mTOR Pathway Inhibition Sensitizes Insulinoma Cells to Streptozotocin Induced Apoptosis

C. Vercherat1; F. Bourguillault1; V. Hervieu1,4; G. Poncet1,5; P. Massoma-Peh1; J. Bollard1; I. Goddard1; N. Gadot2, M. Cordier-Bussat1; J-Y. Scoazec1,6; C. Roche1,T. Walter1,3

1INSERM U1052/CNRS UMR5286/Université de Lyon, Lyon1 UMR-S1052, Centre de Recherche en Cancérologie, Lyon, France
2Anipath, Faculté de médecine Laënnec, Lyon, France
3Hospices Civils de Lyon, Hôpital Edouard Herriot, Service d’oncologie médicale, Lyon, France
4Hospices Civils de Lyon, Hôpital Edouard Herriot, Laboratoire Central d'Anatomie et de Cytologie Pathologiques, Lyon, France
5Hospices Civils de Lyon, Hôpital Edouard Herriot, Fédération des spécialités digestives, Lyon, France
6Département de Biopathologie, Gustave Roussy, 114 rue Edouard Vaillant, VILLEJUIF, France

Background: Pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors (pNETs) are generally chemoresistants probably due to low proliferation rate and defects in apoptotic pathway. Targeted therapies are new encouraging options for pNETs however; clinical trials show limited objective response. Combination of chemotherapy and targeted therapy could be a new solution in therapeutic care. Streptozotocin (STZ) is the 1st line therapy for unresectable pNETs.

Methods: Based on the literature, we hypothesized that mTOR pathway over-activation could lead to resistance to STZ. To evaluate this, we combined mTOR pathway inhibitors to STZ in in vitro and in vivo models. 4 mTOR pathway inhibitors (Everolimus, MK2206, BKM120 and BEZ235) were tested. Cell viability, proliferation and apoptosis were assessed in INS-1E and MIN6 cells (insulinoma cell lines). Development of tumor
nODULES was analyzed in an intra-splenic xenograft model. We also analyzed effects on these combinations on glycaemia and normal β cell mass to evaluate side effects.

**Results:** We show that all 4 combinations have synergistic effect *in vitro*. These combinations lead to heterogeneous mTOR pathway inhibition and increased apoptosis. *In vivo*, combinations lead to decreased tumor dissemination with variable efficacy depending on the inhibitor used. Hyperglycaemia and toxicity observed with BKM120 were avoided by decreasing doses.

**Conclusions:** These results suggest that combination of mTOR pathway inhibitors and STZ should be assessed in clinical trial.

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