Short communication

Comparison of four methods of genotyping IL28B polymorphisms in chronic hepatitis C patients

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A B S T R A C T

Background: Single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) of the interleukin 28B (IL28B) gene are associated with viral clearance and treatment response in hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection; however, most of the available SNP genotyping methods are expensive.

Aims: This study sought to evaluate the cost effectiveness of four methods used to genotype the rs12979860 and rs8099917 SNPs of the IL28B gene.

Methods: Tetra-primer amplification-refractory mutation system-polymerase chain reaction (ARMS-PCR), restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP), quantitative (q) PCR and direct sequencing methods were evaluated in terms of specificity, cost and run time in 281 blood samples obtained from chronic HCV patients.

Results: In ARMS-PCR method, the primers designed to target both SNPs produced PCR fragments of specific sizes that distinguished the alleles of rs12979860 and rs8099917. In RFLP, the band profile allowed the distinction between genotypes. The qPCR was the faster and easier to perform. Validation by nucleotide sequencing showed 100% agreement among the three methods. The cost for a single reaction was lowest for ARMS-PCR, followed in turn by RFLP, qPCR and sequencing.

Conclusions: The methodology described for the ARMS-PCR showed the most favorable cost–benefit ratio. Moreover, this approach is fast and simple, requiring only equipment that is commonly used in molecular diagnosis, which is an essential parameter for use in developing countries where laboratories have scarce financial resources.

The treatment of chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection, despite recent progress following the introduction of direct-acting antiviral (DAA) regimens, remains a great challenge in terms of cost effectiveness. Thus, the rapid identification of sustained virologic response (SVR) predictors remains a major target in HCV research. Two single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) rs12979860 and rs8099917, in close proximity to the interleukin 28B (IL28B) gene, have reported associations with viral clearance and treatment response to HCV infection (Ge et al., 2009; Tanaka et al., 2009). The IL28B gene encodes interleukin 28b, a cytokine belonging to the IFN-λ family that is involved in the regulation of the immune response against viral infections (Dellgren et al., 2009; Li et al., 2009). The SVR rate withPEG-IFN/RBV therapy in HCV-1 infected patients is two-fold higher in individuals with the rs12979860 CC genotype than the CT or TT (70%–80% vs. 30%–40%) (Chen et al., 2011; Thompson et al., 2010). Similarly, the SVR is higher in individuals with the rs8099917 TT genotype compared to the TT or GT + GG genotype (81% vs. 59%) (Sakamoto et al., 2011). Several clinical studies have validated these findings and, IL28B genotyping has become an important tool to assist in clinical decisions regarding the most appropriate therapeutic regimen. Furthermore, IL28B genotyping has shown that it may be useful as a first-generation DAA approach for identifying patients who can be treated successfully with a shorter and simpler treatment scheme (Jacobson et al., 2011; Poordad et al., 2011). Additionally, the impact of the IL28B CC genotype (rs12979860) was observed in HCV-1a infected patients undergoing IFN-free combination therapy (58 to 84% among patients with IL28B CC vs. 33 to 64% in patients with non-CC genotypes) (Chu et al., 2011; Zeuzem et al., 2012, 2013).

IL28B genotyping can be determined using diverse methods, such as DNA sequencing, Taqman assays, PCR-RFLP, and DNA high-performance liquid Chromatography (DHPLC) (Fiorina et al., 2012; Medrano and de Oliveira, 2014). These methods have

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Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SNP</th>
<th>Primer</th>
<th>Primer sequence (5′–3′)</th>
<th>Tm (°C)</th>
<th>Amplicon (bp)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tetra-primer ARM-PCR</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>rs12979860</td>
<td>ARMS 860F1 (Forward outer)</td>
<td>CCA GGC CCC CTA ACC ACC TCT GCA CAG TCT C</td>
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<td>277</td>
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<td>CTA TGC CAG CCG CCA AA T TCC CAA CCA C</td>
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<td>198</td>
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<td>ARMS 860FZ1 (Forward inner)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ARMS 860RZ1 (Reverse inner)</td>
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<td>76.0</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rs1299917</td>
<td>ARMS 917F1 (Forward outer)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ARMS 917R1 (Reverse outer)</td>
<td>GGT ATC AAC ACC ACC TCA AAT TAT CTT A</td>
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<td>197</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ARMS 917F2C (Forward inner)</td>
<td>CTT TTT TTT TTT TTT TTT CTA GCA CTG</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ARMS 917R2C (Reverse inner)</td>
<td>TAT ACA GCA TGG TGC CAA TTT GGG TAA A</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>295</td>
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<td>RFLP and sequencing</td>
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<tr>
<td>rs12979860</td>
<td>860F (Forward)</td>
<td>GCT TAT CGG AT A CA CTA GGA</td>
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<td>860R (Reverse)</td>
<td>AGG TCT AGG GCT ATG AC A</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>242</td>
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<tr>
<td>rs1299917</td>
<td>917F (Forward)</td>
<td>TCA CCA TCC TCC TCT CAT CC</td>
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<td>539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>917R (Reverse)</td>
<td>ACC TCC TCT CCT TCT TTT AG</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>539</td>
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</table>

Table 2

This table lists the primers used in the tetra-primer ARM-PCR and RFLP techniques, along with the primer sequences, melting temperatures (Tm), and amplification products (amplicons) for the SNPs rs12979860 and rs1299917.

The tetra-primer ARM-PCR technique uses primers designed for five different SNPs: rs12979860 and rs1299917. The primers were designed to anneal at specific temperatures and produce amplicons of different sizes.

The RFLP technique involves restriction fragment length polymorphism and uses specific enzymes to digest the PCR products, creating fragments of different sizes.

The amplification results show that the ARM-PCR method distinguishes successfully between the two different SNPs. In the rs12979860 genotyping method, the outer primer pairs produced a band of 277 bp. The homozygote TT could be distinguished by an additional band of 198 bp, the homozygote CC could be distinguished by a band of 132 bp and heterozygote C and T alleles produced fragments of 132 bp and 198 bp, respectively. The genotypes of rs1299917 could be differentiated according to the following band profiles: TT – 437 bp and 295 bp; GG – 437 bp and 197 bp; and TG – 437 bp, 295 bp and 197 bp. A gel shows an agarose gel representing ARM-PCR profiles for SNP rs12979860, and a figure shows the results for SNP rs1299917.

For RFLP, two pairs of primers were designed for each IL28B gene SNP (Table 1). The primer pairs 860F/860R were designed to amplify a fragment of 242 bp for the rs12979860, and the primer pairs 917F/917R were designed to amplify a fragment of 539 bp for rs1299917. The PCR products were performed in separate tubes containing 0.2 pmol of the respective primer pairs.

In ARM-PCR assay, to design the primers to target the two SNPs, we used the program developed by Ye et al. (2001), available at [http://primer1.soton.ac.uk/primer1.html](http://primer1.soton.ac.uk/primer1.html). The limiting of fragment sizes was within the range of 100–300 bp with a ratio of allele bands of 1.5. Default settings were used for the other parameters.

In the rs12979860, the forward primer (FIT 860) was designed to hybridize to the genomic sequence with the T allele, and the reverse primer (RIC 860) was designed to hybridize with sequences containing the C allele. The same procedure was conducted for rs8099917 (FIG 917 inner – G allele, RIT 917 inner – T allele). The primers designed for ARM-PCR assay are shown in Table 1. PCR conditions for both SNPs were performed in a volume of 20 μL. Different amplification conditions (annealing temperatures, PCR cycle protocols and primer concentrations) were assessed to ensure proper formation of all the fragments.

Different amplification techniques (annealing temperatures, PCR cycle protocols and primer concentrations) were assessed to ensure proper formation of all the fragments. For rs12979860, the most appropriate PCR conditions were: 95 °C for 15 min followed by 35 cycles of 94 °C for 30 s, 64 °C for 30 s, 72 °C for 1 min and 72 °C for 10 min. For rs8099917, the best results were obtained with annealing temperature of 55 °C using the same cycling conditions. The PCR products were separated by standard electrophoresis on 2.5% agarose gels containing gel red dye (Biotium Inc., Hayward, CA), with a 100 bp molecular weight marker (Promega, Madison, Wisconsin, USA).

The amplification results showed that the ARM-PCR method distinguishes successfully between the two different SNPs. In the rs12979860 genotyping method, the outer primer pairs produced a band of 277 bp. The homozygote TT could be distinguished by an additional band of 198 bp, the homozygote CC could be distinguished by a band of 132 bp and heterozygote C and T alleles produced fragments of 132 bp and 198 bp, respectively. The genotypes of rs1299917 could be differentiated according to the following band profiles: TT – 437 bp and 295 bp; GG – 437 bp and 197 bp; and TG – 437 bp, 295 bp and 197 bp. A gel shows an agarose gel representing ARM-PCR profiles for SNP rs12979860, and a figure shows the results for SNP rs8099917.

In RFLP, two pairs of primers were designed for each IL28B gene SNP (Table 1). The primer pairs 860F/860R were designed to amplify a fragment of 242 bp for the rs12979860, and the primer pairs 917F/917R were designed to amplify a fragment of 539 bp for rs8099917. The PCR products were performed in separate tubes containing 0.2 pmol of the respective primer pairs. For rs12979860, the PCR conditions were as follows: 95 °C for 15 min, followed by 35 cycles of 95 °C for 1 min, 58 °C for 45 s, 72 °C for 45 s and 72 °C for 3 min. Amplified PCR products were digested with the restriction enzyme BstUI (10 U/rxn; New England Biolabs) at 37 °C for 3.5 h. For rs8099917, the PCR was conducted as follows: 95 °C for 15 min; 10 cycles of 95 °C for 1 min, 50 °C for 45 s, and 72 °C for 45 s; and 25 cycles of 94 °C for 30 s, 55 °C for 30 s, and 72 °C for 30 s. The amplified PCR products were digested with the restriction enzyme Tsp45I (2 U/rxn; New England Biolabs) at 65 °C for 3.5 h. The digested products of both SNPs were separated by standard electrophoresis on 3% agarose gels containing gel red dye (Biotium Inc., Hayward, CA), alongside 100 bp Molecular Weight (Promega, Madison, Wisconsin, USA). The 242 bp PCR fragment obtained with the primers designed for typing rs12979860 digested with BstUI produced the following band profiles: 3 fragments of 25 bp, 82 bp and 135 bp in individuals with the CC genotype; 2 fragments of 82 bp and 160 bp in individuals with the TT genotype; and 4 fragments of 25 bp, 82 bp, 135 bp and 160 bp in individuals with the heterozygote CT genotype (Fig. 1C). The enzymatic digestion of the 539 bp rs8099917 fragment with Tsp45I produced a band profile that allowed the distinction between the GG (39 bp, 214 bp and 286 bp), TG (39 bp, 214 bp, 286 bp and 325 bp) and TT (214 bp and 325 bp) genotypes (Fig. 1D). qPCR was performed using a commercial kit from Roche Life Technologies (TIB MOLBIOL GmbH, Berlin, Germany), according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

The genotyping results for rs12979860 and rs8099917 with the qPCR method could distinguish between the respective SNP genotypes according to the fluorescence profile.

Direct sequencing after PCR amplification was done with the same primers as those used for the RFLP for each polymorphism. The PCR products were purified using the QIAquick gel extraction kit (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany) and submitted to nucleotide sequencing reactions in both directions using the Big Dye

Different characteristics, including equipment needs, cost and technical knowledge. However, some of the methods are excessively expensive, and their high cost of implementation limits their use, especially in developing countries (a "HCV" gene, which is part of the polymerase chain reaction (Pcr) for the restriction fragment length polymorphism (Rflp) was optimized in this study. Commercial qPCR method was also used and direct sequencing was used to validate these techniques. Additionally, the four methods used to determine the IL28B polymorphisms (rs12979860 and rs8099917) in patients with HCV infection were evaluated in terms of specificity, cost and run time.

ARM-PCR, RFLP, quantitative (q) PCR and direct sequencing methods were carried out in 281 blood samples (108 males, aged 56.0 ± 10.9 years) obtained from chronic HCV patients (positive anti-HCV antibody and detectable HCV RNA in serum samples of patients with infection for more than 6 months). The local Ethical Committee (CEPN 297.495) approved this study. Genomic DNA was extracted from 200 μL of whole blood using the QIAamp DNA Blood Kit (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany), according to the manufacturer’s directions, and stored at −20 °C.
Terminator kit 3.1 (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA), according to the manufacturer’s instructions, followed by analysis on the ABI 3730 DNA automated sequencer (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA). In sequencing chromatogram, sequences that showed single peaks were considered as homozygous, whereas those that showed double overlapping peaks were interpreted as heterozygous. All results obtained agreed 100% with the other three methods used in this study. The distribution of genotypes according to the methods used in this study is shown in Table 2.

To estimate the cost of each technique, the price of reagents (enzymes, buffers, agarose, dyes, and other specific reagents for each procedure) and disposable materials (tips, polystyrene tubes, gloves) used in each of the methods was calculated based on currently available commercial prices. Other indirect costs were not included, such as equipment maintenance and human resources. Thus, the price of a single reaction for ARMS-PCR, RFLP, qPCR and direct sequencing was, respectively: US$19.40; US$27.80; US$22.90 and US$202.80. The assay that requires more execution time was direct sequencing (2520 min or more), followed by RFLP (570 min), ARMS-PCR (300 min) and commercial qPCR (130 min).

ARMS-PCR methodology showed the lowest cost and easiest execution, as well as the second fastest run time. In addition, this method presents a wide convenience of execution; it requires only equipment that is routinely used in most laboratories that perform molecular biology assessments, such as a thermal cycler and electrophoresis apparatus. In this technique, the high specificity of the reaction relies on the 3’ terminus mismatch and the position-2 (second to the terminal) mismatch from the 3’ terminus of the same allele-specific primer. This last mismatch destabilizes the same paring between the primers and their corresponding non-target templates and increases the specificity of the reaction by eliminating false-positive results (Ye et al., 2001). This method uses four primers in a single PCR reaction; two non-allele-specific primers (outer primers) amplify the region that comprises the SNP, and as the outer primer fragment is produced, it serves as a template for the two allele-specific primers (inner primers) that generate allele-specific fragments. By placing the outer primers at different distances from the SNP, the two allele-specific fragments can be

Table 2 Distribution of genotypes in 281 HCV chronic patients according to the methods used in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>SNP rs12979860 Genotypes</th>
<th>SNP rs8099917 Genotypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CC CT TT</td>
<td>TT TG GG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tetra-primer ARMS-PCR</td>
<td>80 135 66</td>
<td>173 95 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFLP</td>
<td>80 135 66</td>
<td>173 95 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real-time PCR</td>
<td>80 135 66</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequencing</td>
<td>80 135 66</td>
<td>173 95 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1. (A) A 2.5% agarose gel showing ARMS PCR profiles for SNP rs12979860 (CC, TT and CT genotypes). (B) A 2.5% agarose gel showing ARMS PCR profiles for SNP rs8099917 (TT, TG and GG genotypes). (C) A 3% agarose gel showing RFLP profiles for SNP rs12979860 (CC, CT and TT genotypes). (D) A 3% agarose gel showing RFLP profiles for SNP rs8099917 (TT, TG and GG genotypes). Molecular Weight 100bp (Promega).
distinguished by their different sizes in an agarose gel (Medrano and de Oliveira, 2014; Ye et al., 2001).

The RFLP technique was the second most expensive method and required a longer run-time. This method also requires two stages: PCR reaction and incubation with restriction enzymes. Furthermore, it requires two electrophoresis runs: one for analysis of the PCR amplicons and the other for analyzing the band profiles after enzymatic digestion that takes more than 3 h. In addition, restriction enzymes are high in cost and are extremely unstable. On the other hand, despite its higher cost, the equipments required for RFLP are routinely used in most molecular biology laboratories (thermal cycler, electrophoresis apparatus and water bath) and the training for this technique and interpretation of the results is not complex. Thus, even with disadvantages in several issues, the RFLP technique is, along with ARMS-PCR, very accessible to laboratories with few financial resources.

Among the four methods evaluated in this study, qPCR was the fastest and easiest to perform. Moreover, this method is sensitive and specific due to Taqman probe technology. qPCR was the second least expensive technique, even though it uses a commercial kit. However, this method requires a specific and expensive thermal cycler that is not available in many laboratories and requires additional training for the interpretation and analysis of data.

Direct sequencing is considered the gold standard and was used in this study to validate the results obtained with the other techniques. This method is the most time-consuming and laborious of the procedures evaluated. The number of steps required is large, including two PCR rounds, agarose gel electrophoresis, purification of PCR products, and diverse handling steps, until the sequence is obtained as a chromatogram. Also, it is necessary to have good knowledge of sequencing programs to analyze the data, especially in the heterozygous case. Moreover, the equipment is extremely expensive, and the maintenance cost is high because it demands several specific reagents. In the present work, the results of all three methods were 100% concordant with the results of direct sequencing.

In conclusion, all methods tested were specific for genotyping SNPs rs12979860 and rs8099917 of the IL28B gene. However, ARMS-PCR showed the best results according to the cost-benefit analysis. This approach represents a simple, fast and cost-effective method that involves a single PCR reaction followed by gel electrophoresis. Therefore, this technique is easy to use in a routine molecular diagnostic setting, with minimum equipment requirements. These results are particularly important for developing countries where laboratories generally have scarce financial resources.

Acknowledgments

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References


