Polysaccharide A: An Immunomodulatory Molecule having Therapeutic Potential against Inflammatory Gut Diseases

Rahul Mittal*

Division of Infectious Diseases, Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90027 USA

The human gut is colonized by tens of microorganisms but it is still not known how the immune system distinguishes between beneficial and pathogenic microbes. The recent findings from the laboratory of Sarkis K. Mazmanian from California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA published in Science [1], provides clue by which our immune system differentiates between the microbiota and enteric infections using Bacteroides fragilis. B. fragilis is an anaerobic gram negative bacillus and is a human gut commensal bacteria [2]. This bacterium is common in the terminal ileum, and prolific in the colon. Earlier it has been demonstrated that B. fragilis uses polysaccharide A (PSA) to prevent activation of immune responses [3-6]. In this study it has been shown that B. fragilis in the absence of PSA (B. fragilis ΔPSA) is unable to colonize the colon of the animals. Further, B. fragilis ΔPSA mounts an inflammatory immune response as indicated by elevation IL-17 immune responses, which can be detrimental to the gut and can cause tissue damage. Treatment of B. fragilis mono-associated animals with PSA prevented T H17 responses suggesting that PSA suppress inflammatory immune responses. The suppression of immune responses by PSA was dependent on toll like receptor-2 (TLR2) expression on T lymphocytes leading to production of IL-10. The results of this study also suggest that Foxp3+ Treg cells are responsible for the downregulation of T H17 immune responses. These workers suggested that “unlike pathogens that trigger inflammatory responses through TLRs to clear infections, symbiotic colonization by B. fragilis is actually enhanced via the TLR pathway”. It was concluded that “PSA evolved to engender host-bacterial mutualism by inducing mucosal tolerance through TLR2 activation of T reg cells”.

Taken together the results of this study provide us with a molecule (PSA) by which B. fragilis colonizes the gut. This study provides clue by which immune system discriminates between beneficial and virulent microorganisms. Since PSA has earlier been shown to protect against intestinal inflammation in a mouse model of experimental colitis [7], therefore, this molecule can be of immense therapeutic potential in down regulating intestinal inflammation observed in gut diseases like inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

References

*Corresponding author: Rahul Mittal Division of Infectious Diseases, MS#51, Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, 4650 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90027, USA, Tel: +1 323-361-5809; E-mail: ramittal@chla.usc.edu

Received January 12, 2012; Accepted January 20, 2012; Published January 24, 2012


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