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Journal

FASEB JOURNAL, 12(4)

ISSN

0892-6638

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Publication Date

1998

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Peer reviewed

Identification of candidate bacterial pathogens in ulcerative colitis using a disease-specific marker antibody O. Cohavy, A.B. Tayebali, P. Phou, D. Bruckner, G. Harth, M. Horwitz, S. Targan, J. Braun.
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Ulcerative colitis is associated in most patients with a unique marker antibody, UC-pANCA. Previously, representative monoclonal antibodies identified an epitope present in the C-terminal basic random-coil domain of histone H1. This study addresses the hypothesis that pANCA reacts with a microbial antigen(s), and detects histone H1 through molecular mimicry. BLAST analysis of the peptide databases revealed H1 epitope homologues in ORFs of the *M. tuberculosis* genome. Western analysis of extracts from six Mycobacterial species directly demonstrated reactivity to a single conserved 32 kDa protein. Peptide sequencing confirmed its identity as a novel 214 amino acid ORF with 48% similarity to human H1. The second approach involved direct culture of colonic flora under a large range of selective conditions. Three organisms were isolated by sequential cloning, and monitored for antigen expression by Western analysis. 16S rRNA typing identified two members of the *E. coli* family, and one most similar to *Bacteroides cecae*. Peptide analysis revealed at least three protein antigens, distinct in structure from the Mycobacterial antigen. These findings indicate that the ulcerative colitis marker antibody detects a structural domain recurrent among colonic microbiota, and crossreactive with a DNA-binding domain of histone H1. These organisms deserve further evaluation for their role in the tissue-specific inflammatory response of this disease. Supported by NIH DK46763.

Abstracts of the Experimental Biology 98 Meeting, Sponsored by the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, San Francisco, CA, April 1998