

Review: Spotlight on p53

KeePin' the p53 Family in Good Shape

Fiamma Mantovani^{1,2}

Monica Gostissa^{1,†}

Licio Collavin^{1,2}

Giannino Del Sal^{1,2,*}

¹Laboratorio Nazionale C.I.B.; Area Science Park; Trieste, Italy

²Dipartimento di Biochimica; Biofisica e Chimica delle Macromolecole; Università di Trieste; Trieste, Italy

[†]Present address: Children's Hospital; 1 Blackfan Circle; Boston, Massachusetts USA

*Correspondence to: Giannino Del Sal; Laboratorio Nazionale C.I.B.; Area Science Park; Padriciano 99; I-34012 Trieste, Italy; Tel.: 39040398992; Fax: 39040398990; Email: detsal@lncib.it

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ABSTRACT

The tumor suppressor p53 and the prolyl isomerase Pin1 are both highly connected proteins, lying at the crossroads between many signaling pathways that control cell proliferation and transformation. By catalyzing conformational changes in a large number of phosphorylated proteins, Pin1 has been implicated in the regulation of major cellular events, such as cell cycle progression, transcription, proliferation and differentiation. Recently, a role for Pin1 has emerged also in the DNA damage response, through modulation of p53 functions upon genotoxic stress. A further level of control has now been unveiled by showing that also the p53 sibling p73 requires Pin1 for its apoptotic activity.

INTRODUCTION

The p53 tumor suppressor has long been recognized as a key factor in safeguarding over the genome's integrity and in protecting it from potentially dangerous mutations that might arise upon exposure to DNA damaging agents.

p53 is a tetrameric transcription factor that becomes active following treatment of a cell with a wide range of stimuli impinging on genomic stability, and that is able to specifically bind to target sequences within the promoters of a continuously expanding set of genes.¹⁻⁴ Most of these downstream targets are either involved in mediating cell cycle arrest or in inducing programmed cell death, the final outcome of p53 response being determined by the coordinate expression of specific gene subsets.^{2,5,6} Given its potent growth suppressive activity, improper activation of p53 must be carefully avoided in normal growing cells. p53 functions are indeed controlled through multiple mechanisms, involving modulation of protein stability, post-translational modifications and interaction with other cellular partners.^{7,8} While, for purpose of research, which needs to be reductive, we generally try to analyze separately the various aspects of p53 regulation, they are instead tightly interrelated. The importance of p53 in preventing cancer onset has made it the subject of intense research efforts, yielding an impressive wealth of knowledge about its biochemical and biological functions. Still, however, this vast amount of data may result somehow confusing and even contradictory, raising the need of organizing the information into a coordinate and comprehensive picture of p53 action within the cell.

MECHANISMS OF REGULATION OF p53 FUNCTIONS

p53 has an intrinsically short half-life, estimated to less than 30 minutes in fibroblasts,⁹ that depends on efficient degradation by the ubiquitin-proteasome system. Master regulator of p53 stability is its downstream target Mdm2, which interacts with p53 and mediates its ubiquitination inducing its degradation.¹⁰ Moreover, Mdm2 can also directly inhibit p53 transcriptional activity through binding its N-terminal transactivation domain,¹¹⁻¹³ and possibly affecting its subcellular localization.¹⁴ p53, in fact, possesses both nuclear localization (NLS) and nuclear export (NES) signals,¹⁵ but the NES appears to be masked in the active, tetrameric form of the protein.¹⁶ Mdm2-mediated ubiquitination results in NES exposure and p53 export to the cytoplasm.¹⁶⁻¹⁸ While nuclear export does not seem to be required for p53 degradation,^{19,20} cytoplasmic sequestration may well be an alternative mechanism to restrain p53 function.

Following cell exposure to DNA damaging agents, such as UV, ionizing radiation or chemotherapeutic drugs, p53 becomes rapidly stabilized and functionally activated, as a consequence of post-translational modifications affecting both its N-terminal transactivation and C-terminal oligomerization domains.^{21,22} In particular, DNA damage triggers the

activation of the ATM/ATR kinases, which directly phosphorylate p53 on Ser15 and mediate activation of the downstream kinases Chk1 and 2 that in turn target the neighboring residue Ser20. These modifications render p53 unable to bind Mdm2, resulting in stabilization of the protein. Cellular stress causes also in the activation of other kinases, such as JNK and MAPK, which are responsible for modifying several residues within p53 N- and C-terminus.²¹ Moreover, p53 can be activated by modifications of C-terminal lysine residues, such as acetylation mediated by the acetyl-transferases p300/CPB and PCAF,²² or sumoylation.²³

Until some years ago, the model for p53 activation that could be drawn from the available evidences was, if not simple, quite straight. Phosphorylation of p53 N-terminus would be responsible for relieving the interaction with Mdm2. On the other hand, modifications in the C-terminus would contribute to turn the protein from a "latent" to an "active" DNA binder, rendering it more able to transactivate its downstream targets. Nowadays, however, the story appears far more complex, since new players have been added to the picture and more subtle correlations have emerged between different post-translational modifications.

In the last year two novel ubiquitin-ligases for p53 have been identified, which are encoded respectively by the newly discovered Pirh2 gene²⁴ and by the mammalian homologue of COP1, a gene involved in plant photomorphogenesis.²⁵ Both Pirh2 and COP1 regulate p53 levels in physiological contexts and, similar to Mdm2, these two genes are downstream p53 targets, establishing a peculiar negative feedback circuitry for regulation of the tumor suppressor. Whether Mdm2, Pirh2 and COP1 share overlapping functions or can be differentially activated and regulated still awaits elucidation. However, the fact that Mdm2 knock-out mice are early embryonic lethal and that this effect can be rescued by contemporary deletion of the p53 gene^{26,27} suggests that, at least in mice, Mdm2 functions cannot be completely substituted by other proteins. Moreover, while contemporary ablation of Mdm2 and Pirh2 expression show additive effects, assigning them to parallel yet separated pathways, Mdm2 and COP1 can instead work cooperatively.²⁵ Further experimental work will be required to elucidate these and other issues.

Recently, also the model of "latent" p53 has been challenged. Several evidences suggested that p53 DNA binding activity is influenced by structural features of the target DNA within a defined chromatin context²⁸⁻³⁰ rather than by C-terminal modifications. In particular, the role of acetylation is somehow controversial,^{28,31} and p300/CBP and PCAF seem to contribute to activation of p53-responsive genes in at least two ways, by directly modifying p53 and by promoting histone acetylation and chromatin access at p53-bound promoters.^{29,31,32} Moreover, an unpredicted role for p300 has emerged following the demonstration that, while Mdm2 preferentially catalyzes the addition of a single ubiquitin moiety on several C-terminal lysine residues in p53,³³ the contemporary action of Mdm2 and p300 results in the formation of the polyubiquitin tree necessary for degradation.³⁴ Other reports, however, demonstrated that Mdm2 itself, when present in large amounts, is able to effectively polyubiquitinate p53.³⁵ It is conceivable that the relative levels of Mdm2 and p300, as well as the pattern of p53 post-translational modifications, are crucial in determining p53 fate. Accordingly, N-terminal phosphorylation is not only required for relieving p53 interaction with Mdm2 but can favor subsequent C-terminal acetylation,³⁶ and deacetylation of C-terminal lysines is a prerequisite for p53 ubiquitination and degradation.^{37,38}

In addition to its roles in DNA damage response, a functional cooperation between p53 and TGF- β has been recently revealed, which relies on association between p53 and the SMAD complexes to activate TGF- β target genes both in *Xenopus laevis* and in mammalian cells.³⁹ These findings imply a role for p53 in mediating the cytostatic effects of TGF- β signaling, and suggest potential functions of p53 in development, which remind of the other family members activities. The molecular changes required to activate these functions of p53 are presently unknown. Dynamic phosphorylation and acetylation of p53 are likely to play important roles during DNA damage response as well as upon other signaling events, and post-translational modifications at specific sites may then affect the overall conformation of the protein, thereby altering its ability to interact with other factors and influencing modifications to other, even distant, sites.

THE PROLYL ISOMERASE Pin1

Phosphorylation-directed prolyl-isomerization has recently emerged as a potent and widespread post-translational signaling mechanism. In a few years frame, a growing number of reports have unveiled the elusive mechanisms capable of transducing specific phosphorylation events into conformational changes of important cellular proteins such as cdc25c, β -catenin and Myc, thereby regulating their functions. Triggering these reactions is an enzyme called Pin1,⁴⁰ which belongs to a family of prolyl isomerases (PPIases). These are chaperone enzymes able to switch the peptide bond between an amino acid and the adjacent proline from the *cis* to the *trans* conformation and vice versa.^{41,42} Among PPIases, Pin1 has a unique two-domain structure: an N-terminal WW domain specifically recognizes Serine-Proline and Threonine-Proline motifs in which the first amino acid is phosphorylated (pSer/pThr-Pro),⁴³⁻⁴⁵ and a C-terminal catalytic domain then isomerizes the peptidyl-prolyl bond.⁴⁶ Pin1 therefore specifically induces conformational changes following Ser/Thr-Pro directed phosphorylation of its substrates, thus affecting their phosphorylation status, turnover, catalytic activity, protein-protein interactions and subcellular localization, ultimately regulating their functions in the cell. Pin1 recognition sites are generated by Proline-directed kinases, pivotal players in signaling pathways regulating cell proliferation.⁴⁷ Among them are cyclin-dependent kinases (CDKs), which govern cell cycle transitions, and many mitogen-activated protein kinases (MAPKs), as well as GSK-3 β that functions in cell signaling.⁴⁸ The importance of isomerizing Ser/Thr-Pro bonds depends on the ability of kinases such as MAPK and CDK2, as well as phosphatases such as PP2A, to recognize these sites only in the *trans* conformation.^{49,50} Acting in concert with specific kinases and phosphatases, Pin1 behaves as a central transducer of different signals and modulates the function of several substrates involved in regulating diverse cellular processes, including transcription and splicing (PolII,⁵¹⁻⁵³ c-Jun,⁵⁴ c-Myc⁵⁵), proliferation (cdc25C, Myt1, Wee1⁵⁶⁻⁵⁸), signaling (β -catenin,⁵⁹ NF- κ B,⁶⁰ cyclin D1⁶¹), DNA damage responses (p53,⁶²⁻⁶⁴ p73⁶⁵) (for recent reviews on Pin1, see ref. 66). Pin1 also targets tau, a protein forming part of the neuronal cytoskeleton, which is hyper-phosphorylated in patients suffering from Alzheimer's disease (AD) and could therefore be involved in the pathogenesis of AD.⁶⁷⁻⁶⁹

p53 ACTIVATION UPON GENOTOXIC STRESS REQUIRES Pin1

Both p53 and Pin1 are highly connected proteins, participating to many signaling pathways that control cell proliferation and

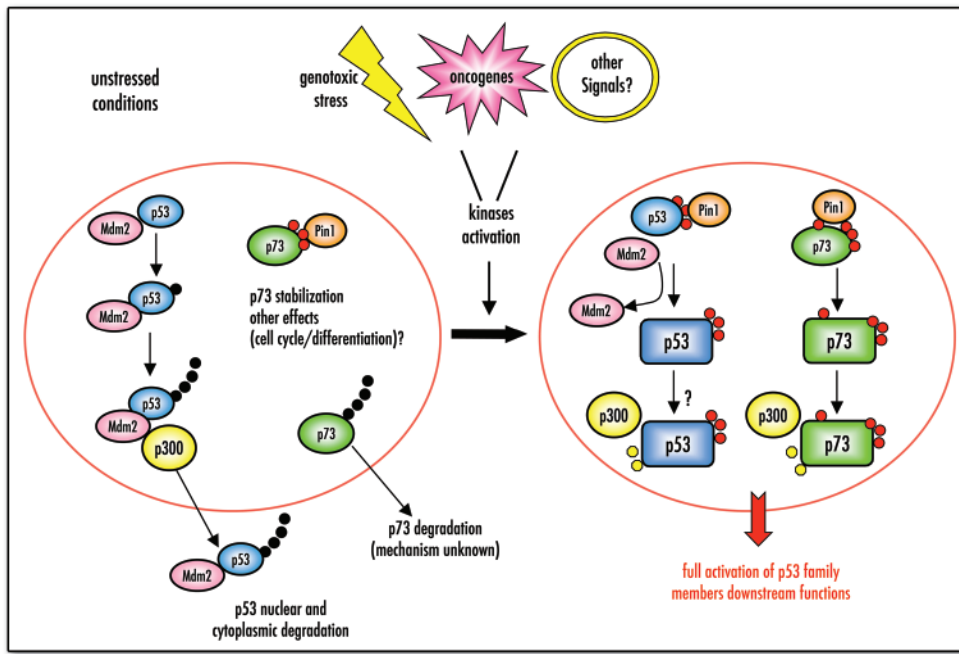


Figure 1. Phosphorylation-dependent prolyl isomerization catalyzed by Pin1 regulates the activities of wild-type p53 and p73. Under normal conditions p53 does not bind to Pin1 and it is targeted by Mdm2 and p300, that induce its ubiquitin-mediated degradation; in contrast, p73 is bound and stabilized by Pin1, which might also regulate its cell cycle-dependent functions. Following genotoxic stress, and possibly also upon other signals, activation of cellular kinases enhance the association of both p53 and p73 with Pin1. As a result, p53 and p73 become stabilized and fully activated as a result of detachment from Mdm2 and increased binding to p300, respectively.

transformation. It was therefore conceivable for the prolyl isomerase to be also involved in DNA damage response, possibly by regulation of the p53 tumor suppressor. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that DNA damage-induced phosphorylation of p53 promotes its binding

Accordingly, p53 accumulation following UV irradiation is reduced in the absence of Pin1 and its half-life is shortened. However, an effect of Pin1 on DNA binding and transactivation capability of p53 has also been observed, which does not simply depend on stabilization.

In agreement with these findings, p53 downstream responses, such as transcriptional activation of endogenous target genes as well as induction of apoptosis and growth arrest, are impaired in cells lacking Pin1.⁶²⁻⁶⁴

Clearly, the exact molecular mechanisms underlying Pin1-mediated regulation of p53 functions still need to be analyzed in detail. In particular, it will be interesting to determine whether, similar to Mdm2, Pin1-induced conformational shift affects the binding of p53 with some of its numerous partners, thus modulating its functions. In fact, the problem of how specificity is achieved in the p53 response remains

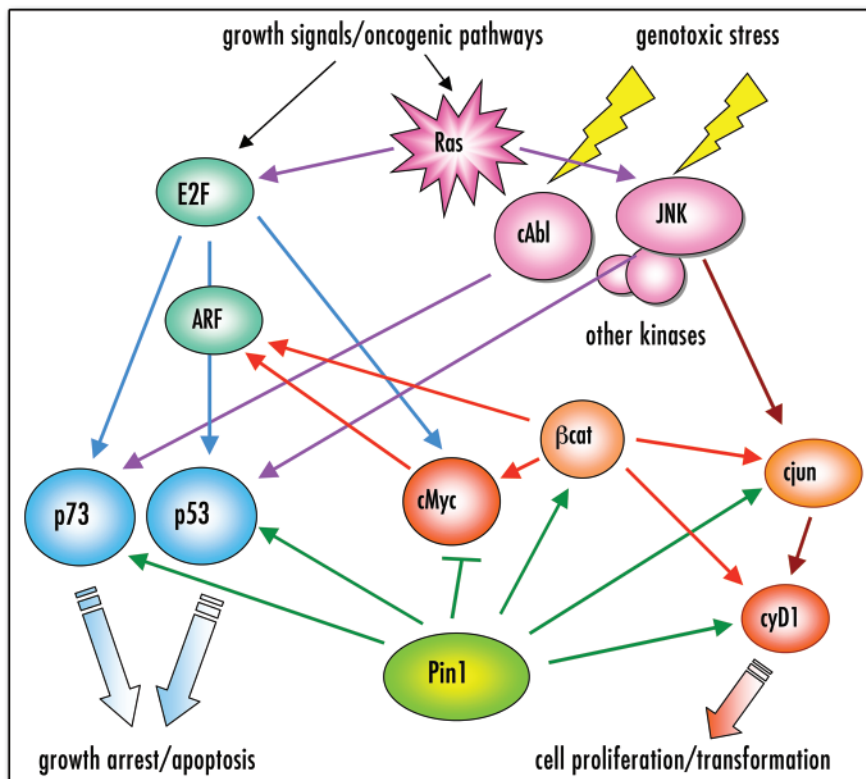


Figure 2. Crosstalk between tumor promoting and tumor suppressive substrates of Pin1. Pin1 triggers prolyl isomerization of many cellular proteins upon their signal-dependent phosphorylation, thereby regulating their localization, stability and catalytic activity. Some of these substrates, such as c-Jun, β -catenin and their transcriptional target cyclin D1 have positive roles in proliferation. Others, such as p53 and p73 have growth suppressive effects, while c-Myc can induce either proliferation or apoptosis depending on the cellular context. However, tumor promoting and tumor suppressive pathways catalyzed by Pin1 are tightly interrelated.

open. It is believed that the choice between p53-induced cell cycle arrest and apoptosis depends on the type and intensity of the DNA damage, as well as on the particular cell type. Several evidences indicate that p53 can be directed toward pro-apoptotic targets by interaction with cofactors, such as ASPP⁷⁰ or its homologues p73 and p63.⁷¹ Pin1 might play a role in this context, and indeed we have observed, at least under some conditions, that Pin1 may preferentially increase transactivation of p53-responsive genes involved in apoptosis.⁶⁴ In addition, Pin1 might possibly affect transcriptional-independent apoptotic activities of p53. On the other hand, recent data have suggested that the role of p53 as a caretaker in maintaining genomic stability is separable from its apoptotic activity,⁷² supporting a multistep tumor suppression mechanism adopted by p53. The contribution of Pin1 in controlling genomic stability, both p53-dependent and independent, is surely worth investigating.

When considering the functional aspects of the p53/Pin1 interaction, it is important to keep in mind that Pin1 is an enzyme with a large number of possible substrates. The overall outcomes of its action depend on which subset of substrates is expressed and phosphorylated in a particular cell type and in a given moment. This may help explaining subtle differences that have been reported for Pin1-mediated effects in different cell types as well as upon different stimuli. For instance, p53 stabilization as induced by doxorubicin does not seem to be significantly reduced in the absence of Pin1, nevertheless p53 responses, in particular growth arrest, are impaired under these conditions.⁶³

Therefore, Pin1 can be envisioned as a catalyst for integrating signals deriving from different kinase pathways, a fine-tuner of p53 activity and, probably, of the global cellular environment.

Pin1 UNVEILS THE MECHANISM OF p73 ACTIVATION

After having long been neglected as minor siblings of p53 in inducing cell death, p73 and p63 have recently been found to be required for the ability of p53 to promote apoptosis in mouse fibroblasts.⁷¹ On the other hand, p73 is capable of inducing apoptosis in response to both E2F overexpression and chemotherapeutic compounds also in the absence of p53.⁷³⁻⁷⁵ This represents an important anti-tumorigenic safeguard mechanism and a determinant of cellular sensitivity to oncotoxic drugs in tumors lacking functional p53.⁷⁴⁻⁷⁶ The high degree of structural and functional similarity⁷⁷ among p53 family members would argue for common regulatory pathways integrating their activities, and some similarities have indeed appeared. ASPP1 and ASPP2 have been recently identified as common regulators of the apoptotic functions of p53, p63 and p73.⁷⁸ E2F-1 and c-Abl induce both p53 and p73, albeit through different mechanisms.⁷⁹ Finally, the p300 acetyltransferase stimulates p53-dependent transcriptional activity,⁸⁰⁻⁸² and it has been also shown to acetylate p73, thereby inducing its recruitment to proapoptotic promoters⁸³ (for an updated review, see Blandino and Dobbstein, pp. 886-894).

Recently, phosphorylation-induced prolyl isomerization mediated by Pin1 has emerged as an important common mechanism activating both p53 and p73 upon certain types of stress⁶²⁻⁶⁵ (Fig. 1). Differently to p53 however, a consistent fraction of p73 in unstressed cells is found associated with Pin1,⁶⁵ and this binding is restricted to the long isoforms alpha and beta. Whether this association plays a role in regulating cell cycle-dependent activities of p73 remains to be determined. Genotoxic stimuli, mediated by the stress-activated c-Abl kinase, further increase the association of p73

with the prolyl isomerase. Although this Tyrosine-kinase cannot directly phosphorylate Pin1-binding sites, it nonetheless promotes Threonine phosphorylation of p73 by p38 MAP kinase,⁸⁴ which in turn stimulates p73 binding to Pin1.⁶⁵ Probably other, as yet unidentified, Pro-directed kinases become also involved in promoting the p73-Pin1 connection in response to specific stimuli. Stress-dependent activation of c-Abl/MAPK induces p73 accumulation^{84,85} and, indeed, this requires Pin1. Similar to p53, Pin1 affects also p73 transcriptional activity, and it appears to be required for efficient recruitment of p73 to the proapoptotic promoter p53AIP1 upon doxorubicin treatment.⁶⁵ Notably, this activity has been shown to rely on c-Abl dependent phosphorylation of p73⁸⁶ and subsequent acetylation by p300.⁸³ Biochemical dissection of this mechanism revealed that the conformational shift induced by Pin1 on p73 stimulates binding to p300, thus enhancing p73 acetylation and activation of proapoptotic targets. Accordingly, also p73 apoptotic activity is dependent on the action of the prolyl isomerase.⁶⁵

Intriguingly, p300 appears to play a role also in Pin1-induced stabilization of p73.⁶⁵ However, our knowledge of the regulation of p73 turnover is still vague: in contrast to p53, Mdm2 fails to target p73 for nuclear export or degradation, rather it has been reported to increase its stability.^{87,88} The complex interplay between p53 family members, p300, Mdm2 and Pin1 surely awaits elucidation. Despite no experimental data are presently available to support this hypothesis, it is possible that Pin1 influences also the interaction between p300 and p53. The action of Pin1, promoting p53 binding to p300 while at the same time displacing Mdm2, might therefore favor the acetyltransferase versus the ubiquitin-ligase activity of p300, further contributing to full p53 activation.

p53, p73 AND Pin1: DUAL ROLES IN ONCOGENESIS

A growing number of reports point towards a role for Pin1 as a transducer of many different signals inside the cell, coordinating various metabolic pathways. Its ability to influence the activity of a number of different substrates with opposing functions (Fig. 2) indicates that this enzyme is likely to exert multiple effects, which may be dependent on the cellular context. In this respect, despite Pin1 being an indispensable positive regulator of the apoptotic response induced by p53 and p73 upon genotoxic stress, Pin1-null mice do not spontaneously develop tumors, although sensitivity to mutagenic treatments has not been challenged. On the other hand, Pin1 deficiency is associated with proliferative defects, and results in low levels of the cell cycle regulator cyclin D1.^{40,61,89} In addition Pin1 stabilizes β -catenin, and its overexpression in both breast⁵⁴ and HCC cancers⁹⁰ has been shown to correlate with increased β -catenin levels.^{59,90} Upregulation of Pin1 has been detected also in some cases of other tumors such as prostate,⁹¹ cervix, brain, lung and colon.⁹²

Further studies are needed in order to better understand the physiological functions of Pin1 in normal cells and to distinguish them from the effects of its deregulated expression in pathological conditions. In fact, sustained Pin1 overexpression does not cause growth alterations in cell culture (Mantovani F, Del Sal G, unpublished observations). However, it can be easily envisaged how elevated levels of Pin1, possibly due to deregulation of the Rb/E2F pathway⁹³ upon early transforming events,⁹⁴ could catalyze tumorigenic processes. This might occur when activation of oncogenic pathways lead to phosphorylation of either a growth promoting substrate of Pin1, for instance β -catenin or cyclin D1, or an antiapoptotic target such as NF- κ B.⁶⁰ Pin1 has indeed been reported to facilitate

transformation by oncogenic Neu or Ras in mammary epithelial cells.⁹³ However, enforced expression of Pin1 in a wild-type (wt) p53 background would be expected to stimulate p53 indirectly, through the concomitant activation of either β -catenin or NF- κ B pathways.⁹⁵⁻⁹⁷ Rather, Pin1 overexpression is likely to represent a cancer risk factor when p53 is not functional, due to mutation or inactivation. Consistent with its different effects on multiple substrates, variations in Pin1 levels could be critical at different stages of tumor progression. While its silencing could represent a selective advantage at early stages, leading to inhibition of wild-type p53 and p73 activities as well as stabilization of c-Myc,⁵⁵ its overexpression could synergize with later events occurring upon p53 mutation. At present however, although p53 mutations represent the most frequent genetic alteration found in human cancer, occurring in about 50% of all cases, the status of p53 in tumors overexpressing Pin1 has not been assessed. The majority of p53 mutations are missense, giving rise to full-length proteins that are unable of sequence-specific DNA binding and of activating p53 target genes, leading to loss of wild-type activities. A critical question is whether mutant p53 (mutp53) forms are capable of interacting with Pin1. This appears to be indeed the case for mutp53 proteins derived from tumor cell lines. Intriguingly, in most cases an interaction can occur even in the absence of DNA damage, suggesting that mutp53 proteins are constitutively phosphorylated on critical Ser/Thr-Pro sites upon activation of oncogenic pathways (Gostissa M, Del Sal G, unpublished observations). Mutations disrupting established Pin1 binding sites on p53 have been observed in human cancers,⁹⁸ however these are relatively rare events,⁹⁹ and in fact no single amino acid substitution has been found sufficient for abolishing the Pin1-p53 interaction, which involves the contribution of different Ser/Thr-Pro sites. Another intriguing possibility is that mutations create new Pin1 binding sites in p53, as might result from the frequent Arg-Ser substitution at position 249 identified in hepatocellular carcinomas, and caused by dietary exposure to aflatoxin B₁.^{100,101}

The effects of this interaction could however differ from those exerted on the wild-type protein. Most mutp53 forms are indeed defective for transactivation, and, failing to activate the Mdm2 negative loop, result intrinsically stable.^{102,103} One important feature of the oncogenic activity of p53 mutants is their ability to interfere with the functions of wtp53 and of the other family members by a dominant negative mechanism¹⁰⁴⁻¹⁰⁶ that involves heteromerization.¹⁰⁷ In addition, mutp53 could interact with other proteins, and the structural changes triggered by Pin1 on wild-type, and possibly also on mutp53, might affect these interactions.

Besides competitive effects, some mutant p53 proteins have been proposed to gain additional biochemical and biological properties, through which they might actively contribute to cancer progression.¹⁰⁸⁻¹¹⁰ Indeed, conformational-defective p53 mutants have been reported to increase resistance of tumor cells to anticancer treatment,^{111,112} and some mutp53-expressing tumors are more aggressive and have a worse prognosis than p53-null cancers.^{113,114} The ability of tumor-derived p53 mutants to associate with p73 and p63, inhibiting their transcriptional and growth suppressive activities, has been proposed as one of the possible molecular events underlying the chemoresistant phenotype.⁷⁵ Since it has been suggested that the conformation of mutant p53 can influence the interaction with p73^{74,115} and given that Pin1 also interacts with p73, elucidation of the interplay between these proteins could better clarify this issue.

Adding a further level of complexity, the TP73 gene, besides the transcriptionally active TAp73, encodes a set of amino-terminally

truncated dominant negative Δ Np73 proteins. These lack the transactivation domain and display antiapoptotic features,¹¹⁶ and some forms have been found expressed in cancer cells.¹¹⁶⁻¹¹⁸ However, only one study has identified expression of a Δ Np73 form as a strong adverse prognostic marker in neuroblastoma.¹¹⁹ Although the Ser/Thr-Pro sites involved in recognition of TAp73 by Pin1 are conserved in Δ Np73, that can indeed interact with Pin1 when overexpressed (Mantovani F, Del Sal G, unpublished results), the phosphorylation state of the endogenous proteins in normal and neoplastic cells has not been investigated. Assuming that Pin1 can stabilize both TA and Δ N forms of p73, the final outcome of the interaction will be dictated by the cellular context, that is, by the TA: Δ N ratio. Interestingly, both TA and Δ Np73 proteins play roles in neuronal development.¹²⁰⁻¹²³ Since neuronal-specific activities of Pin1 have also been reported,⁶⁷⁻⁶⁹ future studies could unveil an effect of Pin1 either in normal neuronal development or in the genesis of tumors such as neuroblastoma, where the transcriptional ratio TA: Δ N has been shown to be strongly modulated in favor of Δ Np73 through selective promoter methylation.¹¹⁹

Recently, attention has been paid also to p53 variants, although their roles and regulation have not been investigated in detail, and the results still remain controversial.¹²⁴ It appears that the expression of several isoforms is a common trait of the p53 family,^{77,124} and growing evidences indicate that the stress-induced, growth suppressive activities of the full-length forms can be modulated, either positively or negatively, by truncated isoforms. These are likely to perform distinct functions on their own, by controlling physiological processes such as differentiation. In this respect, it is tempting to predict that the activities of all p53 family members, including p53, p73 and p63 protein variants, can be modulated through phosphorylation-dependent prolyl-isomerization.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although interaction with Pin1 invariably leads to a conformational change in its substrates, the consequences can be different depending on the cellular context, which is a paradigm in the case of p53. Prolyl isomerization by Pin1 regulates the timing of p53 activation rendering it suitable for subsequent modifications, including conformation-selective dephosphorylation at specific sites and interaction with DNA and cofactors. However, the final outcome varies according to tissue- and signal-dependent expression of the protein partners involved.

Pin1 is an enzyme whose activity depends on phosphorylation of its substrates, and has pleiotropic effects that appear contradictory. While its absence is associated with defects in proliferation, on the other hand Pin1 is required for physiological destabilization of c-Myc.⁵⁵ Tumor-associated myc alleles bear mutations at the site of Pin1-mediated dephosphorylation,¹²⁵ however Pin1 is overexpressed in several tumors. Consistent with its reported role in inducing stabilization and nuclear localization of the p65 subunit of NF- κ B, a subgroup of breast cancers overexpressing Pin1 shows constitutive nuclear expression of p65, nonetheless the NF- κ B pathway appears to be normal in Pin1 KO mice.⁶⁰ Despite Pin1 might represent a good prognostic marker in some human cancers, genetic evidence of a role for this enzyme in oncogenesis is lacking. A possible involvement of Pin1 in modulating tumor growth could be unmasked upon deregulation of oncogenic or tumor suppressor pathways, and more data are needed to shed light on the specific roles that Pin1 might play depending on the particular genetic background. Given its

capacity to enhance oncogenic pathways, Pin1 has been suggested as a potential target for anticancer therapy. This appears counterintuitive, since Pin1 is also required for p53 and p73-dependent sensitivity to genotoxic stress, and its inhibition is associated with resistance to apoptosis as induced by irradiation and chemotherapy.⁶²⁻⁶⁵ The feasibility of finding therapeutical opportunities to block tumor progression depends on our knowledge of the complex interplay between tumor promoting and tumor suppressive substrates of Pin1 at critical stages of specific cancer types.

In conclusion, not only Pin1 has an apparent dual role in cell transformation, but also some of its target proteins, such as p53, p73 and Myc, display both positive and negative functions on cell growth and survival. The future direction is to develop an integrated view of these networks, since keeping in good shape the p53 family, as well as other targets of Pin1, can be important to prevent cancer and other diseases.

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