Serum Intercellular Adhesion Molecule-1 in Childhood Malignancy

By Ching-Hon Pui, Xiaolong Luo, William Evans, Susan Martin, Arthur Rugg, Judith Wilimas, William M. Crist, and Melissa Hudson

Levels of soluble intercellular adhesion molecule-1 (ICAM-1) were measured in serum samples taken at diagnosis from pediatric patients with Hodgkin’s disease (n = 69), acute lymphoblastic leukemia (n = 28), Wilms’ tumor (n = 20), osteosarcoma (n = 17), rhabdomyosarcoma (n = 18), or Ewing’s sarcoma (n = 15). Median levels of serum ICAM-1 were significantly higher in acute lymphoblastic leukemia and Hodgkin’s disease than in controls and other malignancies. Levels were positively correlated with disease stage for patients with Hodgkin’s disease, Ewing’s sarcoma or Wilms’ tumor, and with the frequency of relapse in Hodgkin’s disease (P = .016). Serum levels were normal in all of 76 patients tested in remission. It remains to be determined whether increased serum ICAM-1 levels simply reflect a greater tumor burden or whether this molecule contributes directly to the progression of childhood malignancies.

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RESULTS

All 168 patients studied had detectable serum ICAM-1 levels (Fig 1). The levels in patients with acute lymphoblastic leukemia or Hodgkin’s disease were significantly higher than those in normal children (P = .0001 in each comparison). Significantly higher levels were seen for patients with acute lymphoblastic leukemia than for any of the other tumor types (all P values ≤.01). Levels for patients with Hodgkin’s disease were significantly higher than those for patients with:

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Submitted January 28, 1993; accepted March 30, 1993.

Supported in part by Cancer Center Support CORE Grant No. P30 CA 21763, Grant No. PO1 CA 20180, and PO1 CA 23999 from the National Cancer Institute, and the American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities (ALSAC).

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0006-4971/93/8203-0042$3.00/0

Blood, Vol 82, No 3 (August 1), 1993; pp 895-898
Table 1. Distribution of Serum ICAM-1 Levels According to the Disease Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No. of Patients</th>
<th>Serum ICAM-1 Level (ng/mL)</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hodgkin's Disease</td>
<td>Stage I</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>277.5-655.5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage II</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>486.5</td>
<td>249.5-918</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage III</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>475.5</td>
<td>304-1065</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stage IV</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>790.5</td>
<td>370-1115.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>423.5</td>
<td>249.5-1066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>312.5-1115.5</td>
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<td>Ewing's sarcoma</td>
<td>Localized</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>165-426</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metastatic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>337-510</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilms' tumor</td>
<td>Stage I</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>312-454</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage IV</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>369-621</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>286.5</td>
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<td>Rhabdomyosarcoma</td>
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<td>285.5</td>
<td>144-595</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage II</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>253-473</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stage III</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>253-473</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Non-T cell</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>313-945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T-cell</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>706.5</td>
<td>306-1036</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WBC &lt;50 × 10⁹/L</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>306-945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WBC ≥50 × 10⁹/L</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>677.5</td>
<td>313-1036</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P value represents the comparison between disease categories of a particular malignancy.
Abbreviations: ALL, acute lymphoblastic leukemia; WBC, white blood cell count.

Wilms' tumor, Ewing's sarcoma, rhabdomyosarcoma, and osteosarcoma (all P values < .01).

Higher serum ICAM-1 levels were correlated with more advanced disease in Hodgkin’s disease, Ewing’s sarcoma, and Wilms’ tumor but not in osteosarcoma and rhabdomyosarcoma (Table 1). Among patients with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, serum ICAM-1 levels did not differ significantly according to immunophenotype (T-cell v other) or presenting leukocyte count. In Hodgkin’s disease, higher levels were also significantly correlated with the presence of constitutional (B) symptoms (P = .0001) and with higher erythrocyte sedimentation rate (r = .61, P = .0001). There were no significant differences among the three histologic subtypes of Hodgkin’s disease—nodular sclerosing (n = 53), mixed cellularity (n = 14), and lymphocyte predominant (n = 2).

The relationship of serum ICAM-1 levels (<500 ng/mL v ≥500 ng/mL) to treatment outcome in Hodgkin’s disease is illustrated in Fig 2. Relapse was significantly more frequent among children with higher serum levels at diagnosis (P = .016). The five children who have relapsed had serum levels of 576.5, 680, 763, 789.5, and 918 ng/mL, respectively. This relationship seemed to be independent of disease stage (IIB, n = 2; IIIA, n = 2; and IVB, n = 1), although numbers are too small to permit multivariate analysis.

Serum ICAM-1 levels decreased significantly from diagnosis to remission in patients with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (P < .0001) or Hodgkin’s disease (P < .0001). In fact, serum levels were normal in all of the 43 Hodgkin’s disease, 18 acute lymphoblastic leukemia, 9 Wilms’ tumor, and 6 Ewing’s sarcoma cases tested in remission. Sera obtained 1 to 2 months before the diagnosis of relapse were available in

![Fig 1. Distribution of serum ICAM-1 levels (ng/mL) according to the type of malignancy. Lines represent the minimum and maximum levels, boxes contain values between the 25th and 75th percentiles, and bars indicate the medians.](image-url)
two patients with Ewing's sarcoma and two with Hodgkin's disease. All had normal serum ICAM-1 levels at that time, even though the two patients with Hodgkin's disease had elevated levels (789.5 ng/mL and 918 mg/mL) at diagnosis.

**DISCUSSION**

Elevated serum levels of ICAM-1 were associated with advanced stage malignancy in children with Hodgkin's disease, Ewing's sarcoma and Wilms' tumor. This finding accords with data on serum ICAM-1 levels in adults with melanoma. Of particular interest is the finding that increased serum ICAM-1 level was associated with a poorer treatment outcome in patients with Hodgkin's disease. All five patients with relapsed Hodgkin's disease had high serum levels. Two had only stage II disease at diagnosis, but all presented with constitutional symptoms. Thus, it is conceivable that their poor prognosis may be a reflection of more aggressive disease.

It is not known whether increased serum ICAM-1 levels result from shedding by normal host cells (because of the immune response to tumor, inflammation, or tissue damage) or by tumor cells. The higher levels in patients with more advanced malignancy may represent increased host immune response to malignant cells or may simply reflect a larger tumor burden. Hodgkin's, Reed-Sternberg, and leukemic cells express ICAM-1, which could account for the higher serum levels observed in these two malignancies. Hodgkin's and Reed-Sternberg cells produce several cytokines, including interleukin-1, interferon gamma, and tumor necrosis factor. Thus, cytokine-induced expression of ICAM-1 by tumor or normal cells may be responsible for markedly increased serum levels in patients with advanced Hodgkin's disease. Although soluble ICAM-1 seemed to be expressed more often in non-T-cell than T-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia, as reported previously, we found no difference in serum levels between these two immunophenotypic groups.

Serum levels were normal in all patients tested in remission. Of interest, serum levels obtained 1 to 2 months before relapse were within normal range in all 4 patients tested, including two with high levels at diagnosis of Hodgkin's disease. This finding raises questions about the potential efficacy of serial monitoring of serum ICAM-1 level. Clearly, a prospective study with larger number of patients is needed to address this issue.

The functional role of cellular and soluble ICAM-1 in patients with malignancy is unclear. The interaction of ICAM-1 and leukocyte function-associated antigen 1 (LFA-1) is crucial in non-major histocompatibility complex-restricted cell interactions. Hence, cellular expression of ICAM-1 by tumor cells may initially enhance immune recognition and thereby facilitate tumor cytolysis. If the tumor cells survive this phase of immunosurveillance, active growth may lead to shedding of soluble ICAM-1. Soluble ICAM-1 retains the ability to bind specifically to LFA-1, and thus could block LFA sites on T, natural killer, lymphokine-activated killer, or other effector cells, thereby disabling antitumor immunity and leading to disease progression and metastasis.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

We thank Lisa McNinch and Cynthia Stewart for technical assistance and Christy Wright for editorial review.

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