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Comparison of Cord Blood Transplantation with Unrelated Bone Marrow Transplantation in Patients Older than Fifty Years

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A B S T R A C T

We retrospectively compared the transplantation outcomes for patients 50 years or older who received umbilical cord blood transplantation (UCBT) with those who received unrelated bone marrow transplantation (UBMT) for hematologic malignancies. A total of 1377 patients who underwent transplantation between 2000 and 2009 were included: 516 received 8/8 HLA allele-matched UBMT, 295 received 7/8 HLA allele-matched UBMT, and 566 received 4/6 to 6/6 HLA-matched UCBT. Adjusted overall survival (OS) was significantly lower in those who underwent UCBT than those who underwent 8/8 HLA–matched UBMT but was similar to that of 7/8 HLA–matched UBMT (the 2-year OS after 8/8 HLA–matched UBMT, 7/8 HLA–matched UBMT, and UCBT were 49% [95% confidence interval (CI), 45% to 55%], 38% [95% CI, 32% to 45%], and 39% [95% CI, 34% to 43%], respectively). However, adjusted OS was similar between 8/8 HLA–matched UBMT and UCBT receiving $\geq .84 \times 10^5$ $CD34^+$ cells/kg among those with acute myeloid leukemia and those with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (the 2-year OS was 49% [95% CI, 43% to 55%], and 49% [95% CI, 41% to 58%], respectively). These data suggest that UCB is a reasonable alternative donor/stem cell source for elderly patients with similar outcomes compared with UBM from 8/8 HLA–matched unrelated donors when the graft containing $\geq .84 \times 10^5$ $CD34^+$ cells/kg is available.

INTRODUCTION

Allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT) is a curative treatment for patients with high-risk hematologic malignancies. The frequency of adverse cytogenetic abnormalities is higher in elderly patients with acute myeloid leukemia (AML) or acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) than in younger patients, and overall survival (OS) after intensive chemotherapy in elderly patients is shorter than that in younger patients [1,2]. Inductions of reduced-intensity and nonmyeloablative stem cell transplantations allow elderly patients to receive allogeneic HSCT [3,4], and these patients have increasingly received this type of transplantation [5]. Only approximately 30% of patients

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have an HLA-identical sibling, and some elderly patients have siblings who cannot serve as a donor because of their age or underlying comorbidities; in such cases, an alternative donor is needed.

HLA-matched unrelated bone marrow or peripheral blood stem cells have been used as an alternative to an HLA-identical sibling donor. Umbilical cord blood has been used more frequently over the past decade, and several studies and meta-analyses have compared the outcomes of umbilical cord blood transplantation (UCBT) with that of unrelated bone marrow transplantation (UBMT) or unrelated peripheral blood stem cell transplantation (UPBSCT) [6-15]. However, the findings of those reports varied, and most of those studies included a small number of elderly patients. To the best of our knowledge, there has been no report that compared the outcomes of elderly patients who received UCBT with those who received UBMT or UPBSCT. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to compare the outcomes of patients 50 years or older who received UCBT with those who received UBMT using the Japanese nationwide registry data.

METHODS

Data Collection

Data regarding transplantations were extracted from the Transplant Registry Unified Management Program system of the Japan Society for Hematopoietic Cell Transplantation [16]. A total of 171 transplantation centers performed unrelated HSCT for adults and reported transplantation data to Japan Society for Hematopoietic Cell Transplantation between 2000 and 2009. All patients gave written informed consent at each transplantation center. The trial was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Patients with acute leukemia or myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS) who were 50 years or older and who received unrelated HSCT between 2000 and 2009 were included. Because the bone marrow was exclusively harvested from volunteer unrelated donors in Japan, cases of peripheral blood stem cell transplantation were not included in this analysis. Only 7 patients received double UCBT; therefore, these patients were also excluded. For the bone marrow recipients, recipients whose HLA matched 8/8 or 7/8 with their donor at the allelic level for HLA-A, HLA-B, HLA-C, and HLA-DRB1 were included. For UCBT, recipients whose HLA matched 4/6 to 6/6 with their donor at the antigen level for HLA-A and HLA-B and at the allelic level for HLA-DRB1, and who received a single unit of umbilical cord blood containing 2.0×10^7 or more total nucleated cells per kilogram of recipient's body weight at cryopreservation were included. Patients who had previously received autologous or allogeneic transplantation were excluded.

A myeloablative conditioning (MAC) regimen was defined as a total busulfan dose of more than 8 mg/kg, total melphalan dose of more than 140 mg/kg, fractionated total body irradiation (TBI) of 8 Gy or more, or single TBI of 5 Gy or more [17,18]. Other conditioning regimen was defined as reduced-intensity conditioning (RIC). Acute leukemia in the first complete remission (CR), refractory anemia with or without ringed sideroblasts, and refractory cytopenia with multilineage dysplasia for MDS were defined as early phase; acute leukemia in the second or subsequent CR were defined as intermediate phase; and all other statuses were defined as advanced phase. The karyotype at diagnosis for AML, ALL, and MDS were classified as previously reported [2,19,20]. The year of transplantation was divided into 2 groups: 2000 to 2004 was defined as the early period and 2005 to 2009 was defined as the recent period. Neutrophil recovery was defined as the first 3 consecutive days in which absolute neutrophil counts rose to greater than or equal to 500/mm^3. Acute graft-versus-host disease (GVHD) was evaluated based on standard criteria [21]. Chronic GVHD was defined according to the classical classification [22]. Relapse was defined as disease recurrence detected by hematological examination or detected by cytogenetic or molecular examination and requiring any treatment. Patients who did not obtain CR after HSCT were defined as patients who had a relapse the next day after HSCT. Nonrelapse mortality (NRM) was defined as death without relapse. OS was defined as the survival time from the date of transplantation to death from any cause or the last follow-up.

Statistical Analysis

The demographic factors and disease characteristics were compared between patients who underwent transplantation with 8/8 HLA–matched unrelated bone marrow, 7/8 HLA–matched bone marrow, and umbilical cord blood using Fisher's exact test for the categorical data and the Mann-Whitney U test for the continuous variables. OS was calculated from the date of transplantation to death from any cause or last follow-up and was estimated by the Kaplan-Meier method. Cox proportional hazards regression model was used for the multivariate analyses. Adjusted comparison of the stem cell source on OS was performed using the Cox proportional hazards regression model. Gray's test was employed for the comparison of cumulative incidence curves for relapse, NRM, neutrophil and platelet recoveries, and GVHD [23]. NRM and relapse were the competing event for each other. For neutrophil and platelet recovery, death before neutrophil or platelet recovery was the competing event; for GVHD, death without GVHD was the competing event. Fine and Gray's proportional hazard regression model was employed for multivariate analyses with competing risks [24]. Multivariate analyses to compare the effect of stem cell source on transplantation outcomes were performed with the consideration of other significant clinical variables in the final models, which were built with the significant variables ($P < .10$) from the univariate analysis, which were then deleted in a stepwise fashion from the model when a variable was not statistically significant ($P > .05$). The stem cell source was added in the final model. The following variables were considered: patient age at transplantation, sex, primary disease (AML versus ALL versus MDS), karyotype at diagnosis (favorable versus intermediate versus adverse), disease status at transplantation (early phase versus intermediate phase versus advanced phase), year of transplantation (early period versus recent period), conditioning regimen (MAC versus RIC), use of TBI, and GVHD prophylaxis (cyclosporine alone versus cyclosporine and other agent versus tacrolimus alone versus tacrolimus and other agent versus other). All tests were 2-sided, and $P < .05$ was considered to indicate statistical significance. Analyses were performed with EZR version 1.20 (Saitama Medical Center, Jichi Medical University) [25], which is a graphical user interface for R version 3.0.2 (R Development Core Team, Vienna, Austria).

RESULTS

Patients and Transplantation Characteristics

Patients and transplantation characteristics are shown in Table 1. A total of 1377 patients were included in this analysis, and of those, 516 patients received 8/8 HLA allele-matched UBMT, 295 patients received 7/8 HLA allelic-matched UBMT, and 566 patients underwent transplantation from 4/6 to 6/6 HLA–matched UCBT. The UCBT recipients were significantly older than the 8/8 or 7/8 HLA–matched UBMT recipients ($P < .001$), and more UCBT recipients underwent RIC or nonmyeloablative transplantation ($P < .001$) and received a TBI-containing conditioning regimen than did the 8/8 or 7/8 HLA–matched UBMT recipients ($P < .001$). More UCBT recipients had advanced phase disease ($P < .001$). Female donor to male recipient transplantation was included in UCBT more than in UBMT ($P < .001$). Compared with those receiving UBMT, more UCBT recipients had AML ($P < .001$) and received GVHD prophylaxis with a single-agent regimen ($P < .001$). The distribution of karyotype at diagnosis was similar (Supplemental Tables 1–3). The distribution of recipients' sex and year of transplantation were similar among the 3 groups. The median duration of follow-up for the surviving patients who underwent transplantation with 8/8 HLA–matched UBMT, 7/8 HLA–matched UBMT, and 4/6 to 6/6 HLA-matched UCBT was 23.7 months (range, 1.8 to 125.2 months), 18.6 months (range, 1.6 to 94.0 months), and 22.3 months (range, .1 to 107.5 months), respectively.

Hematopoietic Recovery

The median time from transplantation to neutrophil recovery in patients who underwent 8/8 HLA–matched UBMT, 7/8 HLA–matched UBMT, and 4/6 to 6/6 HLA–matched UCBT was 17 days (range, 1 to 100 days), 17 days (range, 4 to 169 days), and 24 days (range, 0 to 95 days), respectively. Neutrophil recovery was faster in recipients with early phase disease or intermediate phase disease than in those with advanced phase disease ($P < .001$). MAC was an independent negative predictor for neutrophil engraftment ($P = .007$). The