HIV-1 Subtype C Reverse Transcriptase and Protease Genotypes in Zimbabwean Patients Failing Antiretroviral Therapy

RAMI KANTOR,1 LYNN S. ZIJENAH,2 ROBERT W. SHAFER,1 SOLOMON MUTETWA,3 ELIZABETH JOHNSTON,1 ROBERT LLOYD,4 ANDREA VON LIEVEN,5 DENNIS ISRAELSKI,1 and DAVID A. KATZENSTEIN1

ABSTRACT

HIV-1 drug resistance mutations have been identified and characterized mostly in subtype B HIV-1 infection. The extent to which antiretroviral drugs select for drug resistance mutations in non-subtype B HIV-1 is not known. We obtained HIV-1 reverse transcriptase (RT) and protease sequences from 21 Zimbabwean patients failing antiretroviral drug therapy. We compared these sequences with 56 published RT and protease subtype C sequences from untreated patients, 990 RT and 1140 protease subtype B sequences from treated patients, and 340 RT and 907 protease subtype B sequences from untreated patients and identified four mutation categories of subtype C HIV-1. Seventeen of the 21 patients (81%) had known drug resistance mutations. Mutations at 15 RT and 11 protease positions were more common in subtype C isolates than in subtype B isolates. HIV-1 subtype C-infected individuals receiving antiretroviral therapy develop many of the known subtype B drug resistance mutations. Comparison of subtype C RT and protease sequences with a large database of subtype B sequences identified subtype C-specific polymorphisms and candidate drug resistance mutations.

Drug resistance is a major obstacle to achieving and maintaining virus suppression. Most studies of drug resistance, as well as interpretations of genotypic changes in HIV-1 reverse transcriptase (RT) and protease, are based on sequence data from HIV-1 subtype B viruses. Worldwide, however, non-B isolates are far more common than subtype B isolates, and subtype C isolates account for the majority of infections globally.1 Identification of mutations in subtype C isolates associated with antiretroviral therapy may alter the interpretation of drug resistance testing and surveillance.

Five previous studies included 183 patients infected with subtype C virus and receiving antiretroviral therapy.2–6 However, precisely how the sequences from these individuals were related to the antiretroviral treatment has not been published. In this article we describe RT and protease genotypes of subtype C HIV-1 isolates from 21 Zimbabwean individuals receiving antiretroviral therapy. By comparing these sequences with subtype B sequences in a large database, we identify subtype C-specific polymorphisms and potential treatment-related mutations in the RT and protease.

The study population included persons infected with HIV-1 and attending the Centre, an HIV treatment and support clinic in Harare, Zimbabwe. Patients were receiving medications through an access program by which donated drugs were provided through an association of their physicians. Recruitment for the study was performed on two clinic days in 2001. Sam-

1Division of Infectious Diseases and AIDS Research, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305.
2Department of Immunology, University of Zimbabwe Medical School, Harare, Zimbabwe.
3Department of Medical Microbiology, University of Zimbabwe Medical School, Harare, Zimbabwe.
4Visible Genetics, Suwanee, Georgia 30024.
5Department of Community Medicine, University of Zimbabwe Medical School, Harare, Zimbabwe.
amples from patients who had received antiretroviral therapy for at least 2 months and who consented to participate were included. The study was approved by the Stanford University (Stanford, CA) administrative panel on human subjects in medical research.

For each sample, sequences corresponding to RT amino acids 1–240 and protease amino acids 1–99 were obtained. Manual RNA extraction was performed with the TRUPREP viral RNA kit (Visible Genetics, Suwanee, GA), with alternate protocols supplied by the manufacturer for concentrating virus. Genotyping of extracted viral RNA was accomplished with the TRUGENE HIV-1 genotyping kit (Visible Genetics) and sequencing platform with modifications. Briefly, modified RT-polymerase chain reactions (RT-PCRs) were accomplished by substitution of kit primers for Research Use Only version 1.5 RT-PCR primers (Visible Genetics, cat. no. VG 30231) and modified thermocycling conditions. Bidirectional DNA CLIP sequencing was performed according to standardized kit chemistry and manufacturer protocols.

The Roche Amplicor Monitor test (version 1.5; Roche Diagnostics, Branchburg, NJ) was used to determine the plasma HIV-1 RNA concentration. Samples were separated and frozen within 6 hr of collection in the Department of Immunology of the University of Zimbabwe (Harare, Zimbabwe). The limit of detection with this assay was 400 copies/ml. CD4+ cell counts were performed by flow cytometry (Becton Dickinson, Mountain View, CA) in the University of Zimbabwe Public Health Hematology Laboratory.

Mutations were defined as amino acid differences from consensus B RT and protease sequences. Polymorphisms were defined as mutations that occurred in at least 1% of sequences from untreated persons. Treatment-related mutations were defined as mutations that occurred at statistically significant higher rates in sequences from treated versus untreated persons. Drug resistance mutations were defined as mutations known to cause drug resistance based on published experimental data.7

Nucleoside RT inhibitor (NRTI) drug resistance mutations were defined as mutations at RT positions 41, 44, 62, 65, 67, 69, 70, 74, 75, 77, 115, 116, 118, 151, 184, 210, 215, and 219. Nonnucleoside RT inhibitor (NNRTI) drug resistance mutations were defined as mutations at RT positions 98, 100, 101, 103, 106, 108, 179, 181, 188, 190, 225, 230, and 236. Primary protease inhibitor (PI) drug resistance mutations were defined as mutations at protease positions 30, 48, 50, 82, 84, and 90. Secondary PI drug resistance mutations were defined as mutations at protease positions 10, 20, 24, 32, 33, 46, 47, 53, 54, 71, 73, 77, and 88. Mutations at protease positions 36, 63, and 93 were not categorized as drug resistance mutations, because although mutations at these positions may contribute to resistance in subtype B isolates, these positions are highly polymorphic (>50%) in subtype C isolates.5,6,8

To characterize mutations as possible subtype-specific polymorphisms or treatment-related mutations, isolates from patients in this study were compared with publicly available sequences from (1) 990 RT and 1140 protease subtype B isolates from treated patients, (2) 340 RT and 907 protease subtype B isolates from untreated patients, and (3) 56 RT and protease subtype C isolates from untreated patients.9 At each amino acid position, a χ² test comparing the mutation rate of sequences in this study and those in groups 1–3 was performed. A p value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant. Results were not corrected for multiple comparisons.

On the basis of these comparisons, four categories of mutations were defined.

**Subtype C polymorphisms:** Mutations that were significantly more common in subtype C isolates than in subtype B isolates, but that were present at similar frequencies in treated and untreated persons.

**Subtype C polymorphism and subtype B treatment-related mutations:** Subtype C polymorphisms that occurred at significantly higher frequencies in treated persons with subtype B virus than in untreated persons with subtype B virus.

**Subtype C polymorphism and treatment-related mutations:** Subtype C polymorphisms that were present at higher rates in treated compared with untreated subtype C isolates.

**Subtype B/C treatment-related mutations:** Mutations present at higher rates in treated compared with untreated persons with subtype B and C virus.

Twenty-one patients (84%) had RNA levels >400 copies/ml, the lower limit of quantification; four patients (16%) had undetectable plasma HIV-1 RNA levels. Seventy-two percent (18 of 25) of the patients were males. The median age was 41 years (range, 31–61 years). The median viral load was 4.0 log10 copies/ml (range, <2.6–6.0 log10 copies/ml), and the median CD4+ cell count was 95 × 106 cells/liter (range, 1–321 × 106 cells/liter).

Among the 21 patients with detectable viremia, 21 had received NRTIs, 18 had received PIs, and 5 had received NNRTIs. Eleven patients were receiving their first antiretroviral drug regimen, and 10 had received one or more previous antiretroviral regimens. Four of 21 patients (19%) received a regimen with one drug class, 16 of 21 patients (76%) received a regimen with two drug classes, and 1 patient received a regimen with three drug classes. The most commonly used PI was saquinavir (SQV; 10 patients), followed by nelfinavir (NFV; 3 patients), indinavir (IDV; 2 patients), and amprenavir (APV; 2 patients). The most commonly used NRTI was lamivudine (3TC; 15 patients), followed by zidovudine (AZT; 13 patients) and stavudine (d4T; 4 patients). Two patients had received efavirenz and one patient had received nevirapine. The median duration of the most recent antiretroviral regimen was 4 months (range, 2–32 months), and the median duration of total antiretroviral drug therapy was 11 months (range, 3–37 months). The most recent regimen, as well as a list of drugs received before the most recent regimen, are shown in Table 1.

RT and protease sequences were obtained from isolates from each of the 21 patients with detectable viremia. In phylogenetic analyses using TREECON version 1.3b,10 all 21 sequences clustered with subtype C reference sequences C2220 and 92BR025 (http://hiv-web.lanl.gov).

Differences from consensus B were identified at 58 RT and 37 protease positions with a mean of 15.6 differences per RT isolate and 10.7 differences per protease isolate. Table 1 shows the known drug resistance mutations in the isolates from the Zimbabwean patients. Excluding mutations at positions 36, 63, and 93, which are the consensus amino acids at these positions (>50%) in subtype C isolates, there were 1.0 PI resistance mu-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient</th>
<th>Recent regimen</th>
<th>Previous drug exposure</th>
<th>Total Rx duration (months)</th>
<th>RT mutations at drug resistance positions</th>
<th>Protease mutations at drug-resistance positions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NRTI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>AZT + 3TC + SQV</td>
<td>ddI</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>M361, L63ALPV, V82I, I93L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3TC + d4T + SQV</td>
<td>AZT</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>M184V</td>
<td>V179IV, M361, L63T, I93L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3TC + d4T + SQV</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>M411, M184V</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>AZT + 3TC + NFV</td>
<td>ddC, IDV</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M41L, K70KR, M184V, T215Y</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>AZT + 3TC + IDV</td>
<td>d4T, ddI</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>M41I, M184V, T215Y</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>IDV + SQV + NVP</td>
<td>AZT, 3TC, ddI</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M41L, M184V, T215Y</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>AZT + 3TC + SQV</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>M41L, D67DN, K70KR, M184V, T215Y</td>
<td>K103N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>D4T + 3TC + NFV</td>
<td>AZT, NVP</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M184V</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>D4T + 3TC + APV</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>M41L, D67N, L74V, T215Y</td>
<td>Y1811, L101, M36i, I54FL, L63P, I93L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>ABC + APV + EFV</td>
<td>d4T, NFV, NVP</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>AZT + 3TC + RTV</td>
<td>EFV</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M184V</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>AZT + ddC + SQV</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>D67G, K70R, K219Q</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>AZT + ddI</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>D67N, T69N, K70R, F77FL, Q151M, T215IT, K219EQ</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>AZT + 3TC</td>
<td>NFV</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>M184V</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>AZT + 3TC + NFV</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>L101, M36I, I93L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>AZT + 3TC + SQV</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>D67N, K70R, M184V, T215IT, K219Q</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>ddI</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>AZT + 3TC</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>M41LM, D67DN, K70KR, M184V, T215FIST</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>AZT + 3TC + SQV</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>SQV + RTV + EFV</td>
<td>d4T, IDV, NVP</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>M361, L63V, V82I, I93L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Abbreviations:** Rx, treatment; AZT, zidovudine; 3TC, lamivudine; SQV, saquinavir; ddI, didanosine; d4T, stavudine; NFV, nelﬁnavir; ddC, zalcitabine; IDV, indinavir; NVP, nevirapine; APV, amprenavir; ABC, abacavir; EFV, efavirenz; RTV, ritonavir.
tation, 2.4 NRTI resistance mutations, and 1.2 NNRTI resistance mutations per isolate. Seventeen isolates (81%) had at least one known drug resistance mutation. Seven isolates (33%) had mutations associated with resistance to just one drug class, eight isolates (38%) had mutations associated with resistance to two drug classes, and two isolates (10%) had mutations associated with resistance to all three drug classes.

NRTI resistance mutations were identified at positions 41, 67, 69, 70, 74, 151, 184, 215, 219 (14/21 patients receiving NRTIs). NNRTI resistance mutations were identified at positions 98, 103, 179, 181 (3/5 patients receiving NNRTIs). PI resistance mutations were identified at positions 10, 20, 36, 54, 63, 71, 73, 82, 90, 93. Seven of the isolates from patients receiving a PI had primary PI resistance mutations; nine had secondary resistance mutations.

The most common NRTI-related drug resistance mutations were M184V (11 patients), T215Y/F/S (8 patients), K70R (7 patients), M41L (6 patients), and D67N/G (6 patients). Mutations at position 67, 70, and 215 with or without a mutation at position 219 occurred in six patients. The most common NNRTI-related drug resistance mutation was Y181C (two patients). Mutations at primary PI resistance-related positions included L90M (four patients) and V82I (three patients). The most common mutations at secondary PI resistance-related positions were K20R (4 of 21 patients), 171V (3 of 11 patients), and L10I and G73S (2 of 21 patients each).

Figures 1 and 2 show the 34 RT and 21 protease mutations that were present in 2 or more of the 21 Zimbabwean isolates. Figures 1 and 2 compare the prevalence of mutation in the study patients with the prevalence of mutation in subtype C isolates from untreated persons and with subtype B isolates from treated and untreated persons.

Mutations at RT positions 36, 48, 173, and 177 and at protease positions 12, 15, 19, 41, and 69 were subtype C polymorphisms. Mutations at RT positions 35, 39, 43, 60, 90, 200, 207, and 211 and at protease positions 20, 36, 60, 82, 89, and 93 were subtype C polymorphisms that occurred more commonly in treated than in untreated subtype B isolates. Mutations at RT positions 53, 123, and 174 were subtype C polymorphisms that occurred at a higher rate in treated than in untreated persons with subtype C viruses. Mutations at RT positions 41, 67, 70, 77, 181, 184, 203, 213, 214, 215, 219, and 228 and at protease positions 73, 74, and 90 were non-polyorphic mutations that occurred at a higher rate in subtype B and C isolates from treated patients compared with untreated patients.

Eighty-one percent of patient isolates (17 of 21) had known RT and protease drug resistance mutations associated with at least one of the NRTIs, NNRTIs, or PIs. The primary protease-inhibitor resistance mutation L90M was seen in 4 of 10 patients (40%) receiving SQV, a rate similar to that seen in patients infected with subtype B and receiving SQV (75 of 149, or 50%). The amino acid isoleucine (I) at position 82 in the protease substrate cleft is not one of the common HIV-1 subtype B mutations associated with PI resistance, and occurs at a rate of 1% in treated and untreated individuals. In non-B isolates V82I is more common, occurring in 7% of isolates from untreated patients infected with subtype C and in as high as 72% of isolates from untreated patients infected with subtype G. Four (19%) of our study cohort patients had V82I. Decreased susceptibility of isolates with this mutation to PIs has been suggested, and its contribution to PI resistance in non-B subtypes still needs to be determined.

M184V occurred in 11 of 15 patients (73%) receiving 3T3, a rate similar to that seen in patients infected with subtype B and receiving lamivudine (606 of 819, or 74%). The multi-NRTI-resistant Q151M mutation, associated with changes at codons 62, 75, 77, and 116, is reported here for the first time in an HIV-1 subtype C isolate. The patient with this isolate was treated with didanosine (ddI) for 6 months and with AZT and ddI for an additional 8 months. Mutations at RT positions 203 and 228 and at protease position 74 are not known to be associated with drug resistance; however, they were each seen at high rates (5–17%) in isolates from treated patients infected with subtypes B and C compared with untreated patients (0–1%).

Comparison of sequences from treated and untreated persons infected with different HIV-1 subtypes enabled us to identify mutation categories on the basis of the prevalence of mutations in subtypes B and C, with or without drug selection. This approach tests the null hypothesis that mutations associated with treatment are independent of subtype. Subtype C-specific polymorphisms that occur at equal rates among treated and untreated persons would not be expected to influence the response to antiretroviral therapy. In contrast, the subtype C-specific mutations that occur at a higher rate among treated persons (whether subtype B or C) may have implications for response to therapy even if they do not include any of the experimentally characterized drug resistance mutations.

Comparison of sequences from treated and untreated subjects with subtype C HIV-1 identified three possible RT mutations that warrant further study. These subtype C treatment-related mutations, at RT positions 53, 123, and 174, were present at higher rates in treated persons infected with subtype C, suggesting an association with drug resistance in subtype C isolates. RT position 53 is situated in the “fingers” subdomain of the enzyme and is close to the region that is associated with deoxyribonucleotide triphosphate (dNTP) binding. RT position 174 is located in the region associated with the template–primer complex interaction.

Of the 95 differences from consensus B that were identified in the RT and protease of the study cohort, one group, consisting of subtype C polymorphisms, associated or not associated with treatment in subtype B, has been previously described. However, within that group, RT positions 43, 60, and 90 and protease positions 12 and 60 are noted here for the first time.

In summary, antiretroviral therapy becomes available in Zimbabwe and other areas where subtype C predominates, there is a need to identify similarities and differences in the sequences of the molecular targets of therapy among divergent HIV-1 subtypes. Despite study limitations, including small sample size, patient adherence issues, and the impact of different/suboptimal therapeutic regimens on the resistance patterns, our findings suggest that similar selection of drug resistance in non-subtype B viruses is anticipated. However, subtype-associated polymorphisms and preexisting resistance-associated mutations may render some drug treatment strategies more or less effective. Clinical trials and surveillance efforts, including treatment histories and determination of sequences and in vitro pheno-
FIG. 1. Prevalence of HIV-1 RT mutations in 21 subtype C isolates from patients receiving antiretroviral therapy: Comparison with subtype C isolates from untreated patients and subtype B isolates from treated and untreated patients. Shown are only those positions at which two or more mutations were observed in study patients; boxes mark positions associated with drug resistance in subtype B; RT isolates from study patients were compared with 990 isolates from treated patients infected with subtype B, 340 isolates from untreated patients infected with subtype B, and 56 isolates from untreated patients infected with subtype C.
FIG. 2. Prevalence of HIV-1 protease mutations in 18 subtype C isolates from patients receiving antiretroviral therapy: Comparison with subtype C isolates from untreated patients and subtype B isolates from treated and untreated patients. Shown are only those positions at which two or more mutations were observed in study patients; boxes mark positions associated with drug resistance in subtype B; protease isolates from study patients were compared with 1140 isolates from treated patients infected with subtype B, 907 isolates from untreated patients infected with subtype B, and 56 isolates from untreated patients infected with subtype C.
typic resistance of non-subtype B viruses, are needed to identify significant differences in drug susceptibility and resistance among HIV-1 subtypes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank Visible Genetics for the sequencing work in this study, and Ms. Lynde Francis, Director of the Centre, for arranging access to the study patients.

This work was supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

SEQUENCE DATA

Nucleotide and amino acid RT and protease sequences of the 21 study group patients were submitted to GenBank (accession numbers AY090839–AY090859).

REFERENCES


Address reprint requests to: Rami Kantor
Division of Infectious Diseases, Rm S-156
Stanford University Medical Center
300 Pasteur Drive
Stanford, California 94305

E-mail: rkantor@stanford.edu