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Development of an antibody proteomics system using a phage antibody library for efficient screening of biomarker proteins

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ABSTRACT

Proteomics-based analysis is currently the most promising approach for identifying biomarker proteins for use in drug development. However, many candidate biomarker proteins that are over- or under-expressed in diseased tissues are found by such a procedure. Thus, establishment of an efficient method for screening and validating the more valuable targets is urgently required. Here, we describe the development of an "antibody proteomics system" that facilitates the screening of biomarker proteins from many candidates by rapid preparation of cross-reacting antibodies using phage antibody library technology. Using two-dimensional differential in-gel electrophoresis analysis, 16 over-expressed proteins from breast cancer cells were identified. Specifically, proteins were recovered from the gel pieces and a portion of each sample was used for mass spectrometry analysis. The remainder was immobilized onto a nitrocellulose membrane for antibody-expressing phage enrichment and selection. Using this procedure, antibody-expressing phages against each protein were successfully isolated within two weeks. The expression profiles of the identified proteins were then acquired by immunostaining of breast tumor tissue microarrays with the antibody-expressing phages. Using this approach, expression of Eph receptor A10, TRAIL-R2 and Cytokeratin 8 in breast tumor tissues were successfully validated.

These results demonstrate the antibody proteomics system is an efficient method for screening tumor-related biomarker proteins.

1. Introduction

Proteomics-based analysis is the most promising approach for identifying tumor-related biomarker proteins used in the drug development process [1–3]. The technological development of proteomics to seek and identify differentially expressed proteins in disease samples is expanding rapidly. However, in spite of the identification of many candidate biomarkers, the number of biomarker proteins successfully applied to drug development has been limited. The main difficulty is the lack of a methodology to comprehensively analyze the expression or function of many candidate proteins and to efficiently select potential biomarker proteins of interest. To circumvent this problem, an improved technology to efficiently screen the truly valuable proteins from a large number of candidates is desirable.

Monoclonal antibodies are extremely useful tools for the functional and distributional analysis of proteins [4–6]. For example, they can be applied to the specific detection and study of proteins through various techniques including ELISA, Western blotting, fluorescent imaging and tissue microarray analysis (TMA). Of all these techniques, TMA is particularly valuable because it enables the analysis of clinical expression profiles of antigens from many clinical samples [7–11]. However, the common hybridoma-based antibody production is a laborious and time-consuming method. Thus, it is impractical to create antibodies against many differentially expressed proteins identified by proteomics technologies, such as two-dimensional differential in-gel electrophoresis (2D-DIGE) [12–15]. Furthermore, a relatively large amount of antigen (several milligrams) is necessary to produce an antibody (i.e., immunization of animals or screening of positive clones). The

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production of protein on this scale often requires engineering the corresponding gene for heterologous expression, which may require some time to optimize. In this respect, phage antibody library technology is able to construct a large repertoire protein or peptide consisting of hundreds of millions of molecules. Monoclonal antibodies against target antigens are then rapidly obtained from the phage libraries displaying single chain fragment variable (scFv) antibodies *in vitro* [16–21].

However, the amount of protein in spots detected by 2D-DIGE analysis is generally very small (hundreds of nanograms). Therefore, a technology for generating monoclonal antibodies from such small amounts of antigen needs to be developed. There are no reports that describe the successful isolation of antibodies against small amounts of proteins obtained from differential proteome analysis.

Here, we report the establishment of a method for the efficient isolation of scFv antibody-expressing phages from a small amount of protein antigen prepared *via* 2D-DIGE spots using a high quality non-immune mouse scFv phage library [22]. We also describe an efficient method for screening and validating tumor-related biomarker proteins of interest from a number of differentially expressed proteins by expression profiling using TMA and scFv antibody-expressing phages.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Non-immune mouse scFv phage library

Construction of the improved non-immune murine scFv phage library has been described previously [22]. The phage library was prepared from a TG1 glycerol stock containing the scFv gene library.

2.2. Affinity panning using BIAcore® and nitrocellulose membrane

Three different amounts (5000 ng, 50 ng or 0.5 ng) of KDR-Fc chimera (R&D systems Inc., Minneapolis, MN) or a portion of the proteins (1–5 ng) extracted from 2D-DIGE spots were immobilized on a BIAcore sensor chip CM3® (BIAcore, Uppsala, Sweden) or on a nitrocellulose membrane. BIAcore-based panning has been described previously [22]. Membrane-based panning was performed using the Bio-Dot Microfiltration Apparatus (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Hercules, CA). The membrane was incubated with blocking solution (10% skimmed milk, 25% glycerol) for 2 h and then washed twice with 0.1% TBST (Tris-buffered saline containing 0.1% Tween 20). The model phage library (anti-KDR scFv antibody-expressing phages: wild type phage = 1: 100) or the non-immune scFv phage library was pre-incubated with 90% blocking solution at 4 °C for 1 h and then applied to each well. After 2–3 h incubation, the apparatus was washed ten times with TBST. Bound scFv antibody-expressing phages were then eluted with 100 mM triethylamine. The eluted phages were incubated in log phase *E. coli* TG1 cells and glycerol-stocks prepared for further repeat panning cycles. Phage titer was measured by counting the number of infected colony cells on Petrifilm (3M Co., St. Paul, MN).

2.3. Colony direct PCR

After the panning, colonies of phage-infected TG1 were picked up at random as PCR templates. The gene inserts of 16 clones were amplified by PCR using the following primers: primer-156 (5′-CAACGTGAAAAAATTATTATTCGC-3′) and primer-158 (5′-GTAAATGA ATTTTCTGTATGAGG-3′), which anneal to the sequences of pCANTAB5E phagemid vector (GE Healthcare Biosciences AB, Uppsala, Sweden). The size of insert DNA sequence was analyzed by agarose gel electrophoresis.

2.4. Cell lines

Human mammary gland cell line 184A1 (American Type Culture Collection; ATCC, Manassas, VA) was maintained by MEGM Bullet Kit (Takara Bio, Shiga, JAPAN). Mammary gland-derived breast cancer cell line SKBR3 (ATCC) was maintained in McCoy's 5a plus 10% FBS. All cells were grown at 37 °C in a humidified incubator with 5% CO_2.

2.5. 2D-DIGE analysis

Cell lysates were prepared from human mammary gland cell line 184A1 and mammary gland-derived breast cancer cell line SKBR3, and then solubilized with 7 M urea, 2 M thiourea, 4% CHAPS and 10 mM Tris–HCl (pH 8.5). The lysates were labeled at the ratio 50 μg protein: 400 pmol Cy3 or Cy5 protein labeling dye (GE Healthcare Biosciences AB) in dimethylformamide according to the manufacture's protocol. For first dimension separation, the labeled samples (each 50 μg) were combined and mixed with rehydration buffer (7 M urea, 2 M thiourea, 4% CHAPS, 2% DTT, 2% Pharmalyte (GE Healthcare Biosciences AB)) and applied to a 24-cm immobilized pH gradient gel strip (IPG-strip pH 5–6 NL). The samples for the spot-picking gel were prepared without labelling by Cy-dyes. For the second dimension separation, the IPG-strips were applied to SDS-PAGE gels (10% polyacrylamide and 2.7% N,N′-diallyltartardiamide gels). After electrophoresis, the gels were scanned with a laser fluoroimager (Typhoon Trio, GE Healthcare Biosciences AB). The spot-picking gel was scanned after staining with Flamingo solution (Bio-Rad). Quantitative analysis of protein spots was carried out with Decyder-DIA software (GE Healthcare Biosciences AB). For the antigen spots of interest, spots of 1 × 1 mm in size were picked using an Ettan Spot Picker (GE Healthcare Biosciences AB). Proteins were extracted by solubilizing the picked gel pieces using 88 mM sodium periodide. Protein volumes were determined by BSA standard in Colloid Gold Total Protein staining (Bio-Rad).

2.6. In-gel tryptic digestion

Spots of 1 mm × 1 mm in size were picked using an Ettan Spot Picker and digested with trypsin as described below. The gel pieces were then destained with 50% acetonitrile/50 mM NH_4HCO_3 for 20 min twice, dehydrated with 75% acetonitrile for 20 min, and then dried using a centrifugal concentrator. Next, 5 μl of 20 μl/ml trypsin (Promega, Madison, WI) solution was added to each gel piece and incubated for 16 h at 37 °C. Three solutions were used to extract the resulting peptide mixtures from the gel pieces. First, 50 μl of 50% (v/v) acetonitrile in 1% (v/v) aqueous trifluoroacetic acid (TFA) was added to the gel pieces, which were then sonicated for 5 min. Next, we collected the solution and added 80% (v/v) acetonitrile in 0.2% TFA. Finally, 100% acetonitrile was added for the last extraction. The peptides were dried and then resuspended in 10 μl of 0.1% TFA before being cleaned using ZipTip™ μC_{18} pipette tips (Millipore, Billerica, MA). The tips were wetted with three washes in 50% acetonitrile and equilibrated with three washes in 0.1% TFA, then the peptides were aspirated 10 times to ensure binding to the column. The column and peptides were washed three times in 0.1% TFA before being eluted in 1 μl of 80% acetonitrile/0.2% TFA.

2.7. Mass spectrometry (MS) and database search

The tryptic digests (0.6 μl) were mixed with 0.6 μl α-cyano-4-hydroxy-trans-cinnamic acid saturated in a 0.1% TFA and acetonitrile solution (1:1vol/vol). Each mixture was deposited onto a well of a 96-well target plate and then analyzed by matrix-assisted laser desorption ionization time-of-flight mass spectrometry (MALDI-TOF/MS; autoflexII, Bruker Daltonics, Billerica, WI) in the Reflectron mode. The mass axis was adjusted with calibration peptide (BRUKER DALTNICS) peaks (M/z 1047.19, 1296.68, or 2465.19) as lock masses. Bioinformatic databases were searched to identify the proteins based on the tryptic fragment sizes. The Mascot search engine (http://www.matrixscience.com) was initially used to query the entire theoretical tryptic peptide as well as SwissProt (http://www.expasy.org/, a public domain database provided by the Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics, Geneva, Switzerland). The search query assumed the following: (i) the peptides were monoisotopic (ii) methionine residues may be oxidized (iii) all cysteines are modified with iodoacetamide.

2.8. Phage ELISA using nitrocellulose membrane

Phage ELISA using scFv antibody-expressing phages was performed as previously described [22]. Briefly, phage-infected TG1 clones were picked, monocloned in a Bio-Dot Microfiltration Apparatus and scFv antibody-expressing phages propagated. The supernatants containing scFv antibody-expressing phages were incubated with immobilized proteins (~1 ng) extracted from 2D-DIGE spots. scFv antibody-expressing phages bound to 2D-DIGE spots were visualized using HRP-conjugated anti-M13 monoclonal antibody (GE Healthcare Biosciences AB).

2.9. Immunohistochemical staining using scFv antibody-expressing phages

Human breast cancer and normal TMA (Super Bio Chips, Seoul, South Korea & Biomax, Rockville, MD) were deparaffinated in xylene and rehydrated in a graded series of ethanol. Heat-induced epitope retrieval was performed in while keeping Target Retrieval Solution pH 9 (Dako, Glostrup, Denmark) temperature following the manufacturer's instructions. Heat-induced epitope retrieval was performed while maintaining the Target Retrieval Solution pH 9 (Dako) at the desired temperature according to the manufacturer's instructions. After heat-induced epitope retrieval treatment, endogenous peroxidase was blocked with 0.3% H_2O_2 in TBS for 5 min followed by washing twice in TBS. TMA were incubated with 5% BSA blocking solution for 15 min. The slides were then incubated with the primary scFv antibody-expressing phages (10^{12} CFU/ml) for 60 min. After washing three times with 0.05% TBST, each series of sections was incubated for 30 min with ENVISION + Dual Link (Dako), washed three times in TBST. The reaction products were rinsed twice with TBST, and then developed in liquid 3,3′-diaminobenzidine (Dako) for 3 min. After the development, sections were washed twice with distilled water, lightly