Effect of GATA Transcription Factors on Cadmium Toxicity in Human Proximal Tubular Cells

Jin-Yong Lee,* Maki Tokumoto,* Gi-Wook Hwang,* and Masahiko Satoh*.

*Laboratory of Pharmaceutical Health Sciences, School of Pharmacy, Aichi Gakuin University, 1-100 Kasumoto-cho, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya 464-8650, Japan; *Laboratory of Molecular and Biochemical Toxicology, Graduate School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Tohoku University, Sendai 980-8578, Japan

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Cadmium (Cd) is an environmental toxic heavy metal that causes renal dysfunction. Cd triggers renal dysfunction through proximal tubular cell toxicity. Our previous study demonstrated that Cd changed the activities of various transcription factors in human proximal tubular HK-2 cells. Interestingly, several GATA family members were included in the transcription factors whose activities were decreased by Cd treatment. The GATA family has diverse roles in cell proliferation, tissue development, disease regulation, and carcinogenesis. In this study, we examined whether knockdown of GATA family members affected the viability of HK-2 cells. The single knockdown of GATA1, GATA3 or GATA6 using siRNA significantly decreased HK-2 cell viability. In particular, GATA6 knockdown led to the greatest effect on HK-2 cells viability. Cd increased mRNA levels of GATA3 and GATA6 but did not affect that of GATA1. The GATA family may regulate the expression of downstream factors involved in common pathway. Therefore, the effect of combined knockdown of GATA1/3/6 on the viability of HK-2 cells was examined. Our results indicated that the effect on HK-2 cell viability following knockdown of multiple GATA family members was comparable to the single knockdown of GATA6. These results suggest, therefore, that multiple GATA family members may be involved in modulating Cd renal toxicity through a common pathway.

Key words: cadmium, GATA family, HK-2 cells, multiple knockdown

INTRODUCTION

Cadmium (Cd) is a toxic heavy metal that bioaccumulates in the human body. In humans the biological half-life of Cd is long (10–30 years), and Cd accumulates at high concentrations in the kidney.1-3 Although Cd bound to the metal binding protein, metallothionein, does not show a toxic effect, a high concentration of the free form of Cd induces cytotoxicity.4 Cd filtered by glomeruli is reabsorbed through proximal tubules, and as a consequence the proximal tubular cell is the target of Cd toxicity.5-7 Our previous studies demonstrated that Cd alters levels of transcription factors in human proximal tubular HK-2 cells.5,6 Furthermore, gene expression changes induced by Cd led to the alteration of transcription factor activity and affected cell viability.5,6 Among the transcription factors whose activities were decreased by Cd treatment, there were four GATA family members.6 The GATA family is composed of six members that regulate diverse processes in the development and differentiation of various tissues.7,8 Based on their expression profiles, GATA1/2/3 are classified as hematopoietic transcription factors, and GATA4/5/6 are involved in the differentiation of endodermal tissues.7,9 Recently, it has been reported that mutations in GATA genes are related to several diseases such as hypoparathyroidism, sensorineural deafness and renal insufficiency (HDR) syndrome, congenital heart disease (CHD) and chronic or acute myeloid leukemia.9,10 In some cases, several GATA family members are involved in one common disease; for example, GATA1/2/3 are involved in leukemia and GATA 4/5/6 are involved in CHD.9,10 In this study, we determined the effect of suppression of individual GATA family members and multiple knockdowns of several GATA family members on HK-2 cell viability.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Cell Culture and Treatment  HK-2 cells purchased from ATCC (Manassas, MA, USA) were cultured in Dulbecco’s Modified Eagle’s Medium/Nutrient Mixture F-12 Ham (DMEM/F-12) (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA), supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS) (Gibco, Grand Island, NY, USA), 25 µg/mL streptomycin (DS Pharm, Osaka, Japan), 25 U/mL penicillin (DS Pharm), 10 ng/mL EGF (epidermal growth factor; Sigma-Aldrich), 1% Insulin-Transferrin-Selenium-X (Gibco), and 5 ng/mL hydrocortisone at 37°C in a humidified incubator containing 5% CO2.

siRNA Transfection  The following Silencer Select Pre-designed siRNAs were purchased from Ambion (Grand Island, NY, USA): s5594 and s5595 for human GATA1; s5599 and s5600 for human GATA3; and s5606 and s5607 for human GATA6. Control siRNA (Silencer Select Negative Control #1 siRNA) was also purchased from Ambion. siRNA transfection was performed using Lipofectamine RNAiMAX (Invitrogen,
Grand Island, NY, USA). After the siRNA mixture was incubated for 15 min with Lipofectamine RNAiMAX and Opti-MEM I Reduced Serum Medium (Opti-MEM; Gibco), HK-2 cells were transfected with the siRNA mixture (1 nM siRNA/sequence, 0.2% Lipofectamine RNAiMAX, 10% Opti-MEM) for 24 h or 48 h.

**RNA Extraction** Cells were washed twice with ice-cold PBS(-) [phosphate-buffered saline(-)] and total RNA was extracted with the PureLink™ RNA Mini Kit (Ambion) following the manufacturer’s instructions. RNA was quantified and purity was determined using the BioSpec-nano (Shimadzu, Kyoto, Japan).

**Real Time RT-PCR** Total RNA was incubated with the PrimeScript reverse transcription (RT) Reagent Kit (Perfect Real Time) (Takara Bio, Osaka, Japan) to generate cDNA. Real-time PCR was performed with SYBR Premix Ex TaqII (Takara Bio) in a 96-well plate. The PCR conditions were as follows: 10 s hot-start at 95°C followed by 40 cycles of 5 s at 95°C and 30 s at 60°C. Gene expression was normalized to GAPDH mRNA levels. The oligonucleotide sequences of the primers were as follows: sense, 5′-CCAGCTCTTGGAGACCTTTA-3′, and antisense, 5′-CTATTTGGGACAGGGATGA-3′, for the human GATA1 gene; sense, 5′-AAGGCCCAGGAGGATGAC-3′, and antisense, 5′-CGGTTCTGTCCGTTCATTTT-3′, for the human GATA3 gene; sense, 5′-GTGCCCAGACCACTTGATAT-3′, and antisense, 5′-TGGGATCTAGGGAATGGAAT-3′, for the human GATA6 gene; sense, 5′-GACCCTGTAAGGCTGAGAGA-3′, and antisense, 5′-TGGTGAAGACGCACCAGTGA-3′, for the human GAPDH gene.

**Cell Viability** HK-2 cells treated with siRNA mixture were grown in 96-well plates and cultured for 24 h and 48 h. After siRNA transfection, the medium was replaced with fresh 10% FBS-DMEM/F-12 containing MTI [3-(4,5-Dimethyl-2-thiazoyl)-2,5-diphenyl-2H-tetrazolium bromide; Dojindo Laboratories, Kumamoto, Japan] and incubated for another 4 h at 37°C. After removing the medium, 100 µL dimethyl sulfoxide (FUJIFILM Wako Pure Chemical Co., Osaka, Japan) was added to 96-well flat-bottomed plates and incubated for 4 h at 37°C. The absorbance at 570 nm was measured using an iMark Microplate Reader (Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA).

**Cd Treatment** HK-2 cells were grown in plates at a density of 250 cells/mm² and cultured for 48 h. After siRNA transfection, the medium was replaced with fresh 10% FBS-DMEM/F-12 containing MTI [3-(4,5-Dimethyl-2-thiazoyl)-2,5-diphenyl-2H-tetrazolium bromide; Dojindo Laboratories, Kumamoto, Japan] and incubated for another 4 h at 37°C. After removing the medium, 100 µL dimethyl sulfoxide (FUJIFILM Wako Pure Chemical Co., Osaka, Japan) was added to 96-well flat-bottomed plates and incubated for 4 h at 37°C. The absorbance at 570 nm was measured using an iMark Microplate Reader (Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA).

**Statistical Analysis** Statistical analyses were performed using one or two-way ANOVA. When the F value was significant (P < 0.05), Bonferroni’s multiple t-test was performed for post-hoc comparison (P < 0.05).

**RESULTS**

**Effect of GATA Single Knockdown on the Viability of HK-2 Cells** Our previous study demonstrated that treatment with 40 µM Cd for 3 h decreased the transcriptional activity of four GATA family members: GATA1, 81%; GATA 3, 64%; GATA 2, 63%; and GATA6, 58%. To elucidate the effect of the decrease in cellular GATA levels on HK-2 cell viability, we examined the effect of siRNA treatment against individual GATA genes on cell viability. The treatment of GATA1 siRNA for 24 h decreased the level of GATA1 mRNA by approximate-ly 30% (Fig. 1A) and correlated with a significant decrease in cell viability (Fig. 1B). However, after 48 h treatment with siRNA there was no effect on viability (Fig. 1C). Treatment with siRNA against GATA3 for 24 h decreased the level of GATA3 mRNA by approximately 45% (Fig. 1D). GATA3 siRNA treatment for 24 h and 48 h decreased cell viability by 10–15% (Figs. 1E and F). GATA6 siRNA treatment for 24 h suppressed the expression of GATA6 by more than 70% (Fig 1G). Treatment with siRNA against GATA6 decreased cell viability by approximately 30% at 24 h and 15% at 48 h (Figs. 1H and I). GATA2 siRNA treatment did not affect the cell viability (data not shown). These results suggest that the suppression of some GATA family members contributed to cellular toxicity in HK-2 cells.

**Effect of Cd on the Expression of GATA Family Genes in HK-2 Cells** Next, we examined the effect of Cd on GATA family gene expression in HK-2 cells. We have previously shown that treatment with 40 µM Cd for 3 h decreased the activities of GATA transcription factors in HK-2 cells. Therefore, the mRNA levels of individual GATA family members were examined in HK-2 cells treated with 40 µM Cd for 1–6 h. The mRNA level of GATA1 was unchanged by Cd treatment; however, there was a significant increase in the mRNA levels of GATA3 and GATA6 following Cd treatment (Figs. 2A, B, C). These results suggest that the effect of Cd on GATA family transcriptional activity was not because of a decrease in mRNA levels and indicates that Cd may have a posttranslational effect on GATA transcription factors.

**Effect of Multiple Knockdown of GATA Family Members on the Viability of HK-2 Cells** Finally, we examined the effect of multiple knockdown of GATA family members on HK-2 cell viability. Simultaneous introduction of siRNAs targeting GATA1, GATA3, and GATA6 resulted in the reduction of about 40% for GATA1, 70% for GATA3, and 90% for GATA6 mRNA (Figs. 3A, B, C). In addition, treatment with multiple GATA siRNAs for 24 h resulted in 40% inhibition of cell viability, and treatment for 48 h suppressed cell viability by 10% (Figs. 3D and E).

**DISCUSSION**

The GATA family binds to the (G/A)GATA(G/A) motif on DNA, regulating expression of various genes. Mouse embryos in which GATA family members, other than GATA5, are deficient leads to lethality. In this study, among the genes encoding GATA proteins, GATA1, GATA3 and GATA6 were knocked down with siRNA and the effect on cell viability was examined. Single knockdown of three GATA family members resulted in a decrease in cell viability. This was particularly apparent after 24 h treatment with GATA6 siRNA that suppressed cell viability by about 30%. Individual GATA family members may be attributed to specific diseases but may also collectively be involved in the same disease. In this study therefore, we examined the viability of HK-2 cells treated with multiple GATA siRNAs. The combination of siRNAs against GATA1, GATA3 and GATA6 led to a 40% and 10% inhibition of cell survival after 24 h and 48 h respectively. The effect on survival with the multiple knockdown was similar to the single knockdown of GATA6. Therefore, it is conceivable that the three GATA family members studied here are involved in Cd toxicity in proximal tubular cells via the same pathway.
Fig. 1. Effect of Single GATA siRNA on the Viability of HK-2 Cells

HK-2 cells were treated with control siRNA, GATA1, GATA3, or GATA6 siRNA for 24 h and 48 h. mRNA levels of GATA1 in HK-2 cells treated with control siRNA or GATA1 siRNA for 24 h (A). Cell viability of HK-2 cells treated with control siRNA or GATA1 siRNA for 24 h (B) and 48 h (C). mRNA levels of GATA3 in HK-2 cells treated with control siRNA or GATA3 siRNA for 24 h (D). Cell viability of HK-2 cells treated with control siRNA or GATA3 siRNA for 24 h (E) and 48 h (F). mRNA levels of GATA6 in HK-2 cells treated with control siRNA or GATA6 siRNA for 24 h (G). Cell viability of HK-2 cells treated with control siRNA or GATA6 siRNA for 24 h (H) and 48 h (I). mRNA levels were normalized to GAPDH. Values are means ± S.D. (n=3). *Significantly different from the control group, P < 0.05.

Fig. 2. Effect of Cd on mRNA Levels of GATA Family Members in HK-2 Cells

HK-2 cells were seeded at a density of 250 cells/mm² and cultured for 48 h. Cells were treated with 40 µM Cd (CdCl₂) in serum-free medium for indicated hours. GATA family gene mRNA levels were examined using real-time RT-PCR. (A) GATA1. (B) GATA3. (C) GATA6. mRNA levels were normalized to GAPDH. Values are means ± S.D. (n = 3). *Significantly different from the control group, P < 0.05.
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Conflict of interest The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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