Evidence supporting dual, IGF-I-independent and IGF-I-dependent, roles for GH in promoting longitudinal bone growth

J Wang, J Zhou, C M Cheng, J J Kopchick1 and C A Bondy

Developmental Endocrinology Branch, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, Bethesda, Maryland 20892, USA
1Edison Biotechnology Institute and Department of Biomedical Sciences, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio 45701, USA

(Requests for offprints should be addressed to C A Bondy; Email: bondyc@exchange.nih.gov)

Abstract

The possibility that growth hormone (GH) has effects on long bone growth independent of insulin-like growth factor-I (IGF-I) has long been debated. If this is true, then long bone growth should be more profoundly affected by the absence of GH (since both GH and GH-stimulated IGF-I effects are absent) than by the absence of IGF-I alone (since GH is still present and actually elevated). To test this hypothesis, we compared long bone growth in mice with targeted deletions of Igf1 vs growth hormone receptor (Ghr). Tibial linear growth rate was reduced by approximately 35% in Igf1 null mice and by about 65% in Ghr null mice between postnatal days 20 and 40, a time of peak GH effect during normal longitudinal growth. The Igf1 null mouse growth plate demonstrated significant enlargement of the germinal zone; chondrocyte proliferation and numbers were normal but chondrocyte hypertrophy was significantly reduced. In contrast, the Ghr null mouse germinal zone was hypoplastic, chondrocyte proliferation and numbers were significantly reduced, and chondrocyte hypertrophy was also reduced. We have previously demonstrated that IGF-II is highly expressed in growth plate germinal and proliferative zones, so we considered the possibility that GH-stimulated IGF-II production might promote germinal zone expansion and maintain normal proliferation in the Igf1 null mouse growth plate. Supporting this view, IGF-II mRNA was increased in the Igf1 null mouse and decreased in the Ghr null mouse growth plate.

Thus, in the complete absence of IGF-I but in the presence of elevated GH in the Igf1 null mouse, reduction in chondrocyte hypertrophy appears to be the major defect in longitudinal bone growth. In the complete absence of a GH effect in the Ghr null mouse, however, both chondrocyte generation and hypertrophy are compromised, leading to a compound deficit in long bone growth. These observations support dual roles for GH in promoting longitudinal bone growth: an IGF-I-independent role in growth plate chondrocyte generation and an IGF-I-dependent role in promoting chondrocyte hypertrophy. The question of whether GH has direct effects on chondrocyte generation is still not settled, however, since it now appears that IGF-II may mediate some of these effects on the growth plate.

Introduction

The interactions between growth hormone (GH) and insulin-like growth factor-I (IGF-I) in the regulation of somatic growth have been investigated for many years in many different model systems (reviewed in Ohlsson et al. 1998, Le Roith et al. 2001). Briefly, while IGF-I has long been regarded as the mediator of GH’s systemic effects on growth (the ‘somatomedin hypothesis’, evidence has accumulated in recent years suggesting that IGF-I has some GH-independent effects and that GH has some IGF-I-independent effects on somatic growth. The most compelling evidence for the former view is the finding that Igf1 gene disruption results in significant intrauterine growth retardation beginning before the time of GH-regulated growth (Liu et al. 1993, Powell-Braxton et al. 1993, Woods et al. 1996). Igf1 null mice and the single human reported with Igf1 gene deletion also exhibit impaired postnatal growth and elevated GH levels (Liu et al. 1993, Powell-Braxton et al. 1993, Woods et al. 1996).

The evidence for IGF-I-independent growth-promoting actions by GH has been less conclusive for a number of reasons. The finding that IGF-I administration to GH- or GH receptor (GHR)-deficient subjects results in less than optimal growth (Fielder et al. 1996, Ranke et al. 1999, Rosenbloom 1999) may reflect the absence of essential GH effects, or may be due to difficulty in delivering exogenous IGF-I to target tissues. GH’s putative direct effects in cell or explant culture or after local injection in vivo could be attributed to autocrine or paracrine IGF-I activity, since GH stimulates IGF-I production in many different tissues and cell types and IGF-I receptor expression is nearly universal. For example, the fact that local injection of GH to the tibial growth plate...
stimulates germinal zone expansion has been attributed to GH-induced local IGF-I production (Schlechter et al. 1986, Ohlsson et al. 1992, Hunziker et al. 1994). In support of a direct, IGF-I-independent effect by GH on germinal zone expansion, we recently reported that the tibial epiphysial growth germinal is significantly enlarged in the Igf1 null mouse (Wang et al. 1999). Since GH levels are chronically elevated while IGF-I is completely absent in a genetically heterogeneous line, we backcrossed for over 12 generations to C57/6J females resulting in a line that was 99.61% congenic, and the line was maintained in C57/6J mice for over 10 generations at the National Institutes of Health to obtain the animals for this study. The mice were studied in a protocol approved by the NICHD Animal Use and Care Committee. Mice were genotyped by PCR of tail biopsy DNA as previously described (Powell-Braxton et al. 1993, Zhou et al. 1997) and killed by decapitation after CO2 inhalation between 1200 and 1400 h at postnatal days 10, 20 or 40 (P10, P20, P40).

**Cell proliferation**

For cell proliferation studies of the tibial growth plate mice were injected intraperitoneally with [3H]thymidine (2 µCi/g) or bromodeoxyuridine (BrdU) (100 µl/g, Calbiochem HCS24; San Diego, CA, USA) one hour before death. Tissue sections were dipped in Kodak NTB2 nuclear emulsion and exposed at 4°C for 3 weeks, developed in D19 (Kodak), fixed and counter-stained with hematoxylin for detection of nuclear [3H]thymidine incorporation. Positive cells had 5 or more grains/nucleus. BrdU incorporation was detected immunohistochemically as previously described (Wang et al. 1999). A blinded observer scored all proliferative zone chondrocytes in 3–4 tissue sections from each animal under 400× magnification.

**Growth plate morphometry**

Tibias were dissected, fixed in formalin, decalcified in EDTA, embedded in paraffin and cut longitudinally into 5 µ sections, which were mounted onto poly-L-lysine–coated slides. The longitudinal dimensions of the tibia and of the proximal tibial growth plate were measured on photomicrographs of anatomically matched, mid-sagittal sections, taken at 2.5× and 200× magnification respectively. For the growth plate dimensions, three different measurements, clustered about the midline, were taken on each of two sections for each animal, as previously described (Wang et al. 1999). These data were meaned for each animal and then pooled and meaned for each group. The terminal chondrocyte longitudinal diameter was measured on micrographs taken at 400× magnification. Measurements were made only on cells with intact superior and inferior transverse septa.

**In situ hybridization**

The clones used for riboprobe synthesis and the in situ hybridization protocol have been described previously (Wang et al. 1995). IGF-II mRNA was quantified in growth plate proliferative and germinal zones by counting

---

**Materials and Methods**

**Mice**

The Igf1 deletion mouse line used in this study was provided by Lynn Powell-Braxton at Genentech, Inc., San Francisco, CA, USA (Powell-Braxton et al. 1993) and bred in our facility for more than 30 generations into a CD1 strain obtained from Taconic Farms (Germantown, NY, USA). The Ghr line was generated in Sv129 Ola/ Balb/c background (Zhou et al. 1997). Males (+/−) from this genetically heterogeneous line were backcrossed for over 12 generations to C57/6J females resulting in a line that was 99.61% congenic, and the line was maintained in C57/6J mice for over 10 generations at the National Institutes of Health to obtain the animals for this study. The mice were studied in a protocol approved by the NICHD Animal Use and Care Committee. Mice were genotyped by PCR of tail biopsy DNA as previously described (Powell-Braxton et al. 1993, Zhou et al. 1997) and killed by decapitation after CO2 inhalation between 1200 and 1400 h at postnatal days 10, 20 or 40 (P10, P20, P40).
grains overlying 100–200 germinal zone cells and ~500 proliferative zone cells for each animal on masked slides under high magnification (630 ×) microscopy. Background signal from the sense probe hybridization was subtracted from data prior to analysis.

Data analysis

Data for each group are expressed as means with standard errors. Genotyped, homozygous Igf1 and Ghr null mice were compared with littermate WT mice at P20 and P40 with a minimum of 4 mice per group. Comparisons between the different strains were made only after normalization to the relevant WT mean. Differences between groups were analyzed by ANOVA using Stat View 4·1 (SAS Institute, Cary, NC, USA) followed by Fisher’s least significant difference tests. A P value <0·05 was taken as significant.

Results

Total body weights of homozygous Igf1 and Ghr null dwarf mice were compared with the corresponding WT littermate mice at P20 and P40 (Table 1). The weights of the Igf1 null dwarfs were ~60% of WT mice at P20 and the weights of the Ghr null dwarfs were ~55% of their littermate WT group at this stage, with no statistically significant difference between the two dwarf groups. By P40, both Igf1 and Ghr null mice were reduced in weight by ~60% compared with their respective WT groups. Note that the two WT strains (CD1 and Sv129 Ola/Balb/c) are significantly different in weight and therefore direct comparisons of the dwarf phenotypes without normalization to mice of the same genetic backgrounds would be misleading.

Tibial morphology during postnatal development was grossly normal in both Igf1 and Ghr null mice (Fig. 1). Tibial growth rate was assessed in Igf1 and Ghr null mice between P20 and P40, a time of peak GH-induced longitudinal bone growth in normal mice. Tibial growth rate between P20 and P40 was reduced by approximately 37% in Igf1 null mice and by 65% in Ghr null mice (Table 2). Note that tibial growth is substantially slower in the Sv129 Ola/Balb/c strain compared with the CD1 mice, again showing the necessity of evaluating the mutant data against the relevant genetic background.

To elucidate the cause of this marked differential in growth rate, we compared proximal tibial epiphysial growth plate characteristics in the two dwarf phenotypes (Fig. 2 and Table 3). We evaluated the extent of proximal tibial epiphysial ossification in P20 dwarf mice by comparing the area occupied by the secondary ossification center to the entire area of the epiphysis using image analysis. In the Igf1 null mice the tibial secondary ossification center occupied 21·1±2% while in the WT it occupied 30·1±4% of the total epiphysis (P<0·05). In the Ghr null mice the secondary ossification center occupied 25·1±4% and in the WT it occupied 34·4±4% of the total epiphysis (P<0·05). Thus in both dwarfs, the area of the epiphysis occupied by a secondary ossification center was reduced by about 30%.

As previously reported, the Igf1 null mouse growth plate demonstrates an enlarged germinal zone, which is the region at the top of the growth plate thought to produce chondrocyte precursors. Chondrocyte numbers and proliferation are not significantly different in Igf1 null and littermate WT proliferative zones (Figs 3 and 4; Table 3). Chondrocyte hypertrophy is significantly reduced in these mice, however, the reduction in height of Igf1 null mice terminal hypertrophic chondrocytes is proportionate to the reduction in Igf1 null mice long bone growth. In contrast, the Ghr null mouse growth plate germinal zone was diminished and the proliferative zone was reduced in cell number and proliferative index (Figs 3 and 4; Table 3). Finally, the Ghr null mouse hypertrophic zone was also significantly attenuated, with hypertrophic chondrocytes reduced both in number and size. Thus the Ghr null mouse epiphysial growth plate demonstrates a compound deficit in chondrocyte number and hypertrophy contributing to the pronounced linear growth failure.

Since IGF-II is expressed by growth plate germinal and proliferative zone cells (Shinar et al. 1993, Wang et al. 1995), we hypothesized that GH-enhanced IGF-II expression might be responsible for the effects of GH on chondrocyte generation/proliferation, which is preserved in the Igf1 null mouse. Therefore, we compared IGF-II mRNA levels in Igf1 and Ghr null mice and their

---

### Table 1 Effects of Igf1 and Ghr deletion on body weights at P20 and P40. Data represent means ± S.E.M. with the number of mice for each observation indicated in parentheses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Igf1 WT</th>
<th>Igf1 null</th>
<th>Ghr WT</th>
<th>Ghr null</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P20 weight (g)</td>
<td>13 ± 0·5(15)</td>
<td>8 ± 0·4*(14)</td>
<td>11 ± 0·4(10)</td>
<td>6 ± 0·8*(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%WT</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P40 weight (g)</td>
<td>26·3 ± 1·2(11)</td>
<td>10·2 ± 0·8*(14)</td>
<td>22·2 ± 0·6 (5)</td>
<td>8·8 ± 0·3*(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%WT</td>
<td>38 ± 4</td>
<td>38 ± 4</td>
<td>38 ± 4</td>
<td>38 ± 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P<0·0001 compared with the relevant WT control group.
respective WT littermates using in situ hybridization. Cellular patterns for IGF-II gene expression were exactly as previously reported (Wang et al. 1995). IGF-II mRNA levels were significantly increased in the germinal and proliferative zones of the Igf1 null mouse and reduced in both zones of the Ghr null mouse (Table 3), supporting the possibility that GH enhances growth plate IGF-II expression.

Discussion

This study shows that longitudinal bone growth is significantly more retarded by Ghr deletion than by Igf1 deletion, with Ghr null mice demonstrating attenuation of both numbers and size of growth plate chondrocytes, while Igf1 null mice exhibit only reduced chondrocyte size. The fact that the germinal zone is enlarged and chondrocyte

Table 2 Comparison of tibial lengths and growth rates. Data represent means ± S.E.M. with 4–5 mice in each group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Igf1 WT</th>
<th>Igf1 null</th>
<th>Ghr WT</th>
<th>Ghr null</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P20 tibial length (mm)</td>
<td>13.4 ± 0.07</td>
<td>10.5 ± 0.2*</td>
<td>12.5 ± 0.07</td>
<td>10.4 ± 0.2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P40 tibial length (mm)</td>
<td>19.3 ± 0.6</td>
<td>14.3 ± 0.4*</td>
<td>15.7 ± 0.07</td>
<td>11.6 ± 0.2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth rate μ/d</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%WT</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P<0.001 compared with the relevant WT control group.
proliferation is normal in the \textit{Igf1} null mouse growth plate supports the view that GH enhances chondrocyte generation and proliferation independent of IGF-I, since GH is elevated while IGF-I is completely absent in these animals. It has been proposed that GH acts directly on the growth plate germinal zone to promote generation of chondrocyte precursors, and indirectly via IGF-I to promote chondrocyte proliferation (reviewed in Ohlsson \textit{et al.} 1998). The present data, however, show that growth plate chondrocyte proliferation is maintained, even in the complete absence of IGF-I, suggesting that GH may have direct effects upon chondrocyte proliferation as well as on the germinal zone. Alternatively, since IGF-II mRNA is increased in \textit{Igf1} null mice growth plates and reduced in \textit{Ghr} null mice growth plates, GH may, in the absence of IGF-I, promote chondrocyte proliferation by stimulating IGF-II gene expression. IGF-I receptor expression is abundant in all growth plate cells (Wang \textit{et al.} 1995), and it is likely that both the effects of IGF-II on chondrocyte proliferation and of IGF-I on chondrocyte hypertrophy are mediated by this receptor. Thus experiments involving IGF-I injected directly into the growth plate or elevated systemic IGF-I levels may enhance chondrocyte generation/proliferation, but these effects may normally be due to locally produced IGF-I or IGF-II. Supporting a role for IGF-II in longitudinal bone growth, the linear growth rate of the femur is reduced by 10–15% in the \textit{Igf2} null mouse (Mohan \textit{et al.} 2003).

Another study compared growth in independent \textit{Igf1} and \textit{Ghr} deletions in different strains of mice (Lupu \textit{et al.} 2001). They did not analyze long bone growth rates in the different groups (which included a small group of double \textit{Igf1}/\textit{Ghr} null dwarfs), but did report tibial length at different postnatal stages. Analysis of the data in Table 3 in Lupu \textit{et al.} (2001) shows that the \textit{Igf1} null mouse tibia increases in length by 3.4 mm while the \textit{Ghr} null mouse tibia grows only 1.74 mm between P22 and P130 (a reduction of almost 60% compared with the WT growth of 4 mm). There were few observations on the double knockouts and no statistical analyses in this study, but tibial growth was ~1.3 mm between P22 and P130 in this group. Another study reported that femoral growth rate is reduced by approximately 60% in \textit{Ghr} null mice (Fig. 1 in Sims \textit{et al.} 2000), consistent with the reduced growth rate found in the present study. A very recent study compared growth in \textit{Igf1} null mice to the GH-deficient \textit{lit}/\textit{lit} dwarf mice (Mohan \textit{et al.} 2003). While the major focus of that work was on bone mineral density, the authors also

![Figure 2](https://www.endocrinology.org)

**Figure 2** The development of secondary ossification centers in \textit{Igf1} and \textit{Ghr} null dwarf mice. The Figure illustrates representative proximal tibial epiphyses from WT and dwarf mice at P20. The secondary ossification centers (OS) are well-developed in both \textit{Igf1} null and \textit{Ghr} null dwarfs, but occupy a smaller proportion of the epiphysis than in the WT in each case.
Distinct roles of IGF-I and GH in long bone growth

Table 3 Data on growth plate composition from the proximal tibia of P20 mice. IGF-II hybridizations were conducted in separate experiments — all the Igf1 null and WT in one batch and the Ghr null and WT in another batch. Since probe-specific activity and exposure times may vary somewhat between experiments, it is not valid to directly compare the results for the Igf1 with the Ghr mice. All data are means ± S.E.M. for 4–6 mice/group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WT</th>
<th>Igf1 null</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>WT</th>
<th>Ghr null</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tibia (mm)</td>
<td>13·3 ± 0·6</td>
<td>10·5 ± 0·2</td>
<td>0·0001</td>
<td>12·5 ± 0·1</td>
<td>10·5 ± 0·2</td>
<td>0·0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth plate (μm)</td>
<td>366·9 ± 4·3</td>
<td>318·9 ± 8·1</td>
<td>0·002</td>
<td>296·4 ± 10·1</td>
<td>208·5 ± 17·8</td>
<td>0·0027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GZ (μm)</td>
<td>29·9 ± 2·8</td>
<td>44·8 ± 2·8</td>
<td>0·01</td>
<td>21·4 ± 1·0</td>
<td>9·4 ± 0·6</td>
<td>0·0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GZ cell number</td>
<td>2·06 ± 0·1</td>
<td>2·9 ± 0·2</td>
<td>0·04</td>
<td>2·5 ± 0·2</td>
<td>0·8 ± 0·1</td>
<td>0·0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGF-II mRNA (g/cell)</td>
<td>6·3 ± 0·5</td>
<td>9·0 ± 0·5</td>
<td>0·02</td>
<td>6·5 ± 0·3</td>
<td>4·3 ± 0·3</td>
<td>0·02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZ (μm)</td>
<td>118·4 ± 5·8</td>
<td>131·0 ± 10·3</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>120·6 ± 4·7</td>
<td>104·9 ± 8·8</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZ cells/50 μ</td>
<td>8·8 ± 0·3</td>
<td>8·2 ± 0·7</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>8·8 ± 0·3</td>
<td>6·8 ± 0·2</td>
<td>0·04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZ LI (%)</td>
<td>17·2 ± 0·9</td>
<td>16·4 ± 1·3</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>18·9 ± 1·5</td>
<td>12·3 ± 1·0</td>
<td>0·011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGF-II mRNA (g/cell)</td>
<td>38·3 ± 1·5</td>
<td>47·3 ± 2·8</td>
<td>0·03</td>
<td>51·9 ± 3·4</td>
<td>37·7 ± 2·8</td>
<td>0·01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HZ (μm)</td>
<td>2210 ± 10·1</td>
<td>143·2 ± 4·3</td>
<td>0·0004</td>
<td>154·3 ± 10·8</td>
<td>94·3 ± 16·5</td>
<td>0·016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HZ cell number</td>
<td>13·0 ± 0·5</td>
<td>12·6 ± 0·5</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>8·2 ± 0·5</td>
<td>5·6 ± 0·1</td>
<td>0·0011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HZ cell height (μm)</td>
<td>32·5 ± 1·2</td>
<td>23·0 ± 2·4</td>
<td>0·003</td>
<td>29·5 ± 0·3</td>
<td>18·4 ± 0·6</td>
<td>0·0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measurements given in mm or μm represent the longitudinal dimension of the structure parallel to the long axis of the bone. The cell number data for the germinal (GZ) and hypertrophic zones (HZ) represent the mean number of cells in single columns spanning the entire longitudinal diameter of the zone, while the data for the proliferative zone (PZ) represents the number of cells in 50 μ in a closely packed column. The DNA labeling index (LI) was determined by scoring the number of BrdU-positive nuclei per total nuclei in the PZ. The data for IGF-II mRNA are given as grains/cell (g/cell). The data on the Igf1 null growth were published in Wang et al. (1999).

NS, not significant.

The cell number for the germinal (GZ) and hypertrophic zones (HZ) represent the mean number of cells in single columns spanning the entire longitudinal diameter of the zone, while the data for the proliferative zone (PZ) represents the number of cells in 50 μ in a closely packed column. The DNA labeling index (LI) was determined by scoring the number of BrdU-positive nuclei per total nuclei in the PZ. The data for IGF-II mRNA are given as grains/cell (g/cell). The data on the Igf1 null growth were published in Wang et al. (1999). NS, not significant.

They showed that the rate of femoral growth for the Igf1 null mouse was reduced by about 35% while the lit/lit femoral growth rate was reduced by ∼55–60% of Lit/+ controls between P31 and P56 (Fig. 2 and Tables 1 and 3 in Mohan et al. 2003). Thus four independent studies, encompassing independent targeted or naturally occurring deletions, in different murine strains, all show a marked ∼60% reduction in longitudinal bone growth in GH-deficient mice, in contrast to a significantly lower, <40% reduction in Igf1 null mice, even though in general, Igf1 null mice show a more pronounced dwarfism in terms of body weight.

Our findings of compound defects in the Ghr null mouse growth plate, i.e. a reduced germinal zone, reduced chondrocyte proliferation and reduced chondrocyte hypertrophy provide a mechanistic explanation for the greater linear growth deficit in the Ghr null mice and provide support for the view that GH has important, IGF-I-independent effects on long bone growth. Lupu et al. (2001) confirm, in a new mouse line, our previously reported observations of germinal zone expansion and reduced chondrocyte hypertrophy in Igf1 null dwarfs (Wang et al. 1999). However, they appear to categorically reject the notion of GH as an independent effector at the growth plate, and attribute the germinal zone expansion to delayed ossification rather than to GH excess (Lupu et al. 2001). In addition, they report that the Ghr null mouse growth plate germinal zone is not enlarged, a finding we confirmed in the present study, and also that the Ghr null mouse tibia does not exhibit delayed ossification (Lupu et al. 2001). However, Sjogren et al. (2000) report that the Ghr null mouse proximal tibia demonstrates extremely delayed ossification. These conflicting views may be due to problems in obtaining sections from the tiny bones of dwarf mice that are properly anatomically matched to the larger specimens from WT mice, and to qualitative histological data. We examined serial sections through each growth plate to obtain perfectly matched anatomical sections for image analysis and to be sure that we appreciated the full thickness of the growth plate. We found that tibial epiphysial ossification was very similar in Igf1 null and Ghr null mice and that secondary ossification centers were about 30% smaller in area relative to the entire epiphysis in both dwarf lines compared with their respective WT at P20, indicating a mild delay in bone age. However, since both dwarf phenotypes exhibit the same secondary ossification delay, while the germinal zone is enlarged in Igf1 null mice but reduced in Ghr null mice, the germinal zone alterations cannot be attributed to ossification delay. It is important to note that these concordant observations on germinal zone enlargement were made in independent Igf1 targeted deletions maintained in different strains of mice. The present data from CD1 mice together with that of Lupu et al. (2001) in MF1/DBA mice clearly establish that Igf1 deletion results in enlargement of the growth plate germinal zone, irrespective of genetic background. A likely explanation for this finding is that GH, which is elevated in both strains of Igf1 null mice, stimulates germinal zone expansion.

While Lupu et al. (2001) confirmed our observations on germinal zone expansion and decreased chondrocyte...
hypertrophy in the Igf1 null mouse growth plate, they do not agree with our finding of normal chondrocyte number and proliferation in the Igf1 null mouse growth plate (Wang et al. 1999). Lupu et al. (2001) report reduced proliferation and cell numbers in both dwarf growth plates. These observations, however, are not supported by

Figure 3 Effects of Igf1 and Ghr deletion on epiphysial growth plate cell populations. The Figure illustrates representative proximal tibial growth plates from WT and dwarf mice. The germinal zone (G) is expanded in the Igf1 null mice growth plate but reduced in the Ghr null mice growth plate. The number of chondrocytes is equal in Igf1 null and WT mice (A and B) but reduced in Ghr null mice (C and D). The size of hypertrophic chondrocytes is reduced in both dwarfs. P, proliferative zone; H, hypertrophic zone.
quantitative or statistical analyses and provide no explanation for the greater reduction in long bone growth rate in Ghr mice noted in four recent studies.

This analysis of growth plate dynamics provides a plausible explanation for the differences in longitudinal bone growth seen in Igf1 null and Ghr null dwarfs which fits with previous experimental data bearing on the subject (reviewed in Ohlsson et al. 1998). The fact that Igf1 and Ghr deletions each produce consistent tibial growth phenotypes in different strains of mice shows that these deficits are independent of the genetic background and relate specifically to the roles of GH and IGF-I in the promotion of longitudinal bone growth. The dual reduction in chondrocyte generation and hypertrophy accounts for the more profound deficit in the Ghr null mouse, while the reduction only in chondrocyte hypertrophy accounts for a milder effect in the Igf1 null mouse. However, this study does not resolve the issue of whether GH acts ‘directly’ on chondrocyte generation, leaving the door open to mediation by another somatomedin, IGF-II.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Lynn Powell-Braxton at Genentech for providing the Igf1 null mouse line and to Ricardo Dreyfuss for expert photomicrography. The authors have no conflict of interest.

References

Distinct roles of IGF-I and GH in long bone growth


Received 14 September 2003
Accepted 23 October 2003