INCREASED SKELETAL MUSCLE-SPECIFIC MICRORNA-1 IN THE BLOOD OF COPD PATIENTS

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Introduction Quadriceps muscle dysfunction is an important prognostic comorbidity in COPD. MicroRNAs (miRs) are small non-coding RNAs that regulate gene expression. Skeletal muscle expresses a number of tissue-specific microRNAs including miR-1, which modulates muscle phenotype. MicroRNAs can be secreted from cells and maintained in blood within exosomes. Elevated levels of circulating miR-1 have been demonstrated in a number of human and animal models of muscle disease. We hypothesised that plasma levels of miR-1 would be elevated in COPD patients and would correlate with important physiological parameters.

Methods 103 COPD patients and 25 controls were studied. MiR-1 was quantified in stored plasma samples using q-RT PCR.1 MiR-16 and miR-122 were quantified as negative controls. Results were normalised to an exogenous spiked-in control.

Results Characteristics as mean (SD); COPD patients: M: 67, F: 36, age=66.47 (8.4), FEV1 % pred=45.5 (18.6), 6-minute walk (6MW) = 394 (120). Controls: M: 14, F: 11, age=67 (8.1), FEV1 % pred=111.2 (13.1), 6MW=613 (83). Plasma miR-1 was significantly elevated in COPD patients, p=0.002. There was no difference in miR-16 and miR-122. MiR-1 was negatively associated with FEV1 % predicted (r = -0.3, p<0.001) and with Tlco (r = -0.3, p<0.001), but it was not possible to distinguish between GOLD stages using ANOVA. However, if patients were sub-divided into early GOLD stage COPD (1 and 2) or late GOLD stage COPD (3 and 4), miR-1 was significantly higher in the latter group (p=0.02). The plasma level of miR-1 was inversely correlated with daily activity measured as locomotion time (r = -0.25, p<0.01) but miR-1 levels were not associated with any muscle phenotype or with muscle-specific gene expression.

Conclusion Our results show that stable COPD patients have elevated plasma levels of muscle-specific miR-1. The increase in miR-1 may be due to increased muscle degradation or turnover in the COPD patients studied. Our work raises the possibility of using other muscle-specific microRNAs in the future as potential biomarkers of muscle dysfunction in patients with COPD.

NITRATIVE STRESS IS INCREASED IN COPD EXACERBATIONS FOLLOWING EXPERIMENTAL RHINOVIRUS INFECTION

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Introduction and Objectives The majority of acute exacerbations of COPD are associated with viral infection and rhinoviruses are the most frequently detected species. Exacerbations represent a major unmet health need and mechanisms are poorly understood. The association between nitrative stress and virus induced exacerbations of COPD are unclear. To investigate this we used an experimental rhinovirus challenge study.

Methods Experimental rhinovirus challenge was performed in COPD (GOLD stage II) subjects (COPD, n=9), and non-obstructed control smokers (Smk, n=10) and non-smokers (NS, n=11). Rhinovirus infection was confirmed with quantitative PCR performed on nasal lavage and sputum samples collected at baseline and days 3, 5, 9, 12, 15, 21 and 42 post virus inoculation. Nitrite concentration was measured in sputum supernatant using the Griess assay, as a marker of total nitrative stress.

Results At baseline the geometric mean (95% CI) nitrite levels were similar between the groups studied (NS 5.13 (2.57 to 8.05), Smk 2.82 (1.37 to 5.80) and COPD 4.17 (3.04 to 5.72; p=0.281). Nitrite levels were significantly higher in COPD subjects on day 15 when compared to both control groups (geometric mean (95% CI) NS 7.94 (7.59 to 8.31); Smk 7.59 (4.41 to 13.04) and COPD 20.98 (13.92 to 31.56); p=0.008). (Abstract S50 figure 1). At every time point sampled there was a significant increase in nitrite concentration from baseline in COPD subjects, but not controls. The area under the curve for nitrite concentration over the time course for NS, Smk and COPD subjects was 18, 45 and 76 respectively (p<0.05).

Conclusions Rhinovirus infection is associated with increased nitrative stress in COPD subjects compared to smoking and non-smoking controls. This may play a role in COPD exacerbations.