

Title	SLC26A4 p.Thr410Met homozygous mutation in a patient with a cystic cochlea and an enlarged vestibular aqueduct showing characteristic features of incomplete partition type I and II.
Author(s)	Yamazaki, Hiroshi; Naito, Yasushi; Moroto, Saburo; Tamaya, Rinko; Yamazaki, Tomoko; Fujiwara, Keizo; Ito, Juichi
Citation	International journal of pediatric otorhinolaryngology (2014), 78(12): 2322-2326
Issue Date	2014-12
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2433/193437
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Type	Journal Article
Textversion	author

SLC26A4 p.T410M homozygous mutation in a patient with a cystic cochlea and an enlarged vestibular aqueduct showing characteristic features of incomplete partition type I and II

Hiroshi Yamazaki¹, Yasushi Naito², Saburo Moroto², Rinko Yamamoto², Tomoko Yamazaki², Keizo Fujiwara², Juichi Ito¹

1: Department of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery, Graduate School of Medicine, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan

2: Department of Otolaryngology, Kobe City Medical Center General Hospital, Kobe, Japan

Corresponding author: Hiroshi Yamazaki

Department of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery
Graduate School of Medicine, Kyoto University
Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606-8507, JAPAN
TEL: +81-75-751-3346, FAX: +81-75-751-7225
h_yamazaki@ent.kuhp.kyoto-u.ac.jp

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2
3 **Abstract**
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6 Mutations of *SLC26A4* are associated with incomplete partition type II (IP-II) and isolated
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8 enlargement of the vestibular aqueduct (EVA). We experienced a congenitally deaf patient with a
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10 rare p.T410M homozygous mutation of *SLC26A4*. The patient had unusual inner ear malformations
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12 on both sides, in which the vestibules and vestibular aqueducts were identical to those in IP-II, but
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14 the cochleae lacked a bony modiolus and resembled those in incomplete partition type I. These
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16 results suggest that homozygous mutations in *SLC26A4* are always associated with EVA, but that the
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18 severity of cochlear malformation may vary depending on the type of *SLC26A4* mutation.
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32 **Keywords:** *SLC26A4*, homozygous mutation, hearing loss, inner ear malformation, incomplete
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34 partition, enlarged vestibular aqueduct
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3 **1. Introduction**
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6 Severe or profound hearing loss occurs in approximately 1-2 of 1000 newborn children
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9 and genetic causes account for more than half of cases of congenital deafness [1, 2]. Mutations of the
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12 *SLC26A4* gene, which encodes Pendrin, a member of the solute carrier family, are the second leading
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15 cause of autosomal recessive hearing loss and are strongly associated with inner ear malformation,
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18 including isolated enlargement of the vestibular aqueduct (EVA) and incomplete partition type II
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21 (IP-II), which is defined by a cochlea with confluence of the middle and apical turns, a minimally
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24 dilated vestibule, and EVA [3, 4]. Mutations of *SLC26A4* result in non-syndromic or syndromic
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27 hereditary hearing loss [5, 6]. *SLC26A4* was originally identified as the causative gene of Pendred
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30 syndrome, an autosomal recessive hereditary disease characterized by congenital hearing loss and
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33 early adult-onset thyroid goiter [7]. Subsequently, mutations of *SLC26A4* have also been found in
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36 patients with familial non-syndromic sensorineural hearing loss with EVA [5].
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41 Pendrin is expressed in the inner ear, thyroid, and kidney [8] and functions as a
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44 transmembrane $\text{Cl}^-/\text{I}^-/\text{OH}^-/\text{HCO}_3^-$ exchanger across the plasma membrane in vitro [9-11]. Pendrin is
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47 thought to mediate Cl^-/I^- exchange in the thyroid [9] and $\text{Cl}^-/\text{HCO}_3^-$ exchange in the inner ear [12].
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50 To date, more than 170 mutations of *SLC26A4*, including missense, nonsense, frameshift, and splice
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53 site mutations, have been identified and these mutations are located throughout the coding region of
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56 Pendrin [13]. Interestingly, the most common mutation differs among countries [13]. A recent
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3 genetic study in the Japanese population showed that the p.H723R mutation accounted for more than
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6 50% of identified *SLC26A4* mutations, while the frequency of p.T410M is less than 10% and
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9 relatively rare, but is found in Asian, European and American populations [14-18]. Compound
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12 heterozygotes of p.T410M and another mutation, as well as the mono-allelic p.T410M mutation in
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15 *SLC26A4* have been associated with isolated EVA or IP-II [19, 20]. However, only a few p.T410M
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18 homozygous patients have been described and the clinical features and radiographic findings in these
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21 cases have not been widely investigated [17, 21]. Here, we present the case of a congenitally deaf
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24 patient who was homozygous for p.T410M *SLC26A4* and had an unusual inner ear malformation
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27 that was partly similar to IP-II, the typical malformation associated with *SLC26A4* mutations, but
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30 clearly differed from IP-II because of cystic cochleae lacking a bony modiolus.
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38 **2. Case report**

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41 The patient was an otherwise healthy 1-year-old boy who was referred to our hospital
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44 because of failure to pass newborn hearing screening. He had no family history of hearing loss and
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47 no history of prenatal or perinatal problems. He started to use bilateral hearing aids at 5 months old,
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50 but did not respond to surrounding sounds after 6 months of use of the hearing aids. An otoscopic
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53 examination revealed no abnormality in his tympanic membranes and ABR testing exhibited no
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56 response at 105 dB on both sides, indicating bilateral profound sensorineural hearing loss. This
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3 patient showed neither developmental delay nor associated psychophysiological abnormalities,
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6 except for delayed speech development due to the profound sensorineural hearing loss. The Invader
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9 assay for screening of 47 mutations of 13 known deafness genes that are common in the Japanese
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12 population [22] identified a p.T410M homozygous mutation in the *SLC26A4* gene.
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16 CT images revealed a bilaterally symmetrical inner ear malformation with (1) a cystic
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18 cochlea without a bony modiolus, (2) a dilated vestibule, and (3) EVA (Fig. 1A-D), indicating
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21 characteristic features of IP-I (Fig. 1E, F) and IP-II (Fig. 1G, H). The cystic cochleae without a bony
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24 modiolus resembled those in IP-I, while the dilated vestibule and EVA were similar to those in
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27 typical IP-II found in patients with homozygous mutations of p.H723R, the most common mutation
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30 of *SLC26A4* in Japan [14]. To confirm this finding, we measured the size of each part of the
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33 malformed inner ears (Table 1). The length of the basal portion and the height of the cochleae were
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36 8.81 mm and 4.93 mm, respectively, on the right side, and 9.10 mm and 5.51 mm, respectively, on
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39 the left side, which are similar to the width of 8.59 ± 0.41 mm and height of 5.31 ± 0.41 mm for
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42 normal cochleae [23]. The normal external dimensions of the cochleae and complete absence of the
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45 bony modiolus indicated cochleae similar to those observed in IP -I [4]. The widths of the vestibule
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48 were 4.03 mm and 4.18 mm on the right and left sides, respectively, which were shorter than the
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51 typical length of 5.74 ± 0.68 mm in IP-I, but similar to the length of 4.26 ± 0.38 in IP-II [23]. The
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54 widths of the EVA at the midpoint of the vestibular aqueduct were 3.73 mm and 4.33 mm on the
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3 right and left sides, respectively, which were larger than the criteria of 1.5 mm for EVA [4]. These
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6 findings showed that, unlike the cochleae, the vestibule and vestibular aqueduct on each side were
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9 typical of those found in IP-II. CT images also revealed a bony defect between the fundus of the IAC
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12 on both sides (Fig. 1 A, C).
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16 T2-weighted MRI revealed that soft tissue separated the fundus of the IAC from the
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18 malformed cochlea on the right side, but that the IAC communicated with the cystic cochlea on the
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20 left side (Fig. 2A, B). A modiolus-like structure with low intensity on T2-weighted images was
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22 observed at the center of the right malformed cochlea, suggesting that neural tissue was present in
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24 the center of the cochlea, despite the lack of a bony modiolus, while the left side showed a complete
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26 empty cochlea. Interestingly, MRI showed that the endolymphatic sac was not enlarged, even though
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28 the vestibular aqueduct was significantly enlarged (Fig. 2A, B). In IP-II and isolated EVA, an EVA is
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30 always associated with an abnormally large endolymphatic sac, which is a clear contrast to the
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32 observations in the present case (Fig. 2C).
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44 The patient underwent sequential bilateral cochlear implantation: the first implantation on
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46 the right side at 14 months old and the second on the left side at 6 years old. A perimodiolar hugging
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48 electrode array with half-banded electrodes and a straight electrode array with full banded electrodes
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51 (Nucleus CI24RECS and Nucleus CI24REST, respectively; Cochlear Ltd., Sydney, Australia) were
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54 inserted via a cochleostomy on the right and left sides, respectively. A cerebrospinal fluid (CSF)
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3 gusher occurred during the left side implantation, but not on the right side, as predicted by the MRI
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6 findings showing a lack of the lateral end of the IAC on the left side, as described above. The CSF
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9 gusher on the left side was easily controlled by plugging of soft tissue at the cochleostomy. The
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12 patient understood conversation without lip-reading with a familiar talker at 14 months after the first
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15 implantation and scored 90% on a Japanese infant word discrimination test. No delay in language
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18 development was observed before the second implantation on the left side performed at 6 years old.
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25 **3. Discussion**

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28 The patient in this case report had p.T410M homozygous mutation in the *SLC26A4* gene
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31 and showed bilateral symmetric inner ear malformation on CT imaging, with a cystic cochlea, a
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34 dilated vestibule, and EVA. With regard to each part of the bony labyrinth, the cystic cochlea without
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37 a bony modiolus was similar to that observed in IP-I, while the dilated vestibule and EVA were
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40 identical to those in IP-II. MRI showed that a basement membrane-like structure divided the
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43 membrane labyrinth into the scala tympani and scala vestibuli in the left malformed cochlea,
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46 suggesting that this cochlea was more differentiated than the completely empty cochlea observed in
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49 typical IP-I [4, 23]. MRI also showed that each side of the endolymphatic sac was not dilated, even
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52 though the vestibular aqueduct was as wide as those in isolated EVA and IP-II.
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57 These radiographic findings imply that the inner ear malformation in this case had
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3 characteristic features of both IP-I and IP-II and could be classified between IP-I and IP-II using the
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6 classification of inner ear malformations published in 2010 by Sennaroglu [4]. In this classification,
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9 EVA is observed in cochlear hypoplasia type II other than IP-II and isolated EVA. Cochlear
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12 hypoplasia type II is defined by (1) smaller dimensions of the cochlea with no modiolus and
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15 interscalar septa, (2) normal external architecture of the cochlea, (3) a minimally dilated vestibule,
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18 and (4) EVA [4]. The malformed inner ears in our case resembled cochlear hypoplasia type II, but
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21 did not meet the first criterion. The outer diameters of the cochleae were as large as those of normal
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24 cochleae and based on this finding we concluded that the malformed inner ears were not cochlear
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27 hypoplasia type II, but rather were located between IP-I and IP-II.
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32 To our knowledge, this is the first reported case with bi-allelic *SLC26A4* mutations and a
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35 cystic cochlea without a bony modiolus. Many studies have shown that homozygous or compound
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38 heterozygous mutations in *SLC26A4* are associated with LVAS and IP-II [24], in which the cochlea
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41 is normal and mildly malformed, respectively, and the bony modiolus is always present. The results
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44 in our patient with a p.T410M homozygous *SLC26A4* mutation suggest that EVA is a universal
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47 phenotype among *SLC26A4* mutations [25], while the severity of cochlear malformations may vary
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50 widely between patients with bi-allelic *SLC26A4* mutations. The p.T410M mutation in *SLC26A4* has
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53 been found in Asian, European, and American populations, but the frequency is not high among
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56 *SLC26A4* mutations, suggesting that patients with a p.T410M homozygous mutation are rare [15-17,
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3 26]. To date, 8 patients with *SLC26A4* p.T410M homozygous mutations from 5 families have been
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6 reported in the English literature [15-18, 26]. Among these, only a report from Spain described no
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9 inner ear malformation except for EVA in 4 patients of the same family, but CT images were not
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12 shown [17]. The other reports did not mention abnormalities other than EVA.
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16 For genetic testing in the present case, we used the Invader assay, which is optimized for
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19 screening for 47 common mutations of 13 causative genes in the Japanese deafness population [14].
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22 For *SLC26A4*, the Invader assay evaluates 19 mutations including p.H723R, p.Y530H, p.T416P,
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25 p.Q514K, c.919-2A>G, and c.1001+1G>A, which are the most common mutations in the Asian,
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28 European, and American populations [14, 15, 17, 27-29]. In our case, the Invader assay detected
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31 only a p.T410M homozygous mutation of *SLC26A4* among the 47 mutations in the assay, but
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34 additional mutations may have been present because we did not perform other tests, including direct
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37 sequencing of *SLC26A4*. Other mutations or polymorphisms in *SLC26A4* and mutations in genes
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40 such as *FOXII*, which regulates *SLC26A4* expression, may exacerbate the phenotype of p.T410M
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43 homozygotes [30]. Therefore, the causal relationship between p.T410M homozygous *SLC26A4* and
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46 the type of inner ear malformation in our case remains uncertain. An *in vitro* study showed that the
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49 p.T410M mutation eliminated the transport function of Pendrin [11]. Given that the Cl⁻/HCO₃⁻
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52 exchange function of Pendrin in the endolymphatic sac is essential for normal inner ear development
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56 [31], the complete loss of function of Pendrin caused by the p.T410M mutation may result in the
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3 severe malformation in the cochlea. Recent studies have failed to identify a relationship between
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6 sites of mutations in *SLC26A4* and phenotypes in patients with hearing loss, but most of these
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9 studies focused on clinical findings such as progression and fluctuation of hearing thresholds, goiter,
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12 and unilateral or bilateral EVA, rather than on cochlear malformations [18, 25, 32]. Thus, further
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15 studies are needed to evaluate the relationship between the severity of cochlear malformations and
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18 types of *SLC26A4* mutations.
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22 The presence or absence of an entire modiolus, which consists of a bony modiolus and soft
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25 tissue including neural elements, is clinically important when considering cochlear implantation. As
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28 pointed out previously, a CSF gusher is associated with inner ear malformations lacking an entire
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31 cochlear modiolus due to communication between the IAC and the malformed cochlea [4, 23, 33]. In
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34 our patient, we encountered a CSF gusher during implantation on the left side, but not on the right
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37 side, as predicted by MRI findings indicating a lack of the entire modiolus and the fundus of the IAC
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40 only on the left side. Evaluation of the presence of a modiolus is also useful to select an appropriate
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43 type of electrode array for the implant. CT failed to detect a bony modiolus on both sides in the
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46 present case, but MRI identified soft tissue (probably neuronal elements) at the center of the right
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49 cochlea. Therefore, we used a modiolar hugging electrode array on the right side to stimulate the
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52 putative neuronal tissue at the core of the cochlea using the closely positioned electrodes. It should
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57 be noted that identification of soft tissue at the core of the cystic cochlea does not necessarily
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3 indicate a need for use of a modiolar hugging electrode array because the precise distribution of
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6 neuronal elements is uncertain in this type of malformed cochleae. However, when the entire
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9 modiulus is absent, as for the left cochlea in our patient, the standard straight electrode array is
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12 recommended because neuronal tissue may be distributed near the inner wall of the cystic cochlea,
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15 as we previously showed in patients with a common cavity deformity [34].
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19 The patient underwent sequential cochlear implantation on the right side at 1 year old and
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22 on the left side at 6 years old. His implant-aided word discrimination score was excellent and
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25 reached 90% at 14 months after the first implantation, and his language development had caught up
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28 with that of children with normal hearing before the second implantation. Differences in severity of
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31 cochlear malformations may be associated with differences in cochlear implant outcomes. However,
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34 the short follow-up period after the second implantation and the 5-year gap between implantations
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37 made it difficult to evaluate the negative impacts of the more severe left cochlear malformation on
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40 implant-aided auditory performance.
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48 **4. Conclusions**

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51 We have described the case of a congenitally deaf patient with a rare p.T410M
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54 homozygous mutation of the *SLC26A4* gene. This patient had an unusual inner ear malformation that
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57 was classified between IP-I and IP-II. The dilated vestibule and EVA were similar to those typically
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3 seen in IP-II, which is associated with *SLC26A4* mutations, but the cystic cochleae without a bony
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6 modiolus were similar to features seen in IP-I. The causal relationship between a p.T410M
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9 homozygous mutation of *SLC26A4* and this type of inner ear malformation remains unclear.
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12 However, these results suggest that homozygous mutations in *SLC26A4* are always associated with
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15 EVA, but that the severity of cochlear malformations may vary widely depending on the type of
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19 *SLC26A4* mutation.
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25 **5. Financial disclosures**

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28 None.
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35 **6. Grant support**

36
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38 This study was supported by the Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists (B): 25861607 from
39
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41 Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.
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48 **7. Conflict of interest**

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51 None.
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54 **8. Acknowledgements**

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57 We would like to thank Prof. Shin-ichi Usami and Dr. Shin-ya Nishio in Shinshu
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3 University for genetic testing. This study was supported by a Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists (B):
4
5
6 25861607 and a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C): 26462574 from the Japanese Ministry of
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9 Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.
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11 12 13 14 15 16 **9. Figure legends** 17

18
19 Fig.1. Axial CT images showing the right and left malformed inner ears in the present case who had
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21 a p.T410M homozygous mutation in the *SLC26A4* gene (A-D), IP-I (E and F), and IP-II found in a
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23 patient who had a p.H723R homozygous mutation in the *SLC26A4* gene (G and H). The upper
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25 column shows malformed cochleae in each inner malformation (arrow heads). An interscalar septum
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27 is observed in IP-II (G, black arrow), while the others show a cystic cochlea without a bony
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29 modiolus (A, C, and E). The present case has a minimally dilated vestibules (B and D, *), which are
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31 similar to that seen in IP-II (H, *), but differ from the large cystic vestibule in IP-I (F, black arrow).
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35 Both *SLC26A4* mutations are associated with EVA (B, D, and H, white arrows). Scare bars: 5 mm.
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48 Fig.2. Axial T2-weighted MRI shows that soft tissue with low intensity is present at the center of the
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50 cochlea on the right side in the present case who had a p.T410M homozygous mutation in *SLC26A4*
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52 (A, arrow). On the other hand, the left side showed a complete empty cochlea without an entire
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54 modiolus and the lateral wall of the IAC is absent on left side (B, arrow). The endolymphatic sac is
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3 considerably dilated in IP-II, but not in the present case (A, B, and C, arrow heads). Scare bars: 5
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6 mm.
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10. References

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Table 1: Measurements of each part of malformed inner ears

	Length of the basal portion of a cochlea (mm)	Height of a cochlea (mm)	Width of a vestibule (mm)	Width of EVA at the midpoint of a vestibular aqueduct (mm)
p.T410M Rt	8.81	4.93	4.03	3.73
p.T410M Lt	9.10	5.51	4.18	4.33
IP-I*	8.45 ± 0.68	5.04 ± 0.46	5.74 ± 0.68	N.E.
IP-II*	8.10 ± 0.46	4.87 ± 0.19	4.26 ± 0.38	3.68 ± 0.36
Normal*	8.59 ± 0.41	5.31 ± 0.41	3.40 ± 0.28	N.E.

p.T410M Rt and Lt indicate the right and left inner ears of the present case, respectively.

* Sennaroglu and Sacchi 2004 [23]

N.E.: not evaluated due to no EVA

Figure1

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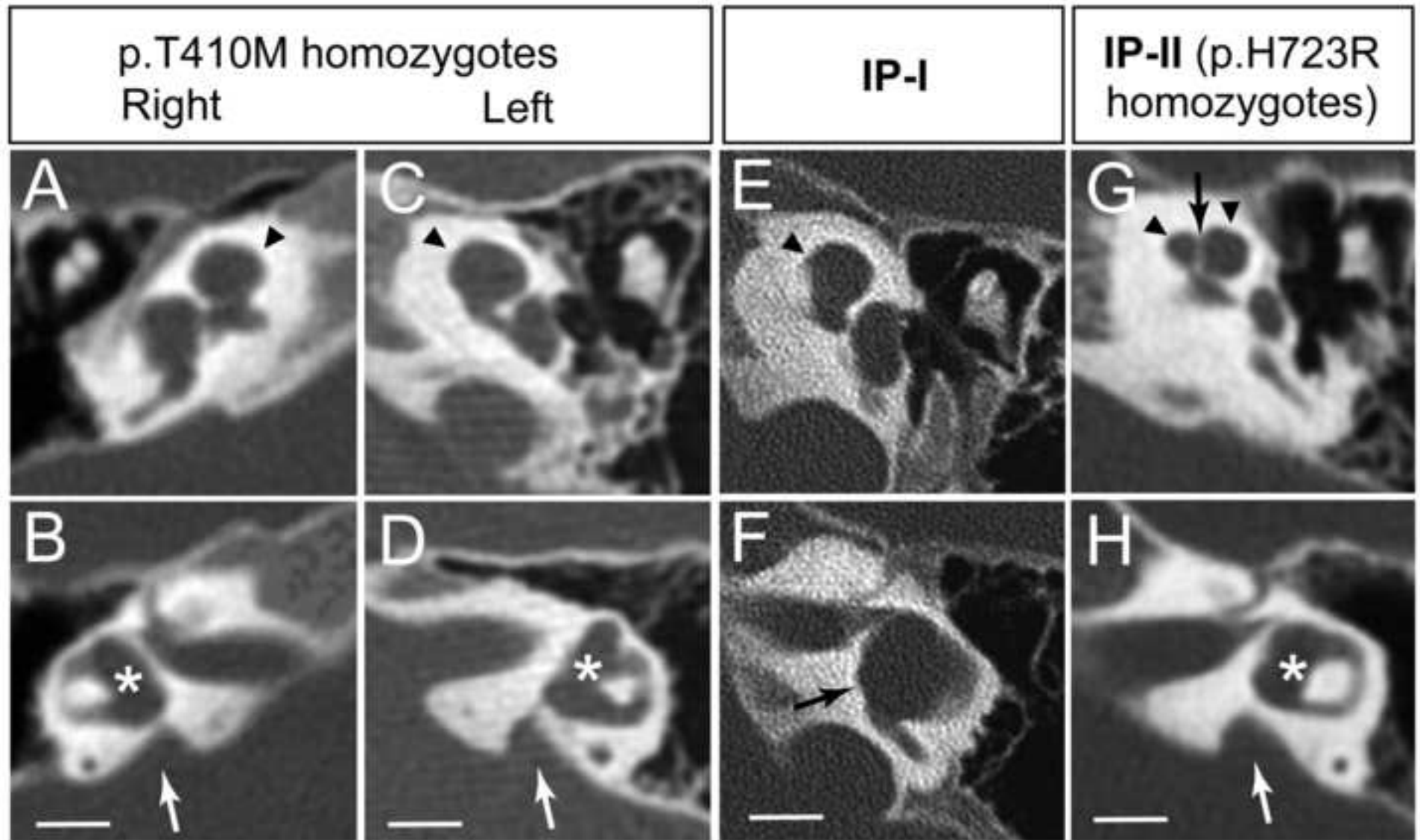


Figure2

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