

胸腺上皮肿瘤免疫检查点及免疫治疗研究进展

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摘要: 胸腺上皮肿瘤是一种起源于胸腺上皮细胞的纵隔常见恶性肿瘤。手术治疗是目前的主要治疗方式, 对于复发及难治性胸腺上皮肿瘤多推荐进行放化疗等辅助治疗, 但以铂类为主的化疗、分子靶向治疗及放疗的治疗疗效依然有限。免疫治疗已成为肿瘤的辅助或新辅助治疗的重要选择之一, 其中针对细胞毒性T淋巴细胞抗原-4、PD-1 和 PD-L1 等免疫检查点的抑制剂已被批准用于许多实体肿瘤的治疗。与传统疗法相比, 这些免疫检查点抑制剂具有更好的疗效和更低的毒性。但可能由于胸腺独特的生物学特性, 免疫治疗通常会引起严重的免疫相关不良事件, 增加了这些患者免疫治疗获益的不确定性。该文总结了胸腺上皮肿瘤的免疫生物学, 讨论了有关免疫检查点抑制剂的现有数据和这一治疗策略的未来前景。

关键词: 胸腺上皮肿瘤; 免疫检查点; 免疫治疗; 免疫生物学; 免疫不良反应事件

中图分类号: R736.3 **文献标识码:** A **文章编号:** 1004-0242(2022)07-0562-07

doi: 10.11735/j.issn.1004-0242.2022.07.A008

Research Progress on Immune Checkpoint and Immunotherapy for Thymic Epithelial Tumor

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Abstract: Thymic epithelial tumor is a common mediastinal malignant tumor originating from thymic epithelial cells. Local surgical resection is the main therapeutic modality at present, and the efficacy of targeted and other adjuvant therapies for recurrent and refractory thymic epithelial tumors is limited. Immunotherapy has become one of the important options for adjuvant or neoadjuvant therapy of tumors, and antibodies targeting immune checkpoints such as anti CTLA-4, PD-1 and PD-L1 have been approved for the treatment of many solid tumors. These immune checkpoint inhibitors are more effective and less toxic than conventional therapies. However, due to the unique biological features of the thymus, immunotherapy often causes severe immune-related adverse events, increasing uncertainty about the feasibility of immunotherapy in these patients. In this article, the immunobiology of thymic tumors is reviewed and the available data on immune checkpoint inhibitors and the future prospects of this therapeutic strategy are discussed.

Key words: thymic epithelial tumor; immune checkpoint; immunotherapy; immunobiology; immune-related adverse events

胸腺上皮肿瘤发生于前纵隔, 每年每 10 万人中

有 1.3~3.2 人发病, 近几年呈逐渐上升趋势^[1-3]。2015 年世界卫生组织根据胸腺上皮细胞的形态、恶性程度及其与淋巴细胞的比例将胸腺上皮肿瘤分为 A、AB、B1、B2、B3 型胸腺瘤和 C 型(胸腺癌, 包括神经内分泌癌), 且根据肿瘤的恶性程度可分为低危组(A

收稿日期: 2022-03-23; 修回日期: 2022-05-12
基金项目: 国家自然科学基金面上项目(82172567)
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型、AB 型和 B1 型)、高危组(B2 型和 B3 型)和胸腺癌组(C 型) 3 个类型^[4-5]。相比于较惰性的胸腺瘤,胸腺癌更具侵袭性,5 年生存率约为 55%。病理分型与胸腺上皮肿瘤的预后有关,是辅助治疗决策的重要依据^[6]。

目前手术切除是治疗局限性胸腺上皮肿瘤的主要治疗方式;对于晚期转移及不可完全切除患者,多推荐化疗或联合放疗进行干预^[6]。有研究数据报告铂类为基础的一线化疗客观有效率(objective response rate, ORR)在胸腺瘤和胸腺癌中分别为 50%和 20%^[7-8];一项复发或转移胸腺上皮肿瘤的靶向治疗临床试验显示,口服抗 VEGFR/KIT/PDGFR 多靶点抑制剂的 ORR 低于 10%;舒尼替尼、依维莫司在胸腺瘤和胸腺癌中的 ORR 也不高于 30%^[9-11]。总之,目前化疗和靶向药物治疗在胸腺上皮肿瘤患者中的疗效依然有限。近年来免疫单抗在肿瘤新辅助和辅助治疗中的疗效令人瞩目,免疫治疗在胸腺上皮肿瘤中应用也陆续开展了临床试验(Table 1)^[12-17]。但与其他肿瘤相比,接受免疫检查点抑制剂(immune checkpoint inhibitors, ICIs) 治疗的胸腺瘤患者出现自身免疫副反应的概率更大,NCCN 和国内指南在推荐免疫疗法用于胸腺瘤辅助治疗的问题上也存在争议^[6,10,18-19]。为此,我们综述梳理了胸腺上皮肿瘤现有的免疫治疗研究成果和相关数据,以期为该少见肿瘤未来术后或术前辅助治疗临床试验设计提供参考资料。

1 免疫检查点分子在胸腺上皮肿瘤中的表达与调控机制

ICIs 是目前肿瘤治疗领域的热点,在多个肿瘤中逐步被推荐成为一线辅助治疗方案^[18,20]。肿瘤中免疫抑制性信号过表达,能抑制 T 细胞活化增殖并诱导 T 细胞耗竭或凋亡,使肿瘤细胞不被人体免疫系统杀伤。目前临床上应用最广泛的免疫治疗药物是针对免疫检查点分子,如细胞毒性 T 淋巴细胞抗原-4 (cytotoxic T lymphocyte-associated antigen-4, CTLA-4)、PD-1、PD-L1 和 T 淋巴细胞免疫球蛋白黏蛋白 3(T cell immunoglobulin and mucin-containing molecule-3, TIM-3) 的阻断抗体。不同免疫检查点分子的表达水平在 T 细胞活化过程中是变化的,如 CTLA-4 常在 T 细胞活化早期表达活跃,而 PD-1 在 T 细胞活化后期表达^[21-22]。检测 CTLA-4、PD-1 和 PD-L1 等免疫检查点分子在肿瘤组织或其浸润淋巴细胞中的表达水平是预测免疫治疗疗效有前景的途径^[23]。

1.1 CTLA-4

CTLA-4 与 CD28 高度同源,都可与 B7-1(CD80)和 B7-2

Table 1 Clinical trials of immune therapy for thymic epithelial tumors

Condition	Intervention	Immune target	Status	Estimated study completion date	Phase	NCT number
Thymic carcinoma	Nivolumab	PD1	Recruiting	July 01, 2024	I	NCT03583086
Thymoma and thymic carcinoma	XmAb20717	PD1 and CTLA4	Recruiting	September 28, 2023	I	NCT03517488
Thymoma and thymic carcinoma	KN046	PD-1 and CTLA-4	Recruiting	July 31, 2026	II	NCT04925947
Thymic carcinoma	Atezolizumab	PD-L1	Recruiting	June 27, 2025	II	NCT04321330
Thymic epithelial tumor, recurrent thymoma and thymic cancer	M7824	TGFB and PD-L1	Recruiting	June 01, 2025	II	NCT04417660
Thymic carcinoma	Pembrolizumab	PD1	Recruiting	December 01, 2023	II	NCT03463460
Thymoma and thymic carcinoma	Avelumab	PD-L1	Recruiting	September 30, 2023	II	NCT03076554
Thymic carcinoma	KN046	PD1 and CTLA-4	Recruiting	August 31, 2023	II	NCT04469725
Metastatic thymic carcinoma and thymoma type B3	Pembrolizumab	PD1	Recruiting	March 01, 2023	II	NCT04710628
Thymoma type B3 and thymic carcinoma	Nivolumab	PD1	Recruiting	July 01, 2021	II	NCT03134118
Thymic carcinoma, thymus neoplasms and thymus cancer	Pembrolizumab	PD1	Unknown	December 01, 2021	II	NCT02364076
Thymoma and thymic cancer	Pembrolizumab	PD1	Unknown	June 01, 2019	II	NCT03295227
Thymoma and thymic carcinoma	Pembrolizumab	PD1	Recruiting	July 30, 2022	IV	NCT04554524

(CD86)配体结合,为共刺激分子^[24]。通常 CTLA-4 在幼稚 T 细胞、效应性 T 细胞和调节性 T 细胞中呈低水平表达^[25]。CD28 在静息和活化的 T 细胞表面都有表达,而 CTLA-4 只在活化的 T 细胞上表达^[26-27]。T 细胞活化后 CTLA-4 的 mRNA 被快速转录表达,优先于 CD28 与 CD80/CD86 配体结合,形成稳定的聚合物复合物;CD28 与 CD80/CD86 配体结合促进 T 细胞的活化,而 CTLA-4 与 CD80/CD86 配体结合时抑制 T 细胞的激活,两者扮演 T 细胞“加速”和“刹车”的调控角色^[27-28]。在调控机理研究方面,有报道 CTLA-4 可增加 T 细胞的运动能力,减少 T 细胞与抗原提呈细胞(antigen presenting cell,APC)的接触时间,并覆盖了 T 细胞受体诱导的停止信号,进而减少了细胞因子的产生和增殖^[22,29];也有研究证实 CTLA-4 通过结合 CD80/CD86 配体,激活下游蛋白磷酸酶 2A、PI3K 和其他相关分子信号通路^[26,30-31]。2018 年 Santoni 等^[32]评估了 68 例胸腺上皮瘤患者 CTLA-4 的转录和蛋白水平与预后的关系,发现高表达 CTLA-4 组患者相比于低表达 CTLA-4 组患者的总生存率显著性降低,提示 CTLA-4 表达可能是胸腺上皮肿瘤患者预后的不良因素。CTLA-4 阻断逆转 T 细胞的“刹车”状态并增强免疫细胞对肿瘤的杀伤,在胸腺上皮肿瘤的免疫治疗中可能具有作用^[33]。

1.2 PD-1/PD-L1

PD-1 是一种参与调控程序性 T 细胞死亡的蛋白^[24]。PD-L1 是 PD-1 的配体,大量的研究表明 PD-L1 在晚期非小细胞肺癌、黑色素瘤、结直肠癌和胶质瘤等多种肿瘤中呈高表达^[34]。有报道胸腺皮质和髓质上皮细胞中分别表达 PD-L1 和 PD-L2^[35]。PD-1 与 PD-L1/2 的结合抑制 T 细胞活化,抗原持续刺激能促进 PD-1 过表达使 T 细胞耗竭,有助于肿瘤免疫抑制环境形成。PD-1/PD-L1 在 82% 的胸腺上皮肿瘤中高表达,且 PD-L1 在更具侵袭性的 B2、B3 型胸腺瘤和胸腺癌中表达更高,提示 PD-1/PD-L1 阻断抗体可能在恶性程度更高的胸腺上皮肿瘤免疫治疗中具有优势^[23,36]。此外,有 Meta 分析表明 PD-L1 在 A 型、AB 型、B1 型、B2 型、B3 型胸腺瘤和胸腺癌中存在明显的表达差异;进一步结合 TCGA 数据库中胸腺瘤测序数据分析,得到 PD-L1 在胸腺癌中的表达水平显著高于其在胸腺瘤中的表达水平,并且是独立的预后不良因素^[23,37-38]。以上研究提示,PD-L1 不仅在胸腺上皮肿瘤恶性程度预测中具有应用价值,

也在免疫治疗预测中具有较高的转化应用价值。

1.3 TIM-3

TIM-3 是一种活化诱导的 T 细胞表面抑制性分子,主要参与慢性病毒感染和癌症的免疫耐受过程中 T 细胞的衰竭^[39-40]。目前已报道 TIM-3 有多个配体,都是通过与其胞外端的 IgV 结构域结合,比如 S 型凝聚素半乳凝素-9 与其结合,使 T 细胞呈耗竭状态或凋亡;高迁移率族蛋白 B-1(high mobility group box-1,HMGB-1) 与其结合,能竞争性抑制 HMGB-1 结合肿瘤相关核酸碎片,参与树突状细胞中的肿瘤核酸转运与先天免疫识别;与磷脂酰丝氨酸结合的相互作用可促进肿瘤微环境中凋亡小体的清除^[41-44]。TIM-3 在肿瘤细胞(黑色素瘤、胃癌和淋巴瘤等)、免疫细胞和树突状细胞上均有表达^[45-47];在胸腺上皮肿瘤中也报道,其呈中度到高度的表达水平^[48-51]。

在一项 TIM-3 启动子区基因多态性与重症肌无力(MG)相关性胸腺瘤研究中发现^[51],TIM-3 是 MG 相关胸腺瘤的保护因子,可能是自身免疫性疾病相关肿瘤的重要免疫调节机制的潜在关键分子,并与肿瘤的发病机制相关。TIM-3 已被认为是一个有效的治疗靶点,它可能与抗 PD-1/PD-L1 阻断有协同作用,具有联合用药的可行性^[39]。

2 胸腺上皮肿瘤免疫治疗试验进展

胸腺是中枢淋巴器官,是 T 细胞发育成熟的重要场所^[52]。未成熟 T 细胞进入胸腺与皮质上皮细胞表面组织相容性复合体(major histocompatibility complex,MHC)结合进行阳性选择而留下 CD4⁺和 CD8⁺双阳性 T 细胞;随后与能表达自身免疫调节因子(autoimmune regulator,AIRE)的髓质上皮细胞进行阴性选择,而获得 CD4⁺或 CD8⁺单阳的成熟 T 细胞^[53]。胸腺瘤在形成过程中还伴随着未成熟淋巴细胞混合增长的特点;但 B3 型和 C 型以恶性上皮细胞为主,可见成熟的淋巴细胞浸润,未成熟淋巴细胞少见和未见^[34]。胸腺上皮肿瘤在免疫细胞非常丰富的环境中增殖,可能具有较高的免疫逃逸和抑制能力,且其在免疫单抗治疗过程中还伴随较高的自身免疫性副反应发生。深入理解胸腺瘤上皮细胞与淋巴细胞的互动模式,将有助于其免疫治疗方案的选择。

2.1 帕博利珠单抗(Pembrolizumab)

帕博利珠单抗是一种人源化单克隆 IgG4 抗

PD-1 抗体,目前有两项 II 期临床试验结果报道^[13-14]。

第一项研究是帕博利珠单抗和 Epcadostat(IDO 抑制剂)在至少接受一种化疗后病情恶化后的胸腺癌患者中的单臂 II 期临床应用研究(NCT02364076),该研究评估了帕博利珠单抗治疗后胸腺癌进展的情况^[14],其中 1 例完全缓解(complete remission,CR)、8 例部分缓解(partial remission,PR)、21 例稳定(stable disease,SD),ORR 为 22.5%,6 例(15%)患者中出现了严重的免疫相关不良事件,最常见的 3~4 级不良反应为门冬氨酸氨基转移酶升高(5 例,13%)和丙氨酸氨基转移酶升高(5 例,53%);且有 2 例患者(5%)在两次服用帕博利珠单抗后发展为多发性肌炎和心肌炎。进一步对纳入患者进行 PD-L1 表达评估,发现胸腺癌患者中 PD-L1 高表达患者组比其低表达患者组的无进展生存期(progression-free survival,PFS)和总生存期(overall survival,OS)更长(PFS:24 个月 vs 2.9 个月;OS:未达到 vs 15.5 个月)。

第二项研究是帕博利珠单抗治疗含铂化疗失败后胸腺瘤/癌的 II 期临床研究(NCT02607631)^[13],33 例患者中 7 例胸腺瘤患者入组治疗后,2 例达到 PR,5 例 SD,ORR 为 28.6%,疾病控制率(disease control rate,DCR)为 100%,中位 PFS 为 6.1 个月;另 26 例胸腺癌患者经治疗后为 5 例 PR、14 例 SD,ORR 为 19.2%,DCR 为 73.3%,中位 PFS 为 6.1 个月。不良反应包括相关性肝炎、心肌炎、甲状腺炎、结肠炎、结膜炎和肾炎。对纳入患者组织进行 PD-L1 表达的分析,显示 14 例 PD-L1 高表达患者中有 5 例治疗达到 PR,而 10 例 PD-L1 低表达患者中未见 PR,该研究提示胸腺上皮肿瘤中 PD-L1 高表达的患者接受免疫治疗具有较好疗效。

2.2 纳武利尤单抗(Nivolumab)

纳武利尤单抗是人源化单克隆 IgG4 抗 PD1 抗体,在一项纳入 15 例不能切除或复发胸腺癌患者的 II 期试验中^[15,17,54-55],最终报告无 CR 或 PR 患者,11 例为 SD,4 例为进展;DCR 为 73.3%,中位 PFS 为 3.8 个月,中位 OS 为 14.1 个月。治疗后不良反应总体可控制,无患者因不良反应而停药,大多数不良反应轻微,但有 2 例患者出现严重反应(1 例 3 级转氨酶升高和 1 例 2 级肾上腺功能不全)。

2.3 阿维单抗(Avelumab)

阿维单抗是人源化单克隆 IgG1 抗 PD-L1 抗体。

阿维单抗治疗晚期胸腺上皮肿瘤的 I 期试验^[16,36,56-57],共入组 8 例患者(7 例胸腺瘤和 1 例胸腺癌),其中 4 例患者 PR,2 例患者 SD,1 例胸腺癌患者 SD,ORR 为 57.1%。值得注意的是,所有应答者都出现了 3 级肌酸磷酸激酶升高、1 级转氨酶升高以及重症肌无力等免疫治疗相关不良反应(immune-related adverse events,irAEs),而在 4 例无反应者中只有 1 例发生了 irAEs。与其他实体肿瘤的现有数据相比,胸腺上皮肿瘤对阿维单抗的耐受性更差,且观察到严重 irAEs 的发生率高于预期。

3 胸腺上皮肿瘤免疫治疗的 irAEs 情况

免疫治疗已应用于多种肿瘤,有研究证实肿瘤组织 PD-L1 的表达情况与免疫治疗疗效呈正相关,鉴于 PD-L1 常在胸腺上皮肿瘤中呈高表达,免疫治疗可能是辅助治疗的有效方式之一。2016 年开始国内外陆续有研究团队报道了胸腺癌和胸腺瘤的免疫治疗试验结果^[58-59],由于在胸腺上皮肿瘤中有较高的 irAEs 发生,故指南中是否推荐免疫治疗作为胸腺上皮肿瘤辅助治疗的一直存在争议;但随着更多临床试验的结果报道,有学者指出免疫治疗在部分胸腺肿瘤与在其他实体肿瘤观察到的疗效相当,因此 NCCN 指南在 2020 年开始已将培溴利珠单抗推荐作为治疗胸腺癌患者(2A 类)的二线全身治疗选择^[60]。

但在胸腺上皮肿瘤免疫治疗临床试验报告了多种 irAEs 仍需得到关注,最常见的 3~4 级 irAEs 是肝转氨酶升高、肌痛、肌炎、肠炎、心肌炎、甲状腺炎、结肠炎和肾炎,也有报告心脏毒性等致命后果的病例;但这些 irAEs 在接受相同药物治疗的黑色素瘤、非小细胞肺癌、肾细胞癌和霍奇金淋巴瘤等其他类型肿瘤中并不常见^[61-63]。提示这可能是由于胸腺独特的免疫器官功能所引起的。胸腺作为重要的免疫器官,通过阴性选择非自身反应性克隆促进 T 细胞的成熟,胸腺上皮细胞恶性增殖引起的髓质上皮细胞功能缺失,可能与较高的 irAEs 发生有关。

4 总结及展望

尽管针对胸腺上皮肿瘤的 ICI 的临床试验仍在进行中,其免疫治疗的理论基础研究报道还缺乏,

近期一些新的研究靶点,如淋巴细胞激活基因-3(LAG-3)、T细胞免疫球蛋白和ITIM结构域蛋白(TIGIT)和T淋巴细胞衰减蛋白(BTLA)等药物在胸腺上皮肿瘤中的基础和临床研究还未见报道^[39]。免疫治疗在治疗复发胸腺瘤及胸腺癌方面还多数处于I、II期临床试验的早期试验阶段,但已展现了持久诱导反应的能力;危及生命的irAEs发生是其应用过程中最大的风险。研发可预测的生物标志物来筛选免疫治疗获益人群或排除不良反应高风险人群,使得免疫治疗成为复发胸腺瘤及胸腺癌患者安全有效的选择,是提高患者生存概率和生活质量的有效策略。此外,胸腺瘤可能是研究irAEs发生的极好素材,深入研究其分子调控机制能提升理解免疫细胞与肿瘤的互动模式,有助于免疫治疗在胸腺瘤或其他实体瘤治疗方案中的优化。

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