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Zakaria, N.A.^a, Islam, M.A.^a, Abdullah, W.Z.^a, Bahar, R.^a, Yusoff, A.A.M.^b, Wahab, R.A.^c, Shamsuddin, S.^{d e f}, Johan, M.F.^a

Epigenetic insights and potential modifiers as therapeutic targets in β -thalassemia

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^a Department of Haematology, School of Medical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Kubang Kerian16150, Malaysia

^b Department of Neurosciences, School of Medical Sciences, University Sains Malaysia, Kubang Kerian16150, Malaysia

^c Department of Biomedical Sciences, Kulliyah of Allied Health Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuantan, 25200, Malaysia

^d School of Health Sciences, University Sains Malaysia, Kubang Kerian16150, Malaysia

^e Institute for Research in Molecular Medicine (INFORMM), University Sains Malaysia, Kubang Kerian16150, Malaysia

^f USM-RIKEN Interdisciplinary Collaboration for Advanced Sciences (URICAS), Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, 11800, Malaysia

Abstract

Thalassemia, an inherited quantitative globin disorder, consists of two types, α - and β - thalassemia. β -thalassemia is a heterogeneous disease that can be asymptomatic, mild, or even severe. Considerable research has focused on investigating its underlying etiology. These studies found that DNA hypomethylation in the β -globin gene cluster is significantly related to fetal hemoglobin (HbF) elevation. Histone modification reactivates γ -globin gene expression in adults and increases β -globin expression. Down-regulation of γ -globin suppressor genes, i.e., BCL11A, KLF1, HBG-XMN1, HBS1L-MYB, and SOX6, elevates the HbF level. β -thalassemia severity is predictable through FLT1, ARG2, NOS2A, and MAP3K5 gene expression. NOS2A and MAP3K5 may predict the β -thalassemia patient's response to hydroxyurea, a HbF-inducing drug. The transcription factors NRF2 and BACH1 work with antioxidant enzymes, i.e., PRDX1, PRDX2, TRX1, and SOD1, to protect erythrocytes from oxidative damage, thus increasing their lifespan. A single β -thalassemia-causing mutation can result in different phenotypes, and these are predictable by IGSF4 and LARP2 methylation as well as long non-coding RNA expression levels. Finally, the coinheritance of β -thalassemia with α -thalassemia ameliorates the β -thalassemia clinical presentation. In conclusion, the management of β -thalassemia is currently limited to genetic and epigenetic approaches, and numerous factors should be further explored in the future. © 2021 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

Author Keywords

BCL11A; DNA methylation; Epigenetics; HBG-Xmn1; HBS1L-MYB; IGSF4; KLF1; LARP2; Thalassemia; β -thalassemia

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Correspondence Address

Islam M.A.; Department of Haematology, Kubang Kerian, Malaysia; email: asiful@usm.my

Johan M.F.; Department of Haematology, Kubang Kerian, Malaysia; email: faridjohan@usm.my

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