Portal and interface chronic inflammation are associated with the progenitor cell compartment activation during NAFLD

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Background and aim: During nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), portal and interface chronic inflammation (PCI and ICI) are strongly associated with fibrosis by activation of hepatic stellate cell (HSC) (Brunt et al., 2009; Vespasiani-Gentilucci et al., 2014). However, the determinants of PCI and ICI observed in NAFLD remain to be elucidated. Since portal and periportal ductular reaction is related to disease progression, we aimed to investigate if PCI and ICI are associated with hepatic progenitor cell (HPC) compartment activation.

Methods: Fifty-two NAFLD patients were studied. NAFLD activity score, fibrosis, PCI and ICI were histologically evaluated. HPCs, intermediate hepatobiliary cells and bile ductules/interlobular bile ducts were evaluated by immunohistochemistry for CK-7, CK-19 and EpCAM. HSC and myofibroblast (MF) activity were determined by immunohistochemistry for α-SMA.

Results: PCI and ICI strongly correlated with HPC compartment activation and with the activity of MFs (p<0.001). Lobular inflammation, ballooning and HPC compartment activation were all associated with both PCI and ICI (p<0.05) by univariate analysis. In the multivariate models, HPC compartment activation was independently associated with PCI and ICI (OR 4.4, 1.7-11.5; OR 3.4, 1.5-7.9, respectively).

Conclusions: During NAFLD, PCI and ICI are strongly associated with HPC compartment activation and this association is likely one determinant subtending the strong association between PCI/ICI and fibrosis.

References


Keywords

Portal inflammation, fibrosis, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, hepatic progenitor cells.