

《Science Advances》重磅！应用赛特 SE-iFISH 揭秘乳腺癌转移机制

乳腺癌是国内外女性发病率最高的恶性肿瘤，让无数女性闻之色变。乳腺癌可防可治，早期乳腺癌 10 年生存率达 80%。虽然早期乳腺癌患者的生存率不断提高，但仍有 20-30% 的 I-III 期患者最终会发生肿瘤远端转移，进展为晚期肿瘤。晚期乳腺癌患者的 5 年生存率低于 25%，因此，揭示肿瘤转移的机制，对于进一步提高乳腺癌及其它肿瘤的诊疗效果具有极其重要的意义。

最近，由国际著名的德国 Ludwig Maximilians 大学医学中心牵头德国多家科研院校及 GSK 制药，与上海交大附属上海第一人民医院肿瘤中心、复旦大学生科院、南京医科大学和赛特生物经过长期密切合作，在大量临床样本及肿瘤动物模型的基础上，使用多种技术手段（包括血液 CTC/骨髓 DTC 分离与培养；相关肿瘤细胞系及肿瘤动物模型的建立；赛特 SE-iFISH CTC/DTC 检测；CTC/DTC 单细胞全基因组扩增与 NGS 测序等），对乳腺癌转移机制进行了长期深入研究，并获得重大发现。在乳腺癌患者体内精确锁定了肿瘤远端转移过程中起主导作用的肿瘤细胞 – EpCAM⁺ 异倍体小细胞 CTCs 与 DTCs (≤白细胞)。该项研究成果已刚刚发表在国际顶级的《科学》杂志子刊《科学·进展》(Science Advances, AAAS) (影响因子 IF=11.511)。

在该杂志将此重大发现向全球 11000 多名相关记者发布的同时，我们也在第一时间向国内广大肿瘤界同行简要介绍该项重要研究成果。

本文要点：

- 本研究基于大量乳腺癌肿瘤动物模型及临床标本，锁定了乳腺癌远端转移过程中起主要作用的肿瘤细胞亚类：EpCAM⁺ 异倍体小细胞 CTCs 与 DTCs。此类乳腺癌细胞与使用赛特 SE-iFISH 确定的肝癌术后复发过程中起主导作用的 CTC 亚类细胞相一致 (Wang et al., 2018 Cancer Lett 412:99)。
- 应用赛特 SE-iFISH 检测乳腺癌患者外周血中 EpCAM⁺ 异倍体小细胞 CTCs，可有效评估肿瘤远端转移，而 EpCAM⁺ 二倍体 CTCs 与肿瘤转移无明显相关性。
- 乳腺癌患者骨髓中检出 EpCAM⁺ 异倍体小细胞 DTCs 可准确预测患者 6 个月的较差预后。如果 EpCAM⁺ 异倍体小细胞 DTCs 占 DTC 总数 ≥20%，患者的总生存率明显降低
- iFISH CTC 单细胞全基因组扩增及 NGS 测序显示，与 EpCAM⁻ CTC 相比，EpCAM⁺ 异倍体 CTC 表现了多个基因扩增，涵盖了 tight junction、有丝分裂细胞周期、乳腺上皮细胞分化、乳腺导管形态发生等，提示乳腺癌患者 EpCAM⁺ CTC 的细胞粘附、增殖、上皮分化能力增加
- 使用依赖 EpCAM 的方法检测 CTCs，会严重漏检 CTC 总数 (如耐药 CTC 等)，但有可能检出与转移相关的 CTC

SCIENCE ADVANCES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

CANCER

Epithelial-type systemic breast carcinoma cells with a restricted mesenchymal transition are a major source of metastasis

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Carcinoma cells undergo epithelial-mesenchymal transition (EMT); however, contributions of EMT heterogeneity to disease progression remain a matter of debate. Here, we addressed the EMT status of ex vivo cultured circulating and disseminated tumor cells (CTCs/DTCs) in a syngeneic mouse model of metastatic breast cancer (MBC). Epithelial-type CTCs with a restricted mesenchymal transition had the strongest lung metastases formation ability, whereas mesenchymal-type CTCs showed limited metastatic ability. EpCAM expression served as a surrogate marker to evaluate the EMT heterogeneity of clinical samples from MBC, including metastases, CTCs, and DTCs. The proportion of epithelial-type CTCs, and especially DTCs, correlated with distant metastases and poorer outcome of patients with MBC. This study fosters our understanding of EMT in metastasis and underpins heterogeneous EMT phenotypes as important parameters for tumor prognosis and treatment. We further suggest that EpCAM-dependent CTC isolation systems will underestimate CTC numbers but will quantify clinically relevant metastatic cells.

INTRODUCTION

Recent cancer mortality has decreased by 40% from 1989 to 2015, owing to the impact of early detection through screening methods and to improved therapeutic modalities (1). Stages I to III tumors in walking breast and hepatocellular lymph nodes are characterized by comparably good overall survival rates at 5 and 10 years (100 and 72%, respectively). In contrast, stage IV metastatic breast cancer (MBC), which involves colonization of distant sites, remains a major life-threatening disease, with survival rates below 20% at 5 years. On average, 3 to 10% of patients are diagnosed with stage IV disease at initial diagnosis, but 20 to 30% of stages I to III patients will eventually progress and develop distant metastases to the cause of their disease. Hence, understanding basic processes of distant metastases formation and identifying key stages of metastases formation are of paramount importance to improve the treatment of patients and ultimately their outcome (2, 3).

Metastases formation initiates with the dissemination of a single or clusters of cancer cells from primary tumors, followed by an intravasation into the blood stream. These circulating tumor cells (CTCs) eventually extravasate from blood vessels and disseminate to distant sites such as the lung, liver, or bone marrow, where they are referred to as disseminated tumor cells (DTCs). In this model environment, DTCs can remain as single cells or generate micrometastases (4), which can give rise to the outcome-determining metastases (5-7).

In the clinical setting, CTC counts evaluated through the usage of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration-approved metastasis technology CELLSEARCH, which were as low as one cell per 7.5 ml of peripheral blood, correlated with poor outcomes in a large cohort of 317 patients with stages I to III metastatic breast cancer (8). Furthermore, CTC numbers correlated with disease progression and metastases formation (9-12). A formal experimental proof of the metastatic potential of MBC-derived CTCs was provided in a xenotransplantation model (13), which also demonstrated poor efficacy of metastases generation by CTCs. Intratumoral transfer of CTCs into the bone marrow of immunocompromised mice induced bone, lung, and liver metastases only in 1 of 10 cases of prognostic MBC (12% efficacy), with a requirement for 2000 CTCs per injection (13). Hence, systemic tumor cells represent a source for metastases-inducing cells (MBCs) but have low metastatic efficiency in current experimental models.

Phenotypic changes of subpopulations of one single tumor cells along an epithelial-mesenchymal transition (EMT) are postulated to actively regulate their transgenic and metastatic functionality (14, 15, 14-20). EMT is a cellular differentiation program that is instrumental during embryonic development, which allows epithelialized cells to differentiate into mesenchymal cells and to reduce within the developing embryo (21). Carcinoma cells can recapitulate EMT to a variable extent, which equips them with increased migratory and invasive capacities, and thereby promotes initial steps of the metastatic cascade (4). A requirement for EMT, as well as an essential mesenchymal-epithelial transition (MET), to support metastatic growth in early carcinoma type has been challenged in animal models of pancreatic and breast cancers (22, 23) and in underwood models (14, 16, 17). The

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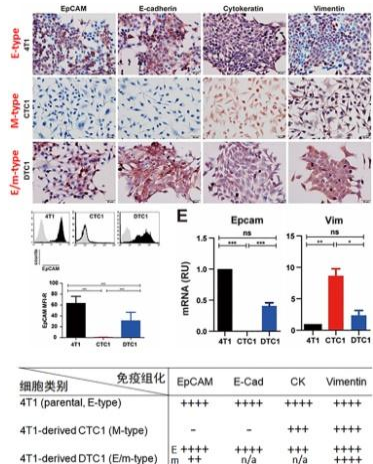
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肿瘤转移过程中的“渐变 EMT”及相应细胞类别

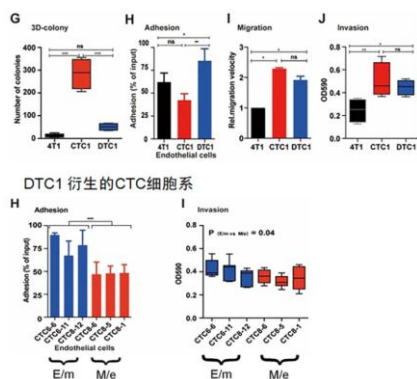
肿瘤细胞在肿瘤转移过程中经历“渐变 EMT (gradual EMT)”，此过程中细胞表面 EMT 标识物的表型也随之不断变化，形成不同类别的肿瘤细胞：包括上皮型(E)、上皮型为主/间质混合型(E/m)、间质型为主/上皮混合型(M/e)及间质型

(M)。M 型的肿瘤细胞浸润血管(intravasation)能力最强, 进入血液后即 为 CTC。CTC 可在特定器官(如肺、肝脏、骨髓等)穿出血管(extravasation), 形成播散性肿瘤细胞(disseminated tumor cells, DTCs), 并进一步形成肿瘤转移灶。



本文研究者首先使用 4T1 乳腺癌细胞借助同源移植技术, 建立了 4T1 小鼠肿瘤动物模型。从肿瘤模型中分离出血液 CTCs 及骨髓 DTCs, 经过细胞培养后形成相应的细胞系 CTC1 及 DTC1。进一步的蛋白表达(免疫组化、流式细胞仪)及 mRNA 检测发现, 与上皮型(E) 4T1 细胞相比, CTC1 为间质型(M), 表达 Vimentin 与 CK, 但却丢失了所有上皮表型蛋白 EpCAM 及 E-Cadherin; 而 DTC1 为混合型(E/m), 含有大量上皮型(E)及少量间质型(m)肿瘤细胞。

不同 EMT 蛋白表型的肿瘤细胞成瘤能力检测

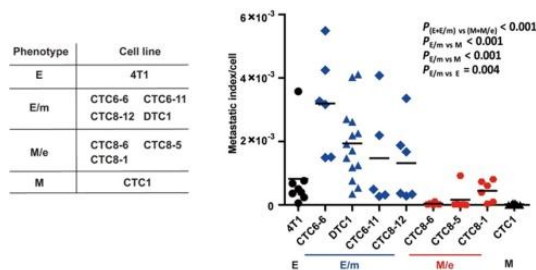
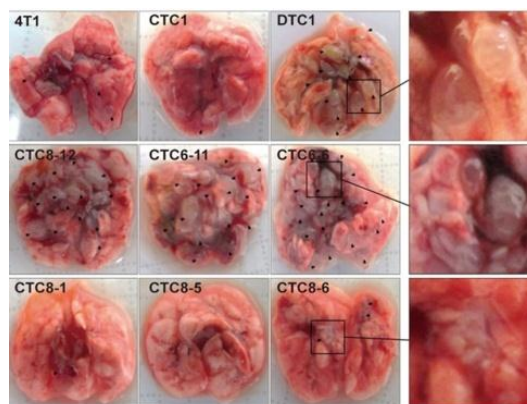


一系列肿瘤细胞成瘤能力(tumorigenic abilities)实验证明, CTC1 细胞具有最强的生长(3D-colony)、迁移(migration)及浸润(invasion)能力, 而 DTC1 具有与血管内皮细胞最强的粘附(adhesion)能力。相比 4T1 细胞而言, CTC1 与 DTC1 的生长、迁移及浸润能力均有较大增加。

作者将培养后的 DTC1 细胞接种 BALB/C 鼠, 成瘤后经富集、培养分别获得了 26 株 DTC1 衍生的 CTC 亚细胞系(sublines)和 10 株 DTC 亚细胞系。这些亚细胞系涵盖了 EMT 所有表型, 包括 E, E/m, M/e 及 M。成瘤能力实验证实, E/m 表型的 CTC 亚细胞系, 无论是与血管内皮细胞的粘附能力, 还是浸润能力均高于 M/e 表型的肿瘤细胞。

E/m 型 CTCs 具有最高的肿瘤转移能力

为了确定 EMT 中哪类细胞具有最高的肿瘤转移能力, 作者将上述 E, E/m, M/e 和 M 型细胞接种于 Balb/c 鼠, 19 天后计数肺转移灶数目。结果显示, 与间质型(M/e, M) CTC 相比, 上皮型(E, E/m) CTC 具有更高的转移指数 (metastatic index/cell), 其中 E/m 型 CTC 具有最高的转移指数。

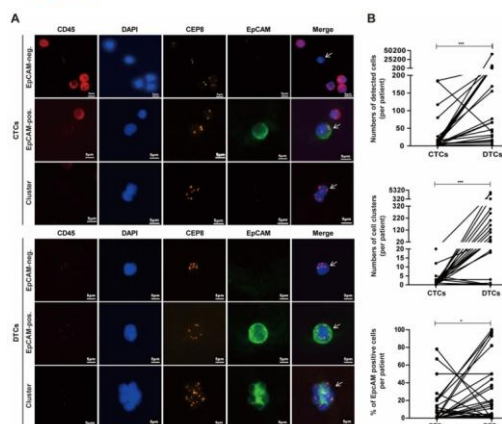


SE-i-FISH[®]检测乳腺癌患者血中 CTCs 及骨髓

中 DTCs

为了进一步验证上述在肿瘤动物模型中得到的“EpCAM⁺ CTCs 及 DTCs 具有较高转移能力”的实验结论，作者使用赛特生物 SE-iFISH 技术，对 34 例确诊为乳腺癌转移的病人进行了血液 CTC、骨髓 DTC 及相应细胞团的染色体核型与 EpCAM 蛋白表型的同步原位检测。结果显示，骨髓中的 DTC 细胞团数目明显高于血中的 CTC 细胞团。

SE-i-FISH[®] 检测乳腺癌患者血液 CTCs 及骨髓 DTCs 各种亚类细胞

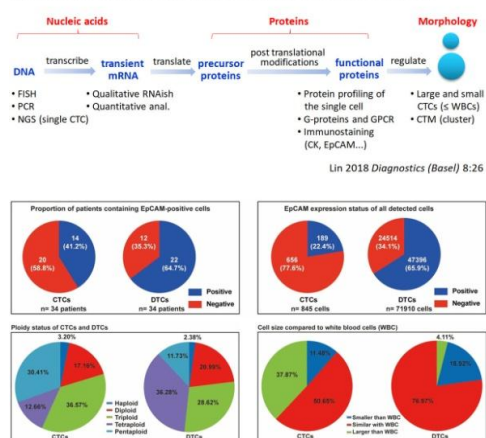


染色体核型、EpCAM 蛋白表型、细胞形态三位一体分析 CTCs 与 DTCs

为了对 CTCs 与 DTCs 进行全面分析，以确定患者体内具有特定临床意义(如与肿瘤转移相关)的亚类细胞，作者使用 SE-iFISH 技术，从细胞内生物链(cellular bio-chain)角度，对所有从患者体内检测出的 CTCs 及 DTCs 进行了全面系统性分析。

鉴于细胞内生物链三要素“DNA-mRNA-蛋白质”中的 mRNA 属于不稳定的中间过渡性产物，不像蛋白质那样具备直接调节细胞的功能，且 DNA 扩增或 mRNA 阳性因受“翻译”与“转录”等调控点的调节，未必导致相应蛋白的阳性表达(Luoh, et al., 2013 Springerplus 2:386)。因此，作者选择了早已被广为接受的针对肿瘤细胞的染色体数目异常和 EpCAM 的蛋白表达进行检测，而 mRNA 不在考量范围之内。

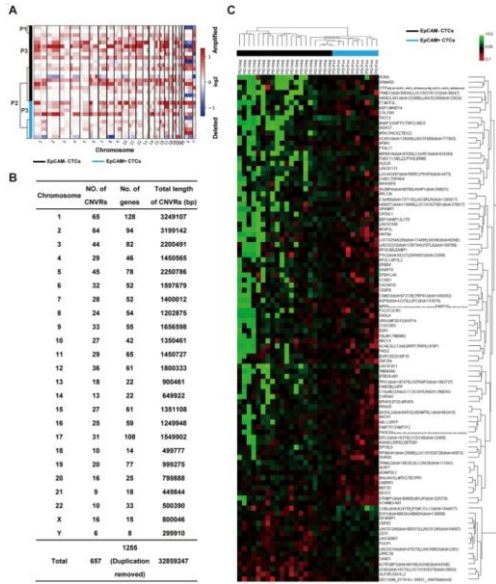
(A) Tri-element of cellular bio-chain: approaches to identify and characterize tumor cells



结果显示：1) 乳腺癌转移患者外周血中 EpCAM⁺ CTCs 检出率为 41.2%，占 CTC 细胞总数的 22.4%；骨髓中 EpCAM⁺ DTCs 的患者阳性检出率为 64.7%，占 DTC 细胞总数的 65.9%；2) 病人 CTCs 多为间质型，而 DTCs 多为上皮型；3) CTCs 中 8 号染色体三倍体及 ≥5 倍体的细胞占多数，分别为 36.6% 及 30.4%，而 DTCs 中占多数的分别是四倍体(36.3%) 及三倍体(28.6%)；4) 无论 CTCs 还是 DTCs，小细胞(≤白细胞)均占大多数，分别为 62.13% 和 95.89%。此结果也再次证实了采用细胞孔径过滤去除白细胞以试图分离肿瘤细胞的方法具有很大的局限性。

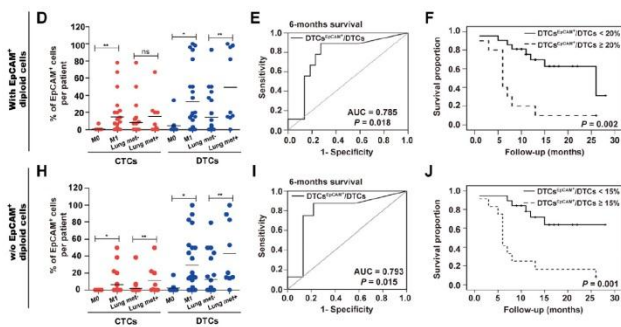
i-FISH CTC 单细胞 NGS 测序

为了比较 EpCAM⁺ 与 EpCAM⁻ CTC 在基因水平的异同，作者利用赛特生物“非激光单细胞分离系统 NMSCM”对来自 3 个肿瘤患者的 10 个 EpCAM⁺ CTCs 及 20 个 EpCAM⁻ CTCs 分别进行了单细胞挑取、全基因组扩增、建库及二代测序。测序数据结果显示，与患者各自的白细胞相比，两类细胞存在 657 个扩增或缺失的 CNV 差异，覆盖了 1255 个编码基因(coding genes)。其中，EpCAM⁺ CTC 扩增的基因涉及 tight junction (CLDN3, STRN, PTPN13)、有丝分裂细胞周期(CCNB1, SHB, EIF4EBP1, DUSP3, ABL1)、乳腺上皮细胞分化(ERBB4)、乳腺导管形态发生(GLI2, CSF1R)等方面，进一步提示肿瘤患者 EpCAM⁺ CTC 的细胞粘附、增殖、上皮分化能力增加。



SE-iFISH®检测出的不同表型 CTCs 与 DTCs 亚类细胞的临床意义

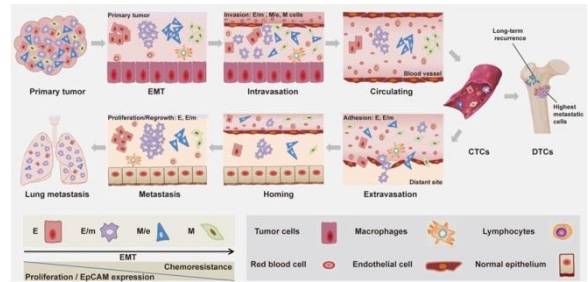
作者对 SE-iFISH 检测出的不同表型的异倍体 CTCs 和 DTCs 在乳腺癌病人中的临床意义做了深入研究，发现 EpCAM⁺ CTCs、DTCs 在各自总数中所占比例与患者肿瘤远端转移密切相关(M₁)，尤其是 EpCAM⁺ DTCs 相关性更大。EpCAM⁺ DTCs 所占比例可以较准确预测乳腺癌转移患者的总生存率(OS)，以 ROC 曲线分析得到 cut-off 值为 20%，骨髓中 EpCAM⁺ DTCs 在 DTC 总数中所占比例 ≥ 20%，患者总生存率显著下降。



结论

1. 根据本研究实验结果，乳腺癌转移的主要机理(包括参与的主要细胞及途径)为：肿瘤细胞自

原发灶脱落，经 EMT 及血管内渗作用后入血形成 CTCs。一部分 CTCs 到达骨髓形成具有很强转移能力的 EpCAM⁺ 小细胞 DTCs，另外一些 EpCAM⁺ 小细胞异倍体 CTCs 经血流至远端器官，外渗穿透出血管，形成远端转移灶。本研究首次揭示了 EpCAM⁺ 异倍体小细胞 CTCs 在肿瘤转移过程中的重要作用。肿瘤转移模式图如下：



2. 乳腺癌病人 CTCs 与 DTCs 中的 EpCAM⁺ 细胞所占比例与患者的肿瘤远端定向肺转移(oligometastasis) 及不良预后密切相关。其中 EpCAM⁺ DTCs 相关性更大，骨髓中 EpCAM⁺ DTCs 在 DTC 总数中所占比例 ≥ 20%，患者总生存率显著下降。
3. 临床常规、无创检测血液中 EpCAM 蛋白阳性表达的异倍体小细胞 CTCs，可有效评估、判断乳腺癌患者的肿瘤远端转移，而 EpCAM⁺ 二倍体 CTC 则与肿瘤转移无明显相关性。
4. 依赖 EpCAM 表达的阳性捕获法会丢失所有 EpCAM⁻ CTCs (如与药敏或耐药相关的 CTCs 等)，但有可能分离出与转移相关的 EpCAM⁺ CTCs，前提是这些细胞的染色体必须为异倍体。本研究结果同时提示，应用“细胞筛”过滤法会显著丢失具有远端转移能力的小细胞 CTCs 与 DTCs。

应用赛特生物 SE-iFISH 技术可对外周血 CTC、骨髓 DTC 等体液中脱落肿瘤细胞的染色体倍体及各种肿瘤标志物蛋白进行持续的同步原位动态监测，锁定与肿瘤转移相关的各种亚类细胞，并结合后续单细胞测序，对肿瘤侵袭、转移过程中的作用机制进行深入研究，从而为进一步改进、优化肿瘤的诊断方法和治疗手段提供有力支持。