Pityriasis Rosea Is Not Associated With Human Herpesvirus 7

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Objective: To examine the proposed association between pityriasis rosea and human herpesvirus 7 (HHV-7).

Design: A retrospective cross-sectional survey.

Setting: University medical center in Switzerland.

Patients: Thirteen patients with pityriasis rosea and 14 persons with normal skin (control subjects).

Main Outcome Measures: Detection of HHV-7–specific DNA sequences and antigen (85-kd phosphoprotein [pp85]) by nested polymerase chain reaction and immunohistochemical analysis, respectively.

Results: Human herpesvirus 7 DNA sequences and expression of the HHV-7–specific immunodominant pp85 antigen were found in 1 (8%) of 13 lesional skin biopsy specimens of pityriasis rosea. The prevalence of HHV-7 DNA sequences and antigens is even slightly lower in lesional skin of patients with pityriasis rosea than in clinically and morphologically normal skin of 14 control persons, in 2 of whom (14%) HHV-7 DNA sequences and antigens could be detected.

Conclusion: The low detection rate of HHV-7 DNA sequences and antigens argues strongly against a causative role for HHV-7 in the pathogenesis of pityriasis rosea.

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PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

We examined 13 skin biopsy specimens of PR lesions (including 4 herald patches) from 13 patients with clinically and histologically proven PR and specimens of histologically normal skin from 14 subjects undergoing plastic surgery. In all cases, the diagnosis of PR was based on a combination of clinical and histological features. Of 13 patients with PR, 12 showed the typical clinical manifestation, with the development of multiple patchy erythematous and scaling skin lesions within days or as much as 2 weeks after the occurrence of a primary plaque. The spontaneous resolution of the lesions within 2 months was observed in all patients. Only 1 patient presented with an atypical manifestation of multiple papular lesions, but the lesions showed histologically typical features of PR and regressed spontaneously after 6 weeks. The histological features of all specimens were compatible with the diagnosis of PR. The median age of patients with PR was 25.8 years (age range, 17-49 years), whereas the median age of the control subjects was 24.3 years (age range, 16-44 years).

On histological examination, all PR lesions showed spongiosis, focal parakeratosis, and some dyskeratotic cells of the epidermis and a mixed perivascular inflammatory infiltrate in the upper dermis. The median time between the onset of the disease and a skin biopsy was 9.3 days (range, 2-17 days). The tissue specimens were routinely fixed in 10% buffered formalin and embedded in paraffin. Informed consent was obtained from all patients. Blood specimens were not available for the evaluation of viral presence in serum or PBMCs.

POLYMERASE CHAIN REACTION

DNA was extracted by proteinase K digestion according to standard procedures as previously described. To avoid contamination and product carryover, the microtome blade was cleaned with xylene after each cut, and DNA extraction, PCR, and gel electrophoresis were done in separate laboratories. Successful amplification of a β-globin phosphoprotein encoded by the U14 gene of HHV-7 and is suitable for detecting HHV-7 in archival, formalin-fixed paraffin-embedded tissues. Because it is directed to a structural component of the virion, reactivity is indicative of active viral infection.

RESULTS

DETECTION OF HHV-7 DNA SEQUENCES

Human herpesvirus 7 DNA sequences were detected in only 1 (8%) of the 13 PR skin biopsy specimens by nested PCR (Figure) and in 2 (14%) of 14 specimens of normal skin. All specimens contained amplifiable β-globin sequences. We note that the prevalence of HHV-7 in normal skin specimens in the present study is lower than that reported previously (63%). The major difference in the 2 groups of specimens relates to the location of the biopsy specimens, which were collected from various body areas of both male and female persons in the present study, in contrast to the use in a previous study of pectoral skin biopsy specimens from women undergoing breast reduction.

IMMUNOHISTOCHEMICAL TECHNIQUE

For immunohistochemical study, we used the monoclonal antibody Mab5E1, which is directed against a phosphorylated protein (85-kd phosphoprotein [pp85]) of the virion tegument of HHV-7. The tissue sections were deparaffinized with xylene and incubated with Mab5E1 (diluted 1:50) for 90 minutes at room temperature. After the sections were washed several times with phosphate-buffered saline solution, the antibody was detected using alkaline phosphatase-antialkaline phosphatase complex (Dako Corporation, Glostrup, Denmark) according to the manufacturer’s protocol. The staining reaction was developed using new fuchsin as chromogen, resulting in a red staining. For counterstaining, hematoxylin solution was briefly added. As a negative control, primary antibody was replaced by phosphate-buffered saline solution.

EXPRESSION OF HHV-7–SPECIFIC ANTIGENS

The expression of HHV-7–specific antigen was detected only in the PR skin biopsy specimens that contained the viral DNA sequences and in 1 of 2 specimens of normal skin harboring the HHV-7 DNA sequence. In all cases, the cells expressing HHV-7 viral antigen pp85 were perivascular cells. Based on morphologic features, the cells expressing HHV-7 antigen represent mononuclear inflammatory cells such as lymphocytes and histiocytes.

COMMENT

Human herpesvirus 7 DNA sequences and cells infected with HHV-7 are present in lesion skin specimens of patients with PR and in clinically and histologically normal skin specimens of healthy persons at comparable levels (1 of 13 persons and 2 of 14 persons, respectively) and with an overall low incidence. The reliability of our experimental approach stems from the findings that PCR and immunohistochemical analysis concordantly detected HHV-7 in the same specimens—those with disease and specimens of normal skin. Current
and varicella-zoster viruses in persons with immunode- 
ness labialis and herpes zoster lesions are frequently ob- 
as is often observed with herpesviruses. For example, her- 
The reasons for the discrepancy are unclear. Whereas 
sequence from different groups of investigators is crucial to demonstrate a causal 
results sharply contrast with those of Drago et al,9 who found HHV-7 DNA sequences in all skin and PBMC specimens analyzed and in plasma specimens from patients with PR at a higher frequency than from healthy persons.

The studies performed at University Hospital, Zurich, 
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singly or doubly infected with human herpesvirus 7 and 6B. Proc Natl Acad 
virus and is related to, but significantly different from, human herpesvirus 6 and 
men of HIV-infected homosexual men? [Retraction of LinJC, LinSC, Mar EC, et 

Inasmuch as a consistency of findings from different 
groups of investigators is crucial to demonstrate a causal 
association between an infectious agent and a disease, 
current results argue strongly against a causative role for 
HHV-7 in the pathogenesis of PR.