High-Dose Zoledronic Acid Impacts Bone Remodeling with Effects on Osteoblastic Lineage and Bone Mechanical Properties

Samantha Pozzi,1,2 Sonia Vallet,1,2 Siddhartha Mukherjee,1 Diana Cirstea,2 Nileshwari Vaghela,1 Loredana Santo,2 Eyal Rosen,3 Hiroshi Ikeda,2 Yutaka Okawa,2 Tanyel Kiziltepe,2 Jesse Schoonmaker,1 Wanling Xie,2 Teru Hideshima,2 Edie Weller,1 Mary L. Bouxsein,3 Nikhil C. Munshi,2 Kenneth C. Anderson,2 and Noopur Raje1,2

Abstract Purpose: The increasing incidence of osteonecrosis of the jaw and its possible association with high cumulative doses of bisphosphonate led us to study the effects of high doses of zoledronic acid (ZA) on bone remodeling. Experimental Design: Five-week-old C57BL6 mice were treated with saline or ZA weekly for 3 weeks at increasing doses (0.05-1 mg/Kg). Effects of ZA on bone remodeling were studied using standard assays. Results: We observed an increase in bone mineral density and content in treated animals at doses of 0.05 mg/Kg, which was not further enhanced at higher doses of ZA. Trabecular bone volume at the proximal tibia and the distal femur assessed by histomorphometry and microCT, respectively, increased significantly in ZA-treated groups. There was however no difference between 0.5 and 1 mg/kg, suggesting a ceiling effect for ZA. ZA led to decreased numbers of osteoclasts and osteoblasts per bone perimeter that paralleled a significant reduction of serum levels of TRAC5b and osteocalcin in vivo. Effects on osteoblasts were confirmed in in vitro assays. Mechanical testing of the femur showed increased brittleness in ZA-treated mice. Conclusions: High doses of ZA inhibit both osteoclast and osteoblasts function and bone remodeling in vivo interfering with bone mechanical properties. No dose response was noted beyond 0.5 mg/kg suggesting that lower doses of ZA may be adequate in inhibiting bone resorption. Our data may help inform future studies of ZA use with respect to alternate and lower doses in the treatment of patients with cancer bone disease. (Clin Cancer Res 2009;15(18):5829-39)

Bisphosphonates are pyrophosphate analogues characterized by high affinity for hydroxypatite (1). They are extensively used in clinical practice for the treatment of diseases with high bone turnover (5) and are released by osteoclasts, their main cellular target. Their action is mediated by the inhibition of osteoclast recruitment and impairment of osteoclast function as evidenced by morphologic changes on osteoclast cytoskeleton, disruption of ruffle borders, and apoptosis (6, 7). Bisphosphonates are stable in bone for prolonged times, and animal studies have shown a long half-life in the skeleton, with a terminal phase of ∼300 days (8, 9). Their effects on cell types other than osteoclast have not been completely elucidated. In particular, interest is focused on delineating the effect of these compounds on cancer cells, osteoblasts, osteocytes, endothelial, and epithelial cells.

Bisphosphonates are broadly divided into two main groups based on their chemical structure: nitrogen and non-nitrogen containing bisphosphonate. Pamidronate and zoledronic acid (ZA), two of the most potent bisphosphonates, are both nitrogen-containing bisphosphonates and are the two main compounds used for the treatment of cancer-related bone disease. Their use is supported by prospective randomized placebo-controlled studies (10, 11) that have shown their ability at reducing skeletal-related events as well as cancer-induced hypercalcemia. Their use is recommended by the American Society of Clinical Oncology for cancer-related bone disease (12, 13). However, despite several decades of intensive use in both malignant and nonmalignant diseases, the duration

Authors' Affiliations:1Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center, 2Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, and 3Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston, MA, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts. Received 2/18/09; revised 4/30/09; accepted 5/21/09; published OnlineFirst 9/8/09.
Grant support: S. Pozzi and S. Vallet are research fellows supported by the International Myeloma Foundation, and N. Raje has a career development award from American Society of Clinical Oncology and grant support from the Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation.

The costs of publication of this article were defrayed in part by the payment of page charges. This article must therefore be hereby marked advertisement in accordance with 18 U.S.C. Section 1734 solely to indicate this fact.

Requests for reprints: Noopur Raje, MD, POB 216, Division of Hematology and Oncology, MGH Cancer Center, Massachusetts General Hospital, 55 Fruit Street, Boston, MA 02114. Phone: 617-726-0711; Fax: 617-724-8801; E-mail: nraje@partners.org.

© 2009 American Association for Cancer Research. doi:10.1158/1078-0432.CCR-09-0426
of therapy and the total dosage required for effective therapy has not been defined. Consequently, with improved outcome and survival of patients despite associated bone involvement, cancer patients are now exposed to two of the most potent bisphosphonates on a monthly schedule for prolonged durations.

These uncertainties were brought to light in 2003 when a new concern with the use of bisphosphonate emerged. The use of bisphosphonates, in particular Pamidronate and ZA, was associated with increasing number of jaw complications, now known as bisphosphonate-associated osteonecrosis of the jaw (ONJ; refs. 14–16). ONJ refers to a nonhealing exposed area of the mandible or maxilla that persists for >8 weeks after its identification, in patients exposed to bisphosphonate, not associated with radiotherapy of head and neck (17). Although this is not a common event in cancer patients (<10%, with a higher prevalence in multiple myeloma compared with solid tumors; ref. 18), a strong association has been described with the use of nitrogen containing bisphosphonate. Several concomitant cofactors may contribute to the pathogenesis of this complication and these are a subject of investigation. Although the underlying pathophysiology is unknown, the relationship between prolonged exposure to bisphosphonate and the development of jaw complications has emerged in many case series (14–16, 18), prompting a revision of current guidelines for the administration of bisphosphonate (19–21). These revised guidelines now suggest limiting treatment with bisphosphonate. The two main concerns related to the prolonged treatment with bisphosphonate are the long half-life of the drug in the skeleton and its possible prolonged effect on bone remodeling.

For these reasons, the 2006 Mayo Clinic consensus statement (19) and the 2007 American Society of Clinical Oncology guidelines (21) suggest 2 years of treatment with either Pamidronate or ZA in multiple myeloma and a careful evaluation for its continued use beyond this time point until more data are available. However, these recommendations are not supported by laboratory or clinical data.

To better characterize the effects of high-dose ZA on bone modeling and remodeling, we studied its effects in preclinical models focusing mainly on the osteoblast lineage and bone mechanical properties. Our data suggest that high-dose ZA, in addition to its inhibition of osteoclast activity, has inhibitory effects on the osteoblast lineage resulting in altered bone remodeling, leading to increased strength but reduced ductility. Thus, high-dose bisphosphonate may adversely affect bone deposition and remodeling and result in brittle bone. Randomized clinical trials to evaluate the appropriate dosing schedule for bisphosphonates are thus warranted.

### Materials and Methods

**Animals and drug administration.** Five-week-old female C57Bl6 mice were divided into four groups, and housed in the animal care facility. The Dana-Farber Cancer Institute animal ethics committee and scientific review committee approved the care and experimental protocol. ZA (Novartis) from commercial 4-mg vials was diluted with sterile saline solution before administration and injected i.p.

To determine the dose for treatment of mice, we extrapolated the amount of drug received by patients for cancer-related bone disease. Assuming that a multiple myeloma patient of ~70 Kg receives 4 mg of drug every 4 wk corresponding to a dose of 0.05 mg/Kg/mo (0.65 mg/Kg/y or ~3 mg/Kg in 5 y), we studied the effect of ZA in three arms at doses of 0.05, 0.5, and 1 mg/Kg compared with control (saline solution). Animals were injected i.p. with either saline solution or ZA weekly for 3 wk; the highest dose recapitulating a lifetime dose of ZA over a 5-yr period in an adult multiple myeloma patient. The experiment was repeated twice for a total of eight animals per group. Blood was collected at baseline and every week before treatment. To study the dynamic histomorphometry, calcin was injected i.p. (40 μg/Kg). 10 and 3 d before sacrifice. After 3 wk of treatment, the animals were sacrificed, and bones from both hind limbs were evaluated with additional studies.

**Bone mass and microarchitecture assessment.** Bone mineral density (BMD, g/cm²) and bone mineral content (BMC, grams) were evaluated immediately after sacrifice using dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA; GE-Lunar PiXImus). BMD and BMC measurements of the whole body (minus the head), and isolated femur and tibia were obtained for control and at doses of 0.05 and 0.5 mg/Kg; DXA was not done at 1.0 mg/Kg dose as we did not see any added benefit by histomorphometry at this dose of ZA.

To assess bone morphology and microarchitecture, femurs were scanned using a high-resolution desktop microtomographic imaging system (μCT40; Scanco Medical AG), as previously described (22–24). Briefly, trabecular bone morphology was analyzed in the distal femur. Trabecular bone outcomes included bone volume fraction (BV/TV, %), trabecular thickness (Tb.Th, μm), trabecular number (Tb.N, mm⁻¹), trabecular separation (Tb.Sp, μm), and connectivity density (1/mm²). Cortical bone morphology was studied at the mid femoral diaphysis. Outcome assessments include total cross-sectional area (TA, mm²); cortical bone area (BA, mm²); bone area fraction (BA/TA, %); cortical thickness (μm); and the maximum, minimum, and polar moments of inertia (Imax, Imin, and Ipolar, mm⁴), which describe the shape/distribution of cortical bone (larger values indicate a higher bending strength).

**Histology and histomorphometry.** Tibias were fixed in 4% formalin for 48 h, followed by ethanol 70% and embedded in methyl methacrylate resin as previously described (25). Samples were cut into 4-μm sections and stained with modified Masson-Goldner’s trichrome for static histomorphometry. Dynamic histomorphometry measurements were done on unstained 8-μm-thick sections. Static and dynamic histomorphometric analysis were done on the tibial secondary spongiosa at 40×, with a bone histomorphometry measure system version 4.10 (Osteometrics, Inc.), using standard procedures published by the American Society for Bone and Mineral Research (26).

**Serum osteocalcin and TRACP5b levels.** Sera from weekly blood collection was separated by centrifugation and kept at -80°C until
tolerated by the animals. No acute toxicities were observed during the 3 weeks of treatment with ZA for all concentrations tested. At the end of the 3 weeks, the animals were sacrificed and the skeletal effects of ZA were analyzed using DXA. Compared with controls, both BMD (grams/cm²) and BMC (grams) were increased in the whole body, femur, and tibia in the ZA-treated animals. In particular, BMD was increased 13%, 27%, and 24% in whole body, tibia, and femur, respectively, in the 0.05 mg/Kg group compared with control; and 18%, 31%, and 25%, respectively, in the 0.5 mg/Kg group compared with control. These increases were statistically significant when compared with controls (P < 0.01); no difference between the two tested doses of ZA was noted, with a maximum effect noted at 0.05 mg/Kg. DXA scans were not done in animals treated with 1 mg/Kg of ZA as histomorphometry did not reveal added benefits.

**ZA increased trabecular bone at the proximal tibia evaluated by static histomorphometry.** Both tibia and femur showed increased mineralization by DXA (Fig. 1). To better define the effect of ZA on bone architecture, we first did static histomorphometry on the proximal tibia to evaluate the trabecular bone.

**ZA treatment led to increased trabecular structure as shown in Fig. 1A compared with control.** This was related to increased BV/TV, Tb.N, and decreased Tb.Sp compared with controls, with less evident effect on Tb.Th (Fig. 1B and C). The difference was statistically significant (P < 0.05) for all the tested doses (0.05, 0.5, and 1 mg/Kg) compared with control, without any difference between the two higher doses of 0.5 and 1 mg/Kg.

**ZA impacts osteoclast and osteoblast number in the treated animals.** To define the effect of ZA on osteoclast and osteoblast, we counted the number of osteoclast and osteoblast per bone perimeter (N.Oc/B.Pm, N.Ob/B.Pm). The N.Oc/B.Pm (mm⁻¹) decreased in the treated animals compared with control (1.49 versus 1.34 versus 1.67 in 0.05 versus 0.5 versus 1 mg/Kg compared with 1.74 in controls). The N.Ob/B.Pm (mm⁻¹) decreased as well (30.07 versus 24.97 versus 25.16 in 0.05 versus 0.5 and 1 mg/Kg versus 32.50 in controls). But in both cases, this difference did not reach statistical significance (Fig. 2A and B).

We attempted to quantify the functional impact of ZA on osteoblast using dynamic histomorphometry. However, due to the profound increase in trabecular bone and the resultant distortion of trabecular architecture, measurement of calcine double labeling was technically difficult and results not conclusive. We therefore confirmed our **in vivo** observations by in vitro assays.

**Serum concentration of osteoclast and osteoblast markers: both TRACP5b and osteocalcin were significantly decreased following ZA treatment.** To confirm our observations from histomorphometry that showed a slight reduction of both Oc.N/B.Pm and Ob.N/B.Pm, we evaluated the concentration of their serum markers after 3 weeks of treatment. Our data showed a significant decrease in TRACP5b, a marker of osteoclast activity, as well as osteocalcin levels, a marker of osteoblast activity, in the treated animals versus controls (Fig. 2C). Although age-related decrease in TRACP5b levels was noted in all animals, treated and not treated, ZA resulted in a further decrease of TRACP5b compared with controls, to 47% in 0.05 mg/Kg, 33% in 0.5 mg/Kg, and 49% in 1 mg/Kg, respectively, compared with a 64% decrease in the control group compared with week 0 (100%). The fold decrease of TRACP5b for the two doses of 0.5 and 1 mg/Kg was statistically significant (P < 0.01) compared with controls. The osteocalcin serum level at week 3 decreased as

**Results**

**ZA leads to increased BMD and BMC.** Treatment was well tolerated by the animals. No acute toxicities were observed during the 3 weeks of treatment with ZA for all concentrations tested. At the end of the 3 weeks, the animals were sacrificed and the skeletal effects of ZA were analyzed using DXA. Compared with controls, both BMD (grams/cm²) and BMC (grams) were increased in the whole body, femur, and tibia in the ZA-treated animals. In particular, BMD was increased 13%, 27%, and 24% in whole body, tibia, and femur, respectively, in the 0.05 mg/Kg group compared with control; and 18%, 31%, and 25%, respectively, in the 0.5 mg/Kg group compared with control. These increases were statistically significant when compared with controls (P < 0.01); no difference between the two tested doses of ZA was noted, with a maximum effect noted at 0.05 mg/Kg. DXA scans were not done in animals treated with 1 mg/Kg of ZA as histomorphometry did not reveal added benefits.

**ZA increased trabecular bone at the proximal tibia evaluated by static histomorphometry.** Both tibia and femur showed increased mineralization by DXA (Fig. 1). To better define the effect of ZA on bone architecture, we first did static histomorphometry on the proximal tibia to evaluate the trabecular bone.

**ZA treatment led to increased trabecular structure as shown in Fig. 1A compared with control.** This was related to increased BV/TV, Tb.N, and decreased Tb.Sp compared with controls, with less evident effect on Tb.Th (Fig. 1B and C). The difference was statistically significant (P < 0.05) for all the tested doses (0.05, 0.5, and 1 mg/Kg) compared with control, without any difference between the two higher doses of 0.5 and 1 mg/Kg.

**ZA impacts osteoclast and osteoblast number in the treated animals.** To define the effect of ZA on osteoclast and osteoblast, we counted the number of osteoclast and osteoblast per bone perimeter (N.Oc/B.Pm, N.Ob/B.Pm). The N.Oc/B.Pm (mm⁻¹) decreased in the treated animals compared with control (1.49 versus 1.34 versus 1.67 in 0.05 versus 0.5 versus 1 mg/Kg compared with 1.74 in controls). The N.Ob/B.Pm (mm⁻¹) decreased as well (30.07 versus 24.97 versus 25.16 in 0.05 versus 0.5 and 1 mg/Kg versus 32.50 in controls). But in both cases, this difference did not reach statistical significance (Fig. 2A and B).

We attempted to quantify the functional impact of ZA on osteoblast using dynamic histomorphometry. However, due to the profound increase in trabecular bone and the resultant distortion of trabecular architecture, measurement of calcine double labeling was technically difficult and results not conclusive. We therefore confirmed our **in vivo** observations by in vitro assays.

**Serum concentration of osteoclast and osteoblast markers: both TRACP5b and osteocalcin were significantly decreased following ZA treatment.** To confirm our observations from histomorphometry that showed a slight reduction of both Oc.N/B.Pm and Ob.N/B.Pm, we evaluated the concentration of their serum markers after 3 weeks of treatment. Our data showed a significant decrease in TRACP5b, a marker of osteoclast activity, as well as osteocalcin levels, a marker of osteoblast activity, in the treated animals versus controls (Fig. 2C). Although age-related decrease in TRACP5b levels was noted in all animals, treated and not treated, ZA resulted in a further decrease of TRACP5b compared with controls, to 47% in 0.05 mg/Kg, 33% in 0.5 mg/Kg, and 49% in 1 mg/Kg, respectively, compared with a 64% decrease in the control group compared with week 0 (100%). The fold decrease of TRACP5b for the two doses of 0.5 and 1 mg/Kg was statistically significant (P < 0.01) compared with controls. The osteocalcin serum level at week 3 decreased as
well, to 78% in the 0.05 mg/Kg group, to 74% in the 0.5 mg/Kg, and to 72% in the 1 mg/Kg, compared with control (100%). The decrease between the two higher doses of 0.5 and 1 mg/Kg compared with control was statistically significant ($P < 0.05$) by the unpaired $t$ test.

MicroCT analysis of distal femur confirmed the increased trabecular bone observed in the proximal tibia, with no difference between 0.5 and 1.0 mg/kg. The histomorphometric analysis of the trabecular bone of the tibia showed increased BV/TV related to increased Tb.N and reduction of Tb.Sp. without any difference between 0.5 and 1 mg/Kg. To confirm these observations, we analyzed the trabecular architecture of distal femur for these two doses of ZA, using the microCT. Compared with controls, trabecular bone at the distal femur increased with increasing doses of ZA (Fig. 3A), with a 5.68-fold and 5.04-fold increase for the 0.5 mg/kg and 1 mg/kg groups, respectively ($P < 0.01$).

This increase in trabecular bone volume was accompanied by an increase in Tb.N and Tb.Th and a reduction in the Tb.Sp, as already described for the tibia. In particular, in the 0.5 mg/Kg group, Tb.N and Tb.Th were increased 1.93- and 2.32-fold, respectively, with a reduction of Tb.Sp of 0.65-fold, compared with control. In the 1 mg/Kg group, the increase of Tb.N and

---

**Fig. 1.** Static histomorphometry at proximal tibia confirmed increased trabecular bone with ZA. Microphotograph of proximal tibia (modified Masson-Goldner’s trichrome assay; x40) of control, ZA 0.05, 0.5, and 1 mg/kg (A). B and C: BV/TV, Tb.N, Tb.Sp., and Tb.Th assessed by static histomorphometry. AV= average; ST.D.= standard deviation.
Tb.Th was 1.83- and 2.31-fold versus control, with a reduction of Tb.Sp of 0.64-fold. Connectivity density was also increased 1.64- and 1.83-fold, respectively, in the 0.5 and 1 mg/Kg groups versus control. The differences for all the parameters were statistically significant in the treated animals compared with control (P ≤ 0.01), with no differences between the two ZA-treated groups. Treatment with ZA also affected the trabecular architecture, as evidenced by the structure model index (SMI). This is a geometric parameter that describes the characteristics of the trabecular bone, quantifying plate-like versus rod-like structures (30). Our data suggest increased plate-like structures (Fig. 3B).

High doses of ZA affected the cortical bone morphology of the femur, without any difference between 0.5 and 1 mg/Kg. Both histomorphometry at proximal tibia and microCT at distal femur confirmed an architectural change due to ZA treatment in the trabecular region, without any difference between 0.5 and 1 mg/Kg. We next studied the femoral midshaft by microCT of control and the two higher doses of ZA (0.5 and 1 mg/kg) to evaluate any possible effect of ZA on cortical bone. Although less pronounced than the effects on trabecular bone, cortical bone was affected as well. In the ZA-treated groups, TA, BA, and BA/TA were 7% to 8%, 12% to 14%, and 4% to 6% higher, respectively, than controls (Fig. 4). Cortical thickness was 9% to 12% higher than control in the ZA-treated groups. Differences between the treated animals and the controls reached statistical significance (P < 0.01), without any difference between the two tested doses.

Mechanical testing showed increased bone stiffness associated with a decrease in postyield displacement following ZA treatment. After observing the effects of ZA on cortical bone morphology, we next determined whether the changes observed in bone mass and architecture affected bone biomechanical properties. Three-point bending test was applied to femurs of animals in control, 0.5, and 1 mg/Kg groups. The maximum and minimum moment of inertia (I_{max}, I_{min}) that represent resistance to bending of the bone cross-sections (31) were both increased in treated animals versus control (Fig. 5A and B). Specifically, the I_{max} increased from 12%...
to 14% and the Imin from 27% to 34% in the ZA-treated versus control. Even the polar moment of Inertia (Ipolar; Fig. 5C) that measures the resistance of the bone to torsion increased from 18% to 19% in the ZA-treated versus control. The three-point bending test revealed an increased stiffness in ZA-treated mice versus controls ($P < 0.05$; Fig. 5D) and the postyield displacement was significantly decreased both in 0.5 and 1 mg/Kg cohorts compared with controls (Fig. 5E), suggesting increased brittleness of ZA-treated bones, as expected in highly mineralized bone tissue. Ultimate moment was also increased in ZA-treated groups, but did not reach statistical significance (Fig. 5F). Estimated ultimate strength was higher in

---

Fig. 3. MicroCT of distal femur confirmed increase of trabecular bone in ZA-treated animals. MicroCT images of distal femur (A). B demonstrates an increased BV/TV related to increased Tb.N and Tb.Th and reduction of Tb.Sp. Connective density (conn. dens.) increased in the treated animals compared with controls. The structure model index was decreased, suggesting prevalent plate-like trabeculae versus rod-like trabeculae in the treated animals compared with control.
ZA-treated mice than controls ($P < 0.05$), whereas estimated elastic modulus was decreased in the 0.5 mg/kg group (Fig. 5G and H).

**Prolonged exposure to ZA in vitro induced direct cytotoxicity on osteoblasts compared with bone marrow stromal cells.** Given that our dynamic histomorphometry was technically difficult to interpret because of the profound effects of ZA on mice bones, we sought to confirm effects on osteoblasts by *in vitro* assays. We studied the possible direct effect of ZA on osteoblasts using increasing concentrations of ZA *in vitro*, on osteoblasts derived from BMSC of patients affected by multiple myeloma. BMSC similarly treated served as controls (Fig. 6A). Cell viability was tested at 7, 14, and 21 days of treatment. BMSC showed minimal cytotoxicity for concentrations of ZA lower than 10 μmol/L. In contrast, the viability of differentiated osteoblasts showed a dose and time-dependent toxicity starting from doses of 10 μmol/L at day 7, and 1 μmol/L at longer time points. These data were further confirmed using alkaline phosphatase staining (Fig. 6B) and alizarin red staining (Fig. 6C) that showed reduced osteoblast function with increasing doses of ZA. The results were similar both during osteoblast differentiation as well as in fully differentiated osteoblasts, suggesting that ZA affected viability of osteoblast.

**Discussion**

The use of bisphosphonate has changed the management of bone disease in patients with a significant reduction in skeletal-related events and improvement in bone-related morbidity (10, 11). Emerging data on the development of bisphosphonate-associated ONJ, however, raises new concerns about the duration and dose of amino bisphosphonate administration,
prompting the need to better understand their effects on bone remodeling and their targets beyond osteoclast. Although the mechanism underlying this complication has not yet been established, we hypothesized that prolonged treatment with bisphosphonate may induce an extreme suppression of bone remodeling and possibly interfere with osteoclast and osteoblast function and bone properties. We have previously characterized ONJ in 11 multiple myeloma patients clinically, radiographically, and biochemically (32). Our data showed a suppression of bone formation markers both at the gene transcript and protein level in patients treated with bisphosphonate. The gene expression profiling of patients with multiple myeloma treated with bisphosphonate, with and without ONJ, compared with healthy volunteers highlighted a downregulation of genes implicated in osteoblast signal transduction, differentiation, and activation, and was more pronounced in patients who developed ONJ (32). Given that myeloma patients’ already have profoundly altered bone remodeling, due to increased osteoclast activity and reduced osteoblast function, prolonged bisphosphonate use likely induces marked suppression of bone formation, predisposing them to development of ONJ in the presence of other cofactors. Based on our previous results, we evaluated the effects of high doses of ZA on bone modeling and remodeling, focusing especially on osteoclast lineage and bone mechanical properties.

Bisphosphonates linked to bone mineral matrix are released in the phase of bone resorption (33, 34). The effects of nitrogen-containing bisphosphonate on osteoclast are well established and rely on a dual mechanism. The nitrogen containing bisphosphonate affect the mevalonate pathway (35) inhibiting the enzyme farnesyl diphosphate synthase, with consequent inhibition of the prenylation of proteins involved in cell survival (35, 36), proliferation, and cytoskeleton organization (37). They also induce the intracellular production of Apppi [triphosphoric acid 1-adenosin-5-yI ester 3-(3-methylbut-3-enyl) ester], an ATP analogue (38) that induces cell apoptosis. However, the effects of bisphosphonate on osteoblast are not completely elucidated, and data from literature are controversial (39–42). Extraplating data from the management of cancer patients who receive the most intensive bisphosphonate therapy, we treated mice with ZA, the most potent bisphosphonate widely used in cancer-related bone disease. The doses used correspond to duration of treatment of 3 months, 2.5, and 4.5 years in cancer patients. Our in vivo studies suggest an increase of BMD and BMC in treated animals compared with controls, without any further benefit for doses higher than 0.05 mg/Kg. Increased BMD is a known consequence of bisphosphonate treatment, and it seems to be related to the osteoclast inhibition that induces prolongation of the life span of basic structural units and consequent increased secondary mineralization (43). Studying the effect of ZA in more detail, we saw that high doses of ZA not only affected mineralization, but also the bone architecture. First, we evaluated the effect of escalating doses of ZA on the trabecular bone of the proximal tibia, using static histomorphometry. Our data showed increased trabecular bone with similar effects noted at the two higher doses tested, suggesting a ceiling...
effect. ZA also induced a decrease in both osteoclast and osteoblast number per bone perimeter, although this decrease was not statistically significant. Importantly, both TRAP5b and osteocalcin were significantly decreased in the treated animals compared with controls, suggesting a functional impairment of both osteoclast and osteoblast.

To clarify a possible direct effect of ZA on osteoblast lineage, we tested increasing concentrations of ZA in vitro on osteoblast derived from BMSC of multiple myeloma patients. Our data showed that prolonged exposure of differentiated osteoblast in vitro to ZA resulted in a cytotoxic effect compared with undifferentiated BMSC, confirming our in vivo observation, and suggesting a possible direct toxic effect of ZA on osteoblast.

Changes in tibial trabecular architecture were confirmed by microCT analysis of the femur. Again, no difference between the two tested doses was observed. Furthermore, microCT at the midshaft of the femur showed increased cortical thickness in the treated animals compared with control, without any difference between the two higher doses.

Because of the changes induced by ZA on BMD and on cortical morphology, we used mechanical testing to evaluate if these changes translated into alterations of bone mechanical properties. Our data confirmed increased stiffness associated with increased brittleness of the bones.

Although the direct translation of animal model systems to human studies are not necessarily reproducible, our preclinical studies suggest effects on the osteoblast compartment that warrant studies in prospective human clinical trials. These data along with observations of patients treated with bisphosphonate for a prolonged period experiencing low-energy or spontaneous bone fractures and delayed healing likely related to an extreme suppression of bone turnover serve as a cautionary to the use of prolonged and high doses of bisphosphonate in the treatment of bone disease. It is possible that the increased bone fragility is related to accumulation of microdamage, as postulated by some authors (47, 48), although not confirmed (49). It is also possible that this increased fragility is a result of a supraphysiologic increase in the degree of mineralization of the bone matrix.

In conclusion, despite the limitations of our study including the use of young mice, and relatively short treatment duration, we have shown that high doses of ZA interfere with both osteoblast and osteoclast lineages, resulting in a possible inhibition of both cell types. Most importantly, high doses of ZA have effects on trabecular and cortical bone morphology and function. Exposure to ZA results in increased bone stiffness associated with increased brittleness resulting in altered biomechanical properties. These observations will prompt the use of lower doses or shorter duration of bisphosphonate, and/or their combination with novel anabolic agents to counter their purely catabolic effects with the goal of restoring bone homeostasis in the treatment of cancer bone disease in the future.

Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest

N. Raje and K. Anderson are on the advisory board of Celgene, Novartis, and Millennium.

Acknowledgments

We thank Dr. Ernestina Schipani, Clare Thomas, and Dilani Rosa of the Endocrine Unit of Massachusetts General Hospital for their technical support and invaluable suggestions.

References


High-Dose Zoledronic Acid Impacts Bone Remodeling with Effects on Osteoblastic Lineage and Bone Mechanical Properties

Samantha Pozzi, Sonia Vallet, Siddhartha Mukherjee, et al.

Clin Cancer Res  Published OnlineFirst September 8, 2009.

Updated version  Access the most recent version of this article at: doi:10.1158/1078-0432.CCR-09-0426