Lipid mediators in epithelial cell-cell interactions

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Abstract. Epithelial cells which line mucosal surfaces (e.g. lung, intestine) play a central role in the coordination of the inflammatory response. In both the healthy and diseased mucosa, epithelia lie anatomically positioned in close proximity to a number of other cell types, including leukocytes, fibroblasts, smooth muscle cells and vascular endothelia. This complex architecture supports a unique microenvironment for biochemical cell-

cell crosstalk. Our previous studies and work by others have elucidated lipid mediator signaling networks emanating from epithelial cell-cell interactive pathways, and have defined a number of targets for development of effective therapeutics. This short review will focus on recently defined pathways of lipid mediator function in the mucosa, particularly with regard to the role of the epithelium.

Key words. Epithelium; leukocyte; inflammation; chemokine; chloride secretion.

Introduction

Epithelial cells of the mucosa are a dynamic cell population which serve critical and diverse functions. This monolayer of cells provides regulated barrier function and serves as a conduit for vectorial ion movement, the transport event responsible for mucosal hydration [1]. By secreting solutes and actively transporting fluid across the epithelium, epithelia are able to coordinate compositional changes of the luminal compartment. A number of paracrine mediators, including bioactive lipids, hormones, neurotransmitters and cytokines have been shown to directly regulate epithelial responses [2].

In intact mucosal tissues, epithelia lie anatomically positioned adjacent to a number of subepithelial cell types, including leukocytes, fibroblasts, smooth muscle cells and vascular endothelia. These subepithelial cell populations contribute significantly to epithelial function through paracrine crosstalk pathways. Locally generated mediators bind to epithelial surface receptors, and mediate both physiologic and pathophysiologic functional responses. Important in this regard, both epithelial and subepithelial cell populations express enzymes (e.g. lipoxygenases, cyclooxygenases) capable of utilizing arachidonic acid substrates to generate bioactive lipid mediators. Such lipid mediators can signal via autocrine or paracrine pathways (see recent review by Eberhart and Dubois) [3] and, depending on the tissue microenvironment, can convey a pro- or anti-inflammatory message. This review will highlight recent studies defining cellular responses mediated by lipids derived from epithelial interactions with subepithelial populations.

Epithelial-leukocyte interactions

Basic aspects

Neutrophils (polymorphonuclear leukocytes, PMN) have a demonstrated role in mucosal inflammation. At mucosal surfaces, PMN migration into the epithelium is a first line of defense against infectious agents, and defects in such PMN-epithelial interactions contribute to fulminate microbial infections, mucosal ulcerations and delayed tissue healing [4, 5]. The protective aspects of PMN in mucosal disease are objectively exemplified by the clinical observation that patients with primary defects in PMN function support ongoing mucosal infections, including neutropenic patients and patients afflicted with genetic PMN immunopathologies [e.g. leukocyte adhesion deficiency (LAD), Chediak-Higashi syndrome, myeloperoxidase deficiency, and so on] [6–8]. As a

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corollary, extensive functional defects in PMN have been observed in these patients with chronic mucosal inflammation.

PMN migration across epithelia is a result of an orchestrated series of events, ultimately resulting in PMN accumulation at sites of tissue injury. The recruitment signals, the cell-cell interaction steps and the regulatory pathways for these events have only recently been explored. It is now appreciated that adhesion-based interactions, involving specific cell adhesion epitopes, are the primary means by which PMNs interact with epithelial cells [4, 9]. For example, recent studies have shown that PMN β_2 integrins are required for PMNs to move across oral epithelia, kidney epithelia [10] and intestinal epithelia [11-13]. These integrins, like others, are heterodimeric glycoproteins which exist in four forms on the PMN. Each displays a unique α subunit (CD11a, b, c or d) and an identical β subunit (CD18) [14, 15]. These receptors are best demonstrated in the genetic disorder LAD, in which patients lack normal expression of the CD 18 β subunit and, as a result, show increased susceptibility to infection due to abnormal leukocyte function [14]. These patients manifest severe mucosal disease, characterized primarily by severe bacterial infections. PMNs from LAD patients fail to migrate across intestinal epithelial monolayers [11-13], indicating the dependence of this event on PMN expression of CD11/18 integrins. At several levels, studies have revealed that PMN-epithelial interactions are dependent on CD11b/18, but not CD11a or CD11c/18 [4]. At the present time, the epithelial ligand for CD11b/18 has not been identified. Studies directed at defining specific PMN-epithelial interactive events have unveiled a functionally inhibitory monoclonal antibody (mAb) which blocks PMN transmigration, but not PMN adhesion, to epithelia [16-18]. Subsequent experiments revealed that the antigen recognized by this mAb (C5/D5) represents a membrane glycoprotein of ~60 kDa and is expressed in a polarized fashion (basolateral). Isolation, purification and microsequencing identified this antigen as CD47 (also termed integrin-associated protein), a previously cloned protein with homology to the immunoglobulin supergene family [19]. Similarly, others have demonstrated that CD47 is important in PMN transendothelial migration [20], suggesting some degree of universality for CD47 in leukocyte-mediated interactions.

Regulation of epithelial-PMN interactions by lipoxins

Leukocyte-epithelial interactive pathways are significantly influenced by locally generated lipid mediators. Of particular interest are a group of lipid mediators termed the lipoxins [21]. Lipoxins are tetraene eicosanoids derived from membrane arachidonic acid through the combined action of 5-lipoxygenase (LO) and 12-LO or 15LO [22] (see fig. 1). A number of recent in vitro and in vivo studies have revealed that lipoxins, and specifically lipoxin A₄ (LXA₄), function as an innate 'stop signals', acting to control local inflammatory processes [23-26]. At nanomolar concentrations, LXA₄ has been demonstrated to inhibit PMN transmigration across confluent epithelia and endothelia [24, 25]. It is likely that the action(s) of LXA₄ are on leukocytes and involve the activation of protein kinase C, since original studies revealed that LXA₄ inhibition required PMN preexposure and such responses were sensitive to the protein kinase C inhibitor staurosporine [24]. Additional mechanistic studies have revealed that LXA₄ inhibit PMN β_2 integrin (CD11/18) expression [27]. Importantly, compared with LXA4 (hydroxyl groups at carbon positions 5S, 6R and 15S), the positional isomer LXB₄ (hydroxyls at carbon positions 5S, 14R and 15S) is not active in PMN transepithelial migration [24], but potently inhibits PMN transendothelial migration and potentiates monocyte adhesion to endothelia [28]. Such studies define an important structure-function relationship with these eicosanoids and highlight the significant differences between endothelial and epithelial cells and within leukocyte subpopulations.

Lipoxins are rapidly (within minutes) converted to inactive compounds by myeloid cells [29]. For this reason, stable lipoxin analogs have be synthesized and biochemically and functionally studied in detail [25] (see fig. 1). Strategies to alter in the native LXA₄ molecule have primarily utilized substitutions (methoxy, cyclohexyl or phenoxy groups) at the carbon 15 and/or carbon 20 positions. As a general finding, synthetic lipoxin analogs exhibit greater potency for these counter-regulatory actions than the native compound, likely due to decreased metabolism to inactive compounds [25, 28]. A particularly potent LXA₄ analog is 15 (R/S)-methyl-LXA₄. This synthetic molecule resembles that of 15-epi-LXA₄, a native lipoxin generated in vivo in the presence of aspirin [23], which may contribute in part to the antiinflammatory actions of aspirin. 15 (R/S)-methyl-LXA₄ inhibits PMN transmigration across epithelia and effectively blocks PMN adhesion to vascular endothelia at concentrations as low as 10 pM [25]. Structure-function analyses have revealed that 16-phenoxy-LXA₄ and 15-cyclohexyl-LXA₄ (see fig. 1) are also potent inhibitors of PMN transendothelial and transepithelial migration $[EC_{50}]$'s (effective concentration for 50% response) 1-5 nM] [25]. The 15-deoxy-LXA₄ compound, lacking a position 15 hydroxyl (see fig. 1), is not metabolized by leukocytes and carries no bioactivity [25]. In vivo, both the native compound and analogs to LXA4 have been demonstrated to block PMN diapedesis within the microcirculation of the hamster cheek pouch [30], depress contraction of the guinea pig ileum [31] and inhibit increases in vascular permeability elicited by acute inflammation [32].

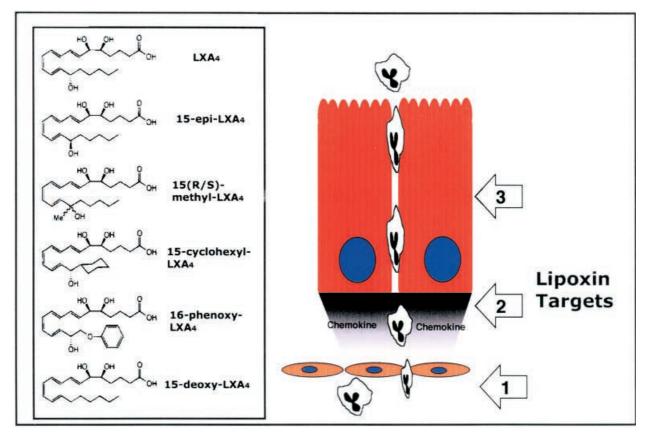


Figure 1. Model of lipoxin targets during active mucosal inflammation. The structure of native lipoxin A_4 (LXA₄) and stable analogs derived from the parent compound [25] are shown in the left panel. The 15-deoxy-LXA₄ compound (bottom structure) is not active. The right panel depicts defined targets for LXA₄ or stable analogs to LXA₄, and include (i) inhibition of PMN-endothelial adhesion and transmigration [25, 73]; (ii) chemokine release from epithelia [26, 41] and (iii) PMN transepithelial migration [24, 25].

Role of chemokines in PMN-epithelial interactions

During both acute and chronic inflammatory processes, mucosal epithelial cells orchestrate the active recruitment of leukocytes, particularly PMN. Epithelia are demonstrated sources of PMN chemotactic cytokines (chemokines), including interleukin-8 (IL-8), GRO- α , GRO- γ and ENA-78 [17, 33, 34]. Epithelia produce and release chemokines in response to multiple activation stimuli, including cytokines [35, 36], infectious agents [34, 37, 38] and cellular hypoxia [17]. Detailed studies have revealed that chemokine release occurs predominantly through the physiologically relevant basolateral surface [17, 39]. Such polarized chemokine targeting 'imprints' the epithelial matrix [39] and selectively recruits PMN to the basolateral epithelial surface [17, 39]. Indeed, selective inhibition of hypoxia-induced IL-8 using antisense oligonucleotides specifically inhibits PMN migration into, but not across, the epithelium [17]. Levels of these chemokines positively correlate with mucosal disease status [40], and for this reason much recent attention has been paid to defining strategies of 'dampening' chemokine generation at mucosal sites. Lipoxins have

been studied in this regard. Previous studies have demonstrated that quiescent epithelia lack a functional LXA₄ receptor (e.g. with regard to ion transport and barrier functional responses) [24]. However, recently it was shown that lipoxins [and the stable lipoxin analog 15 (R/S)methyl-LXA₄] act directly on epithelia to inhibit cytokine-induced release of IL-8 [41]. Expression of a functional LXA₄ receptor on epithelia required preexposure to cytokines such as interferon- γ and IL-13 [41], of which epithelia express well-characterized receptors. Such findings reveal important counter-regulatory roles for LO-derived lipid mediators in the mucosa.

While LO-derived lipid mediators serve as downregulatory signals for epithelial chemokine release, it appears that cyclooxygenase-derived prostaglandins may enhance chemokine release. For example, PGE₂ induces colonic epithelial IL-8 release through a posttranscriptional mechanism involving elevated cyclic AMP (cAMP) (similar responses were observed with other cAMP agonists) [42]. Induction of IL-8 by PGE₂ paralleled increased messenger RNA (mRNA) stability, and this effect mapped to a cis-acting PGE₂ responsive element in the 3' untranslated region of the IL-8 gene [42]. We have similarly demonstrated a cAMP-dependent induction of IL-8 by hypoxia [43, 44]. Whether such responses are similarly regulated by lipid mediators are not known at the present time.

Epithelial-parenchymal cell interactions

In the healthy mucosa, subepithelial cell populations consist of parenchymal and stromal cells intercalated to provide a structural matrix to the tissue. These cell populations are also active in liberation of potent bioactive substances, including lipid mediators. To this end, some studies have suggested that prostaglandin synthesis in the intestine is derived almost exclusively from these subepithelial populations [45]. Prostaglandins are derived from free arachidonic acid through the cyclooxygenases (COX-1 and COX-2), enzymes which bear both cyclooxygenase and peroxidase activity [46]. The role of cyclooxygenase-derived lipid mediators has been widely studied in mucosal tissue, given their clinical relevance to nonsteroidal antiinflammatory therapy [3]. In particular, epithelial cells bear surface receptors for a number of

prostaglandins [47]. These receptors are G-protein-coupled, seven-transmembrane-spanning proteins linked to a number of different signaling pathways [48]. The complexity of the intestine and other mucosal tissues complicates identification of individual cell types responsible for such prostaglandin synthesis. Thus, cells grown as cocultures incorporating two distinct cell types have been an effective strategy to define the generation of prostaglandins and elucidate signaling pathways. For instance, studies utilizing intestinal epithelial-fibroblast cocultures have revealed that fibroblast-derived prostanoids, especially PGE₂, promote agonist-stimulated epithelial Cl- secretion [49], the ion transport event responsible for mucosal hydration [2]. Such enhanced responses to prosecretory agonists were effectively blocked with COX inhibitors. Further studies using cocultures of epithelia with intestinal myofibroblasts revealed that such responses were specific for Ca2+ agonists, paralleled COX-2 activation and were fully explained by myofibroblast generation of PGE₂[50]. These results define a paracrine function for the intestinal fibroblastic sheath and identify this subepithelial layer as an immunophysiologic regulator of the inflammatory response.

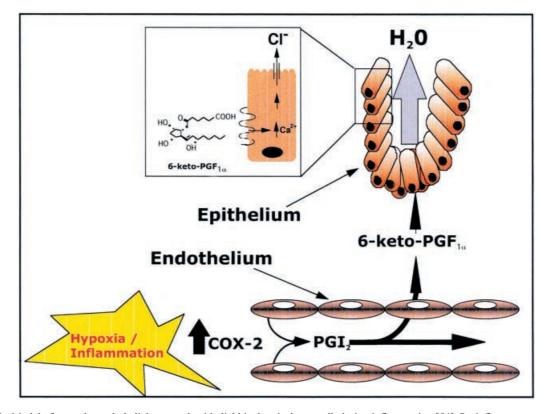


Figure 2. Model of vascular endothelial-mucosal epithelial biochemical crosstalk during inflammation [54]. Proinflammatory conditions which induce endothelial COX-2 (e.g. cytokines, endotoxin, hypoxia) activate liberation of prostacyclin (PGI₂). Prostacyclin is unstable and rapidly hydrolyzes to 6-keto-PGF_{1a}. Epithelia bear basolaterally localized receptors for 6-keto-PGF_{1a}, the ligation of which activates Ca²⁺-dependent electrogenic chloride secretion (see inset), the transport event responsible for mucosal hydration.

Epithelial-vascular endothelial interactions

The vascular endothelium functions as more than a passive conduit for blood components, and synthesizes many compounds which precisely regulate blood vessel tone, vascular composition and leukocyte movement [51–53]. Endothelial cells themselves respond to a variety of pro-inflammatory stimuli, including cytokines, endotoxin and hypoxia and in turn release inflammatory mediators such as cytokines and lipid mediators (see fig. 2 model) [52]. The vital role of the endothelium in coordinating inflammation and the proximity of the vasculature to the epithelium provides a potential paracrine crosstalk pathway between these two cell types. In coculture experiments, it was demonstrated that activated endothelia (exposed to endotoxin, cytokines or hypoxia) liberate a small (< 500 Da), stable factor which activates epithelial electrogenic Cl- secretion and concomitant fluid transport (see fig. 2) [54]. Further experiments identified this secretagogue as 6-keto-PGF_{1 α}, a stable hydrolysis product of prostacyclin (PGI₂). Results obtained with synthetic prostanoids indicate that 6-keto- $PGF_{1\alpha}$, but not 2,3-dinor-6-keto- $PGF_{1\alpha}$, activates a basolaterally polarized, Ca²⁺-coupled epithelial receptor (see fig. 2). While not well characterized, several lines of evidence indicate that 6-keto-PGF_{1 α} activates a PGI₂ receptor (likely the IP receptor), a recently cloned seven transmembrane-spanning protein [55, 56]. First, epithelial preexposure to the prostacyclin analog carbaprostacyclin resulted in receptor desensitization to subsequent activation by 6-keto-PGF_{1 α}. Second, while iloprost has also been demonstrated to activate the PGE₂ receptor (specifically the EP_1 receptor) [57], PGE_2 did not desensitize subsequent activation by 6-keto-PGF_{1 α} (see 'Results'). Of note, it is possible that epithelial PGI₂ (IP) and $PGE(EP_1)$ receptors share a common signaling pathway since, for example, oocytes expressing EP₁ receptors display a Ca2+-mediated Cl- current, similar to our findings here [58, 59]. Third, while most evidence indicates that the PGI₂ receptor signals through cAMP [57], the cloned mouse PGI₂ receptor [58] as well as the rabbit cortical collecting duct [60] also signal through intracellular phosphatidyl inositol hydrolysis and elevations in intracellular Ca2+. In addition, prostaglandin responses of porcine intestinal epithelia implicated a role for increased intracellular Ca²⁺[61]. Thus, these findings of an intestinal epithelial PGI₂ receptor signaling through elevation in intracellular Ca²⁺ are not unprecedented in the literature. Taken together, these results reveal a novel action for the prostacyclin hydrolysis product 6-keto- $PGF_{1\alpha}$ and provide a potential endothelial-epithelial crosstalk pathway in intestinal tissue.

Pathophysiology of epithelial cell-cell interactions: Role of COX-2 activation

Under pathological conditions, the influx of inflammatory cells and the liberation of soluble factors can transform mucosal tissue into a phenotypically distinct entity. Similarly, such a phenotype switch can occur at the cellular level. For several reasons, such phenotypic transformations are predominated by activation of COX-2, and pathophysiology parallels COX-2 activation. First, epithelial cells themselves express COX-2 and liberate lipids which mediate activation of autocrine and paracrine pathaways. Such COX-2 expression in epithelia is driven by preexposure to proinflammatory agonists such as transforming growth factor- α in the rat [62] and tumor necrosis factor- α /IL-1 in human epithelia [41]. Specific overexpression of COX-2 in epithelia results in alterations in apoptosis, adhesion and adaptive responses [62-65]. Second, alterations in COX-2 expression manifest at the level of the epithelium. COX-2 null animals [66] have revealed a phenotype of severe renal epithelial defects [66], and a number of epithelial-related abnormalities in female reproduction [67]. Third, as alluded to above (see fig. 2), the COX-2 gene can be regulated by a number of pathways relevant to mucosal disease. The COX-2 promoter is well characterized and bears consensus motifs for nuclear factor kappa B (NF- κ B), cAMP response element binding protein (CREB), nuclear factor of IL-6 (NF-IL-6), PEA-3, substance P and TPA [68]. Moreover, generalized cellular hypoxia is a potent activator of COX-2 [54, 69], and the cytokines IL-4 and IL-13, of which epithelia express functional receptors [70, 71], have been shown to downregulate COX-2 [72]. Thus, given the complex nature of tissues lined by epithelia and the multiple inflammatory targets within the subepithelium, activation of existing pathways rapidly and efficiently regulates COX-2 expression in one or more compartments. Ongoing studies to more clearly delineate the role of lipid mediators in mucosal healthy and disease will define future directions toward targeted therapeutics.

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