

Tumor-bone cellular interactions in skeletal metastases

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Abstract

Human tumor cells inoculated into the arterial circulation of immunocompromised mice can reliably cause bone metastases, reproducing many of the clinical features seen in patients. Animal models permit the identification of tumor-produced factors, which act on bone cells, and of bone-derived factors. Local interactions stimulated by these factors drive a vicious cycle between tumor and bone that perpetuates skeletal metastases. Bone metastases can be osteolytic, osteoblastic, or mixed. Parathyroid hormone-related protein, PTHrP, is a common osteolytic factor, while vascular endothelial growth factor and interleukins 8 and 11 also contribute. Osteoblastic metastases can be caused by tumor-secreted endothelin-1, ET-1. Other potential osteoblastic factors include bone morphogenetic proteins, platelet-derived growth factor, connective tissue growth factor, stanniocalcin, N-terminal fragments of PTHrP, and adrenomedullin. Osteoblasts are the main regulators of osteoclasts, and stimulation of osteoblast proliferation can increase osteoclast formation and activity. Thus, combined expression of osteoblastic and osteolytic factors can lead to mixed metastases or to increased osteolysis. Prostate-specific antigen is a protease, which can cleave PTHrP and thus change the balance of osteolytic versus osteoblastic responses to metastatic tumor cells. Bone itself stimulates tumor by releasing insulin-like growth factors and transforming growth factor- β . Secreted factors transmit the interactions between tumor and bone. They provide novel targets for therapeutic interactions to break the vicious cycle of bone metastases. Clinically approved bisphosphonate anti-resorptive drugs reduce the release of active factors stored in bone, and PTHrP-neutralizing antibody, inhibitors of the RANK ligand pathway, and ET-1 receptor antagonist are in clinical trials. These adjuvant therapies act on bone cells, rather than the tumor cells. Recent gene array experiments identify additional factors, which may in the future prove to be clinically important targets.

Keywords: Cancer, Breast, Prostate, Bone Metastasis, Parathyroid Hormone-Related Protein, Endothelin, Adrenomedullin, Transforming Growth Factor- β , Prostate-Specific Antigen

Introduction

The majority of patients dying from cancer of the breast or prostate have metastases to the skeleton. The affinity of these and several other solid tumors for this metastatic site is the consequence of the special microenvironment provided by bone. Stephen Paget in 1889 proposed the seed and soil hypothesis: bone provides the fertile soil in which certain cancer cell seeds prefer to grow. We now appreciate that mineralized bone matrix is a rich storehouse of growth factors¹, which are mobilized by osteoclastic bone resorption.

The released growth factors enrich the local microenvironment. A main effect of the factors appears to be alteration of the tumor cell phenotype rather than an increased growth rate. Tumor cells in turn secrete additional factors that act upon bone cells, causing the responses that characterize the osteolytic and osteoblastic metastases. Local interactions between tumor cells and bone form a vicious cycle, which underlies the development of skeletal metastases^{2,3}. Interactions between tumor cells and bone cells change the phenotypes of both.

The basic mechanisms of cancer metastases to specific sites have been controversial. Cancer cells *in vivo* continue to mutate. The ability of cancer cells to metastasize is characteristic of advanced disease and could occur only after the gradual accumulation of a necessary set of pro-metastatic mutations⁴. However, recent experiments suggest that a constellation of expressed genes necessary for metastasis to bone pre-exists within the primary breast tumor⁵. Thus, bone-specific metastases are the consequence of a selection

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of variants from a heterogeneous population of cells within the primary tumor, plus changes in gene expression induced by bone factors⁶. Cells of the osteoblastic lineage appear to be the main targets of tumor-secreted factors. Bone-derived transforming growth factor- β (TGF β) is a major factor regulator of tumor cell behavior in bone.

There are no convenient animal models where primary tumors reproducibly metastasize to bone. Many of the results described here use an animal model in which human tumor cells are inoculated into immuno-deficient mice. Injection into the venous circulation most often results in tumor cell entrapment within the capillary beds of the lung or liver. However, careful tumor administration directly into the left cardiac ventricle can result in 100% incidence of bone metastases with many tumor cell lines (Table 1). Osteolytic lesions are detected by X-ray as early as 3 weeks and can be quantified by image analysis. Osteoblastic lesions may take up to 6 months to develop in nude mice, and the lesions cannot be quantified radiographically.

Osteolytic metastases

Destructive bone lesions are characteristic of breast cancer. The most prominent cause of bone destruction is parathyroid hormone-related protein, PTHrP, which is secreted by many cancer types and, when systemically elevated, is responsible for humoral hypercalcemia of malignancy (HHM)⁷. Breast and lung cancer cells that secrete PTHrP in concentrations insufficient to induce HHM still cause extensive osteolytic bone destruction in nude mice. Bone lesions and tumor burden can be significantly decreased, and survival increased, by treatment with PTHrP-neutralizing antibody^{8,9}. The antibody has been humanized and is in clinical trials against HHM and bone metastases.

PTHrP was originally suspected to play a role in osteolytic metastases based on its known role as a stimulator of hypercalcemia⁷, plus its high expression by tumor cells in bone versus soft tissue sites in patients^{10,11}. These results suggested that PTHrP expression by the primary tumor might be prognostic of metastases to bone. This is not the case. In a prospective study, PTHrP expression by the primary tumor was an independent prognostic marker of improved survival and *decreased* metastasis to bone¹². PTHrP is a complex, multi-functional protein and appears to play independent roles in primary and metastatic cells. It is likely that the expression of PTHrP by breast cancer cells in bone is the result of induction of its gene by factors in bone, such as TGF β ¹³.

PTHrP cannot be the only factor responsible for bone metastases, and a number of other proteins play either contributory or PTHrP-independent roles². Candidate factors that may contribute to PTHrP-induced osteolytic lesions are interleukin (IL)-11, macrophage colony-stimulating factor (M-CSF), and vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF)¹⁴. PTHrP-independent factors have also been reported, including IL-8, which can directly stimulate the osteoclast^{15,16}.

Kang et al. compared less- and more-metastatic variants

of a breast cancer cell line by gene expression profiling⁵. They identified mRNAs whose expression strongly correlated with increased bone metastasis. Five of the mRNAs encoded IL-11, matrix metalloproteinase (MMP)-1 osteopontin, connective tissue growth factor (CTGF), and CXCR-4. MMP-1 is an interstitial collagenase made by osteoblasts. It cleaves collagen at a site resistant to osteoclastic enzyme hydrolysis and may be rate-limiting in normal bone resorption¹⁷. Osteopontin plays a complex role in metastasis, including modulation of anti-tumor immune responses¹⁸ and is differentially regulated in tumor cells metastatic to bone versus other sites¹⁹. CTGF is a potent osteoblast-stimulatory factor²⁰, as well as being expressed by tumor cells. CXCR-4 is the receptor for the chemokine SDF-1 and functions in the attraction of breast cancer cells to specific metastatic sites including, but not limited to, bone²¹. Kang et al.⁵ found that the pro-metastatic gene set was coordinately increased in cells that pre-existed in the original cell population. The authors attempted to convert low-metastatic MDA-MB-231 breast cancer cell line clones into ones highly metastatic to bone by overexpressing each of the five individual factors. They found that conversion of the cells to a phenotype of aggressive metastasis to bone required co-transduction of combinations of four of the five factors. The results strongly support a multi-factorial mechanism underlying organ-specific metastases.

Many osteolytic factors act via osteoblasts and stimulate osteoclastic bone resorption indirectly, rather than acting directly on cells of the osteoclast lineage²². This has been shown for PTHrP, which induces osteoblastic expression of RANK ligand²³. IL-11 can act similarly, while M-CSF and VEGF serve as co-factors for the RANK ligand-stimulated differentiation of hemopoietic precursors into active osteoclasts.

Osteoblastic metastases

Metastases with net formation of disorganized new bone are characteristic of prostate cancer²⁴ and also occur in 15% of breast cancer bone metastases. The tumor-induced lesions are characterized by formation of new but abnormal and disorganized new bone, and they are accompanied by increased bone resorption. A number of candidate factors made by tumor cells could stimulate osteoblasts, but progress has lagged in the area until recently. Endothelin-1 (ET-1), a 21-amino acid vasoactive peptide, is a potent stimulator of new bone formation. It is secreted by tumor cells²⁵ and can cause osteoblastic metastases in the nude mouse model. Metastases are effectively blocked with a selective antagonist of the endothelin A receptor^{26,27}. This orally active antagonist is in clinical trials in men with advanced metastatic prostate cancer²⁸⁻³⁰. The vicious cycle model predicts that osteoblasts, osteoclasts and tumor cells cooperate to cause the pathology of bone metastases. The endothelin receptor antagonist blocks the activation of osteoblasts by tumor-produced ET-1. It also decreases osteoclastic bone resorption, as indicated by decreases in markers of resorp-

Cell Line	Bone Metastases	PTHrP	IL-6 ^F	IL-11 ^F	VEGF	Other Osteolytic Factors	ET-1	AM	Other Blastic Factors
Breast									
ZR-75-1	OB	0	0	0	99±1.5		81±5		
MCF-7	OB	0	3.3±0.2	0	180±2		19±2	+ ^A	PDGF ^B
					[171±20] ^M				
T47D	OB	0			[68±12] ^M		227±12	+ ^A	
BT483	M	0					22±6		
MDA-MB-231	OL	0.54±0.1	360	240±3	1258±34	IL-8 ^C	0	+	CTGF ^D
					[1021±23] ^M				
BT549	OL	0.44±0.12					0		
MDA-MB-435s	OL	0.29±0.12			[91±7] ^M		0		
HS578T	N	0.46±0.05					3±2		
MDA-MB-436	N	0.4±0.4					0		
MDA-MB-361	N	0					0		
Prostate									
DU-145	N	0.75±0.08					23±2x	78±10 ^K	
							[4±0.3] ^J		
LNCaP	N	0.08±0.08			470 ^L		0	0 ^K	
							[1.2±0.2] ^J		
PC-3	OL	12±0.8			<25 ^L		0	+ ^E	
							[5±0.3] ^J	71±9 ^K	
Lung									
RWGT2F	OL	64±2	117±2	0	1233±14				
SBC-5G	OL	+							
A549	OL	+ ^H					+	+	
HARAI	OL	+							
Ovary									
CHO-K1	OL	+							

Table 1. Cancer Cell Lines and Phenotypes of Bone Metastases. PTHrP in pM/10⁵ cells/48 hr by Nichols Institute 2-site IRMA. ET-1, IL-6, IL-11, VEGF in pg/ml/10⁵ cells/48 hr by R&D Systems immunoassays. OB = osteoblastic, OL = osteolytic, M = mixed, N = none, when cells are inoculated into the arterial circulation of nude mice via the left cardiac ventricle. Most data from Yin et al.²⁷. ^AAM = adrenomedullin (Miller et al.)⁴⁰. ^BPDGF = platelet-derived growth factor B chain (Yi et al.)⁹⁷. ^CIL-8 = interleukin-8 (Bendre et al.)¹⁵; ^DCTGF = connective tissue growth factor (Kang et al.)⁵; ^EAM = adrenomedullin (Abasolo et al.)⁴³; ^F(Gallwitz et al.)⁸¹; ^G(Miki et al.)⁹²; ^H(Hastings et al.)⁴²; ^I(Iguchi et al.)⁹; ^J(Chiao et al.)⁹³; ^KFmol/mg protein (Rocchi et al.)⁴¹; ^Lpg/mg protein (Dall’Era et al.)⁹⁴; ^MArbitrary mRNA units (Scott et al.)⁹⁵. Remaining data, indicated by pluses, are unpublished from the authors’ laboratory. Note that some of these cells (MCF-7 and MDA-MB-231, for examples), vary in PTHrP production depending on source of the cell line. A number of cell lines, scored N here, cause bone responses when injected directly into the marrow cavity of the tibia or femur⁹⁶. Most of the cell lines are of human origin.

tion seen in the patient trials. Conversely, bisphosphonates effectively reduce skeletal-related events in prostate cancer³¹. These observations support an important role for the vicious cycle in patients.

Other factors responsible for osteoblastic metastases remain to be identified. Such factors need to meet two initial criteria: 1) ability to stimulate osteoblastic new bone formation, and 2) expression by cancer cells. The bone morphogenetic proteins (BMPs) are obvious candidates, but a causal role in bone metastases has not been demonstrated. CTGF, identified in the experiments of Kang et al.⁵ is another factor that stimulates osteoblasts^{20,30}. It is a normal product of hypertrophic chondrocytes and is the second of three closely related gene products CCN1-3, which are selectively expressed in certain tumor types³³. It is possible that CCN1 and CCN3 may contribute to bone metastases. CCN3 is expressed by prostate cancers³⁴, while CCN1, *cyr61*, is expressed by breast³⁵ and other cancers.

Adrenomedullin (AM) is a 52-amino acid vasoactive peptide with potent bone-stimulatory actions *in vitro*^{36,37} and *in vivo*^{38,91}. It is made by many cancers³⁹, including breast⁴⁰ and prostate⁴¹. We have recent data that it increases bone metastases *in vivo*. We tested the A549 human lung adenocarcinoma cell for its ability to form bone metastases when inoculated into the left cardiac ventricle. Animals developed osteolytic metastases after five weeks. These cells express PTHrP⁴², ET-1, and AM. AM secretion was reduced 50% by stable expression of AM siRNA. These cells, made by Dr Alfredo Martinez at the National Cancer Institute, caused fewer metastases and increased survival, compared to empty vector-transfected A549 cells (unpublished results). In experiments the human prostate cancer cell line PC-3 was transfected with an AM expression DNA, resulting in a greater than ten-fold increase in AM secretion. These cells showed slower growth *in vitro* and as subcutaneous tumors⁴³; this response is opposite to that found with many other tumors, where AM is an autocrine growth stimulatory and pro-angiogenic factor³⁹. However, when these same PC-3 subclones were inoculated into nude mice, animal survival was less than half that of mice receiving control PC-3 cells. Mice with AM-overexpressing tumors showed accelerated osteolytic lesions and also adjacent areas of osteoblastic new bone formation (unpublished).

Another factor that could play a role in osteoblastic metastases is stanniocalcin, a polypeptide that is produced by cancer cells^{44,45} and can stimulate new bone formation^{46,47}.

Mixed osteolytic/osteoblastic metastases

Mixed lesions are characteristic of both breast and prostate cancers. The effect of combined expression of osteolytic and osteoblastic factors on bone has not been studied, so the net response of bone at the metastatic site is unpredictable. As noted above, osteolytic factors such as PTHrP and IL-11 act on osteoblasts to increase expression of RANK ligand. We tested the effects of introducing the

osteoblastic factor, ET-1, into the PTHrP-secreting MDA-MB-231 breast cancer cell line. Instead of converting the bone response from osteolytic to osteoblastic, the bone-destructive effects were enhanced by ET-1. Some of this effect may be caused by autocrine responses of the tumor cells to ET-1. We believe that osteoblastic factors can stimulate osteoblast proliferation, increasing the population of early osteoblasts⁴⁸. The enlarged pool of early osteoblasts responds to osteolytic factors by increased expression of RANK ligand⁴⁹. A similar mechanism may be involved in the metastases caused by A549 and PC-3 cells, described in the preceding paragraph. Both cell lines secrete PTHrP and adrenomedullin, and A549s make ET-1 as well (unpublished). Thus, expression of an osteoblastic factor may not simply convert an osteolytic tumor cell line into one that causes osteoblastic metastases.

Another puzzling question has been the role of PTHrP in osteoblastic metastases, especially those due to prostate cancers, which nearly always express PTHrP. A partial explanation was provided by the observation that prostate-specific antigen (PSA) is a serine protease, which cleaves PTHrP after phenylalanine residues 22 and 23^{50,51}. The resulting fragment fails to activate the classical PTH/PTHrP receptor. This is not the end of the story. It was later observed that the inactive fragment PTHrP1-16 increased contraction of cardiac myocytes apparently by binding to the endothelin A receptor. Binding was attributed to a 4 amino acid near-identity between the two peptides⁵². We have extended these observations to bone. PTHrP1-23 is a potent stimulator of calvarial new bone formation at concentrations as low as 1nM (unpublished results), although this polypeptide has no detectable affinity for the type 1 PTH receptor. New bone formation was blocked by the endothelin A receptor antagonist, ABT-627. The results suggest that PSA proteolysis of PTHrP, rather than inactivating it, converts the protein from an osteolytic factor to a potent osteoblastic one. These preliminary results are *in vitro* and require confirmation of their physiological significance *in vivo*. PTHrP can also be cleaved by the neutral endopeptidases, neprilysin, which is expressed on the surface of prostate and bone cells⁵³; so N-terminal fragments of PTHrP could play a role in normal bone metabolism.

Actions of bone on tumor cells

The effects of bone-derived factors on tumor cells remain understudied. Van der Pluijm et al. elegantly demonstrated that several mRNAs are increased in bone versus non-bone sites of human breast cancer metastases in nude mice¹⁴. RNA abundances were determined by species-specific RT-PCR. PTHrP, VEGFs and M-CSF were increased specifically in bone, while several mouse markers of host angiogenesis were similarly increased. These experiments did not identify the factor(s) responsible for the bone-specific mRNA induction. Hauschka et al.¹ found that insulin-like growth factors (IGFs) -2, then -1, were the most abundant factors in bone matrix, followed by TGF β , after which were lower concentrations of

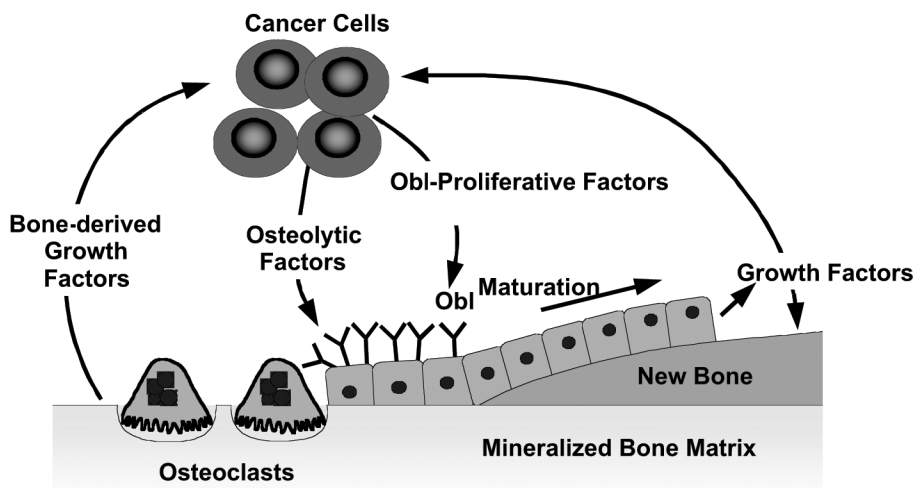


Figure 1. Tumor stimulation of osteoblasts can increase both new bone formation and resorption. Tumor products, such as endothelin-1 and adrenomedullin, stimulate osteoblast (Obl) proliferation. Immature osteoblasts respond to osteolytic cytokines, such as parathyroid hormone and interleukin-11, by expressing RANK ligand (Y). RANK ligand stimulates bone resorption by osteoclasts, which releases growth factors, such as transforming growth factor- β , from mineralized matrix. Mature osteoblasts synthesize growth factors, which are incorporated into bone and also enrich the local microenvironment. Growth factors stimulate tumor cells. Osteoblasts lose RANK ligand expression during maturation. The balance of osteoblast proliferation versus maturation, plus tumor production of factors like PTHrP, determines whether bone metastases are osteoblastic, osteolytic, or mixed. The new bone synthesized in osteoblastic metastases is disorganized and of poor mechanical quantity.

BMPs, fibroblast growth factors -1 and -2, and platelet-derived growth factor¹. Of these, only TGF β has been shown to play a direct role in stimulating tumor cells. TGF β is growth-inhibitory in the early stages of tumorigenesis. Advanced cancers lose growth inhibition but retain TGF β regulation of metastasis-promoting genes⁵⁴, such as CTGF and IL-11, identified by Kang et al.⁵, and PTHrP^{13,55}. In the MDA-MB-231 model of breast cancer metastasis to bone, detailed experiments showed that tumor cell expression of PTHrP is the major target of TGF β and that TGF β is the most important regulator of PTHrP⁵⁶. These experiments also showed that dual pathways in the tumor cells, through p38 MAP kinase and through the Smad proteins, transmit TGF β signaling to the nucleus. Osteoclastic bone resorption specifically activates TGF β from its stored form in bone matrix⁵⁷. This step may be another point at which the efficacy of bisphosphonates against bone metastases is exerted³¹.

It is likely that in patients, tumor cells secrete sets of multiple proteins with actions on bone cells⁵, and these sets may vary between metastatic sites within individuals. The list of the factors contributing to bone metastases is already large (Table 1) and will continue to grow. The effects of multiple factors and their relative expression levels probably change during the course of growth of a metastatic lesion, and the responses of the host cells at the metastatic site will also change over time. Many of the factors isolated from bone

matrix¹ have been generically named as growth factors. However, tumor cell proliferation is generally growth factor-independent, and such proliferation is not rate-limiting for the progress of bone metastases. Experiments with inhibitors of bone responses to tumor cells (but which do not directly target the tumor cells) effectively decrease tumor burden^{8,27,58,59}. These results suggest that paracrine interactions between tumor cells and bone cells are central regulators of skeletal metastases, and that the regulation is not via control of cell proliferation.

The vicious cycle

Animal models have established that bone metastases involve a vicious cycle between tumor cells and the skeleton (Figure 1). The cycle is driven by four obvious contributors: the tumor cells, bone-forming osteoblasts, bone-destroying osteoclasts, and organic bone matrix. Osteoclast formation and activity is controlled by the osteoblast, adding complexity to the vicious cycle. The mineralized matrix of bone provides a rich store of growth factors, such as insulin-like and transforming growth factors¹. These factors are synthesized by osteoblasts and released by osteoclasts. The factors reach high local concentrations in the bone microenvironment and can act on tumor cells to encourage metastatic growth. The products released from resorbing bone attract tumor cells⁶⁰.

In turn, breast cancers secrete many factors that act on bone cells. It is likely that at sites of osteoblastic metastases, the tumor cells continue to secrete osteolytic factors, such as parathyroid hormone-related protein, which stimulate bone resorption. Therapies targeting the vicious cycle can decrease metastases by lowering the concentrations of growth factors in bone. It is characteristic of skeletal metastases that the properties of the bone are altered, contributing to the clinical pathology seen in patients. As disease progresses, the bone and the bone cells probably become more and more abnormal, under the continuing influence of tumor-secreted factors. It should be borne in mind that the images of metastases seen in animal models represent a much-simplified version of the clinical picture. The animal models are of much shorter duration and involve homogeneous tumor lines, whereas bone metastases in patients are much more heterogeneous, even within individual patients⁶¹.

Roles of other cells in bone to skeletal metastases

It is an oversimplification to consider only osteoblasts and osteoclasts as the interacting partners of tumor cells in the vicious cycle of cancer bone metastases. Vascular endothelial cells are a major fourth cellular component. Most of the tumor-produced factors discussed above are vasoactive and many are pro-angiogenic, including endothelin⁶², adrenomedullin⁶³, IL-8⁶⁴, the CCN proteins^{33,65}, stanniocalcin⁶⁶, as well as VEGF. PTHrP may be anti-angiogenic⁶⁷. These same angiogenic factors are also increased by the hypoxic response in tumor cells, including endothelin⁶⁸, adrenomedullin⁶⁹, the CCN proteins^{70,71}, and stanniocalcin⁷². To further complicate the situation, many of these factors are both regulated by and regulators of VEGF, and many are also TGF β -regulated genes. Thus, there must be an extremely complex cross-talk between endothelial cells, bone cells, and tumor cells at the metastatic site. Making sense of these interactions will require the development of novel and subtle experimental strategies.

Endothelial cells in bone differ from the cells lining blood vessels in other organs, which could contribute to the bone-tropism of certain tumors⁷³. Just as tumor-secreted factors can alter the phenotypes of bone cells in the vicinity of metastases, such factors will probably also alter the behavior of endothelial cells. Van der Pluijm et al. observed specific changes in host vascular markers in bone versus non-bone metastatic sites¹⁴. Di Raimondo et al. similarly detected angiogenic factors at higher concentrations in bone marrow plasma than in the peripheral circulation of patients with multiple myeloma⁷⁴, suggesting the specific induction of angiogenic factor expression within the bone microenvironment of patients with cancer in the skeleton. Tumor cells are also likely to perturb the lineages of cells in bone. Bone marrow is a major site of stem cells, including the stem cells of the bone stromal lineage⁷⁵, and cells in bone such as pericytes could alter their differentiation under the influence of tumor-produced factors. Thus, tumor cells could alter the

supply of osteoblastic precursors and also alter the differentiation of hematopoietic precursors into osteoclasts²². The animal model that is the focus of this article relies on T-cell deficient nude mice, which ignores the contribution in patients of the immune system to both normal bone cell function⁷⁶, as well as to cell-mediated immune surveillance and killing of tumor cells.

Clinical applications

The bisphosphonates are a class of drugs that resemble pyrophosphate. The replacement of the central oxygen of pyrophosphate by a carbon in the bisphosphonate backbone results in resistance to hydrolysis and confers high affinity for bone mineral, which is the basis for bisphosphonate-radiionuclide conjugates as diagnostic bone-scanning agents. The bisphosphonates have high affinity for bone, where they can persist for years⁷⁷. They are released at high concentrations in areas of active bone remodeling and are absorbed by nearby cells. They inhibit cells by several mechanisms, including the stimulation of apoptosis. Bisphosphonates are effective in animal models and the clinic. Whether bisphosphonates have significant effects *in vivo* on tumor cells or angiogenesis⁷⁸, especially at non-bone sites where their concentrations are low, is controversial.

An inhibitor of intracellular src signaling, when modified by the addition of a pair of phosphonate groups, inhibited osteoclastic bone resorption⁷⁹. This approach could add bone specificity to existing chemotherapeutic and adjuvant compounds. Recombinant osteoprotegerin decreased osteolytic destruction and tumor burden in bone, without affecting metastases to soft-tissue sites in an animal model⁵⁹, and decreased cancer bone pain⁸⁰. Recombinant osteoprotegerin entered clinical trials but is likely to be superseded by neutralizing antibodies against RANK ligand.

A recent study identified 6-thioguanine and 6-thioguanosine as effective inhibitors of PTHrP transcription. These agents have long been used against leukaemias and several inflammatory disorders. They were effective in animal models of humoral hypercalcemia of malignancy and breast cancer bone metastases⁸¹. Endothelin receptor antagonists are in extensive clinical trials, and their efficacy against osteoblastic metastasis is discussed above. Most of these adjuvant treatments target bone cells, but it may be possible to block the effects on tumors of bone-derived factors such as TGF β ⁸².

Treatment options

Bisphosphonate drugs are currently approved for skeletal metastases due to multiple myeloma and solid tumors of the breast and prostate. In the last case, an anti-resorptive is effective against what are predominantly osteoblastic metastases. In fact, osteoblastic metastases are accompanied by active bone remodeling, and prostate cancer patients with bone metastases have markers of bone resorption higher than those seen in patients with osteolytic disease⁸³.

Bisphosphonates are also effective in animal models of osteoblastic bone metastases⁸⁴. The results are consistent with the importance of the vicious cycle, outlined above and in Figure 1, to both osteolytic and osteoblastic diseases. The role of a vicious cycle in osteoblastic metastases is also supported by the observation that when patients with advanced metastatic prostate cancer were treated with the endothelin A receptor antagonist ABT-627, atrasentan, markers of bone resorption were decreased^{29,30}. Trials are now underway to test whether combining a bisphosphonate drug with an endothelin receptor antagonist is more effective than the single agent treatments.

Future directions and limitations

Areas of active research include the continuing identification of candidate osteolytic and osteoblastic factors. Many of those already identified require substantial further testing *in vivo* to determine whether they are valid targets for therapeutic intervention. They include IL-8, IL-11, CTGF, adrenomedullin, stanniocalcin, and CXCR-4. Angiogenesis is of obvious central importance in bone metastases. Many of the factors made by tumor cells are increased by hypoxia and in turn are angiogenic, in addition to having stimulatory actions on bone cells.

The roles of the abundant, bone-derived insulin-like growth factors need to be tested for their contributions to metastases to bone. IGF-2 is the most abundant bioactive factor in the mineralized matrix¹, but its role in skeletal metastasis, along with those of IGF-1, has been little studied⁸⁵. The effects of these molecules, through activation of the type 1 IGF-1 receptor on tumor cells and bone cells, are likely to be complex and extend beyond stimulation of growth. Actions of secreted IGFs are controlled by the IGF binding proteins⁸⁶⁻⁸⁸. The extremely complex relationship between bone metastases and angiogenesis, discussed above, remains to be clarified.

The animal models, which are the focus of this article, have been limited to a modest number of cultured cell lines (Table 1). This is a strength in terms of defining molecular mechanisms, but it is clearly a weakness for understanding the more diverse and complex situations encountered in the clinic. We believe that this weakness is not effectively addressed by repeating the animal model experiments with more cell lines, even if funding were available for such confirmatory studies. A goal of the animal models is to provide platforms for pre-clinical testing of therapeutic interventions. If the animal models provide useful guidance in improving the care of patients with skeletal metastases, then they will have served their purpose well.

On a broader scale are the clinical consequences of bone metastases, in particular severe bone pain and systemic weight loss (cachexia). ET-1, for example, is nociceptive. Mechanisms of bone pain are specific and under active investigation⁸⁰. It seems likely that bone metastases release unknown factors into the circulation, which stimulate wast-

ing of skeletal muscle⁸⁹. These syndromes are of great consequence to the patients who suffer from cancers of the breast and prostate, which are incurable once they become housed in bone³. It is now appreciated that the standard treatments for patients with cancers of the breast and prostate result in bone loss. Not only does this result in skeletal morbidity for the patients, but increased bone turnover could enhance metastases to bone by stimulating the vicious cycle. Patients with treatment-related bone loss should benefit from therapy with bisphosphonate anti-resorptive drugs⁹⁰. Tumor-bone interactions, and the secreted factors which mediate them, offer targets for future therapeutic intervention to ameliorate or perhaps prevent skeletal metastases.

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