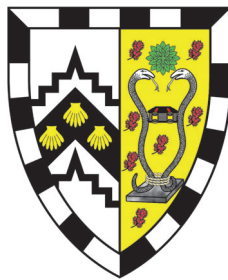




Cas9-induced on-target genomic damage



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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Declaration

I declare that his dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Acknowledgements and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. This dissertation contains fewer than 60,000 words exclusive of tables, footnotes, bibliography, and appendices.

Michał Konrad Kosicki
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Abstract

CRISPR/Cas9 is the gene editing tool of choice in basic research and poised to become one in clinical context. However, current studies on the topic suffer from a number of shortcomings. Mutagenesis is often assessed using bulk methods, which means rare events go undetected, unresolved or are discarded as potential sequencing errors. Many of the genotyping methods rely on short-range PCR, which excludes larger structural variants. Other methods, such as FISH, do not provide basepair resolution, making the genotype assessment imprecise. Furthermore, it is not well understood how Cas9 delivery format influences the dynamics of indel introduction. Finally, many studies of on-target activity were conducted in cancerous cell lines, which do not accurately model the mutagenesis of normal cells in the therapeutic context.

In my thesis, I have investigated on-target lesions induced by Cas9 complexed with single gRNAs and no exogenous template. I have followed the time dynamics of Cas9-induced small indels as a function of reagent delivery methods, established an assay for quantification of Cas9-induced genomic lesions that are not small indels ("complex lesions") and used this assay to isolate and genotype complex lesions, many of which would be missed by standard methods. I found that DNA breaks introduced by single guide RNAs frequently resolved into deletions extending over many kilobases. Furthermore, lesions distal to the cut site and cross-over events were identified. Frequent and extensive DNA damage in mitotically active cells caused by CRISPR/Cas9 editing may have pathogenic consequences.

Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Precise and efficient modification of DNA	1
1.2	DSB repair	3
1.2.1	Repair pathways	4
1.2.2	Cell-cycle arrest, apoptosis and controlled DSB induction	5
1.2.3	Diversity in cellular DNA repair	6
1.3	Precision nucleases	7
1.3.1	CRISPR – biology and applications	7
1.3.2	Cas9 off-target problem	9
1.3.3	Cas9 on-target damage	10
1.4	Outstanding issues	11
2	Materials and Methods	13
2.1	Cell lines and cell culture	13
2.2	Vectors	13
2.3	Transfections, flow cytometry and sequencing	13
2.4	Comparison of delivery methods in HEK cells	15
2.5	PacBio sequencing and analysis	15
2.6	Bioinformatics	16
3	Indel dynamics	17
3.1	Introduction	17
3.1.1	Cas9 mutagenesis of genes	17
3.1.2	Genotyping of small indels in bulk cell populations	17
3.1.3	Factors influencing Cas9 mutagenesis and genotyping	18
3.2	Results	19
3.2.1	Transfection and construct integration dynamics	19
3.2.2	Mutagenesis efficiency over time	21
3.2.3	Indel profiles over time	23
3.2.4	Dynamic effect of gRNA stability on indel efficiency	23
3.2.5	Comparison of IDAA and TIDE methods	24
3.3	Discussion	24
3.3.1	Causes and consequences of mutagenesis efficiency fluctuation	24
3.3.2	Delayed large indel formation	24
3.3.3	Caveats of indel profiling	26
4	Detection and quantification of complex lesions	27
4.1	Introduction	27
4.1.1	Mutation reporters	27

4.2	Results	28
4.2.1	Assay design	28
4.2.2	Mouse <i>PigA</i> and human <i>PIGA</i> loci	29
4.2.3	Autosomal <i>Cd9</i> locus	32
4.3	Discussion	34
5	Genotyping of complex lesions	39
5.1	Introduction	39
5.2	Results	39
5.2.1	Deletions underlying loss of gene expression caused by intronic gRNAs . . .	39
5.2.2	Deletions in primary bone marrow cells	44
5.2.3	Insertions	45
5.2.4	Non-contiguous lesions	48
5.2.5	Unexpected genotypes of inconsistent clones	48
5.2.6	Diversity of resolved alleles at the <i>PigA</i> locus	49
5.2.7	Diversity of deletion fingerprints at the <i>PigA</i> locus	51
5.3	Discussion	52
5.3.1	Consequences of large deletions	52
5.3.2	Consequences of other complex lesions	53
5.3.3	Stochasticity of large deletions	54
5.3.4	Other considerations	54
6	Discussion	57
6.1	Causes of complex lesions	57
6.2	Ways to avoid complex lesions	58
6.3	Ways to exploit complex lesions	59
6.4	Probing protein isoform diversity using CRISPR/Cas9-based assays	60
6.5	New methods for genotyping of complex lesions	60
6.6	Complex lesions and risk management	60
	References	63

Glossary

BIR break-induced replication.

BL6 *Mus musculus*.

CAST *Mus musculus castaneus*.

CRISPR Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats.

DDR DNA damage repair.

DSB double-stranded break.

dsDNA double-stranded DNA.

ES embryonic stem.

gRNA guide RNA.

HR homologous recombination.

IDAA Indel Detection by Amplicon Analysis.

LOH loss of heterozygosity.

MMEJ microhomology-mediated end-joining.

NAHR non-allelic homologous recombination.

NGS Next-Generation Sequencing.

NHEJ non-homologous end-joining.

NMD nonsense-mediated decay.

PAM protospacer adjacent motif.

RNP ribonucleoprotein.

SNP single-nucleotide polymorphism.

SSA single-strand annealing.

ssDNA single-stranded DNA.

SSTR single-strand template repair.

TIDE Tracking of Indels by DEcomposition.