May 8th, 3:30 PM - 5:00 PM

Molecular Mechanisms of FSH Muscular Dystrophy Pathogenesis

Peter L. Jones
University of Massachusetts Medical School Worcester, Peter.Jones@umassmed.edu

Takako I. Jones
University of Massachusetts Medical School, takako.jones@umassmed.edu

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Molecular mechanisms of FSH muscular dystrophy pathogenesis

Peter L. Jones, Ph.D. and Takako I. Jones, Ph.D.
Principal Investigators

Departments of Cell and Developmental Biology & Neurology
Facioscapulohumeral Muscular Dystrophy (FSHD)

Most prevalent muscular dystrophy afflicting children and adults (~1:7,000-15,000)

Autosomal dominant

Facio: refers to face
Scapulo: refers to shoulders
Humeral: refers to humerus (upper arm bone)

Winging on both sides in a patient with FSHD due to weakness of all the scapula stabilizing muscles

Great genetic and clinical heterogeneity
Each patient may differ in severity
Most patients exhibit symptoms by age 20
>50% of patients retain ability to walk

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The FSHD1 genetic lesion is a deletion in a tandem repeat array at 4q35

Human chromosome 4q35, Normal D4Z4 n=11-150

Human chromosome 4q35, D4Z4 contraction 1<N<11

FSHD
A pathogenic FSHD1 deletion is complex

- The deletion itself is not pathogenic
- The 4qA sub-telomere is permissive, not pathogenic
- The 4qB sub-telomere is not permissive
- Requires at least 1 D4Z4 repeat unit for FSHD
- Chromosome 10 arrays (devoid of chr. 4 D4Z4) are not linked to FSHD
A putatively pathogenic FSHD1 deletion shows very low penetrance

Normal

Unaffected

FSHD1A

The deletion itself is not pathogenic
The 4qA sub-telomere is permissive, not pathogenic
FSHD2 is independent of the contraction

- The 4qA sub-telomere is required for FSHD1 and 2
- At least 1 D4Z4 is required for FSHD1 and 2
FSHD is linked to D4Z4, the A type subtelomere and the epigenetic status of the 4q35 D4Z4 repeat.

- Normal: The status of the 4q35 D4Z4 repeat is normal.
- FSHD1: The status of the 4q35 D4Z4 repeat is abnormal, with hypermethylated CpGs.
- FSHD2: The status of the 4q35 D4Z4 repeat is abnormal, with hypomethylated CpGs.

Legend:
- ● = Hypermethylated CpGs
- ○ = Hypomethylated CpGs

● = more heterochromatic
○ = more euchromatic
The 3 types of FSHD are linked by epigenetic dysregulation

FSHD1: Dominant deletions at 4q35 D4Z4 array
   Apparently low penetrance
   DNA Hypomethylation of shortened 4q35

FSHD2: SMCHD1 inactivating mutations
   --ATPase chromatin remodeling protein
   --Modifier of metastable epialleles
   DNA Hypomethylation of 4q35 and 10q26 arrays

IFSHD: Infantile form of FSHD1 or FSHD2, much more severe
   DNA Hypomethylation of FSHD1 or 2
FSHD is linked to the A type subtelomere and the epigenetic status of the 4q35 D4Z4 repeat.

- **Normal**: Hypermethylated CpGs are more heterochromatic, Hypomethylated CpGs are more euchromatic.
- **FSHD1**: Hypermethylated CpGs increase, Hypomethylated CpGs decrease.
- **FSHD2**: Hypermethylated CpGs increase significantly, Hypomethylated CpGs show a more extreme decrease, leading to a greater heterochromatic state.

Symbols:
- • = Hypermethylated CpGs
- ☀ = Hypomethylated CpGs

Notes:
- More heterochromatic means less active transcriptionally.
- More euchromatic means more active transcriptionally.
FSHD results from an epigenetic-mediated dysregulation of gene repression

- DNA methylation
- Histone modifications
- Chromatin structure
- Long non-coding RNAs
- Nuclear organization
- High variability within the clinical population
  - Severity
  - Age of onset
  - Gene expression
Which gene(s) is responsible for FSHD pathology?

The FSHD causal gene:
1. Should be misexpressed in FSHD (Up or down)
   → mRNA, protein, cell type, developmental timing
   → adversely affect skeletal muscle and potentially vasculature

2. Explain the 4qA linkage and under epigenetic repression

Both FRG1 and DUX4 produce phenotypes consistent with FSHD when overexpressed in animal models
Wellstone family cohorts of muscle biopsies and myogenic cell cultures

Subjects screened for FSHD clinically and genetically

Genotyping (Iowa Wellstone)

Cell Culture (UMMS)

Biopsies (KKI-JHU)

Deltoid – Expect less pathology

Biceps – Expect more pathology

mRNA & protein analysis (CHB, UMMS)

Microsatellite analysis (CHB)

FSHD1 affected and genetically unaffected 1st degree relatives
Myogenic cultures from FSHD and unaffected first-degree relatives have similar patterns of gene expression during proliferation and myogenic differentiation.

Homma et al. (2012) EJHG
FSHD permissive 4qA subtelomeres encode a third exon containing a polyadenylation site that stabilizes the DUX4 mRNA.

- Unstable mRNA
- DUX4 protein not made
- Nontoxic

**“A Unifying Model for FSHD” based on DUX4**

Chr 4qB or Chr 10qA or 10qB → Normal

- Stable poly A mRNA
- DUX4 protein produced
- DUX4 expression is exclusive to FSHD

Chr 4qA → FSHD

PAS = polyadenylation site
* = translation stop
NP = non-permissive
P = permissive

Lemmers et al. (2010) *Science* 329:1650
“A Unifying Model for FSHD” based on DUX4

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- DUX4 protein produced
- DUX4 expression is exclusive to FSHD

PAS = polyadenylation site
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Lemmers et al. (2010) Science 329:1650
**DUX4-FL expression leads to massive loss of developing myogenic cells**

*Xenopus embryos*

1 pg DUX4-fl mRNA

**Immunostaining for developing skeletal muscle**

Wuebbles et al. (2010) *IJCEP*
DUX4-fl mRNA is expressed in FSHD1-derived myogenic cells

DUX4-fl mRNA expression is not exclusive to FSHD1-derived myogenic cells

DUX4-fl mRNA expression is expressed in both FSHD1-derived and unaffected muscle biopsies
Differentiated myogenic cells from genetically FSHD1 and control subjects express DUX4-FL protein.
DUX4-FL expression in myogenic cells from FSHD affected unaffected subjects suggests a quantitative model of pathogenesis

FSHD is linked to the permissive 4qA subtelomere, the epigenetic status of the 4q35 D4Z4 repeat and DUX4-fl expression.

Normal

FSHD1

FSHD2

DUX4-fl

\(\bullet\) = Hypermethylated CpGs more heterochromatic

\(\bigcirc\) = Hypomethylated CpGs more euchromatic
Which gene(s) is responsible for FSHD pathology?

The FSHD causal gene:
1. Should be misexpressed in FSHD (Up or down)
   - mRNA, protein, cell type, developmental timing
   - adversely affect skeletal muscle and potentially vasculature

2. Explain the 4qA linkage and under epigenetic repression

**DUX4** fulfills these criteria

**DUX4** encodes (DUX4-fl and DUX4-s)
Many DUX4-FL responsive genes are upregulated in FSHD myotubes (biomarkers)

Oliver King, et al. (2012)
Increased DUX4-fl expression appears necessary* but alone is not sufficient for FSHD
FSHD-derived myoblasts are epigenetically poised to express DUX4-fl

Decitabine treatment leads to DNA demethylation
FSHD derived myogenic cells are epigenetically poised to express DUX4-fl mRNA

DUX4-fl qRT-PCR Analysis
FSHD subjects show individual variability in the stability of DUX4-fl epigenetic repression.
The 4q35 D4Z4 in FSHD exists as differentially metastable epialleles among affected subjects → epigenetically poised for DUX4 expression

The 4q35 D4Z4 in normal subjects exhibits stable epigenetic repression
Differentiated myogenic cells from genetically FSHD1 but clinically non-manifesting subjects express DUX4-FL protein.

Clinically FSHD

15Abic vs 28Adel vs 29Abic vs 29Adel

Clinically Non-manifesting

15Bbic vs 28Bdel vs 29Bbic vs 29Bdel

Non-manifesting 15B = 69 yr old vs 28B = 68 yr old vs 29B = 70 yr old

Affected 15A = 66 yr old vs 28A = 44 yr old vs 29A = 39 yr old

T. Jones et al. (2012)
DUX4-FL expression in myogenic cells from FSHD1 subjects that show no clinical manifestation of the disease suggests modifiers of disease

T. Jones et al. (2012)
**DFX4 expression alone is not necessarily causal for FSHD**

**Normal**

- DUX4-fl
- 4q ter
- 4qA

**FSHD1**

- 4q ter
- 4qA

**FSHD2**

- 4q ter
- 4qA

- Hypermethylated CpGs
- Hypomethylated CpGs

- = More heterochromatic
- = More euchromatic
Multiple therapeutic targets for FSHD

1. Prevent induction
   - Induction of DUX4-fl
   - Environmental factors
   - Family background
   - Genetic modifiers

2. Knockdown DUX4-fl

3. Block or reduce pathogenic drivers
   - Inflammatory response
   - Cytotoxicity
   - Gene regulation
   - Genetic modifiers

Upstream regulators

Downstream effectors

Pathogenic cascade

FSHD
Multiple therapeutic targets for FSHD

Upstream regulators
- Induction of DUX4-fl
- Environmental factors
- Family background
- Genetic modifiers

Downstream effectors
- Inflammatory response
- Cytotoxicity
- Gene regulation
- Genetic modifiers

Key to therapy may lie with identifying the disease modifiers
Analysis of DUX4 mRNA and protein expression in muscles and myogenic cells from FSHD subjects and unaffected relatives

At University of Massachusetts Medical School (and formerly BBRI)
Takako Jones*, Jennifer Chen*, Oliver King, Charles P. Emerson Jr., and Peter L. Jones

At Kennedy Krieger Institute and Johns Hopkins University
Kathryn R. Wagner

At Children’s Hospital – Boston and Harvard Medical School
Fedik Rahimov and Louis M. Kunkel

At Boston University School of Medicine (and formerly BBRI)
Sachiko Homma, Mary Lou Beerman and Jeffrey Boone Miller

For FSHD Research
Acknowledgements

Takako Jones  Charis Himeda  Celine Debarnot

NIAMS
National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases

MDA® Muscular Dystrophy Association

Fighting Muscle Disease

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HUMERAL MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY

FSH SOCIETY

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Association Française contre les Myopathies