

Review

The effects of antibody treatment on regulatory CD4⁺CD25⁺ T cells

Huanfa Yi^{a,b}, Jialin Zhang^c, Yong Zhao^{a,b,*}

^a Transplantation Biology Research Division, State Key Laboratory of Biomembrane and Membrane Biotechnology, Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China

^b China-U.S. Joint Research Center for Life Sciences, Beijing, China

^c Department of General Surgery and Organ Transplant Unit, First University Hospital, China Medical University, Shenyang, China

Received 31 May 2007; received in revised form 9 December 2007; accepted 11 December 2007

Abstract

Current therapeutic antibodies, at least some, possess the capacity to induce immune tolerance in experimental models with allo-grafts or autoimmune diseases. Clinical application of humanized or chimeric antibodies to treat graft rejection or autoimmune diseases is presently underway. It is now becoming clear that immune tolerance can be acquired in some cases due to the action of regulatory T cells (Tregs), especially CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs. In addition to their inhibition on immune response, some antibodies could promote tolerance induction in organ transplantation and autoimmune diseases essentially through the induction of Tregs. In this manuscript, we review the recent progress on the effects of therapeutic antibodies on the development, phenotypic changes and functions of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs.

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Keywords: Regulatory T cells; Immunosuppression; Antibodies; Immune tolerance; Transplantation

Contents

1. Introduction	38
2. Antibodies used in animal models and clinical trials	38
3. Types of Tregs and transplant tolerance	38
4. The effects of mAbs on CD4 ⁺ CD25 ⁺ Tregs	38
4.1. ALS or ATG	38
4.2. Anti-CD45RB mAb	39
4.3. Anti-CD25 mAb	39
4.4. Anti-CD20 mAb	39
4.5. Anti-CD4 mAb	39
4.6. Anti-CD52 mAb (alemtuzumab)	40
4.7. Anti-CD40L mAb (CD154)	40
4.8. Anti-CD3 mAb	40
4.9. Anti-CD28 mAb	40
4.10. Other antibodies and CD4 ⁺ CD25 ⁺ Tregs	41

Abbreviations: APC, antigen presenting cells; ALS, anti-lymphocyte serum; ATG, anti-thymocyte globulins; CTLA-4, cytotoxic T lymphocyte-associated protein-4; Foxp3, Forkhead/winged-helix family transcriptional repressor p3; GVHD, Graft versus Host Disease; LAP, latency-associated peptide; PBMC, peripheral blood mononuclear cell; PTEN, phosphatase and tensin homolog; Tregs, regulatory T cells; TCR, T cell receptor; TGF-β, transforming growth factor-β.

* Corresponding author. Transplantation Biology Research Division, State Key Laboratory of Biomembrane and Membrane Biotechnology, Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Datun Road 5, Beijing, China 100101. Tel./fax: +86 10 64807302.

E-mail address: zhaoy@ioz.ac.cn (Y. Zhao).

5. Summary	41
Acknowledgements	41
References	41

1. Introduction

Organ transplantation is the preferred treatment modality for end-stage organ failure [1]. At present, though immunosuppressive medicines have significantly improved the short-term graft survival, chronic allograft nephropathy (CAN) and cardiovascular disease remain major challenge for long-term graft survival. So the induction of transplantation tolerance has been one of the major goals of transplant community. Transplantation tolerance can be achieved via central and peripheral tolerance [2]. Peripheral tolerance involve several different mechanisms including T cell clonal deletion, “ignorance”, energy and active suppression [3,4]. Accumulating evidence has shown that Tregs play an important role in the induction and maintenance of transplantation tolerance [4,5].

In recent years, it has been demonstrated that monoclonal antibodies (mAbs) can successfully induce long-term immunological tolerance. Though the mechanisms have not been defined completely, it appears that the induction of Tregs and co-stimulation blockade may be the major mechanisms for mAbs to induce transplant tolerance in some experimental models [3,6–11]. Because CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs are the most regulatory T cell subsets in transplantation tolerance, the goal of this manuscript is to briefly review the current literature about the effects of antibody treatment on the phenotype, development and function of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs in experimental models.

2. Antibodies used in animal models and clinical trials

Since the late 1960s, Polyclonal anti-lymphocyte serum (ALS) or anti-thymocyte globulins (ATG) have been using as potent immunosuppressive agents in organ transplantation, and the availability of mAbs in the 1980s provides better practical possibilities. Since then, many groups have demonstrated that a variety of antibodies that interference with T cell-antigen presenting cell (APC) interactions could induce tolerance in some models. At present, mAbs used in transplantation and autoimmune diseases primarily target CD molecules (CD3, CD4, CD8, CD20, CD22, CD28, CD80/86, CD40-CD154, CTLA-4, CD52, CD45RB), chemokines and their receptors (CCR5, CCR1, etc), as well as cytokines (TNF- α , IL-2, etc). At present, must related studies or information were collected in experimental models.

3. Types of Tregs and transplant tolerance

A variety of Treg subsets have been identified according to their surface markers or cytokine products in a number of experimental models, such as CD4⁺ Treg cells (including

natural CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs [12], IL-10-producing Tr1 cells [13], TGF- β -producing Th3 cells [14], CD8⁺ Tregs [15], Veto CD8⁺ cells [16], $\gamma\delta$ T cells, NKT (NK1.1⁺CD4⁻CD8⁻) cells [17], NK1.1⁻CD4⁻CD8⁻ cells [18], and others [19,20]. Co-transfer of purified CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs (nTregs) along with the CD4⁺CD25⁻ T cells significantly delayed graft versus host disease (GVHD) onset caused by the latter cells [21,22] or block MHC-mismatched allogeneic skin graft rejection [23,24]. Tr1 cells have been shown able to prevent GVHD [25] and graft rejection [26].

Foxp3, as a member of the forkhead/winged-helix family of transcriptional repressors, is still a most specific marker for distinguishing Tregs and non-Treg cells in CD4⁺T cells now [27]. The precise mechanisms for the immune regulation by these subsets are different. For CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs, there are at least three mechanisms: First, CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs suppress the proliferation of effector cells via cell–cell contact style, which may involve in Fas–FasL pathway [28] or Granzyme and/or perforin pathway [29]. Secondly, IL-10 and/or TGF- β may involve in the regulation, but it is controversial. For example, CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs from IL-10^{-/-} mice are unable to prevent the development of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) [30]. Anti-TGF- β mAb can attenuate the suppression of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs [31], but Piccirillo et al consider that the suppression of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs is not correlated with TGF- β [32]. Third, CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs down-regulate the expression of Immunoglobulin-like transcript 3 (ILT3) and ILT4 in DCs [33], then decrease the expression of costimulatory molecules, such as CD40, CD80 and CD86 [15]. Thus, CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs may perform their suppression via kinds of mechanisms according to different microenvironments, such as intensity and sites of immune response. In addition, other Treg cells have different regulatory mechanisms: CD8⁺ Treg cells increase IL-4 production [34], NKT cells use costimulatory blockade [17], or DN Treg cells can deplete alloreactive CD8⁺ T cells [18]. The full significance of other Treg subsets in transplantation tolerance remains to be documented. Much evidence indicates that active immunosuppression by Tregs is essential for induction of peripheral tolerance to both self and foreign antigens in small animal models in vivo. However, no studies in non-human primates or humans specifically using these cells for tolerance induction have been reported so far.

4. The effects of mAbs on CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs

4.1. ALS or ATG

ALS and ATG are the mixture of antibodies against CD2, CD3, CD45, and HLA molecules, can result in broad T cell depletion via complement-dependent lymphocyte lysis and Fas/

Fas ligand-mediated apoptosis [35], and are used as an integral part of tolerance induction in experimental transplantation [36,37]. ATG treatment resulted in the attenuation from myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein (MOG)-induced experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis (EAE), an animal model for multiple sclerosis, both in a preventive and early therapeutic setting via the expansion of MOG-specific CD4⁺Foxp3⁺Tregs [38]. A short course treatment with ALS can effectively expand CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs and significantly prevent onset of type 1 diabetes mellitus in NOD mice [39]. Minamimura et al have recently reported that CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs are spared from T cell-depleting effect of ALS, because of the up-regulation of Bcl-2 in these cells, while post-ALS treatment, CD4⁺CD25⁻ T cells exhibited transient regulatory activity [40]. Because auto-reactive effector T cells are eliminated by ALS while Tregs survive, this treatment thus creates a long-lasting immunoregulatory cell-dominant condition [39,41].

4.2. Anti-CD45RB mAb

CD45, which plays a pivotal role in T-cell antigen receptor signal transduction, is recognized as a potential candidate for tolerance induction strategies [8]. As we known, CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs are CD45^{low}, CTLA-4^{high} [42]. Previous report considers that anti-CD45RB mAb treatment leads to a switch from CD45RB^{high} to CD45RB^{low} [43]. In fact, this mAb may selectively deplete CD45RB^{high} effector T cells, thereby enriching Tregs expressing low level of CD45RB, which causes the inversion of CD45RB^{high}/CD45RB^{low} ratio [44,45]. Moreover, this also can explain the up-regulation of CTLA-4 after administration of anti-CD45RB mAb [44,46]. It is reported that anti-CD45RB-treated mice exposed to alloantigens exhibited anergic CD4⁺CD25⁻ effector cells and CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs. Moreover, depletion of CD25⁺T cells in the peritransplant period significantly prevented anti-CD45RB-mediated engraftment of islets [47]. These data indicate that CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs were involved in transplant tolerance induction in this model. Thus compared with those non-selectively T cell-depletion reagents, anti-CD45RB mAb provides a better alternative for transplant tolerance induction.

In addition, anti-CD45 mAb may directly take part in the negative selection and causes the appearance of donor-specific Tregs in thymus [48]. This suggests that thymus is necessary for tolerance induction by anti-CD45RB mAb. Recently, ChA6 mAb, a chimeric anti-CD45RO/RB mAb, can induce the generation of CD4⁺CD25⁺Tregs that are phenotypically and functionally equivalent to those of Tr1 cells and CD8⁺ Tregs with low level of CD25 and considerable level of CD28 expression [49].

4.3. Anti-CD25 mAb

Although anti-CD25 mAbs were previously shown to prevent graft rejection via depleting activated T cells in rodent models, they are only used as adjunctive agents to immunosuppression, and not part of tolerance protocols in the clinic. The presence of anti-CD25 mAb together with anti-CTLA-4

mAb can highly augment lymphokine-activated killer cell activity through the immunosuppression of Tregs [50]. Two anti-human CD25 mAbs (basiliximab and daclizumab) are currently used in clinical organ transplantation and have been shown to prevent acute rejection [51,52]. Recent studies by investigators have shown that PC61, a IgG1 isotype of anti-CD25 mAb, also deplete CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs [53,54], and leads to prevent induction of tolerance [55], to exacerbate of acute GVHD [56] or inhibit tumor growth [57–59]. However, Kohm et al believe that anti-CD25 mAbs, regardless of which isotype, do not deplete CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs, but inactivate the function of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs via down-regulating the expression of CD25 [60]. However, the depletion of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs by PC61 is kept for short term, because new CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs are continuously produced from the thymus and enter the periphery.

But Game et al find that basiliximab does not influence the immunosuppressive function of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs in vitro, despite of abolishing the CTLA-4, HLA-DR and CD62L expression on CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs [61]. Basiliximab can reduce apoptosis of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs possibly via increasing the expression of PTEN [61]. Consistently, another CD25 mAb, daclizumab, does not change the number and function of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs in renal transplantation patients [62].

4.4. Anti-CD20 mAb

Because CD20 is solely expressed on B cells, not B progenitors, CD20 mAb (such as rituximab) is mainly used to deplete B cells in the treatment of several autoimmune or lympho-proliferative diseases [63–65]. Interestingly, a recent study showed that rituximab therapy could significantly increase the frequency and the number of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs with the recovery of B cells in systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) patients [66]. The reason is still unclear; perhaps due to expansion or emigrant of thymic-derived CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs, conversion of CD4⁺CD25⁻ T cells or decreased traffic of Tregs to inflammatory sites following the remission of disease.

4.5. Anti-CD4 mAb

Anti-CD4 mAbs are potential therapeutic agents for the prevention of autoimmune diseases and the treatment of graft rejection by restoring tolerance to self-antigens and inducing tolerance to antigens introduced under the cover of the Ab therapy [7,67]. Though some studies propose that depleting anti-CD4 mAb can inhibit CD4⁺ T cell proliferation triggered by TCR/CD3 ligation [68] and induce Tregs [69] as well as non-depleting anti-CD4 mAbs do, Several lines of evidence strongly support that non-depleting anti-CD4 mAbs appear to be more effective than depleting ones. It has been shown that a short-course treatment with non-depleting anti-CD4 mAb and donor antigen can significantly induce donor antigen specific-CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs [[23,70–73]. It have been confirmed that these CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs are transformed from CD4⁺CD25⁻ precursors in periphery [74]. However, the possibility that some CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs develop in thymus can not be excluded.

4.6. Anti-CD52 mAb (alemtuzumab)

CD52 is an exceptionally abundant antigen which is expressed specifically on human lymphocytes, monocytes, eosinophils. Alemtuzumab (rat IgG2b) and its humanized form cause extensive T and B lymphocyte depletion, which results in a prolonged lymphopenia, particularly of CD4⁺ cells. It has been clinically used to treat lympho-proliferative disorders (leukemia and lymphoma) [75,76] and autoimmune diseases [77,78], and to deplete lymphocytes in organ and bone marrow transplantation [79–82].

It was reported that the recognition of CD52 on T lymphocytes by alemtuzumab led to the activation of cell proliferation via the CD2 pathway and the expression of interleukin -2 receptors [83]. Recently, a report shows that the interaction between 4C8 antigen (it is recently determined that it is CD52, too [84]) and its mAb provides a co-stimulatory signaling even stronger than that of anti-CD28, which then leads to the production of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs from CD4⁺CD25⁻ T cells that perform their suppressive function via a cell contact-dependent fashion [85]. So at least in vitro, costimulation of CD4⁺ T cells by alemtuzumab indeed leads to the induction of certain Treg cell subset which inhibits polyclonal or allogeneic response of CD4⁺ and CD8⁺T cells. CD52-costimulation slightly increased FOXP3 expression in CD4⁺CD25⁻ T cells in the protein level. In addition, anti-CD52 mAb-induced CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs can be expanded more than 20-fold with IL-2, and these expanded Tregs do not lost their immunosuppressive function and can prevent GVHD-like pathology in SCID mice injected with human PBMCs. But some experiments need to be done to decide whether alemtuzumab can expand Tregs.

4.7. Anti-CD40L mAb (CD154)

Interruption of co-stimulation signaling pathway can result in the suppression of immune response and possibly same in immune tolerance. Combining with donor antigens [86] or other blockers [87–89], nondepleting antagonists to CD154 have been used in animal models or non-human primates models [90–92]. Despite these mAbs can induce the apoptosis of alloreactive T cells, it appears that Tregs play more important roles in the induction of infectious tolerance. CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs harvested from C3H mice having received donor-specific blood transfusion from DBA/2 plus anti-CD40L mAb exhibited a much more powerful suppressive phenotype, ensuring the long-term survival of DBA/2 skin allografts, even when co-transferred at equal numbers with CD4⁺CD25⁻ T cells [93,94]. But at present, it is unclear that these CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs come from expanded inherent CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs or induced from aggressive T effector cells.

Recently, a report proposes that recruitment of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs into grafts might be an alternative mechanism for tolerance induction in this model, because CCR4 and CCL22 are up-regulated in grafts coinciding with the increasing expression of Foxp3. Tolerance induction by anti-CD154 mAb could not be achieved in CCR4^{-/-} recipients, indicating

that recruitment of Foxp3⁺Tregs to allograft tissue is dependent on CCR4 and critical for tolerance induction by this approach [95].

4.8. Anti-CD3 mAb

Although they were used initially as non-specific immunosuppressants in transplantation, CD3-specific mAbs have elicited renewed interest owing to their ability to induce immune tolerance. In addition to the rapid depletion of T cells and a decrease of CD4/CD8 ratio [96–98], Different types of Tregs can be produced according to CD3 mAb isoforms or administration routes.

The proportions of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs in anti-CD3 mAb treated mice were significantly increased in pancreatic and mesenteric lymph nodes, but not in the spleen of in adult overtly diabetic NOD mice [99,100]. These cells are fully unresponsive to antigen-specific or mitogen stimulation and produce high levels of TGF-β, indicating that the induced CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs in this model are distinct from naturally occurring Tregs [100]. Interestingly, changing the mAb administration route perhaps produce distinct Treg subpopulations. Oral administration of anti-CD3 mAb can prominently increase the latency-associated peptide (LAP)⁺CD4⁺CD25⁻ Tregs in mesenteric lymph nodes or spleens. LAP⁺CD4⁺CD25⁻ Tregs from mice that have been orally administrated CD3 mAb have excellent immunosuppressive activity in vitro and in vivo through a TGF-β-dependent mechanism [14]. It is unclear why it can induce CD4⁺CD25⁻ LAP⁺ Tregs in this model yet.

Besides CD4⁺ Tregs could be induced by anti-CD3 mAbs, Bisikirska et al show that hOKT3γ1 (Ala-Ala), a modified anti-human CD3 mAb, can induce CD8⁺CD25⁺Foxp3⁺Tregs in patients with type 1 diabetes. These induced CD8⁺CD25⁺Foxp3⁺ Treg cells inhibit the responses of CD4⁺ cells to antigens in a cell-contact dependent fashion [101].

4.9. Anti-CD28 mAb

CD28 is the most prominent co-stimulatory receptor, it interacts with its ligands, B7 molecules (CD80 or CD86) expressed on APCs, to provide “secondary” signaling for T cell activation. Though the expression of CD28 has similar levels in both CD25⁺ and CD25⁻ populations, CD28/B7 co-stimulatory pathway appears to be more important for the development, homeostasis, peripheral maintenance and function of nTregs than for CD25⁻ T cells, because CD28 or B7-deficient mice present a profound decrease of nTregs. Moreover, CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs from CD28^{-/-} mice have a functional deficit on CD25⁻ T cells [102]. CD28 may support the survival and self-renewal of peripheral Tregs via regulating IL-2 production by conventional T cells and CD25 expression on nTregs themselves [103]. The combination of suboptimal DST with anti-CD28 mAb induces donor-specific tolerance that correlates with enhanced numbers of regulatory T-cells [104]. In addition, JJ316, a stimulatory anti-CD28 mAb known to promote Th2 function and the expansion of Treg cells, can efficiently prevented the inflammatory process of adjuvant arthritis in rats [105].

Recently, Beyersdorf et al find superagonistic anti-CD28 mAb, a new CD28 mAb with more potent co-stimulation effect independently of TCR signaling, can effectively abate or prevent the symptoms of autoimmune diseases [106,107,111]. Tregs are preferentially expanded and activated in vivo over CD25⁻ T cells in this model [106,107]. Lin et al also provide the evidence that superagonistic anti-CD28 mAb can expand Tregs in vivo and in vitro [108]. On the other hand, Tregs expanded by superagonistic anti-CD28 mAb reveal a dose-dependent increase in suppressive activity [106,107]. But the severe toxic response of CD28 superagonist in clinical trials limits its application in the future.

4.10. Other antibodies and CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs

It has been reported that the anti-inflammatory extracellular matrix protein, thrombospondin-1, promoted the generation of human peripheral Treg cells through the ligation of one of its receptor, CD47 [109]. CD47 stimulation by mAb induced naive or memory CD4⁺CD25⁻ T cells to become immunosuppressive [109]. Triggering either GITR or OX40 (CD134) on CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs using agonist mAbs significantly inhibited their capacity of immunosuppression [110]. Strikingly, the suppression of Tregs on GVHD was abrogated either by intraperitoneal injection of anti-OX40 or anti-GITR mAbs [110]. The results suggest that OX40 directly controls Tregs-mediated suppression.

5. Summary

Antibody therapeutics offer promising approaches for the induction of immune tolerance. T cell tolerance induced by mAbs may be achieved by expansion, induction and recruitment of CD4⁺CD25⁺ Tregs or even other types of Tregs. The ideal antibody therapeutics should do not interfere with, but rather promote, Tregs while still controlling innate and adaptive immunity against the graft. For those antibodies for tolerance induction to become clinically applicable, there is a need to know how the various antibody-based regimens affect the power of Tregs when combined with immunosuppressive medicines.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by grants from the National Natural Science Foundation for Distinguished Young Scholars (No. 30425026, Y.Z.), the Knowledge Innovation Program of CAS (KSCX2-SW-333, Y.Z.), the National Natural Science Foundation for Key Programs (No. 30630060, Y.Z.), the National Basic Research Program (973 Program, 2003CB515501, Y.Z.), 100 Quality Vocational Colleagues of the CAS (2003-85, Y.Z.), and the Scientific Research Foundation for Returned Overseas Chinese Scholars, State Education Ministry (2005-546, Y.Z.).

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