Predictive Assays in Radiation Therapy
Immunotherapy in Cancer Treatment

Radiation Biology
Lecture 4-23-2014

Outline
- Introduction: Predictive assays in radiation therapy
- Examples for specific tumors
- Immunotherapy
- Summary

Introduction
- Absolute radioresistance does not exist: if a sufficiently high dose is delivered, all cells can be sterilized
- Radiation therapy objective is to optimize treatment for a higher probability of cure and minimal normal tissue damage
- Predictive assays are needed due to the potential role they could have in selecting individually tailored therapy course

Current clinical practice
- The radiation oncologist writes a prescription for
  - the total radiation dose in Gy
  - the dose per fraction
  - the number of fractions needed to deliver the total dose (and their temporal separation)
- These variables are mostly dictated by the primary site of disease, the histology and the stage of the cancer
- Geometrical factors are of utter importance: target should be fully covered, volume of exposed normal tissues minimized

Biological factors determining tumor response to radiotherapy
- There are three widely acknowledged radiobiological factors involved in determining tumor response to radiotherapy:
  - Cellular radiosensitivity
  - Tumor hypoxia
  - Cell proliferation rate
- Studies suggesting the potential of all three as prognostic factors for radiotherapy

Cellular Radiobiology Assays
- Not only tumors, but also normal tissues of individuals, differ in their intrinsic radiosensitivity
- Correlation between cellular radiosensitivity of skin fibroblasts and severe reaction to radiotherapy in an individual with the genetic disorder ataxia telangiectasia (A-T) was initially discovered in 1975
- Several independent studies shown a correlation between the in vitro radiosensitivity of skin fibroblasts and the severity of late complications
- A promising predictive assay?
Cellular Radiobiology Assays

In the early 1990s, 1 study per year was published (black bars), all of them showing a significant relationship between in vitro radiosensitivity of fibroblasts and late effects of radiotherapy.

Two large confirmatory studies (white bars) published in 1998 and 2000 showed no significant predictive value of this assay for late effects.

Early predictive assays

- Inherent radiosensitivity for normal tissue side effects is predictive in only small subset of tumors.
- Proliferation rate (doubling time) looked promising in many small studies but turned out not to be a significant predictor of radiotherapy outcome in a larger multi-center analysis of 476 patients with head and neck squamous-cell carcinoma (HNSCC).
- Only the Eppendorf microelectrode measurement of partial oxygen tension has consistently shown to have prognostic value, recently confirmed in a joint analysis of outcome after radiotherapy in 397 patients with HNSCC from 7 centers.

New era of predictive assays

- The cellular-based assays lacked the sensitivity and specificity.
- Accompanying development of new high-throughput techniques provide extensive capabilities for the analysis of a large number of genes.

New era of predictive assays

- Molecular (biomarker) tests have the potential to be more robust, comprehensive, and capable of better standardization between centers.
- These assays can be carried out in various clinical samples at the DNA (genome), RNA (transcriptome) or protein (proteome) level.

DNA assays for normal tissue radiosensitivity

- It is now recognized that DNA mutations in a single or even a few genes are unlikely to be responsible for the patient-to-patient variability in sensitivity to radiation.
- Single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNP) account for ~90% of the naturally occurring sequence variation within a population.

DNA assays for tissue response

- Work carried out to date exploring genotyping to predict normal tissue and tumor response to radiotherapy has involved a candidate gene approach, which uses a priori knowledge of SNP and gene functions.
- Such approaches require smaller sample sizes and benefit from reduced complexity by targeting relevant genes.
**RNA microarrays**

- Gene expression microarrays provide the ability to monitor, rapidly and simultaneously, the RNA expression levels of thousands of genes or the whole genome.
- Allows investigation of gene expression profiles associated with the radioresponse of tumors and normal tissues for the derivation of biomarkers to predict local control and toxicity after radiotherapy.

**Proteomics and Tissue Microarrays**

- The study of the function of all expressed proteins.
- The promise of proteomics lies in the identification of biomarkers that could favorably affect disease diagnosis, as well as our ability to assess the response to treatment and, thereby, the prognosis.
- Radioresistance-related proteins were identified in a proteomic study of pre-radiotherapy tumor biopsies from 17 patients with rectal cancer.

**Biomarker predictive assays**

- Large studies are required with exploratory and validation cohorts of patients, associated with the collection of high-quality physics, clinical and outcome data.

**Controversial observations**

- Example: the tumor suppresser gene p53
  - Mutations of p53 generally lead to deregulation of cell cycle by eliminating the G1 checkpoint, and impairment of DNA repair process.
  - Reported to be associated with increased cellular resistance to irradiation and tumor relapse after therapy.
  - The loss of p53 also shown to either increase or not change radiosensitivity of cells.
  - Current trend: the p53 protein is analyzed in normal and tumor cells for its functional quality.

**Example: breast cancer**

- At least 4 biologically distinct molecular subtypes of breast cancer were identified, which correlated to different clinical outcomes: luminalA (ER+, and/or PR+, HER2-), luminal B (ER+, and/or PR+, HER2+), HER2+ (ER-, PR-, HER2+), and basal-like (ER-, PR-, HER2-).
Example: prostate cancer

- Novel gene-based tests have been developed to improve the prediction accuracy at various phases within the prostate cancer (PCa) disease course
- Urine-based assays (expression levels of PCA3 and TMPRSS2:ERG) aim to refine the selection for both initial and repeat prostate biopsy
- Tissue-based gene expression tests: to predict the occurrence of subsequent PCa events, including adverse characteristics, biochemical recurrence, metastatic progression, and mortality

Immunological markers that predict radiation toxicity

- Therapeutic doses of radiation lead to large amounts of cellular damage; the immune response plays a major role in dealing with it
- The resident immune cells produce pro-inflammatory cytokines and growth factors, eventually leading to chronic inflammation, which may induce the genomic instability which in turn perpetuates the inflammation

Current (2002) status of various predictive assays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assay</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
<th>Status (2002)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tissue adenoma urine (TAU)</td>
<td>Prostate adenoma antigens in urine, orthogonal with prostate biopsy</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tissue growth assay (TGA)</td>
<td>Assay for tissue tumor burden for lesion-specific modeling, may correlate with clinical outcomes</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chromosome aberrations</td>
<td>Assessment of chromosome abnormalities</td>
<td>Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urine-based PCA2:ERG</td>
<td>Assay of urine biomarkers</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apoptosis assay</td>
<td>Quantitative analysis of radiation apoptosis</td>
<td>Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oncogene expression</td>
<td>Assay of specific expression of oncogenes</td>
<td>Study/Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAF activating alleles</td>
<td>Assay of BRAF activating mutations</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth factors</td>
<td>Assay of tissue growth factors</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pho.</td>
<td>Assay of phospho-proteins</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m6mE</td>
<td>Assay of m6mE RNA methylation</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Immunological markers that predict radiation toxicity

- Modulating immune cells during the radiation-induced inflammatory response may provide benefits to avoid a severe fibrosis outcome
- Several studies for different cancer types implicate immunological markers for radiation sensitivity such as transforming growth factor TGFβ and associated genes

Current (2002) status of various predictive assays

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<th>Assay</th>
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<tr>
<td>Iodine-131 (I-131)</td>
<td>Radiolabeled antibodies</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palomino assay</td>
<td>Immunohistochemical staining</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSMA</td>
<td>Immunohistochemical staining</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKC</td>
<td>Immunohistochemical staining</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOS</td>
<td>Immunohistochemical staining</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNA breaks</td>
<td>Assay of DNA double-strand breaks</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TGFβ</td>
<td>Assay of TGFβ expression</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFKB</td>
<td>Assay of NFKB expression</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNFα</td>
<td>Assay of TNFα expression</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL-6</td>
<td>Assay of IL-6 expression</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL-8</td>
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<td>IL-10</td>
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<td>CD4</td>
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<tr>
<td>CD8</td>
<td>Assay of CD8 expression</td>
<td>Clinical</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Technical aspects and costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Technical difficulties</th>
<th>Result of application</th>
<th>Time to results (days)</th>
<th>Initial cost (USD)</th>
<th>Reimbursement cost (USD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fluorescence * *</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Under 1 week</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radiotherapy</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Under 1 week</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemotherapy</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Under 1 week</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immunotherapy</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Under 1 week</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Immunotherapy in treatment of cancer

- Body has a natural mechanism to limit the strength and duration of immune responses with immune checkpoint proteins (e.g., located on the surface of activated T-cells)
- Some tumors can commandeer these proteins and use them to suppress immune responses
- Blocking the activity of immune checkpoint proteins releases the "brakes" on the immune system, increasing its ability to destroy cancer cells

### Immunotherapy in treatment of cancer

- Several immune checkpoint inhibitors have been approved by the FDA
- The first such drug to receive approval, ipilimumab (Yervoy), for the treatment of advanced melanoma
- Other drugs, targeting different checkpoint inhibitors are: nivolumab (Opdivo) and pembrolizumab (Keytruda); approved for treatments of advanced melanoma or advanced lung cancer

### Immunotherapy in treatment of cancer

- Drugs acting through other mechanisms are under development
  - Adoptive cell transfer (ACT) – patient cells with abilities to recognize tumor cells are grown in a lab and re-introduced into the patient in massive quantities
  - Therapeutic antibodies – designed and grown in a lab; several antibody-drug conjugates (ADCs) were FDA approved: ado-trastuzumab emtansine (Kadcyla) for the treatment of some types of breast cancer; brentuximab vedotin (Adcetris) for Hodgkin lymphoma and a type of non-Hodgkin T-cell lymphoma; ibritumomab tiuxetan (Zevalin) for a type of non-Hodgkin B-cell lymphoma

### Immunotherapy in treatment of cancer

- Cost is prohibitive for many patients:
  - 12 new oncology treatments approved in 2012, 11 were priced above $100,000 for one year of treatment
  - Opdivo, approved for both melanoma and lung cancer, is priced at $12,500 a month, or about $150,000 for a year of treatment; Keytruda, approved for the treatment of metastatic melanoma, will cost about the same
  - Provenge (sipuleucel-T), a series of 3 immunotherapy vaccines approved in 2010; improves median overall survival of men with advanced prostate cancer by 4.1 months, is priced at $93,000 per patient
  - Patients take the drug until disease progression or unacceptable toxicity

### Summary

- Despite a substantial research effort over 25 years, very few prognostic markers and virtually no predictive assays have been established in routine clinical radiation oncology
- New approaches concentrating on biological markers as opposed to cellular assays are promising due to possibility of acquiring large datasets
- Immunotherapy is a fast-growing and promising field; so far works only for limited number of patients
References

- Predictive assays and their role in selection of radiation as the therapeutic modality, IAEA, VIENNA, 2002
- S.N Bentzen, From Cellular to High-Throughput Predictive Assays in Radiation Oncology: Challenges and Opportunities, Semin Radiat Oncol 18:75-88, 2008
- Michael S. Leapman and Peter R. Carroll, New Genetic Markers for Prostate Cancer: Urologic Clinics of North America 43, 2016, pp. 7-15

Beware of the bystander effect!