice having Flp, ACTB:FLPe (B6;SJL-Tg(ACTB:FLPe)205Dyme/J, JAX 003800) to leave Pdpnfl/fl. In this study, C57BL/6. FVB-Tg (Dmp1-cre) 1Jqfe/BwdJ, carrying alleles with dentin matrix acidic phosphoprotein 1 (Dmp1) promotor-driving Cre recombinase gene expressing tissue-specific heterozygously, was used to delete Pdpnfl/fl. The mice simultaneously having homozygous Pdpnfl/fl alleles (Pdpnfl/fl) and heterozygous allele were used as a true conditional knockout for podoplanin in Dmp1-expressing osteocytes and odontoblasts (Dmp1-cre;Pdpnfl/fl).

**Cell culture**

Primary osteoblasts of neonate calvaria were collected following a protocol previously used. In brief, neonatal mice were euthanized by anesthesia and cervical dislocation, and treated with collagenase with 0.25% trypsin with 5 sequential 30-min digestions at 37°C. Cell frac-

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**Table 1. Sequence of primers**

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<tr>
<th>RefSeq</th>
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<th>reverse (5’-3’)</th>
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<td>472</td>
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Gene symbols are described according to international notation.
tions from the third to fifth digestion were collected and seeded on collagen-coated 24-well culture plates (Asahi Glass Co., LTD., Shizuoka, Japan). The primary cells were cultured in Minimum Essential Medium Eagle, Alpha Modification (α-MEM, Sigma-Aldrich Corp. LLC., St. Louis, MO, USA) with 10% fetal bovine serum (Biowest, Nuaillé, France) for 10 days and harvested, and then cultured in calcification medium of a mouse osteogenesis culture medium kit (Cosmo Bio, Tokyo, Japan) containing 100 nM dexamethasone, 50 μg/ml, ascorbic acid, and 10 mM β-glycerophosphate in collagen-coated 6-well culture plates for 20 days. The culture was fixed by 10% formalin-phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) and stained by 40 mM alizarin red S (pH 4.2) using a CalciNodule Staining kit (Cosmo Bio) for 30 min at room temperature. The culture was washed 3 times with distilled water and was added by 5% formic acid to dissolve the alizarin red-stained calcified nodules. The establishment of osteoblasts was determined by the detection of alizarin red staining and alkaline phosphatase activity (Cosmo Bio), and by the detection of podoplanin and Dmp1 mRNAs.

Table 2. Sequence of primers

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<td>ACGTGTGCTCGTGTTGCTA</td>
<td>58.1</td>
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Gene symbols are described according to international notation.

Figure 1. Gene map for genotyping. The gPdpn1 primers were designed flanking the loxP after the Pdpn exon 3 in the allele of Pdpnfl (208 bp) and the PCR products for the podoplanin wild-type allele show 128 bp. The gPdpn2 primers were designed flanking the FRT site and loxP after the Pdpn exon 3 (1,096 bp), and the PCR products for the PdpnΔ allele show 174 bp. The gPdpn3 primers were designed flanking the Pdpn exon 3 (207 bp).
Genotyping and reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR)

The method is described elsewhere. Briefly, genomic DNA from the tail was isolated with a QIAamp DNA Blood and Tissue Kit (Qiagen, Inc., Hilden, Germany). The RT-PCR was also performed to detect the podoplanin mRNA in the cultured osteoblasts from calvaria. All procedures were performed according to protocols provided by the manufacturers. Total RNA extraction from the primary cell culture in a mouse osteogenesis culture medium kit (Cosmo Bio) was performed with a QIAshredder column and RNeasy kit (Qiagen, Inc., Tokyo, Japan). This study used the primer sets (50 pM) which had been confirmed the specificities by the manufacturer (Table 1; Sigma-Aldrich Corp., Tokyo, Japan). The PCR products were separated on 2% agarose gel (NuSieve 3:1 Agarose; FMC Bio Products, Rockland, ME, USA) and visualized by Syber Green (Takara Bio Inc.). The correct size of the amplified PCR products was confirmed by gel electrophoresis and the amplification of accurate targets was confirmed by sequence analysis. Genotyping (Table 1, Fig.1), the gPdpn1 primer set was designed flanking loxP after exon 3 in the allele of Pdpn<sup>fl/fl</sup> (208 bp) and the wild-type Pdpn gene without loxP shows 128 bp. The gPdpn2 primer set was designed flanking exon 3 and loxP (1,096 bp), and the Pdpn<sup>Δ</sup> allele deleted this region.

Figure 2. Measuring the range of osteocyte dendrites. A rectangle (dotted line) was constructed by four tangential lines to the four points of osteocyte margin (Topmost, Bottommost, Leftmost, Rightmost) and the center of the rectangle (Central point) was determined as the center of the osteocyte. The horizontal and intersecting axes passing through Central point were constructed and the four intersections with the margin of the osteocyte (Cross point) were determined. The number and thickness of osteocytes were measured in four 3.0-μm squares (red) where the center of the square is 3.0 μm away from Cross point.

Figure 3. Genotyping and RT-PCR of tail and cultured osteoblasts. (A) The genotyping of the tail. For the gPdpn1, the gene containing loxP after the Pdpn exon 3 in the allele of Pdpn<sup>fl/fl</sup> (208 bp) was detected from the tails of the Pdpn<sup>fl/fl</sup> mice and Dmp1-Cre;Pdpn<sup>Δ/Δ</sup> mice, while the gene without loxP shows 128 bp. For the gPdpn2, the gene containing FRT and loxP after the Pdpn exon 3 (1,096 bp) in the allele of Pdpn<sup>fl/fl</sup> was detected from the tail of the Pdpn<sup>fl/fl</sup> mice while not detected from the tail of the wild-type mice. Both of the intact gene (1,096 bp) and the gene cleaved by the Cre recombinase (174 bp) was detected from the Dmp1-Cre;Pdpn<sup>Δ/Δ</sup> mice. The gene of Cre recombinase (472 bp) was detected from the tail of the Dmp1-Cre;Pdpn<sup>Δ/Δ</sup> mice. (B) The genotyping and RT-PCR of cultured osteoblasts. For the gPdpn1, the gene containing loxP after the Pdpn exon 3 (208 bp) was detected from the cultured osteoblasts of Dmp1-Cre;Pdpn<sup>Δ/Δ</sup> mice while the gene without loxP shows 128 bp. For the gPdpn2, both of the gene containing the FRT and loxP after the Pdpn exon 3 (1,096 bp) and the gene cleaved by the Cre recombinase (174 bp) were detected from the cultured osteoblasts of Dmp1-Cre;Pdpn<sup>Δ/Δ</sup> mice. The gene of Cre recombinase (472 bp) was detected from the cultured osteoblasts of Dmp1-Cre;Pdpn<sup>Δ/Δ</sup> mice while not detected from the cultured osteoblasts of wild-type mice. For the gPdpn3, the gene showing 207 bp was not detected from the cultured osteoblasts of both the wild-type and Dmp1-Cre;Pdpn<sup>Δ/Δ</sup> mice. The mRNAs of podoplanin (Pdpn, 192 bp) were detected from the cultured osteoblasts of wild-type mice but not from the cultured osteoblasts of Dmp1-Cre;Pdpn<sup>Δ/Δ</sup> mice.
resulted in 174 bp. The gPdpn3 primer set was designed flanking Pdpn exon 3 in the allele of Pdpn<sup>f</sup> (207 bp). The primer set for the Cre recombinase which is driven by Dmp1 promoter was designed to detect a part of the Cre gene (472 bp). For RT-PCR (Table 2, Fig.1), primer sets were also designed for common regions in all splicing variants of podoplanin (192 bp) and Dmp1 (165 bp) mRNAs.

**Immunohistochemistry**

The method is described elsewhere<sup>26,27</sup>. Briefly, frozen 10 µm-sections were cut and fixed in 100% methanol for 30 sec at -20°C, treated with 0.1% goat serum for 30 min at 20°C, and then treated for 8 hrs at 4°C with PBS containing 0.1% goat serum and 1 µg/ml hamster monoclonal anti-mouse podoplanin (BioLegend, Inc., San Diego, CA, USA). The sections were washed three times in PBS for 10 min and treated for 0.5 hr at 20°C with 0.1 µg/ml of Alexa Fluor 568-conjugated goat anti-hamster IgG (Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc., Waltham, MA, USA). The immunostained sections were mounted in 50% polyvinylpyrrolidone solution and examined by fluorescence microscopy (BZ-8100, Keyence Corp., Osaka, Japan) or confocal laser-scanning microscopy (LSM710, Carl Zeiss, Jena, Germany) with an x63 oil Plan Apochromatic objective lens.

**Transmission electron microscopic study**

The femur specimens of wild-type and Pdpn<sup>Δ/Δ</sup> mice were fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde-PBS. After washing, specimens were immersed in a decalcifying solution (G-Chelate/Quick, GenoStaff Inc., Tokyo, Japan; 4°C, for 7 days) and in the neutralization solution (G-Chelate/NT, GenoStaff; 4°C, 12 hr). After the treatment in 30% potassium hydroxide

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**Figure 4.** Immunostaining of podoplanin in the one-week mouse odontoblasts. (A) Immunostaining of podoplanin in the one-week wild-type mouse lower incisor sagittal section. In the right images at the higher magnification of the parts highlighted by the boxes in the left panels, the expression of podoplanin (arrow) is observed in the odontoblasts (Ob), in the inner enamel epithelial cells (IEE), and in the outer enamel epithelial cells (OEE), but not in the dental pulp fibroblasts (DPF). The podoplanin expression is also observed in the alveolar bone. Bar: 100 μm. (B) Immunostaining of podoplanin in the one-week Dmp1-Cre;Pdpn<sup>Δ/Δ</sup> mouse lower incisor sagittal section. In the right images at the higher magnification of the parts highlighted by the boxes in the left panels, the expression of podoplanin is not observed in the odontoblasts (Ob) as well as not in the dental pulp fibroblasts (DPF), while the expression is observed in the inner enamel epithelial cells (IEE) and in the outer enamel epithelial cells (OEE). The cross-reaction to the bone is also observed. Bar: 100 μm. (C) Immunostaining of podoplanin in the one-week Pdpn<sup>f/f</sup> mouse molar sagittal section. In the right images at the higher magnification of the parts highlighted by the boxes in the left panels, the expression of podoplanin is observed in the odontoblasts (Ob), in the inner enamel epithelial cells (IEE), and in the outer enamel epithelial cells (OEE), but not in the dental pulp fibroblasts (DPF). Bar: 100 μm. (D) Immunostaining of podoplanin in the one-week Dmp1-Cre;Pdpn<sup>Δ/Δ</sup> mouse molar sagittal section. In the right images at the higher magnification of the parts highlighted by the boxes in the left panels, the expression of podoplanin is not observed in the odontoblasts (Ob) as well as in the dental pulp fibroblasts (DPF), while the expression is observed in the inner enamel epithelial cells (IEE) and in the outer enamel epithelial cells (OEE). Bar: 100 μm.
Specimens were dehydrated in 70, 80, 90, and 100% ethanol at RT for 30 min each. The specimens were treated with critical point drying by Hitachi HCP-1 at 37°C in 80 atm for 1 hr and adhered to the sample stage with carbon double-sided tape. The specimens were treated with platinum palladium coating by Hitachi E-1030 for 120 s and observed by SEM (Hitachi S4800; Electron gun acceleration voltage: 5.0 kV, magnification: ×5.00 k). The osteocyte dendritic network was measured on five different spots (0.36 mm x 0.36 mm) in the renal section images using ImageJ (National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD) (Fig. 2). The edge of the osteocyte of photograph was traced on graph paper and the center of the osteocyte obtained as determined from the highest point, the lowest point, the leftmost point, and the rightmost point of the osteocyte. Four points at which the edge of the osteocyte intersects with each of the vertical and horizontal axes drawn from the central point were determined. Four squares with sides of 3.0 μm were drawn centering on a point 3.0 μm away on the axis from each of the four points and the numbers of cell processes in the squares were counted, followed by the calculation of the mean number of cell processes per 1.0μm².

Statistics

All experiments were carried out 10 times, repeatedly, and data are expressed as mean ± SD. The determination of statistically significant differences (p<0.01) was assessed by one-way ANOVA and the unpaired two-tailed Student’s t-test with STATVIEW 4.51 software (Abacus concepts, Calabasas, CA, USA).
Results

Genotyping of Pdpn exon3, Cre, and FRT genes in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mouse tail and cultured osteoblasts isolated from calvaria

For the genotyping of the tail, the gene containing loxP after Pdpn exon 3 in the allele of Pdpn wild-type mice was detected in Pdpn[fl/fl] mice and Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice, while the gene without loxP after the Pdpn exon 3 was detected in wild-type mice (Fig. 3). The gene flanking FRT and loxP after Pdpn exon 3 in the allele of Pdpn[fl/fl] mice was detected in the Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ while not detected in wild-type mice. Both the intact gene and the cleaved podoplanin gene were detected in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice. The gene of Cre recombinase was detected in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice. For genotyping of cultured calvarial osteoblasts, the gene containing loxP after Pdpn exon 3 in the allele of PdpnΔ/Δ was detected in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice while genes without loxP after Pdpn exon 3 was detected in wild-type mice (Fig. 3). The gene of Cre recombinase was detected in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice. Both of the genes flanking FRT and loxP after Pdpn exon 3, and the cleaved podoplanin gene were detected in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice, while it was not detected in wild-type mice. The gene flanking Pdpn exon 3 was detected in wild-type mice while it was not detected in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice. For RT-PCR of cultured osteoblasts, the mRNAs of β-actin and DMP-1 were detected in both wild-type mice and Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice in similar intensities (Fig. 3). The mRNAs of Pdpn were detected in wild-type mice but not in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice.

Immunostaining of Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mouse teeth for podoplanin

In the one-week-old wild-type and PdpnΔ/Δ mouse tissue, the expression of podoplanin was observed in the odontoblasts, inner and outer enamel epithelial cells and pre-ameloblasts in the incisors and molars (Fig. 4). The expression of podoplanin was also observed in the alveolar bone while it was not observed in the dentin, dental pulp fibroblasts, pre-odontoblasts, periodontal ligament, or bone marrow. In the one-week-old Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mouse tissue, the expression of podoplanin was observed in the inner and outer enamel epithelial cells and pre-ameloblasts but not in the odontoblasts in the incisors and molars, which were PDNP-positive in wild-type and PdpnΔ/Δ mice (Fig. 4). There were no abnormalities in the tooth or bone development in the Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mouse tissue.

Calcification, alkaline phosphatase activity and cell process elongation of cultured mouse osteoblasts

In calcification medium cultured calvarial osteoblasts isolated from Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice showed calcified nodules stained by alizarin red and alkaline phosphatase activity (Fig. 5). There were no differences in the calcification and alkaline phosphatase activity in cultured calvarial osteoblasts of wild-type mice and Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice. Cell process elongation was observed in cultured calvarial osteoblasts of wild-type mice while the elongation was suppressed in cultured calvarial osteoblasts of Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice.

Morphological analysis for osteocytes in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mouse femur

Highly-developed networks of osteocyte processes were observed in the femur of both wild-type and Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice (Fig. 6). The process formation was sparser and the network formation with neighboring cells was more deficient in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice than in wild-type mice.

Figure 6. TEM analysis for osteocytes in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mouse femur. (A) Microscopic observations. In the right images at the higher magnification of the parts highlighted by the boxes in the left panels. Well-developed osteocyte processes are observed in the wild-type mouse femurs. There were no significant differences in bone matrix formation and osteocyte distribution in the Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ compared to the wild-type mice. However, the process formation and the network with neighboring cells are less well developed in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ than in wild-type mice. (B) Quantitative analysis. The number and thickness of cell processes are significantly smaller and thinner in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice (PΔ) than in wild-type and PdpnΔ/Δ mice (W). *Significantly different (p<0.001).
type mice. There were no morphological differences in bone matrix formation and osteocyte distribution in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ compared with wild-type mice. In the quantitative analysis, the number and thickness of cell processes were significantly lesser and thinner in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice than in wild-type mice. There were no differences in the body growth between Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice and wild-type.

Discussion

Generation of Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice

Previously we first reported that podoplanin-cKO mice in which Cre recombinase driven by the wingless-related MMTV integration site one promoter targets the gene of podoplanin exon 3 in cranial bone cells and in odontoblasts, and showed that the podoplanin deletion in the odontoblasts and osteoblasts does not affect the development and growth of cranial bone and teeth25). In the study here, we generated podoplanin-cKO mice in which Cre recombinase driven by the dmp1 promoter targets the gene of podoplanin exon 3 in cranial bone cells and in odontoblasts. For genotyping of both the tail and cultured calvarial osteoblasts, the gene containing loxP after Pdpn exon 3 in the allele of Pdpnfl/fl was detected in Pdpnfl/fl and Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice, while the gene without loxP after Pdpn exon 3 was detected in wild-type mice (Fig. 3). It is thought that the insertion of the loxP site after Pdpn exon 3 was successful. The Cre recombinase gene and the podoplanin gene cleaved by the Cre recombinase were detected in both the tail and cultured calvarial osteoblasts of Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice, furthermore, the gene flanking Pdpn exon 3 was detected in wild-type mice but not detected in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice, indicating that the deletion of the loxP-floxed podoplanin gene by Dmp1-driven Cre recombinase in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice was successful (Fig. 3). The DMP-1 mRNA was detected in both wild-type mice and Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice while the Pdpn mRNA was detected in wild-type mice but not in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice, indicating that the deficiency in podoplanin production in Dmp1-expressing osteoblasts isolated from Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice was successful (Fig. 3).

Previously we reported the expression of podoplanin in the teeth23,24). In the wild-type and Pdpnfl/fl mouse tissue, the expression of podoplanin was observed in the odontoblasts, inner and outer enamel epithelial cells and in pre-ameloblasts, and cells in the alveolar bone while it was not observed in the dentin, dental pulp fibroblasts, pre-odontoblasts, periodontal ligament, bone marrow, as we have also reported elsewhere, indicating that the immunostaining is successful. In the Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mouse tissue, the expression of podoplanin was not observed in the odontoblasts, indicating that the conditional knockout of podoplanin in Dmp1-expressing cells in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice is successful (Fig. 4). There were no abnormalities in the nerve, bone, or tooth development, indicating that the cKO of podoplanin in odontoblasts and osteocytes has no effect on the development and growth of teeth and bone as we have reported elsewhere for Wnt1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice27). Therefore, it is thought that podoplanin may not be significantly involved in the mineralization in bone and teeth.

Characteristics of podoplanin-deficient osteoblasts and osteocytes

Our previous study showed that mechanostress induces the production of podoplanin in osteoblasts, and that in cultured osteoblasts the calcification was significantly suppressed by anti-podoplanin and by CLEC-2 protein29,30). Considering this, CLEC-2 may be able to cancel the calcification of osteoblast by blocking the maturation of osteoblast via interaction with the CLEC-2 receptor podoplanin in osteocytes under mechanostress. Since the inhibition of podoplanin-mediated calcification requires CLEC-2 in cultured osteoblasts, it may be thought to be natural that podoplanin-cKO mice grew healthily and no abnormalities appeared in bones and teeth25). In the study on osteoblasts in three-dimensional culture, the cell process elongation of osteoblasts was suppressed with CLEC-226). There are detailed reports of the cell process elongation via podoplanin and it is thought that podoplanin-cKO may affect the cell process formation of the osteocyte in the bone27,28). In the study here, there were no differences in the body growth of Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice and the wild-type mice, and no differences in calcification and alkaline phosphatase activity in cultured calvarial osteoblasts of the wild-type and Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice (Fig. 5), in total this suggests that the podoplanin-cKO has no effect on generation of the bone. The cell process elongation was observed in cultured calvarial osteoblasts of wild-type mice while elongation was suppressed in cultured calvarial osteoblasts of Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice compared with wild-type mice, suggesting that the podoplanin expression may contribute to the formation of osteocyte cell processes. In the electron microscopic study, there were no morphological differences in bone matrix formation and osteocyte distribution in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice when compared with wild-type mice (Fig. 6). The highly-developed networks of osteocyte processes were observed in wild-type mouse femurs whereas the process formation was sparser and the network with neighboring cells was more deficient in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice than in wild-type mice. In the quantitative analysis, the number and thickness of the cell processes were significantly smaller and thinner in Dmp1-Cre;PdpnΔ/Δ mice than in wild-type mice. This could suggest that podoplanin plays a role in the formation of the osteocyte network created by the cell process elongation.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors indicate no potential conflicts of interest.

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