

## Poster P.03.19

### SKELETAL MUSCLE AND CIRCULATING MICRORNAS IN MYOTONIC DYSTROPHY TYPE 1

Perfetti A.<sup>[1]</sup>, Cardinali B.<sup>[2]</sup>, Cappella M.<sup>[2]</sup>, Fuschi P.<sup>[1]</sup>, Provenzano C.<sup>[2]</sup>, Voellenkle C.<sup>[1]</sup>, Cardani R.<sup>[1]</sup>, Garcia-Manteiga J.M.<sup>[3]</sup>, Meola G.<sup>[1]</sup>, Falcone G.<sup>[2]</sup>, **Martelli F.**<sup>.\*[1]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup>IRCCS-Policlinico San Donato ~ San Donato Milanese ~ Italy, <sup>[2]</sup>Institute of Cell Biology and Neurobiology, National Research Council ~ Monterotondo, Roma ~ Italy, <sup>[3]</sup>IRCCS San Raffaele Scientific Institute ~ Milano ~ Italy

Myotonic dystrophy type 1 (DM1) is a complex disease caused by the expansion of a (CTG)<sub>n</sub> repeat in the 3'UTR of the DMPK gene. This genetic lesion causes the accumulation of the mutated transcripts into nuclear RNA foci that trigger a toxic gain of function, including alteration of microRNA (miRNA) expression and intracellular localization.

The first aim of this project was to define the physio-pathogenetic role of miRNA dysregulation in DM1 by a comprehensive characterization of the RNAs present in the miRNA effector complex (RISC). We analyzed by RNA-sequencing the RISC-associated RNAs in skeletal muscle biopsies derived from DM1 patients and matched controls. The miRNA/mRNAs found deregulated in DM1 biopsies were involved in pathways and functions relevant for the disease, such as energetic metabolism, calcium signaling, muscle contraction and p53-dependent apoptosis. Bioinformatics analysis of the miRNA/mRNA interactions based on the RISC enrichment profiles, identified 24 miRNA/mRNA correlations. Following validation in 21 independent samples, we focused on the couple miR-29c/ASB2 because of the role of miR-29c in fibrosis (a feature of late-stage DM1 patients) and of ASB2 in the regulation of muscle mass. Luciferase reporter assays confirmed the direct interaction between miR-29c and ASB2. Moreover, decreased miR-29c and increased ASB2 levels were verified also in immortalized myogenic cells and primary fibroblasts, derived from biopsies of DM1 patients and controls. CRISPR/Cas9-mediated deletion of CTG expansions rescued normal miR-29c and ASB2 levels, indicating a direct link between the mutant repeats and the miRNA/target expression. In conclusion, functionally relevant miRNA/mRNA interactions were identified in skeletal muscles of DM1 patients, highlighting the dysfunction of miR-29c and ASB2.

The second aim of this project was the identification of a DM1-specific miRNA signature in the peripheral blood to use as disease biomarker.

Preliminary studies identified a subset of miRNAs that are deregulated in the plasma or serum of small groups of DM1 patients. Here we adopted very stringent selection and normalization criteria to validate or disprove these miRNAs in 103 DM1 patients and 111 matched controls. We confirmed that 8 miRNAs out of 12 were significantly deregulated in DM1 patients: miR-1, miR-27b, miR-133a, miR-133b, miR-206, miR-140-3p, miR-454 and miR-574. The levels of these miRNAs, alone or in combination, discriminated DM1 from controls significantly, and correlated with both skeletal muscle strength and creatine kinase values. Finally, the identified miRNAs were also deregulated in the plasma of a small group (n=30) of DM2 patients. In conclusion, this study proposes that miRNAs might be used as DM1 humoral biomarkers.

In line with the results obtained with miRNAs, in parallel we also identified circular RNAs dysregulation in skeletal muscles of DM1 patients, highlighting the important role of noncoding RNAs in DM1.

MicroRNA del muscolo scheletrico e circolanti nella distrofia miotonica di tipo 1

La distrofia miotonica di tipo 1 (DM1) è una malattia che coinvolge il muscolo scheletrico, ma anche gli occhi, il cuore, il sistema endocrino e il sistema nervoso centrale. Le forme più gravi sono caratterizzate da ipotonia e debolezza generalizzata alla nascita, spesso accompagnata da

insufficienza respiratoria e morte precoce. La DM1 è causata dalla presenza di triplette di CTG ripetute fino a migliaia di volte nella sequenza di DNA del gene DMPK. Questa mutazione provoca l'accumulo degli RNA messaggeri del gene DMPK in aree nucleari chiamate foci e, come conseguenza, un effetto tossico sulle funzioni cellulari, incluse alterazioni della maturazione di altri RNA messaggeri e della funzione di piccoli RNA regolativi chiamati microRNA. Sebbene studi precedenti abbiano evidenziato alterazioni di alcuni microRNA nei pazienti affetti da distrofia miotonica, le conseguenze funzionali sullo sviluppo della malattia sono ancora poco conosciute e sono state oggetto di questo progetto di ricerca.

Le attività pianificate sono state condotte con successo e i risultati ottenuti dimostrano un ruolo critico dei microRNA nei meccanismi molecolari alla base della DM1. I nostri studi hanno messo in evidenza i microRNA che sono funzionalmente alterati nei tessuti dei malati di DM1 e hanno permesso di identificare combinazioni di microRNA e loro RNA messaggeri bersaglio rilevanti per la malattia.

Inoltre, questi studi hanno confermato l'esistenza di un'alterazione della frazione dei microRNA presenti nel sangue periferico dei pazienti affetti da DM1 e hanno portato all'identificazione di un gruppo di microRNA utilizzabili come biomarcatori della malattia, che consentono cioè di valutare la progressione della malattia.

Infine, sono state poste le basi per due altri studi, uno incentrato sul ruolo degli RNA circolari nella DM1 e uno finalizzato a rimuovere le triplette CTG del gene DMPK e recuperare le normali funzioni cellulari.

Gli studi svolti nell'ambito di questo progetto stati oggetto di 6 pubblicazioni.

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Distrofia Miotonica di tipo 1

Coordinator: Fabio Martelli

Partner: Germana Falcone

Duration (N. Years): 3 years

Starting year: 2014

**Telethon Project (nr):**

GGP14092

**Disease Name:**

Myotonic Dystrophy Type 1

**Keywords:**

Myotonic dystrophy type 1, microRNAs, skeletal muscle