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Cystic fibrosis mice carrying the missense mutation G551D replicate human genotype–phenotype correlations

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We have generated a mouse carrying the human G551D mutation in the cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator gene (CFTR) by a one-step gene targeting procedure. These mutant mice show cystic fibrosis pathology but have a reduced risk of fatal intestinal blockage compared with ‘null’ mutants, in keeping with the reduced incidence of meconium ileus in G551D patients. The G551D mutant mice show greatly reduced CFTR-related chloride transport, displaying activity intermediate between that of cftr\(^{m1UNC} \) replacement (‘null’!) and cftr\(^{mHGU} \) insertional (residual activity) mutants and equivalent to ~4% of wild-type CFTR activity. The long-term survival of these animals should provide an excellent model with which to study cystic fibrosis, and they illustrate the value of mouse models carrying relevant mutations for examining genotype–phenotype correlations.

Keywords: animal models/cystic fibrosis/gene targeting/gene–phenotype correlations/meconium ileus

Introduction

An important goal in the field of human genetics is to understand the relationship between gene function and disease pathophysiology. Cystic fibrosis (CF) is the most common lethal genetic disorder in the Caucasian population, and is caused by mutations in the cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator (CFTR). We, and others, have produced mouse models for CF in which mutations have been introduced into the murine CFTR gene (Cftr) by homologous recombination in embryonal stem (ES) cells (reviewed in Dorin et al., 1994a). These animals demonstrate both the characteristic CF chloride defect and intestinal pathology typical of this disease. They have also proved useful in pre-clinical studies of CFTR gene transfer using correction of the chloride transport deficit as the primary measure of efficacy (Alton et al., 1993; Hyde et al., 1993; Grubb et al., 1994).

However, the available models carry grossly disrupted alleles, resulting either in no CFTR protein, exemplified by the ‘null’ cftr\(^{m1UNC} \) gene replacement event (Snouwaert et al., 1992), or very low levels of normal protein, as in the case of the cftr\(^{mHGU} \) gene insertion event (Dorin et al., 1994b). In contrast, the majority of CF patients carry subtle mutations which result in the production of a dysfunctional mutant protein (Tsui, 1992). The effect of ectopic expression of normal CFTR on a mutant CFTR background is unknown and it may, therefore, be important and instructive to carry out such gene transfer studies in a mouse engineered to carry a mutant form of CFTR equivalent to that which occurs in CF subjects.

G551D is one of the most ancient and common CF mutations, with a world-wide frequency averaging 3% but found at higher frequencies in populations of Celtic descent (Hamosh et al., 1992). In humans, G551D CFTR protein is processed normally but produces cAMP-regulated chloride channels showing markedly reduced function (Class III mutation) (Welsh and Smith, 1993). A key aspect of this mutation is the 3-fold reduction in the incidence of meconium ileus (neonatal intestinal blockage) in CF patients carrying the G551D mutation compared with patients homozygous for the most common CFTR mutation, AF508 (Hamosh et al., 1992). We have used a single-step targeting strategy to introduce the human missense mutation G551D into mice, allowing us to determine whether this protective effect is substantiated across species and allowing for the first time the examination of CF genotype–phenotype correlations in the laboratory.

We have examined the histological features and determined the electrophysiological responses of the G551D mutant mice, and show that the phenotype is intermediate between that of existing cftr\(^{m1UNC} \) replacement (‘null’!) and cftr\(^{mHGU} \) insertional (residual activity) mutant mice. Importantly, intestinal blockage is reduced and survival increased in comparison with the ‘null’ cftr\(^{m1UNC} \) mutant mouse, mimicking the mild intestinal phenotype of G551D patients. In man, only a small number of CF phenotype–genotype correlations have been established (Hamosh and Cutting, 1993). This study indicates, therefore, how mice carrying relevant mutations may be used to test phenotype–genotype correlations which are difficult to establish clinically. These may be difficult to establish either because the numbers of patients with particular mutations are low or because any intrinsic effects are submerged by environmental or epigenetic factors.

Results

Generation of G551D mice

R1 ES cells were electroporated with the linearized targeting construct (Figure 1A) which carries both the G551D mutation and neomycin-selectable marker sequences. To minimize disruption of the transcription of the targeted

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Fig. 1. Generation of mice carrying the G551D mutation. (A) Targeting of exon 11 to produce the G551D mutation; the genomic region of the Cfr gene cloned is shown at the top, exons 11, 11b, 12 and 13 are represented by filled boxes; EcoRI (E), HindIII (H), KpnI (K), Xhol (X) and Xbal (Xb) restriction enzyme sites are indicated. The targeting construct shown below contains a 6.3 kb Xbal genomic fragment into which two pgk-neo expression cassettes have been inserted, both in the same orientation as that of the Cfr gene. A HSV-TK expression cassette (hatched box) is situated at the 3’ end, together with vector sequences (not shown). The structure of the genomic locus following targeting is shown at the bottom. The sizes of novel Sall, S and BstXI, B, restriction enzyme fragments identified by an external 3’ probe are indicated. (B) Representative Southern blot performed on ES cell DNA with the probe indicated in (A); targeted colony (lanes 1 and 2), non-targeted colony (lanes 3 and 4) digested with Sall (lanes 1 and 3) and BstXI (lanes 2 and 4). The sizes of the novel restriction enzyme fragments generated by the targeting event are indicated at the left of the panel. (C) The absence of novel splice variants in G551D animals is shown by RT-PCR performed on RNA prepared from wild-type (lane 1), +/cfrG55ID (lane 2) and +/cfrG55ID/cfrG55ID mice (lanes 3-6). Lanes 1–3, small intestine; lane 4, kidney; lane 5, lung; lane 6, testis; lane 7, no RNA control. (D) Quantitation of G551D transcripts by RT-PCR. To distinguish wild-type and G551D transcripts, all products have been digested with Bsal. Lanes 1 and 2 are reactions performed on tissues from a wild-type mouse, lanes 3–5 are reactions carried out on RNA from a +/cfrG55ID animal. Lanes 1 and 3, testis RNA; lanes 2 and 4, kidney RNA; lane 5, small intestine RNA. The identity of the bands detected is shown at the right of the panel.

allele, selectable marker sequences were positioned adjacent to exon 11 which is skipped in somatic CFTR transcripts (Delaney et al., 1993). Targeting of the Cfr locus in ES cells by homologous recombinant was identified by Southern blot analysis (Figure 1B). This occurred in 37 of 96 ES colonies obtained under positive/negative selection. Fifteen of 18 targeted colonies tested by allele-specific PCR retained the G551D allele. Five of these lines were used to generate chimaeric animals, and two males from independent cell lines showed germ-line transmission. Approximately half of the progeny of the two transmitting males were heterozygous for the G551D allele, as determined by allele-specific PCR (data not shown). We have designated this allele cfrG551D but will refer to it in this manuscript as cfrG551D. These heterozygous animals were inter-crossed to produce wild-type (+/+), heterozygous (+/cfrG551D) and homozygous mutant (cfrG551D/cfrG551D) offspring. In agreement with the expected ratio of 1:2:1, in 123 animals genotyped from these crosses, 23% were +/-, 48% were +/cfrG551D and 29% were cfrG551D/cfrG551D. RT-PCR carried out on RNA prepared from a variety of tissues from heterozygous and homozygous animals indicated that selectable marker sequences retained in the targeted allele were not being incorporated as novel additional exons into CFTR transcripts (Figure 1C). Semi-quantitative RT-PCR indicated that the level of transcription of the G551D allele in a variety of tissues was ~53% of that of the wild-type allele (Figure 1D).

Intestinal obstruction is responsible for perinatal lethality and is reduced in G551D mutant mice compared with cfr+/-UNC (‘null’) mice

In crosses between heterozygous animals, cfrG551D/cfrG551D offspring were runted and between 50 and 70% of the weight of normal siblings. In matings maintained in specific pathogen-free conditions, ~33% of homozygous animals (46/141) died from intestinal obstruction before 35 days after birth (Figure 2). The site of intestinal obstruction in most animals, regardless of age, was just
distal or proximal to the caecum, and the cause of death appeared to be peritonitis due to intestinal perforation.

To compare directly the relative survival of mice carrying different Cfr mutant alleles, animals were reared and housed in the same facility. The survival at 35 days was 8% (2/27) for the cfr<sup>m1UNC</sup> animals and 27% (12/44) for the cfr<sup>G551D</sup> animals. Survival of cfr<sup>m1HGU</sup> mutants was 93% as previously determined (Dorin et al., 1994b). The reason for the reduction in survival of G551D mice in the common facility is uncertain, but most likely reflects the transfer from a specific pathogen-free to a standard animal facility and a concomitant change of food and bedding. The survival of the G551D mice was nevertheless significantly higher than for cfr<sup>m1UNC</sup> mutants (P<0.05).

**Histopathological abnormalities in G551D animals**

Histological examination of the intestinal tract of 15 cfr<sup>G551D</sup>/cfr<sup>G551D</sup> adult animals of various ages revealed abnormalities in all mutant mice when compared with control (+/cfr<sup>G551D</sup> or +/+ ) siblings, regardless of intestinal obstruction. The small intestines of mutant animals showing obstruction were grossly abnormal, with loss of the villi and the accumulation of necrotic and faecal material in the lumen (Figure 3B). The most characteristic abnormality found in all of the apparently healthy mutant mice examined was the presence of eosinophilic concretions in the crypts of Lieberkuhn. This results in the dilation of some crypts, particularly in the jejunum (Figure 3C and D). The colon of some animals also showed dilated mucus glands (data not shown).

In keeping with previous studies of the cfr<sup>m1UNC</sup> (Snouwaert et al., 1992) and cfr<sup>m1HGU</sup> mutant mice (Dorin et al., 1992), no difference in the appearance of the acinar or epithelial cells of the pancreas was detected between cfr<sup>G551D</sup>/cfr<sup>G551D</sup> animals and control siblings. The lungs of 10 animals were also examined histologically and scored for cellularity of the lung parenchyma, expansion of the lung, creation of the airway epithelia and epithelial hyperplasia. Using these criteria, no difference could be detected between homozygous animals and control siblings. No abnormalities were detected in the epithelia of the trachea or pharynx of nine cfr<sup>G551D</sup>/cfr<sup>G551D</sup> animals, but three showed inspissated eosinophilic material in the lumen of the pharyngeal submucosal glands (Figure 4A and B).

In three of seven mutant animals suffering from intestinal obstruction, the gallbladder appeared black and enlarged. Abnormalities were also evident in a number of healthy mutant animals, and included gallbladders which were black, enlarged or reduced in size. Five of nine gallbladders from cfr<sup>G551D</sup>/cfr<sup>G551D</sup> animals showed the presence of large numbers of polymorphonuclear cells, particularly eosinophils, in the gallbladder wall. In two of these animals, the gallbladder wall had an extremely vacuolated appearance in addition to the presence of inflammatory cells (Figure 4C and D). Abnormalities were also evident in the biliary tree of the liver. In three of 15 animals there was hyperplasia of the bile duct epithelia and in one of these animals there were bile pigments in the hepatocytes. Another of these three apparently healthy mutant animals showed focal biliary cirrhosis. In the area of focal cirrhosis, the biliary ducts were completely absent and were replaced by a fibrotic stroma and an inflammatory infiltrate characterized by large numbers of eosinophils (Figure 4E and F). Elsewhere in the liver, other than some bile ducts showing hyperplasia, the tissue was unremarkable.

Salivary gland defects have been reported in CF individuals and other CF mouse models (Ratliff et al., 1993). In two out of 10 G551D animals examined, the gland appeared hypercellular due to the serous cells having lost their vacuolated appearance (Figure 4G and H). The reproductive tract of five female and four male G551D animals appeared normal in comparison with control animals.

**Electrophysiological responses of the cfr<sup>G551D</sup>/cfr<sup>G551D</sup> mice**

In comparison with wild-type litter mates, sodium-related measurements [baseline potential difference (PD) and response to amiloride] were significantly (P<0.001) increased in the nasal epithelium of cfr<sup>G551D</sup>/cfr<sup>G551D</sup> mice in vivo (Figure 5A and B). The baseline PD profile closely resembles that seen in man, with a gradual increase in PD within the nasal cavity. Furthermore, the maximal value was reached at a greater distance from the external nares in the mutant mice, similar to the case in CF subjects. Subsequent perfusion with the cAMP-related agonist forskolin produced no response in the mutant mice; typically a depolarization was seen (Figure 5C). Finally, perfusion with ATP produced no significant difference between the calcium-related chloride secretion of the two genotypes (Figure 5D). In the trachea, in vitro measurements of baseline short circuit current (I<sub>SC</sub>) or response to amiloride showed no significant difference between genotypes (Figure 5 legend), although the G551D mutant mice tended to have reduced values for both responses. Subsequent addition of forskolin produced a significantly (P<0.01) reduced response in the mutant.
mice (Figure 5E), whilst ATP responses were significantly (P<0.05) greater in the mutant mice (Figure 5E legend).

Throughout the intestinal tract, whether studied in vitro (jejunum and caecum) or in vivo (rectum), both baseline values and the response to forskolin were significantly (P<0.001) reduced (Figure 6). We, and others, have demonstrated previously that the response of wild-type mice to forskolin principally relates to chloride secretion (Alton et al., 1993). This was confirmed in the present study by the subsequent addition of bumetanide (Figure 6). We also attempted to assess the effect of ionomycin (5 μM) added at the peak of the forskolin response. In both genotypes, this addition produced variable small changes, in keeping with CFTR acting as the principal chloride channel in the intestinal tract. Thus, in all tissues studied, the animals are characterized by a marked reduction in CFTR-related bioelectric responses.

The most frequent site of intestinal obstruction for cftrG551D/cftrG551D animals was near the caecum, and the apparent protection against intestinal obstruction relative to cftrm1UNC/cftrm1UNC 'null' mutant mice might result from residual CFTR-related chloride conductance in this region. For comparison, we therefore also measured in vitro forskolin responses in cftrm1UNC/cftrm1UNC mice. In these animals, forskolin responses in the caecum were small, variable and frequently depolarizing, equivalent in magnitude to ~0.5% (0.8) of wild-type values. In contrast, cftrG551D/cftrG551D animals show a residual caecal forskolin response (Figure 6B) significantly (P<0.05) greater than those of cftrm1UNC/cftrm1UNC mice equivalent to ~4.9% (1.3) of wild-type values. In the jejunum, forskolin responses in cftrG551D/cftrG551D mice also tended to be greater than those in cftrm1UNC/cftrm1UNC mice equivalent to ~2.9% (3.3) of wild-type values.

**Discussion**

We have used a single-step gene targeting procedure to produce mice carrying the equivalent of the common human mutation G551D by placing the marker sequences necessary to select for homologous recombination events adjacent to an exon which is skipped in somatic cells. In common with existing CFTR 'null' mouse mutants, G551D mutant mice display runting, intestinal obstruction, gallbladder abnormalities and alterations in serous and mucous glands, and show an absence of frank pathology in the lungs, pancreas and reproductive tract. The pathological changes seen in the liver and biliary tract are similar to the focal biliary cirrhosis seen in 5% of CF patients (Park and Grand, 1991) and are of specific interest as they have not been reported previously in other CF mouse models. This may reflect the combined effect of...
Cystic fibrosis mice carrying a G551D mutation

Fig. 4. Pathology of G551D animals in epithelial lined tissues. (A), (C), (E) and (G) are tissues from +/+ or +/cfrG551D animals; (B), (D), (F) and (H) from cfrG551Di/cfrG551D animals. All animals were apparently healthy when sacrificed. (A) and (B) Mucosal glands from behind the pharynx. The cfrG551D/cfrG551D animal (B) has an accumulation of eosinophilic material in the acinar lumen (arrowed). (C) and (D) Sections of the gallbladder; the enlarged gallbladder of a cfrG551D/cfrG551D animal (D), apparently healthy when sacrificed, shows a highly vacuolated epithelium [cf. wild-type sibling (C)] and evidence of an inflammatory infiltrate (arrowed). (E) and (F) Liver; the cfrG551D/cfrG551D animal (F) shows a focal inflammatory infiltrate with an apparent absence of bile ducts when compared with a control sibling (E). (G) and (H) Submaxillary salivary gland; the serous cells of the cfrG551D/cfrG551D animal (H) have lost some of their vacuolar appearance, as a result the gland appears hypercellular compared with a sibling control (G). For each tissue control and cfrG551D/cfrG551D samples are shown at the same magnification. Scale bar: (A), (B), (E) and (F) 50 µm; (C) and (D) 20 µm; (G) and (H) 100 µm.
the increased longevity of these mice compared with cftr<sup>−/−</sup> 'null' mutants and reduced residual CFTR-related chloride transport function compared with cftr<sup>−/+</sup> mutants which have ~10% wild-type CFTR mRNA (Dorin et al., 1994b). Further study is warranted to distinguish between a specific effect of the G551D mutation and a direct effect of limited CFTR function.

G551D CFTR is known to reach the apical membrane (Class III CFTR mutation), but probably demonstrates reduced residence time at this site (Prince et al., 1994). Increases in cAMP levels inhibit the normal cycling of CFTR between the apical surface and an endocytic pool, but this inhibition does not occur with the G551D mutation. Furthermore, G551D demonstrates reduced nucleotide binding to the first nucleotide binding fold in which the mutation is localized (Logan et al., 1994). Both these factors are likely to play a part in the markedly reduced function demonstrated here in the mutant mice and also reported in studies in cultured cells (Gregory et al., 1991; Yang et al., 1993) and Xenopus oocytes overexpressing
systems studied and the inclusion of 3-isobutyl-1-methylxanthine (IBMX) in the stimulant cocktail. Phosphodiesterase inhibitors such as IBMX have been shown recently to activate G551D channels (Becq et al., 1994), and suggest a therapeutic approach which may be tested in the cfr<sup>G551D</sup> mice.

Reduced cAMP, but not calcium-mediated chloride transport, was observed in the airways of the G551D mutants, as predicted from previous studies of CFTR function. We also demonstrate in the mouse that the G551D mutation increases sodium transport in the airways. To our knowledge, this has only been reported previously for CF subjects with either Class I ‘null’ mutations (and a complete absence of cellular CFTR) or Class II mutants, such as ΔF508 (in which the mutant protein is localized to the cytoplasm). Our results suggest that fully functional CFTR localized to the apical membrane appears to be necessary to prevent an increase in sodium absorption in the airways.

We measured a small, but significantly elevated response to forskolin in the caecum of G551D mice compared with ‘null’ mutants which had a marked effect on survival. As many as 67% of G551D mutant mice survived to 35 days when housed under specific pathogen-free conditions. Under conventional animal housing, survival was reduced to 27%, but this was still significantly higher than for complete ‘null’ mutants (8% survival; P<0.05). The improved survival of cfr<sup>G551D</sup>cfr<sup>G551D</sup> vs. cfr<sup>+</sup>⁄⁄cfr<sup>+</sup>⊂ mice is in accord with the clinical picture where CF patients bearing the G551D allele are indistinguishable in all respects from ΔF508 homozygotes except for a 3-fold decrease in risk of meconium ileus (Hamosh et al., 1992). This genotype–phenotype correlation is therefore substantiated across species, and the residual bioelectric responses in G551D animals probably explain these findings. The production of these G551D mice illustrates how mouse models carrying clinically relevant mutations may be of use in establishing mechanisms which underlie genotype–phenotype correlations.

The survival of the cfr<sup>G551D</sup> homozygous mice is clearly improved over that for the cfr<sup>+/+</sup> homozygous mice, despite only a very low level of residual cAMP-mediated chloride conductance. This provides evidence for a phenotypic effect accruing from only a modest level of normal CFTR chloride channel function (in the caecum equivalent to ≈5% of wild-type function). This is encouraging with respect to both gene therapy and pharmacological-based strategies for the treatment of CF. Our results also complement those of Zhou et al. (1994) who recently reported that transgenic expression of the human CFTR transgene driven by the FABP promoter, active in intestinal villus cells, restored ~30% of the cAMP-mediated chloride conductance, sufficient to substantially rescue the cfr<sup>+/+</sup> mutant strain from fatal intestinal disease.

The resulting good survival of the G551D mice means they provide an excellent model with which to study other aspects of CF pathogenesis, for example involving the lung and liver. We have recently shown that cfr<sup>+/+</sup> mice develop lung disease on exposure to CF-related pathogens (Davidson et al., 1995). It will be of interest to establish whether the G551D mice, which have less residual CFTR function than the cfr<sup>+/+</sup> mice, develop more severe lung disease that might recapitulate the

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**Fig. 6.** Measurements of bioelectric responses in the intestine of cfr<sup>G551D</sup>cfr<sup>G551D</sup> animals. (A) Jejunum studied in <i>vitro</i>, +/+ n = 10; cfr<sup>G551D</sup>cfr<sup>G551D</sup> n = 7. (B) Caecum studied in <i>vitro</i>, +/+ n = 11; cfr<sup>G551D</sup>cfr<sup>G551D</sup> n = 7. (C) Rectum studied in <i>vivo</i>, +/+ n = 9; cfr<sup>G551D</sup>cfr<sup>G551D</sup> n = 7. Conductance values were, jejunum: +/+ 14.6 mS/cm<sup>2</sup> (1.0), cfr<sup>G551D</sup>cfr<sup>G551D</sup> 19.0 mS/cm<sup>2</sup> (6.1); caecum: +/+ 16.9 mS/cm<sup>2</sup> (1.7), cfr<sup>G551D</sup>cfr<sup>G551D</sup> 14.0 mS/cm<sup>2</sup> (1.3); all conductance comparisons P = NS. In each figure, error bars indicate SEM. **P<0.001. Hatched bars = +/+, speckled bars = cfr<sup>G551D</sup>cfr<sup>G551D</sup>.
chronic infection found in patients. These animals are the first CF mice to be produced to carry a Class III mutation, which occur in a significant number of CF patients. In contrast to the most common CFTR mutation (ΔF508), Class III mutations result in CFTR which is able to reach the apical membrane. These mice will therefore also be of value in testing treatment strategies that may only be applicable to this type of mutation, for example activation by pharmacological agents which alter CFTR regulation.

Materials and methods

Construction of the G551D targeting vector

A phase clone was isolated from an 129/Sv genomic library using a primer homologous to exon 11 sequences (nt 1721–1742) and contained exons 11, 11b, 12 and 13. The G551D mutation was introduced into exon 11 by PCR with Vent polymerase (New England Biolabs) using the primer (5'-CATG GAGG AGTCG GCGT GC-3'). Mutagenized clones were checked for PCR errors in coding regions, and a fragment containing exon 11 and 12 was used to replace the equivalent wild-type sequences in a subclone containing 6.3 kb of Cftr genomic DNA. A HSV-TK cassette was inserted at the 3' end of the insert (Mansour et al., 1988). Two pgk-neo cassettes (Tybulewicz et al., 1991), as used in other Cftr replacement constructs (Koller et al., 1991), were inserted 8 bp downstream of exon 11b.

Production of targeted lines and mutant mice

R1 ES cells were maintained and selected on primary embryonic fibroblasts (Wurst and Joyner, 1993) with leukemia inhibitory factor (LIF) added to the media at 1000 U/ml. Chimaeric animals were produced by the aggregation method essentially as described for tetraploid aggregation by Nagy and Rossant (1993), except that a clump of 10–15 ES cells was placed in a well with a single CD-1 8 cell morula. Phenotype analysis of G551D mice was carried out on animals maintained in specific pathogen-free conditions on wood shaving bedding and standard redot food (Norco Cooperative Ltd).

Allele-specific PCR

Amplification of DNA prepared from ES colonies or tail-tips for genotyping was carried out using the primers (5'-GACAT CACCA AGTTT GCAGA ACAAG-3') and (5'-GATATA AAGCT TCCG GTTGT GGTTG-3') and a thermal profile of 95°C 30 s, 67°C 45 s, 72°C 1 min for 35 cycles. This primer pair produces a fragment of ~640 bp extending from the first nucleotide of exon 11 to 13 bp downstream of exon 11b and, in wild-type DNA, has a single BsrI site 83 bp from the 3' end. The mutagenesis of codon 551 results in the introduction of an additional BsrI site such that PCR products from wild-type and cftr551ID alleles differ in length following digestion with BsrI. Semi-quantitative RT-PCR of G551D transcripts was performed essentially as previously described (Delaney et al., 1993). Products were quantitated by the inclusion of 1 µCi of [32P]ATP in the PCR reaction. The primers used extend from exon 7 to exon 13 and were X7F2 (5'-GGCCAG ACAGA TATGG TATGA TTC-3') and SDCF 4 (5'-AAACGT GTGCA AAGAT CACACC-3'). Reactions were terminated in the logarithmic phase of amplification. RT-PCR products corresponding to G551D transcripts can be distinguished from wild-type transcripts by the presence of a single BsrI site.

Relative survival of the CFTR mutant mice

For the comparison of survival rates, animals were housed under conventional animal house conditions on Corn cob bedding (R.S.Biotech) and fed standard rodent food CRX5 (Special Diet Services). cfr11onc mutant mice (Snouwarta et al., 1992) were obtained from the Jackson Laboratories, Bar Harbor.

Histology

Dissected tissues were fixed in ice-cold 4% phosphate-buffered formaldehyde, embedded in paraffin wax and 6 µm sections were cut and stained with haematoxylin and eosin and periodic acid Schiff (PAS) reagent. Liver and lung sections were examined with the genotype of the animal coded.

Electrophysiological methodology

Mice (weight 15–53 g) were anaesthetized (tribromoethanol 0.2 ml/10 g intraperitoneally) and a subcutaneous electrode inserted into a hind limb. Both this and the exploring electrode were connected by Krebs–HEPES of composition (mM): Na+ 140, Cl-152, K+ 6, Ca2+ 2, Mg2+ 1, glucose 10, HEPES 10 to a calomel electrode and, in turn, to a handheld computer connected to a pre-amplifier containing a low-pass signal averaging filter with a time constant of 0.5 s. The offset of the electrodes was recorded prior to measurements, and appropriate corrections made. Buccal PD was assessed by passing the integrated pulse: the absolute values ranging from ~10 to ~17 mV. Rectal PD was measured using a double-lumen tube of outer diameter 1 mm, inserted to a distance of ~15 mm. Following the recording of stable values (~0.2 mV over 15 s), drugs were perfused at a rate of 40 µl/min through the second lumen. Amiloride (100 µM) followed by forskolin (10 µM), each dissolved in Krebs–HEPES, were administered. Following these measurements, an opening was fashioned in the laryngeal cartilage and a tissue plug inserted. A tracheotomy was then made at the junction of the larynx and trachea. For nasal measurements, the exploring electrode consisted of a fine double-lumen plastic tube (outer diameter 0.5 mm) advanced into the left nasal cavity and the stable PD (~0.5 mV over 15 s) recorded at ~1 mm intervals up to 10 mm. For drug perfusion, the exploring electrode was positioned 5 mm from the external nares. Drugs were perfused through the second lumen in the sequence: amiloride (100 µM in Krebs–HEPES), forskolin (10 µM) and ATP (100 µM, both in low chloride (6 mM) HEPES–Krebs with gluconate substitution). The junctional potential between the normal bathing solution and the low-chloride solution was ignored because of paired comparisons. It is unlikely that the paracelluar shunt is affected in CF airway epithelium (Widdicombe et al., 1993).

Following in vivo measurements, animals were sacrificed, the trachea, and caecum dissected and placed in Krebs Henseleit solution of composition (mM): Na+ 145.0, Cl-126.0, K+ 5.9, Ca2+ 2.5, Mg2+ 1.2, HCO3- 26.0, PO43- 1.2, SO42- 1.2, glucose 5.6. The small intestine was placed in an equivalent solution, with the glucose replaced by equimolar mannitol. All tissues were transported to the laboratory on ice and mounted in Ussing chambers of aperture diameter 0.28 cm (jejunum and caecum) or 0.03 cm2 (trachea). Two chambers were obtained from each jejunum and caecum and one from the trachea. Values were subsequently meaned to provide a single measurement for each animal. Both mucosal and serosal surfaces of the tissues were bathed in Krebs Henseleit solution at 37°C, pH 7.4, circulated by 95% O2/5% CO2, with the exception of the jejunum, where glucose was replaced with equimolar mannitol on the mucosal surface. Studies were performed under short-circuit conditions. Prior to and at the peak/trough of each drug intervention, a 2 µA pulse was passed to allow measurement of tissue conductance. In the trachea, once stable values were attained, tissues were treated sequentially with amiloride (100 µM), forskolin (10 µM) and ATP (100 µM). All drugs were added mucosally. In the jejunum, the sequence of additions was forskolin (10 µM, serosally), ionomycin (5 µM, bilaterally), bumetanide (100 µM, serosally), glucose (5.5 mM, mucosally) and chloridzin (200 µM, mucosally). In the caecum, the sequence of additions was forskolin (10 µM, serosally), ionomycin (5 µM, bilaterally) and bumetanide (100 µM, serosally). Recordings from all animals studied are included in the analyses, with the exception of one animal (cfr11onc/cfr11onc) in which no measurements could be obtained due to technical difficulties. All statistical comparisons were made using the Mann–Whitney U test; the null hypothesis was rejected at P<0.05.

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