Full Length Research Paper

Pure curcumin inhibits exogenous Wilms’ tumor (WT1) (+/+ ) isoform protein via degradation pathway and protein kinase C in transfected U937 cells

Suwanna Semsri1, Songyot Anuchapreeda1*, Nutjeera Intasai1, Tanyarat Jomgeow1, Singkome Tima1, Colleen Sweeney2 and Pornngarm Limtrakul3

1Faculty of Associated Medical Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand. 2UC Davis Cancer Center, 4645 2nd Avenue, Sacramento, CA, USA. 3Faculty of Medicine, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Accepted 13 October, 2011

Wilms’ tumor (WT1) gene overexpresses in leukemic cells which is alternatively spliced at two sites, yielding four isoforms: WT1 (+/+), (+/-), (-/+), and (-/-). Curcumin is one of major active components of the spice turmeric, widely known as anticancer. This study investigated the effects and inhibitory mechanism of pure curcumin on WT1 isoform-transfected U937 cells. WT1 transfected U937 cells were initially treated for 24 h, with 10 µM pure curcumin. Pure curcumin exhibited a strong inhibitory effect on WT1 (+/+ ) mRNA level detected by real time PCR. Treatment of WT1 transfected U937 cells with non-cytotoxic doses (10, 15, and 17 µM) of pure curcumin decreased WT1 protein levels in a dose-dependent manner. Pure curcumin at the concentration of 15 µM significantly decreased the protein levels of the WT (+/+ ) isoform in a time-dependent manner. It also decreased exogenous WT1 (+/+ ) protein half-life. WT1 protein expression was inhibited by protein kinase C inhibitor (GF109203x) suggesting that pure curcumin decreased exogenous WT1 (+/+ ) expression in transfected U937 cells via protein kinase C during post-translational processing.

Key words: Pure curcumin, Wilms’ tumor (WT1), isoform, protein kinase C, transfected U937 cell line.

INTRODUCTION

Turmeric (Curcuma longa Linn) is commonly used as a spice in curries and other South Asian and Middle Eastern cuisine, for dyeing, and to impart color to mustard condiments. It is also a highly popular medicinal herb, due to its biological properties. Its active ingredient is curcuminoids. Curcuminoids, especially pure curcumin, have strong anti-cancer and anti-tumor progression properties (Azuine and Bhide, 1992; Huang et al., 1992; Nagabhushan and Bhide, 1992; Naama et al., 2010; Pandey et al., 2010).

The WT1 gene encodes a 48 to 57 kDa nuclear protein that has four zinc fingers and acts as a transcriptional activator or repressor (Rauscher et al., 1990; Wang et al., 1993; Wang, 2000). The four different isoforms of WT1 have been reported in WT1-expressing cells (Haber et al., 1991). Alternative splice I inserts 17 amino acids (+17AA) in exon 5, between the amino terminus and the zinc finger domain, and alternative splice II inserts 3 amino acids (+KTS) in exon 9 which is located between zinc-Fingers 3 and 4, and yields for four isoforms: WT1 [17AA(+)+KTS(+)] or WT1 (+/+), WT1 [(17AA(+)+KTS(-)) or WT (+/-), WT1 [(17AA(-)+KTS(+)) or WT1 (-/+), and WT1 [(17AA(-)+KTS(-)] or WT1 (-/-). All of the four isoforms are expressed in primary human solid cancers (Oji et al., 2002) and human primary leukemia (Miwa et al., 1992). Among the four WT1 isoforms, the WT1 17AA(+)+KTS(+) isoform is dominantly expressed in all of the above mentioned cancers (Haber et al., 1991; Gu et al., 2010). This suggests that the constitutive expression of the WT1 17AA(+)+KTS(+) isoform could rescue the growth inhibitory effect of WT1 antisense oligomers in solid tumors (Oji et al., 1999) indicating the contribution of the WT1 17AA(+)+KTS(+) isoform to the growth of cancer cells (Hubinger et al., 2001). The 17AA(-)+KTS(-)WT1...
isoform induced G1 arrest in osteosarcoma cell lines (Englert et al., 1997) and inhibited G1/S progression and accelerated differentiation in 32D c3 murine myeloid progenitor cells in response to G-CSF (Loeb et al., 2003), suggesting that in some cases a tumor-suppression role. As for the WT1 17AA(-)KTS(+), its functions remains unclear (Ito et al., 2006). These results indicate that each of the WT1 isoforms has a separate function and that these play an important role in leukemogenesis and tumorigenesis. The WT1 gene is involved in the promotion of the cell cycle, as supported by findings that suppression of the WT1 expression induced a G2/M or G1 block in human leukemia K562 cells (Yamagami et al., 1998; Tuna et al., 2005).

Protein kinase C (PKC) is a family of serine/threonine protein and plays important roles in several diseases such as cancer, diabetes, stroke (Koivunen et al., 2006; Griner and Kazanietz, 2007). Therefore, PKC has been subject to intensive research and drug development (Hofmann, 2004) particularly in cancer research.

Previous studies have demonstrated that pure curcumin inhibits both WT1 gene and protein expression (Anuchapreeda et al., 2006a, 2006b, 2008). However, the inhibitory effect of pure curcumin on the various WT1 isoforms has not been reported. Moreover, the inhibitory mechanism of pure curcumin on WT1 protein expression in transfected U937 cells is still unclear. Thus, the aims of this study were to investigate the effect and inhibitory mechanism of pure curcumin on WT1 isoforms in WT1 transfected U937 cells.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Cell culture

Human monoblastic U937 and K562 cell lines were cultured in RPMI 1640 (Invitrogen, USA), supplemented with 10% heat-inactivated fetal bovine serum (FBS) (Invitrogen, USA) and incubated in a 5% humidified CO2 atmosphere at 37°C.

Vector construction

The eukaryotic expression vector pcDNA 3.1 carrying the cDNA for WT1 [17AA(+)]KTS (+)] or WT1 [17AA(-)]KTS(+) or WT (+/+) WT1 [17AA(-)]KTS (+]) or WT1 [17AA(+)KTS (+)] or WT1 [17AA(-)KTS (-)] or WT1 [17AA(-)KTS (-)] and a mock control cell (empty vector) were kindly provided by Dr. Haruo Sugiyama and Dr. Yusuke Oji, Osaka University Graduate School of medicine, Osaka, Japan.

Transfection procedure

Before transfection, plasmid vectors were linearized by a restriction enzyme PvuI. U937 cells (5 x 10⁶ cells/ml) and seeded in 24-well plates overnight. The next day, 5 ng of plasmid were added to 2 ml of cell suspension and introduced into U937 or K562 cells through lipofectin (Quiagen, USA) or lipofectamine LTX Plus. Afterward, the cells were incubated at 37°C, 5% CO2, for 24 h. Next, the cells were washed with PBS and resuspended in fresh medium before further incubation at 37°C, 5% CO2, for 24 h. The cells were cultured in 96-well plate at a density of 1 x 10⁴ cells/well (100 µl). After 2 weeks, individual clones that grew in the presence of 500 µg/ml G418 (Invitrogen, USA) were expanded for WT1, GFP, ErbB2 (678), EbrB3, and myc tagged Lrig1 expression.

Extraction and isolation of pure curcumin

Pure curcumin was purified from turmeric powder using column chromatography. Pure curcumin extraction and isolation were performed as previously described (Limtrakul et al., 2004).

Cytotoxicity of pure curcumin extract on WT1 isoform-transfected U937 clone by 3(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide (MTT) assay

The cytotoxicity of the pure curcumin extract, on the WT1 isoform-expressing U937 clones, was detected by the MTT assay as previously described (Anuchapreeda et al., 2006b). Cell viability was assessed using the MTT [3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide] assay (Sigma-Aldrich, USA). The reaction is catalyzed by mitochondrial succinate dehydrogenase and requires NADH, which must be supplied by the living cells.

RNA extraction, reverse transcriptase PCR (RT-PCR) and real time PCR

WT1 isoform-transfected U937 clones were harvested and RNA was isolated using a High pure RNA isolation kit Roche, Germany) with the manufacturer’s instructions. RNA was isolated and reagent, and RNA extraction, reverse transcriptase PCR (RT-PCR) and real time PCR were performed as previously described (Anuchapreeda et al., 2006b). The mRNA expression levels of the WT1, GFP, ErbB2 (678), and myc tagged Lrig1 were analyzed using the MTT assay as previously described (Limtrakul et al., 2004).

Real-time PCR was carried out using TaqMan probe-based chemistry (Operon Biotechnologies GmbH, Germany). The primers and probe for WT1 were 5′-GACCTGGAATCAGATGAACTTAG-3′ (forward), 5′-CACACGCACACATCTGAAT-3′ (reverse), and 5′-FAMACACCGTGCGTGTATTCTGTATTGG[TAMRA-6-FAM]-3′ (probe). The beta-actin primers were 5′-AGCCTTCTCGGTGGTGAAGAC-3′ (forward), 5′-AGGTTTCTCATGGAGAAGAC-3′ (reverse), and 5′-FAM[TAMRA]-6-FAM-3′ (probe). The amplification reactions were all performed in triplicate in a Chromo4 Real-Time PCR System with 50 cycles, which consisted of activated Taq DNA polymerase at 95°C for 10 min, denaturation at 95°C for 30 s, and annealing at 63°C for 1 min. Data were collected and analyzed using the Opticon Monitor 3 program (BioRad, USA). The mRNA expression levels of the WT1 gene were presented as a ratio to that of beta-actin, and the relative expression levels, based on the ΔΔCt method (Ginzinger, 2002) were calculated. Normalization: ΔCt = Ct (sample) - Ct (beta-actin); ∆∆Ct = ∆Ct (Sample 1) - ∆Ct (Sample 2).
Western blot analysis

Cells were washed twice with cold PBS and then washed once with hypotonic buffer (10 mM 2-hydroxy piperazine ethanesulfonic acid [HEPES]-KOH, pH 7.9, 10 mM KCl, 1.5 mM MgCl₂, 0.5 mM dithiothreitol). Cells were lysed, on ice, with hypotonic buffer containing 0.1% Nonidet P40, for 30 min. Then crude nuclei and cytosolic fractions were separated by centrifugation at 15,000 x g for 10 min. The crude nuclear pellets were successively incubated in laemmli buffer (60 mM Tris-HCl, pH 6.8, 10% glycerol, 2% SDS, 0.5 mM dithiothreitol, 0.5 mM phenylmethanesulphonylfluoride) for 15 min on ice. The supernatant nuclear proteins were collected by centrifugation at 15,000 x g for 15 min. The nuclear protein extracts (50 µg/lane) were heated in boiling water for 5 min. Samples were loaded onto 12% sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS)-polyacrylamide gels for electrophoresis. WT1 protein detection was performed using primary rabbit polyclonal anti-WT1 (C-19) and GAPDH (Santa Cruz, USA). HRP conjugated goat anti-rabbit IgG (Promega, USA) was used as a secondary antibody for WT1 and GAPDH protein detection. Proteins were visualized using the SuperSignal® protein detection kit (Thermo Scientific, USA).

Immunoprecipitation

Nuclear extracts were removed by NE-PER® Nuclear and Cytoplasmic extraction reagent (Thermo Scientific, USA). Nuclear protein extracts (70 µg) were incubated with 10 µg of the agarose conjugated with rabbit polyclonal WT1-specific antibodies (Santa Cruz, USA) for 5 h at 4°C. The immunoprecipitated proteins were separated by 12% SDS-PAGE. The proteins on the membrane were detected with rabbit polyclonal anti-WT1 (C-19).

Assay for protein half life

Cells were incubated with cycloheximide (CHX: 50 µg/ml) in the presence or absence of 15 µM pure curcumin for 3, 6, 12 and 24 h. After that, the cells were lysed with lysis buffer (50 mM Tris, 0.1% SDS, 1% Triton X-100, 150 mM NaCl, 0.5 mM EDTA) and the crude protein lysates were resolved by SDS-PAGE and subjected to Western blot analysis. GAPDH was used as an internal protein loading control.

Proteasome inhibitor assay

Cells were incubated with or without 5 µM MG132, in the presence or absence of 15 µM pure curcumin for 3 h. After that, the cells were lysed in lysis buffer (50 mM Tris, 0.1% SDS, 1% Triton X-100, 150 mM NaCl, 0.5 mM EDTA) and the crude protein lysates were resolved by SDS-PAGE and subjected to Western blot analysis. GAPDH was used as an internal protein loading control.

PKC inhibitor assay

Cells were incubated with 2.5 µM GF109203x (PKCα,δ, β1, and ε inhibitors) for 1, 3, 5, 7 and 24 h. After that, the cells were lysed in lysis buffer and the crude protein lysates were evaluated using Western blot analysis. GAPDH was used as an internal protein loading control.

Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed with SPSS software (version 10.0). All experiments were conducted in duplicate and repeated at least three times. The data were expressed as the mean ± standard error of sample mean (S.E.M.). Statistical differences between the means were tested by one-way ANOVA. Probability values P<0.05 were considered significant.

RESULTS

Establishment and characterization of U937 clones constitutively expressing WT1

To investigate the role of WT1 isoforms on cell proliferation in leukemic cells, stable clones of WT1-expressing U937 cells were established. The WT1 (+17AA/KTS or +/+), WT1 (+17AA/KTS or +/-), WT1 (-17AA/KTS or -/-), and WT1 (-17AA/KTS or -/-) constructs were transfected into U937 cells by lipofection. The overexpression of WT1 mRNA in different clones was detected using RT-PCR and real time PCR. Transfected U937 cells displayed high levels of WT1 isoform mRNA. WT1 (+/+)+ clones were designated as WT1 (+/+)+/1C7, WT1 (+/+)+/1G3, WT1 (+/+)+/2E10, and WT1 (+/+)+/1E3, whereas WT1 (+/-)+ clones were WT1 (+/-)+/1C8, and WT1 (+/-)+/1G9. WT1 (-/+)+ clones were WT1 (-/+)+/1D3 and WT1 (-/+)+/1D6. The WT1 (-/-)+ clone was WT1 (-/-)+/1E9. Mock control cells were transfected with pcDNA 3.1 empty vectors. The control clones showed low levels of endogenous WT1 mRNA (Figure 1A and 1B). Moreover, when the expression of the four WT1 isoforms was found in WT1-tranfected U937, control cells (wild type U937), and mock control using immunoprecipitation and Western blot analysis, all four isoforms were clearly observed at higher levels in the transfected cells, than in those of the cell and mock controls (Figure 1C).

The effect of pure curcumin on WT1 isoform and WT1 overexpression reverses the effect of pure curcumin activity

Pure curcumin exhibited a cytotoxic effect on the U937 clones with inhibitory concentrations at 50% (IC₅₀ value) of approximately 21 ± 1.0 µM (WT1 (+/+)+/1C7), 19 ± 0.2 µM (WT1 (+/+)+/1G9), 24 ± 0.6 µM (WT1 (+/-)+/1D6), and 23 ± 0.4 µM (WT1(-/-)+/1E9), respectively by MTT assay. The IC₅₀ values of U937 control cells and mock control cells were 15 ± 1.0 and 17 ± 2.2 µM, respectively. The IC₂₀ values of pure curcumin were used to investigate the inhibitory effect and mechanism of pure curcumin on the WT1 gene expression. Indeed, WT1 mRNA undergoes alternative splicing at two sites resulting in four mRNA species and protein products; WT1 +/+ , WT1 +/−, WT1 −/+ , and WT1 −− (Haber et al., 1991; Fraizer et al., 1994). WT1 reportedly plays an important role in leukemic cell proliferation in leukemogenesis. Recently, pure curcumin was shown to inhibit cell growth and repress WT1 expression (Anuchapreeda et al., 2008).
riment, it was determined whether pure curcumin could reverse the anti-proliferative effects by overexpressing exogenous WT1 in stably transfected U937 cells. Cells were then treated with 15 µM pure curcumin and the anti-proliferative effect was determined using the MTT assay. The overexpression of all four WT1 isoforms in stably transfected U937 cells showed their resistance to the anti-proliferative effects of pure curcumin was greater in comparison to the transfected vector control (Figure 2). Data demonstrates both of the transcriptional redundancy of WT1 isoforms and their regulatory function in cell proliferation. These findings provide key insights into the growth inhibitory mechanisms of pure curcumin.

The effect of pure curcumin on mRNA levels in four WT1 isoform-transfected cells

Previous studies have reported that pure curcumin was able to inhibit the endogenous WT1 gene in K562, U937, HL60, and Molt4 cells and to inhibit protein expression in K562 and Molt4 cells (Anuchapreeda et al., 2008). Yet to
date, the effect of pure curcumin on WT1 isoform expression has not been reported. Thus, the WT1 isoform-transfected cells, control cells, and mock control cells were treated with non-cytotoxic doses (IC$_{20}$ value) of the pure curcumin, for 24 h. The concentrations, at IC$_{20}$ value, of WT1 (+/+), (+/-), (-/+), (-/-), cell control, and pcDNA3.1 control vector were 15, 11, 13, 13, 9, and 9 µM, respectively. The expression of the exogenous WT1 (+/+) and WT1 (+/-) isoforms were significantly decreased by pure curcumin when compared to total endogenous WT1 mRNA levels in the cell control and pcDNA3.1 control vectors. However, pure curcumin did not inhibit WT1 expression in WT1 (-/+), and WT1 (-/-) isoform-transfected cells (Figure 3). Each treatment was compared to the vehicle control (0.02% DMSO alone without the pure curcumin in the culture medium).

The effect of pure curcumin on exogenous WT1 protein in WT1 (+/+) isoform-transfected U937 cells

To examine whether pure curcumin could inhibit WT1 (+/+) protein expression, WT1 protein levels were determined using the Western blot analysis. WT1 (+/+) isoform-transfected cells were treated with pure curcumin (10, 15, and 17 µM) for 24 h. The levels of WT1 (+/+) protein after pure curcumin treatment were 37 ± 3.7, 13 ± 1.2, and 11 ± 1.5%, respectively. Thus the exogenous WT1 (+/+) protein levels were significantly decreased by 63, 87 and 89%, respectively (P<0.05), when compared to vehicle control (Figure 4A and 4B). In addition, the levels of the exogenous WT1 (+/+) protein after 15 µM pure curcumin treatment for 3, 6, 12, and 24 h were 52 ± 6.7, 31 ± 2.7, 19 ± 4, and 12 ± 1.8%, respectively. Thus the WT1 (+/+) protein levels were significantly decreased
Figure 3. The relative level of WT1 mRNA in pure curcumin treated WT1 isoform-transfected U937 cells. Data show the mean ± S.E.M. of three independent experiments. Asterisks (*) denote values that were significantly different from the vehicle control (P<0.05).

Figure 4. Effect of pure curcumin on WT1 protein levels in WT1 (+/) transfected U937 cells. (A) The WT1 protein levels were detected using the Western blot analysis. (B) The percentage of WT1 protein levels were determined by scanning densitometry and normalized to GAPDH. (C) WT1 proteins were detected by the Western blot analysis. (D) The percentages of WT1 protein were determined by scanning densitometry and normalized to GAPDH. Data show the mean ± S.E.M. of three independent experiments. Asterisks (*) denote values that were significantly different from the vehicle control (P<0.05).
The effect of pure curcumin on exogenous WT1 is specific

To determine whether the effect of pure curcumin on exogenous WT1 expression was specific, we examined the impact of pure curcumin on the expression of four other exogenous proteins, driven by the pCMV promoter, in the same pcDNA3.1 vector as WT1. This experiment used GFP, p95 ErbB2, ErbB3, and myc-tagged Lrig1 genes. K562 cells were transfected as indicated in the materials and methods.

The cells were either treated with or without 15 µM of pure curcumin. While 15 µM pure curcumin decreased exogenous WT1 expression by 87% (Figure 3), the protein levels of GFP, p95 ErbB2, ErbB3, and myc-tagged Lrig1 were not decreased when compared to the vehicle control in transfected K562 cells (Figure 5). This indicates that pure curcumin specifically decreases WT1 expression. Moreover, it is not related to the pCMV promoter activity inhibition of the exogenous WT1 expression. The K562 cells were used for WT1 isoform transfections in this study in order to observe the effect of pure curcumin on the endogenous and exogenous WT1 gene expression. Normally, the K562 cell itself constitutively overexpresses the endogenous WT1 protein. It could then be determined if the activity of pure curcumin effects the WT1 protein expression, but not pCMV promoter.

The effect of pure curcumin on exogenous WT1 protein half life in WT1 (+/+) isoform-transfected U937 cells

To investigate whether the decrease in the WT1 (+/+) protein isoform involved a degradation mechanism, WT1 (+/+) isoform-transfected U937 cells were treated with cycloheximide, to inhibit new protein synthesis, either with or without 15 µM of pure curcumin. WT1 protein expression was then followed over time to measure its half life. Exogenous WT1 (+/+) protein stability after pure curcumin treatment was significantly decreased when compared to control conditions. The half life of WT1 protein in the control treatment was 15 h, whereas in pure curcumin treatment was only 3.6 h. To examine whether pure curcumin promotes the proteasomal degradation of WT1, we determined if the MG132 proteasome inhibitor could eliminate the impact of pure curcumin on WT1. Indeed, in the presence of MG132, the suppressive effect of pure curcumin on WT1 expression was largely prevented (Figure 6). These results demonstrate that pure curcumin decreases WT1 expression, at least in part through the promotion of proteasomal degradation. However, it should also be noted that a decrease in WT1 (+/+) mRNA was observed following treatment with pure curcumin (Figure 3), so its effects on WT1 expression are
The effect of PKC inhibitor on exogenous WT1 (+/+) protein expression in transfected U937 cells

According to the results presented in this paper, pure curcumin clearly and specifically decreases the exogenous WT1 (+/) protein in transfected U937 cells in a process that is dependent upon the proteasome. Interestingly, phosphorylation of WT1 has been previously reported to show that pure curcumin can decrease WT1 phosphorylation, by PKC (Jensen, 2006). Thus, this experiment aimed to investigate the effect of a PKC inhibitor (GF109203x) on the exogenous WT1 (+/+) protein expression in transfected U937 cells. Cells were incubated with 2.5 μM GF109203x for different lengths of time (1, 3, 5, 7, and 24 h). The levels of exogenous WT1 (+/+) protein were significantly decreased after 2.5 μM GF-109203 treatment for 3 and 5 h, when compared to the individual vehicle control (P<0.05). Moreover, an incubation time of 5 h treatment significantly decreased the exogenous WT1 (+/+) protein compared to those at 7 and 24 h (Figure 7).

DISCUSSION

Overexpression of Wilms' tumor 1 (WT1) gene is important in leukemogenesis because both the RNA and the protein levels of WT1 increase 1,000-10,000 fold in leukemic cells (Inoue et al., 1994; Menssen et al., 1995). This suggests it may play an important role in oncogenesis. Therefore, the over expression of WT1 gene and WT1 protein may serve as a possible biological marker for monitoring leukemia. Chemical compounds extracted from the spices and/or medicinal plants, such as turmeric, ginger, garlic, chilli, pepper, and black pepper are becoming popular as chemotherapeutic drugs in anticancer drug research. In fact pure curcumin extracted from turmeric, a spice grown in tropical regions of Asia, has been shown to decrease WT1 mRNA and WT1 protein levels in human leukemic cell lines (Anuchapreeda et al., 2008). There are four WT1 isoforms (WT1 (+/+), WT1 (+/-), WT1 (-/+), WT1 (-/-).
However, the specific WT1 isoform that is inhibited by pure curcumin in leukemic cells is still unknown. This study aimed to address this question by identifying the WT1 isoform that is suppressed by pure curcumin. Stably transfected U937 cells expressing each of the WT1 isoforms were used as the experimental model because U937 cells express modest WT1 mRNA and WT1 protein levels (Svedberg et al., 1998). In this study, pure curcumin was cytotoxic toward wild type, vector control, and WT1 isoform transfected U937 cells. When non-cytotoxic doses of pure curcumin (IC$_{20}$) were used, WT1 (+/+) isoform-transfected cells clearly showed decreased WT1 mRNA and WT1 protein levels. This demonstrates that the WT1 (+/+) isoform is specifically suppressed by pure curcumin compared to other WT1 isoforms.

Curcumin also has numerous other biological properties, such as antioxidant effects and anti-inflammatory effects as well as anti-mutagen and anti-cancer properties. Additionally, curcumin inhibits oncogene expression and activation of PKC upon induction by TPA (Liu et al., 1993). The tumor promoter (example, TPA) activates PKC by reacting with the zinc-thiolates present within the regulatory domain of PKC. In contrast, the oxidized forms of some cancer preventive agents, such as polyphenolics (curcumin, ellagic acid, and 4-hydroxytamoxifen) and seleno compounds, can inactivate PKC by oxidizing the vicinal thiols present within the catalytic domain. This brings an efficient counteractive mechanism to block the signal transduction, induced by the tumor promoter, at the first step (Gopalakrishna and Jaken, 2000). The inhibitory effect of curcumin affects a wide variety of genes that require transcription factors, such as Activation-Protein 1 (AP1) and Nuclear Factor Kappa B (NFkB) (Singh and Aggarwal, 1995; Qi et al., 2009), which are regulated by PKC. WT1 protein has also been reported to be involved in early hematopoiesis and cell proliferation. WT1 protein is a transcription factor regulated by activated PKC that phosphorylates the C-terminal domain of WT1 regulating the proliferation in leukemic cells (Ye et al., 1996).

This study is the first to demonstrate the inhibitory properties of pure curcumin on the expression of the WT1 (+/+) isoform, in transfected U937 cells. However, pure curcumin did not affect the expression of four different reporter proteins (GFP, p95 EbrB2, ErbB3, and myc-tagged Lrig1) under the same pCMV promoter, highlighting the specificity of the action of pure curcumin on WT1. Therefore, the decreased amount of WT1 expression in WT1 (+/+) transfected U937 cells was not due to the
effect of pure curcumin on the pCMV promoter activity. Moreover, we found that it was related to the decreased stability of the WT1 protein in response to the treatment of pure curcumin. Inhibition of PKC-mediated phosphorylation of WT1 using the PKC inhibitor (GF109203x) led to the suppression of the WT1 (+/+ ) protein expression, suggesting that PKC signaling in the WT1 (+/+ ) transfected U937 cells is important for the stability of the WT1 protein. We propose that pure curcumin suppresses WT1 protein levels through the inhibition of PKC at post-translational level, thereby destabilizing the protein.

Conclusion

This study is the first to discover that pure curcumin could down-regulate exogenous WT1 (+/+ ) protein in transfected U937 cells. Previous studies reported that curcumin inhibited the phosphorylation capacity of PKC (Lin, 2004; Aggarwal et al., 2007; Anand et al., 2008). We suggested that pure curcumin suppressed the exogenous WT1 (+/+ ) protein level by inhibiting the activation of PKC, thereby destabilizing WT1 (+/+ ). This property of pure curcumin could be used as a possible anti-leukemic agent in human leukemic cancer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by Thailand Research Fund (TRF), the Royal Golden Jubilee (RGJ) PhD Program, the Thailand Government Budget, and National Research Council of Thailand (NRC). The authors would like to thank Dr. Haruo Sugiyama and Dr. Yusuke Oji for providing the vectors encoding the four WT1 isoforms. We gratefully acknowledge Dr. Dale E. Taneyhill and Dr. Lakmal Kotelawala for critically reading the manuscript.

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