Characterization of Post-translational Modifications and Resulting Structure/Function Relationships of Recombinant Human Factor IX Produced in the Milk of Transgenic Pigs

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(Abstract)

Hemophilia B is a debilitating and life-threatening disorder caused by a deficiency in or dysfunction of factor IX (FIX), a complex plasma glycoprotein required for the formation and maintenance of blood clots. Treatment of hemophilia B involves infusion of replacement FIX currently derived from two sources: FIX purified from pools of human plasma (pd-FIX) and a single recombinant FIX product generated in genetically engineered Chinese hamster ovary (CHO) cells. Both of these FIX products are prohibitively expensive, limiting the treatment options of hemophiliacs worldwide. As a result, a more abundant and affordable FIX product would greatly improve the life prospects for hemophiliacs.

The biological activity of FIX is dependent upon its numerous post-translational modifications (PTMs), including $\gamma$-carboxylation, proteolytic maturation, phosphorylation, sulfation, and glycosylation. Of these PTMs, those known to be vital for activity are $\gamma$-carboxylation of multiple glutamate residues near the N-terminus and proteolytic cleavage of the FIX propeptide. When expressed at a high rate in exogenous expression systems, however, the ability of current systems to effect the necessary PTMs is severely rate limited, restricting the production of active FIX.

The transgenic pig bioreactor represents a promising source for the production of FIX due to its demonstrated ability to perform the required FIX PTMs. It was the goal of this study to characterize the PTM structure and the resulting function of recombinant FIX when expressed at 1-3 mg/ml in the transgenic pig mammary epithelium (tg-FIX). It was found that the expressed tg-FIX is comprised of a heterogeneous mixture of FIX PTM isoforms. This mixture represents a spectrum of tg-FIX molecules of varying $\gamma$-carboxyglutamic acid (Gla) and propeptide content, indicating that rate limitations in effecting these PTMs are present. A purification process was developed utilizing heparin-affinity chromatography to purify the total population of tg-FIX from pig milk, a complex multi-phase feedstock. Subsequently, a process was developed to fractionate the total population of tg-FIX into subpopulations based upon the extent of post-translational modification. Q ion-exchange chromatography was utilized to fractionate tg-FIX based upon molecular acidity which was found to be correlated to both biological activity and Gla content. The resulting biologically active tg-FIX population contained an average of 7 of the 12 Gla residues found in pd-FIX. Immuno-affinity chromatography was subsequently utilized to further fractionate tg-FIX into mature tg-FIX and propeptide-containing tg-FIX populations.

The isolated FIX PTM populations were subjected to functional analysis by investigating in vitro clotting activity, activation by factor Xla, and in vivo pharmacokinetics. From this analysis it was found that mature tg-FIX with an average 7 Gla residues, representing approximately 9% of the total tg-FIX produced, exhibits wild-
type \textit{in vitro} clotting activity and normal activation by factor XIa. The remainder of the
tg-FIX produced, characterized by either a lower Gla content or the presence of the
propeptide, was found to be inactive and displayed less efficient activation by factor IXa.
In an \textit{in vivo} pharmacokinetic study in the hemophilia B mouse model, biologically active
tg-FIX was found to possess altered circulating properties. Tg-FIX was characterized by
a lower recovery, approximately one-sixth that of pd-FIX, but an extended circulation
half-life. From this study it was found that the mean residence time of tg-FIX after
injections is approximately twice that observed for pd-FIX. These altered
pharmacokinetic properties are likely linked to the unique tg-FIX PTM structure, perhaps
through altered endothelial cell binding characteristics caused by the reduced Gla content.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ ii  
Table of Contents ....................................................................................................................... iv  
List of Figures ............................................................................................................................. vii  
List of Tables ............................................................................................................................... ix  
Amino Acid Abbreviations ......................................................................................................... x  

Chapter 1: Project Description ................................................................................................. 1  
  1.1 Specific Aims .................................................................................................................... 1  
  1.2 Significance of Research ................................................................................................. 3  

Chapter 2: Background .............................................................................................................. 5  
  2.1 Hemophilia ...................................................................................................................... 5  
  2.2 FIX in Blood Coagulation ............................................................................................... 7  
  2.3 Factor IX Structure and Post-translational Modification ............................................... 9  
      2.3.1 General Structure .................................................................................................... 9  
      2.3.2 γ-Carboxylation ..................................................................................................... 11  
      2.3.3 Glycosylation ......................................................................................................... 16  
      2.3.4 Propeptide Cleavage ............................................................................................... 16  
      2.3.5 Phosphorylation and Sulfation ............................................................................... 17  
      2.3.6 β-hydroxylation ..................................................................................................... 17  
  2.4 FIX Activation .................................................................................................................. 18  
  2.5 Current Recombinant Technologies .............................................................................. 20  
  2.6 Transgenic Animal Bioreactors ...................................................................................... 22  

Chapter 3: Purification of Recombinant DNA-derived Factor IX Produced in Transgenic pig Milk and Fractionation of Active and Inactive Subpopulations .............................................................................. 30  
  3.1 Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 30  
  3.2 Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 31  
  3.3 Experimental .................................................................................................................. 32  
      3.3.1 Reagents ................................................................................................................ 32  
      3.3.2 Transgenic Milk Collection and Storage ............................................................... 32  
      3.3.3 Purification of rFIX ............................................................................................... 32  
      3.3.4 SDS PAGE ............................................................................................................. 34  
      3.3.5 FIX Activity - aPTT Assay .................................................................................... 34  
      3.3.6 Total Gla Analysis ................................................................................................. 34  
      3.3.7 Isoelectric Focusing ............................................................................................... 35  
  3.4 Results and Discussion ..................................................................................................... 36  
  3.5 Conclusions .................................................................................................................... 40
Chapter 4: Determination of the Kinetics and Mechanism of tg-FIX Activation by FXIa

4.1 Introduction ................................................................. 49
4.2 Materials and Methods .................................................. 51
  4.2.1 Transgenic Pig Milk .................................................. 51
  4.2.2 Ion-Exchange Fractionation of tg-FIX .......................... 51
  4.2.3 Isolation of proFIX ................................................. 52
  4.2.4 Determination of FIX Concentrations ......................... 53
  4.2.5 FIX Specific Activity Measurements ......................... 53
  4.2.6 Gla Analysis ....................................................... 54
  4.2.7 FIX Activation by FXIa – SDS-PAGE and Western Blot .... 55
  4.2.8 Integrated Michaelis-Menten Analysis ......................... 55
  4.2.9 FIX activation in the Presence of 4-aminobenzamidine ... 56
4.3 Results ........................................................................... 57
  4.3.1 Fractionation of tg-FIX .............................................. 57
  4.3.2 FIX in vitro Activity and Gla Content ........................ 59
  4.3.3 Activation of HS-tg-FIX by Factor Xla ....................... 60
  4.3.4 Integrated Michaelis-Menten Analysis ....................... 62
  4.3.5 Activation of HS-tg-FIX in the Presence of Benzamidine ... 63
  4.3.6 Activation of HS-tg-proFIX ..................................... 64
  4.3.7 Activation of LS tg-FIX and LS-tg-proFIX .................... 65
4.4 Discussion .................................................................... 67
4.5 Summary and Conclusions ............................................. 73

Chapter 5: Pharmacokinetics of tg-FIX in the Factor IX-Knockout Mouse Hemophilia B Animal Model .......................................................... 76
5.1 Introduction .................................................................. 76
5.2 Materials and Methods ................................................ 78
  5.2.1 Transgenic Milk Collection ........................................ 78
  5.2.2 Preparation of tg-FIX for Injection ......................... 78
  5.2.3 FIX Activation and PNGase Digestion ..................... 79
  5.2.4 SDS PAGE and Western Blot ................................. 79
  5.2.5 FIX Activity – aPTT Assay .................................. 79
  5.2.6 Phosphate Content-ProQ Diamond Assay ................ 79
  5.2.7 Total Gla Analysis ............................................... 80
  5.2.8 Pharmacokinetic Analysis .................................. 80
5.3 Results .......................................................................... 87
  5.3.1 tg-FIX Product ....................................................... 87
  5.3.2 Pharmacokinetic Analysis ...................................... 88
  5.3.3 PTM Analysis ....................................................... 92
5.4 Discussion .................................................................. 96
5.5 Summary and Future Work ......................................... 101
Additional Calculations ...................................................... 107
List of Figures

Chapter 2

Figure 2-1: Minimum volumetric feedstock requirements for the worldwide prophylactic treatment of hemophilia B based on an estimate of 300 million IU of FIX required ................................................................. 6
Figure 2-2: Schematic representation of the blood coagulation cascade ................. 8
Figure 2-3: FIX primary sequence and post-translational modifications .............. 10
Figure 2-4: Post-translational modifications of FIX in the secretory pathway.......... 11
Figure 2-5: γ-Carboxylation reaction ................................................................. 12
Figure 2-6: Ca$^{2+}$-bound FIX Gla domain 3-D structure ................................. 14
Figure 2-7: FIX activation pathways ............................................................... 19
Figure 2-8: NetPhos predicted phosphorylation sites on human FIX ................. 24

Chapter 3

Figure 3-1: Amino acid sequence of the Factor IX propeptide and Gla domain ....... 44
Figure 3-2: Purification of rFIX from transgenic pig milk by heparin-affinity chromatography on heparin-Sepharose ................................................. 44
Figure 3-3: HPLC analysis of the purity of the heparin-Sepharose product .......... 45
Figure 3-4: Silver-stained SDS PAGE of column fractions from Matrex Cellufine Sulfate, a synthetic heparin analogue ........................................... 45
Figure 3-5: Anion exchange chromatography of heparin-purified rFIX on a Mini Q column ......................................................................................... 46
Figure 3-6: Anion exchange fractionation of biologically active and inactive subpopulations of rFIX on a Mini Q column ..................................... 47
Figure 3-7: cIEF electropherograms of rFIX subpopulations and plasma-derived FIX ................................................................. 48
Chapter 4

Figure 4-1: Activation of FIX by two pathways .................................................50
Figure 4-2: tg-FIX fractionation procedure .........................................................58
Figure 4-3: SDS PAGE and Western blot of tg-FIX and tg-proFIX purification product .................................................................59
Figure 4-4: SDS PAGE analysis of FIX activation by FXIa .................................62
Figure 4-5: Analysis of SDS PAGE FIX activation data by the linearized Michaelis-Menten equation .........................................................63
Figure 4-6: FIX activation in the presence of 4-aminobenzamidine .................64
Figure 4-7: Western blot of the activation products of the time course activation of HS-tg-proFIX by factor XIa .................................................65
Figure 4-8: Western blot of the activation products of the time course activation of LS-tg-FIX and LS-tg-proFIX by factor XIa ...............................66

Chapter 5

Figure 5-1: One-compartment pharmacokinetic model ....................................81
Figure 5-2: Two-compartment pharmacokinetic model ....................................83
Figure 5-3: Western blot of FIX products ..........................................................87
Figure 5-4: One-compartment model fit to concentration versus time data ..........89
Figure 5-5: Half-life of FIX products calculated from the one-compartment model ....89
Figure 5-6: Two-compartment model fit to concentration versus time data ..........90
Figure 5-7: Western blot of PNGase digestion of FIX from different sources ........94
Figure 5-8: ProQ Diamond phosphoprotein-dependent staining of FIX .............95

Appendix A

Figure A-1: Transgene stability ...........................................................................139
Figure A-2: Milk Western blots ...........................................................................139
Figure A-3: Reduced SDS PAGE of relaxin purification ....................................140
Figure A-4: Intracellular cAMP levels of THP-1 cells versus concentration of porcine relaxin exposure .........................................................140
Figure A-5: C chain termini of human and porcine relaxin .................................141
List of Tables

Table 2-1: Comparison of post-translational modifications and pharmacological properties of pd-FIX and BeneFIX® ........................................22
Table 4-1: Table of properties of FIX preparations ........................................60
Table 5-1: Measured FIX activities detected in mouse plasma after injection ........88
Table 5-2: Incremental recovery of FIX in FIX-KO mouse model .........................88
Table 5-3: Calculated two-compartment model parameters.........................91
Table 5-4: Mean residence times (MRT) of tg-FIX and pd-FIX derived from the model-independent method by different integration techniques ....92
Table 5-5: Summary of the circulation half-lives of tg-FIX and pd-FIX Calculated by compartmental and non-compartmental methods .......... 98
# List of Amino Acid Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amino Acid</th>
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