Testing of Multiple Autoantibodies Identifies Expansion of Targeted Antigens and a Method to Identify Imminent Onset of Clinical Rheumatoid Arthritis

S. H. Goff 1, D. Bergstedt 2, M. L. Feser 3, L. Moss 3, T. Mikuls 4, J. D. Edison 5, V. Holers 3, M. Mahler 6, K. Deane 3

1. The University of Colorado School of Medicine, Aurora, CO, United States.
2. St Joseph's Hospital/Intermountain Health, Denver, CO, United States.
3. Division of Rheumatology, The University of Colorado School of Medicine, Aurora, CO, United States.
4. University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, NE, United States.
5. Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, MD, United States.
6. Werfen, San Diego, CA, United States.

ABSTRACT BODY:

Purpose of Study: Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) has a period termed ‘pre-RA’ during which there are autoantibody elevations prior to the onset of clinically-apparent inflammatory arthritis (i.e. clinical RA). Multiple autoantibody systems including antibodies to citrullinated proteins (ACPA), rheumatoid factor (RF), anti-peptidyl arginine deiminase (anti-PAD) and anti-carbamylated proteins (anti-CarP) have been described in pre-RA; however, few studies have tested all antibodies in a single pre-RA cohort. The objective of this study was to test multiple autoantibody systems in pre-RA, and evaluate the role of these autoantibodies in potentially identifying a signature in the pre-RA period that indicates imminent onset of clinical RA.

Methods Used: We evaluated 148 individuals with two pre- and one post-RA diagnosis serum samples available from the Department of Defense Serum Repository (DoDSR), and matched controls. Samples were tested for anti-CCP3, five ACPA fine specificities, anti-PAD, anti-CarP and RF IgA and IgM (Werfen). Positive levels for autoantibodies were determined using levels present in <=1% in a separate set of DoDSR controls. Analyses included comparison of positivity of autoantibodies over time in pre-RA and post-RA, and comparisons between RA and controls.

Summary of Results: The individuals with RA had a mean age at diagnosis of RA of ~37 years, were ~55% female and had post-RA positivity of anti-CCP3 of 60.8%, RF IgA of 45.9% and RF IgM of 45.9%. Positivity of anti-CCP3, RF IgA and IgM, anti-PAD1 and PAD4, anti-vimentin 2, anti-fibrinogen and anti-histone 1 increased over time in pre-RA and were significantly different than controls; however, positivity rates were overall similar in immediate pre-RA samples compared to post-RA samples. Counts of autoantibodies also increased over time in pre-RA, and within anti-CCP3 positive samples, a higher total autoantibody count was significantly associated with a time period <=3 years prior to RA diagnosis.

Conclusions: Multiple autoantibodies including anti-CCP3, RF IgA and M, ACPA fine specificities and anti-PAD antibodies are present in pre-RA, although anti-CCP3 and
RFs have the highest positivity rates. This confirms prior findings, however also expands upon them by demonstrating the rates of these antibodies in a single cohort. In addition, in anti-CCP3 positive samples, an increasing total antibody count indicates a sample is <=3 years prior to RA diagnosis; when further validated, that could serve as a model to predict imminent RA.