2898-Pos Board B590
Myosin II Functions as a Direct Mechanosensor for Intercellular Invasion during Cell-Cell Fusion
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How cells sense and react to external mechanical stimuli is a fundamental question in cellular biophysics. Here, we describe a previously unrecognized mechanosensory response to a localized cellular protrusive force during cell-cell fusion. Our previous studies of myoblast fusion in Drosophila embryos and cell fusion in a reconstituted culture system revealed that cell-cell fusion is an asymmetric process, in which one fusion partner (the attacking cell) extends invasive finger-like protrusions into the other (the receiving cell) to promote plasma membrane juxtaposition and fusion. Here, we demonstrate that the Rho-Rok-Myosin II (MyoII) pathway is specifically activated in the receiving cell in response to the invasive force from the attacking cell. Disrupting the function of this pathway renders less cortical resistance in the receiving cell and defects in cell-cell fusion, despite deeper invasion of the attacking cell. Increasing the cortical tension in the receiving cell by overexpressing an actin crosslinker significantly rescued such fusion defect. We show that MyoII accumulates to the cell cortex earlier than its upstream biochemical regulators Rok and Rho in response to applied force, and that MyoII is required for the steady-state accumulation of Rok and Rho. Furthermore, the motor domain of MyoII is indispensible for its cortical accumulation triggered by intercellular invasion. These results strongly suggest that MyoII functions as a direct mechanosensor that feeds back to its upstream regulators, and that the mechanosensory function of MyoII is mediated by its binding to actin filaments under mechanical stress. This newly discovered mechanosensory system, consisting of a well-defined source of protrusive force and the corresponding activation of the Rho-Rok-MyoII pathway in the neighboring cell, highlights a central role of MyoII in the mechanosensory response that ultimately leads to cortical tension generation in animal cells.

2899-Pos Board B591
Electromechanical Model for Eukaryotic Cells
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Electromechanics is important in many cellular processes, including motility, cancer metastasis, wound healing, and embryogenesis. Experiments show that cells placed in direct current electric fields are able to sense the field and direct their motion. Other experiments show that cell volume changes are important in invading cancer cells. A computational model is necessary to understand how cells respond electro-mechanically to electro-mechanical changes in their environment. The model proposed in this study considers how ion flux and water flux across the cell membrane enable a cell to regulate its size, internal pressure, and membrane voltage. This model also studies how active ion pumps, voltage gated channels, mechanosensitive channels, and water transport allow a cell to change its size when its membrane voltage is fixed during a voltage clamp experiment. Specifically, the model predicts cell volume increases during hyperpolarization and decreases during depolarization. Preliminary voltage clamp experiments suggest that the predicted size changes are observed in eukaryotic cancer cells, which validates our model.

2900-Pos Board B592
Molecular Mechanisms Underlying the Inside-Out Signaling through Focal Adhesions
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Cell adhesion is key to many important processes such as cell differentiation and migration, which all involve bi-directional signaling across the plasma membrane. At sites of adhesion a large assembly of macromolecules, called focal adhesions, function together in order to orchestrate complex signaling events. It is not yet clear how molecules in focal adhesions communicate with one another causing the signals to be transmitted through their interaction. Cells sense and respond to both chemical and mechanical signals suggesting that individual focal adhesion molecules should act as mechanosensors. Mechanical forces from the extracellular matrix (ECM) are detected by integrin receptors on the plasma membrane and transmitted to actin cytoskeleton through focal adhesions, which is called out-side-in signaling. The reverse process is also possible in which acto-myosin forces are applied to the ECM. Some proteins play key roles in regulating focal adhesions and their function may shed light on the order of events in a certain signaling pathway. Talin, alpha-actinin and filamin are among a few molecules that directly bind to both actin and integrin, and thus focal adhesions are largely affected by their function. It has been shown that talin plays a significant role in integrin activation, which is essential for initiating focal adhesion formation, while filamin inhibits integrin activation. The role of alpha-actinin is somehow controversial, i.e. it is not yet clear whether it inhibits or promotes activation since both observations have been made. We use all-atom molecular dynamics simulations to investigate the role of each of these molecules both in isolation and in competition with one another. Our results reveal how the presence of one molecule would affect the interaction of others suggesting possible cooperative functions in some cases.

2901-Pos Board B593
Quantitative Determination of Cell Wall Mechanical Properties using Microfluidics
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Certain cell types have the intriguing ability to forcibly invade a neighboring tissue or a solid growth matrix. The purpose of this invasive growth activity depends on the cell type and ranges from establishing contact between remote locations in the organism (neurons), procuring nutrients and water (fungi, root hairs), to the delivery of gametes (pollen tubes). To invade a tissue or solid matrix, these cells exert significant penetrative forces generated either by the cytoskeleton or the hydrostatic turgor pressure. Using a microfluidic device we quantified the penetrative forces generated by pollen tubes, the fastest growing plant cells. The tubes were guided through microscopic gaps made of elastic polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS) material. Depending on the size ratio between tube and gap, the tubes either deformed the gap walls completely, became deformed themselves while passing, or stalled. Within a narrow range of size ratios, the tubes successfully passed the gap but subsequently burst raising the question whether sperm cell release in planta is triggered mechanically. Based on the deformation of the PDMS-gaps the extrusive force exerted by the elongating tubes was determined using reverse engineering and finite element modeling.

2902-Pos Board B594
Assessing the Influence of Electric Cues and Conductivity on Pollen Tube Growth via Lab-On-A-Chip Technology
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Pollen tubes are believed to react to a combination of chemical, mechanical, and electrical cues during its journey through the pistil in order to achieve fertilization. Despite extensive work dedicated to the subject it is still not clear how these exogenous guidance signals work or how they are processed internally. Using Lab-on-a-chip (LOC) technology, we assessed the influence of electric fields on pollen tube growth at the microscale. Microelectrodes were integrated into the LOC in order to enable the application of electric fields in a controlled manner. Due simulation of the LOC electrical configuration and characterization of the pollen growth medium conductivity were carried out. DC and AC electric fields were applied to batches of Camellia japonica pollen grains under various conditions. Results show that pollen tube growth is increasingly degraded as the applied DC electric field increases. Furthermore, germination is completely inhibited for sufficiently strong fields. AC electric fields, however, had a restoring effect as growth is promoted as frequency increases beyond 100 mHz, which suggests a significant role of the medium conductivity in enabling cell growth. Interestingly, no sign of pollen tube orientation was found under any tested condition, weakening the much debated argument for electrotropism in pollen tubes. When exposed to a highly localized field, pollen tubes did not deviate. This work suggests that both strength and frequency of an applied electric field influence pollen tubes, and most likely living cells in general, in a much more subtle way rather than being a macro scale exogenous guiding signal.

2903-Pos Board B595
Keratins Significantly Contribute to Cell Stiffness and Impact Invasive Behavior
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Cell motility and cell shape adaptations are crucial during wound healing, inflammation and malignant progression. These processes require the remodeling of the keratin cytoskeleton, to facilitate cell-cell and matrix adhesion.

However, the role of keratins for biomechanical properties and invasion of epithelial cells are only partially understood. Here, we address this issue in murine keratinocytes lacking all keratins upon genome engineering. In contrast to prediction, keratin-free cells show an about 60% higher cell deformability even for small deformations. This is compared to less pronounced softening effects for actin depolymerization induced via latrunculin A. To relate these findings with functional consequences, we use invasion and three-dimensional growth assays. These reveal higher invasiveness of keratin-free cells. Re-expression of a small amount of the keratin pair K5/K14 in keratin-free cells reverses the above phenotype for the invasion but does not with respect to cell deformability. Our data shows a novel role of keratins as major player of cell stiffness influencing invasion with implications for epidermal homeostasis and pathogenesis. This study supports the view that downregulation of keratins observed during epithelial-mesenchymal transition directly contributes to the migratory and invasive behavior of tumor cells. (see K. Seltmann et al., PNAS, in press).

2904-Pos Board B596

Dry Mass and Cell Cycle Follow-Up from Quantitative Phase Imaging

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During cell cycle, a cell doubles all its components and divides into two cells. Cell cycle is often studied with fluorescent labeling, by flow cytometry. Here, we propose a simple method to analyze cell cycle and dry mass fluctuations using quantitative phase imaging.

The technique is based on a quadri-wave lateral shearing interferometry (QWLSI) wave front sensor [1]. It provides a quantitative measurement of the optical path difference (OPD = $\Delta n \bullet$thickness) in nm. This measurement, when integrated over the cell surface, is directly proportional to the cell dry mass [2], giving direct information on the cell growth. No labeling is needed. It is self-referenced and can be plugged on any microscope with classic objectives, a white light and a camera port. Since it is achromatic, it can be used in near IR for long live cell imaging. It can easily be combined with fluorescence for simultaneous correlative microscopy. Automated segmentation of cells is easy due to the absence of halo or artifacts. It is fast (camera frame-rate limited) and sensitive (diffraction-limited in X and Y, $\pm$ 0.5 nm in OPD, $\pm$ 0.6 pg for a 570 pg cell).

We established criteria integrating both dry mass and morphological parameters to identify different cell cycle stages and growth rate of haploid and diploid yeasts, as well as four different mammalian cell lines, under different conditions. We studied them by time lapse and population snapshot imaging. The method is robust to record cellular division processes and effects of drugs on cell growth.

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2905-Pos Board B597

How Embryonic Cartilage Grows: Insights Gained from Quantitative Live Imaging

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One central question in development biology is how individual cell behaviors contribute to tissue morphogenesis. Growth plate cartilage contains morphologically distinct populations of chondrocytes in different zones during much of its growth phase, indicating a link between regulated cell behaviors and tissue elongation. To gain insights into this process, we develop a robust avian embryonic metacarpal culture system, and employ time-lapsed live 2-photon laser scanning microscopy to observe the cartilage growth. Quantitative analysis of the cellular displacements during the tissue growth reveals that cells in the proliferative and prehypertrophic zones, though morphologically distinct, display similar displacement trajectories, contributing in a linearly additive fashion to the unidirectional tissue growth. Our analysis rules out cell division and convergence-extension as the driving mechanisms for tissue elongation; rather, anisotropic matrix deposition and cell volume enlargement are responsible for sculpting the directional tissue growth.

2906-Pos Board B598

Optical Measurement of Biomechanical Properties of Human Red Blood Cell using Digital Holographic Microscopy: Malaria and Sickle Cell Diseases

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Pathophysiological aspect of several hematologic diseases is largely determined by biomechanical properties of red blood cells (RBCs) and their hemodynamical properties in circulatory system. Here we present the biomechanical properties of individual RBCs from patients with sickle cell disease and RBCs infected with malaria-inducing parasites *Pf. falciparum*. Using laser digital holographic technique, we non-invasively quantify membrane fluctuation in RBCs at the nanometer and millisecond scale, which is analyzed with the mathematical model to retrieve four important mechanical properties of RBCs; bending modulus, shear modulus, area expansion modulus, and cytoplasmic viscosity. We find significant alterations in the mechanical properties of RBCs in several pathophysiological states, ranging from depletion of Adenosine-5'-triphosphate (ATP)[3], different osmotic pressures[4], malaria infections[5,6,7], and sickle cell diseases[9].

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2907-Pos Board B599

The Nanoscale Organization of Focal Adhesion Signaling Complexes can Reflect Changes in Cellular Contractility and Motility

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Focal adhesions are the conduits through which cells receive and interpret mechanical signals. It is not known if nanoscale protein organization is altered to accommodate changes in mechanical inputs from the cytoskeleton and extracellular matrix components. We hypothesized that the relative position of specific focal adhesion proteins could correspond to the engagement of a physical protein clutch for different adhesion functions. To this end we employed Scanning Angle Interference Microscopy to determine the 3D organization of proteins comprising focal adhesions with a precision of ~5nm. We found paxillin, FAK, vinculin, talin, and zyxin to be stratified in distinct layers over a vertical range of 60 nm. We then compared nascent versus focal adhesions at the cell leading edge, and found that paxillin localized ~7nm towards the cell membrane in developing adhesions. We inhibited intracellular contractility to see how adhesion architecture dynamically responds to changes in mechanical input, and observed that paxillin and zyxin, but not vinculin, undergoes a marked increase in height of >15nm. Conversely, vinculin without a force dependent auto-inhibition domain, T12; undergoes dramatic reorganization at the nanoscale after contractility inhibition. Overexpression of vinculinT12 resulted in increased intramolecular forces as seen in a vinculinT12 FRET tension sensor, targeting of vinculin to an architecture that corresponded with talin and actin engagement, but not changes in cellular traction. When we reduced cellular motility through overexpression of a constitutively active Rac1 mutant, adhesions at the lamella-lamellipodia border had different vinculin architecture than other adhesions in the cell. Our results suggest that elimination of vinculin force dependent auto-inhibition can dictate focal adhesion architecture and