Molecular Genetic Analysis of the DiGeorge Syndrome among Korean Patients with Congenital Heart Disease

Hyangsuk Hur¹,², Yung Jin Kim³, Chung Il Noh³, Jeong-Wook Seo⁴, and Myoung Hee Kim*

Department of Anatomy, Yonsei University College of Medicine, Seoul 120-752, Korea;
² Department of Biology, Chungnam National University, Taejon 305-764, Korea;
³ Korea Research Institute of Bioscience and Biotechnology, KIST, Taejon 305-600, Korea;
⁴ Department of Pediatrics, Seoul National University College of Medicine, Seoul 110-799, Korea.

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The DiGeorge syndrome (DGS) is a developmental defect of the third and fourth pharyngeal pouches, which is associated with congenital heart defects, hypoparathyroidism, cell-mediated immunodeficiency, velo-pharyngeal insufficiency and craniofacial dysmorphism. The aetiological factor in a great majority of DGS cases is monosomy for the chromosomal region 22q11. To analyze DGS at the molecular level, a new molecular probe (DGCR680) encompassing the ADU balanced translocation breakpoint was prepared. When 13 Korean patients with DGS-type congenital heart disease were analyzed with this probe, 9 turned out to have a deletion at this locus, and all of them except one exhibited a typical facial dysmorphism associated DGS. Though only 9 independent patients were detected to have a deletion at the locus using the commercial probe N25 (D22S75), which maps at about 160 kb from the ADU breakpoint to the telomeric end, results from fluorescence in situ hybridization revealed a deletion in all cases tested at this locus. Two patients who had a deletion at the locus D22S75 but not at DGCR680 did not exhibit any DGS-type facial abnormalities. This result implies that the 680 bp probe covering the ADU translocation breakpoint might be a candidate for a molecular marker that can distinguish a specific phenotype, such as facial features associated with the DiGeorge syndrome, such as cardiac defects, abnormal faces, thymic hypoplasia, cleft palate, and hypocalcemia, etc.

Keywords: Conotruncal Anomaly Facial Syndrome (CTAFS); Diagnosis; DiGeorge Syndrome.

Introduction

The DiGeorge syndrome (DGS) is a developmental field defect of the third and fourth pharyngeal pouches which associates hypoplasia or aplasia of the thymus and parathyroids, conotruncal cardiac malformations and facial abnormalities (Muller et al., 1988). Although the aetiology of DGS is heterogeneous, about 90% of the patients exhibit monosomy at the 22q11 chromosomal region. Such monosomy is known to be associated with other phenotypes including the velocardiofacial (Shprintzen) syndrome (VCFS), conotruncal anomaly facial syndrome (CTAFS), and sporadic or familial cardiac defects, implying that these represent variants of the same disorder generated by the common cause (Demczuk and Aurias, 1995). Therefore, the defects caused by the deletions in chromosome 22 are all represented by the acronym CATCH22, which stands for cardiac defects, Abnormal faces, Thymic hypoplasia, Cleft palate, and Hypocalcemia (Wilson et al., 1993).

Cytogenetic as well as high resolution banding techniques have revealed that most patients with DGS have

Abbreviations: CTAFS, conotruncal anomaly facial syndrome; DGS, DiGeorge syndrome; VCFS, velocardiofacial (Shprintzen) syndrome.
unbalanced translocation involving chromosome 22, or
interstitial deletions within this chromosome. An analysis
of numerous patients with different deletion endpoints
showed that there is a region, so-called the DGCR (DiGeorge syndrome critical region), which is about
1.5 Mb, is deleted in the majority of the patients. The
extent of the deletion, however, does not seem to correlate
with the severity of clinical features, implying that one or
perhaps a few genes play a major role in its pathogenesis.
Moreover, a balanced translocation which disrupted sequences within the shortest region of the deletion overlap
for the DiGeorge syndrome has been reported in one patient — ADU (46,XX,t(2;22)(q14.1;q11.1) — and the same translocation was present in her mother (VDU), who was mildly affected (Augusseau et al., 1986). These
findings strongly suggested that the 22q11 deletion
phenotype could be determined by a single gene. The DGS
phenotype in ADU and VDU has made this balanced translocation point the target for the positional cloning
approaches in the hope of isolating the critical gene(s)
responsible for DGS.

Thus far, several cDNA and molecular probes for
diagnosis have been isolated (Funke et al., 1997; 1998;
Goldmuntz et al., 1996; Halford et al., 1993; Lindsey
et al., 1996; McKenzie et al., 1997; Sutherland et al., 1996;
Wadey et al., 1995). However, none of them encompasses
the ADU breakpoint except renex40, DGCR3 (Budarf et al.,
1995) and DGCR5 (Sutherland et al., 1996). Since both
DGCR3 and DGCR5 have not been proven to have protein
encoding potential, we attempted to isolate a real transcript
using a new DNA probe which covers the ADU breakpoint
based on previously published sequences (Budarf et al.,
1995). During the course of this study, we found that the
probe we generated was an efficient molecular marker for
diagnosing DGS, since it hybridized with an unexpected
band which could be used as an internal control for dosage
analysis. In this study, 13 Korean patients having the DGS-
type congenital heart disease were analyzed with the
generated probe, and compared with the fluorescence in
situ hybridization data prepared with commercial probe
N25 (D22S75), which maps at about 160 kb from the ADU
breakpoint toward the telomeric end.

**Materials and Methods**

**Patient selection and clinical evaluation** Thirteen Korean
patients with DGS-type congenital heart disease (CHD) were
selected for molecular studies (Ten patients were evaluated at the
Seoul National University College of Medicine, and three were
evaluated at the Sejong Hospital in Seoul, Korea). Eight out of
the 13 patients studied had the characteristic facial features
for DGS (Table 1), consisting of hypertelorism, antimongoloid slant,
bloated eyelids, recurrent otitis media, prominent nose with
 squared nasal roof, deficient malar area, retracted mandible, short
philtrum, small mouth. A-shaped mouth, nasal voice, high arched
palate, narrow palpebral fissures, asymmetric low-set malformed
ears and long face.

**DNA probes** Two primers (5' primer, B1: 5'-GGCTCTCT
AGGGATCAGCACAGGCCGC, and 3' primer, B2: 5'-
CTCCCCATTTTACAGGAGGCTGG) were designed to be
located at both the 5' and 3' sides of the ADU balanced
translocation point based on the nucleotide sequences around
the breakpoint (Budarf et al., 1995), and were synthesized
chemically. The 680 bp fragment of DGCR680 was obtained by
amplification of the human genomic DNA using B1 and B2 as
PCR primers, and then it was used as a DNA probe after
subcloning it into the pBluescript SK (pDGCR680) followed by
sequencing.

**Southern analysis** The genomic DNA purified from the
leukocytes of 13 patients and four normal controls was digested
with HindIII, and then Southern hybridization was conducted
according to the standard procedure with 32P-labelled DGCR680
as a probe. In brief, all prehybridization and hybridization
reactions were carried out in 0.5 M Sodium phosphate buffer
(pH 7.2) with 7% SDS, 1 mM EDTA and 1% BSA at 55°C
(Sambrook et al., 1989). To decrease the background generated
by the human repetitive sequences, membranes were
prehybridized with sonicated human placental DNA. Membranes
were then washed with 2× SSC (0.3 M NaCl, 30 mM sodium
citrate, pH 7.0), 1× SSC and 0.2× SSC containing 0.1% (w/v)
SDS at 65°C for 30 min each.

**Dosage analysis** To determine the copy number, a quantitative
analysis of Southern blot bands was performed. The DGCR680
probe recognized an 18 kb band in the 22q11 chromosomal
region and a 16 kb HindIII fragment as well. Hybridization
signals on the filter were quantitated by a Phosphor-Imager S425
system (Molecular Dynamics), equipped with ImageQuant
software (version 3.3) which measured the radiation energy
directly. The signal strengths were normalized and the ratios
were calculated by following the basic protocol published previously
(Discorell et al., 1992). In brief, the standard hybridization signals
were calculated by taking the ratio of the radiation energy emitted
by the 18 kb fragment to that of the control 16 kb fragment.
The copy number was designated as twice the mean of the ratios
of standard signals. It was assumed that one or two copies of a locus
were present. Values less than 1.5 were defined as hemizygosity,
whereas values greater than 1.5 were not. All studies were
performed in triplicates.

**FISH analysis** Human metaphase chromosomes were prepared
from lymphoid cell lines and/or peripheral blood by standard
methods. The hybridization mixture containing the digoxigenin-
labeled D22S75 (N25) DGCR probe, along with the D22S39
control probe (Oncor, Gaithersburg, MD, USA) was placed on the
denatured chromosome slides following the manufacturer's
instructions. After overnight hybridization at 37°C, the slides
were incubated with anti-digoxigenin fluorescein in 1× PBD/
5%BSA at 37°C for 1 h and rinsed. For amplification, the slides
were treated with rabbit anti-sheep antibodies at 37°C for 30 min
and incubated with FITC-rabbit antibody at 37°C for 30 min. The
chromosomes were then counterstained with propidium iodide in
an antifade solution.
### Table 1. Summary of molecular analysis and clinical findings of DGS patients.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient No.</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age (yr.)</th>
<th>Types of cardiac anomaly</th>
<th>Typical faces</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Molecular Dosage analysis</th>
<th>Deletionb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>TOF, MAPCA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>(TOF)</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>NT</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>TOF, MAPCA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>NT</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>TOF</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>TOF</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>(CATCH22 questionable)</td>
<td>NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>TOF, PDA, MAPCA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>TOF, MAPCA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>TOF, MAPCA</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>TOF, MAPCA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>TOF, MAPCA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Cleft palat e, Maternal aunt (CHD)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>TOF, MAPCA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>TOF, MAPCA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>NT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a* tertralogy of fallot (TOF), atrial septal defect (ASD), multiple anomalous pulmonary collateral arteries (MAPCA), patent ductus arteriosus (PDA), pulmonary atresia (PA).

*b* Dosage analysis (+: deleted/-: not deleted), NT (not tested).

### Results and Discussion

The most dramatic and clinically important issue for the genetic origin of congenital heart disease has been the recent discovery of the association of conotruncal defects with the deletion within the chromosomal region, 22q11. The acronym CATCH22 (Cardiac defects, Abnormal faces, Thymic hypoplasia, Cleft palate, and Hypocalcemia from deletions in chromosome 22) was coined to encompass the spectrum of clinical manifestations in patients with deletions in this locus (Wilson et al., 1993). DOS, YCFS, and CTAFS belong to this syndrome having the chromosome 22q11 deletion and overlapping clinical features (Driscoll et al., 1995). Thus far, several cDNA and molecular probes used to diagnose CATCH22, including DGS, have been isolated and generated. However, none of them encompasses the ADU breakpoint. Therefore, we generated a new probe which covers the ADU breakpoint. Two oligonucleotide primers, B1 and B2, originally designed to isolate a critical gene for DGS encompassing the ADU breakpoint, were designed to be located at both the 5' (centromeric) and 3' (telomeric) side of the balanced translocation breakpoint (Budarf et al., 1995), respectively, and were chemically synthesized to perform PCR using the human genomic DNA as a template (Fig. 1). The resulting 680 bp fragment (DGCR680) was cloned into the EcoRV restriction endonuclease site in the pBluescript SK vector (pDGCR680), and used as the hybridization probe to diagnose DGS among patients having congenital heart disease.

The DNA from the 13 patients and four normal controls were completely digested with the restriction...
Fig. 1. Schematic diagram of 22q11 showing relative order of probes. The vertical line indicates the ADU balanced translocation breakpoint, and the empty rectangles designate the loci. The black rectangle shows the DGCR680 probe, under which the primers B1 and B2 are marked. The DiGeorge syndrome critical region (DGCR) is shown by a double-headed arrow above the schematic chromosome 22.

endonuclease, HindIII, and subjected to Southern hybridization with DGCR680 as a hybridization probe. Surprisingly, the probe hybridized with two specific bands: one was the 18 kb fragment located in the DGCR, and the other was the unidentified 16 kb fragment. Furthermore, the relative band intensities of the two bands were the same in all four normal controls, whereas in the 13 patients, the intensities varied consistently, where the intensity of the upper band was weaker than the lower band. The 16 kb band was located neither in the PAC16K23 nor in the PAC1L11 region (constructed by Pieter J. DeJong), which covers about 200 kb around the ADU breakpoint (data not shown). A primitive study with panel blot hybridization implied that the 16 kb band was not from the chromosome 22, although the exact locus was not identified. Therefore we regarded the 16 kb band as being the internal control of two copies lying outside the DGCR.

Figure 2 shows the Southern blot data where the intensity of the 18 kb fragment is not reduced relative to that of the 16 kb fragment in normal controls, whereas the relative intensity of the 18 kb fragment was reduced in patients 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, and 13. The copy number of the DGCR locus was determined by the relative band intensities quantitated by the PhosphorImager directly on the membrane, considering the the 16 kb fragment as a diploid control. Since one or two copies of the locus are assumed to be present, the dosage was calculated following the standard protocol (Driscoll et al., 1992), in which values less than 1.5 were considered as heterozygosity (see Materials and Methods). As shown in Table 2, 9 out of 13 patients had monosomy at the chromosomal locus 22q11.

Since most patients with DGS are known to be associated with a large locus deletion at around 22q11, a commercial D22S75 DiGeorge chromosome region probe was applied to check the monosomy at this locus, mapped at about 160 kb from the ADU breakpoint toward the telomeric end. Nine patients (patients 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12) were randomly chosen and fluorescence in situ hybridization (FISH) was individually performed (Fig. 3). Surprisingly, the deletions were detected in all nine cases. Patients 8 and 9 were particularly interesting since they did not have any deletion at the locus DGCR680 whereas the locus D22S75 was deleted. Also, both patients did not exhibit any typical facial dysmorphism. Furthermore, patients 2 and 5, who did not have monosomy at the DGCR680 locus, did not exhibit the typical facial dysmorphism either, although the deletion at the D22S75 locus was not checked due to the failure of FISH. Meanwhile, the patients who had deletions at the DGCR680 locus (patients 1, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, and 13) did exhibit the typical DGS-type face, such as hypertelorism, narrow eye fissures, bloated eyelids, a flat nasal bridge, a
In one patient (patient 4), however, the face looked normal even though the DGCR680 locus was deleted. Although the number of patients we analyzed was not sufficient to make any conclusion, there could still be other mechanism(s) which can overcome the proposed function of the gene(s) located at the DGCR680 locus. Most of the patients we have analyzed had both deletions, which was not surprising since most CATCH22 deletions are rather large around the DGCR.

There have been several reports about the DiGeorge syndrome that are caused by the different loci, such as the deletions at 10p13 (Daw et al., 1996; Gelb, 1997), 4p16 and 4p13-q12 (Gelb, 1997), 17p13 (Greenberg et al., 1988), and outside the shortest region of the deletion overlap in 22q11 (Kurahashi et al., 1996). Although it was very unlikely, the patients with non-deletions at DGCR680 could have a mutation occurring at other loci other than DGCR, regardless of the deletion at the D22S75 locus. It is also possible that a small rearrangement, small deletions or point mutation could have occurred in the region of DGCR680.

All in all, the aetiology of DGS seems to be heterogeneous, not involving a single locus. However, the 680 bp probe encompassing the ADU breakpoint turned out to be interesting since it seemed to be able to dissect the complex phenotype caused by the large deletions in most patients. Thus far, it has been estimated that the minimum prevalence of 22q11 deletions among birth defects was 1/4000−1/5000, and this deletion seems to be involved in at least 5% of newborns with heart defects (Wilson et al., 1994), which occur in approximately 8 out of every 1000 livebirths (Goldmuntz et al., 1993). DGS, VCFs, and CTAFS belonging to the syndrome with chromosome 22q11 deletion and overlapping clinical features (Driscoll et al., 1995), have been reported to have deletions within the chromosomal region 22q11 with frequencies of 89%, 81%, and 84%, respectively (Driscoll et al., 1995; Matsuoka et al., 1994). The probe we generated in this study seemed to be a candidate molecular marker to distinguish the specific phenotype, such as facial features associated with the DiGeorge syndrome. This study implies that systematic approaches with several small DNA probes along the DGCR could dissect the complex phenotypes associated with CATCH22 and would help to isolate the specific gene related to the specific phenotype such as cardiac defects, abnormal faces, thymic hypoplasia, cleft palate, and hypocalcemia, etc.

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