MGMT Inhibition by Disulfiram Sensitizes ER+ Breast Cancer Cells to Temozolomide and Cyclophosphamide

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PROBLEM

MGMT (O6-methylguanine-DNA methyltransferase), a DNA repair protein known to confer resistance, is overexpressed in a majority of cancers, including breast cancer. MGMT expression correlated with ER expression and tamoxifen resistance, making ER-positive breast cancer resistant to alkylators like Temozolomide and Cyclophosphamide. Aldehydes like Disulfiram (AZL) act as alkylating agents, thus, it has been reported to interfere with MGMT expression in other cancers, and has been linked to chemotherapy and radiation resistance.

BACKGROUND

In breast tumors, MGMT expression is elevated at levels that are 3.4-fold higher than in the normal tissue (2, 3, 5). MGMT has been recognized as a central determinant of tumor resistance to alkylating agents and represents an important target for inhibitor development. Disulfiram (AZL), a thioether-based aldehyde, also known as Antabuse, is a carbonate derived clinically for treating alcoholism. As a nitrosamine oxidase inhibitor, it has demonstrated antitumor activity against various tumor types including glioma, melanoma, nonsmall-cell lung cancer, and carcinomas of the breast and colon (4, 6, 7). Cyclophosphamide is an alkylating agent with dose-dependent antitumor activity that has been widely used in various cancers (8). Disulfiram (AZL) and cyclophosphamide are used in combination treatment of breast cancer.

OBJECTIVE

To investigate whether Disulfiram, either alone or in combination with Temozolomide or Cyclophosphamide can inhibit breast cancer growth and establish whether use of Disulfiram AZL inhibitor would allow for use of lower doses of Temozolomide or Cyclophosphamide.

METHODS

We have treated the effect of Temozolomide (EZ51), as a dual MGMT and ALDH inhibitor, in breast cancer cells, in combination with Temozolomide (TMZ) and cyclophosphamide (CP) on ER+ breast cancer cells.

RESULTS

Effect of Disulfiram on Normal Breast Epithelial Cells and Breast Cancer Cells: Normal breast epithelial cells (MCF-10A) and 11DB breast cancer cells (MCF-7 and MDA) were treated with different concentrations of AZL. Forty eight hours post treatment cell viability was assessed. Results revealed that Disulfiram has minimal effect on normal breast epithelial cells (MCF-10A) whereas EA alpha positive breast cancer cell growth was dose dependently inhibited (Figure 1).

Combination Therapeutic Effect on MGMT, EZ51, TMZ and CPX on Breast Cancer Cells: Breast cancer cells were treated with single agents (CPX, Temozolomide and Temozolomide and combination of the drugs) Forty eight hours post treatment cell viability was assessed and western blots showed that EZ51 affected MGMT activity. Results revealed that EZ51 at 100μM alone or in combination with Temozolomide and Temozolomide decreased MGMT expression, EZ51 alpha, EZ51, EZ51, EZ51 and Survivin (SM04) expression in EZ51 breast cancer cells (Figure 4).

Combination Therapeutic Effect on Colony Formation: We used colony formation assay to determine the effectiveness of these drug treatments on breast cancer cells. Plated breast cancer cells (MCF-7 and MDA) in 6 well plates and treated with Temozolomide, Cyclophosphamide and Disulfiram alone or in combination. Results revealed that Disulfiram inhibited the colony formation of these cells and EZ51 in combination with Temozolomide significantly decreased the colony formation of these cells (Figure 7).

CONCLUSIONS

- EZ51 at very low doses (achievable in human serum with standard D5F clinical dosing) decreases ER+ breast cancer cell growth (MCF-10A, EZ51) in a dose-dependent manner.
- EZ51 further sensitizes breast cancer cells to TMZ treated CPX and significantly inhibits breast cancer growth without causing unwanted side effects on the normal breast epithelial cells.
- EZ51 alone or in combination with TMZ (EZ51 and TMZ) and/or CP (EZ51 and CP) significantly inhibits expression of MGMT, alkylate deactivation, T21 and EZ51 gene (survivin) – all responsible for tumor chemoresistance.
- EZ51 alone or in combination with TMZ (EZ51 and TMZ) and/or CP (EZ51 and CP) caused significant apoptosis in breast cancer cells.
- In a dose dependent manner, EZ51 inhibited colony formation, effect which was further enhanced by addition of TMZ (EZ51 and TMZ)
- Similar, EZ51 alone in combination with TMZ (EZ51 and TMZ) and/or CP (EZ51 and CP) decreased the metastatic potential of breast cancer.

REFERENCES


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