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Malignant catarrhal fever-like lesions associated with ovine herpesvirus-2 infection in three goats

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27 **Abstract**

28 This is the first description of malignant catarrhal fever-like lesions associated with
29 ovine herpesvirus-2 (OvHV-2) infection in goats with central nervous symptoms. The
30 diagnosis was based on typical histological lesions characterized by systemic
31 lymphohistiocytic and fibrinoid vasculitis and confirmed by polymerase chain reaction and
32 subsequent phylogenetic analysis of the detected OvHV-2 sequences.

33 Keywords

34 Ovine herpesvirus-2, Goats, Vasculitis, Malignant catarrhal fever

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35 Introduction

36 Malignant catarrhal fever (MCF), a fatal lymphoproliferative disease of ruminant
 37 species including domestic cattle and wild living ruminants, is caused by a group of closely
 38 related gammaherpesviruses collectively referred to as malignant catarrhal fever viruses
 39 (Callan and Van Metre, 2004). Epidemiologically, two primary forms of MCF in cattle have
 40 been described with wildebeest-derived (WD)-MCF, caused by alcelaphine herpesvirus-1
 41 (AlHV-1), primarily seen in Africa and the sheep-associated-MCF (SA-MCF) due to ovine
 42 herpesvirus-2 (OvHV-2) in North America, Europe and Australia (Callan and Van Metre,
 43 2004). In goats another gammaherpesvirus, termed caprine herpesvirus-2 (CpHV-2) was
 44 identified (Li et al., 2001) causing MCF in white-tailed deer (Li et al., 2003) and in sika deer
 45 (Keel et al., 2003) in the USA. MCF-like lesions or disease in goats have not been reported so
 46 far. Interestingly, various ruminant species are susceptible to infection by MCF-viruses, but
 47 only few develop characteristic lesions. This is also the case for goats, which can be infected
 48 inapparently by OvHV-2 and CpHV-2 (Callan and Van Metre, 2004, Keel et al., 2003).

49 **Clinical signs similar to MCF have been observed in sheep under natural conditions, but**
 50 **the conjunction with OvHV-2 was not confirmed by laboratory tests (Rae, 1994).**

51 Experimentally, MCF-like disease was induced in sheep after aerosol inoculation with OvHV-
 52 2 (Li et al., 2005). MCF was also described in Barbary sheep (Yeruham et al., 2004) and pigs
 53 (Loken et al., 1998) identifying OvHV-2 by PCR as the presumable causative agent.

54 Here we describe MCF-like lesions in goats with OvHV-2-infection as confirmed by
 55 PCR and nucleic acid sequencing.

Results and discussion

Three female goats, two German Improved Fawn breed (No. 1, 3.5 years old; No. 2, 7 years old) and one dwarf goat (No. 3, 5 month old) originated from two different **flocks consisting of three goats and five sheep, and three dwarf goats, respectively**. All three animals showed fever and central nervous disorders including ataxia, tonic-clonic spasm, disorientation and tremor of the head. Animal No. 3 displayed diarrhea and cloudy corneas in both eyes. Goat No. 1 was euthanized by the local veterinary surgeon after 7 days of clinical disease, goat No. 2 and No. 3 died after 22 and 23 days of illness, respectively. At necropsy, the animals showed enlargement of lymph nodes, spleen and liver, pulmonary congestion and multifocally distributed tiny white spots in liver and kidney. Goat No. 3 displayed, in addition, an erosive, ulcerative esophagitis. Histopathology on hematoxylin and eosin stained sections revealed a lymphohistiocytic vasculitis with fibrinoid necrosis of vessel walls in several organs including lymph nodes, liver, kidney, brain, retina, and rete mirabile (Figure 1). Additionally, a granulomatous pneumonia due to parasites (No. 1), lymphohistiocytic meningitis (No. 1), pericholangitis (No. 2) and a multifocal ulcerative lymphohistiocytic esophagitis (No. 3) were observed.

Immunohistochemically, antigen for Borna disease virus, porcine herpesvirus-1, *Toxoplasma gondii* and *Neospora caninum* were not detectable. By immunofluorescence microscopy antigens of rabies and pestiviruses were not found.

Samples from different organs (goat No. 1: brain, kidney; goat No. 2: brain, cornea, lymph node, blood; goat No. 3: brain, mesenteric lymph node, spleen) were used for two different PCR set ups. Primers targeting the tegument region of OvHV-2 were taken from the literature (Baxter et al., 1993). For the glycoprotein B region of OvHV-2 and CpHV-2 primers were designed using the primer express software (ABI, Langen, Germany). The primer pair designated GlycoF02 (5'TCYGCCAAGCGMATCG3') and GlycoR01 (5'ACCGTGCTCATGCGCTT3') amplified a 424bp fragment. **Upon gel electrophoresis all**

samples showed DNA bands at the expected size. Positive controls for OvHV-2 originated from the brain of a cow that died after showing clinical signs of MCF and peripheral blood lymphocytes from an inapparently infected goat for CpHV-2. Obtained reaction products were cloned and sequenced. Comparison to nucleotide sequences of the glycoprotein B region of other herpesviruses retrieved from the gene bank revealed similarities of 99.04-99.68% for OvHV-2 and 83.93% for CpHV-2, respectively. Based on the DNA sequences of the glycoprotein B fragment including several other members of the gammaherpesvirinae pair wise genetic distances were calculated using the Kimura 2-parameter method (Kimura, 1980) and a phylogenetic tree was constructed applying the neighbour-joining method (Felsenstein, 1985) from the PHYLIP software package (University of Washington, Seattle, USA) (Figure 2). Phylogenetic analysis based on amplicons from the tegument region led to the same results (data not shown).

Clinically, these animals showed central nervous disorders, increased body temperature, pleocytosis and diarrhea. Similar signs have been described for cattle (Callan and Van Metre, 2004). Frequent clinical signs in bovine include persistent high fever and lymph node enlargement, whereas the intestinal form characterized by diarrhea is less often observed in this species (Callan and Van Metre, 2004). Neurological signs in bovine are less frequent and typically appear in the terminal stages of the disease. Affected animals are lethargic and appear obtunded (Callan and Van Metre, 2004). In the cerebrospinal fluid there is a marked pleocytosis (Plowright, 1990). Though animal No. 3 displayed a cloudy cornea, characteristic lesions of the “head-and-eye”-form described for cattle were not seen in these goats. Macroscopically, all three goats showed enlargement of lymph nodes and visceral organs with tiny white spots in liver and kidney. One animal displayed ulcerations and erosions of the esophagus. Similar findings have been reported for MCF in cattle (Plowright, 1990). Histopathologically, the animals showed lymphohistiocytic vasculitis with fibrinoid necrosis in several organs. In cattle this regarded as almost pathognomonic for MCF (Callan and Van

Metre, 2004). Vasculitis in bovines, similar to the present cases, is segmental and irregular in distribution, most readily seen in medium-sized arteries invariably accompanied by perivascular and intramural infiltration of mononuclear cells (Plowright, 1990). Frequently, there is fibrinoid degeneration of infiltrated mural tissues and smooth muscle elements of vessel walls. Vascular lesions appear to have predilection sites including kidney, brain and the rete mirabile of the hypophysis (Plowright, 1990). Until now, such disease pattern has not been described in goats.

Though the pathology of MCF is well documented, the pathogenesis still is poorly understood. Studies suggest a lymphoproliferative disorder involving the dysregulation of T-lymphocytes (Callan and Van Metre, 2004). In addition, there is evidence that MCF presents an immunopathological process (Plowright, 1990). The essential defect in MCF pathogenesis appears to be an immune deregulation attributable to a dysfunction of Natural Killer cells and uncontrolled proliferation of lymphoblastoid elements in many tissues (Plowright, 1990). Whether MCF-lesions are due to a type III or Arthus-like hypersensitivity reaction is still discussed controversially (Plowright, 1990). Most episodes of spontaneous SA-MCF in cattle appear to be a sequel of close contact to infected sheep actively shedding the agent (Metzler, 1991). Goat No. 1 and No. 2 were kept together with sheep. Though, goat No. 3 was kept together with sheep too, direct contact has been ruled out by the owner. However, there is evidence that OvHV-2 transmission can occur over distances (Callan and Van Metre, 2004).

Confirmatory diagnosis was based on the histological demonstration of a generalized lymphohistiocytic vasculitis in multiple organs, including the brain. Since members of the gammaherpesvirinae in general cannot be propagated easily in cell culture, PCR represents the method of choice to facilitate a direct diagnosis of viral infection. **Infections of goats with both OvHV-2 and CpHV-2 have been reported (Li et al., 2001, Metzler, 1991). However, data with regard to the prevalence of both agents in the goat population are limited. On the other hand OvHV-2 and CpHV-2 are well known as agents of MCF in**

various ruminant species including cattle, deer and Barbary sheep (Li et al., 2003, Keel et al., 2003, Yeruham et al., 2004, Plowright, 1990), however, MCF or MCF-like lesions have not been described in goats so far. Unfortunately, data of the OvHV-2 status of the sheep and unaffected goats from both flocks are not available. Experimental infections demonstrated the crucial role of the viral dose with regard to disease development in sheep and in cattle (Li et al., 2005, Taus et al., 2006). The latter studies suggested that a high viral burden correlates with the development of clinical MCF and histological lesions (Taus et al., 2006, Li et al., 2005). If a similar pathogenesis applies to OvHV-2 infection in goats remains to be investigated in further studies.

This is the first known description of MCF-like lesions in goats associated with an infection with OvHV-2. Diagnosis of OvHV-2 was established by PCR and confirmed by nucleotide sequencing. Phylogenetic analysis, based on two different regions of the genome, identified the viruses detected in three infected goats as OvHV-2 that is clearly separated from known caprine herpesviruses. Although the etiological role of the viruses found independently in goats with signs of MCF was not formally established, it is likely that OvHV-2 was responsible for disease induction and played an essential role in the pathogenesis of the lesions. **However, further studies are required to establish a causal relationship between the observed clinic, lesions and OvHV-2 infection.**

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190 Figure captions

191 Figure 1:

192 Lymphohistiocytic vasculitis (star) with fibrinoid necrosis (arrow) in a medium-sized artery,
193 kidney, hematoxylin and eosin. Bar 50µm.

194

195 Figure 2:

196 Phylogenetic analysis of the glycoprotein B sequence (315bp): The branch lengths are
197 proportionate to relative genetic distances. Statistical significance of the branches was
198 calculated by boot strap analysis using 1000 replicates. Boot strap values are indicated for
199 main branches. According to the phylogenetic analysis the newly identified sequences from
200 the three goats with clinical symptoms of malignant catarrhal fever (Goat No. 1, No. 2 and
201 No. 3) group together with ovine herpesvirus-2 (OvHV-2 I-V [AF327833, AF385442,
202 AF385439, AF385440, AF385441]; 99,04-99,68% similarity) and clearly separate from
203 caprine herpesvirus-2 (CpHV-2 [AF283477]; 83,93% similarity), alcelaphine herpesvirus-1
204 (AlHV-1 [AF005370]; 79,01-79,89% similarity) and other tested members of the
205 Gammaherpesvirinae (alcelaphine herpesvirus-2 (AlHV-2 [AY237369]), bovine
206 lymphotropic herpesvirus (BLHV I and II [AF327832, AY237373]), type 1 and 2 ruminant
207 rhadinovirus (Type 1 RRhV [AY237371]; Type 2 RRhV I and II [AY237367, AY237368]),
208 and malignant catarrhal fever virus in white-tailed deer (WTD-MCF [AY237370]).



