

Dendritic Cells and Their Role in Cancer Immunotherapy

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ABSTRACT

Dendritic cells (DCs) are antigen presenting cells with unique capability to take up and process antigens in the peripheral blood and tissues. They subsequently migrate to draining lymph nodes where they present these antigens and stimulate naive T lymphocytes. During their life cycle, DCs go through two maturation stages and are referred to as immature and mature cells, respectively. While immature DCs are very good at capturing antigens, mature DCs are suitably equipped to present antigens to T cells and to initiate an immune response. DCs with different phenotypes serve as sentinels in nearly all tissues including the peripheral blood, where they are continuously exposed to antigens. Very small numbers of activated DCs are extremely efficient at generating immune response against viruses, other pathogens and in experimental models of tumors. Protection against infectious microorganisms and probably against tumors is provided by complex interactions of the innate and adaptive immune systems. For the initiation to occur, pathogens must first be recognized as a “danger”. DC possesses specific receptors to detect such danger signals. The unique immune-stimulating properties of DC and the feasibility of manipulating their function arouse much enthusiasm and hold great promise for the treatment of cancer. Early clinical trials showed that DC can induce immune responses in cancer patients. Nonetheless, cancer treatments based on DC administration require further studies that will optimize this promising treatment modality.

Keywords: Dendritic cells, Cancer, Immunotherapy

1. HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF DENDRITIC CELLS DISCOVERY

In 1868 a medical student, Paul Langerhans, applied gold salts to human skin samples and observed a strikingly organized network of cells. Because of their dendritic morphology, he suggested they might be a new type of nerve cells. Although we now know much more about Langerhans cell (LC, a member of the DC family which resides in the epidermis of the skin) functions, their origins have long remained controversial. In the late 19th century, it was suggested that LC might be leukocytes, but it was not until the early 1970s, when DCs were identified and characterized as specialized bone marrow-derived antigen-presenting cells, that some understanding of the functions of LC developed.

Ralph Steinman and Zanvil Cohn identified murine splenic DCs in 1973 (1) and initiated a series of experiments that established lymphoid-tissue derived DCs as potent stimulators of primary immune responses (2-5). The identification of similar cells in non-lymphoid organs gave the start for intense investigations that led not only to better understanding of the immune response but also to performing first clinical trials using DCs in the treatment of human diseases (6-10).

2. CLASSIFICATION OF DENDRITIC CELLS

Dendritic cells represent a heterogeneous cell population, residing in most peripheral tissues, particularly at sites of interface with environment such as skin and mucosa where they represent 1-2% of the total cell population (11, 12). DCs were originally thought to be derived from myeloid precursors due to their functional, phenotypic and morphological similarities with macrophages (13), and the fact that macrophages, granulocytes and DCs can develop from a common precursor in the presence of granulocyte-macrophage colony stimulating factor (GM-CSF) (14). Although the issue of the origin of DCs precursor has not yet been unequivocally resolved, it was found that both the common lymphoid and the common myeloid precursors (CLP and CMP, respectively) had the potential to produce DCs. All the different DC populations identified in mouse thymus and spleen could be produced by all these precursor populations (15).

DCs can be classified either according to their anatomical localization (circulating DCs, LC, mucosal surface-associated DCs, interstitial DCs, veiled cells, interdigitating DCs and thymic DCs), or their differential expression of specific cell surface markers (e.g: CD8, CD4, CD11b, CD11c, DEC-205) and their function. To simplify, the classification of mice and human DCs subtypes are discussed separately.

2.1. Mouse DCs. Murine DCs can be divided into lymphoid, myeloid, plasmacytoid DCs and LC. Lymphoid DCs are characterized by expression of CD8, in contrast to myeloid DCs which lack this marker. The main biological difference of these two main DC groups (lymphoid and myeloid) is the ability of CD8⁺ to induce a Th1-biased cytokine response in reactive CD4⁺ T cells, whereas CD8⁻ DCs tend to induce a Th2-biased response (16). CD8⁺ DCs have the greatest capability to produce IL-12, the fact that may explain their capacity to induce Th1-biased immune response. Uninfected LN tissue of mice contains five different subtypes of DCs. CD4⁻ CD8^{hi} CD205^{hi} CD11b⁻ lymphoid DCs, CD4⁺ CD8⁻ CD205⁻ CD11b⁺ myeloid DCs, CD4⁻ CD8⁻ CD205⁻ CD11b⁺ myeloid DCs, CD4⁻ CD8⁻ CD205⁺ CD11b⁺ myeloid DCs and CD4⁻ CD8^{low} CD205^{hi} CD11b⁺ LC. Plasmacytoid dendritic cells (pDC) are CD11c⁺ CD45RA^{low} MHCII^{hi} CD4^{low} CD8⁺. Mouse pDC are found in all lymphoid organs and as with the human

pDC, it is a potent producer of type I interferons when stimulated by CpG or in viral infections (see below for details) (17).

2.2. Human DCs. In contrast to mouse DCs, there are relatively few studies on the human DCs freshly isolated from tissues. Human DCs do not express CD8, so making it difficult to compare them directly with mouse DCs. Most of our understandings of human DCs are by studying blood derived DCs. Human DCs can be classified as myeloid, pDC and LC. Myeloid DC or DC1 (CD11c⁺ CD123^{lo} CD45RO^{high}) have a myeloid progenitor whereas pDC or DC2 (CD11c⁻ CD123^{high} CD45RO^{low}) are derived from lymphoid precursors, both precursors arising from hematopoietic stem cells.

Currently there are two theories regarding the origin of DCs subtypes in both mouse and humans: a) the functional plasticity model in which DC subtypes might represent different activation states of a single lineage, the functional difference depending completely on local environmental signals or, b) the specialized lineage model in which DCs could be the product of entirely separate developmental lineages (18).

In both mouse and humans, pDC are found in lymphoid tissues (LN, tonsil, spleen, thymus, bone marrow and Peyer's patches) (17), blood (19) and peripheral tissues (during inflammation) including skin (lymphoid hyperplasia of the skin (20), cutaneous SLE (21), psoriasis vulgaris (21) and contact dermatitis (21)), mucosa (allergic mucosa (22)) and tumor infiltrates (melanoma (23), head and neck carcinoma (24) and ovarian carcinoma associated ascites (25)). They play a central role in immunity, not restricted to their ability to produce type I interferons and antiviral immune responses. Blood-borne pathogens can stimulate maturation of pDC which can lead to the bystander maturation of surrounding pDC and myeloid dendritic cells (mDC). Mature pDC can migrate to LN (26), where they activate antigen specific B cells (differentiation into antibody secreting cell (27)), CD4⁺ T cells (priming and restimulation of memory response (28)), CD8⁺ T cells (priming and restimulation of memory response (29)), regulatory T cells (anergy and IL-10 production (30)), mDC (bystander maturation (31)), NK cells (recruitment and activation (32)) and monocytes (DC differentiation (33)).

pDC express CD123 (IL-3 receptor α -chain), respond to IL-3 and express TLR9 that binds to bacterial DNA and unmethylated CpG deoxynucleotides (34, 35). The term plasmacytoid makes these cells distinct from the mDC, but it has not been so far proven that these cells do not have myeloid origin. There is still a lot to be learned and discovered about the DC subsets before we will be able to come up with a clear-cut classification of these cells. Table 1 summarizes some of the surface markers of mDC and pDC in human.

Table 1. Human mDC and pDC surface markers

mDC			pDC		
Markers	TLRs	CLRs	Markers	TLRs	CLRs
CD11c	TLR2	DC-SIGN (CD209)	CD123	TLR7	BDCA-2
CD11b	TLR3	DC-LAMP (CD208)	CD62L	TLR9	Dectin-1
CD13	TLR4	Macrophage Mannose Receptor (CD206)	CD45RA		DEC-205 (CD205)
CD45RO	TLR5	DEC-205 (CD205)	CD36		DC-LAMP (CD208)
CD33	TLR6		MHC class II		
MHC class II	TLR7		CD40		
CD40	TLR8		CD54		
CD54			CD80		
CD80			CD86		
CD86					

CLRs: C-type lectin receptors

3. MATURATION OF DENDRITIC CELLS

During their life cycle, DCs are present either as immature or mature cells. Immature DCs specialize in antigen capture. They express characteristic chemokine receptors for inflammatory chemokines (e.g. MIP-3 α) released at sites of antigen challenge within peripheral tissues (36). Immature DCs capture antigens by phagocytosis, macropinocytosis or endocytosis via interaction with a variety of cell surface receptors (37). These receptors include lectins, immunoglobulin superfamily molecules, Fc receptors, heat shock protein (HSP) receptors, and Toll-like receptors (TLR) (38). A number of these cell surface receptors are down-regulated upon DC maturation, emphasizing their specific roles in antigen uptake (38). Both exogenous and endogenous antigens can be processed by DCs and presented in the context of either MHC class I or II molecules (37, 38).

Endogenous antigens are processed and loaded into the MHC class I exclusively (37, 39). Exogenous antigens are proteolytically processed and loaded into the grooves of MHC class II molecules for the presentation to T cells. In DC only, exogenous antigens may also undergo processing and presentation in association with class I MHC molecules by the classical proteasome and TAP-dependent pathway, a phenomenon referred to as "cross presentation" (40-43). This function is particularly important for *in vivo* priming of CTL responses to antigens that are not synthesized by DC (44).

Maturation of DCs is accompanied by morphological and functional changes in these cells. Table 2 shows differential expression of some important molecules and receptors as well as several properties of immature and mature DC.

Table 2. Differences between immature and mature dendritic cells

Immature DC	Mature DC
Low capacity of antigen presentation	High capacity of antigen presentation
Short dendritic projections	Long dendritic projections
High intracellular MHC class II	High surface MHC class II
High capacity of endocytosis, phagocytosis and macropinocytosis	Low capacity of endocytosis, phagocytosis and macropinocytosis
High expression of CCR1, CCR2, CCR5, CCR6, CXCR1, CXCR2 and CXCR4	High expression of CCR7
Expression of low levels of CD54, 58, 80 (B7-1), 86 (B7-2), PD-L1 (CD274) and PD-L2 (CD273)	Expression of high levels of CD54, 58, 80 (B7-1), 86 (B7-2), PD-L1 (CD274) and PD-L2 (CD273)
Expression of low levels of CD40, CD83 (human but not murine DC), DC-LAMP and p55 TNF receptor subunit	Expression of high levels of CD40, CD83 (human but not murine DC), DC-LAMP and p55 TNF receptor subunit
Induce expansion of regulatory T cells	Induce expansion of helper/cytotoxic T cells

Morphological changes include decreased adhesiveness to extracellular matrix, cytoskeleton reorganization, formation of dendritic projections and acquisition of high cellular motility (45). Abundant dendritic projections on mature DCs increase their surface area and help them in having better contact with T cells. Maturation is also linked with upregulation of MHC class II (46), with co-stimulatory and adhesion molecules needed for the stimulation of T cells and down-regulation of receptors and with molecules used by immature DCs for the uptake of antigens (47). All these morphological and functional changes are to facilitate effective priming of naïve T lymphocytes. Table 3 shows a list of some of the known stimulants that induce DC maturation.

Table 3. Some of the endogenous and exogenous stimulants and their receptors inducing maturation of DCs

Endogenous stimulants	Receptors
ATP and UTP	P2X7 purinergic receptor (48)
Reactive oxygen intermediates	--- (49)
Hyaluronan	CD44 (50, 51)
HSP70, HSP90, and HSP96	CD91 (52)
HSP60	TLR4 (53)
CD40L	CD40 (54)
TNF	TNFR (55)
IL-1 β	IL-1 β R (56)
Type 1 IFNs	IFN-R (57)
Vasoactive intestinal polypeptide	VIP-R (58)
Fas	FasL (59, 60)
CCL19 (MIP-3 β) & CCL21 (SLC) *	CCR7 (61)
Exogenous stimulants	Receptors
Bacterial peptidoglycans, lipoteichoic acids and lipopeptides	TLR 1, TLR 2 and TLR 6 (62)
LPS	TLR 4 (63, 64)
DNA containing unmethylated CpG dinucleotides	TLR 9 (65)
Bacterial and mitochondrial unmethylated RNA	TLR3, 7, 8 (66)
dsRNA	TLR 3 (67, 68)
Viral and bacterial ssRNA	TLR 7/8 (69, 70)
Flagellin	TLR 5 (71)
Mannoproteins	Mannose Receptor (72)
Candida albicans	Mannose Receptor (73) (74)
Toxoplasma gondii-derived cyclophilin	CCR5 (75)
Uropathogenic E.coli & Toxoplasma gondii	TLR11 (76, 77)

*In our work CCL19 (MIP-3 β) & CCL21 (SLC) induce surface expression of CD40 on DC but not maturation as manifested by upregulation of co-stimulatory molecules or characteristic morphological changes (author's unpublished observation).

4. MIGRATION OF DENDRITIC CELLS

With the exception of thymic DCs that are located exclusively within thymus and do not seem to traffic (78), all DC types continuously migrate from blood into tissues and consequently into lymphoid organs. They traffic from one site to the next, performing specific functions at each location (79, 80). An important question for the understanding of DC biology is how DCs populate the periphery in homeostasis, and how they are recruited in inflammation. Myeloid DCs enter the blood stream from bone marrow and circulate as precursor/immature DCs capable of slow constitutive migration required for the maintenance of resident tissue populations (81). In inflammatory circumstances endothelial adhesion molecules and chemokines are up-regulated, facilitating efficient recruitment of circulating DCs to the affected site (82). Upon maturation, DCs reprogram their repertoire of chemokine receptors (83, 84) and after a time necessary for antigen loading they migrate to lymph nodes where they obtain access to the naïve T cell population (85, 86). Plasmacytoid DCs circulate in peripheral blood in precursor form, and comprise a significant leukocyte population in most secondary lymphoid organs (17). They migrate directly from blood to secondary lymphoid organs.

The extravasation of DCs from the blood to peripheral tissues and the movement from peripheral tissues into lymphoid organs requires chemoattractants, including chemokines and non-chemokine chemotactic factors (Table 4-6) (87-89). The anatomic location of inflammatory chemokines within peripheral tissues and constitutive chemokines within lymphoid organs regulate the migration of DCs initially to sites of antigen delivery and ultimately to lymphoid tissues to initiate an immune response.

Rapid recruitment of DCs from blood into inflamed tissues is thought to be a response to the increased requirement for surveillance at the local site (90). At such inflammatory sites, endothelial cell adhesion molecule expression including E- and P-selectin, VCAM-1 and L-selectin ligands is upregulated, mediating DCs tethering and rolling (91, 92). Using radioactive tracing techniques and confocal microscopy *in vivo*, immature, but not mature bone marrow derived DCs accumulated in inflamed ear skin as early as 6 h after intravenous injection (93). Immature and mature DCs differentially express chemokines and their receptors (Table 4 and 6). Similar phenomenon is true for myeloid and plasmacytoid DCs (94). Table 4 shows chemokine receptors expressed by immature and mature DCs and their respective ligands.

Table 4. Chemokine receptors expressed by immature and mature DCs

Immature DC		Mature DC	
Chemokine receptor	Ligand	Chemokine receptor	Ligand
CCR1 (84)	CCL3 (MIP-1 α), CCL4 (MIP-1 β), CCL5 (RANTES)	CCR7 (95)	CCL19 (MIP-3 β), CCL21 (SLC)
CCR2 (84)	CCL2 (MCP-1), CCL7 (MCP-3), CCL8 (MCP-2), CCL13 (MCP-4)	CCR8 (96)	CCL1 (I-309)
CCR3 (97)	CCL5 (RANTES), CCL8 (MCP-2), CCL11 (Eotaxin)	CXCR4 (84)	CXCL12 (SDF-1 α/β)
CCR4 (98)	CCL17 (TARC), CCL22 (MDC)		
CCR5 (84)	CCL3 (MIP-1 α), CCL4 (MIP-1 β), CCL5 (RANTES)		
CCR6 (99)	CCL20 (MIP-3 α)		
CXCR1 (84)	CXCL8 (IL-8)		
CXCR2 (100)	CXCL1 (GRO- α), CXCL5 (ENA-78), CXCL7 (NAP-2), CXCL8 (IL-8)		
CXCR3 (101)	CXCL9 (Mig), CXCL10 (IP-10), CXCL11 (I-TAC)		
CXCR4 (84)	CXCL12 (SDF-1 α/β)		

DCs express a variety of receptors for chemotactic stimuli which are different from chemokines. These encompass receptors for bacterial components, bioactive lipids and for signals of "tissue danger". At the site of inflammation these chemotactic stimuli are rapidly produced within minutes, therefore they represent an early signal for the recruitment of DCs and their precursors before chemokines start their action. Table 5 summarizes some of these chemotactic receptors expressed by DCs and their respective ligands.

Table 5. Non-chemokine chemotactic receptors expressed mainly by immature DCs

Receptor	Ligand
ChemR23 (102)	Chemerin
FPR (103)	FMLP
FPRL1 (104)	LL37
FPRL2 (105)	F2L
C5aR (106)	C5a
PAFR (107)	PAF
CCR6 (107)	α and β -defensins
CXCR3 and CXCR5 (108)	S-antigen, IRBP

In order to attract different cell types to their site and also to facilitate their own migration, DCs depending on their maturation status, produce different types of chemokines. Table 6 summarizes some of these chemokines produced by immature and mature DCs.

Table 6. Differential secretion of chemokines by immature and mature DCs

Immature DC	Mature DC
CCL17 (TARC) (109)	CCL2 (MCP-1) (110)
CCL18 (DC-CK-1, MIP-4) (111)	CCL3 (MIP-1 α) (110)
CCL20 (MIP-3 α , Exodus-1) (98)	CCL4 (MIP-1 β) (109)
CCL22 (MDC) (111)	CCL5 (RANTES) (84)
CXCL8 (IL-8) (110)	CCL17 (TARC) (109)
CXCL16 (112)	CCL18 (DC-CK-1, MIP-4) (111)
	CCL20 (MIP-3 α Exodus-1) (111)
	CCL22 (MDC) (113)
	CXCL8 (IL-8) (110)
	CXCL10 (IP-10) (109)
	CXCL13 (BLC) (114)
	CXCL16 (112, 115)
	CXCL17 (101)
	CX3CL1 (Fractalkine) (116)

Upon maturation, parallel to down-regulation of inflammatory chemokine receptors is the up-regulation of CCR7, which confers lymph node homing capability on maturing DCs (117). The critical role for CCR7 ligands in DC homing is demonstrated in mice that lack CCR7, and also in *plt/plt* (paucity of lymph node T cells) mice that are deficient in both of the CCR7 ligands i.e. CCL19 and CCL21 in their secondary lymphoid tissues (118, 119).

Inside the lymph node, CCL19 and CCL21 are expressed within the T cell area by stromal cells where they are thought to be important for appropriate DC localization (120). Gene gun-mediated administration of plasmid DNA expressing CCL21 in the skin leads to drainage/accumulation of transgenic CCL21 into/in the draining peripheral lymph nodes (PLN) and attraction of CCR7 expressing cells including DCs (author's unpublished observations).

5. DENDRITIC CELLS, ANTIGEN PRESENTATION AND T CELL STIMULATION

Several conditions have to be fulfilled in order to switch on an immune response. These include: a) the capture of the antigen and its processing, b) the presentation of antigenic peptide in the context of self MHC, c) the physical interaction of antigen-bearing APC with T cells specific for the same antigen, and d) the presence of T cell costimulatory signals. An inadequate immune response may even be deleterious and result in tissue damage, allergic reactions, or autoimmune diseases, thus requiring the action of the most professional antigen presenting cells, the dendritic cells. When compared directly to other cells, DCs showed to be far superior in *in vitro* assays for the priming of alloreactive, naïve TCR transgenic T cells or the expansion and activation of antigen-specific naïve precursors from polyclonal populations (11). *In vivo*, injection of antigen loaded DCs induce potent CD4⁺ and CD8⁺ T cell primary responses (121). Interaction between antigen-specific transgenic T cells and antigen-loaded DCs has been visualized by immunofluorescence on lymph node sections (122).

CD4⁺ and CD8⁺ cells respond to peptide antigens displayed on MHC class II and MHC class I molecules, respectively (referred to as Signal 1). Accessory molecules on DCs are required to ensure that T cells will divide and differentiate into effector cells (Signal 2). In the absence of sufficient costimulation, T cells exhibit anergy or undergo apoptosis. Secretion or lack of secretion of additional factors by DCs, particularly IL-12, is instrumental in the final differentiation of T cells into type 1 or type 2 effector T helper cells, respectively (Signal 3). As mentioned earlier two distinct populations of DCs can be observed based on CD8 expression in mice: CD8⁺ and CD8⁻ DC (123). Splenic CD8⁺ and CD8⁻ DCs do not exhibit significant differences in their ability to stimulate naïve CD8⁺ T cells *in vitro* and after *in vivo* intravenous injection (124). Subcutaneous injection of antigen-loaded CD8⁺ DCs primed Th1 responses, whereas CD8⁻ DCs primed Th2 responses (125). The selective induction of Th1 responses by CD8⁺ DC is in direct causal relationship with their ability to produce Th1 promoting cytokines such as IL-12 and IFN- γ (125, 126). On the other hand IL-10 production and lack of IL-12 production capability of CD8⁻ DC leads to their capacity to induce Th2 immune response (126). Expression of MHC products and MHC-peptide complexes are 10- to 100-fold higher on DCs than on other APC like B cells and monocytes (127). Besides MHC-TCR, DC-T cell clustering is mediated by several adhesion molecules, like integrins β 1 and β 2 and members of the immunoglobulin superfamily (CD2, CD50, CD54, and CD58) (12, 128). The crucial factor that constitutes Signal 2 (as mentioned earlier) requirement to sustain T cell activation is the interaction between co-stimulatory molecules expressed by DCs and their ligands expressed by T cells. Molecules belonging to B7 family (B7-1 (CD80), B7-2 (CD86) in particular and ICOS ligand, PD-L1 (B7-H1), PD-L2 (B7-DC), B7-H3, and B7-H4 (B7x/B7-S1)) are so far the most critical molecules for amplification of T cell responses (129). Although, B7-CD28 interaction leads to stimulation of T lymphocytes, B7-CTLA4 plays the opposite role and dampens the T lymphocyte activation, therefore controlling the magnitude of the immune response (129). Table 7 lists some of the known co-stimulatory molecules and their ligands involved in DC-T cell interaction.

Table 7. Surface molecules engaged in the interaction between dendritic cells and T cells.

Dendritic cells	T cells
B7-1 (CD80)	CD28, CTLA-4 (CD152)
B7-2 (CD86)	CD28, CTLA-4 (CD152)
ICOSL (B7h, B7-H2; B7RP-1)	ICOS
PD-L1 (B7-H1)	PD-1
PD-L2 (B7-DC)	PD-1
B7-H3	?
B7-H4 (B7x; B7S1)	?
CD40	CD40L (CD154)
OX40L	OX40 (CD134)
TRANCE-R	TRANCE
ICAM-1 (CD54)	LFA-1 (CD11a/CD18)
DC-SIGN (CD209)	ICAM-3 (CD50), ICAM-2 (CD102)
CD58	CD2

Reciprocally, T cells can activate DCs via CD40 ligand (CD40L)-CD40 signalling leading to increased expression of CD80/CD86, cytokine release (IL-1, TNF- α , chemokines and IL-12) and DC survival (130-133).

6. TOLEROGENIC/REGULATORY DENDRITIC CELLS

So far, it has been accepted that immature DCs are capable of inducing T-cell anergy and Treg cells, whereas mature DCs are potent stimulants of T effector cell responses. This bimodal concept of immature and mature DCs has been recently challenged by studies demonstrating that antigen-bearing mature DCs can expand Treg cells that have suppressive properties (134). Immature DCs are disseminated through peripheral tissues and capture antigens from apoptotic cells during normal tissue turn over. Necrotic cells promote maturation of DCs and induce strong CD4⁺ and CD8⁺ T-cell stimulation, whereas apoptotic cells fail to activate DCs. Recent evidences suggest that semi-mature DCs can also be tolerogenic (135). These semi-mature tolerogenic DCs can be defined based on high expression levels of co-stimulatory and MHC class II molecules but produce low levels of proinflammatory cytokines such as IL-1 β , IL-6, TNF- α and IL-12, therefore they are referred to as 'semi-mature DCs' (135, 136). Interestingly, respiratory exposure to ovalbumin induces migration of IL-10-producing pulmonary DCs with mature phenotype into the draining lymphoid tissue where they stimulate antigen-specific Treg cells (137). Rutella et al. have recently summarized current strategies used to promote the tolerogenicity of DCs *in vitro* (138).

7. DENDRITIC CELLS AND TUMOR IMMUNITY

Tumor immunotherapy aims at activation of the body's own immune system to fight an existing tumor. At the time of diagnosis, the tumor has successfully adapted to the various immune effector mechanisms via exhaustion (139), ignorance (140), tolerization (141), inhibition of antigen specific lymphocytes (142) or by the generation of antigen loss variants (143). In addition, tumor antigens are relatively weak and are often masked or sequestered inside of the tumor cell, or are expressed in barely detectable amounts. Growing tumor is generally capable of creating a local micro-milieu, which hampers antigen presentation as well as induction of immune effector functions. Effector mechanisms against endogenous tumors include both cellular and humoral immunity. The majority of experimental systems clearly demonstrate that tumor immunity is largely provided by CD4⁺ (144-146), CD8⁺ T lymphocytes (147-149) and NK cells (150). T cells require activation by antigen-presenting cells. Although activation of NK cells is less well understood, their direct interaction with DCs has been demonstrated (150). Apart from generating a powerful anti-tumor immune response, DCs may also play an active role in the elimination of tumor cells themselves, since DCs have been shown to kill tumor cells via expression of death receptor ligands (151) and recent data suggest that DCs activated by pro-inflammatory cytokines, LPS or TLR-7 ligand imiquimod, can directly inhibit the growth of tumor cell lines (152-155). Even a single intra-tumoral injection of DCs is able to reduce tumor growth in mice (156). Thus, DCs are at the very center of developing tumor-specific immune response, and are involved both in the initiation of tumor-specific immunity and in the generation of immune effector mechanisms. The rapid increase in the understanding of DC physiology and their importance in the generation of immune responses has raised many hopes that the antigen presenting capacity of DCs might be exploited for tumor therapy (157). With the techniques for the *in vivo* modification of DCs or their large scale *ex vivo* production from precursors (11,

128, 158), this dream has come into reality and is now intensively being studied in numerous clinical trials.

8. THE USE OF DENDRITIC CELLS FOR CANCER THERAPY

Currently, there are numerous attempts to induce cancer immunity, both by activation of DCs *in vivo* as well as by manipulation and reinfusion of *ex vivo* generated DCs.

***In vivo* Approaches.** Direct enhancement of tumor antigen presentation by DCs has been a strategy for tumor therapy. *In vivo* modifications of DCs generally aim at either expanding the DCs pool within the tumor-bearing host, at attracting and activating DCs locally, or both. Systemic administration of DC-specific growth factors, such as GM-CSF, Flt3-L, G-CSF or DC activation signals like CD40-L (159-166) are intended to positively influence DC function by increasing DC numbers and stimulating DCs to present tumor-derived antigens more effectively. It could indeed be demonstrated convincingly that the DCs can be expanded significantly by administration of these factors, and that this can be associated with augmented tumor immunity (159-161). Different subsets of DCs appear to expand after administration of GM-CSF versus Flt3-L, opening the potential for selective augmentation of certain DC subsets (162). Bacteria transduced with tumor antigen-encoding genes and administered orally have been used to provide a DC activation signal (CpG, LPS) and the relevant antigen. Material derived from such bacteria is taken up by intestinal DC, which afterwards become activated and induce a productive immune response (167, 168).

Enhancing tumor antigen presentation *in vivo* can also be done by engineering of tumor cells to express functions of APC. Transfection of tumor cells with co-stimulatory molecules of the B-7 or the TNF/TNF-R family alone or together with MHC II has been successful in generating protective immunity both against the transfected as well as the unmodified wild-type tumor (169-171). However, it appears unlikely that tumor cells can acquire the full functional properties of professional APC by simple transfection of individual co-stimulatory molecules. It seems that induction of tumor immunity is likely to be due to indirect antigen presentation via locally recruited and/or activated endogenous host-derived APC rather than due to direct presentation of tumor antigen by the gene-modified tumor cells (172, 173). To achieve local activation of DCs in the vicinity of the autologous tumor, tumor cells were obtained from patients, transfected with DC-activating genes (such as GM-CSF or CD40-L), and re-administered (174-176).

In summary, several strategies are being evaluated that aim at the enhancement of tumor antigen presentation within the tumor-bearing host. These approaches are attractive and appear to be rather easily adaptable for clinical use, and have proven to be effective in preclinical models. Initial trials are in progress that will evaluate the clinical effect of some of these approaches in cancer patients. A critical consideration in attempts to activate or expand DCs *in vivo* is that neither tumor antigen loading nor the exact state of DC activation can be controlled directly. This might be deleterious, as the presentation of antigen on immature DCs can lead to the induction of antigen-specific tolerance (177). Moreover, effective DC activation greatly depends on the local cytokine microenvironment (178), which is almost impossible to control. Therefore, resident DCs in a patient may often be functionally suppressed (141), and their use as inducers of tumor immunity is not likely to be successful.

Ex vivo Approaches. A promising approach to reach effective vaccination has been the isolation of DCs from the patient, their propagation and activation in the absence of a putatively suppressive tumor milieu, and their re-infusion after tumor antigen exposure and/or suitable manipulation (reviewed in detail in (179)). While methods to generate DCs were being developed, it has become clear that DCs are diverse both by origin and function. The DC system has become even more complicated due to the discovery that ontogenetically diverse subtypes of DCs exist which may stimulate different types of immune responses, such as preferential priming of Th1 versus Th2 responses (18, 28, 180, 181). The recent observation that activated DCs produce Th1 inducing cytokines only for a limited period after activation (182) might pose a problem for using terminally mature DCs for tumor vaccination. Following this concept, it might be expected that after the usual period of 24–48 h in the presence of an activating stimulus the transferred DCs, although mature, might be ‘exhausted’ and thus induce a Th2 rather than Th1 response (182). These considerations have to be taken into account when searching for the ‘right’ DCs for use in tumor vaccination.

Due to the recent availability of defined tumor antigens, clinical trials with these reagents are currently underway or have already been completed successfully (183-186). Antigens of the MAGE family have been employed to induce melanoma specific immunity, first by using immature DCs (183) and later by using terminally mature DCs (184-186). Indeed, the use of defined antigens for tumor immunotherapy has the clear advantage of being able to control the amount of antigen administered, and to monitor the emerging immune response. For vaccination against B-lymphoma, DCs were loaded with lymphoma specific whole idiotype proteins with success (187). Alternatively, the direct transfection of DCs with whole tumor RNA (188) or RNA that was specific for a given tumor antigen (189) was effectively used to generate tumor immunity (190). Indeed, preclinical models show that tumors expressing a model antigen can be rejected when DCs were transfected with the relevant gene (191, 192). In line with this, DCs transfected with a melanoma-associated antigen were able to induce melanoma antigen-specific CTL from PBMC *in vitro* (193). *In vivo* transfection of DCs with DNA led to induction of an immune response against a model antigen (194). Whole cell protein extracts represent a broad source of tumor antigens, and have been used for vaccination against melanoma by loading *ex vivo* generated DCs with tumor lysate (author's unpublished observation and (186)). Since DCs are very effective at taking up and processing apoptotic material which might lead to the presentation of previously unrecognized antigens (195, 196), loading DCs with apoptotic tumor cells has been used in melanoma (149) and leukemia vaccination models (196). Injection of immature DCs locally to the solid tumor that has been treated with agents inducing apoptosis/necrosis (e.g photodynamic therapy, PDT) seems to be also a good strategy while it provides DCs with tumor antigen and danger signals needed for their maturation (197, 198).

In a recent study conducted by Schadendorf et al, DCs (MHC class I- and II-restricted tumor-peptides-pulsed) showed similar efficacy as conventional chemotherapy with dacarbazine (DTIC) in melanoma patients, however DC immunotherapy was accompanied with slightly lower side effects (199). Unscheduled subset analyses revealed that only in the DC-arm, did those patients with (i) an initial unimpaired general health status (Karnofsky = 100) or (ii) an HLA-A2⁺/HLA-B44⁻ haplotype survive significantly longer than patients with a Karnofsky index < 100 or other HLA haplotypes (199).

DCs are being also fused with tumor cells and is shown to be able to induce tumor specific immune response (200). Fused DC-tumor cell hybrids are thought to combine the

whole antigenic spectrum of the tumor with the powerful antigen presentation capabilities of DCs. An intriguing approach is suggested by studies showing that DCs can be generated in cell culture from leukemic blasts of AML (201, 202), ALL (203, 204), and CML patients (205). Since such *ex vivo* generated DCs maintain their characteristic chromosomal disorders, at the same time developing the powerful antigen presentation capacities of DCs, they are considered as a promising way to generate APC for vaccination against leukemias (206).

Besides different DC generation protocols, types of tumor antigen, and modes of tumor antigen delivery as well as other variables such as the use of syngeneic MHC-matched or fully allogeneic DCs, the dose of DCs, DCs injection site and intervals, and concomitant treatment with substances that stimulate the proliferation of DC-precursors, activate them, or recruit them to either the tumor site or the regional lymph node or concomitant removal of Tregs need to be taken into consideration for planning the optimal DC vaccination protocol (157, 207-213).

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