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Commentary

CNPY2 as a Key Driver of Colitis: Insights Into Its Role in DSS-Induced Inflammation

Hui Xiao[1,2] and Feng Hong[1,2,*]

[1]Pelotonia Institute for Immune-Oncology, The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center, USA

[2]Division of Medical Oncology, Department of Internal Medicine, The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, 410 W 12th Ave, Columbus, OH 43210, USA

Corresponding author: Feng Hong, Pelotonia Institute for Immune-Oncology, The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center, USA

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Summary and Methodology

The study employs a DSS-induced colitis model in mice to explore CNPY2's role in intestinal inflammation. Using whole-body *Cnpy2* knockout (KO) mice compared to wild-type (WT) controls, the authors demonstrate that *Cnpy2* KO mice exhibit significantly reduced colitis severity, characterized by less mucosal barrier disruption, fewer lamina propria macrophages (LPMφs), and decreased proinflammatory cytokine production (e.g., IL-6, TNF-α, IFN-γ). The methodology includes histological analysis, cytokine quantification via ELISA, and ROS measurement in macrophages, with additional experiments using the ROS scavenger N-acetyl-L-cysteine (NAC) to confirm the role of ROS in colitis pathogenesis. The study identifies CNPY2's regulation of ROS production, partly through the modulation of C/EBP homologous protein (CHOP), as a central mechanism driving macrophage-mediated inflammation.

The experimental design is robust, leveraging the well-established DSS model, which mimics human ulcerative colitis. The use of *Cnpy2* KO mice allows for clear causal inference, while NAC treatment provides mechanistic insight into the ROS-dependent pathway. Comparisons with WT controls and detailed molecular analyses (e.g., CHOP regulation) strengthen the study's findings.

Strengths and Contributions

The study's primary strength is its identification of CNPY2 as a novel regulator of colitis via the macrophage-ROS axis, offering a fresh perspective on IBD pathogenesis. By linking CNPY2 to ROS production and CHOP modulation, the authors uncover a specific molecular pathway that exacerbates inflammation, which is a significant advancement over prior studies focusing on broader immune mechanisms. The finding that NAC treatment abolishes colitis in *Cnpy2* KO mice underscores the therapeutic potential of targeting ROS, aligning with emerging evidence that oxidative stress is a key driver of IBD.

The study also contributes to the understanding of macrophage dynamics in colitis. Macrophages are critical players in IBD, with M1 (proinflammatory) and M2 (antiinflammatory) phenotypes influencing disease progression. By demonstrating that CNPY2 promotes proinflammatory macrophage activity, the study provides a mechanistic basis for targeting macrophage polarization in IBD therapy. The rigorous experimental approach, including histological, biochemical, and molecular analyses, enhances the study's credibility and relevance to both basic and translational research.

Limitations and Areas for Improvement

Despite its strengths, the study has limitations. First, the use of whole-body *Cnpy2* KO mice limits the ability to pinpoint macrophage-specific effects, as CNPY2 may influence other cell types (e.g., epithelial cells or T cells). Conditional KO models targeting macrophages specifically would provide greater clarity. Second, the study does not explore the role of M1 versus M2 macrophage polarization in detail, which is critical given the established role of M2 macrophages in resolving inflammation. Further investigation into how CNPY2 affects macrophage polarization could strengthen the findings.

Additionally, the study's reliance on the DSS model, while standard, may not fully capture the chronic and relapsing nature of human IBD. Testing CNPY2's role in chronic DSS models or other IBD models (e.g., IL-10 KO mice) could enhance generalizability. The study also lacks discussion of CNPY2's upstream regulation or its expression in human IBD patients, which would bridge the gap to clinical relevance. Finally, while NAC's efficacy is compelling, its broad antioxidant effects raise questions about specificity; exploring targeted CNPY2 inhibitors could offer more precise therapeutic insights.

Broader Context and Implications

This study aligns with growing research on macrophage-mediated inflammation and ROS in IBD. Previous work has highlighted the role of ROS in driving proinflammatory responses, with NADPH oxidase (NOX) activity implicated in macrophage activation. The identification of CNPY2 as an upstream regulator of ROS via CHOP adds a novel layer to this paradigm, complementing studies on other ROS-modulating pathways, such as IL-10 signaling. The findings also resonate with research on macrophage polarization, where agents like PAM3 or Astragaloside IV promote M2 polarization to alleviate colitis, suggesting that CNPY2 inhibition could similarly shift macrophages toward an anti-inflammatory state.

The implications for IBD therapy are significant. Current treatments, such as anti-TNF-α therapies, are often inadequate. Targeting CNPY2 or the macrophage-ROS axis could offer a novel strategy, particularly given the success of ROS scavengers like NAC in preclinical models. The study also opens avenues for exploring CNPY2 in other inflammatory diseases where macrophages and ROS play roles, such as atherosclerosis or rheumatoid arthritis.

Conclusion

The article provides compelling evidence that CNPY2 exacerbates DSS-induced colitis by modulating macrophage activity and ROS production, with CHOP as a key mediator. Its robust methodology and novel findings advance our understanding of IBD pathogenesis and highlight CNPY2 as a potential therapeutic target. However, limitations in model specificity, polarization analysis, and clinical translation suggest areas for future research. Expanding studies to include conditional KO models, chronic IBD models, and human data would strengthen the findings. Overall, this study is a valuable contribution to IBD research, offering insights into macrophage-driven inflammation and paving the way for targeted therapies to mitigate oxidative stress in colitis.

Reference

1. Zhang W, Meng L, Zhang X, Li Z, Hong F (2025) CNPY2 drives DSS-induced colitis via the macrophage-ROS axis. *Biomed Pharmacother* 187. [crossref]

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