

## **An interferon signature is associated with HAM/TSP but not viral containment in HTLV-1 infection**

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► **To cite this version:**

Sonja Tattermusch, Jason Skinner, Damien Chaussabel, Jacques Banchereau, Matthew Berry, et al..  
An interferon signature is associated with HAM/TSP but not viral containment in HTLV-1 infection.  
15th International Conference on Human Retroviruses: HTLV and Related Viruses, Jun 2011, Leuven  
and Gembloux, Belgium. BioMed Central, 8 (Suppl 1), pp.A108, 2011, Retrovirology. <10.1186/1742-  
4690-8-S1-A108>. <inserm-00663943>

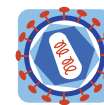
**HAL Id: inserm-00663943**

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Submitted on 27 Jan 2012

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MEETING ABSTRACT

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# An interferon signature is associated with HAM/TSP but not viral containment in HTLV-1 infection

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From 15th International Conference on Human Retroviruses: HTLV and Related Viruses Leuven and Gembloux, Belgium. 5-8 June 2011

Most people infected with Human T-cell Lymphotropic Virus Type 1 (HTLV-1) remain clinically asymptomatic; however, a minority develops the debilitating myelopathy HAM/TSP. Current treatment of HAM/TSP is limited by our partial understanding of the protective immune response to HTLV-1 and the pathogenesis of HAM/TSP.

We wished to test the hypothesis that a gene expression signature in peripheral blood distinguishes between patients with HAM/TSP and ACs. We investigated genome-wide transcription patterns in whole blood from HTLV-1 asymptomatic carriers (AC; n=37), patients with HAM/TSP (n=20) and uninfected control subjects (n=17). We identified a 542-gene signature that was deregulated in all HTLV-1+ individuals and predominantly comprised transcripts involved in p53-mediated DNA damage responses (p=0.00489). An 80-gene signature distinguished patients with HAM/TSP from those with the clinically similar disease multiple sclerosis. Paradoxically, at a given proviral load patients with HAM/TSP, but not ACs, over-expressed antiviral interferon-stimulated genes (ISGs; p=0.00859).

Expression of these ISGs (assessed by quantitative PCR and flow cytometry) was not limited to HTLV-1-infected CD4+ T cells, suggesting that all peripheral blood immune cells were exposed to interferons (IFN) *in vivo*. Neither elevated IFN plasma levels nor an abnormal capacity for IFN production was detected in patients with HAM/TSP. However, peripheral immune cells in patients with HAM/TSP were more sensitive to IFN-alpha and IFN-gamma stimulation.

These findings suggest that chronic over-expression of a specific subset of ISGs is ineffective in containing HTLV-1 and may instead contribute to the pathogenesis of HTLV-1-associated myelopathy.

#### Acknowledgements

This study is funded by the Wellcome Trust (UK).

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Published: 6 June 2011

doi:10.1186/1742-4690-8-S1-A108

Cite this article as: Tattermusch *et al.*: An interferon signature is associated with HAM/TSP but not viral containment in HTLV-1 infection. *Retrovirology* 2011 **8**(Suppl 1):A108.

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