

Role of Endogenous Neural Stem Cells in Neurological Disease and Brain Repair

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Introduction

There is abundant evidence that neural stem cells persist in the adult mammalian brain—including humans—throughout lifetime and support ongoing neurogenesis in restricted regions of the central nervous system (CNS). The potential role of neural stem cells not only in normal brain function, but also in neurological disease and repair now appears to be larger than anticipated only a few years ago. The question, however, remains whether the persistence of adult stem cells, their proliferation, and neurogenesis from these progenitors reflect the ability for self-repair in the mammalian brain. We here discuss recent advances in the understanding of the role of endogenous stem cells in normal brain function and under circumstances of neurological disease.

Neural Stem Cells in the Mammalian CNS

Neural stem cells (NSCs) are defined by their potential for theoretically unlimited self-renewal, and their ability to generate cells of both neuronal and glial lineages. During development, stem cells are found in the ventricular zone of the CNS.^{1,2} In the adult brain, neural stem cells are primarily restricted to two brain regions, the subventricular zone of the lateral ventricles³⁻⁸ and the subgranular zone of the dentate gyrus⁹⁻¹¹—both regions in which neurogenesis persists throughout adulthood (Fig. 1). In low numbers, stem or progenitor cells have also been derived from many other brain regions, including septum, striatum,¹² cortex,¹⁰ optic nerve,^{12,13} spinal cord¹⁴ and retina.^{15,16} Apparently, these cells comprise a quiescent population of stem cells with as yet unknown functional relevance for the brain.

Stem cells of the adult brain have traditionally been classified as “multipotent”. This term reflects their potential for differentiation into multiple neuroectodermal lineages, but not beyond this tissue-specificity. More recent evidence, however, suggests that cells with greater differentiation potential (“pluripotency”) can be derived from the adult brain.^{1,17-19} Moreover, stem cells from outside the brain can give rise to neurons *in vivo* (Fig. 2), at least under specific experimental conditions.²⁰⁻²²

The field of neural stem cell biology is currently undergoing dramatic changes in its concepts of “stemness”, tissue-specificity, and developmental potential.^{23,24} For the purpose of this review we adhere to the classical concepts of neural stem cell biology. However, much of what

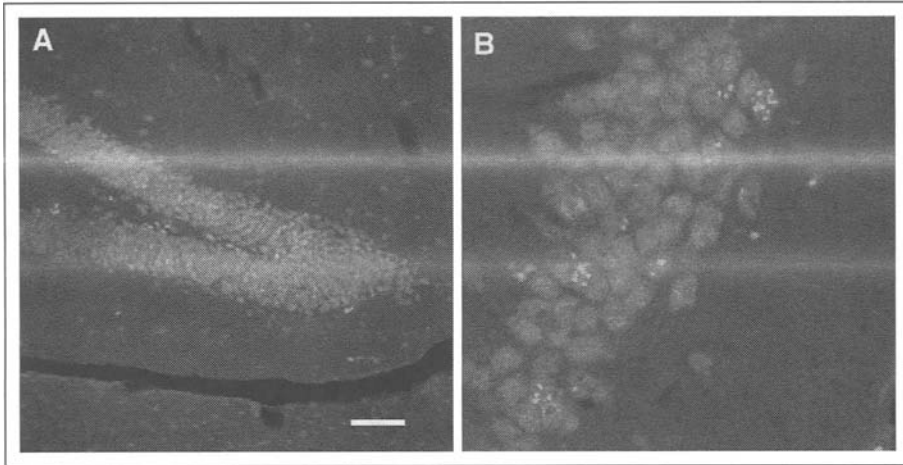


Figure 1. New neurons in the adult hippocampus. Confocal microscopic image of the hippocampus of an adult mouse, demonstrating neurogenesis in the granule cell layer of the dentate gyrus. A) Dividing cells in the subgranular zone (the border between granule cell layer and hilus) are labeled with proliferation marker bromodeoxyuridine (BrdU). B) Four to five weeks after cell division, newly generated neurons can be found throughout the granule cell layer. They are identified by their colocalization of immunoreactivity with antibodies against BrdU and neuronal marker NeuN. Astrocytes are identified by their expression of S100 β . Scale bar (in A) equals 100 μ m for (A) and 20 μ m for (B). Image from Kempermann, *Bipolar Disorders* 2002; 4:17-33, with kind permission of Munksgaard, Copenhagen, Denmark, ©2002.

will be discussed reflects a rather preliminary and probably simplifying view on the principles underlying stem cell biology in the adult brain.

Progeny from neural stem cells of the subventricular zone migrate along the rostral migratory stream to the olfactory bulb to differentiate into local interneurons.^{25,26} In the hippocampus, neural stem cells give rise to new granule cells that extend their axons to area CA3 along the mossy fiber tract, as do all other granule cells of the dentate gyrus.²⁷⁻³³ The new granule cells are electrophysiologically indistinguishable from older granule cells,³⁴ suggesting their functional integration.

Numerous factors that regulate adult hippocampal neurogenesis have been identified, but at present we are far from a unifying theory on which principles govern this regulation and which functional consequences it has (as reviewed in e.g., ref. 35).

Cells with stem-cell-like properties, dissected from diverse regions of the adult mammalian brain, can be induced to proliferate and differentiate *in vitro* in the presence of various growth factors, such as epidermal growth factor (EGF) or fibroblast growth factor (FGF-2).^{2,11,36-38} Clonal analysis of these cells derived from the embryonic and adult brain has demonstrated their multipotency by giving rise to neurons, astrocytes and oligodendrocytes. This multipotency can also be detected in so-called neurospheres, a three-dimensional cell aggregates that are widely used to study neural stem cells *in vitro*.^{37,39} With multiple neural stem cell populations loosely identified, questions arise where exactly these cells are located in the adult CNS and whether these stem cell populations are actually distinct cell types sharing similar potentials⁴⁰ or reflect different developmental stages that can be traced back to one unifying stem cell population. Interestingly, the isolation and characterization of neurospheres from different regions of the human embryonic CNS reveals a regionally specific pattern of growth and differentiation characteristics, suggesting the possible existence of distinct neural stem cell populations.⁴¹ Consistent with these observations, there is evidence that stem cells

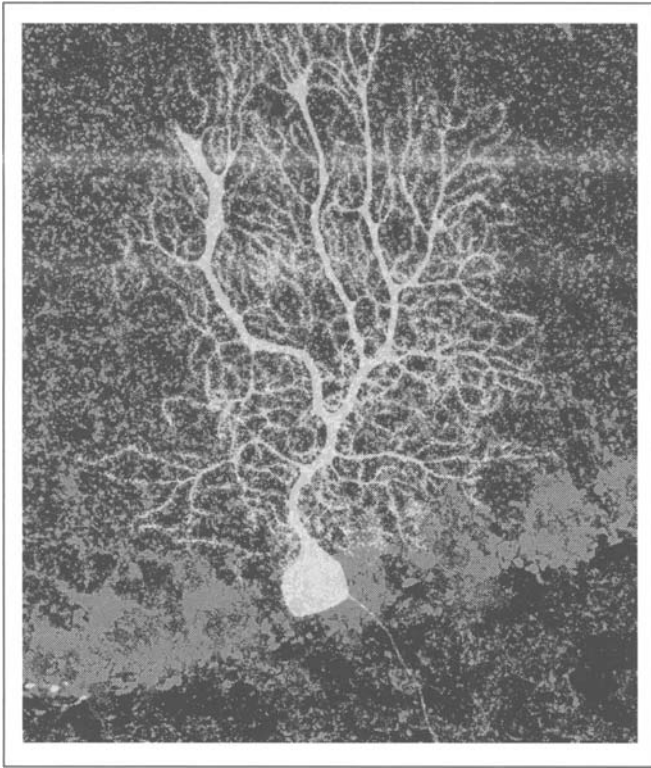


Figure 2. New neurons from bone marrow. Confocal microscopic image of bone marrow-derived Purkinje cells. One year after transplantation of bone marrow transduced with a retrovirus carrying green fluorescent protein (GFP), donor-derived Purkinje cells were visualized by confocal microscopy. The surrounding staining is GAD (glutamate decarboxylase), identifying the neighboring GAD-expressing Purkinje cells (see Priller et al. *J Cell Biol* 2001; 155:733-738 for details. Image courtesy of Josef Priller, Berlin).

isolated from different brain regions maintain their regionally specific expression pattern of homeobox genes *in vitro*.⁴² These results suggest that the identity of a particular stem or progenitor cell might be regionally and temporally specified depending on local environmental cues. However, in many respects, the behavior of the adult-derived stem and progenitor cells is indistinguishable from that of similar cells of the embryonic brain, suggesting some lineage continuity between the embryogenic and the adult CNS.⁴³

Neural Stem Cells in Neurological Disease and Repair

The very existence of stem cells and neurogenesis in the adult brain throughout lifetime has shed new light on the potential of the brain for regeneration in the context of a variety of neurological diseases. In fact, several pathological conditions of the CNS have been associated with alterations in progenitor and stem cells – either as a consequence or as a cause of disease. In general, the following concepts for a stem cell-based therapy in the brain exist:

1. NSCs for direct replacement of lost cells from an identified neuronal population,
2. NSCs for replacement of glial or other cells with indirect effects on neurons (e.g., in spinal cord injury or multiple sclerosis),
3. NSCs for replacement of diffuse and complex cell losses (e.g., in stroke or trauma),

4. NSCs as vehicles for growth factor or gene delivery,
5. NSCs as basis of regeneration in situ, and
6. NSCs as target cells for other therapies based on the assumption that stem cells are involved in the pathology of a particular disease (e.g., depression, brain tumors).

In the following paragraphs we will discuss recent developments in which the concept of neural stem cells has been of special importance in changing the current understanding of neurological and psychiatric disease.

The Injured CNS

In contrast to other self-repairing tissues, such as the liver, skin or blood, the mammalian brain apparently lacks the regenerative potential to compensate adequately for neuronal and glial cell death, making this tissue particularly vulnerable to injury and disease.⁴⁴

Repair strategies following CNS injury consist of different aspects of regeneration, including cellular replacement (by means of cell transplantation or endogenous stem cell activation), neurotrophic factor delivery, axon guidance and removal of growth inhibition, manipulation of intracellular signaling, bridging and artificial substrates, and modulation of the immune response (as reviewed in e.g., ref. 45).

For the purpose of this review we will specifically focus on recent findings in the contribution of endogenous neural stem cells to repair mechanisms.

Brain injury induced by traumatic lesions can cause a transient increase in proliferation of neural stem cells in the ventricle wall.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸ However, these studies could not clearly demonstrate any neuronal contribution of stem cells to the lesioned CNS.

As multipotent neural stem cells have been isolated from various regions of the adult mammalian brain, the failure of the normal brain to sufficiently regenerate under pathological conditions (e.g., traumatic brain injury) does not appear to be an intrinsic deficit of neural stem cells, but rather a characteristic feature of the damaged environment that does not sufficiently promote functional repair.

Nevertheless, the adult brain appears to be able to reorganize itself after *peripheral* injury and initial deficits in behavior, perception or cognition can be followed by a spontaneous recovery.⁴⁹⁻⁵¹ At least on a cortical level, this has been explained by the ability of the mammalian brain for cortical reorganization and plasticity.⁵² From these studies, however, it cannot be concluded whether or to what extent adult neurogenesis contributes to such re-organizational processes.

In a more recent study Macklis and co-workers have demonstrated that neurogenesis can be induced in the lesioned neocortex of adult mice.⁵³ Endogenous precursor cells were stimulated by selective pyramidal cell apoptosis to generate cortical neurons that established appropriate corticothalamic connections. It has been speculated that either neural stem cells from the subventricular zone or resident cortical progenitors might have represented the source of these newborn neurons.⁴⁴ Thus, it seems possible that cells with stem-cell-like properties exist throughout the adult CNS. However, physiologically, these cells appear to give rise to neurons only in restricted neurogenic areas. Accordingly, it has also been suggested that adult neurogenesis represents the dormant capacity of the brain for a limited self-regeneration.⁴⁴ However, direct evidence is still missing that would clearly demonstrate the replacement of degenerated or dying neurons by newborn neurons. If this were the case, it would be important to know about the sequence of signals (e.g., released by apoptotic cell death) that are involved in the neurogenic response and that might direct newborn cells towards the lesioned area.

While the persistent neurogenesis in the brain with its apparent responsiveness to injury might reveal a possible endogenous repair program, the situation in the spinal cord seems to be somewhat different. A few studies report the existence of multipotent neural stem cells derived from adult spinal cord.⁵⁴⁻⁵⁶ At present there is no convincing report on neurogenesis in the

adult mammalian spinal cord. Progenitor cells in the adult rodent spinal cord produce glial cells.⁵⁷ Although there is increased proliferation of parenchymal progenitor cells⁵⁶ and nestin-expressing ependymal cells in the spinal cord after traumatic injury,⁵⁸ neurogenesis as a response to injury has not been found. This suggests that in case of spinal cord injury mobilizing endogenous neural stem cells to initiate neuronal repair remains a relatively distant possibility. However, at present no study on spinal cord injury has used such a highly specific and local induction of cell death as in the described study by Macklis and co-workers.⁵³

Spinal cord injury is usually followed by a combination of neuronal and axonal damage, inflammation and demyelination. Thus, mobilizing more restricted progenitor cell pools (e.g., oligodendrocyte precursors) after spinal cord injury might—under appropriate conditions—contribute to myelin repair, regeneration of conduction velocity, and functional improvement (see ref. 59). Functional recovery frequently observed after spinal cord trauma in rodents and humans appears to be a consequence rather of axonal plasticity than of neural stem cell activation.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the stimulation of local progenitor pools⁵⁹ and the enhancement of axonal plasticity, e.g., by local application of growth factors⁶¹ and neuroprotective factor,⁶²⁻⁶⁵ or other compounds^{66,67} might become a useful approach to promote recovery after adult spinal cord injury.

Thus far, cell transplantation strategies for the injured brain and spinal cord have been performed using a variety of cell types and tissues, such as neuronal cell lines,⁶⁸ embryonic neuroblasts,^{69,70} neural precursors,⁷¹ oligodendrocyte precursors⁷² and spinal cord tissue.⁷³

In many of these studies, the expression of appropriate neurotransmitters by the grafted cells, the receiving of synaptic inputs from host neurons, or the establishment of long-distance projections could be demonstrated. In addition, functional improvements have been observed. Thus, cellular replacement of the injured CNS via transplantation might be possible, however, it seems to be critically dependent on the molecular host environment and the functional integration of the grafted tissue into the neuronal synaptic circuitry.

Taken together, in the field of spinal cord injury, stem cell research and the potential recruitment of endogenous cellular repair mechanisms hold great promises, but at present only few data exist that substantiate this optimism. However, the existence of neural stem cells in the adult mammalian brain and the positive effects of physical activity or the exposure to a complex environment on adult hippocampal neurogenesis suggest a potential practical impact of this research for neurorehabilitation.⁵²

Neurodegenerative Diseases

Neurodegenerative diseases are characterized by a continuous loss of neurons with specific patterns of neuronal cell death associated with distinct disturbances in the neuronal network. Examples are the loss of dopaminergic input to the striatum from the substantia nigra in Parkinson's disease or the degeneration of cortical neurons with a cholinergic deafferentation in Alzheimer's disease.

In the light of our current understanding of the limited regenerative capacity of the adult mammalian CNS, the hypothesis has emerged that neurodegenerative diseases might actually reflect a failure of endogenous neural stem cells to replace lost neurons.⁷⁴ This "malfunction" of neuro-regeneration could be due to a primary failure of stem cell proliferation, migration, appropriate differentiation or a combination of all three, resulting in a lack of neurons at critically important topographical locations. At present there is no experimental evidence that a generalized theory of this kind could hold true, because with extremely few well-documented exceptions adult neurogenesis is restricted to the olfactory system and the hippocampal dentate gyrus.

Neurogenesis within neurogenic regions can be stimulated *in vivo* after exogenous administration of various growth factors and cytokines, including erythropoietin,⁷⁵ brain derived

neurotrophic factor (BDNF),⁷⁶ Insulin-like growth factor I (IGF),⁷⁷ epidermal growth factor (EGF) and basic fibroblast growth factor (bFGF).^{78,79} Moreover, cytokine infusion has been shown to stimulate neurogenesis in animal models of neurological disease. For example, infusion of transforming growth factor alpha (TGF α) to the forebrain of 6-hydroxydopamine lesioned rats (a model for Parkinson's disease) resulted in increased cell proliferation, directed migration of newly generated cells toward the infusion site and increased numbers of neurons in the striatum. This increase of neurons was associated with improvements in apomorphine-induced rotations of the animals (indicative of motor improvement).⁸⁰ This result fits well with data from the first study using transplantation of embryonic stem cells into a model of Parkinson's disease.⁸¹

Although very little is known about what signals direct newborn cells towards a particular CNS lesion and what factors orchestrate the appropriate site-specific differentiation of neural progenitors, the activation of endogenous stem cells to induce neurogenesis might be a possible means to overcome neuronal cell loss that occurs during the course of neurodegenerative disease. Despite encouraging first findings, this strategy remains speculative at the present time.

Most experiences in using neural stem cells for treatment of neurological disease have been made in Parkinson's disease.⁸² Fetal cells have already been transplanted to severely impaired patients in clinical trials⁸³⁻⁸⁶ and demonstrate that fetal human mesencephalic cells containing dopaminergic neurons can survive after transplantation, restore striatal dopamine release, and ameliorate motor behavior impairments. However, clinical and experimental studies have shown that functional integration of the grafted neurons within the host brain is necessary to produce substantial recovery.⁸⁷⁻⁸⁹

In Huntington's disease, a genetic disease characterized by a progressive neurodegeneration in the striatum and cerebral cortex, transplantation of fetal neural tissue has also offered a therapeutic opportunity.^{82,90} In animal models of Huntington's disease, transplantation of fetal striatal neuroblasts to the striatum have been shown to be functionally integrated into the host environment and to restore striatal connections.⁹¹ Reconstruction of neuronal circuitry by grafted tissue into the striatum could also be demonstrated in primates.^{92,93} Moreover, transplantation of fetal striatal tissue has also been applied in patients with Huntington's disease.^{90,94} In a clinical study, five patients with Huntington's disease who received fetal grafts were assessed for therapeutic outcome one year after transplantation. Patients with presumed surviving grafts (demonstrated by positron-emission tomography) showed improvements in motor and cognitive functions, and functional benefits were seen in daily-life activities.⁹⁴

Due to a number of limitations using fetal grafts (e.g., ethical problems, survival of grafted cells, and problems in standardization and quality control), future efforts will also focus on the *in vitro* expansion and differentiation of neural stem cells as alternative sources to primary fetal CNS tissue for replacement therapy in neurodegenerative diseases.^{82,95,96}

A cell-mediated gene therapy of the diseased CNS offers an alternative approach for the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases.⁹⁷⁻¹⁰⁰ For example, specific neurotransmitter release (e.g., γ -aminobutyric acid or dopamine) by transplanted neurotransmitter-synthesizing cells into the affected regions of the CNS has been shown to improve disease-related symptoms.^{101,102}

Taken together, neurodegenerative diseases in which a defined cell type is being lost or damaged, such as Parkinson's disease, might be good candidates for a targeted stem cell therapy. In contrast, owing to the diffuse nature of neuronal and glial cell death that is associated with other neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's disease, repair of such disorders represents a potentially different category of problem than the repair of focal degeneration. Assuming that there is no primary deficit in the neural stem cells themselves as a cause of disease, a direct stimulation of endogenous neural stem cells through pharmaceutical or behavioral manipulation might increase brain plasticity and repair. Regardless, the continued cell loss during the course of neurodegenerative diseases will be challenging to overcome. It seems substantial,

however, to define more clearly the cellular compartments affected in those disorders as a prelude to the analysis of cell protection or cell replacement strategies. It seems more likely that future therapies of neurodegenerative diseases will be advanced by general lessons on cellular development, survival and plasticity learned from stem cell biology than by the direct application of stem cells in these conditions.

Brain Tumors

Compelling theories are linking neural stem cell biology to neurological disease in the field of neuro-oncology. An increasing knowledge about neural stem and progenitor cells has started to shed light on the potential role of these cells in respect to tumorigenesis, brain tumor classification, and the treatment of brain tumors. Moreover, understanding the vulnerability of CNS precursor cells towards drug toxicity or irradiation might help to reveal the biological basis for brain damage frequently associated with cancer treatments.

Consistent with experiences in the treatment of tumors of the hematopoietic system, the diagnosis of brain tumors based on cell lineage appears to be of great potential value. In hemato-oncology, the normal cellular lineage to which a tumor is related seems to be closely correlated with treatment response and prognosis.¹⁰³⁻¹⁰⁹

At present, various precursor cell populations have been identified in the developing and/or mature CNS: EGF-dependent and FGF-dependent neuroepithelial stem cells (NSCs),^{3,37,54,110-113} lineage-restricted precursor cells,¹¹⁴⁻¹¹⁶ including neuron-restricted precursor (NRP) cells^{114,117} and glial-restricted precursor (GRP) cells,¹¹⁵ and oligodendrocyte-type-2 astrocyte (O2A) progenitor cells.^{118,119} In addition, a number of astrocyte precursor cells¹²⁰⁻¹²³ and a pre-O2A progenitor cell have been reported in the literature.¹²⁴ Both multipotent neural stem cells and lineage restricted precursor cells have also been identified in the adult mammalian brain, including humans.^{11,125-131}

To make matters even more complex, there have been recent reports on stem cells with an overlapping developmental potential between the CNS and the hematopoietic system, which could give rise to both neural cells and blood cells.^{23,132-136} Bartlett and colleagues have isolated a more-than-multipotent stem cell from the adult mouse brain, whose developmental potential approached that of pluripotent embryonic stem cells.¹ Similar data exist for stem cells from bone marrow¹³⁷ and skin.¹³⁸ These data question the validity of the term "tissue specificity" of stem or progenitor cells and elucidate that we are far from a final systematic of stem cell biology in the adult.

All of the described cells could be potential targets of transformation events to initiate the development of a tumor in the CNS.¹³⁹ Thus, a lineage-based classification system for brain tumors might lead to the establishment of better prognostic criteria and might also help to define patient populations that would benefit from a particular treatment.¹³⁹⁻¹⁴²

Establishment of brain tumor models on the basis of CNS precursor cells will not only increase our understanding of potential genomic alterations during tumorigenesis, but will also provide helpful information on the relation between transformed precursor cells and the (heterogeneous) tumors they create *in vivo*.^{140,143-145} In this regard, the cell lineage appears to be important in determining whether or not a particular genetic lesion will have functional consequence. For example, a specific genetic alteration could result in a different tumor-forming ability or tumor phenotype, depending on the precursor cell that was targeted.¹⁴⁶

Several studies have described the expression of glial and neuronal markers in brain tumors, including astrocytomas, oligodendrogliomas, medulloblastomas and primitive neuroectodermal tumors (PNETS).¹⁴⁷⁻¹⁵¹ To date no markers are available that specifically and unambiguously label neural stem or precursor cells, only the development of antibodies to new cell type specific antigens, e.g., by gene expression analysis and microarray technology, might help to assign particular brain tumors to their lineages of origin.¹⁵²⁻¹⁵⁴ For some tumor populations

such analysis has already been successfully applied in order to cluster tumors with a similar prognosis.¹⁵⁵⁻¹⁵⁷

Neural stem cells might become useful as possible means of brain tumor treatment. To achieve this it will be important to understand to what extent endogenous stem and precursor cells influence or modulate tumor cells in the CNS. The most straightforward approach is to use stem cells as vehicle cells in gene therapy, building on the readiness of these cells to develop tissue specificity and become functionally integrated in the host organism. For example, neural stem cells genetically modified to produce interleukin-4 promoted tumor regression and prolonged survival in mice injected intracranially with a mouse glioma cell line.¹⁵⁸ In another study, implantation of a neural stem cell line, engineered to produce cytosine deaminase (which converts 5-fluorocytosine to the oncolytic drug 5-fluorouracil), into the CNS of mice harboring a tumor resulted in a reduction of the tumor mass *in vivo*, when animals were treated with 5-fluorocytosine.¹⁵⁹ Interestingly, implanted neural stem cells were detected in the primary tumor mass when injected at a distance from the tumor and were also seen to co-cluster with tumor cells at distances remote from the tumor injection site. This result is exciting since one of the most important impediments to the treatment of malignant brain tumors has been the invasion of tumor cells into the surrounding normal brain tissue, which makes their treatment particularly challenging.^{160,161} Many more experiments will be required and many questions will have to be answered before it is clear whether neural stem cells can be used for the treatment of brain tumors (as reviewed in refs. 162,163). For example, do neural stem cells really migrate towards dispersed tumor cells or are they simply using the same migratory substrates leading to an occasional juxtaposition? Do endogenous or transplanted neural stem cells change their biological properties (e.g., differentiation and proliferation) in case of a present tumor mass? What are potential adverse effects of transplanting neural stem cells into the human brain? And would it be possible to visualize and monitor transplanted stem cells *in vivo* to design controlled clinical studies? In this regard, there have already been promising results with labeling neural stem or progenitor cells in order to make them detectable by magnetic resonance imaging after transplantation.¹⁶⁴⁻¹⁶⁶

A different aspect relating neural stem cells to oncology has been raised in regard to the vulnerability of the CNS to conventional cancer treatment. In fact, traditional approaches to cancer therapy are often associated with severe neurotoxicity. For example, radiation-induced neurological complications include leukoencephalopathy, radionecrosis, myelopathy, cranial nerve damage and cognitive impairment.¹⁶⁷⁻¹⁶⁹

Moreover, it has been well known that many chemotherapeutic regimens may be associated with severe neurotoxicity. For example, multiple reports have confirmed cognitive impairment in children and adults after chemotherapy. Neurotoxicity of chemotherapy may be particularly hazardous when combined with radiotherapy.^{169,170} For example, computed tomography (CT) studies of patients receiving both brain radiation and chemotherapy showed that all patients surviving a malignant glioma for more than 4 years developed leukoencephalopathy and brain atrophy.¹⁷¹

Thus, improvements in survival for children with leukemias or brain tumors treated with radiotherapy and chemotherapy have led to increasing concerns on quality-of-life issues for long-term survivors, in which neuropsychological testing has revealed a high frequency of cognitive deficits.^{168,172-175}

Potential clues to the biological basis of neurotoxicity, such as cognitive impairment, have come from studies on the effects of radiation on the brain. On a cellular basis, radiation appears to cause damage to both dividing and non-dividing CNS cells. Irradiation has been shown to cause apoptosis in the subgranular zone of the hippocampal dentate gyrus^{176,177} and in the subependymal zone,¹⁷⁸ both of which are sites of continuing stem or progenitor cell proliferation in the adult CNS. Such damage also is associated with long-term impairment of

subependymal repopulation,¹⁷⁷ indicating that surviving stem cells are unable to regenerate the subependymal zone. This could in fact lead to a profound impairment of the overall cellular plasticity in the CNS.

Furthermore, non-dividing cells, such as oligodendrocytes, are also killed by irradiation,¹⁷⁹ which seems to be consistent with clinical evidence, where irradiation induces diffuse myelin and axonal loss, tissue necrosis and diffuse spongiosis of the white matter.¹⁸⁰ There is considerable discussion whether the damage caused by irradiation represents a direct or indirect effect on the brain. Although some damage in vivo might be secondary to vascular damage, radiation is also directly damaging important CNS populations, such as oligodendrocyte precursor cells.¹⁸¹

Recent studies have indicated that carmustine (BCNU), a lipophilic alkylating agent, is toxic for oligodendrocytes at doses that would be routinely achieved in patients. In contrast, astrocytes appear to be relatively resistant to BCNU, and O-2A cells showed intermediate levels of sensitivity.¹⁸² The sensitivity of oligodendrocytes to BCNU raises the disturbing issue of whether the normal cells of the brain are damaged by exposure to chemotherapeutic agents. Preliminary results raise the concern that multiple types of neural precursor cells are at least as sensitive to death induced by chemotherapeutic agents as are cancer cells themselves (J. Dietrich and M. Noble, unpublished observations).

Taken together, in the field of neuro-oncology various intersections between neural stem cells and tumors of the CNS seem to emerge. An increasing knowledge about the lineage relationships and biological properties of different neural stem and precursor cells might help to better understand the process of tumorigenesis in the CNS and might also help to develop novel treatment options for future cancer therapies.

Demyelinating Diseases

Demyelination is a common feature of various neurological diseases with different underlying causes such as inflammation, autoimmune reactions, degeneration, and trauma.¹⁸³⁻¹⁸⁶ Multiple sclerosis (MS), as the most prominent example of a demyelinating disease, is characterized by chronic inflammatory focal demyelination associated with a variable degree of axonal loss.¹⁸⁷⁻¹⁸⁹

The appearance of demyelination and axonal loss very early in the course of the disease^{190,191} suggests that strategies of myelin repair might be a possible means of protecting axons from further immunological insults.

In general, therapeutic strategies to promote myelin repair have focused on two major avenues: (1) cell transplantation to provide an exogenous source of cells which are competent to form myelin producing cells, and (2) recruitment of endogenous cell populations that are capable to produce myelin.¹⁹²

Experimentally, the transplantation of certain types of cells, including oligodendrocyte precursor cells or multipotent stem cells, which are able to generate myelin-producing oligodendrocytes, can lead to remyelination of chronic demyelinated tissue.¹⁹³⁻¹⁹⁷ Promising results in myelin repair and re-establishment of nerve conduction have come from the use of embryonic neural stem cells that were expanded in vitro and induced to the oligodendroglial lineage prior to transplantation.^{192,193,198} However, regardless of the potential of transplanted cells to produce myelin, poor survival of grafted cells, lack of migration of these cells beyond the lesion site and therefore an unpredictable therapeutic outcome are current limitations to this approach.¹⁹⁹

In demyelinated CNS regions a certain amount of remyelination occurs,²⁰⁰⁻²⁰⁴ but remyelination in the adult damaged brain remains incomplete.^{202,205-207}

The identity and origin of cells, that participate in endogenous remyelination has been unraveled to some degree. Multipotent stem cells, oligodendrocytes, or oligodendrocyte precursor cells are possible candidates involved in the remyelination process. Multipotent neural

stem cells have been implicated in myelin repair.²⁰⁸ For example, in a lysolecithin-induced demyelination of the corpus callosum progenitors of the rostral subventricular zone (SVZ) expressing the polysialylated form of the neural cell adhesion molecule (PSA-NCAM) proliferate and seem to migrate towards the lesion site and differentiate into glia but not neurons.²⁰⁹

Whereas oligodendrocytes of the adult forebrain are primarily postmitotic,²¹⁰ persistent cycling oligodendrocyte precursor cells (OPCs) might represent the most likely population and source for myelin repair.^{72,210-212}

OPCs are not only present in the developing but also in the adult mammalian brain.^{118,213-215} Their specific function in the normal brain is largely unknown. It has been hypothesized that they play a role in influencing neuronal activity^{216,217} and synaptic growth.^{218,219}

In the injured brain or in case of demyelination, oligodendrocyte precursor cells might form a glial population that can be activated to proliferate and to become involved in repair mechanisms by giving rise to myelinating oligodendrocytes.^{209,220} This exciting potential has initiated research on the exact mechanisms that induce oligodendrocyte precursor cells migration, proliferation and differentiation to promote myelin repair.

Several studies have also indicated the persistence of mitotic oligodendrocyte precursor cells in the *adult human* subcortical white matter.²²¹⁻²²⁴ However, only small numbers of oligodendrocytes are generated in the intact adult mammalian brain.²²⁵ Thus, subcortical white matter progenitors appear to be a quiescent population, and oligodendrocyte differentiation from these cells to a myelinating stage is considered to be a rare event.²¹⁵

In contrast, glial progenitor proliferation can be found after injury and in several animal studies of induced demyelination.^{192,220,226} Moreover, oligodendrocyte precursor cells have also been identified in multiple sclerosis lesions.^{227,228}

However, they apparently fail to proliferate and to differentiate during chronic stages of the disease.²⁰³ Reasons for the incomplete repair might lie in a profound axonal loss, the lack of sufficient precursor migration towards a lesion, insufficient precursor pools that could be mobilized or the lack of permissive environmental cues (e.g., growth factors and cytokines) to activate precursor cells.

For example, immature cycling progenitor cells of the adult subcortical white matter can be recruited to give rise to myelin-producing oligodendrocytes in response to experimental focal demyelination by lysolecithin,²²⁹ but do not migrate towards the lesioned area so that only cells present at the site of demyelination can participate in remyelination.²²⁹ Consequently, severe demyelination might damage all resident progenitors at one particular lesion site—as it is to be assumed in chronic MS lesions—and thus profoundly reduce the capacity for myelin repair in that region.

Therefore it would be a useful approach to direct the migration of cycling precursor cells towards a demyelinated area that has suffered depletion of its own precursor population.

Since oligodendrocyte precursors fail to survive and migrate when transplanted into the *intact* mammalian brain,^{230,231} multiple environmental factors might be important to trigger progenitor cells to proliferate and differentiate. In fact, the balance between cell proliferation and differentiation appears to be mediated by local environmental cues, such as growth factors locally synthesized by surrounding neurons and glia. For example, glial growth factor 2 (a neuroregulin isoform) or Insulin-Growth-Factor 1, have been shown to promote remyelination in animal models of inflammatory demyelination.²³²

The immune system itself is likely to influence myelin repair.²³³⁻²³⁵ For example, there is evidence that circulating immunoglobulins bind to oligodendrocyte surface antigens to promote remyelination,²³⁶ and that antigen-antibody binding may facilitate the opsonization of myelin debris allowing repair to proceed.²³⁶

Taken together, it remains to be determined to what extent cell types such as neural stem or progenitor cells can contribute to myelin repair. It is a substantial scientific challenge to determine the signals involved in the activation of oligodendrocyte precursor cells and in the induction of multipotent CNS precursor cells to proliferate and differentiate into migratory oligodendrocyte precursor cells to enhance remyelination and to improve neurological deficits.

Seizures

Epilepsy is a common neurological condition that is characterized by recurrent seizures due to hyperactivity and synchronization of activity within neuronal populations (as reviewed e.g., in refs. 237-240). Animal models of induced seizure activity attempt to mimic these characteristic features of epilepsy. For example, *kindling* is a widely used model, in which repeated electrical stimulation of limbic areas leads to a stimulus-induced stable seizure activity, that resembles the temporal lobe epilepsy in humans.^{241,242} Other commonly used seizure models are based on the stimulation of glutamatergic or cholinergic receptors by drugs such as kainate and pilocarpine.²⁴³⁻²⁴⁵ For review on other widely used seizure models, see e.g., ref. 245.

Epileptic activity has been reported to result in a number of long-term alterations, such as altered gene and growth factor expressions,²⁴⁶⁻²⁴⁹ neuronal cell loss in the hippocampus,²⁵⁰⁻²⁵³ Ammon's horn sclerosis,²⁵⁴⁻²⁵⁸ dendritic abnormalities of pyramidal cells,²⁵⁹ and synaptic reorganizations within the hippocampus,²⁶⁰⁻²⁶² all of which have a potential impact on the neuronal circuits. These effects might induce a cascade of consequences, including alterations of glutamate receptor expression, glial hypertrophy, axonal growth and formation of new synapses that might contribute to an increased susceptibility to further seizures.²⁶³

In patients with temporal lobe epilepsy, nests of ectopic granule cells have been described.^{264,265} Similarly, Houser and co-workers found aberrant sprouting of mossy fibers, the axons of granule cells, in the brains of these subjects.²⁶⁶ These findings were first interpreted as reflecting a deranged development and thus a cause of the seizures. Research on adult hippocampal neurogenesis has allowed the alternate hypothesis that these changes are a direct consequence of seizures.²⁶⁷⁻²⁷¹ Parent et al were the first to report that pilocarpine induced seizures in rats lead to a transient increase in cell proliferation in the dentate gyrus.²⁷² Others have extended on these findings with similar models and similar findings.²⁷³⁻²⁷⁸ Such increased proliferation corresponds to the up-regulation of several cytokines and mitogens, as described elsewhere.²⁷⁹⁻²⁸³ Interestingly, it appears that stimulation of neurogenesis following kainate-induced seizures requires endogenously synthesized FGF-2, since this result cannot be seen in FGF-2 knockout mice.²⁸⁴ While the induction of cell proliferation has been convincingly documented in several studies, less attention has been given to the question, whether a greater number of mature, functionally relevant neurons develop from these dividing cells and what their ultimate fate is. Parent et al have initially speculated that it might be the new cells that produce aberrant connections considered to sustain seizure activity,²⁷² but later provided arguments that this might not be the case (see below).²⁸⁵

Activity-induced cell proliferation in the dentate gyrus—and in some cases neurogenesis—has been demonstrated in both electrical^{286,287} and chemically induced seizures,^{272,273,277,285,288} suggesting a fundamental response mechanism as a result of synchronized neuronal activity. However, it remains to be shown, whether altered neurogenesis is a cause or consequence of increased seizure activity.

Blümcke et al reported an increased proliferation index as assessed by Ki-67 immunoreactivity in the dentate gyrus of children with early-onset temporal lobe epilepsy who had undergone surgery to remove the epileptogenic focus in the hippocampus.²⁸⁹ They found an increase in nestin-labeled cells as a putative marker of progenitor cells in the dentate gyrus. Although the further development of the proliferating cells remains unclear, these findings are suggestive that the response of the human hippocampus is similar to the rodent hippocampus. Scharfman

et al demonstrated that pilocarpine- and kainate-induced seizures in rats cause proliferation of hippocampal neural stem or progenitor cells whose progeny can migrate to the CA3 region of the hippocampus to give rise to ectopic NeuN⁺ and Calbindin⁺ granule cells.²⁷⁷ This would be consistent with the observation by Houser et al in humans.²⁹⁰ However, despite exhibiting granule cell specific intrinsic properties (e.g., membrane properties, firing behavior and morphology), these cells seem to be abnormally integrated into the CA3 network.²⁷⁷

Interestingly, conditions known to be able to induce neurogenesis, such as living in an enriched environment,²⁹¹ have not only been shown to be associated with reduced spontaneous apoptotic cell death in the rat hippocampus, but also to protect from kainate-induced seizure activity itself.²⁹² The relation between these two separate observations that is suggested by Young et al remains to be proven, but raises the question whether seizure-induced structural changes in the brain might be linked to altered stem cell activity.

It appears, however, that there are fundamental differences between the immature and the aged brain in regard to susceptibility to seizures and the functional consequences of seizures.²⁹³⁻²⁹⁷ Despite the evidence that seizures result in a more profound cell death in aged animals compared to young animals,^{295,298} seizures might have deleterious effects in the neonatal brain. For example, seizures in the developing brain can result in irreversible alterations in neuronal connectivity, as reviewed in 295. It has been reported that newborn animals receiving 10 daily electroconvulsive seizures have significantly smaller brains than controls.²⁹⁸ Furthermore, seizures in the neonatal brain result in a reduced neurogenesis in the dentate gyrus, measured by BrdU incorporation and phenotypical characterization of newborn cells by the neuronal marker NeuN. In contrast, aged animals exposed to the same number of seizures show a significant increase in hippocampal neurogenesis.²⁹⁹ While the underlying cause of the age-related differences is not exactly known, it has been speculated that increased glutamate release following seizures or a pronounced level of sensitivity to hypoxia in the neonatal brain might be partly responsible for altering the balance between cell death and birth.²⁹⁹

These observations are intriguing, because recurrent neonatal seizures could therefore—even in the absence of cell loss—have profound effects on brain development and might explain some of the late neurological impairments following recurrent seizure activity.^{294,300-302}

In addition, recurrent seizures in the neonatal brain cause sprouting of mossy fibers into the inner molecular layer of the dentate gyrus and pyramidal layer of CA3 in rats.³⁰³ While seizure-induced progenitor proliferation in the dentate gyrus can be inhibited by irradiation, synaptic remodeling of the mossy fiber pathway appears not to be altered.²⁸⁵ Thus, it seems likely that mossy fiber synaptic reorganization is independent of neurogenesis, suggesting that sprouting arises from mature granule cells.²⁹⁹

A completely different question is whether the use of neural stem cells (either as transplanted cells or as recruitment of endogenous cells) might provide a possible means for the treatment of epilepsy.⁸² For example, there have been several studies trying to circumvent the imbalance between excitatory and inhibitory neurotransmission in seizures by transplanting embryonic cells that release inhibitory neurotransmitters such as GABA. Although successful transplants resulted in seizure suppression, the underlying mechanisms of the graft action are mostly unclear and seizure suppression has so far only been transient.³⁰⁴⁻³⁰⁷

It remains to be established whether there is any potential therapeutic benefit to be derived from endogenous stem cell activity in response to seizures, and whether the seen effects are part of the epileptogenic pathology or attempts of endogenous regeneration.

In summary, repetitive seizures have been shown to lead to well-described neuropathological changes such as neuronal cell death, reactive gliosis, enhanced neurogenesis and axonal sprouting.³⁰⁸ Most of these damages seen in animal models are similar to those seen in humans, e.g., in cases of intractable temporal lobe epilepsy. Many questions about the molecular mechanisms involved in these changes remain to be elucidated, as reviewed in e.g., ref. 309).

Better understanding the exact mechanisms that modulate proliferation and differentiation of neural stem and progenitor cells following seizure activity might offer potential targets for future therapies.

Ischemia

Cerebrovascular insults are a major cause for permanent neurological impairment. After cerebral infarction, necrotic tissue is usually not replaced and functional recovery of the patient is very limited. As in other areas, neural stem cell activity and neurogenesis in the adult brain might play a role in the clinical outcome of CNS disease such as cerebral infarction. Unfortunately, much of this general optimism is as yet backed by only limited experimental evidence. Nevertheless, the use of neural stem cells might offer future treatment options either as vehicle systems to deliver neurotrophic factors or as cell replacement therapy via transplantation. Recent studies have described a significant increase of cell proliferation in the subventricular zone and the dentate gyrus of the mammalian brain in response to vascular injury, such as global and focal ischemia in experimental models.³¹⁰⁻³¹⁵

Thus, transient ischemia could be a potent signal for inducing neural stem cell proliferation (as measured by BrdU-incorporation) and differentiation into neuronal and astroglial phenotypes (by co-labeling BrdU-positive cells with lineage specific markers). However, it is not known, what is actually reflected by the increase in the number of BrdU-labeled cells, which is interpreted as increased cell proliferation, because most conclusions are indirect. No specific positive markers for neural stem cells *in vivo* are known and most studies lack the examination of long survival periods in order to assess the net and long-term effects. Also, at least in the hippocampus, prolonged periods of global ischemia (> 2 minutes) seem to be necessary to significantly increase BrdU incorporation.³¹² Despite several reports describing the proliferation and differentiation of hippocampal progenitors following global ischemia, further quantitative studies will be required to determine whether this also results in an sustained increase of granule neurons. Interestingly, BrdU incorporation in the subgranular zone of the dentate gyrus has been described to a more pronounced degree on the ipsilateral side, in case focal cerebral ischemia was applied,³¹⁰ suggesting that signals associated with cell death might locally stimulate cell proliferation.

Increased cell proliferation has also been described in the rat neocortex following transient global³¹⁶ and focal ischemia.³¹⁷ Newborn cells were distributed randomly in cortical layers II-VI with highest densities in the ischemic boundary zone.³¹⁶ Reactive neurogenesis in a photothrombotic stroke model has been reported,³¹⁷ which seems to fit well with cortical neurogenesis after phototoxic lesions⁵³ and the controversial report of spontaneous neurogenesis in cortical areas of the primate brain.³¹⁸ Photothrombotic stroke is an interesting model system that however lacks several features characterizing normal embolic or thrombotic ischemia. It remains generally conceivable that some ischemia-induced neurogenesis might also be present in the human brain in various brain areas and might even be a potential means for brain repair after stroke. However, the unequivocal demonstration of functional and lasting neurogenesis following ischemia has still to be made.

Mechanisms that have been shown to reduce vascular damage and ischemia-induced cell death, such as glutamate receptor blockade, have also been demonstrated to positively influence stem or progenitor cell proliferation.³¹⁹ Several mechanisms have been controversially discussed that might influence hippocampal neurogenesis after ischemia. Potential signals include changes of NMDA receptor signaling,³¹⁹⁻³²³ death of glutamatergic neurons that project into the granule cell layer,^{322,324} dying hippocampal neurons,^{272,273,325-329} growth factors or mitogenic factors such as FGF^{330,331} and erythropoietin.⁷⁵

In addition, age-related differences in stem or progenitor cell activity following ischemic insults appear to be important. While neurogenesis in the dentate gyrus following global

ischemia seems to be less accelerated in aged and more pronounced in young animals,³³² young animals seem also to be more vulnerable to ischemic insults. Neonatal rats exposed to cerebral ischemia show a severe and sustained damage of the subventricular zone (SVZ) with necrotic and apoptotic cell death.³³³ More specifically, oligodendrocyte precursor cells and neural stem cells appear to be particularly vulnerable resulting in subcortical white matter demyelination and profound cell loss in the SVZ three weeks after the insult.³³³ Moreover, there is evidence for a maturation-dependent vulnerability of oligodendrocyte precursors to hypoxia and ischemia, which might explain the selective vulnerability of the periventricular white matter to hypoxia and ischemia seen in the premature infant.³³⁴

Thus, neurological impairment (e.g., cognitive and motor dysfunction) caused by asphyxia of the newborn might be due to damage to progenitors and stem cells of the CNS.

It has been hypothesized that grafted neural tissue may be a possible means for therapy of brain ischemia by either direct cell replacement or by releasing neurotrophic factors to the damaged brain, as reviewed e.g., in refs. 82,335. A variety of grafted cell types have been studied in ischemic brain models, including fetal cells and tissues,³³⁶ immortalized cells³³⁷ and genetically modified cells, as reviewed in e.g., 338. Numerous reports have demonstrated that transplanted cells were able to survive, to migrate preferentially toward the lesioned area, to differentiate into neuronal cells, to re-establish functional connections within the host animal, and to restore functional deficits.^{335-337,339} A first clinical study by Kondziolka et al is an initial indication that transplanting cultured neuronal cells into the brains of humans after stroke is safe and could have functional benefits.³⁴⁰ In general, however, clinical application of this strategy appears premature, because risks and potential benefits cannot yet be reasonably judged.

The establishment of a functional neuronal circuitry between the host and the grafted tissue is dependent on many variables, including the availability of trophic factors. Neurotrophic factors are essential to maintain the physiological function of glia and neuronal cells.³⁴¹⁻³⁴⁴ Furthermore, proliferation and differentiation of endogenous stem and progenitor cells is also dependent on appropriate neurotrophic signals.^{345,346}

In pathological situations, as in the ischemic brain, neurotrophic factors protect brain tissue from experimentally induced damage.³⁴⁷⁻³⁵¹ For example, gene delivery of the *glial cell line-derived neurotrophic factor* (GDNF) into the rat brain one day before a transient middle cerebral artery occlusion resulted in a significantly smaller infarct volume and was associated with a reduction of apoptosis.³⁵² Consistent with these reports, neurotrophin receptors are up-regulated in cholinergic striatal interneurons after global cerebral ischemia, suggesting that neurotrophin signaling might be important for the survival and function of these cells.³²⁵

In summary, recent findings have raised hopes for novel treatment approaches of ischemic brain damages, including activation of endogenous neural stem cells and transplantation of neural grafts. However, the use of neural transplants for the treatment of CNS ischemia has to be considered with caution and further pre-clinical studies are needed to validate the safety and efficacy of such an approach before neural stem cells could be applied to stroke patients. Alternatively, there is evidence that endogenous progenitors and stem cells are activated and might be involved in repair mechanisms following ischemic brain injury. As of yet, the plasticity of the adult human brain in acute and chronic ischemic conditions is poorly understood. For example, compensatory reactions and functional recovery (as it can be seen in stroke patients) that have been thus far explained by synaptic or functional plasticity might in fact include a limited neuronal replacement, potentially far from the injury site.

Mood Disorders

Adult hippocampal neurogenesis affects hippocampal function and is thus potentially involved in higher cognitive functions. Some of the known factors that are able to induce neuronal cell death and to potently suppress hippocampal neurogenesis are psychosocial stress^{353,354} and glucocorticoid hormones.³⁵⁵⁻³⁵⁷

Major depression, although not a hippocampal disease in a strict sense, shows hippocampal impairment, for example with regard to symptoms of dementia and memory loss.^{358,359} Recent studies have indicated that the pathogenesis and treatment of depression is likely to involve the impaired plasticity of neuronal circuits within the hippocampal formation. Thus, stress-induced impairment of dentate gyrus neurogenesis has been linked to the onset of clinical phases of depression.³⁶⁰

In accordance with this hypothesis, studies using magnetic resonance imaging demonstrated selective atrophies in the *limbic-cortical-striatal-pallidal-thalamic tract*, which consistently includes a volume loss of the hippocampus in various psychiatric disorders, like in long-standing depression.³⁶¹ These findings were complemented by postmortem observations of hippocampal atrophy and cell loss in patients with mood disorders.³⁶²⁻³⁶⁴ These structural changes correlate with deficits in declarative, spatial and contextual memory performance, supporting a link between hippocampal dysfunctions and the development and clinical appearance of certain psychiatric conditions.³⁶⁵

This hypothesis has led to the assumption that remodeling the hippocampal network, e.g., by increased neurogenesis, might be a possible means to influence the outcome of stress-related mood disorders.^{355,366-368} Hence, circumstantial evidence to support this hypothesis has come from several studies showing that drugs used for treatment of depression, including tricyclic antidepressants and serotonin re-uptake inhibitors, as well as electroconvulsive therapy and physical activity stimulate adult hippocampal neurogenesis.^{287,369-372}

It has been suggested that antidepressants might therefore exert their therapeutic effects by stimulating changes in neuronal systems, such as by an increase in neurogenesis – possibly by enhancing the expression of growth and survival promoting factors like neurotrophins.³⁷³ Interestingly, in the case of serotonin re-uptake inhibitors, stimulation of neurogenesis requires long-term treatment,³⁷⁴ which is consistent with the clinical experience of a long latency period before onset of an anti-depressive effect.

Furthermore, lithium (in clinical use for the treatment of bipolar disorders) has an effect on adult hippocampal neurogenesis, too.³⁷⁵ This effect is possibly mediated through the upregulation of the anti-apoptotic protein bcl-2.³⁷⁵

Stimulation of neurogenesis (e.g., by antidepressants) might thus inhibit or reverse the effects of stress-induced downregulation of hippocampal neurogenesis and hippocampus atrophy.^{370,374,376}

At present, however, it remains unknown, whether a disturbance in adult hippocampal neurogenesis is a consequence, cause or correlate of major depression and bipolar disorders.³⁵ Several recent reviews have speculated about this potential pathogenic link.^{355,360,377} As of yet, this relation remains an interesting hypothesis that still has to be substantiated by empiric and experimental evidence. Intriguingly, major depression and schizophrenia share some characteristic features such as hippocampal involvement. Whether an impairment of cellular plasticity within the hippocampus is involved in schizophrenia has been suggested,³⁷⁸⁻³⁸⁰ but at present, this hypothesis is even more speculative than in the case of major depression.

Summary

These examples show that stem-cell-based therapy of neuro-psychiatric disorders will not follow a single scheme, but rather include widely different approaches. This is in accordance with the notion that the impact of stem cell biology on neurology will be fundamental, providing a shift in perspective, rather than introducing just one novel therapeutic tool. Stem cell biology, much like genomics and proteomics, offers a “view from within” with an emphasis on a theoretical or real potential and thereby the inherent openness, which is central to the concept of stem cells. Thus, stem cell biology influences many other, more traditional therapeutic approaches, rather than introducing one distinct novel form of therapy.

Substantial advances have been made in neural stem cell research during the past few years. With the identification of stem and progenitor cells in the adult brain and the complex interaction of different stem cell compartments in the CNS—both, under physiological and pathological conditions—new questions arise: What is the lineage relationship between the different progenitor cells in the CNS and how much lineage plasticity exists? What are the signals controlling proliferation and differentiation of neural stem cells and can these be utilized to allow repair of the CNS? Insights in these questions will help to better understand the role of stem cells during development and aging and the possible relation of impaired or disrupted stem cell function and their impact on both the development and treatment of neurological disease. A number of studies have indicated a limited neuronal and glial regeneration in certain pathological conditions. These fundamental observations have already changed our view on understanding neurological disease and the brain's capacity for endogenous repair. The following years will have to show how we can influence and modulate endogenous repair mechanisms by increasing the cellular plasticity in the young and aged CNS.

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