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Commentary

Overview on Immunoconjugate Development

Louis Weiner*

Department of Cancer Centre, Georgetown University Medical Centre, Washington, USA

DESCRIPTION

Immunoconjugates are anticancer medicines that are highly selective, very effective, and have low toxicity. An antibody that binds to a cancer cell antigen with high specificity, an effector molecule with a high capacity to kill the cancer cell, and a linker that ensures the effector does not separate from the antibody during transit and reliably releases the effector to the cancer cell or tumour stroma are all components of immunoconjugates. The specific and selective delivery of a range of effectors, such as pharmaceutical drugs, radioisotopes, and poisons, to cancer cells is enabled by the high affinity antibody–antigen interaction. Because of severe toxicity to the host, several anticancer compounds are not well tolerated when delivered systemically. This limitation can be circumvented by coupling such cytotoxins to specific antibodies, which cover the drug's harmful effects until it reaches its intended target. Many unconjugated antibodies, on the other hand, are highly selective for a cancer target but have little therapeutic potential and can be repurposed as delivery vehicles for more effective effectors.

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The development of a therapeutic molecule, such as an antibody, that could carry a toxic substance directly to a cancer cell at the turn of the twentieth century. However, it took nearly a century of technological advances to put this principle into practise. Chemotherapy medicines have been created to stop cellular replication with a high degree of specificity for malignant cells among cancer therapies. Such drugs can be quite efficient; nevertheless, the doses that are given must usually be kept low in order to avoid deadly toxicity at the expense of efficacy. Other cancer treatments, such as radiation and cytokine therapy, have run across similar issues.

Further research has resulted in the production of a growing number of unconjugated antibodies that are highly cancer-specific and employed as anticancer medicines. However, while these antibodies are powerful at destroying cancer cells, their clinical utility is generally limited; for example, in the treatment of patients with colorectal cancer, cetuximab, which targets EGFR, demonstrated a 4-month improvement in overall survival. Furthermore, while cetuximab has single-agent effectiveness, some antibodies, such as bevacizumab, are only effective when used in combination with chemotherapy.

Immunoconjugates combine the powerful anticancer effects of cytotoxic drugs with the highly selective cancer targeting properties of monoclonal antibodies to form immunoconjugates. Several immunoconjugates, such as brentuximab inactive user and trastuzumab emtansine, have shown to be quite effective in the treatment of Hodgkin lymphoma, large-cell lymphoma, and breast malignancies. The structure, targets, therapeutic entities, and future perspectives of such compounds in cancer therapy are discussed.

Antigens that are distinguishable from their host cell counterparts (tumour-specific) and/or expressed at higher levels than host cells are often required for the development of therapeutic antibodies (tumour-selective). In addition, the effectiveness of the provided treatment structure's absorption should be evaluated. 12,13 Several B-cell antigens (such as CD20, CD19, CD22, and CD70) for the treatment of haematological malignancies, and HER2 and EGFR for the treatment of certain solid tumours, including breast, gastric, colon, lung, and head and neck cancers, have been used as tumor-selective antibody targets in cancer medicine.

These verified targets have the potential to be appealing antigens for immunoconjugate therapy. Several monoclonal antibodies that are currently used in clinical practise have been developed further as immunoconjugates. As stated previously, an ideal immunotherapy target is highly and specifically expressed on malignant cells, is swiftly and thoroughly internalised by the targeted cells, and its absorption has a negative impact on cell proliferation, survival, and resistance to the cytotoxic agent. Although no perfect target has yet been identified, several immunoconjugate-based approaches have been developed.

This antigen can be absorbed quickly; however, because HER2 is also produced by some normal cells, such as cardiac myocytes, it is not a very selective target. Despite this, immunoconjugates can

Correspondence to: Louis Weiner, Department of Cancer Centre, Georgetown University Medical Center, Washington, USA, E-mail: Louisweiner@georgetown.edu

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effectively target HER2 by connecting an antibody to HER2 to a therapeutic molecule, allowing for highly selective delivery to HER2 expressing tumour cells.