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## **GENE POLYMORPHISMS IN PRIMARY BILIARY CIRRHOSIS: ASSOCIATION WITH THE DISEASE AND HEPATIC OSTEOPATHY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Genetic factors have been implicated in the pathogenesis of osteoporosis, a common disorder in primary biliary cirrhosis (PBC). Estrogen receptor-alpha gene (ER- $\alpha$ ), vitamin-D-receptor gene (VDR) and IL-1-receptor-antagonist gene (IL-1RN) are all attractive candidates for osteoporosis susceptibility. Furthermore insulin-like growth factor-I (IGF-I) gene microsatellite repeat polymorphism was found to be associated with osteoporosis in some studies and collagen-I $\alpha$ 1 (COLIA1) Sp1 s allele was associated with lower bone mineral density (BMD) in one study in PBC. IGF-I treatment restored osteopenia and reduced fibrogenesis in experimental cirrhosis. In this study we summarize our results on polymorphisms of the above genes and bone disease in Hungarian PBC patients.

Patients and methods: 70 female patients with PBC were enrolled (age:57.6yrs, range:37-76yrs, each AMA-M2 positive, stage II-IV). 139 age-matched female subjects served as controls (age: 55.9 yrs, range:43-72 yrs). COLIA1 Sp1 and IGF-I microsatellite polymorphisms were determined by PCR in all patients and controls. VDR BsmI, IL-1RN variable-number tandem repeat (VNTR) and ER- $\alpha$  PvuII and XbaI polymorphisms

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were detected in 33 patients and controls. BMD was measured by dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (Lunar, Prodigy, USA) in lumbar spine (LS) and femoral neck (FN).

Results: There was no difference in IGF-I microsatellite repeat polymorphism (192/192=34.2%, 194/192=28.6%, other=37.2%) and COLIA1 Sp1 polymorphism (SS=72.9%, Ss=22.8% and ss=4.3%) and IL-1 VNTR polymorphism between PBC patients and controls, however, the COLIA1 Sp1 s allele was significantly less frequent in patients with PBC ( $p=0.038$ ). The genotype frequency of VDR BsmI (BB=57.5%, Bb=33.3%, bb=9.1%,  $p=0.01$ ) and ER- $\alpha$  PvuII (PP=18.2%, Pp=75.6%, pp=6.2%,  $p=0.03$ ) and XbaI (XX=9.1%, Xx=90.9%, xx=0%,  $p=0.0003$ ) of the patients was different from that of the control group, with higher frequency of the BB, Pp and Xx genotypes in PBC. Osteoporosis (t score < -2.5) was detected in 22 patients (31.4%). Osteoporotic patients were elder and had longer disease history ( $p=0.01$  for both). An association was found between the IGF-I genotypes and ODM data, the 192/192 genotype was associated with higher FN Z-score compared to other genotypes ( $p=0.036$ ).

Conclusions: In contrast to previous studies the COLIA1 Sp1 s allele was less frequent in patients with PBC, and its presence was not associated with BMD. We confirmed previous findings on higher frequency of VDR BsmI BB genotype in patients with PBC. The ER- $\alpha$  PvuII and XbaI Pp and Xx genotypes were more frequent in PBC patients, while IL-1RN VNTR and IGF-I microsatellite repeat polymorphism was not different. Since IGF-I polymorphism was associated to BMD, it may be hypothesized that not COLIA1 but IGF-I together with other genetic and environmental factors may be involved in the complex regulation of BMD in PBC.

**Keywords:** Primary biliary cirrhosis, hepatic osteopathy, gene polymorphisms, estrogen receptor gene, vitamin D receptor gene, IL-1 receptor antagonist gene, COLIA1, IGF-I, microsatellite repeat polymorphism.

## INTRODUCTION

Primary biliary cirrhosis (PBC) is a chronic cholestatic disease believed to be of autoimmune origin, which is characterized by the inflammation of the small bile ducts, affecting middle age women [1]. Osteoporosis (OP) is a common complication in primary biliary cirrhosis (PBC), even in the absence of biochemical hyperbilirubinaemia. It is a major source of morbidity and mortality [2,3,4].

The pathogenesis of bone disease in PBC is not fully understood. Numerous factors may be involved in the pathogenesis, such as immobility, poor nutrition, disturbances in hormonal status, immunological alterations, as well as risk factors commonly associated with primary osteoporosis (postmenopausal status, cigarette smoking, and alcohol consumption). Possible mechanisms include Ca and vitamin D malabsorption as a consequence to bile salt deficiency, vitamin K deficiency, altered parathyroid function [5,6,7]. Both low and high bone turnover states have been reported in PBC [8,9,10]. Recent study by our group showed high osteoprotegerin and low RANKL level in patients with PBC that might represent a compensatory mechanism to negative balance of bone remodeling [8].

Bone mass is partially determined by genetic factors and which may account for up to 75-80% of the variability in BMD in healthy women [11]. Twins studies and segregation analysis in normal families have suggested polygenic regulation of BMD [11,12]. Several

candidate genes involved in the control of bone formation have been identified. The best characterized genetic association is the relationship between Vitamin D receptor (VDR) allelic polymorphisms and BMD in pre- and postmenopausal women [13,14,15,16] with or without hormone replacement therapy [17]. The presence of BB genotype or B allele was associated with greater risk to develop osteoporosis [14, 15].

This association was not confirmed in some studies [18,19]. Likewise, data in patients with PBC are conflicting. VDR genotypes are associated with PBC, independent of changes of BMD [20,21]. However, they may explain the role of hormonal influence in the development of hepatic osteopathy in PBC [22]. Another polymorphisms related to osteoporosis is located in the first intron of the collagen type 1 $\alpha$ 1 (COL1A1) gene Sp1 [23,24,25,26]. The s (T) allele is associated with increased bone loss and fracture frequency and decreased yield threshold in otherwise healthy subjects. The ss genotype was associated with a 2-fold increased rate of yearly bone loss and a 5.9-fold elevated risk of bone fractures [23,24]. In a meta-analysis of Efstathiadou and colleagues [27] the total average attributable fraction of fractures due to the s allele in Europe/U.S. population was estimated as 9.4%. Finally, the Ss genotype was associated with reduced yield strength of bone samples compared to SS genotypes [28]. In the only study in PBC patients COL1A1 genotype was a genetic marker of peak bone mass [29]. Because of the impact of estrogens on bone formation the estrogen receptor alpha (ER- $\alpha$ ) gene PvuII, XbaI- and (TA) $_n$  promoter repeat polymorphisms are also of particular interest [30,31,32,33]. In Japanese postmenopausal women a strong association between ER- $\alpha$  gene PvuII polymorphism and reduced bone mass in the spine was observed [30,34] but data in Caucasians are conflicting [31,32,33,35]. Experimental studies support the role of the ER- $\alpha$  gene in the regulation of BMD. In transgenic ER knockout mice BMD is 20-25% lower than in normal mice [36]. So far, ER- $\alpha$  gene polymorphisms were not studied in patients with PBC. Insulin-like growth factor-I (IGF-I) is a ubiquitous polypeptide involved in cell growth and differentiation, stimulation of linear growth and proliferation of chondrocytes. It also plays an important role in the acquisition of peak bone mineral density (BMD) [37,38,39]. Serum IGF-I levels are decreased in chronic liver diseases [40,41,42], but there was no relationship between serum IGF-I and BMD. A microsatellite repeat polymorphism located 1kb upstream from the IGF-I gene transcript start site appears to exert a genetic control of bone formation, the 192/192 genotype is associated with lower BMD [37,43]. No data are available on IGF-I microsatellite repeat polymorphisms in chronic liver diseases.

Interleukin-1 receptor antagonist (IL-1Ra) is a competitive inhibitor of IL-1 $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , which completely inhibits the stimulatory effects of interleukin-1 (IL-1) on bone resorption in vitro [44]. A trend for higher IL-1/IL-1Ra ratio found in osteoporotic women compared with healthy age-matched controls [45]. Some, but not all studies reported an association between the number of tandem repeats (VNTR) of interleukin-1 receptor antagonist gene (IL-1RN) and postmenopausal bone loss in the spine [46,47]. The A2 allele was associated with some inflammatory and autoimmune diseases [48,49,50,51]. In this study the polymorphisms of the above mentioned genes was investigated in two cohorts of Hungarian PBC patients and correlated them with clinical, laboratory and osteodensitometric findings.

## PATIENTS AND METHODS

### Patients

VDR BsmI, ER- $\alpha$ , and IL-1RN VNTR polymorphisms were studied 33 (group 1; mean age:  $54.7 \pm 11.7$  yrs; 27 postmenopausal), IGF-I microsatellite repeat and COLIA1 Sp1 polymorphism in 70 patients (group 2; mean age:  $57.6 \pm 10.6$  yrs; 62 postmenopausal; histologic stage: I: 11, II: 31, III: 18, and IV: 10 patients). All patients were female with biochemical evidence of cholestasis, consistent histological findings and anti-mitochondrial antibody (AMA) M2 positivity. Patients with evidence of extrahepatic cholestasis were excluded. All patients received ursodeoxycholic acid (UDCA) as well as 1000 mg Ca and individually 1000-3000 IU Vitamin D3 supplementation orally. None of the patients received other treatment for osteoporosis. The serum Ca and vitamin D3 values of the patients were in the normal range. The clinical data of the PBC patients are summarized in Table 1.

The onset of the disease was defined as the date of the first documentation of abnormal liver function test, the duration of liver disease as the time from disease onset to the date of the BMD measurement. For the study of VDR BsmI, ER- $\alpha$ , and IL-1RN VNTR polymorphisms 82 age matched, healthy female controls (mean age:  $54.1 \pm 4.7$  yrs, postmenopausal: 71/82, 86 %) were selected from a panel undergoing DNA genotyping. None of the healthy controls had osteoporosis, 58.5% had osteopenia. We also selected 76 female subjects with osteoporosis as a “disease” control group (mean age:  $56.8 \pm 6.1$  yrs, 93 %, 71/76 postmenopausal, weight:  $62.1 \pm 10.1$  height:  $160 \pm 6.9$ , BMD LS:  $0.847 \pm 0.123$ , Z-score:  $-1.627 \pm 1.083$ , T-score:  $-2.987 \pm 0.961$ , BMD FN:  $0.749 \pm 0.105$  Z-score:  $-0.721 \pm 0.846$ , T-score:  $-1.901 \pm 0.962$ ). For the study of IGF-I microsatellite repeat and COLIA1 Sp1 polymorphism 139 age-matched, healthy females served as controls (mean age:  $55.9 \pm 6.8$  yrs, postmenopausal: 118/139, 84.9%). 53 control subject had osteopenia (46.1%).

The studies were approved by the Semmelweis University Regional and Institutional Committee of Science and Research Ethics. After written informed consent, all patients and controls underwent DNA genotyping and BMD measurements.

### Methods

#### *Laboratory Determinations*

Serum bilirubin concentration, aspartate-aminotransferase (AST), alanine-aminotransferase (ALT), alkaline phosphatase (ALP) and albumin activities were measured by Olympus AU600 (Olympus Co. Ltd, Shizuoka, Japan) autoanalyser at 37 °C. The enzyme activities are expressed in U/L, albumin in g/L and serum bilirubin concentration is given in  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ . AMA M2 was determined by immunofluorescent method (Binding Site kit, Birmingham, UK), vitamin D3 level by RIA (25-OH D3 vitamin kit, Med-elpho Ltd, Budapest, Hungary).

Serum osteocalcin (OC) levels were measured with the N-MID Osteocalcin Electrochemiluminescence Immunoassay (ELICA) kit (Roche Diagnostics GmbH, Mannheim, Germany). The serum levels of C-terminal cross-linking telopeptide of type I

collagen (CTX-I) was determined by the Elecsys  $\beta$ -Crosslaps immunoassay kit (Roche Diagnostics GmbH, Mannheim, Germany). Both measurements were performed by Elecsys 2010 immunoassay system (Hitachi, Tokyo, Japan).

**Table 1. The summary of the clinical and laboratory data of PBC patients according to the presence of osteoporosis (values are mean  $\pm$  SD, \* $p=0.01$ , # $p=0.03$ , between patients with osteoporosis vs. without osteoporosis, in the brackets see normal values.)**

|                                      | Study 1           |                   |                      | Study 2           |                   |                      |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
|                                      | total             | with osteoporosis | without osteoporosis | total             | with osteoporosis | Without osteoporosis |
| Number of patients                   | 33                | 14                | 19                   | 70                | 22                | 48                   |
| Age (years)                          | 54.7 $\pm$ 11.7   | 58 $\pm$ 10*      | 52 $\pm$ 12*         | 57.6 $\pm$ 10.6   | 60.8 $\pm$ 8.8    | 56.2 $\pm$ 11.1#     |
| Duration of the disease (years)      | 7.8 $\pm$ 5.7     | 9.5 $\pm$ 5.1*    | 5.4 $\pm$ 3.3*       | 6.8 $\pm$ 5.5     | 9.0 $\pm$ 6.8     | 55.8 $\pm$ 4.#       |
| Serum bilirubin (0-20.5 $\mu$ mol/l) | 31.4 $\pm$ 75.6   | 49.1 $\pm$ 112.8  | 18.5 $\pm$ 23.7      | 29.1 $\pm$ 58.2   | 35.1 $\pm$ 93.1   | 26.2 $\pm$ 30.5      |
| ASAT (1-46 U/l)                      | 41.2 $\pm$ 23.9   | 44.9 $\pm$ 27.0   | 38.5 $\pm$ 21.7      | 42.4 $\pm$ 21.2   | 44.6 $\pm$ 21.9   | 41.4 $\pm$ 21.1      |
| ALAT (1-49 U/l)                      | 42.3 $\pm$ 26.6   | 45.6 $\pm$ 33.6   | 39.9 $\pm$ 20.5      | 44.9 $\pm$ 25.5   | 48.1 $\pm$ 30.2   | 43.3 $\pm$ 23.1      |
| GGT (9-52 U/l)                       | 166.6 $\pm$ 146.6 | 162.7 $\pm$ 181.8 | 169.6 $\pm$ 117.9    | 205.5 $\pm$ 211.4 | 169.4 $\pm$ 173.9 | 223.1 $\pm$ 227.3    |
| ALP (98-290 U/l)                     | 496.2 $\pm$ 227.3 | 517.7 $\pm$ 214.8 | 480.4 $\pm$ 240.6    | 551.8 $\pm$ 326.2 | 480.2 $\pm$ 231.1 | 586.8 $\pm$ 361.1    |
| Albumin (35-50 g/L)                  | 43.4 $\pm$ 4.2    | 42.8 $\pm$ 4.5    | 44.0 $\pm$ 4.2       | 41.7 $\pm$ 5.0    | 42.7 $\pm$ 3.9    | 41.1 $\pm$ 5.5       |
| Ca (2.25-2.61 mmol/l)                | 2.44 $\pm$ 0.14   | 2.45 $\pm$ 0.14   | 2.43 $\pm$ 0.14      | 2.37 $\pm$ 0.16   | 2.43 $\pm$ 0.13   | 2.35 $\pm$ 0.17      |
| P (0.85-1.45 mmol/l)                 | 1.11 $\pm$ 0.14   | 1.12 $\pm$ 0.14   | 1.11 $\pm$ 0.14      | 1.09 $\pm$ 0.13   | 1.10 $\pm$ 0.14   | 1.18 $\pm$ 0.14      |
| Vitamin D (60-180 nmol/l)            | 151.5 $\pm$ 61.6  | 131.5 $\pm$ 40.2  | 183.6 $\pm$ 72.5     | 146.5 $\pm$ 47.4  | 134.4 $\pm$ 30.1  | 172.3 $\pm$ 56.7     |
| OC (20-48 ng/ml)                     | -                 | -                 | -                    | 22.9 $\pm$ 13.5   | 25.9 $\pm$ 17.9   | 21.1 $\pm$ 9.8       |
| CTX-I (0-320 pg/ml)                  | -                 | -                 | -                    | 329.0 $\pm$ 278.6 | 401.1 $\pm$ 414.1 | 283.4 $\pm$ 128.3    |

### Genomic DNA Analysis

Genomic DNA was extracted from peripheral mononuclear cells using DNA isolation-kit (NukleoSpin Blood Quickpure, Macherey-Nagel, Düren, Germany) according to the description of the manufacturer and amplified by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) with sequence-specific primers using a Hybaid Express thermocycler (Teddington, Middlesex, UK). PCR products were separated by electrophoresis on 2% agarose gel at 120V for 30 min and visualized by ethidium bromide staining if not stated otherwise.

### Vitamin D Receptor Genotyping

A fragment of the vitamin D receptor was amplified by PCR with primers as described previously [13]. The amplified DNA was subjected to digestion by BsmI restriction enzyme

(65°C, 90 min) with enzyme BsmI, Hybaid, Teddington, UK) and the fragments were separated by gel electrophoresis. The absence or presence of the BsmI restriction site is indicated by B (825 bp) or b (650 + 175 bp) respectively. All samples with BB genotype were repeatedly digested and analyzed to avoid possibility of enzyme inhibition and the false assignment of bb or Bb genotype to truly BB individuals.

### **Estrogen Receptor Alpha Genotyping**

ER- $\alpha$  genotyping was performed by PCR using previously described primers and amplification conditions [30]. For the digestion of ER PCR product enzymes PvuII, XbaI (Hybaid, Teddington, UK) were used (37°C 90 min). The genotype assignments were PP, Pp, pp for PvuII and XX, Xx, xx for XbaI, with uppercase letters signifying the absence of and lower case letters the presence of the restriction site.

#### **IL-1-RN genotyping**

DNA was subjected to PCR amplification for the 86 bp tandem repeat polymorphism of the IL-1RN gene using primers as described [52]. Allele assignments were made in accordance with previous reports: allele 1 (A1), 410 bp-four repeats; allele 2 (A2), 240 bp-two repeats; allele 3 (A3), 500 bp-five repeats; allele 4 (A4), 325 bp-three repeats; allele 5 (A5), 595 bp-six repeats.

### **IGF-I Genotyping**

The PCR was performed with primers and amplification conditions as described previously [53], to amplify a polymorphic microsatellite composed of variable cytosine-adenine (CA) repeats, situated 1kb upstream from the transcription start site of the IGF-I gene. The forward primer was radiolabeled with  $^{32}\text{P}$  using T4 polynucleotid kinase (Invitrogen Corp., Carlsbad, CA, USA). Radiolabeled PCR products were screened for length variation by a 6.5% polyacrilamide gel electrophoresis at 70 watts for 165 min. Autoradiographs were exposed for 4-12 h in cassettes without intensifying screens. Genotypes were scored by two independent investigators. Allele assignments were made according to the size of the CA repeat.

### **COLIA1 genotyping**

COLIA1 Sp1 genotypes were determined by PCR using previously described primers and amplification conditions using [54]. The amplified DNA was subjected to digestion by BSA restriction enzyme (37°C for 30 h, New England BioLabs GmbH, Frankfurt Germany) and the fragments were separated by gel electrophoresis (2% agarose at 120V for 30 min) and visualized by ethidium bromide staining. The alleles were assigned as "S" (G) or "s" (T) [54].

### **BMD Assessment**

Bone density was measured at the lumbar spine (L2-4) and at the femoral neck (FN) by dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (Lunar Prodigy, Lunar corp., Madison, WI, USA). BMD was expressed as areal density in grams per square centimeter, as well as in t-scores (difference from the mean BMD value of healthy young people divided by its standard

deviation) and z-scores (difference from the mean BMD value of age-matched people divided by its standard deviation). Established osteoporosis was diagnosed if the BMD t-score value was below  $-2.5$  at either position [55].

### Statistical Analysis

Shapiro Wilk's W test was used to test normality. To test the differences between genotype / allele frequencies of the cohort and controls and between subgroups of the patients Chi square analysis or Fischer exact with Yates correction test was computed. To test the differences in clinical data between osteoporotic and non-porotic patients as well as between patients and controls t-test with separate variance estimates and in study 2 Mann-Whitney U test was used. The correlation between laboratory findings and BMD was tested by using Spearman Rank Order Correlation. The association between genotype or allele frequencies and BMD was tested by using ANOVA and post hoc Scheffe analysis. For the purposes of comparison the patients were considered osteoporotic if they fulfilled t-score criteria at either lumbar spine or femoral neck. For the statistical analysis Statistica for Windows 6.0 (StatSoft Inc., OK, USA) was used. A p value  $<0.05$  was considered significant.

## RESULTS

Osteoporosis (OP) was detected in 14 (42.4%) and 22 patients (31.4%) in groups 1 and 2, respectively. Each or them was in the postmenopause and they were approximately 5-years older and had a longer disease history compared to patients without OP ( $p=0.01$  and  $p=0.03$ , for both). In group 1 OP was associated with increased fracture frequency (at least one fracture in 6/14 OP patients vs. 1/19 non-OP,  $p<0.01$ ). The BMD data of patients and controls is summarized in Table 2. The intraindividual correlation between BMD measurements at spine and femur of the patients showed a strong correlation in both groups ( $r=0.68-88$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ). In group 2 an inverse correlation was found between the age and LS BMD and t-score values ( $p=0.011-0.023$ ), and between disease duration and LS BMD, z- and t-score values ( $p=0.015-0.03$ ). No correlation was found between the laboratory markers of the liver disease (bilirubin, ASAT, ALAT, GGT, ALP) and BMD values at either position.

The genotype frequency of VDR Bsm I, ER- $\alpha$  PvuII and XbaI is shown in table 3, the genotype and allele frequency of IL-1RN in patients and controls in table 4. The VDR genotype frequency in controls was consistent with other studies performed in healthy populations of Caucasian origin [13,14,15]. In osteoporotic controls the genotype frequency was similar to that of the healthy controls. In contrast, in PBC patients the BB genotype ( $n=19$ , 57.5 %,  $p=0.01$ ) and B allele ( $n=49$ , 74.2 %) was overrepresented compared to the control groups ( $p<0.01$  for both).

The IGF-I genotype and allele frequencies of PBC patients were not different from that of the control group (table 5). The association of BMD data and IGF-I microsatellite repeat polymorphism are presented in Figures 1 and 2. Patients with the IGF-I 192/192 genotype had higher FN z-score values than patients with other genotypes ( $p=0.036$ ) despite almost

identical disease duration (192/192: 7.2 yrs vs. other genotypes: 6.4 yrs) and matching body mass index (192/192: 25.6 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, vs. other genotypes 24.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup>). The same tendency was observed between this genotype and LS BMD and z-score (p=0.07 for both) or FN BMD and t-score (p=0.058 and p=0.06) values. No difference was found in IGF-I genotype or allele frequencies between patients with OP (192/192=27.3%, 194/192=22.7%, other=50.0%) or without OP (192/192=37.5%, 194/192=31).

**Table 2. Bone mineral density values in lumbar spine (LS) and femoral neck (FN) of controls and PBC patients (BMD g/cm<sup>2</sup>, values are mean ± SD, \*p≤0.01, #p=0.04 PBC patients vs. controls)**

|         |                  | LS             |              |               | FN             |              |               |
|---------|------------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|
|         |                  | BMD            | Z-score      | T-score       | BMD            | Z-score      | T-score       |
| Study 1 | PBC (n=33)       | 0.937 ± 0.261  | -0.68 ± 1.67 | -2.01 ± 2.39  | 0.789 ± 0.227  | -0.53 ± 1.68 | -1.72 ± 2.20  |
|         | Controls (n=82)  | 1.085 ± 0.129* | -0.16 ± 0.13 | -0.95 ± 1.07* | 0.901 ± 0.134* | 0.05 ± 1.08# | -0.66 ± 0.13* |
| Study 2 | PBC (n=70)       | 0.975 ± 0.216  | -0.34 ± 1.70 | -1.63 ± 1.98  | 0.831 ± 0.188  | -0.30 ± 1.54 | -1.43 ± 1.86  |
|         | Controls (n=139) | 1.086 ± 0.142* | -0.05 ± 1.19 | -0.89 ± 1.15* | 0.898 ± 0.126* | 0.04 ± 1.03  | -0.69 ± 1.06* |

**Table 3. Genotype frequency of vitamin D-receptor BsmI, estrogen receptor alpha PvuII and XbaI, IGF-I microsatellite repeat and COLIA1 Sp1 polymorphism in controls and patients with PBC (p calculated by Chi-square analysis, # p=0.026 for SS vs. Ss/ss by Fischer exact test).**

|            | PBC n (%)   | Control n (%) | p       |
|------------|-------------|---------------|---------|
| VDR Bsm I  |             |               |         |
| BB         | 19 (57.5%)  | 23 (28.1%)    | p=0.01  |
| Bb         | 11 (33.3%)  | 41 (50.0%)    |         |
| Bb         | 3 (9.1 %)   | 18 (21.9%)    |         |
| ER-α PvuII |             |               |         |
| PP         | 6 (18.2 %)  | 26 (31.7%)    | p=0.03  |
| Pp         | 25 (75.6 %) | 40 (48.8%)    |         |
| pp         | 2 (6.2 %)   | 16 (19.5 %)   |         |
| ER- α XbaI |             |               |         |
| XX         | 3 (9.1 %)   | 15 (18.3%)    | p=0.003 |
| Xx         | 30 (90.9%)  | 49 (59.8%)    |         |
| Xx         | 0           | 18 (21.9%)    |         |
| IGF I      |             |               |         |
| 192/192    | 53 (38.2%)  | 24 (34.2%)    | NS      |
| 194/192    | 43 (30.9%)  | 20 (28.6%)    |         |
| other      | 43 (30.9%)  | 26 (37.2%)    |         |
| COLIA1     |             |               |         |
| SS         | 81 (58.4%)  | 51 (72.9 %)   | NS      |
| Ss         | 50 (35.9%)  | 16 (22.8%)    |         |
| ss         | 8 (5.7%)    | 3 (4.3%)      |         |



**Table 4. Genotype and allele frequency of interleukin-1 receptor antagonist gene VNTR in controls and patients with PBC (NS: not significant by Chi square). Allele 4 was not found in either patients or controls.**

| A               | IL-1RN VNTR, Genotype n (%) |            |          |          |          |      | Allele frequency n (%) |            |          |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|------------|----------|----------|----------|------|------------------------|------------|----------|
|                 | A1A1                        | A1A2       | A2A2     | A1A3     | A2A3     | A3A3 | A1                     | A2         | A3       |
| PBC (n=33)      | 20 (60.6%)                  | 10 (30.2%) | 2 (6.1%) | 1 (3.1%) | 0        | 0    | 52 (78.8%)             | 13 (19.7%) | 1 (1.5%) |
| Controls (n=82) | 41 (50.0%)                  | 28 (34.1%) | 5 (6%)   | 7 (8.5%) | 1 (1.4%) | 0    | 117 (71.3%)            | 39 (23.8%) | 8 (4.9%) |
| p value         | NS                          |            |          |          |          |      | NS                     |            |          |

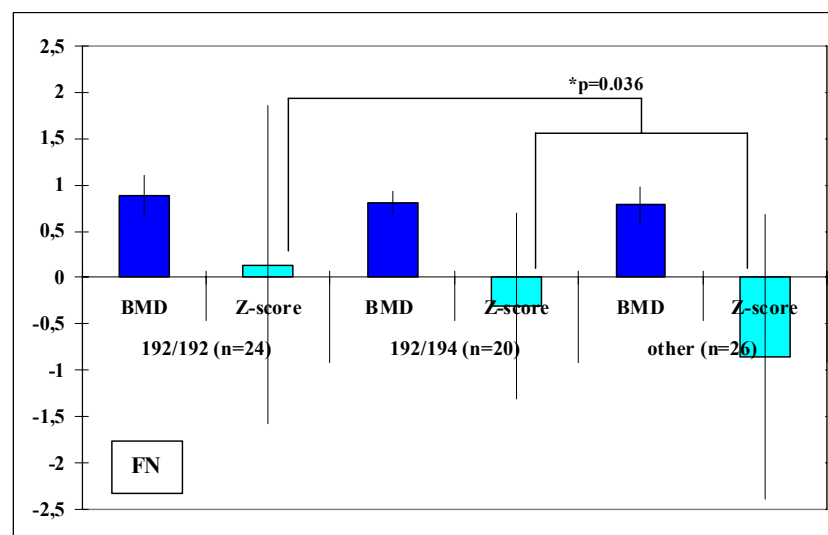
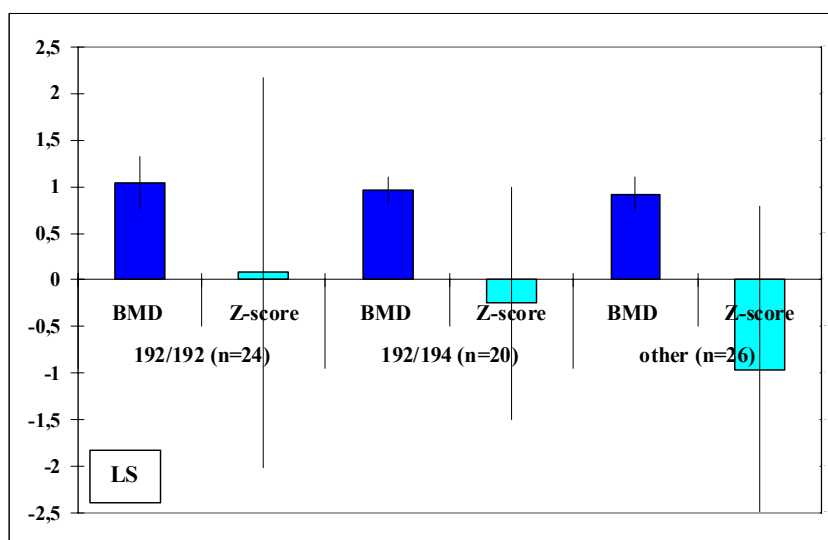


Figure 1. IGF-I microsatellite repeat genotypes, lumbar spine (LS) and left femur neck (FN) BMD and z-scores in patients with PBC (BMD= $\text{g}/\text{cm}^2$ , values are mean  $\pm$  SD, \* $p=0.036$  for Z-score values 192/192 vs. others by Mann Whitney U test).

The IL-1RN genotype frequency of the osteoporotic controls was similar to the healthy subjects and it was not different from that of the PBC patients. 25%, other=31.25%). The COLIA1 Sp1 genotype frequency of PBC patients was also not different from that of the controls (Hardy-Weinberg disequilibrium test). The s allele was less frequent in PBC patients without OP than in controls (12.5% vs. 24.5%,  $p=0.01$  by Fischer exact). The same tendency was observed between patients with and without OP (22.7% vs. 12.5%,  $p=0.08$ ) (see table 6 and Figure 2).

**Table 5.: Allele frequency of IGF-I microsatellite repeat polymorphisms in controls and patients with PBC (NS: not significant by Chi square).**

| B                   | IGF-I n (%) |             |             |              |                |               |              |             |             |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
|                     | 174         | 176         | 188         | 190          | 192            | 194           | 196          | 198         | 200         |
| Controls<br>(n=278) | 2<br>(0.7%) | 1<br>(0.3%) | 2<br>(0.7%) | 15<br>(5.4%) | 185<br>(66.5%) | 51<br>(18.3%) | 17<br>(6.2%) | 4<br>(1.6%) | 1<br>(0.3%) |
| PBC (n=140)         | 0           | 1<br>(0.7%) | 3<br>(2.1%) | 12<br>(8.6%) | 84<br>(60.0%)  | 26<br>(18.6%) | 13<br>(9.3%) | 0           | 1<br>(0.7%) |
| P value             | NS          |             |             |              |                |               |              |             |             |

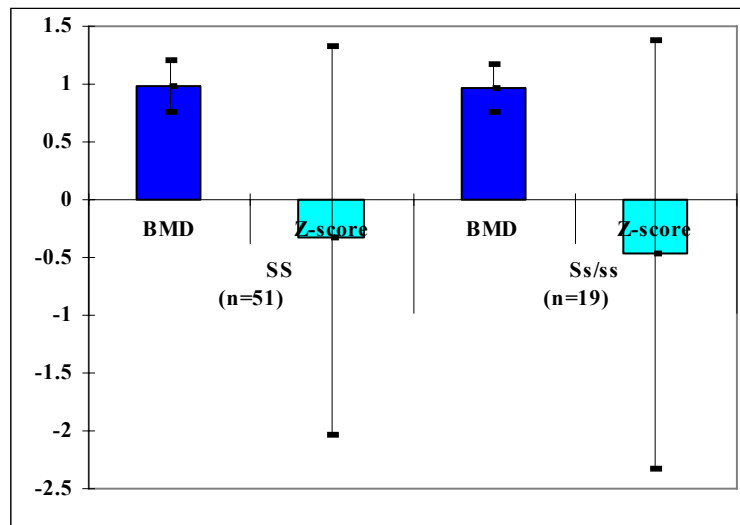


Figure 2. COLIA1 Sp1 genotypes, lumbar spine BMD and z-scores in patients with PBC (BMD= $\text{g}/\text{cm}^2$ , values are mean  $\pm$  SD. No significant difference between SS and Ss/ss by Mann-Whitney U test).

No association was found between BMD (t and z scores) and the other polymorphisms determined (VDR, ER-alpha PvuII or XbaI, IL-1RN or COLIA1 Sp1). There was a tendency of VDR BsmI bb genotype to be associated with higher BMD values however, but only 3 patients had this genotype.

**Table 6. Genotype frequency the vitamin D-receptor (VDR) BsmI, estrogen receptor alpha (ER- $\alpha$ ) PvuII and XbaI and IGF-I microsatellite repeat polymorphism and COLIA1 Sp1 polymorphism in PBC patients with and without osteoporosis.**

|                    | with osteoporosis n (%) | without osteoporosis n (%) | p  |
|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|----|
| VDR Bsm I          |                         |                            |    |
| BB                 | 9 (64%)                 | 10 (53%)                   | NS |
| Bb                 | 5 (36%)                 | 6 (32%)                    |    |
| Bb                 | 0                       | 3 (15%)                    |    |
| ER- $\alpha$ PvuII |                         |                            |    |
| PP                 | 1 (8%)                  | 4 (21%)                    | NS |
| Pp                 | 11 (78%)                | 15 (79%)                   |    |
| pp                 | 2 (14%)                 | 0                          |    |
| ER- $\alpha$ XbaI  |                         |                            |    |
| XX                 | 2 (14%)                 | 1 (6%)                     | NS |
| Xx                 | 12 (85%)                | 18 (94%)                   |    |
| Xx                 | 0                       | 0                          |    |
| IGF I              |                         |                            |    |
| 192/192            | 6 (27.3%)               | 18 (37.5%)                 | NS |
| 194/192            | 5 (22.7%)               | 15 (31.2%)                 |    |
| other              | 11 (50.0%)              | 15 (31.2%)                 |    |
| COLIA1             |                         |                            |    |
| SS                 | 14 (63.6%)              | 37 (77.1%)                 | NS |
| Ss                 | 6 (27.3%)               | 10 (20.8%)                 |    |
| ss                 | 2 (9.1%)                | 1 (2.1%)                   |    |

## DISCUSSION

This study attempted to identify genetic markers for PBC and for PBC-associated hepatic osteopathy. Among many markers investigated only the BB genotype of the VDR and the XbaI Xx genotype of the ER- $\alpha$  were overrepresented in middle-aged Hungarian PBC patients as compared with both healthy subjects and disease controls with non-liver disease-related osteoporosis. However, we did not find a direct association between VDR genotypes and BMD [56].

Osteoporosis is a common disorder in PBC [2,3]. Its prevalence in this study (31-42%) is in concordance with previously reported values of 24-43 % [2,7,57]. The cause of bone abnormalities in patients with cholestatic liver disease is not fully understood. Disease duration may reflect severity of the disease; however the rate of progression is variable. As expected [1-2,21] patients with osteoporosis were older and had a longer disease duration than those without osteoporosis. Both high and low bone turnover has been reported [8-10]. High turnover osteoporosis is further supported by the elevated CTX-I level found in group 2, particularly in advanced stages. In these patients OC levels were also elevated indicating increased osteoblastic activity representing a possible compensatory mechanism. An

association between the rate of bone loss and the severity of cholestasis has been reported in PBC patients [22,58], but was not confirmed in this study. This discrepancy may be explained by the fact that all of our patients were treated with UDCA [59], which improved cholestasis.

Many studies have addressed the genetic background of osteopenia and osteoporosis, several candidate genes have been investigated (VDR, ER- $\alpha$ , IL-6, collagen 1A1) [13-54]. VDR has been of special interest [13-17].

Similarly, a possible genetic background of PBC is under intense investigation. Associations were found at chromosomes 6p21.3 and 2q including HLA DRB1\*08, CTLA4\*G, IL1RN-IL1B haplotypes, CASP8 and APO-E epsilon4 [60,61]. Recently the HLA-DRB1\*11 has been shown to be associated with reduced risk of developing PBC, while the presence of B\*15, B\*41, B\*55 and B\*58 was found to be more frequent in PBC [62].

The study of the role of genetic polymorphisms of bone formation in patients with PBC is complicated because they may be independently associated with PBC like the BsmI polymorphism of VDR or the Sp1 polymorphism in COL1A1 gene [20,22,63]. Furthermore, the possible genetic factor may render subjects more susceptible to the effects of pathophysiologic mechanisms which by themselves are involved in the pathogenesis of bone disease.

This problem is further complicated by the fact, that established risk factors for osteoporosis are also associated with the development of autoimmune diseases such as PBC. 1,25-(OH)<sub>2</sub>-D<sub>3</sub> was shown to inhibit T-cell activation in vitro and in vivo, and to suppress IL-1, IL-2, IL-6, TNF and INF- $\gamma$  production [64]. These cytokines are important in the development of T helper 1 cells, which are believed to be involved in the pathogenesis of autoimmune diseases, such as PBC. It has also been shown that vitamin D is able to regulate the expression of costimulatory molecules B7.1 and B7.2 [65]. Interestingly VDR genotypes have been found to be associated with susceptibility to various diseases, as Graves' disease [66,67] and hepatitis B [68]. The association between the presence of B allele or BB genotype and the susceptibility to other autoimmune diseases (like Graves' disease) suggests that VDR-polymorphisms may not only be associated with osteoporosis, but may also play a role in the development of autoimmune diseases. Not surprisingly, the reported data in PBC patients are conflicting [20,21,22]. A similar association may apply to ER- $\alpha$  and IL-1ra. ER- $\alpha$  is a strong candidate for the regulation of BMD [17, 30-33], but ER- $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  expression was also reported in peripheral and thymic lymphocytes, macrophages and endothelial cells, suggesting that estrogen might affect immune cells during development and mature function [69]. Furthermore in T cells from female patients with systemic lupus erythematosus an altered ER function was identified [70]. In autoimmune conditions and in multiple sclerosis ER- $\alpha$  P allele and Xx was associated with disease susceptibility and onset of the disease [71]. We also found an overrepresentation of the Pp and Xx genotypes in PBC patients.

IL-1 is a potent stimulator of the bone resorption, and it has been implicated in the pathogenesis of postmenopausal osteoporosis [45,46]. Interleukin-1 antagonist protein (IL-1ra) is a natural anti-inflammatory molecule, a competitive inhibitor of IL-1 $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ . In Graves disease, polymyositis, systemic lupus erythematosus and rheumatoid arthritis elevated levels of IL-1ra have been reported [48]. Increased frequency of A2 allele was found in inflammatory and autoimmune diseases (Graves's disease, inflammatory bowel disease,

multiple sclerosis, Henoch-Schönlein nephritis, etc.) [48-51]. In vitro in the presence of A2 allele a reduced IL-1/IL-1ra ratio with increased IL-1ra production was reported [72]. Donaldson et al. found IL-1RN VNTR A1A1 genotype (60% vs. 40%, OR: 2.28) and the IL-1B 1,1 genotype (65% vs. 43%, OR: 2.37) to be more frequent in PBC compared to controls [73]. We observed a similar but not significant tendency in our PBC patients. The A1A1 genotype is not associated with reduced IL-1/IL-1Ra ratio, in concordance with the observed proinflammatory T-cell (T helper 1) profile in PBC [74]. In our study we did not find any significant difference in BMD in patients having at least one A2 allele compared to non-carriers. The presence of A2 allele was not more frequent in the non-osteoporotic patients nor we did find any correlation between IL-1RN genotype and BMD. Our results suggest that IL-1RN VNTR polymorphism may not play an essential role in the development of osteopenia in PBC, at least not in this set of patients.

Because of its important role in the acquisition of peak BMD, modeling of bone and stimulation of periosteal bone growth [39,75] several studies addressed the association between IGF-I microsatellite polymorphism and OP [39,53]. Liver derived IGF-I [75] exert a small, but significant effect on cortical periosteal bone growth and on adult axial skeletal growth. This may be affected by chronic liver diseases. Low serum IGF-I has been reported in chronic liver diseases [41,42], but no relationship was found between serum IGF-I and BMD [42]. In contrast, IGF-I treatment restored osteopenia in experimental cirrhosis [76]. In our study the 192/192 genotype was associated with higher femoral neck z-scores compared to other genotypes, which raises the possibility that IGF-I microsatellite repeat polymorphism together with genetic and/or environmental factors is involved in the complex regulation of BMD in PBC. To our knowledge this is the first report on IGF-I polymorphism in chronic liver diseases including PBC. However, in the absence in differences in genotype frequencies between patients and controls, it is unlikely that IGF-I microsatellite polymorphism plays an essential role in the pathogenesis and/or progression of PBC.

Even more complex is the relation of genetic marker with the pathogenesis and the progression of PBC. The pathogenesis of PBC is unknown, but because of the presence of typical autoantibodies it is generally considered as an autoimmune disease. Thus, the relation of some of the genetic polymorphisms to autoimmunity is of interest. Based on our data a direct relation of the investigated polymorphisms and the pathogenesis of PBC seems unlikely. However, it may be assumed, that genetic factors influence the rapidity of progression to cirrhosis.

Insulin-like growth factor-I (IGF-I) is involved in the regulation of cell growth and differentiation; it stimulates linear growth [38]. An important issue is that IGF-I treatment has been found to exert an antifibrogenic effect in experimental setting [77]. The treatment of cirrhotic rats was accompanied by the reduction hydroxyproline content, prolyl hydroxylase activity, collagen 1alphaI and 1alpha (III) m RNA expression in the liver. Furthermore IGF-I treatment partially normalized the gene expression profile and restored the expression of growth hormone receptor and the levels of global DNA methylation in experimental cirrhosis, and also enhanced the regenerative activity [78]. Low serum IGF-I has been reported in chronic liver diseases [40,41,42], however, the role of IGF-I protein in fibrogenesis is complex.

Collagen type I plays an important role in liver fibrogenesis. Early fibrotic events lead to conversion of the basement membrane-like matrix to one rich in fibrillar matrix, with dramatic increase in the expression of type I collagen [79]. Mutations in collagen type I that confers resistance to the action collagenases critically impair hepatic stellate cell apoptosis and may prevent restoration of hepatocyte mass in liver fibrosis [80], furthermore halofuginone, a collagen type I inhibitor was found to improve liver regeneration in experimental cirrhosis [81]. Since collagen type I expression is influenced by Sp1 polymorphism and lower frequency of the s allele was found in PBC, it might be hypothesized that COLIA1 may influence disease progression and fibrogenesis in patients with PBC.

It has also been suggested that IL-1RN polymorphism might influence the risk of hepatic fibrosis. In Japanese alcoholics heterozygotes for A1 allele rather than A1 homozygotes tended to have greater risk to develop fibrosis or cirrhosis [82]. Although numbers are small, in our study 7 out of 11 (63.3 %) patients heterozygous for A1 had advanced stage disease (stage III-IV), while 8 out of 22 (36.4%) of the A1 or A2 homozygotes, however, they did not differ in age nor had a longer disease history. Further studies are needed to determine, whether IL-1RN VNTR polymorphism could be associated with a more rapid disease progression.

In summary, in our studies we confirmed previous findings on higher frequency of the VDR BsmI BB genotype and B allele in patients with PBC. Our study was the first study to our knowledge to report on the ER- $\alpha$  XbaI and PvuII polymorphisms in PBC patients. An overrepresentation of the ER- $\alpha$  Pp and Xx genotypes was found in Hungarian PBC patients, while there was no difference in the IL-1RN VNTR and IGF I microsatellite repeat polymorphism between PBC patients and controls. Since IGF-I polymorphism was associated to BMD in PBC, it may be hypothesized that not COLIA1 but IGF-I together with other genetic and environmental factors may be involved in the complex regulation of BMD in PBC. In contrast to previous studies the s allele was less frequent in patients with PBC, and its presence was not associated with BMD.

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