

*Regulation of the
Tumour Suppressor PP2A by
Oncogenic Tyrosine Kinases*

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B.BiomedSci (Hons)

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

December 2009

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

Reversible protein phosphorylation plays a central role in the regulation of intracellular signalling, and is controlled by the opposing activities of protein kinases and phosphatases. Deregulation of these mechanisms can result in increased proliferation and enhanced survival, which is a hallmark feature of malignant transformation. For example, over 90% of chronic myeloid leukaemia (CML) patients express the BCR/ABL oncoprotein, which exhibits unrestrained tyrosine kinase activity. In addition, activating mutations within the receptor tyrosine kinase, c-KIT, contribute to the pathogenesis of gastrointestinal stromal tumours (GIST), systemic mastocytosis, acute myeloid leukaemia (AML), testicular seminoma and melanoma. The advent of small molecule tyrosine kinase inhibitors, such as imatinib, has revolutionised the treatment of malignancies driven by these oncogenic kinases. However, a proportion of patients are either unresponsive or develop resistance, and as such, relapse and disease progression is a major clinical problem. In order to improve the treatment outcome for these patients, a greater understanding of the signalling pathways regulated downstream of BCR/ABL and c-KIT is required.

The data presented in this thesis indicates that oncogenic BCR/ABL and mutant c-KIT both require inhibition of the tumour suppressor, protein phosphatase 2A (PP2A), to induce tumorigenesis. PP2A is a large family of serine/threonine phosphatases that provide the fine control on signalling pathways by governing the rate and duration of phosphorylation. The heterotrimeric PP2A enzyme is comprised of a structural subunit (PP2A A α and A β), a catalytic subunit (PP2A C α and C β) and a regulatory subunit, which consists of three unrelated families: B55 (α , β , γ , δ), B56 (α , β , γ , δ , ϵ) and B η (PR72/130 / PR70/48). Binding of the regulatory subunit to the core PP2A AC dimer directs both the substrate specificity and cellular localisation of the enzyme. The combinatorial assembly of these individual components permits the formation of distinct complexes which have been implicated in numerous cellular functions such as proliferation, survival and mitosis. In particular, important roles for PP2A in various aspects of malignant transformation are beginning to emerge.

Recent work demonstrates that PP2A is functionally inactivated by BCR/ABL in myeloid progenitor cells. Using the mouse myeloid progenitor cell line, FDC-P1, these

observations were confirmed in the current study. Detailed investigation into the underlying mechanisms have demonstrated for the first time that active BCR/ABL increases the expression of the PP2A structural and certain regulatory subunits. This alters the PP2A holoenzyme composition and results in the abundance of complexes containing B55 α and B56 α . Consequently, B56 γ , a known tumour suppressive subunit, appears to be simultaneously displaced. To investigate which subunits are functionally important for BCR/ABL-mediated leukaemogenesis, individual PP2A subunits were targeted with shRNA sequences in WT BCR/ABL FDC-P1 cells. Subsequent evaluation identified B56 α as a key player which facilitates the leukaemic phenotype. In accordance with an increase in PP2A activity, knockdown of B56 α significantly inhibited the cellular growth and reduced the clonogenic potential of BCR/ABL⁺ myeloid progenitors. Furthermore, suppression of the B56 δ subunit in WT BCR/ABL FDC-P1 cells appears to delay progression through the cell cycle. Together, these findings provide new insights into the biology of PP2A and begin to define the precise mechanisms by which BCR/ABL induces leukaemogenesis via PP2A in CML.

Investigation of the regulation of PP2A was also extended to the oncogenic tyrosine kinase, c-KIT. Using FDC-P1 cells expressing imatinib-sensitive (V560G) or –resistant (D816V) mutant c-KIT, this work demonstrates for the first time that constitutive activation of c-KIT impairs the activity of PP2A, and this is essential for tumourigenesis. Pharmacological reactivation of PP2A with FTY720 significantly reduced the proliferation, impaired the clonogenic potential and induced apoptosis of oncogenic c-KIT cells, whilst having no effect on empty vector controls or WT c-KIT cells stimulated with stem cell factor (SCF). These cytotoxic effects of FTY720 are mediated, in part, by the rapid dephosphorylation, and hence inactivation, of oncogenic c-KIT receptors. These promising *in vitro* findings were translated into an *in vivo* model, where the daily administration of FTY720 significantly delayed the growth of mutant c-KIT⁺ tumours. Furthermore, FTY720 markedly prevented the infiltration of D816V c-KIT tumour cells into secondary lymphoid organs, such as the spleen and bone marrow. As a result, the survival of FTY720-treated mice was significantly prolonged compared to saline-treated controls.

Overall, this body of work greatly enhances our understanding of PP2A function and identifies the complex mechanisms of PP2A regulation by the oncogenic tyrosine kinases, BCR/ABL and c-KIT. Taken together, the data suggests that inhibition of PP2A may represent a general mechanism employed by constitutively active kinases to facilitate tumour growth. As such, this work supports the future application of PP2A-activating agents in a broad range of human malignancies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Wow what an amazing journey I've experienced during this PhD candidature! Of course there are numerous people who have contributed along the way, and without which, the road to thesis submission would have seemed an almost impossible task. I'd like to acknowledge The University of Newcastle and The Ohio State University for providing the facilities to carry out this research. A special acknowledgement is extended to the Cancer Institute NSW for a Research Scholarship that provided project funding and also enabled me to present my work at national and international conferences. Firstly, a big thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Nikki Verrills, who has been such a fantastic mentor that I honestly could not have dreamed of a more appropriate person for guidance during the past 4 years. It continues to amaze (and scare me a little!) how much we are on the same wavelength on so many different levels. I've lost track how many times I've received an email saying "have you done/or thought about doing XYZ" when I have either just done the experiments or about to write a very similar email saying "I think it would be interesting to look at XYZ!" Being under the supervision of someone who has such a passion for research is truly inspiring and I have learnt so much from our interesting conversations. In addition to being an amazing role model, Nikki provided me with focus when required and pushed me above and beyond what I thought I was capable of. She was always there to listen and provide advice on any problems I was having, both work-related and personal. Thanks Nik!

I would like to thank Prof. Leonie Ashman for being a continual source of knowledge on a wide range of topics and helping me to think about my work in the bigger picture. Leonie has provided important guidance, particularly in the last six months, when I have had some big decisions to make. Thank you also to Prof. Alistair Sim, who is still officially my co-supervisor, although he has not worked at the University for the last two years. Despite this separation, he was always accessible and still interested in providing feedback on written work. A special thank you is extended to Prof. John Rostas, who I first met when applying for a travel grant through HMRI during the first year of my candidature. Since that time, John has showed a genuine interest in my progress and provided constructive feedback on several aspects of research such as grant writing, presentations and post-doctoral interviews. No matter what time of the

day, even if we ran into each other in the corridor, he was more than happy to stop and give advice, which is something I really appreciate.

Within the laboratory I would like to send a very big thanks to Fiona McDougall, without whose help I would still be struggling to catch mice, let alone inject and measure them on a daily basis! Fiona provided an absolute wealth of knowledge on the design of the animal experiments, helped with the daily management of the mice and established the protocols for immunohistochemical and TUNEL staining. I'd also like to thank Amanda Smith who has not only contributed to extra runs of several experiments, but on a social level is the one person who has kept me sane! Our morning coffee breaks was something I always looked forward to. Thanks to Helen Carpenter for her work in setting up our plasmid database, and always willing to help with any experiment that required an extra set of hands. Thank you also to Martin Horan for his help in setting up the real-time PCR assay.

Six months of this work was conducted at The Ohio State University and made possible by a travel award which was donated by Jennie Thomas through HMRI. Jennie is truly an inspiring person and I can not thank her enough for enabling me the amazing opportunity to study abroad. I would also like to thank my supervisor A/Prof. Danilo Perrotti for accepting me into his laboratory and continuing to maintain contact and provide feedback on my project. Thanks as well to the lab members, Anna, Paolo and Josh for making the Perrotti lab such a welcoming and fun working environment! A special thank you is extended to Anna, who started her PhD at the same time. It was very comforting to know there was someone else out there who was pulling all nighters and experiencing the same emotional and mental stress as myself!

I would like to save the biggest thanks to my wonderful parents who have always told me "the sky is the limit", and have provided me with every opportunity to achieve my very best. Their never-ending love and support is a continual source of motivation for me. Just knowing I could rely on them for anything (and that dinner would always be in the microwave when I came home late!) was extremely comforting. To my beautiful friends, especially Skye, Elizabeth, Katie and Ezz. Thank you for understanding when I couldn't make most social outings, particularly this year. You have no idea how much all your thoughtful and motivating messages helped me get through the tough times.

PUBLICATIONS

Roberts KG, Smith AM, McDougall F, Carpenter H, Neviani P, Perrotti D, Sim ATR, Ashman LK, Verrills NM (2009) Essential requirement for PP2A inhibition by c-KIT: FTY720-mediated reactivation of PP2A as a treatment strategy for c-KIT⁺ cancers. Submitted to *Cancer Research* #CAN-09-2544

Patents

International PCT Patent: Inhibition of c-KIT Cancers *Filed March 2009*

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Awarded winner for best student poster.

Roberts KG, Smith AM, Carpenter, H, Santhanam R, Ashman LK, Sim ATR, Perrotti D, Verrills NM (2008) Inhibition of the tumour suppressor PP2A by c-KIT in acute myeloid leukaemia. *HMRI Conference on Translational Cancer Research*, Newcastle, Australia. **Awarded winner for best student poster.**

Roberts KG, Carpenter, H, Ashman LK, Sim ATR, Perrotti D, Verrills NM (2008) Altered expression of PP2A regulatory subunits in chronic myeloid leukaemia. *HMRI Conference on Translational Cancer Research*, Newcastle, Australia.

Roberts KG, Smith AM, Carpenter, H, Santhanam R, Ashman LK, Sim ATR, Perrotti D, Verrills NM (2008) c-Kit functionally inactivates the tumour suppressor PP2A in AML. *New Directions for Leukaemia Research*, Sunshine Coast, Australia.

Awarded a travel scholarship for best student abstract submission.

Roberts KG, Carpenter, H, Ashman LK, Sim ATR, Perrotti D, Verrills NM (2008) BCR/ABL alters the expression of specific PP2A regulatory subunits in CML. *New Directions for Leukaemia Research*, Sunshine Coast, Australia.

Roberts KG, Smith AM, Carpenter, H, Ashman LK, Sim ATR, Santhanam R, Neviani P, Perrotti D, Verrills NM (2008) BCR/ABL-induced inactivation of the tumour suppressor, PP2A: role of PP2A regulatory subunits and their potential as therapeutic targets in CML. *Lorne Cancer Conference*, Lorne, Australia.

Roberts KG, Ashman LK, Sim ATR, Perrotti D, Verrills NM (2007) Altered Expression of PP2A Regulatory Subunits in Chronic Myelogenous Leukemia: Identifying Targets for Improved Therapies. *Blood (American Society of Hematology Annual Meeting Abstracts)* 110: 2925.

Roberts KG, Ashman LK, Sim ATR, Verrills NM (2006) BCR/ABL expression functionally inactivates the tumour suppressor PP2A in early myeloid cells, *Australian Health & Medical Research Congress*, Melbourne, Australia.

Roberts KG, Ashman LK, Sim ATR, Verrills NM (2006) Investigating the role of protein phosphatase 2A in chronic myeloid leukaemia, *HMRI Conference on Translational Cancer Research*, Newcastle, Australia.

Awarded runner-up for best student poster.

Awards

Best Poster Presentation – *Australia Society for Medical Research Annual Meeting, Sydney, June 2009.*

GlaxoSmithKline Best Student Poster Presentation – *Hunter Medical Research Institute Conference, Newcastle, September 2008*

Leukaemia Foundation Student Travel Scholarship – *New Directions for Leukaemia Research, Sunshine Coast, April 2008.*

GlaxoSmithKline Runner-up Best Student Poster Presentation – *Hunter Medical Research Institute Conference, Newcastle, September 2008*

Hunter Medical Research Institute Travel Grant – *November 2007*

Cancer Institute NSW Research Scholar Award – *February 2006*

ABBREVIATIONS

µg	microgram
µl	microlitre
µM	micromolar
ALL	acute lymphoblastic leukaemia
AML	acute myeloid leukaemia
B-CLL	B-cell chronic lymphocytic leukaemia
bp	base pair
BSA	bovine serum albumin
CBF-AML	core-binding factor AML
CML	chronic myeloid leukaemia
cDNA	complementary DNA
CML-BC	blast crisis CML
CML-CP	chronic phase CML
Ct	cycle threshold
DAB	diaminobenzidine
DMEM	Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium
DMSO	dimethyl sulphoxide
DNA	deoxyribose nucleic acid
ECL	enhanced chemiluminescence
ERK	extracellular signal-regulated kinase
EtOH	ethanol
FACS	fluorescence-activated cell sorter
FCS	fetal calf serum
FITC	fluorescein isothiocyanate
FLT3	fms-like tyrosine kinase 3
g	gram
<i>g</i>	gravity
GFP	green fluorescent protein
GIST	gastrointestinal stromal tumour
GM-CSF	granulocyte-macrophage colony-stimulating factor
GSK3β	glycogen synthase kinase 3β
HRP	horseradish peroxidase

HSC	haematopoietic stem cell
ID ₅₀	concentration of drug that inhibits cells by 50%
IFN	interferon
IL	interleukin
IMDM	Iscove's modified Dulbecco's medium
i.p.	intraperitoneal
JAK	Janus kinases
JMD	juxtamembrane domain
kDa	kilodalton
M	molar
mAb	monoclonal antibody
MAPK	mitogen-activated protein kinase
mg	milligram
ml	millilitre
mM	millimolar
mRNA	messenger RNA
nt	nucleotide
nm	nanometre
pAb	polyclonal antibody
PAGE	polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis
PBS	phosphate buffered saline
PBA	PBS / 0.1%BSA / 0.1% sodium azide
PCR	polymerase chain reaction
Ph ¹	Philadelphia chromosome
pH	potential of hydrogen
PI	propidium iodide
PI3K	phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase
p.o.	oral gavage
PP2A	protein phosphatase 2A
pSR	pSUPER.retro.neo+GFP
qRT-PCR	quantitative real time PCR
RIPA	radio-immunoprecipitation assay
RNA	ribonucleic acid
RT-PCR	reverse-transcriptase PCR

RTK	receptor tyrosine kinase
RTV	relative tumour volume
S1PR	sphingosine-1-phosphate receptor
s.c.	subcutaneous
SCF	stem cell factor
SDS	sodium dodecyl sulphate
SEM	standard error of the mean
SFK	Src family kinases
SMP	skim milk powder
SphK	sphingosine kinase
ST	small T antigen
STAT	signal transducer and activator of transcription
SV40	simian virus 40
TBST	tris buffered saline-Tween 0.1%
TUNEL	terminal deoxynucleotidyltransferase-mediated dUTP nick end labelling
U	units
Wnt	wingless/Int
WT	wild-type