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## Cancer type specific copy number variants are identical over species borders

Thomas Liehr<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jena University Hospital, Friedrich Schiller University, Institute of Human Genetics, Am Klinikum 1, D-07747 Jena, Germany

\*Correspondence: [Thomas.Liehr@med.uni-jena.de](mailto:Thomas.Liehr@med.uni-jena.de)

### Abstract

Over the past two decades, we have studied dozens of murine and a few rat-derived tumor cell lines. While these cell lines are commonly used as models for human cancer, their cytogenetic and genetic properties are not fully understood. Therefore, we characterized approximately 40 rodent cancer cell lines using molecular cytogenetics, including multicolor fluorescence *in situ* hybridization and array-comparative genomic hybridization. We then *in silico* translated the observed acquired gains and losses of chromosomal regions into the human genome. During these studies, we found that rodent cancer cell lines carried chromosomal imbalances similar to those observed in human cancer cells. In this review, we discuss the cell lines studied, the percentage of gains and losses that agreed with the corresponding human cancer type, and the human cancer subtypes for which each cell line can serve as a suitable model. Additionally, we discuss the fact that polyploidy can only be reliably accessed by cytogenetics and that male cell lines tend to lose their Y chromosome. Overall, the reviewed findings highlight the need for an in-depth cytogenomic characterization before using a cell line in research. Furthermore, the data support the idea that copy number changes are more important than point mutations, at least in advanced tumors, as they are similar across species boundaries.

**Keywords:** murine tumor, rat tumor, cell lines, multicolor-fluorescence *in situ* hybridization – mFISH, murine multicolor banding, array-based comparative genomic hybridization – aCGH

### Introduction

Cancer patients are identified at different ages within the human population; however, the risk of cancer is known to increase with age [1]. Some cancer types are associated with gender [2-3], while others are associated with the types of food, spices [4] or drugs used in daily life [5]. In general, the risk of cancer is increased by radiation or mutagenic influences [6]. Early diagnosis is imperative for adequate treatment of patients [7]. Subgrouping specific tumors based on genetic, immunohistochemical, and/or other factors impacts treatment, prognosis, and follow-up strategies [8].

Both basic and applied cancer research largely depends on *in vitro* models [9]. Although many model systems are available nowadays, such as tumor spheroids, genetically engineered cells (knock-in or knock-out models, including corresponding murine strains), 3D cell culture, microfluidics and all Crispr/Cas modeling variants, tumor cell lines remain popular as established tools [9]. Over the last 20



years, we have performed cytogenomic characterizations of approximately 30 human cancer cell lines [10]. We also characterized 36 murine [11-33] and two rat cancer cell lines [34-35]. Specifically, the latter were not characterized at the chromosomal level beforehand. This is because murine (and rat) chromosomes are difficult to distinguish using cytogenetic banding approaches [27]. Since 1996, multicolor fluorescence in situ hybridization with all 20 murine whole chromosome paints in different color combinations (M-FISH) became available [36]. However, it was only after establishing murine multicolor banding that besides inter- intrachromosomal aberrations became accessible as well [27]. Interestingly, most of the studied cell lines were established between 40 and over 100 years ago and some of them are now standard reference systems. Nevertheless, their chromosomal constitutions remained unknown until recently [11-35]. Thus, our results were partly surprising and called into question the justification for using some cell lines as corresponding model systems based only on histological parameters of a primary lesion [11-35].

In previous papers [11-35], we focused on whether cytogenomic characterization could help define the cancer subtype for which an individual cell line could serve as a model (see Table 1). Here, we discuss what can be learned from these studies in terms of a more general view of the results obtained.

### Literature Review and Analysis

We focused on a cumulative analysis of data obtained from 37 murine and two rat-derived tumor cell lines (see Tables 1 and 2). The inclusion criteria for the cell lines in Table 1 were that they were studied using M-FISH, murine multicolor banding, and array comparative genomic hybridization (aCGH), and imbalances were translated into the human genome according to [13]. Table 2 only includes male-derived rodent cancer cell lines that were characterized by M-FISH and examined for the presence or absence of the Y chromosome.

Accordingly, we can deduce the following:

1. Of the studied murine cancer cell lines, only 14 out of 33 (42%) have not formed subclones, as have all two (100%) of the rat-derived ones. The remaining 19 murine cell lines had between one and five subclones besides a main clone. However, it should be noted that the almost all cell lines exhibited single-cell aberrations to some extent.
2. Nearly 80% of the studied cell lines are hyperdiploid (Figure 1A). Approximately 70% of the cell lines are triploid to tetraploid, while about 9% have a chromosome complement ranging from  $4.5n$  to  $6n$  (Figure 1B).
3. As shown in Table 1, the observed copy number alterations in murine cell lines were consistent with those in the corresponding human cancer counterparts between 40% and 91%. On average, there was concordance for 64% of the detected gains and losses. The range was similar for the two rat cell lines, i.e., between 38% and 55%.
4. According to Table 2, Y chromosome loss was observable in seven of eleven cell lines (63%), gain was present in two of eleven cell lines (18%), and gain and loss in a mosaic pattern was observed in one of eleven cell lines (9%). Only one remaining triploid cell line had correctly a Y chromosome alongside two X chromosomes. The Y chromosome remained stable in the only male rat cell line studied. Interestingly, Y-chromosome loss led to complete erasure of this gonosome in six out of seven cell lines; these cell lines retained a “Turner syndrome-like” gonosomal constitution.

### Discussion

We live in a time when the end of cytogenetics is loudly proclaimed once again — it is stated that it will all be replaced by a single approach yet to be introduced that can identify all possible genetic aberrations in a single experiment [37]. This review clearly shows that this idea is misleading.

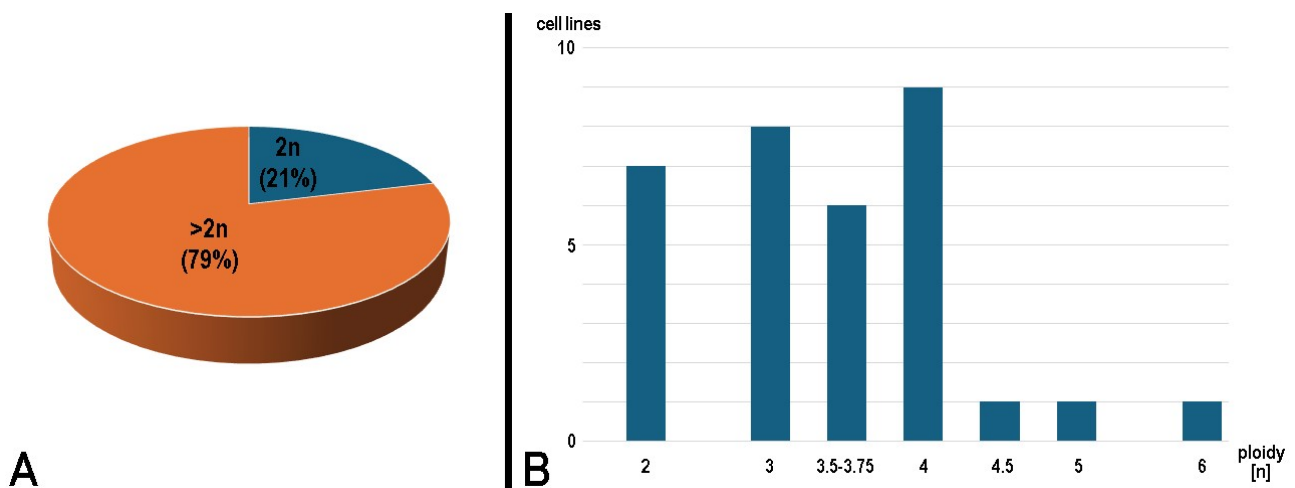


**Table 1.** Summary of studied cancer cell lines derived from two different rodent species, for which a chromosomal gains and losses have been in silico translated to human genome.

Cell line	Ploidy/ subclones	Cancer type	Imbalances in agreement with human cancer type [%]	Reference
<b>mouse</b>				
A-20	2n / yes	Burkitt's lymphoma	63	11
AB1	3.5n / no	malignant epithelioid mesothelioma	88	12
AB22	4n / no	malignant epithelioid mesothelioma	90	12
AC29	3n / yes	malignant epithelioid mesothelioma	75	12
AE17	2n / yes	malignant sarcomatoid mesothelioma	75	13
AML12	4n / yes	advanced hepatocellular CA	68	14
B16-F0	4n / yes	malignant skin melanoma	67	15
B16-F1-ATCC	3.5n / yes	malignant skin melanoma	67	16
B16-4A5	3.5n / yes	malignant skin melanoma	70	16
C-127I	5n / yes	breast CA (late stage)	60	17
C57/B1	2n / yes	malignant skin melanoma	50	15
CMT-93	3n / yes	advanced type of metastatic colorectal CA	79	18
CT26	3n / yes	advanced type of metastatic colorectal CA	79	18
EMT6/P	3n / yes	breast CA (early stage)	42	17
Hepa 1-6	3n / no	advanced hepatocellular CA	66-78	19
I-10	2n / no	testicular germ cell tumor (early)	63	20
JC	4n / yes	breast CA luminal B, basal-like	57	21
KLN 205	4n / yes	lung squamous cell CA	43	22
LA-4	4.5n / no	lung squamous cell CA	58	23
MH-22A	3n / no	hepatoblastoma or early hepatocellular carcinoma	50-55 53	19
MLTC-1	6n / no	Leydig cell tumor (late)	40	24
MMT 060562	2n / yes	breast CA (early stage)	43	25
Neuro-2a	4n / no	neuroblastoma (late)	75	26
Neuro-2a TR-a	4n / no	neuroblastoma (late)	75	26
Neuro-2a TR-β	4n / no	neuroblastoma (late)	75	26
NIH3T3	3.75n / no	ectodermal tumor	66	27
S91 clone M3	3n / no	malignant skin melanoma	61	16
S-180	4n / yes	mesenchymal chondrosarcoma	70	28
SCA-9	3.5n / no	mucoepithelioid or myoepithelioma salivary gland tumor	40	29
SEWA	2n / no	osteosarcoma (late)	91	30
TA3 Hauschka	3n / yes	breast CA (early stage)	40	17
TSC2ang1	3.5n / yes	cutaneous sarcoma	55	31
WR21	2n / yes	myoepithelioma salivary gland tumor	69	29
<b>rat</b>				
H9c2	3n / no	sarcoma	55	34
RAT-1	2n / no	epithelioid sarcoma or liposarcoma	43 38	35

**Table 2.** Y chromosome presence in the studied male rodent cancer cell lines.

Cell line	Ploidy/ subclones	Cancer type	Y-chromosome status	Reference
<b>mouse</b>				
AML12	4n / yes	advanced hepatocellular CA	XX,-Y,-Y	14
CMT-93	3n / yes	advanced type of metastatic colorectal CA	XXY	18
Col-GFP HSC	4n / yes	hepatic stellate cells	XXY,-Y/XXYY/ XXYY,+Y	32
I-10	2n / no	testicular germ cell tumor (early)	X,-Y	20
KLN 205	4n / yes	lung squamous cell CA	XXYY,+Y,+Y	22
NIH3T3	3.75n / no	ectodermal tumor	XXY,-Y	27
MLTC-1	6n / no	Leydig cell tumor (late)	XX,-X,-Y,-Y,-Y	24
Panc02	4.5n / no	pancreatic cancer	XX,-Y,-Y	33
S-180	4n / yes	mesenchymal chondrosarcoma	XX,-Y,-Y	28
SEWA	2n / no	osteosarcoma (late)	X,-Y	30
WR21	2n / yes	myoepithelioma salivary gland tumor	XY,+Y	29
<b>rat</b>				
RAT-1	2n / no	epithelioid sarcoma or liposarcoma	XY	35



**Figure 1.** Graphic summary on the murine cell lines reviewed here. **A)** 21% of the cell lines were diploid, while 79% were hyperdiploid. **B)** Ploidy levels of the studied murine cell lines are detailed.

The first finding mentioned in this review is that 58% of murine cell lines have one to five additional subclones besides one main clone. This cannot be detected or characterized in detail by any approach that is not single-cell directed. Hints for mosaic situations may be present in next-generation sequencing (NGS) or aCGH. However, the nature of the underlying chromosomal aberrations cannot be determined this way, nor can mosaics. This is due to technical limitations, such as the blindness of NGS and aCGH toward heterochromatic regions and their goal to analyze than ten thousands cells at a time; thus the same is true for optical genome mapping [38-40]. Our group recently discovered amplification of satellite DNAs in advanced cancers [41], which has been found in at least one murine cell line [26], to and cannot be found by any other approach than FISH yet. The high rates of chromosomal instability detected in our studies, a typical feature of cancer, cannot be accessed by high-throughput approaches either [42].

As shown here, 80% of murine cancer cell lines are hyperdiploid with 3n to 6n. This information can only be obtained through (molecular) cytogenetics. Knowing the ploidy of a cancer cell line model



is essential. When studying the effects of knocking out a tumor suppressor gene, for example, the necessity of this knowledge is clear. Furthermore, a highly polyploid cell line can only model a late-stage tumor, which is important to know when studying a cell line as a model for tumor treatment, for example.

For the cancer cell lines derived from the Rodentia family that were studied here, 64% of the detected gains and losses were in concordance with those of their human cancer counterparts, ranging from 40% to 91%. As expected, these results demonstrate that mice and rats are not human [43]. However, it also suggests that tumorigenesis in the same tissue of different species involves similar environmental factors that favor specific imbalances. During tumor progression, chromosomal imbalances at least trigger tumor evolution. These environmental conditions may be the same in all mammals. Thus, this finding reinforces the idea that murine cancer cell lines are suitable models for human cancer [43]. At the same time, it demonstrates that cancer development may have more similarities across mammals than previously suggested [44].

Finally, this study demonstrated that cytogenomic analysis of a cell line's karyotype is particularly important in male murine cell lines. More than half of these cell lines lost their sex-determining Y chromosome, and in approximately 90% of the affected lines, the loss is complete. Therefore, these cell lines are better models for individuals with Turner syndrome [45] than for males. This must be considered when choosing cell lines based on their original sex.

## Conclusions

Before using a murine cancer cell line in a larger research project, conduct a molecular cytogenetic study to confirm its ploidy, characterize its chromosomal rearrangements, and determine its gonosomal constitution. This will help avoid using an unsuitable model system.

After studying ~40 murine and rat-derived cancer cell lines, it was found that they carry similar chromosomal imbalances to those observed in human cancer cells. This supports the hypothesis that gains and losses, together with chromosomal instability, are driving factors in cancer progression [44]. Their impact on cancer initiation remains to be determined.

A whole genomic view of tumor cell lines is imperative and cannot be replaced by high-throughput approaches. Short-read NGS cannot reliably access translocations, complex rearrangements, or mosaic situations. Although long-range sequencing and optical genomic mapping can detect a certain percentage of gene fusions or fissions, the nature of chromosomal rearrangements is difficult to determine without a chromosomal view. Both approaches are blind to heterochromatic regions, and their role may be underestimated [41]. Overall, no approach should be dismissed simply because it is “old,” such as banding cytogenetics, when it provides a whole genomic view combined with single-cell analysis.

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