

Aus dem Institut für medizinische Immunologie
der Medizinischen Fakultät der Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin

DISSERTATION

CC chemokine receptor 2 is relevant for CD8-induced graft-versus-
host disease but not for graft-versus-tumor activity

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von

Theis Helge Terwey

aus Heidelberg

Gutachter: 1. Prof. Dr. med. H.-D. Volk

2. Prof. Dr. rer. nat. K. Ulrichs

3. Prof. Dr. rer. nat. R. Schwinzer

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Summary

Allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT) is a well-established therapy for a variety of malignant and non-malignant disorders of the hematopoietic system and for certain solid tumors. One of the major complications limiting the success and wider application of allogeneic HSCT is the occurrence of acute graft-versus-host disease (GVHD), which is a rapidly progressive illness with epithelial damage of gut, liver, skin, and lung, immunosuppression and cachexia. GVHD is mediated by alloreactive donor T cells contained in the graft and can be prevented by depletion of these T cells prior to transfer. However, alloreactive donor T cells also mediate the so-called graft-versus-tumor (GVT) effect, which is increasingly being recognized as an important component of the overall anti-tumor effect of an allogeneic HSCT. Therefore, a major focus of current research is to ameliorate GVHD without reducing GVT activity. Recent murine bone marrow transplantation studies suggest that interfering with T cell migration represents an attractive therapeutic approach towards this goal. Three families of migration molecules (selectins, chemokines, integrins, and their respective ligands and receptors) control T cell migration in homeostasis and inflammation, and members of all three families have been identified as important players during GVHD. Recently, especially chemokines and chemokine receptors have been evaluated as possible new targets for GVHD therapy.

In the present study, the role of the inflammatory chemokine receptor CCR2 for donor CD8⁺ T cell migration during GVHD was analyzed in well-established murine bone marrow transplantation models. It was found that recipients of CCR2-deficient (CCR2^{-/-}) CD8⁺ T cells develop significantly less GVHD morbidity and mortality than recipients of wild type CD8⁺ T cells and that this correlates with reduced target organ damage to the gut and liver. A competitive *in vivo* migration assay revealed that CCR2^{-/-} CD8⁺ T cells have an intrinsic migratory defect to the gut and liver, which was previously unknown. Other causes for the reduction in GVHD could be excluded, as alloreactive proliferation, activation, IFN- γ production and *in vitro* cytotoxicity of CCR2^{-/-} CD8⁺ T cells were intact. Importantly, the GVT effect of CCR2^{-/-} CD8⁺ T cells against murine P815 mastocytoma and A20 B cell lymphoma was preserved, which demonstrates that interference with T cell migration by blockade of CCR2 signaling can separate GVHD from GVT activity. These data provide first evidence for a critical role of CCR2 for the control of CD8⁺ T cell migration in a pre-clinical disease model and establish the rationale for the use of CCR2 antagonists possibly in combination with other chemokine receptor antagonists as novel therapeutic tools in GVHD.

Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	<i>Hematopoietic stem cell transplantation.....</i>	1
1.2	<i>Graft-versus-host disease.....</i>	3
1.2.1	Clinical presentation	3
1.2.2	Pathophysiology	4
1.2.3	Prophylaxis and therapy	7
1.3	<i>Graft-versus-tumor activity.....</i>	8
1.4	<i>T cell migration.....</i>	9
1.4.1	Selectins and selectin ligands	10
1.4.2	Chemokines and chemokine receptors	11
1.4.3	Integrins and integrin ligands	14
1.4.4	CC chemokine ligand 2 and CC chemokine receptor 2	15
2	Objective	17
3	Materials and methods.....	19
3.1	<i>Materials</i>	19
3.1.1	Mice.....	19
3.1.2	Tumor cell lines.....	19
3.1.3	Cell lines for generation of retrovirus.....	20
3.1.4	Chemicals and reagents	20
3.1.5	Media and buffers.....	21
3.1.6	Plasticware and other materials	22
3.1.7	FACS antibodies.....	22
3.1.8	MACS antibodies	23
3.1.9	ELISA kits	23
3.1.10	Instruments	23
3.1.11	Software.....	24
3.2	<i>Methods.....</i>	24
3.2.1	General procedures	24
3.2.2	Cell culture	25
3.2.3	Mouse handling, anesthesia and euthanasia.....	25
3.2.4	Preparation of single cell suspensions from mouse organs.....	26
3.2.5	Fluorescence activated cell sorting.....	27
3.2.6	Magnetic cell sorting	28
3.2.7	Generation of tumor cell lines for <i>in vivo</i> bioluminescence imaging	29
3.2.8	Bone marrow transplantation, graft-versus-host disease and tumor induction	31
3.2.9	Assessment of graft-versus-host disease and graft-versus-tumor activity	32
3.2.10	Assessment of graft-versus-host disease target organ damage	34

3.2.11	Competitive migration assay	34
3.2.12	Mixed lymphocyte reaction	34
3.2.13	CFSE assay	35
3.2.14	Intracellular cytokine staining	35
3.2.15	Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay	36
3.2.16	Cytotoxicity assay.....	36
3.2.17	Statistics.....	37
4	Results	38
4.1	<i>CCR2-deficient CD8⁺ T cells induce less graft-versus-host disease.....</i>	38
4.2	<i>CCR2-deficient CD8⁺ T cells induce less damage to the gut and liver.....</i>	39
4.3	<i>CCR2-deficient CD8⁺ T cells have a migratory defect to the gut and liver.....</i>	42
4.4	<i>CCR2-deficient CD8⁺ T cells have no functional defect besides impaired migration</i>	45
4.4.1	Alloreactive proliferation.....	46
4.4.2	Upregulation of activation markers	47
4.4.3	Cytokine production	48
4.4.4	Cytotoxicity	49
4.5	<i>CCR2-deficient CD8⁺ T cells have intact graft-versus-tumor activity.....</i>	50
5	Discussion.....	53
5.1	Overview.....	53
5.2	Survival	53
5.3	Histopathology	56
5.4	Migration.....	57
5.5	Functional assays.....	58
5.6	Graft-versus-tumor activity.....	59
5.7	CC chemokine receptor 2 as potential therapeutic target.....	61
6	Conclusions	64
7	Appendix	65
7.1	References	65
7.2	Abbreviations	77
7.3	Acknowledgments	79
7.4	Lebenslauf.....	81
7.5	Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch	84
7.6	Erklärung	86