

RANKL-inhibition in Fibrous Dysplasia of bone: A preclinical study in a mouse model of the human disease.

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Abstract

Fibrous Dysplasia of bone/McCune-Albright Syndrome (FD/MAS, OMIM#174800) is a crippling skeletal disease caused by gain-of-function mutations of $G_s\alpha$. Enhanced bone resorption is a recurrent histological feature of FD and a major cause of fragility of affected bones. Previous work suggests that increased bone resorption in FD is driven by RANKL and some studies have shown that the anti-RANKL monoclonal antibody, denosumab, reduces bone turnover and bone pain in FD patients. However, the effect of RANKL inhibition on the histopathology of FD and its impact on the natural history of the disease remain to be assessed. In this study, we treated the $EF1\alpha$ - $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ mice, which develop an FD-like phenotype, with an anti-mouse RANKL monoclonal antibody. We found that the treatment induced marked radiographic and microscopic changes at affected skeletal sites in two-month-old mice. The skeletal segments involved became sclerotic due to the deposition of new, highly mineralized bone within developing FD lesions and showed a higher mechanical resistance compared to affected segments from untreated transgenic mice. Similar changes were also detected in older mice with a full-blown skeletal phenotype. The administration of anti-mouse RANKL antibody arrested the growth of established lesions and, in young mice, prevented the appearance of new ones. However, after drug withdrawal, the newly formed bone was remodeled into FD tissue and the disease progression resumed in young mice. Taken together, our results demonstrate that the anti-RANKL antibody significantly affected the bone pathology and natural history of FD in the mouse. Pending further work on the prevention and management of relapse after treatment discontinuation, our pre-clinical study suggests that RANKL inhibition may be an affective therapeutic option for FD patients.

Key words: RANKL, Fibrous Dysplasia, denosumab, $G_s\alpha$, Bone Remodeling.

Introduction

Fibrous Dysplasia of bone/McCune-Albright Syndrome (Polyostotic FD/MAS, OMIM#174800) is a genetic, non-inherited disease caused by gain-of-function mutations (mainly R201H and R201C) of the α subunit of the stimulatory G protein ($G_s\alpha$)^(1,2) encoded by the *GNAS* gene (GNAS complex locus;GNAS, OMIM *139320). Consistent with the origin of the mutation in a pluripotent cell of the developing embryo,⁽³⁾ mutated cells in post-natal life may be found in derivatives of all three embryonic germ layers. Thus, a wide range of tissues and organs (e.g., skin, endocrine glands, skeletal muscles, bone) may be affected in variable combinations in FD/MAS patients. However, except for MAS cases with very early neonatal onset,⁽⁴⁾ skeletal lesions usually represent the most severe, and less treatable, expression of the clinical phenotype due to bone pain, fracture and deformity.⁽⁵⁾

The histopathology of FD typically features marrow fibrosis (fibroblast-like osteogenic precursors replacing adipocytes and hematopoiesis), abnormal bone trabeculae (with site-specific patterns of distribution), defective bone mineralization and dysregulated osteoclast formation.⁽⁵⁻¹⁰⁾ Overall, these changes convert normal bone and bone marrow into an architecturally disorganized and mechanically unsound fibro-osseous tissue. Increased osteoclastogenesis is thought to play a role in the establishment and progression of FD lesions and currently represents the only target for a medical therapy of the disease. Indeed, multiple studies have tested the effect of bisphosphonates (BPs) in FD patients, showing some clinical benefits (reduction of bone pain), but, in the absence of significant changes in the histology and evolution of the skeletal phenotype.⁽¹¹⁻¹⁵⁾ Potential alternative approaches rely on the identification of the specific cellular and molecular mechanism(s) leading to the enhanced osteoclast formation within FD lesions. Increased expression of IL-6 has been previously identified as a molecular link between gain-of-function mutations of $G_s\alpha$ and enhanced osteoclastogenesis in FD.^(10,16,17) Consequently, inhibition of IL6 by has been considered as a potential treatment for the disease.⁽¹⁸⁾

Recently, a role for RANKL (Receptor Activator of Nuclear factor Kappa-B Ligand, a member of the Tumor Necrosis Factor superfamily and a potent stimulator of osteoclastogenesis^(19,20)), in the disease has emerged from studies performed on human skeletal progenitors transduced with $G_s\alpha^{R201C(21)}$, transgenic mice expressing $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ in skeletal cells⁽²²⁾ and human FD tissue and cells.⁽²³⁻²⁵⁾ In addition, serum levels of RANKL have been reported to be increased in mouse models that replicate human FD,^(22,26) as well as in FD patients, in which they strongly correlated with the burden of the disease.⁽²⁵⁾ Accordingly, a limited number of studies have already tested the effect of the humanized anti-RANKL antibody, denosumab, in FD patients and have reported a positive effect on bone turn-over, on the growth rate of lesions, as assessed by CT analysis, and on bone pain.^(23,27-29) However, the role of RANKL in the histopathology of FD, as well as the effect of RANKL inhibition on the natural history of the disease, need to be further investigated.

We have previously generated transgenic mouse models with ubiquitous and constitutive expression of $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ ($EF1\alpha$ - $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ and PGK - $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ mice)⁽³⁰⁾ that faithfully reproduce the essential pathological features of human FD and allow for controlled radiographic and histological studies in a sizable number of individuals. In this study, we have tested the effect of RANKL inhibition on the skeletal phenotype of the $EF1\alpha$ - $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ model. Following the assessment of RANKL expression in developing skeletal lesions, we have treated transgenic mice with an anti-mouse RANKL antibody and performed micro-radiographic, histological, biochemical and mechanical studies during the treatment and after its discontinuation. Overall, our results demonstrate that inhibition of RANKL profoundly affects the bone pathology and natural history of FD in the mouse, thus confirming that RANKL inhibition may be an effective therapeutic option for FD patients.

Materials and Methods

Mice and experimental groups

Generation and characterization of EF1 α -G $_s\alpha$ ^{R201C} mice were reported previously.⁽³⁰⁾ Briefly, the transgenic line was generated by lentiviral transgenesis using the constitutive promoter human elongation factor 1 α (EF1 α). In this mouse model, the mutant G $_s\alpha$ ^{R201} sequence is germline transmitted and the genetic mosaicism typical of human FD is not reproduced. However, similarly to the human disease, FD-like lesions appear in the post-natal life and develop according to an asymmetric and methachronous temporo-spatial pattern. The animals were maintained in cabin-type isolators at standard environmental conditions (temperature 22–25°C, humidity 40–70%) with 12:12 dark/light photoperiod. Food and water were provided *ad libitum*.

All studies were performed in compliance with relevant Italian laws and Institutional guidelines and all procedures were IACUC approved. Transgenic mice were selected based on radiographically detectable FD-like lesions in the tail vertebrae and femurs and were treated with an anti-mouse RANKL monoclonal Antibody (mAb, BioXCell Clone IK22/5, West Lebanon, NH, USA).

Twenty-four EF1 α -G $_s\alpha$ ^{R201C} young mice (22 females and 2 males of two months of age) with developing FD-like skeletal lesions and 4 EF1 α -G $_s\alpha$ ^{R201C} adult mice (2 females of eight months of age and 1 female and 1 male of twelve months of age) with extensive, full-blown FD-like lesions were treated with 300 μ g/mouse of either anti-RANKL mAb⁽³¹⁾ or rat IgG2a Isotype Control (BioXCell, clone 2A3, West Lebanon, NH, USA) by intra-peritoneal injection, twice a week for 14 weeks.

In the 2-month-old group, half of the mice were euthanized at the end of treatment (anti-RANKL group n=6; Isotype Control group n=6) and the other half underwent a 12-week follow-up (anti-RANKL group n=6; Isotype Control group n=6). Radiographic analysis was performed at different time points when serum samples were also collected for the evaluation of biochemical markers of bone turnover. During all of the experiments, mice were carefully monitored and no important adverse events were observed. In addition, to test the effect of anti-RANKL administration and cessation in the absence of any G $_s\alpha$ ^{R201C} dependent change, such as endocrine abnormalities, which

could potentially affect the result, 4 FVB/NJ wild type mice (WT) (Jackson Laboratories, Bar Harbor, ME) were treated at 2 months of age according to the same regimen used for transgenic mice. Two mice were sacrificed after 14 weeks of treatment and 2 mice after 14 weeks of treatment plus 12 weeks of follow-up.

The study design schema and the experimental groups are summarized in Table 1 and in Table 2 respectively.

Additional methods [microradiography, biochemical markers, histology, histomorphometry, Back Scattered Scanning Electron Microscopy (BSE-SEM), RANKL immunolocalization, biomechanical analysis and statistics] are reported in the online Supplemental Material.

Results

RANKL inhibition reverted osteolysis and prevented progression of the radiographic FD-like phenotype in $EF1\alpha$ - $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ mice

The expression of RANKL in the FD-like tissue of $EF1\alpha$ - $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ mice was confirmed by immunohistochemistry (**Fig. S1**). Twenty-four transgenic mice at two months of age were selected based on the radiographic phenotype, randomly assigned to the anti-RANKL (n=12) or Isotype Control (n=12) group and treated for 14 weeks. All mice showed irregular endosteal/medullary profiles and cortical lytic areas in the tail vertebrae (**Fig. 1, T0**) consistent with FD lesions at early/intermediate stage of development. Early endosteal changes were also present in 4 femurs in the anti-RANKL group and in 5 femurs in the Isotype Control group (**Fig. 1, T0**).

In mice receiving the anti-RANKL mAb, cortical lytic areas in the tail vertebrae were no longer detectable at the first radiographic survey performed after 7 weeks of drug administration (**Fig. 1 A, T7**). At this time, the radiodensity of the tail vertebrae was higher compared to the pre-treatment stage and, in some segments, further increased during the following 7 weeks of drug administration (**Fig. 1 A, T14**). However, at all time points during the treatment, the radiographic aspect of the

individual vertebrae was variable and apparently dependent on the initial burden of the disease. Segments with large osteolytic lesions and prominent irregularity of the endosteal profile at T0 showed a sclerotic appearance with narrowing/obliteration of the medullary cavity (**Fig. 1 A**). On the other side, slightly affected or apparently unaffected vertebrae, maintained their normal shape with no significant change in the profile and transparency of the medullary canal (**Fig. 1 A**). Neither new osteolytic lesions nor bone deformities were detected during or at the end of the treatment. In contrast, in control mice, the radiographic phenotype steadily progressed with enlargement of pre-existent areas of cortical radiolucency and appearance of new lytic foci and bone deformities, also in vertebrae that were not affected at T0 (**Fig. 1 B**). Similar findings were observed in the affected femurs (**Fig. 1 A and B**). Importantly, radiographic analysis of all femoral segments clearly demonstrated that RANKL inhibition also prevented the progression of the phenotype across the skeleton (**Fig. S2**). None of the 20 unaffected femurs of the anti-RANKL treated mice developed radiographically detectable lesions during the treatment (**Fig. S2 A**). In contrast, at T14, a radiographically detectable phenotype appeared in 11 out of 19 femurs that were normal at T0 in the Isotype Control group (**Fig. S2 A**), in agreement with the emergence of femoral lesions between 2 and 5 months of age in the $EF1\alpha$ - $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ mouse strain.⁽³⁰⁾ To assess whether RANKL inhibition could also modify the radiographic phenotype in fully developed (final stage) murine FD, we then treated two adult $EF1\alpha$ - $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ mice bearing lytic-sclerotic (ground-glass) FD-like lesions. After 14 weeks of treatment, a homogeneous opacity of the tail vertebrae and femurs was observed in both animals receiving the anti-RANKL mAb (**Fig. 2 A**), while the radiographic phenotype became more severe in control mice (**Fig. 2 B**).

RANKL inhibition led to deposition of highly mineralized bone within FD-like lesions of $EF1\alpha$ - $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ mice

After 14 weeks of treatment, we euthanized 6 anti-RANKL-mAb mice and 6 rat IgG2a Isotype mice that started the treatment at 2-3 months of age, and all of the adult mice. Consistent with the

radiographic results, histology of the tail vertebrae demonstrated that RANKL inhibition led to deposition of newly formed bone within the lesions. In young mice (**Fig. 3**), the amount of bone tissue clearly varied in the different segments according to the radiographic phenotype at the beginning of the anti-RANKL mAb administration. Bone deposition was extensive in vertebrae with pronounced lesions and led to the virtual obliteration of the medullary cavity (**Fig. 3 A, E and G**). In contrast, no evidence of intramedullary bone formation was observed in tail vertebrae that were radiographically free of the disease at T0 (**Fig. 3 C**) or in other unaffected skeletal segments. FD-like changes were observed in all of mice that received rat IgG2a Isotype (**Fig. 3 B, D, F and H**). Furthermore, a thorough histological analysis of multiple radiographically normal skeletal segments from both experimental groups confirmed the absence of lesions in the anti-RANKL mAb treated mice, but revealed the presence of microscopic foci of disease in bones from the Isotype Control group (**Fig. S2 B**). Analysis of von Kossa/Methylene Blue stained sections and BSE-SEM images demonstrated the absence of excess osteoid in the newly formed bone (**Fig. 4 A, C and E**) in contrast with samples from rat IgG2a Isotype treated mice (**Fig. 4 B, D, F**). In addition, qBSE showed a higher mineral content in the newly formed bone compared to both FD-bone and unaffected cortical bone (**Fig. 4 G and H**). Consistent with the histological changes, the mechanical properties of anti-RANKL mAb treated tail vertebrae improved. Compressive tests analysis revealed that the maximum load and axial stiffness of the specimens from treated mice were significantly increased compared to control samples (**Fig. 5 A and B**). Neither multi-nucleated osteoclasts nor mono-nucleated osteoclast-progenitors were recognized by morphology, TRAP histochemistry or iodine stained BSE-SEM image analysis in RANKL inhibited mice (**Fig. S3 A and C**), whereas they were numerous and irregularly distributed within the fibrosis and on the bone surfaces in control mice (**Fig. S3 B and D**). In addition, in mice treated with the anti-RANKL mAb, inhibition of osteoclastogenesis prevented the resorption of the metaphyseal mineralized cartilage at the growth plates. As a consequence, metaphyses appeared radiographically sclerotic (**Fig. S4 A and B**) and showed persistence of cartilaginous cores reflecting the failure of transition

from primary to secondary spongiosa (**Fig. S4 C, D and E**). Increased density at the metaphyseal regions was the only radiographically detectable change induced by RANKL inhibition in WT mice (data not shown). Extensive bone deposition was also observed during anti-RANKL mAb treatment in adult mice with full-blown FD-like phenotype (**Fig. S5**). However, in these mice, at variance with young animals, small areas of fibrotic tissue persisted among the newly formed bone. Histomorphometry demonstrated that in young mice the mean amount of total bone was significantly higher in the anti-RANKL mAb group compared to controls (**Fig 5 C**), due to the replacement of the pre-existing FD tissue by newly formed bone. The mean amount of adipose marrow was also significantly higher compared to controls indicating that marrow adipocytes were not replaced by the FD tissue during the anti-RANKL mAb treatment. In the tail vertebrae of adult mice treated with the anti-RANKL mAb (**Fig 5 D**), the increase in the total amount of bone was even more evident due to the greater extent of the lesional tissue at the beginning of the treatment, although the fibrotic marrow was not entirely replaced by bone.

Recurrence of the radiographic and histological FD-like phenotype in $EF1\alpha$ - $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ mice during the follow-up

To assess whether, and how long, the radiographic and microscopic changes induced by RANKL inhibition persisted after the withdrawal of the antibody, we carried out a follow-up study on some mice that started the treatment at two months of age. Mice were radiographically monitored for 12 weeks (**Fig. 6, T18-T26**). The first Faxitron analysis performed after 4 weeks from the last injection of the drug showed a reduction in the radiodensity and the appearance of small lytic areas in some tail vertebrae (**Fig. 6 A, T18**). At the end of the follow-up, radiographically evident lesions were detected in the tails (**Fig. 6 A, T26**) and in other skeletal segments (data not shown) and the phenotype was overall comparable to that of control mice (**Fig. 6 B, T26**). Accordingly, a fibro-osseous tissue including abnormal and osteomalacic trabeculae and multiple osteoclasts was observed by microscopic analysis (**Fig. 7**). In WT mice, following anti-RANKL withdrawal, a

reduction of the metaphyseal density compared to T14 was observed at the end of follow-up (data not shown).

Biochemical profile of $EF1\alpha$ - $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ mice during and after RANKL-inhibition

Serum samples from young mice were harvested before (T0), during (T7) and at the end (T14) of the treatment and once a month (T18, T22 and T26) during the follow-up. Serum total calcium levels (**Fig. 8 A**) remained similar in the anti-RANKL mAb and control group during the treatment. As expected, they significantly increased in mice that received the anti-RANKL mAb shortly after the discontinuation of the drug. However, at the end of the follow-up no statistically significant difference was observed between the two cohorts of animals. Serum phosphate levels (**Fig. 8 B**) remained comparable in the two groups throughout the treatment and during follow-up. CTX-1 levels (**Fig. 8 C**) significantly decreased at week 7 and 14 in the anti-RANKL group and significantly increased shortly after drug withdrawal (T14 vs T18, $p = 0.0029$). Serum levels of P1NP (**Fig. 8 D**) were significantly reduced during the anti-RANKL mAb treatment compared to controls and significantly increased during the follow-up (T14 vs T22, $p = 0.0220$). Serum levels of both markers returned to the initial values (T0) at the end of the follow-up.

DISCUSSION

The genetic nature of FD calls for the development of therapies based on transplantation of normal skeletal stem cells (keeping in mind the somatic mosaic nature of the disease) and/or genetic correction as the only possibility to eradicate the disease.⁽³⁾ These approaches are feasible in principle and have also been shown to be effective in appropriate experimental systems.⁽²¹⁾ However, translational studies are impeded by the complex structure and physiology of the skeleton, in addition to the gain-of-function effect of the $G_s\alpha$ mutation. Besides corrective surgery, alternative, although not radical, modalities of intervention rely on approaches able to target the key morbidity factors of the disease. Recently, attention has been focused on denosumab,⁽³²⁾ an FDA

approved therapeutic option for osteoporosis and skeletal conditions featuring increased osteoclast activity, such as giant cell tumor of bone, and cancer metastasis.⁽³³⁻³⁷⁾

To clarify the effect of RANKL-inhibition on the radiographic and histological expression of FD, we took advantage of our transgenic murine model of the disease⁽³⁰⁾ that allowed us to investigate the effects of an anti-mouse RANKL-mAb in a sizable number of individuals, homogenous for age and type of lesion. The use of our model was further validated by the demonstration that, as in FD patients,⁽²³⁻²⁵⁾ in $EF1\alpha-G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ mice the fibro-dysplastic tissue was a source of RANKL. In addition, as in primates and humans under treatment with denosumab,⁽³⁵⁻³⁸⁾ a sustained decrease of both CTX-1 and PINP occurred during the administration of the anti-RANKL mAb.

Our data show that RANKL inhibition in $EF1\alpha-G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ mice led to the deposition of highly mineralized bone at affected skeletal sites. In contrast, changes in non-affected bones were similar to those observed in WT mice and consisted in sclerotic metaphyseal bands that resulted from the failure of transition from primary to secondary spongiosa and reduced after cessation of the anti-RANKL mAb administration. According to our preliminary data, these physal cartilage changes did not interfere with the growth of the skeletal segments (data not shown). However, further in-depth studies are required to better assess this point, which represents a very important question in children with FD.

The replacement of the FD tissue with mineralized bone implies that the treatment reverted the two major tissue changes that underlie the bone fragility and the clinical morbidity of the disease; i.e., osteolysis and osteomalacia.-It must be noted that the radiographic and/or histological changes observed with the anti-RANKL mAb have never been reported following treatment of FD lesions with BPs,⁽¹¹⁻¹³⁾ which inhibit the activity but not the formation of osteoclasts. The different effect of the two types of anti-resorptive agents strongly suggests that osteoclasts and/or osteoclast precursors, independent on their resorption activity, negatively modulate osteogenic differentiation within the FD tissue and the deposition of mineralized bone. If the recently reported secretion of

molecular factors and extracellular vesicles by osteoclasts^(39,40) is involved in the effect of RANKL inhibition in FD must be investigated in future studies. Interestingly, Ohishi and colleagues⁽⁴¹⁾ previously compared the effect of Osteoprotegerin (OPG) and BPs in a mouse model of constitutive activation of the PTH/PTHrP receptor that transiently reproduces histological features of FD.⁽⁴²⁾ They reported that OPG (which reduced osteoclast activity and number), but not BPs (which reduced only osteoclast activity), abrogated marrow fibrosis in their mouse model and suggested that the differential effect could be dependent on the reduced number of osteoclasts in OPG treated mice.

Another interesting finding of our work was the increased mineral content of the newly formed bone compared to the untreated FD-bone and also to cortical unaffected bone, as established by qBSE analysis. This result could be directly dependent on the inhibition of remodeling within the FD tissue. As previously reported⁽⁴³⁾ in high bone-remodeling conditions, Bone Multicellular Units (BMUs) do not reach the maximum levels of mineralization since their lifespan is reduced by the continuous appearance of new BMUs. Accordingly, the reduction in the remodeling rate associated with the anti-resorptive drugs might favor the mineralization of the extracellular matrix by allowing a higher number of BMUs to reach their maximal mineralization capacity.⁽³⁸⁾ It is possible that in our mouse model, inhibition of bone resorption resulted in the saturation of calcium hydroxyapatite in pre-existing under-mineralized bone matrix as well as in the osteoid that was rapidly deposited during the treatment with the anti-RANKL mAb.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Even though we cannot exclude the occurrence of a dystrophic calcification rather than a physiological mineralization process (because we did not compare the structure and mechanical properties of the newly formed bone to those of wild type mouse bone), the deposition of a highly mineralized bone in anti-RANKL treated mice translated into a significant improvement in the biomechanical properties (namely maximum load and axial stiffness) of the FD-affected skeletal segments compared with those obtained from rat IgG2a Isotype treated mice.

Our data also show that treatment of older mice with an advanced bone phenotype with anti-

RANKL mAb, did not completely reproduced the effect observed in young mice with recent lesions. Although this result could be potentially ascribed to an insufficient drug dosage in old mice with full-blown disease, it may also suggest that in long standing FD lesions, the $G_s\alpha$ mutated, and perhaps the genetically normal, osteogenic cells have a reduced ability to complete osteoblastic differentiation *per se*, due the abnormal microenvironment and/or aging. This would imply that the anti-RANKL treatment should be started as early as possible in FD in order to achieve the best results, not only for the prevention but also for the reversion of the disease. Finally, as expected the withdrawal of the anti-RANKL antibody in FD mice was associated with the resumption of osteoclast formation and bone resorption. This was associated with the recurrence of skeletal lesions for which the impact of the germline mutation in our mouse model (compared to the somatic mosaicism observed in humans) remains to be assessed.

In conclusion, our data demonstrate that RANKL inhibition in mice reproducing human FD had a relevant effect on the radiographic and histological appearance of the skeletal phenotype and suggest that denosumab may be a treatment option for the human disease, even though the disease relapse observed with discontinuation of treatment remains problematic. In addition, further studies are required to test in mice dosing regimens comparable to those currently used in human diseases. In our study, the used dosing of anti-RANKL mAb was estimated^(45,46) to be lower compared to the 12-month course of denosumab that was planned in Boyce et al⁽²³⁾ and to a greater extent, to those currently used in human diseases such as Giant Cell Tumor of Bone⁽⁴⁷⁾. Our work also suggests that osteoclasts may be involved in the pathogenesis of FD through mechanisms not necessarily related to bone resorption. Unveiling these molecular mechanisms could lead to a better understanding of the pathogenesis of the disease and to the identification of new specific therapeutic targets.

Authors' role

Study design: AC, BP, PR and MR. Radiographic and histological studies: BP, ES, CR, RL, ADF,

SD. Mechanical tests: FB and FM. BSE-SEM analysis: AB. Statistical analysis: DR. Drafting manuscript: BP, AC and MR. Revising manuscript: AB, PR, AC and MR. Approving the final version of the manuscript: BP, ES, CR, RL, ADF, SD, FB, DR, FM, AB, PR, AC and MR. BP, AC and MR take responsibility for the integrity of the presented data.

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Disclosure

All authors state that they have no conflicts of interest.

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Table 1. Study design schema.

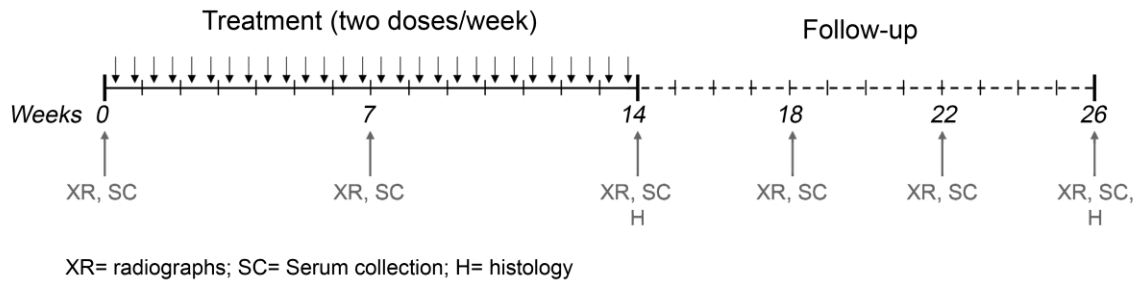


Table 2. Experimental groups.

Group	Age	Treatment	Follow-up	N
EF1 α -G α ^{R201C}	2 months	anti-RANKL mAb	-	6
			+	6
	12 months	rat IgG2a Isotype Control	-	6
			+	6
FVB/NJ (WT)	2 months	anti-RANKL mAb	-	2
			+	2

Figures & Legends

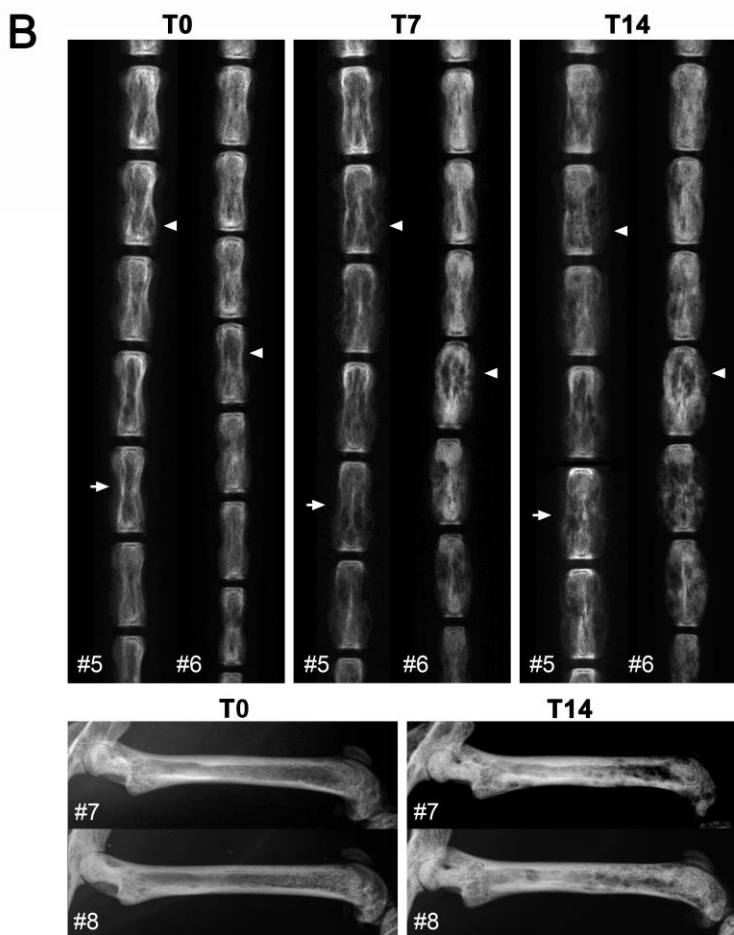
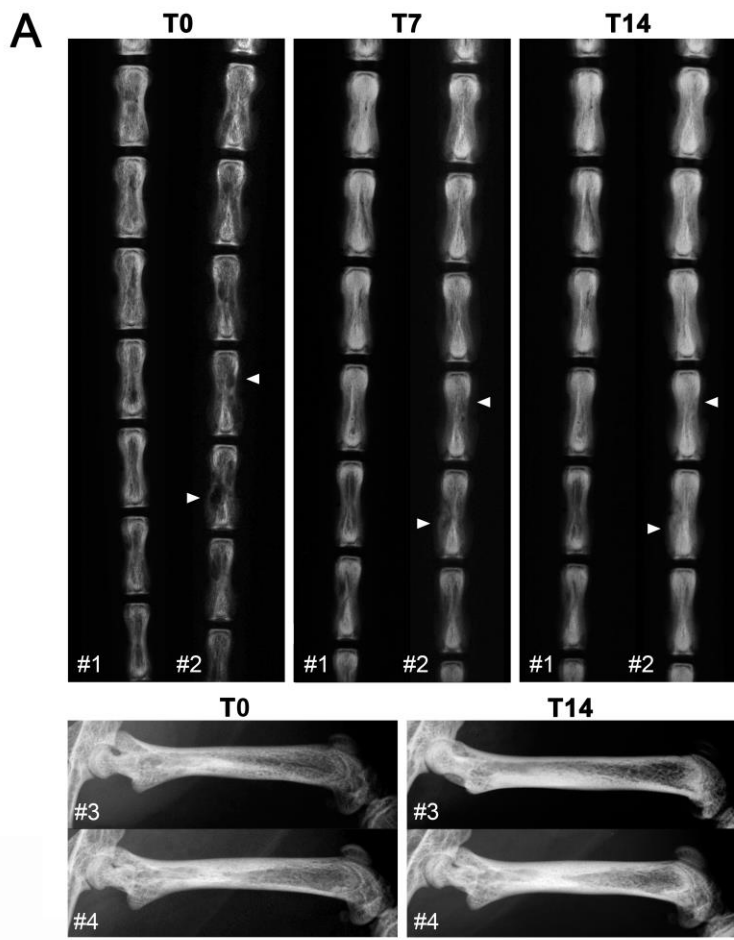


Figure 1. Skeletal radiographic changes during treatment with either anti-RANKL mAb (A) or rat IgG2a Isotype (B) in 2 young $EF1\alpha$ - $G_s\alpha^{R201C}$ mice. A) Serial Faxitron analysis of two representative tails and femurs at different time points during the treatment with anti-RANKL mAb. In the tails (mice #1 and #2, upper panel), bone density increased in all the affected vertebrae, with progressive disappearance of the intracortical lytic lesions (arrowheads). In slightly affected or apparently unaffected segments (arrows), the vertebral shape and the profile and transparency of the medullary canal were maintained. In the femurs (mice #3 and #4, lower panel), in which very early lesions were recognized as thickening of the cortex at midshaft (T0), no progression of the disease was observed (T14). B) Serial Faxitron analysis of two representative tails (mice #5 and #6, upper panel) and two femurs (mice #7 and #8, lower panel) at different time points during the treatment with rat IgG2a Isotype. The disease evolved in all the affected vertebrae (arrowheads) and appeared in unaffected vertebrae (arrows) with progressive deformity and lytic changes. In the femurs, the lesions expanded progressively and at T14 almost the whole skeletal segment was involved with a combined lytic and sclerotic phenotype.

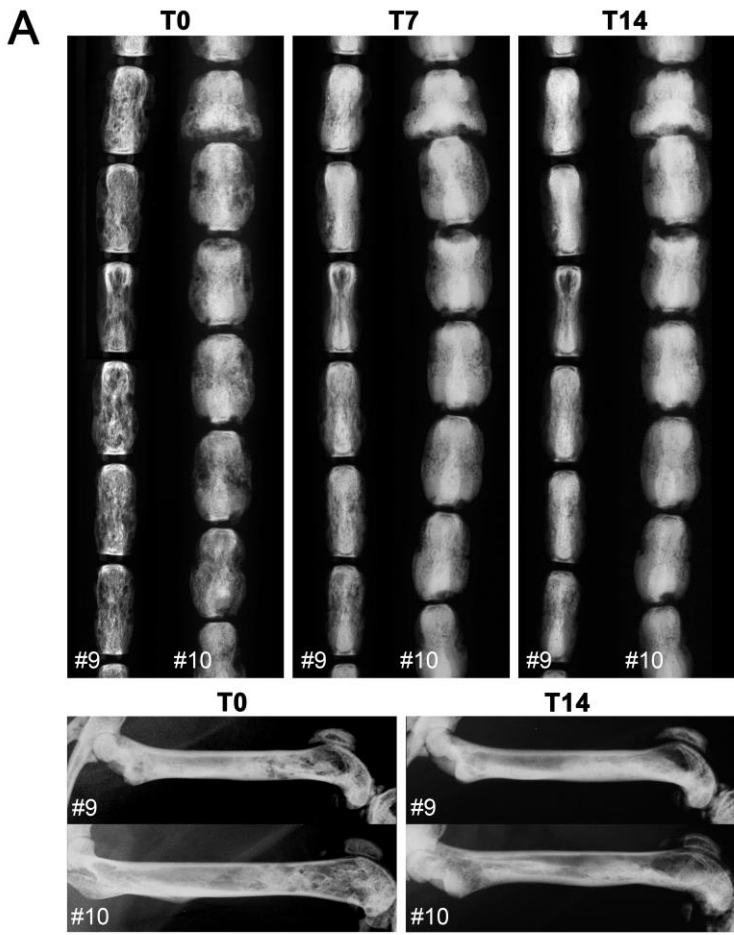


Figure 2. Skeletal radiographic changes during treatment with either anti-RANKL mAb (A) or rat IgG2a Isotype (B) in adult EF1 α -G α ^{R201C} mice. A) Serial Faxitron analysis of two mice (mice #9 and #10) treated with the anti-RANKL mAb showing tail vertebrae (upper panel) and femurs (lower panel). At T0 all bones bore FD-like lesions with a ground-glass appearance, and, as in young mice, the treatment progressively enhanced their radiographic density (T14). B) Serial Faxitron analysis of two adult mice (mice #11 and #12) treated with rat IgG2a Isotype at the same time points showing tail vertebrae (upper panel) and femurs (lower panel). The lesions progressed leading to deformities of the skeletal segments.

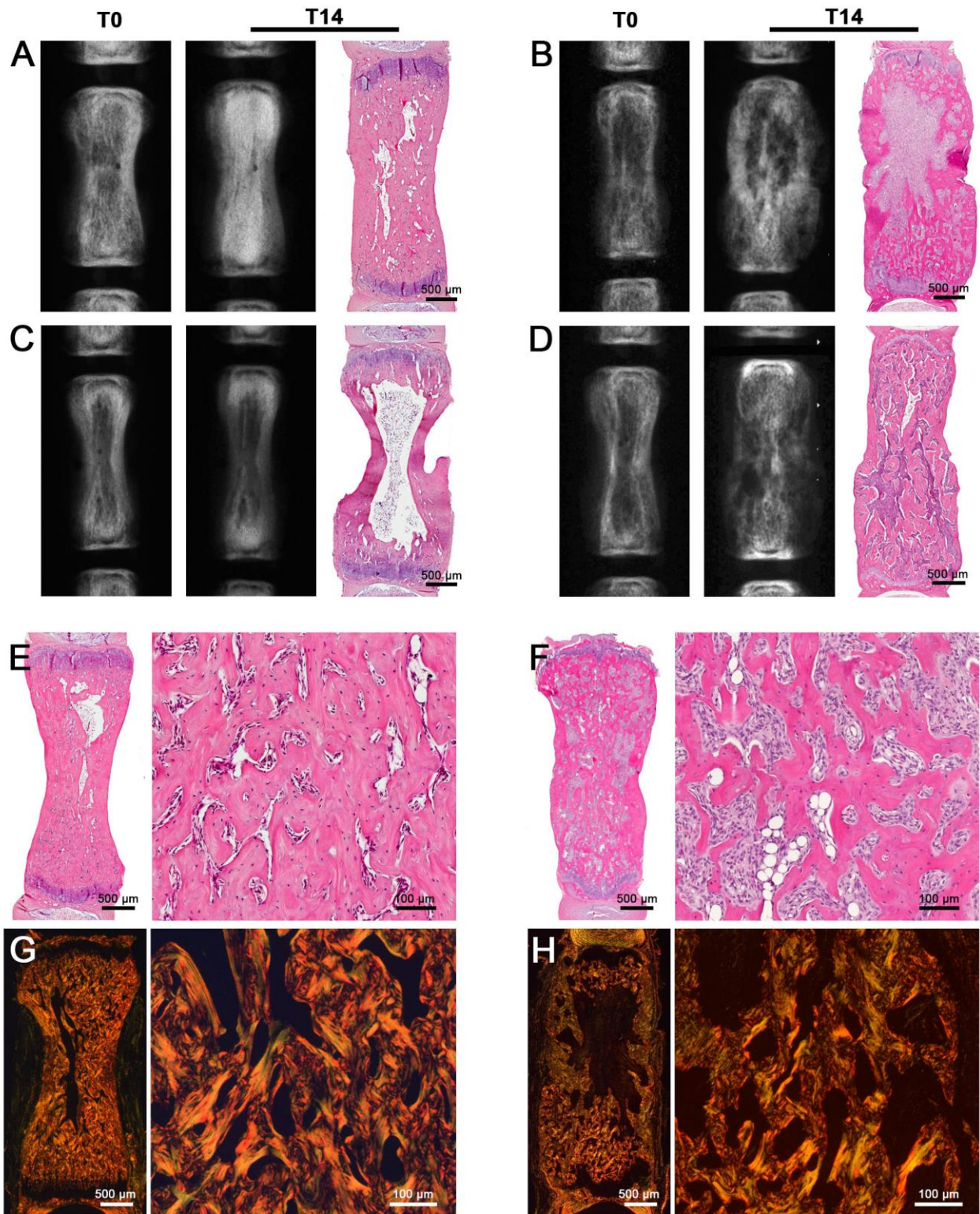


Figure 3. A-D) Correlation between radiographic and histological changes in young EF1 α -G α ^{R201C} mice. H&E-stained histological sections of tail vertebrae that were radiographically affected at T0 revealed newly deposited bone after anti-RANKL mAb treatment (A) and FD-like fibro-osseous tissue after rat IgG2a Isotype treatment (B). Tail vertebrae that were radiographically free of disease at T0 showed a normal morphology after anti-RANKL mAb treatment (C) and a FD-

like appearance after rat IgG2 Isotype administration (D). Replacement of the FD-like fibro-osseous tissue by newly formed bone occurred in the anti-RANKL mAb treated mice (E: H&E, transmitted light; G: Sirius Red, polarized light), but not in mice receiving the rat IgG2a Isotype (F: H&E, transmitted light; H: Sirius Red, polarized light).

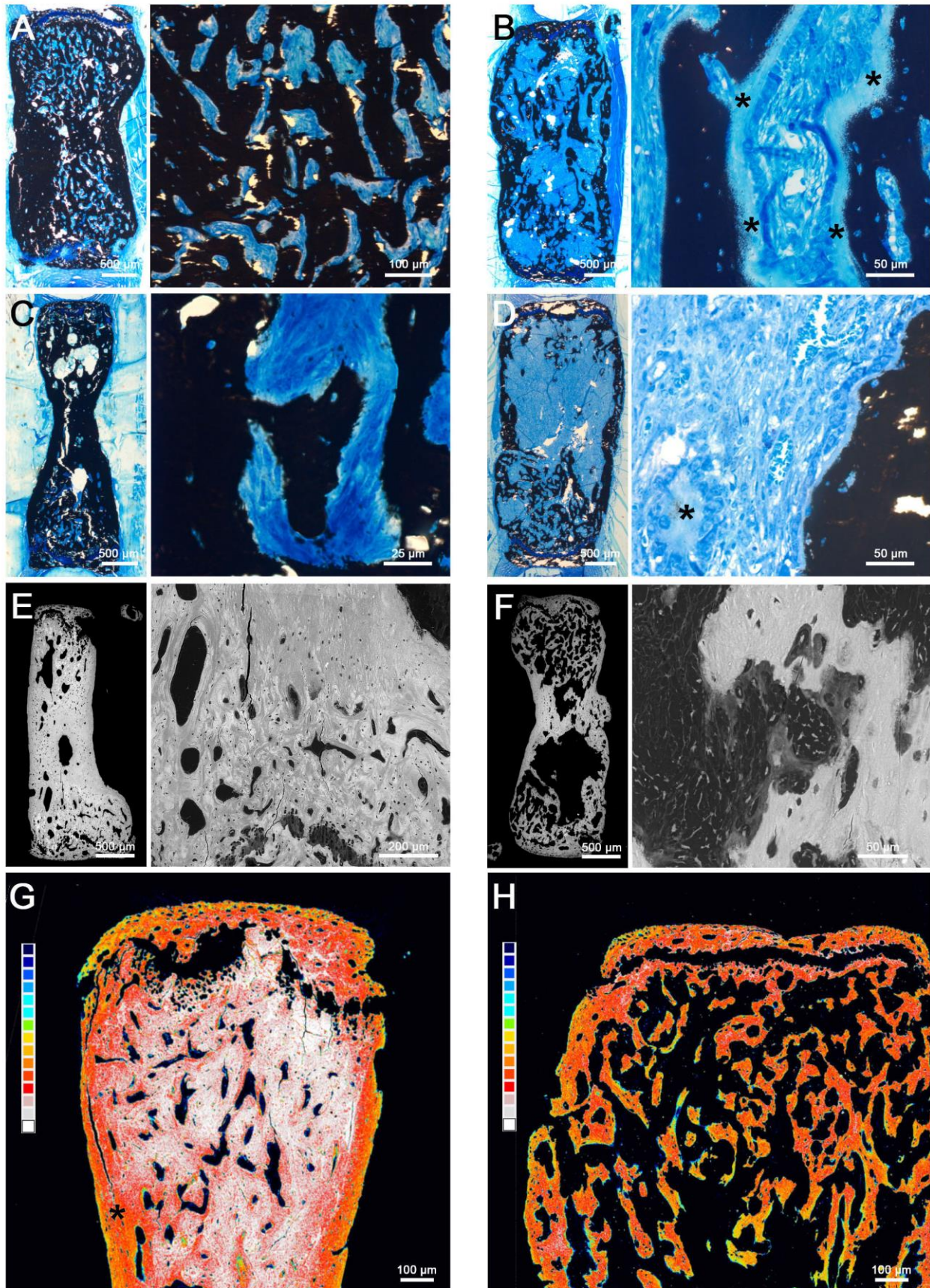


Figure 4. Von Kossa/Methylene Blue stained sections of non-decalcified bone samples showed extensive mineralization of the bone matrix in tail vertebrae from young anti-RANKL mAb treated

mice (A, C) and excess of osteoid (i.e., unmineralized bone matrix) in tail vertebrae from rat IgG2a Isotype treated mice (B, D). The same findings were observed in BSE-SEM images of tail vertebrae from anti-RANKL mAb treated (E) and rat IgG2a Isotype treated (F) mice. Qualitative BSE (qBSE) analysis revealed a higher level of mineralization of the newly formed bone in the tail vertebrae of anti-RANKL mAb treated mice (G) compared with cortical unaffected bone (G) and FD bone of tail vertebrae from rat IgG2a Isotype treated mice (H). Black asterisks in B, D and F: osteoid. White asterisk in G: cortical unaffected bone.

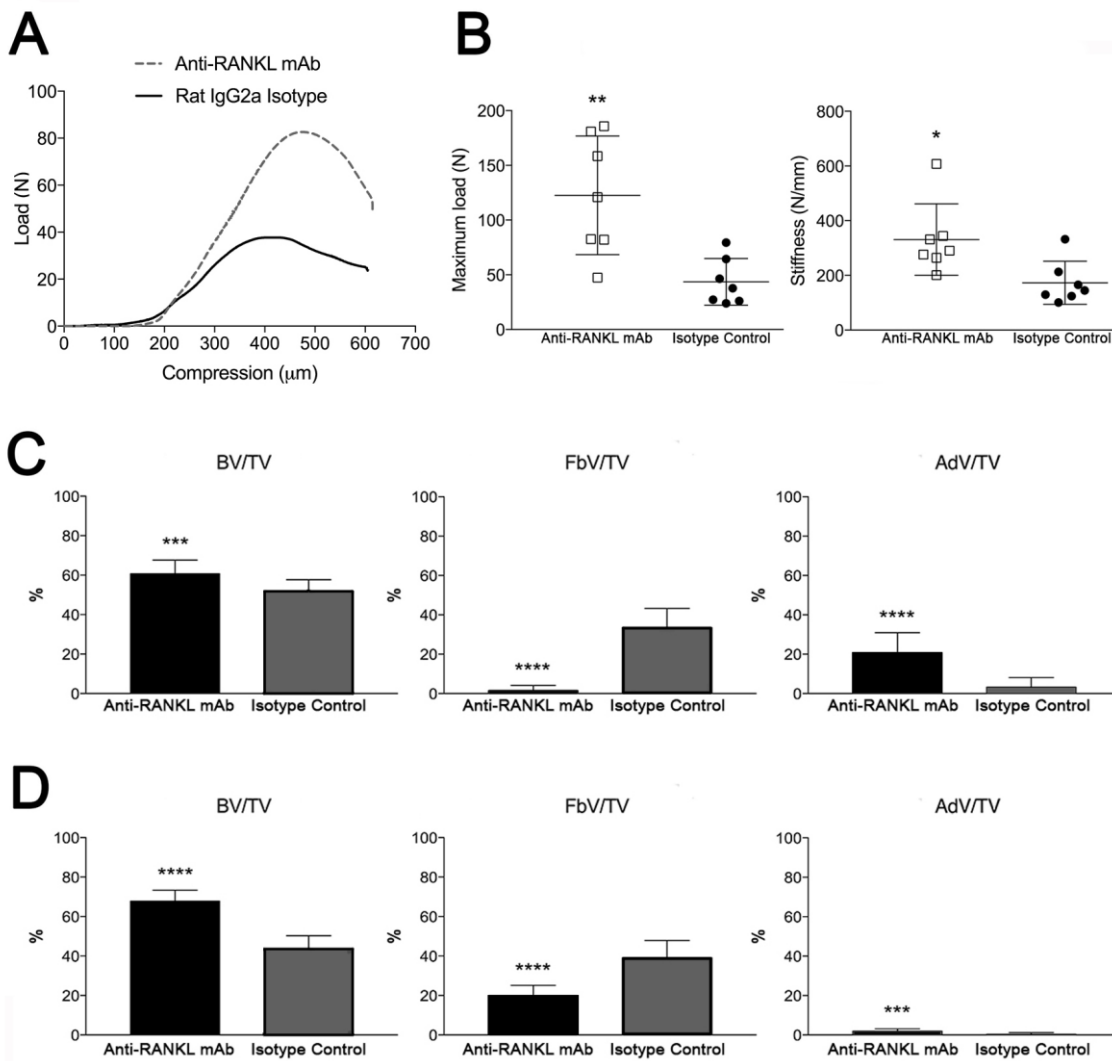


Figure 5. A, B) Biomechanical analysis of the tail vertebrae. Panel A shows two representative load–displacement curves generated from vertebral compression test performed on one tail vertebra from an anti-RANKL mAb treated mouse and one tail vertebra from a rat IgG2a Isotype treated mouse. In Panel B the comparative analysis of maximum load and stiffness, computed from the load-displacement curves, reveals an increase of 180% and 90% respectively in anti-RANKL mAb compared to rat IgG2a Isotype treated mice. C, D) Histomorphometric analysis of volumes of bone (Bone Volume/Total Volume, BV/TV), fibrous (Fibrous tissue Volume/Total Volume, FbV/TV), and adipose (bone marrow Adipose tissue Volume/Total Volume, AdV/TV) tissues performed on histological sections obtained from the tail vertebrae at the end of the treatment with either anti-RANKL mAb or rat IgG2a Isotype in young (C) and adult (D) mice. In both groups, the mean amount of BV/TV and AdV/TV was significantly higher and that of FbV/TV significantly lower in anti-RANKL mAb treated mice compared to the rat IgG2a Isotype groups. *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$; ***: $p < 0.001$; ****: $p < 0.0001$.

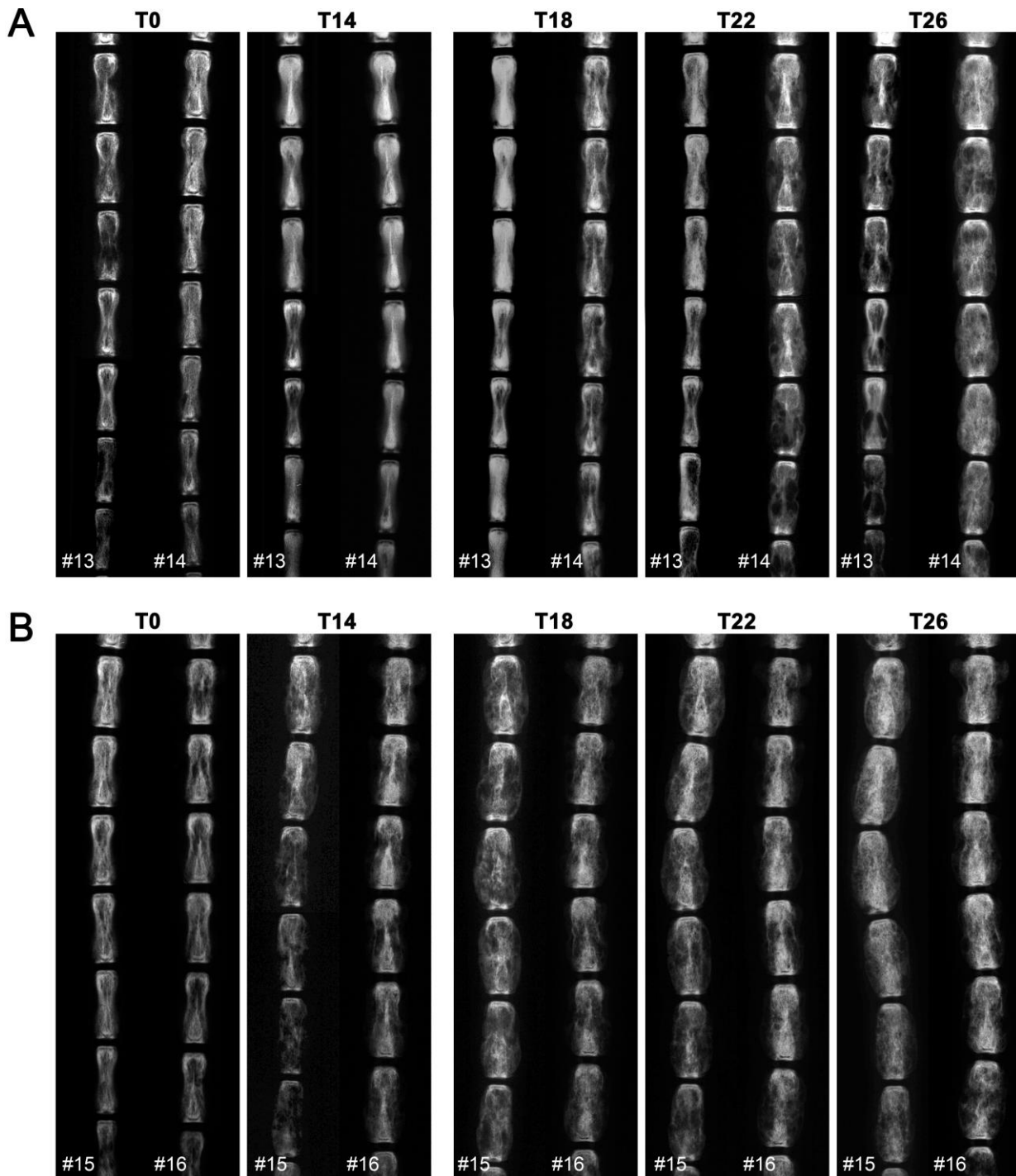


Figure 6. Radiographic changes during the 12-week follow-up in the tail vertebrae of EF1 α -G α ^{R201C} mice treated for 14 weeks with either anti-RANKL mAb (A, mice #13 and #14) or rat IgG2a Isotype (B, mice #15 and #16). Reduced bone density and osteolytic areas were detected in some anti-RANKL mAb treated mice at the first radiographic analysis performed after drug discontinuation (T18, mouse #14). At the end of the follow-up (T26) radiographs of the tail vertebrae of mice treated with the anti-RANKL mAb showed recurrence of original lesions (arrowheads) and completely new lesions in vertebrae that were radiographically unaffected at the beginning of the treatment (arrows).

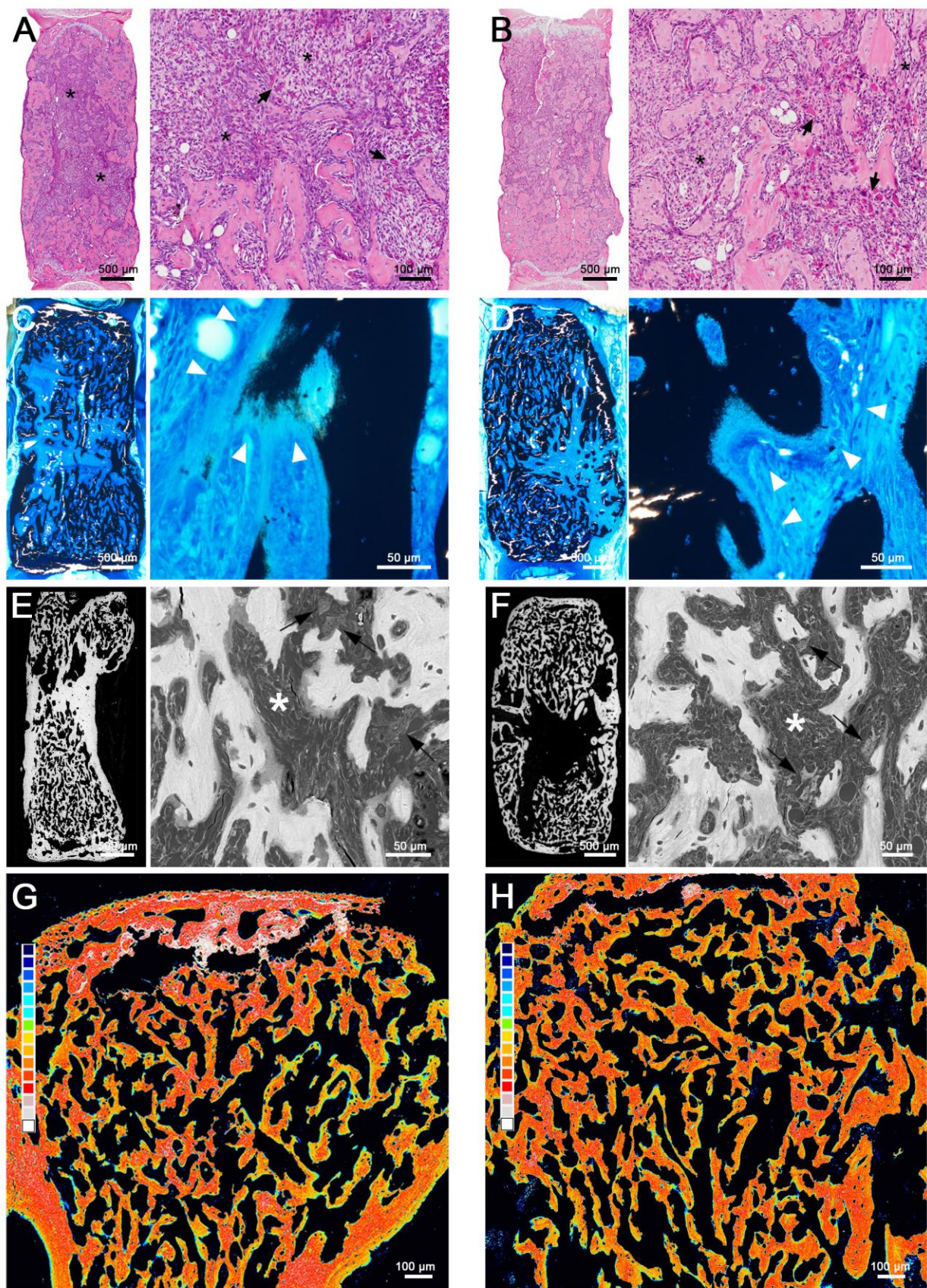


Figure 7. Histology of tail vertebrae of mice sacrificed at the end of the 12-week follow-up (T26). In H&E stained sections of anti-RANKL treated mice (A) the amount of osteoclasts (arrows) and fibrous tissue (asterisks) was comparable to that observed in rat IgG2a Isotype treated animals (B).

Undecalcified, Von Kossa/Methylene Blue stained sections showed numerous tiny bone trabeculae with a thick layer of osteoid in both anti-RANKL mAb (C, asterisks) and rat IgG2a Isotype (D, asterisks) treated mice. BSE-SEM images of vertebrae from mice treated with anti-RANKL mAb (E) and rat IgG2a Isotype (F) showed fibrous marrow (asterisks), osteoclasts (arrows) and intralesional under-mineralized bone trabeculae (arrowheads). Qualitative BSE (qBSE) revealed a similar content of mineral in the bone matrix of the lesional bone in anti-RANKL (G) and rat IgG2a Isotype (H) treated mice.

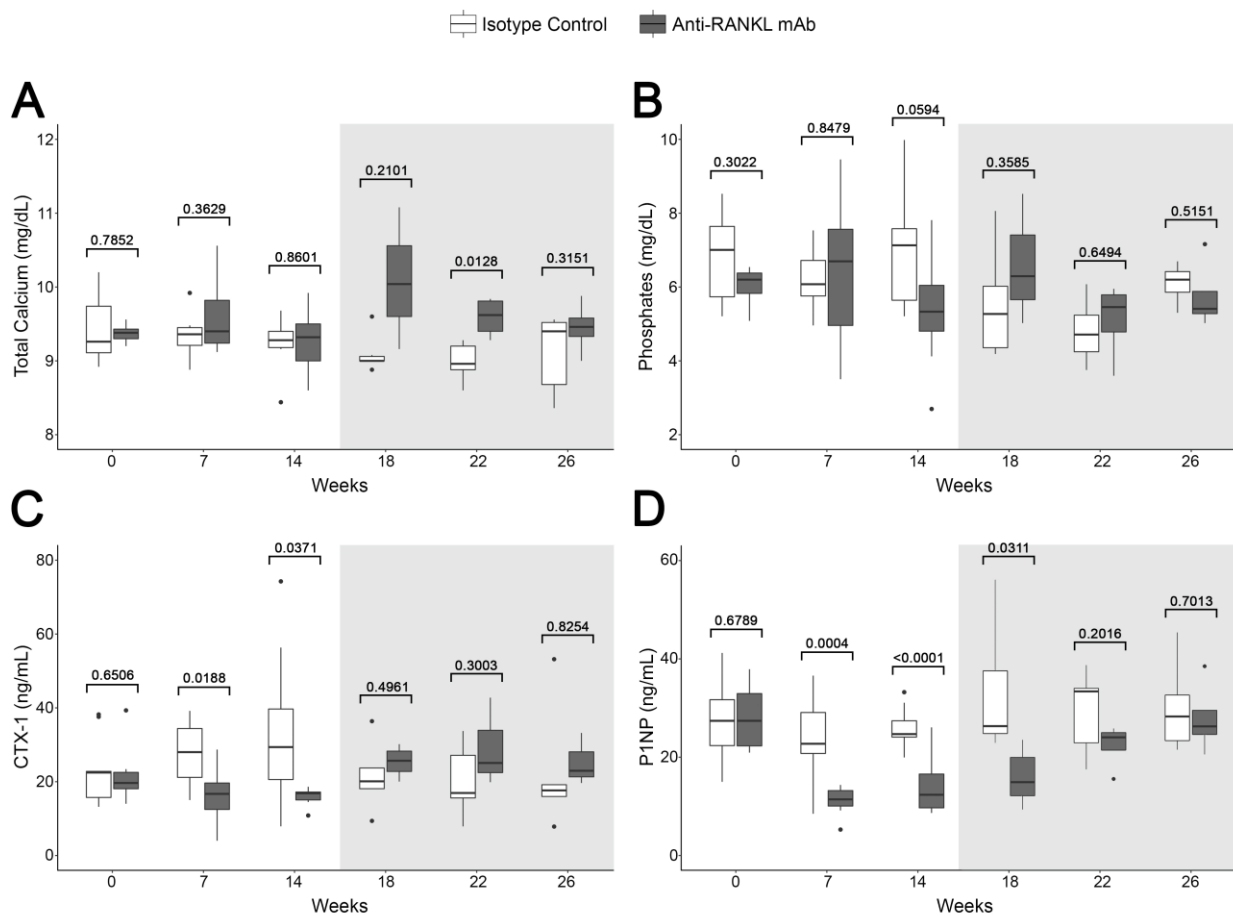


Figure 8. Serum analysis performed during the treatment and follow-up in anti-RANKL mAb treated mice and in rat IgG2a Isotype treated mice. Box plots show the serum levels of total Calcium (A), Phosphate (B), CTX-1 (C) and P1NP (D) at different time points. Outliers are represented as single spot outside the limits of the box. The significant p-values from t test comparison of anti-RANKL mAb vs rat IgG2a Isotype mice at specific time points are reported. The grey field in all graphs shows the follow-up period. During treatment, serum calcium (A) and phosphate (B) levels did not show significant changes. In contrast, CTX1 (C) and P1NP (D) significantly reduced in the anti-RANKL group. In the follow-up period, a statistically significant difference was observed for total Calcium and P1NP serum levels at 22 and 18 weeks respectively.

Moreover, comparative analysis between the mean values for all the measured parameters at the end of the treatment (T14) and at the different time points during the follow-up in the anti-RANKL group demonstrated an increase, even though not significant, for calcium and phosphate at T18 and a significant increase for CTX at T18 ($p = 0.0029$) and for P1NP at T22 ($p = 0.0220$). At the end of follow up, serum levels for all the measured parameters were not significantly different between anti-RANKL mAb and rat IgG2a Isotype treated mice.