Mass spectrometric quantification of amyloid-beta in cerebrospinal fluid and plasma – Implications for Alzheimer’s disease

Akademisk avhandling

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ABSTRACT

Alzheimer’s disease (AD) is the most common neurodegenerative disease among the elderly and accounts for 60-80% of all cases of dementia. Currently, the diagnosis of AD is based on cognitive tests and mental state exams, but the peptide amyloid-beta (Aβ) in cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) is increasingly used in clinical trials and settings. As for most protein and peptide biomarkers, quantification is performed using antibody-based techniques such as enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA). However, these immunoassays suffer from high variability in measurements of Aβ concentrations, hampering its use as a diagnostic marker.

The aim of this thesis was to develop an antibody-independent method for absolute quantification of Aβ in human CSF, free of the specificity and reproducibility issues associated with antibody-based quantification. The method was based on solid-phase extraction (SPE) and liquid chromatography (LC)-tandem mass spectrometry (MS/MS). Stable isotope labeled Aβ peptides were used as internal standards, enabling absolute quantification. The method was first tested in a pilot study with CSF samples from AD patients and controls. As expected, the level of the 42 amino acid variant of Aβ (Aβ_{1-42}) was decreased in AD CSF as compared to controls (p<0.01). The results were similar to those obtained with conventional ELISA, and an even better separation between the groups was obtained when using the Aβ_{1-42}/Aβ_{1-40} ratio. To investigate whether the antibody-independent method would give similar results across different research centers, an inter-laboratory study was initiated which included three other laboratories using similar LC-MS/MS methods. Results showed good agreement and highlighted the importance of a certified reference material (CRM) to further increase the agreement between laboratories and MS methods. The method was further optimized, validated, and published as a candidate reference measurement procedure (RMP). An RMP is required to set the value of a CRM used as a ‘gold standard’ to harmonize CSF Aβ measurements. To investigate if the large number of Aβ peptides in addition to Aβ_{1-38}, Aβ_{1-40} and Aβ_{1-42} found in CSF could also be found in human plasma, an immunoprecipitation-based method for enrichment of Aβ peptides was developed. Sixteen N- or C-terminally truncated Aβ peptides were reproducibly detected using matrix-assisted laser desorption/ionization time-of-flight (MALDI-TOF) MS. While quantification of Aβ_{1-38}, Aβ_{1-40} and Aβ_{1-42} using LC-MS/MS showed no AD association, the method may be useful in clinical trials of drugs affecting amyloid precursor protein (APP) processing or Aβ homeostasis.

In summary, absolute quantification of Aβ_{1-42} using the developed LC-MS-MS method overcomes many of the issues associated with antibody-based methods. The method is currently being considered for formal certification as a RMP to determine the absolute concentration of Aβ_{1-42} in a CRM to harmonize CSF Aβ_{1-42} measurements across techniques and analytical platforms.

Keywords: Alzheimer’s Disease, Mass Spectrometry, Biological markers, Cerebrospinal fluid, Amyloid beta-Peptides

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