

Original papers

Fibroblast migration and proliferation during in vitro wound healing

A quantitative comparison between various growth factors and a low molecular weight blood dialyzate used in the clinic to normalize impaired wound healing

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Abstract. During the formation of granulation tissue in a dermal wound, platelets, monocytes and other cellular blood constituents release various peptide growth factors to stimulate fibroblasts to migrate into the wound site and proliferate, in order to reconstitute the various connective tissue components. The effect on fibroblast migration and proliferation of these growth factors, and of Solcoseryl (HD), a deproteinized fraction of calf blood used to normalize wound granulation and scar tissue formation, was quantified in vitro. The presence of basic fibroblast growth factor (bFGF), platelet-derived growth factor (PDGF), transforming growth factor- β (TGF- β) and hemodialyzate (HD) increased the number of cells in the denuded area, i.e., in the “wound space” of an artificially ruptured monolayer of LM-fibroblasts (mouse lung fibroblasts). When cell proliferation was blocked with Mitomycin C, in the first 24 h all factors, i.e., bFGF, PDGF, TGF- β and HD, promoted cell migration, whereas after 48 h it became obvious that each factor stimulated both migration and proliferation, each in a characteristic way. The effects were significant and more distinct after 48 h, following the order: PDGF (46%) ~ bFGF (87%) > HD (45%) ~ TGF- β (40%) > control (62%). The relative contributions of migration after inhibiting proliferation are given in brackets. The modulatory activity of HD was localized in its hydrophilic fraction. It was destroyed by acid hydrolysis. Furthermore, this activity could be blocked by protamine sulfate, an inhibitor blocking peptide growth factor receptor binding.

Key words: Fibroblasts – Growth factors – Drugs – Wound healing in vitro – Cell migration

Introduction

After wounding, peptide factors derived from blood constituents such as fibrinopeptides A and B of the fibrinolytic pathway [20], PDGF [14, 36, 37, 42] and TGF- β from platelets and monocytes [33] and complement-derived peptides [32, 44, 47] start to direct inflammatory cells to the wound. These cells in turn produce more mediators to attract mast cells, neutrophils, fibroblasts, endothelial cells and basal cells to migrate from adjacent areas into the wound site [7]. Granulation tissue is formed and remodeled to the final scar tissue [43]. Growth factors released at sites of injury are supposed to act in concert, promoting wound repair and maintaining tissue architecture [4]. Impairment of the regulatory cascade, e.g., by insufficient blood supply or catabolism or by overshooting production of a specific growth factor, may cause poor healing, or uncontrolled fibroplasia leading to the formation of hypertrophic scars and keloids respectively [45, 46].

Theoretically, supplementing healing wounds with blood constituents should favor tissue repair. Clinical investigators have tested various blood extracts and blood preparations of human and animal origin for the capacity to act as wound healing agents, and used some of them successfully to improve the healing of ulcers and burns [1]. A deproteinized fraction of calf blood, Solcoseryl (HD), has been manufactured at an industrial level [19] and has been used ever since for the treatment of dermal and mucosal injuries [3, 6, 21]. Recent studies *in vivo* [16–18] and *in vitro* [2, 11, 12, 16] strongly indicate that HD interacts multifactorially with different steps of the wound healing cascade, improving granulation, epithelization and tissue remodeling as well as reducing the duration of the inflammatory phase [18, 19, 25, 31].

Fibroblast migration to and proliferation within the wound site are prerequisites for wound granulation. Fibroblasts then participate in the construction of the scar tissue and its remodeling. Modulation of fibroblast activity by peptide growth factors is reported as responsible for improved wound healing [23, 27, 28]. We have now quantified the influence of various blood-cell-derived peptide growth factors and of HD on fibroblast migration and proliferation in “wounded” fibroblast monolayers, i.e., in confluent monolayer cultures of fibroblasts wounded by scraping off half of the cell monolayer. Under these conditions, cells migrate into the denuded area, synthesize DNA and proliferate, in a manner comparable to that *in vivo* [5, 24, 26].

Materials and methods

Cell cultures

Mouse lung fibroblasts (LM cells), human skin fibroblasts (CCL 110 cells) and baby hamster kidney cells (B14F28 cells) were obtained from the American Type Culture Collection (Rockville, Md., USA). Cells were incubated at 37°C, 95% air/5% CO₂ in 75-cm² tissue culture flasks (Falcon, Becton Dickinson, Oxnard, Calif., USA) with 20 mM HEPES-buffered DMEM (LM cells and B14F28 cells), or with 10 mM HEPES-buffered MEM (CCL 110 cells), in the presence of 10% FCS. Cells were harvested by trypsinization (0.05% Trypsin/0.02% EDTA solution from Gibco, Grand Island, N.Y., USA).

Growth factors and hemodialyzate

We obtained bFGF and PDGF from Boehringer Mannheim, Germany. TGF- β and EGF were from Sigma (Sigma Chemicals, St. Louis, Mo., USA). Stock solutions were prepared accord-

ing to manufacturer's instructions and kept in aliquots at -20°C . Protamine sulfate was from Sigma. The hemodialyzate Solcoseryl (HD) (42.5 mg/ml dry weight from Solco, Basle, Switzerland) was further separated by CHCl_3 /methanol extraction (2/1, V/V) according to Folch et al. [13] into a lipophilic (HD-lip) and a hydrophilic (HD-hyd) fraction. HD-lip was stored as an ethanolic stock solution (approx. $100\times$ concentrated) and diluted to its original volume with double-distilled water prior to use. For acid hydrolysis, 1 ml of HD (or HD-hyd) was evaporated to dryness and hydrolyzed with 1 ml of 6 N HCl (Pierce, Rockford, Ill. USA) in a sealed glass tube at 110°C for 20 h.

Migration assay

We seeded 50,000 cells into "Easy grip" culture dishes of 35 mm diameter (21 cm^2 , Falcon) and let them grow to confluence. Fibroblast monolayers were then "wounded" by removing half of the layer with a razor blade; the blade was pressed down in the middle of the dish, thus cutting the cell layer and concomitantly marking the "wound boundary" on the underlying plastic. Then the blade was gently slid unidirectionally to remove half of the confluent cell layer. The "wounded monolayer" was washed twice with phosphate-buffered saline pH 7.4 (PBS) and then incubated with serum-deprived medium containing the various test agents at 37°C for 24 h or for 48 h respectively. In the respective assays, protamine sulfate was added to confluent monolayers immediately prior to wounding. Cell monolayers were then wounded and rinsed with medium containing the respective concentrations of protamine sulfate, and incubated accordingly.

For evaluation, cultures were rinsed twice with PBS, fixed by absolute methanol, stained according to Giemsa, and examined by a light microscope equipped with a calibrated ocular at a magnification of $\times 190$. The number of cells having migrated at least $180\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ (day 1) or $300\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ (day 2) from the "wound boundary" were counted within six areas ($600\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ by $600\text{ }\mu\text{m}$) randomly chosen adjacent to the migration lines. For each test agent, three cultures were prepared and evaluated. Since the experimental errors were markedly lower than the systematic errors, each of the 3×6 counts was treated as an independent random sample. The values, expressed as average number of cells per field ($\pm\text{SD}_{n-1}$), were analyzed for significance by Student's *t*-test. Significant differences versus the respective controls are indicated by * for $P < 0.05$ and by ** for $P < 0.01$.

DNA labeling

Wounded monolayer cultures (see above) were cultivated in the presence of various factors for 2 days. Then, 5 h prior to evaluation, $0.5\text{ }\mu\text{Ci/ml}$ [^3H]-thymidine (Amersham, 5 Ci/mmol) was added to the medium, and the cells were incubated for a further 5 h. The medium was then removed, the cultures rinsed with PBS, and fixed by PBS/methanol/acetic acid: 4/3/1 (V/V) for 15 min. The solution was then changed to methanol/acetic acid (3/1; V/V) and the cell cultures were fixed for another 10 min. The fixative was removed and the cultures were left to dry at ambient temperature. In the dark, the dried dishes were coated by a thin layer of NTB2 emulsion (Kodak, Rochester, N.Y., USA) in water (1/1). Dishes were left to dry for 1 h at ambient temperature and then stored at 4°C under exclusion of light. After 6 days the NTB2 emulsion was developed using D-19 developer (Kodak) and Kodak Ektaflo for fixation. Developed culture dishes were left to dry. The dishes were then rinsed with methanol, and the cells stained according to Giemsa. In the autoradiographed cultures, labeled and unlabeled nuclei were counted within six areas (0.36 mm^2) adjacent to the $300\text{-}\mu\text{m}$ migration line, and within the confluent monolayer, so as to give the relative contribution of labeled cells to the total number of cells.

Results

Evaluation of the cell line

Several fibroblast cell lines were stimulated in the "migration assay" with PDGF in order to select the one most convenient for quantification. Figure 1a shows

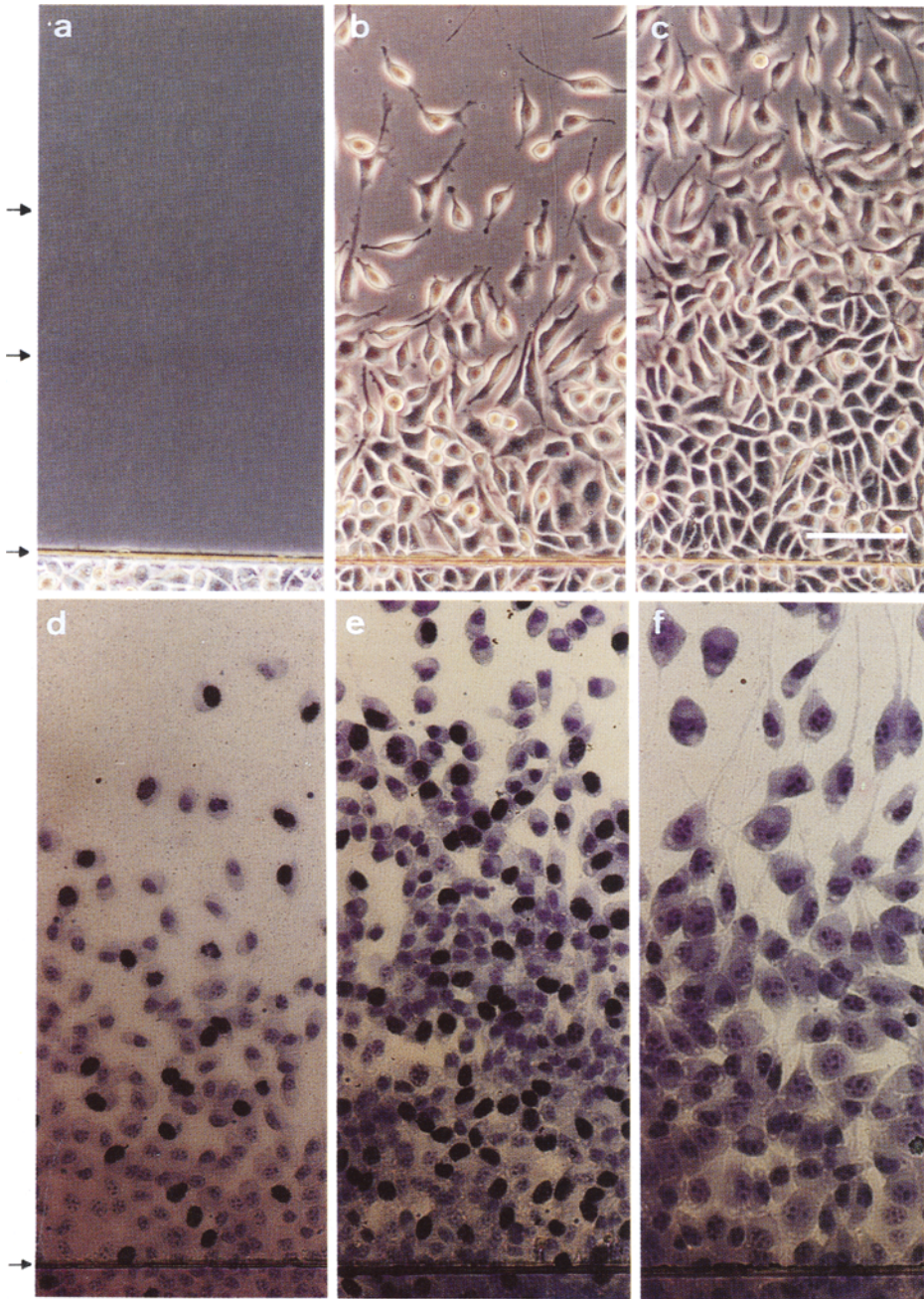


Fig. 1a-f. Scratch assay. A confluent monolayer of LM-fibroblasts was “wounded” by scraping off half of the cell layer. **a** Immediately after wounding. *Arrows* indicate the wound edge, and the 180- μm and the 300- μm migration lines. **b-f** After 48 h; **b, d** controls (no factors added); **c, e** in presence of 8 ng/ml PDGF; and **f** in presence of 8 ng/ml PDGF and 5 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ Mitomycin C. **d-f** Proliferating cells visualized by in situ autoradiography of incorporated [^3H]-thymidine. *Bar*, 100 μm

Table 1. Chemokinetic activities of various factors: dose response relationship. Values represent mean number of cells \pm SD_{n-1} ($n=18$) per field. Differences versus controls: * $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$

Agent	Migrated cells	
	> 180 μ m/24 h	> 300 μ m/48 h
bFGF		
Control	25 \pm 4	45 \pm 6
0.1 ng/ml	35 \pm 6**	49 \pm 8*
1.0 ng/ml	43 \pm 9**	55 \pm 9**
10 ng/ml	76 \pm 16**	95 \pm 22**
100 ng/ml	81 \pm 15**	150 \pm 18**
EGF		
Control	21 \pm 4	42 \pm 6
0.1 ng/ml	26 \pm 5*	50 \pm 8*
1 ng/ml	29 \pm 7*	73 \pm 12**
10 ng/ml	30 \pm 6**	59 \pm 15**
100 ng/ml	21 \pm 5	63 \pm 14**
PDGF		
Control	24 \pm 3	48 \pm 9
0.5 ng/ml	48 \pm 6**	67 \pm 15**
2 ng/ml	63 \pm 9**	140 \pm 22**
8 ng/ml	67 \pm 12**	153 \pm 29**
16 ng/ml	76 \pm 10**	158 \pm 31**
TGF-β		
Control	24 \pm 4	46 \pm 4
0.1 ng/ml	44 \pm 7**	75 \pm 15**
0.5 ng/ml	40 \pm 5**	81 \pm 11**
1 ng/ml	45 \pm 9**	74 \pm 13**
5 ng/ml	58 \pm 5**	56 \pm 8**
10 ng/ml	57 \pm 9**	57 \pm 13**
Solcoseryl		
Control	24 \pm 4	46 \pm 4
0.2% (V/V)	26 \pm 4	58 \pm 7**
1% (V/V)	35 \pm 4**	90 \pm 7**
3% (V/V)	38 \pm 4**	100 \pm 8**
5% (V/V)	45 \pm 5**	88 \pm 10**
7% (V/V)	35 \pm 6**	62 \pm 10**

the “wound” produced by removing half of a confluent fibroblast monolayer with a razor blade.

PDGF significantly increased the number of human skin fibroblasts (CCL 110) in the denuded space. However, these cells migrated as cell clusters rather than as single cells. B14F28 cells, which are very small in diameter (10–15 μ m), were not able to cross the incision mark at the wound boundary (data not shown). In

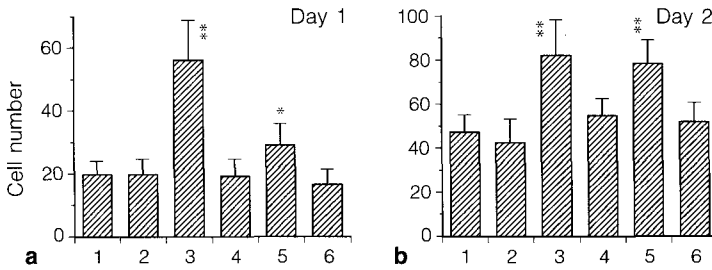


Fig. 2a, b. Influence of autocrine factors. Inhibition of peptide growth factor receptor-binding by protamine sulfate. Cells immigrated within 24 h (a) and within 48 h (b) expressed as cells/0.36 mm² beyond the 180-µm or 300-µm migration line. 1, Control; 2, 5 µg/ml protamine sulfate; 3, 10 ng/ml bFGF; 4, 10 ng/ml bFGF + 5 µg/ml protamine sulfate; 5, 3% (V/V) HD; 6, 3% (V/V) HD + 5 µg/ml protamine sulfate

contrast, LM cells (average size: 30–40 µm) were large enough to cross the incision mark and migrated as single cells (Fig. 1b, c). In the presence of PDGF, significantly more LM cells were found in the denuded area (Fig. 1c) compared to the control (Fig. 1b).

Dose-finding studies

PDGF, bFGF, TGF-β, EGF and HD increased the number of cells in the denuded area specifically and dose-dependently. Highest responses were measured with 16 ng/ml PDGF (0.5 ng/ml–16 ng/ml) and with 100 ng/ml bFGF (0.1 ng/ml–100 ng/ml). HD at 3% v/v (0.2%–7%) stimulated in a manner comparable to 0.5 ng/ml TGF-β (0.1 ng/ml–10 ng/ml) and significantly better than 1 ng/ml EGF ($P < 0.05$) (0.1 ng/ml–100 ng/ml) or the control ($P < 0.005$). Dose-ranges covered are given in brackets. Stimulatory activities after 24 h and 48 h were PDGF ~ bFGF > HD ~ TGF-β > EGF > control. The stimulatory effects became more distinct after 48 h (Table 1). When a mixture of PDGF, bFGF and TGF-β was used, stimulatory effects were additive (data not shown).

Absence of endogenous growth factors

Human skin fibroblasts and NIH3T3 fibroblasts have been observed to release endogenous bFGF [39]. Protamine sulfate, a non-specific inhibitor binding to various peptide growth factor receptors (e.g., PDGF and bFGF) [10, 39] was used to block the activity of autocrine bFGF or other growth factors eventually released by LM-fibroblasts. LM-fibroblast migration, stimulated by bFGF, was inhibited by about 80% in the presence of 5 µg/ml protamine sulfate. However, protamine sulfate did not alter the migratory behavior of unstimulated controls (Fig. 2a, b), indicating the absence of autocrine stimulatory peptide growth factors.

Differentiation between migration and proliferation

The number of cells in the denuded area increases either due to immigration of cells from the wound edge, or by mitosis of the migrated cells. The contribution of cell migration to the increase of the cell population in the denuded space was determined after inhibiting cell division with the antimetabolic agent Mitomycin C.

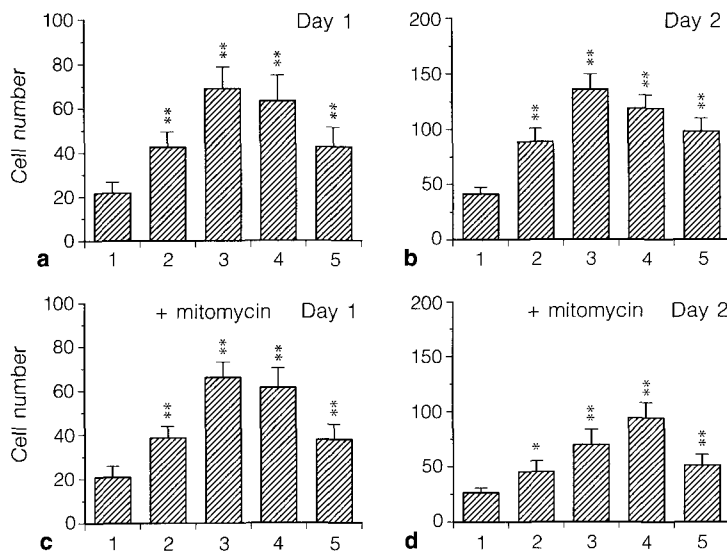


Fig. 3a–d. Migratory and proliferative activities. Cells immigrated after 24 h (**a, c**) and 48 h (**b, d**) expressed as cells/0.36 mm² beyond the 180-μm or 300-μm migration line in the absence (**a, b**) or presence (**c, d**) of 5 μg/ml of the antimetabolic Mitomycin C. 1, Control (no factor added); 2, 0.5 ng/ml TGF-β; 3, 16 ng/ml PDGF; 4, 100 ng/ml bFGF; 5, 3% (V/V) HD

The lowest effective dose of Mitomycin C inhibiting [³H]-thymidine uptake was found to be 5 μg/ml. This concentration completely blocked cell division, but was not cytotoxic (Fig. 1f).

Wounded monolayer cultures were incubated with the various factors at optimal dose (see above) for 24 h (Fig. 3a, c) and 48 h (Fig. 3b, d) respectively, in absence (Fig. 3a, b) and presence (Fig. 3c, d) of Mitomycin C. The number of cells counted in the denuded space after 24 h was not influenced by the presence of Mitomycin C, implying cell division to be marginal within the 24 h after “wounding” (Fig. 3a, c). After 48 h in the absence of Mitomycin C (Fig. 3b) there were significantly ($P < 0.005$) more cells in the “wounded” area than in the presence of the antimetabolic agent (Fig. 3d). The overall stimulatory effects in the absence of Mitomycin C, i.e., migration + proliferation, followed the order PDGF ~ bFGF > HD ~ TGF-β > control, as observed in the dose-finding studies (Table 1). The relative migrations were calculated as the ratio between the effects measured in the presence (migration) and in the absence (migration + proliferation) of Mitomycin C. The contribution of migration was highest with bFGF (87%; $P < 0.01$). The relative migration in the control was 62%, whereas the other growth factors or HD stimulated proliferation more than migration (PDGF: 46%; HD: 45%; TGF-β: 40%), the relative migrations corresponding to bFGF » control > PDGF ~ HD ~ TGF-β. Because of its weak overall response (cf. Table 1), the influence of EGF was not further investigated.

The extent of fibroblast mitosis was estimated by in situ autoradiography via [³H]-thymidine incorporation into single cells (Fig. 1d–f). In the presence of the various factors or in the control, about 3% of the cells were found to proliferate within the confluent area. Within the wounded area proliferation was significantly ($P < 0.005$ vs the confluent area) higher: HD: $30 \pm 6\%$; PDGF: $25 \pm 6\%$;

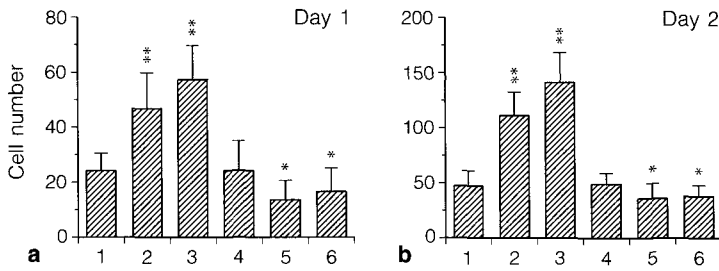


Fig. 4a, b. Characterization of the activity in the hemodialyate HD. Cells immigrated within 24 h (a) and within 48 h (b) expressed as cells/0.36 mm² beyond the 180- μ m or 300- μ m migration line. 1, Control; 2, 3% (V/V) HD; 3, 3% (V/V) hydrophilic fraction HD-hyd; 4, 3% (V/V) lipophilic fraction HD-lip; 5, 3% (V/V) acid hydrolyzate of HD; 6, 3% (V/V) acid hydrolyzate of HD-hyd

control $25 \pm 5\%$; EGF: $24 \pm 6\%$; TGF- β : $21 \pm 12\%$; bFGF: $19 \pm 6\%$. The latter differences did not reach statistical significance (data not shown).

Partial characterization of the chemokinetic activity in the hemodialyate

The migratory/proliferatory activity of the HD (Fig. 4) was found to be localized in the hydrophilic fraction (cells in the "wounded" area: HD-hyd 24 h: 57 ± 12 , 48 h: 142 ± 24 ; HD-lip 24 h: 24 ± 10 , 48 h: 48 ± 8 ; HD 24 h: 47 ± 12 , 48 h: 112 ± 18 ; control: 24 h: 24 ± 6 , 48 h: 48 ± 12). Hydrochloric acid (6N HCl, 20 h at 110°C) destroyed the activities in the HD (24 h: 14 ± 6 , 48 h: 36 ± 12) and in HD-hyd (24 h: 17 ± 8 , 48 h: 38 ± 8). Protamine sulfate suppressed stimulation by HD to the level of the control (Fig. 2).

Discussion

Fibroblast migration and proliferation within a dermal wound are prerequisites for the formation of granulation tissue, and in turn, for successful wound closure [36]. In vivo, within their extracellular matrix, dermal fibroblasts limit their proliferative activity to that required to retain their steady-state number [38]. However, upon wounding of the dermal matrix, fibroblasts, attracted by growth factors released during fibrin clot formation, concentrate at the edge of the ruptured matrix to synthesize a first set of matrix proteins and to concomitantly migrate and proliferate along these proteins until the dermal gap has been filled with granulation tissue [7]. Comparably, in vitro, in a confluent monolayer, contact inhibition reduces cell proliferation to that required for maintaining the steady state number. Upon wounding of the confluent monolayer, however, cells start to migrate and proliferate at the edge of the rupture [5], proliferation increasing by about tenfold as shown by Lipton et al. [26] and our own observations (see below).

We assayed fibroblast migration and proliferation after "in vitro wounding" using the monolayer scratch assay [5, 24, 26]. This test compares well to the Boyden chamber assay [29, 30] and at the same time makes it possible to differentiate between migration and proliferation [24]. For routine assays, LM-fibroblasts proved the most convenient with respect to migration behavior and

evaluability. These cells were then used to establish optimal dose-response for each factor 24 h and 48 h after wounding.

We quantified the migratory and proliferatory potential of bFGF, PDGF and TGF- β – all factors that are released during fibrin clot formation – and compared these with Solcoseryl (HD), a product from calf blood used to improve granulation and epithelization of poorly healing dermal wounds [3, 6, 21]. The peptide growth factors as well as HD characteristically and significantly increased the fibroblasts in the denuded space. We then tested for the presence of autocrine peptide growth factors, since the migrations of human skin fibroblasts, of BHK-21 and of NIH 3T3 cells [39], and of aortic endothelial [40] and smooth muscle cells [41] have been reported to be influenced by endogenous bFGF, as revealed after neutralizing bFGF with anti-bFGF antibodies, or by blocking its receptor by protamine sulfate [39]. Protamine sulfate is a small basic protein that competitively inhibits cell-surface binding of various peptide growth factors [8, 10, 39]. We found no inhibition of spontaneous migration of LM-fibroblasts by protamine sulfate, implying the absence of autocrine bFGF or other protamine sulfate-sensitive autocrine peptide growth factors.

In vitro wound repair starts with the spreading of individual cells at the wound edge and the synthesis of matrix fibrils (e.g., fibronectin), followed by cell migration (translocation) along the fibronectin bundles and by cell proliferation [9, 15, 26, 34, 35]. Blocking mitosis with Mitomycin C allowed us to discriminate between stimulation of translocation and proliferation. Mitomycin C did not interfere during the 24 h, implying that all factors, i.e., bFGF, PDGF, HD and TGF- β , exclusively stimulated migration. However, after 48 h Mitomycin C significantly reduced the stimulatory behavior of various factors, revealing the strong proliferatory effects of PDGF, HD and TGF- β . PDGF, HD and TGF- β may well exert multiple activities, stimulating – apart from migration and proliferation – the recovery and spreading of resting fibroblasts after loss of contact inhibition, and the synthesis of fibronectin for migratory guidance. An increase of fibronectin around the cells migrating into the “wound spaces” in the presence of HD has been detected using immunofluorescence labeling (our unpublished results). In contrast, bFGF seems merely to enhance migration. Fibroblast mitosis during migration as visualized via [3 H]-thymidine incorporation and in situ autoradiography (Fig. 1d–f) [24], though statistically not significant, was in line with the measurements in absence and presence of Mitomycin C (see above). Cell labeling within the confluent part of the cell monolayers, i.e., steady state proliferation, was about 3%, whereas in the wound space mitosis was found to have increased by up to tenfold.

The modulatory activity of HD was confined to the hydrophilic fraction of HD and was labile to acid hydrolysis. Moreover, this activity could be blocked by protamine sulfate. As a protein-free dialyrate/ultrafiltrate (nominal cut-off 5000 Da) of hemolyzed calf blood, HD contains oligopeptides as well as autolytic fragments originating from higher molecular weight proteins. In that respect, the presence of minute amounts of EGF in HD (0.4 ng/ml, [22]) has been reported, but not in sufficient concentration to account for the growth-factor-like effect observed in in vivo ulcer healing [22]. No relevant quantities of TGF- α , EGF or Somatostatin C [12] have been observed in HD. A lipidic compound of HD not yet structurally identified, was found to stimulate S6-kinase activity [12]. This investigation shows that a hydrophilic moiety of HD influences fibroblast migration and proliferation in a growth-factor-like manner.

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