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DISSERTATION

Detection of adult stem cells in the human thyroid gland by cell
and molecular biology techniques

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To my parents

Στους γονείς μου

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Abbreviations

AFP:	Alpha Fetoprotein
ALB:	Albumin
APC:	Allophycocyanin
Bcl-2:	B-cell leukemia/lymphoma 2 (cell proliferation marker)
BSA:	Bovine Serum Albumin
cDNA:	complementary Desoxyribonucleic Acid
°C:	Degree Celsius
DMEM:	Dulbecco's Modified Eagle Medium
DNA:	Desoxyribonucleic Acid
dNTPs	Deoxynucleotide Triphosphates
EDTA:	Ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid
EG:	Embryonic Germ cell
ERK-1	Extracellular signal Regulated Kinase 1
ES:	Embryonic Stem cell
FACS:	Fluorescence activated cell sorting
FCS:	Fetal Calf Serum
FISH:	Fluorescent <i>In Situ</i> Hybridization
FITC:	Fluorescein iso-thiocyanate
FRTL5:	Fischer Rat Thyroid Low serum 5 (thyroid cell line)
*g	G-Force (unit of measurement of rotation speed of a centrifuge)
HBSS:	Hank's Balanced Salt Solution
HeLa:	Human cervix carcinoma cell line (initials of Henrietta Laks, the patient from whom the cell line originates)
HNF4 α .	Hepatocyte Nuclear Factor alpha
IMPDH:	Inosine Monophosphate Dehydrogenase
KCL:	Potassium Chloride
LIF:	Leukemia Inhibitory Factor
MCM2	Minichromosome Maintenance deficient 2 (cell proliferation marker)
MEM:	Minimum Essential Aminoacids
MgCl ₂	Magnesium chloride
MgSO ₄	Magnesium sulfate
MIB-1	Mindbomb homolog 1 (cell proliferation marker)

μM	Micromol per Liter Solution (unit of concentration)
M-MLV-RT	Moloney Murine Leukemia Virus Reverse Transcriptase
ml:	milliliter
MODY:	Maturity Onset Diabetes of Youth
mRNA:	messenger Ribonucleic Acid
mU/ml:	milliunits per milliliter
μg :	Mikrogramm
NaOH:	Sodium hydroxide
NIS:	Sodium-Iodide Symporter
PAX8	Paired box gene 8
PBS:	Phosphate Buffered Saline
PCR:	Polymerase Chain Reaction
PE	Phycoerythrin
pH:	potentia Hydrogenii (negative decimal logarithm of hydrogen-ion concentration)
PI:	Propidium iodide
TSH:	Thyroidea-stimulating-hormone
Rpm:	Rounds per minute
RPMI 1640:	Roswell Park Memorial Institute (Culture Medium)
RT:	Reverse Transcription
SACK:	Suppression of Asymmetric Cell Kinetics
SCN:	Solid Cell Nest
TBE:	Tris-Borate EDTA
TBS:	Tris Buffered Saline
Tg:	Thyroglobulin
TPO:	Thyroid Peroxidase
UV:	Ultraviolet
Xs:	Xanthosine

5 Summary

Adult stem cells are undifferentiated cells found in differentiated tissues that can renew and (with certain limitations) differentiate to yield all the specialized cell types of the tissue from which they originated (6). They have been proven to exist in several differentiated human tissues but not in the thyroid. In the present work this hypothesis was tested using primary thyroid cell cultures and histology slides obtained from human goitres after thyroidectomy.

A set of stem cell markers was selected which characterise either pluripotent stem cells (Oct4) or multipotent endodermal stem cells (HNF4 α , GATA-4, AFP), since the main cells which constitute the thyroid gland, the thyroid follicular cells, are of endodermal origin. Using reverse transcription PCR, immunocytochemistry, immunohistochemistry and flow cytometry, cells were detected within the thyroid, which express three of the above mentioned markers (Oct4, GATA-4 and HNF4 α). These cells display two of the basic three stem cell properties: Undifferentiated state (demonstrated by expression of pluripotency markers) and self-renewal capacity (demonstrated by the ability of the cells to survive in culture even after an increased number of passages). The third stem cell property (multilineage differentiation potential) could not be experimentally demonstrated since all attempts to isolate the cells by fluorescence-activated cell sorting and subsequently culture them or to selectively increase their numbers by suppression of asymmetric stem cell kinetics were unsuccessful.

These cells are very rare and cannot be found in differentiated thyroid cell lines such as the FRTL5 cell line or in established thyroid carcinoma cell lines, such as the HTC thyroid follicular carcinoma cell line and the HTh74 thyroid anaplastic carcinoma cell line. In co-culture with thyrocytes, they can be maintained in vitro for several passages. The role of TSH, the main stimulator of thyroid cell growth, in the propagation and differentiation of the cells was analyzed by stimulation experiments, using varying TSH concentrations. High-dose TSH treatment (200 mU/ml) led to a 5-6-fold increase in GATA-4 expression, however no effect on Oct4 or HNF4 α expression was observed. This finding suggests that TSH might have a regulatory role regarding the growth and differentiation of the GATA-4-expressing subpopulation of thyroid cell progenitors, however its exact effect on the whole thyroid differentiation process remains unclear.

The main outcome of this work is the identification within the human thyroid gland of a population of thyroid cell progenitors which is clearly distinct from normal, differentiated thyrocytes. These cells originate from the same embryonic layer as thyroid follicular cells and

they are not terminally differentiated. Further experiments are needed to better characterise them and to determine under which conditions they grow, divide, differentiate into thyrocytes and possibly become tumorigenic.

Zusammenfassung in deutscher Sprache

Erwachsene Stammzellen („adult stem cells“) sind undifferenzierte Zellen, die in differenzierten Geweben vorhanden sind. Sie können propagieren und (unter bestimmten Bedingungen) in den verschiedenen Zellsorten des Ursprunggewebes differenzieren. Die Existenz solcher Zellen ist in verschiedenen differenzierten Geweben bereits nachgewiesen worden, in der Schilddrüse allerdings bisher noch nicht. Bei der vorliegenden Arbeit wurde dieser Hypothese anhand primärer Schilddrüsenzellkulturen und histologischer Schnitte, die aus menschlichen Strumen nach Thyroidektomie stammten, nachgegangen.

Die follikulären Schilddrüsenzellen, die den wichtigsten und zahlreichsten Zellbestand der Schilddrüse ausmachen, kommen aus dem Entoderm. Daher wurde eine Kombination von Stammzellmarker gewählt, die entweder pluripotente Stammzellen (Oct4) oder multipotente entodermale Stammzellen (HNF4 α , GATA-4, AFP) charakterisieren. Durch den Einsatz von RT-PCR, Immunzytochemie, Immunhistochemie und Durchflusszytometrie wurden Zellen detektiert, die drei der oben genannten Stammzellmarker (Oct4, GATA-4, HNF4 α) exprimieren. Diese Zellen stellen zwei der drei elementaren Stammzellmerkmale dar: Undifferenzierte Lage (demonstriert durch Expression von Markern für Pluripotenz) und Eigenvermehrungskapazität (demonstriert durch die Fähigkeit der Zellen mehrere Kulturpassagen zu überleben). Ein weiteres Stammzellmerkmal, das Differenzierungspotenzial in unterschiedlichen Abstammungszelllinien, konnte nicht experimentell nachgewiesen werden. Das lag daran, dass Versuche die Zellen durch FACS zu isolieren und anschließend zu kultivieren oder ihre Zahlen innerhalb der primären Zellkulturen durch Suppression der asymmetrischen Zellkinetik selektiv zu erhöhen, nicht erfolgreich waren.

Diese Zellen sind sehr rar und in differenzierten Schilddrüsenzelllinien, wie die FRTL5 Zellen, oder in etablierte Schilddrüsenkarzinomzelllinien, wie die HTh74 und die HTH Zelllinien, nicht zu finden. In Cokultur mit Thyreozyten sind sie nach mehreren Passagen in vitro nachweisbar. Die Rolle von TSH (der wichtigste Anreger des Schilddrüsenzellwachstums) bei der Vermehrung und Differenzierung der Stammzellen wurde durch Stimulationsexperimente analysiert, wobei unterschiedliche TSH Konzentrationen verwendet wurden. Die Behandlung mit einem erhöhten TSH Konzentration (200 mU/ml) führte zu einer Steigerung der GATA-4 Expression um das 5-6 fache, es war jedoch kein Einfluss auf die Oct-4 oder HNF4 α Expression zu sehen. Diese Befunde weisen auf eine regulierende Funktion des TSH beim Wachstum der

GATA-4 positiven Gruppe von Schilddrüsenvorläuferzellen hin. Sein exakter Effekt auf dem gesamten Prozess der Schilddrüsendifferenzierung bleibt jedoch unklar.

Das wichtigste Ergebnis dieser Arbeit ist die Identifizierung einer Gruppe von Schilddrüsenvorläuferzellen in der menschlichen Schilddrüse die eindeutig von den normalen, differenzierten Thyreozyten zu unterscheiden sind. Diese Zellen entstammen aus dem gleichen Keimblatt wie die follikulären Schilddrüsenzellen (Entoderm) sie sind aber nicht endgültig differenziert. Weitere Experimente sind notwendig, um die Zellen besser zu charakterisieren und um festzustellen, unter welchen Bedingungen sie wachsen, differenzieren und ein eventuelles onkogenes Potenzial darstellen.

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Erklärung

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