

Targeted Gene Correction of Laminopathy-Associated *LMNA* Mutations in Patient-Specific iPSCs

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SUMMARY

Combination of stem cell-based approaches with gene-editing technologies represents an attractive strategy for studying human disease and developing therapies. However, gene-editing methodologies described to date for human cells suffer from technical limitations including limited target gene size, low targeting efficiency at transcriptionally inactive loci, and off-target genetic effects that could hamper broad clinical application. To address these limitations, and as a proof of principle, we focused on homologous recombination-based gene correction of multiple mutations on lamin A (*LMNA*), which are associated with various degenerative diseases. We show that helper-dependent adenoviral vectors (HDAdVs) provide a highly efficient and safe method for correcting mutations in large genomic regions in human induced pluripotent stem cells and can also be effective in adult human mesenchymal stem cells. This type of approach could be used to generate genotype-matched cell lines for disease modeling and drug discovery and potentially also in therapeutics.

INTRODUCTION

The development of targeted gene-editing technologies in human induced pluripotent stem cells (hiPSCs) and human embryonic stem cells (hESCs) may not only open the opportunity for à la carte cell engineering but also offer the potential for the efficient treatment and/or cure of multiple human diseases. Recently, several technologies have been developed allowing for gene targeting in human embryonic stem cells (hESCs) and hiPSCs (Buecker et al., 2010; Händel and Cathomen, 2011; Hockemeyer et al., 2009; Howden et al., 2011; Irion et al., 2007; Khan et al., 2010; Lombardo et al., 2007; Mitsui et al., 2009; Nieminen et al., 2010; Sancho-Martinez et al., 2011; Song et al., 2010; Suzuki et al., 2008; Tenzen et al., 2010; Zou et al., 2009; Zwaka and Thomson, 2003). However, despite numerous efforts and recent advancements, major problems

remain unresolved. First, the classical nonviral vectors and delivery approaches are associated with low efficiency of gene targeting in human pluripotent stem cells, especially for transcriptionally silenced genomic loci (Goulburn et al., 2011; Ruby and Zheng, 2009; Wang et al., 2011; Xue et al., 2009). Second, the current technologies introduce DNA double-strand breaks (DSBs) (Arnould et al., 2011; Händel and Cathomen, 2011; Miller et al., 2011). Accordingly, the potential for off-target effects leading to unexpected mutations and chromosomal aberrations might not be acceptable for therapeutic applications. Moreover, for genes bearing mutational “hot spots” (Worman et al., 2010), efficient tools targeting multiple sites spanning a large DNA sequence still need to be developed.

In the present work we sought to address some of these issues by taking advantage of a recently established *LMNA*-based iPSC model of disease (Liu et al., 2011). *LMNA* is a known transcriptionally inactive locus in pluripotent cells. Importantly, more than 400 different mutations of *LMNA* have been reported, with additional mutations continuously being discovered (Zaremba-Czogalla et al., 2011). Thus, *LMNA* represents an ideal candidate locus for the study of hot-spot gene correction of silenced genes by using single vectors targeting large genomic regions. *LMNA* encodes lamin A, an architectural component of nuclear lamina in somatic cells indispensable for nuclear integrity (Dechat et al., 2008). Mutations on lamin A are associated with disruption of the nuclear structure, aberrant cellular function, and disease development, defining a group of human degenerative diseases referred to as laminopathies (Burke et al., 2001; Worman et al., 2010; Zaremba-Czogalla et al., 2011). One of the best-known laminopathies is Hutchinson-Gilford progeria syndrome (HGPS or progeria), a premature aging disorder associated with the presence of a specific mutation of the *LMNA* gene. Such mutation results in a truncated mRNA encoding the mutant protein progerin (Burtner and Kennedy, 2010). Progerin plays a dominant role in the nucleus and its accumulation can result in a number of different nuclear defects, accelerated aging, and cellular senescence (Dechat et al., 2008; Scaffidi and Misteli, 2005).

Recently we and others have reported the generation of iPSCs (HGPS-iPSCs) from HGPS patient fibroblasts (Liu et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2011). Here we report the establishment of an efficient and highly specific method for correction of a number of *LMNA* mutations. Indeed, the use of a single helper-dependent adenoviral vector (HDAdV) was sufficient for the correction of

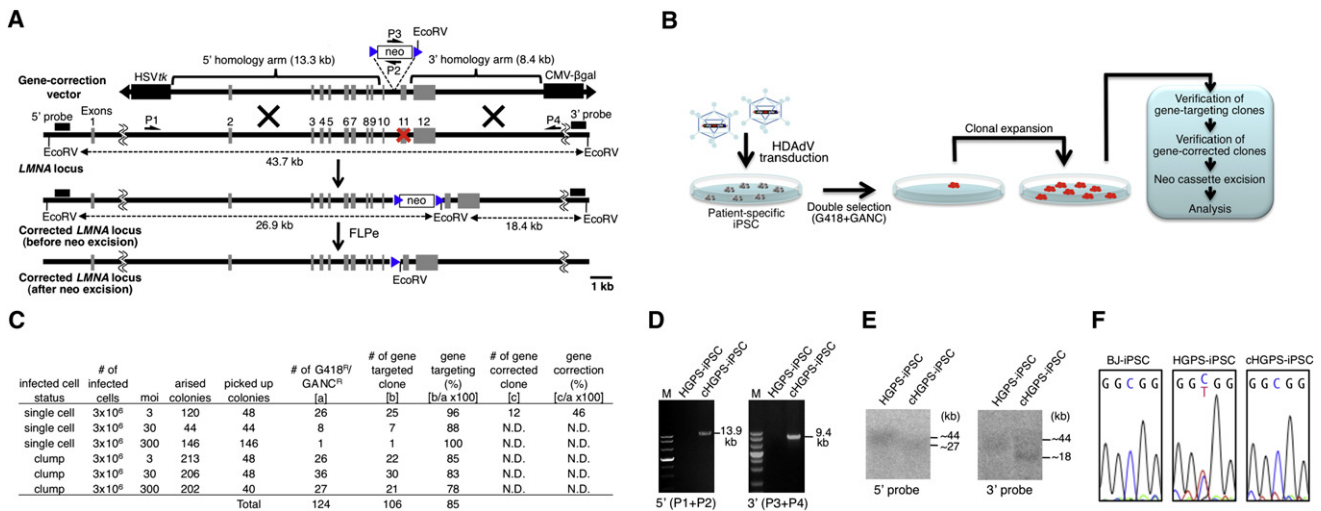


Figure 1. Correction of HGPS-Associated *LMNA* Mutation in iPSCs with *LMNA*-c-HDAV

(A) Schematic molecular representation of *LMNA* gene correction with *LMNA*-c-HDAV. The primers for PCR are shown as arrows (P1, P2, P3, and P4). The probes for Southern analyses are shown as black bars (5' probe and 3' probe). HSVtk stands for herpes simplex virus thymidine kinase gene cassette used for negative selection; neo stands for neomycin-resistant gene cassette used for positive selection; CMV-βgal indicates the β-gal expression cassette for determination of HDAdV titer; blue triangle, *FRT* site; red X, mutation sites in exon 11.

(B) Schematic representation of the gene-correction approach employed in iPSCs with laminopathy-associated mutation(s).

(C) Gene-targeting and gene-correction efficiencies at the *LMNA* locus in HGPS-iPSCs achieved by different infection conditions. N.D., not determined.

(D) PCR analyses of HGPS-iPSCs and cHGPS-iPSCs via 5' primer pair (P1 and P2; 13.9 kb) or 3' primer pair (P3 and P4; 9.4 kb). M, DNA ladder.

(E) Southern blot analyses of HGPS-iPSCs and cHGPS-iPSCs. The approximate molecular weights (kb) corresponding to the bands are indicated.

(F) Sequencing results of C1824T mutation site in exon 11 of *LMNA* in BJ-iPSCs (wild-type), HGPS-iPSCs, and cHGPS-iPSCs. All iPSCs employed represent high-passage iPSCs (>30).

See also Figure S1.

different mutations spanning a substantially large region of the *LMNA* gene. Targeted correction of *LMNA* led to the restored expression of wild-type lamin A and to the abolishment of progerin expression. Consequently, lack of progerin expression resulted in the correction of the disease-associated cellular phenotypes, including decelerated senescence and restoration of normal nuclear morphology. Furthermore, the use of HDAdV-based approaches demonstrated very high efficiencies in the absence of any observed genetic and epigenetic abnormality and led to indistinguishable cell genetic backgrounds before and after gene targeting. Thus, the method described here might represent a more efficient and safer alternative to other current technologies. Along the same line, HDAdV-based approaches can be used for the generation of genetically matched iPSCs serving as a more reliable control for disease modeling and drug discovery. Lastly, our methodologies demonstrate the use of HDAdV-based gene targeting as a reliable tool for the engineering of adult mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

HDAdV-Based Gene Correction Shows High Efficiency in Transcriptionally Inactive Locus

Of the 12 exons of the *LMNA* gene, exons 2 to 12 cluster closely together. This region covers around 80% of the whole *LMNA* coding sequence and accumulates up to 246 of the published mutations in the *LMNA* gene (<http://www.umd.be/LMNA/>). With the aim to develop a single method amenable for the

correction of multiple *LMNA* mutations, we engineered a HDAdV-based gene-correction vector (*LMNA*-c-HDAV) (Figure 1A). HDAdV has been proven to mediate efficient and precise gene editing in hESCs without the requirement for artificial DNA DSBs (Suzuki et al., 2008). Because of the complete removal of viral genes from the vector, HDAdVs show low cytotoxicity while displaying the major advantage of having a large cloning capacity (~37 kb). Thus, HDAdVs permit the insertion of long homologous DNA regions that are designed to facilitate targeted integration via homologous recombination (HR) (Suzuki et al., 2008).

In view of these advantages, we first evaluated the ability of *LMNA*-c-HDAV to correct the HGPS-associated *LMNA* mutation C1824T in exon 11 in HGPS-iPSCs. We initially tested various viral infection conditions as well as different multiplicities of infection (MOIs). The system here employed includes a negative selection step by ganciclovir (GANC) resistance. If the vector randomly integrates into the genome, the integrated DNA will still include an HSVtk cassette leading to cell death by GANC selection. On the other hand, if the vector integrates at the targeted site by HR, the HSVtk cassette is removed and the cell displays GANC resistance (Mansour et al., 1988). Thus, negative selection helps to minimize ectopic vector integration (Suzuki et al., 2008). Accordingly, after sequential positive (G418) and negative (GANC) selection (Mansour et al., 1988), double-resistant colonies were expanded and maintained in hESC medium (Figure 1B). Effective gene targeting at the *LMNA* loci in drug-resistant clones was verified by PCR and Southern blot (Figures

1C–1E; Figure S1A available online). We speculated that because of the transcriptional inactivation of the *LMNA* locus in HGPS-iPSCs (Liu et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2011), gene-targeting efficiencies would be considerably low as previously described for other methodologies (Goulburn et al., 2011; Ruby and Zheng, 2009; Wang et al., 2011; Xue et al., 2009). Surprisingly, efficient gene targeting of *LMNA* (78%–100%) was consistently obtained even with the lowest MOI used (Figure 1C). These results indicate that high-targeting efficiency might saturate the system, allowing for reduced number of viral particles. We arbitrarily selected the iPSC colonies that were infected as single cells with the lowest viral titer (MOI = 3) for further analysis. Since most laminopathy-associated mutations are heterozygous, we expected gene-correction efficiencies to be 50% of the total frequency of gene-targeting events. Accordingly, DNA sequencing showed that mutations in 46% of the drug-resistant colonies were successfully corrected (Figures 1C and 1F).

Gene Correction by *LMNA*-c-HDAV Maintains Genetic and Epigenetic Integrity and Reverses Disease-Associated Phenotypes

In order to achieve genomic integrity in the corrected clones, we next excised the neomycin-resistant gene cassette, flanked by *FRT* sites, by transient expression of FLPe recombinase (Figure S1B). The neo-removed corrected HGPS-iPSC lines (hereafter referred to “cHGPS-iPSCs”) showed a normal karyotype, expressed pluripotent markers, and exhibited demethylation of the *OCT4* promoter and pluripotency (Figures S1C–S1I; Movie S1). Genome-wide single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) genotyping demonstrated that the genetic background of the cHGPS-iPSCs was the same as the parental HGPS fibroblasts, but distinct from H9 hESCs and the control BJ-iPSCs (Figure 2A; Table S1). By copy number variation (CNV) of the SNP genotyping data, using the method described in Laurent et al. (2011), there were no detected new duplications or deletions in the cHGPS-iPSCs compared to the HGPS-fibroblast cells (Figure 2B). Although this result may appear to be at variance with a recent report by Hussein et al. (2011), there were significant differences between the samples analyzed. Hussein et al. (2011) reported a higher frequency of CNVs in very early passage (<10 passages) when compared to later-passage iPSCs and postulated that these CNVs occurred during the process of reprogramming and were negatively selected in culture. Thus, because our gene targeting experiments started with HGPS-iPSCs at passage 30, our corrected iPSCs (>passage 30) clearly surpassed that early window of high-frequency CNV. Both SNP arrays used in the two studies assayed ~1 million SNPs, and the analyses required consistent calls for a minimum of ten adjacent markers to identify a CNV; therefore the controversies observed between Hussein’s and our own results were not due to technical but to passage number differences. DNA microarray analysis revealed very similar expression profiles between cHGPS-iPSCs and their parental HGPS-iPSCs (Figure 2C), indicating that the targeting procedure did not alter global gene expression. To examine whether the gene-targeting procedure interfered with the global epigenetic state, we performed genome-wide DNA methylation analysis. An average of 12 million single-end 80 bp sequencing reads was generated for each sample, yielding an average read depth of >50x for all CpG sites called, which is

roughly twice as high as the published whole-genome bisulfite sequencing data (Lister et al., 2011). The methylation levels measured on the Watson strand and the Crick strand were highly consistent for the same CpG sites (Pearson correlation coefficient $r = 0.965$ for site with read depth ≥ 10), indicating that the methylation measurements were very accurate. As shown in Figure 2D, the cHGPS-iPSCs showed a highly similar methylation profile as its parental iPSCs, in contrast to hESCs and wild-type iPSCs. Thus, our gene correction approach effectively maintained genetic and epigenetic cell integrity.

To ascertain whether correction of the mutant *LMNA* in HGPS-iPSCs is able to prevent development of some of the disease-associated phenotypes, we differentiated the cHGPS-iPSCs into vascular smooth muscle cells (SMCs) and fibroblasts, two known HGPS-affected cell types (Liu et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2011). Immunoblotting and RT-PCR analysis did not detect progerin mRNA or protein in cHGPS-iPSCs-derived cells (Figures 2E–2G). These results correlated with a significant rescue of the senescence phenotype. Senescence-associated (SA)- β -gal staining was reduced from 21.3% in SMCs differentiated from the noncorrected HGPS-iPSCs to 6.8% in cHGPS-iPSCs-derived SMCs, compared to 11.4% observed in BJ-iPSC-derived SMCs (Figure 2H). In addition, cHGPS-iPSCs-derived fibroblasts showed more than 60% reduction in the number of abnormal nuclei as compared to noncorrected counterparts (Figure 2I). Altogether, our results show that genetic correction of HGPS-iPSCs completely abrogated expression of progerin and resulted in expression of wild-type lamin A, thus leading to restored nuclear architecture and a normal cell senescence program.

LMNA-c-HDAV Spans Large Genomic Regions and Could Be Used for the Correction of Multiple Mutations

Considering the large DNA-carrying capacity of our generated *LMNA*-c-HDAV, we next decided to examine whether the same approach could be used to correct other *LMNA* mutations. We generated iPSCs from a patient with atypical Werner syndrome (AWS), a milder premature aging disease caused by a different *LMNA* mutation (A1733T in exon 11, E578V) (Csoka et al., 2004). AWS-iPSCs demonstrated acquisition of the typical iPSC characteristics including expression of pluripotency markers, ability to differentiate in vitro, formation of teratomas, and pluripotent gene expression and DNA methylation signatures (Figures 2C, 2D, 3A, and 3B; Figure S1G). In addition, AWS-iPSCs showed a normal karyotype and carried the disease-specific *LMNA* mutation (Figure 3F; Figure S1C). By employing the same approach used for the correction of HGPS-iPSCs, we obtained gene-targeting efficiencies ranging from 89% to 100% and specific gene correction of up to 35% (Figures 3C–3F; Figure S1J). The corrected AWS-iPSCs (cAWS-iPSCs) expressed pluripotent markers and showed a normal karyotype as well as a highly similar DNA methylation and gene expression profile as their parental AWS-iPSCs (Figures 2C and 2D; Figure S1C and S1E). These observations highlight the possibility of using a single *LMNA*-c-HDAV vector for the correction of multiple mutations of the *LMNA* gene and thus for the treatment of different laminopathies.

We next sought to determine the maximal region that *LMNA*-c-HDAV covers. To this end, we sequenced the whole *LMNA* locus in HGPS- and AWS-iPSCs looking for specific SNP sites

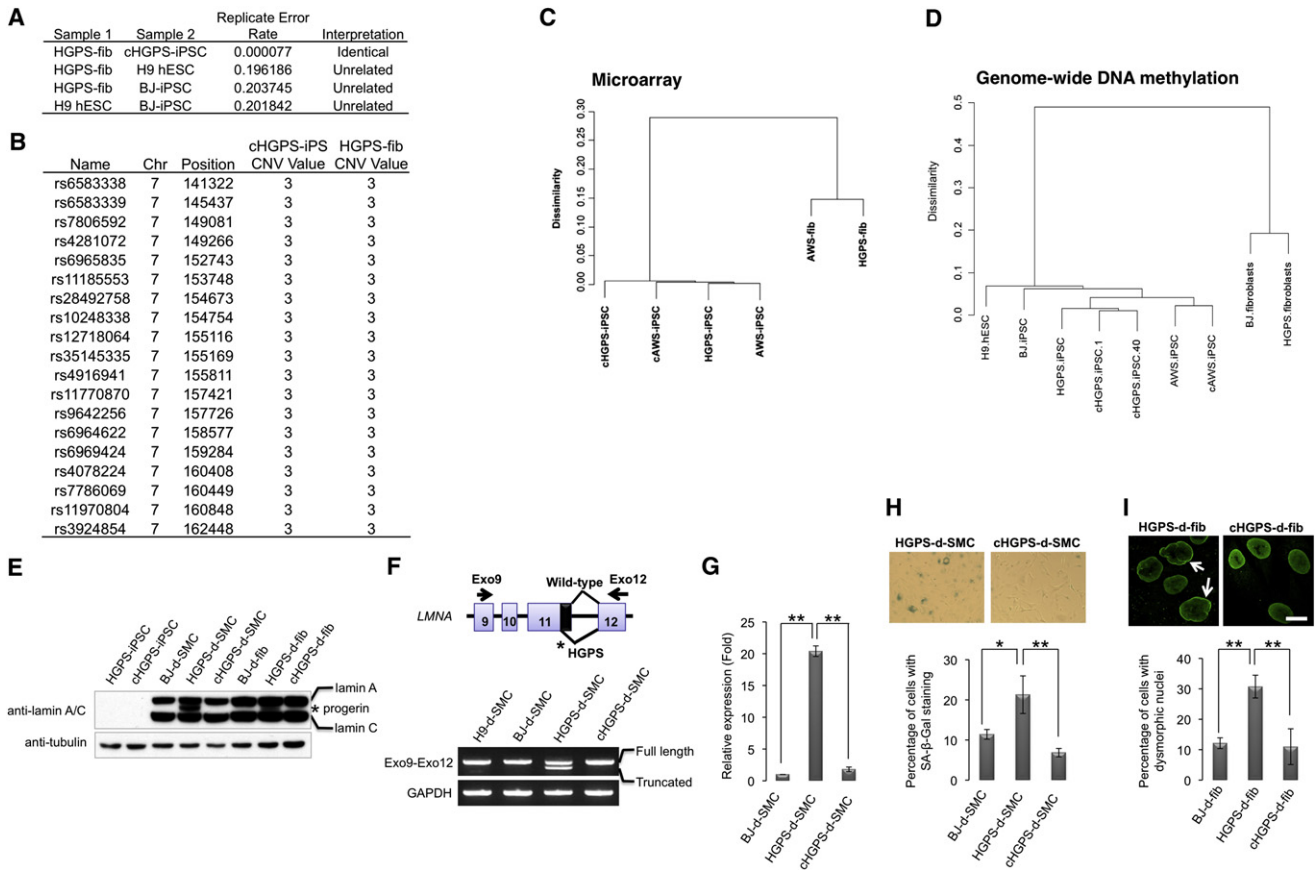


Figure 2. Abrogation of HGPS-Associated Phenotypes by Correction of LMNA in iPSCs

(A) Replicate error analysis indicating that cHGPS-iPSCs and HGPS fibroblasts were essentially genetically identical, whereas HGPS fibroblasts, H9 hESCs, and BJ-iPSCs came from unrelated individuals.

(B) CNV calling via CNVPartition, identifying one region of duplication (CNV value = 3) at chr7:141322-162448, which was present in both the original HGPS fibroblasts and cHGPS-iPSCs.

(C) Hierarchical clustering on RMA-normalized probe sets intensity values for HGPS- and AWS-iPSCs before and after gene correction, and their original fibroblast cell lines.

(D) Hierarchical clustering on genome-wide DNA methylation profiles of the indicated cell lines.

(E) Immunoblotting analysis of lamin A/C and progerin expression in the indicated cell lines with lamin A/C antibody. Tubulin was used as loading control. d-SMC, iPSC-derived SMC; d-fib, iPSC-derived fibroblast.

(F) RT-PCR analysis of expression of full-length lamin A (top band) and truncated lamin A (progerin; bottom band) in hESC/iPSC-derived SMCs (passage 3) with the indicated primer pair. GAPDH was used as loading control.

(G) Quantitative RT-PCR analysis of progerin expression in BJ-iPSC-, HGPS-iPSC-, or cHGPS-iPSC-derived SMCs at passage 3. **p < 0.01.

(H) Senescence-associated (SA)-β-gal staining of SMCs derived from HGPS-iPSC or cHGPS-iPSC at passage 5. Correction of HGPS-iPSCs resulted in more than a 68% reduction on the derived SMCs undergoing senescence; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

(I) Immunostaining of lamin A in iPSC-derived fibroblasts at passage 15. Arrows denote dysmorphic nuclei. Dysmorphic nuclei were quantified and represented in the lower panels. **p < 0.01. Data are shown as mean ± SD; n = 3. Scale bar represents 20 μm. All iPSCs employed represent high-passage iPSCs (>30). See also Figure S1, Table S1, and Movie S1.

across the *LMNA* locus that are not present in the vector. Two AWS-specific SNP sites located downstream of exon 12 were found on the same chromosome as the AWS mutation in the noncorrected cells and were used as a read-out for our analysis (Figure 3G). These two SNP sites are located 3.3 and 4.4 kb downstream of the neo-insertion site, respectively. By examining the presence of these two SNPs in the corrected AWS-iPSCs, we found that both of them were effectively replaced by the wild-type *LMNA*-c-HDAV sequence (60% of the gene-corrected clones) (Figure 3H), indicating that the majority of HR events occur outside of the second SNP site. Since exons 3–12 are

also located within the 4.4 kb region from neo-insertion site (Figure 3I), our results suggest that *LMNA*-c-HDAV can at least replace the whole exon 3–12 region. Thus, our method could potentially be used to correct more than 200 different mutations described in the *LMNA* locus.

Targeting of LMNA Locus with LMNA-c-HDAV Can Be Achieved in Adult Stem Cells

Finally, we evaluated the possibility of using HDAV-based vectors for gene editing in human adult stem cells. We focused on mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs) because of their current

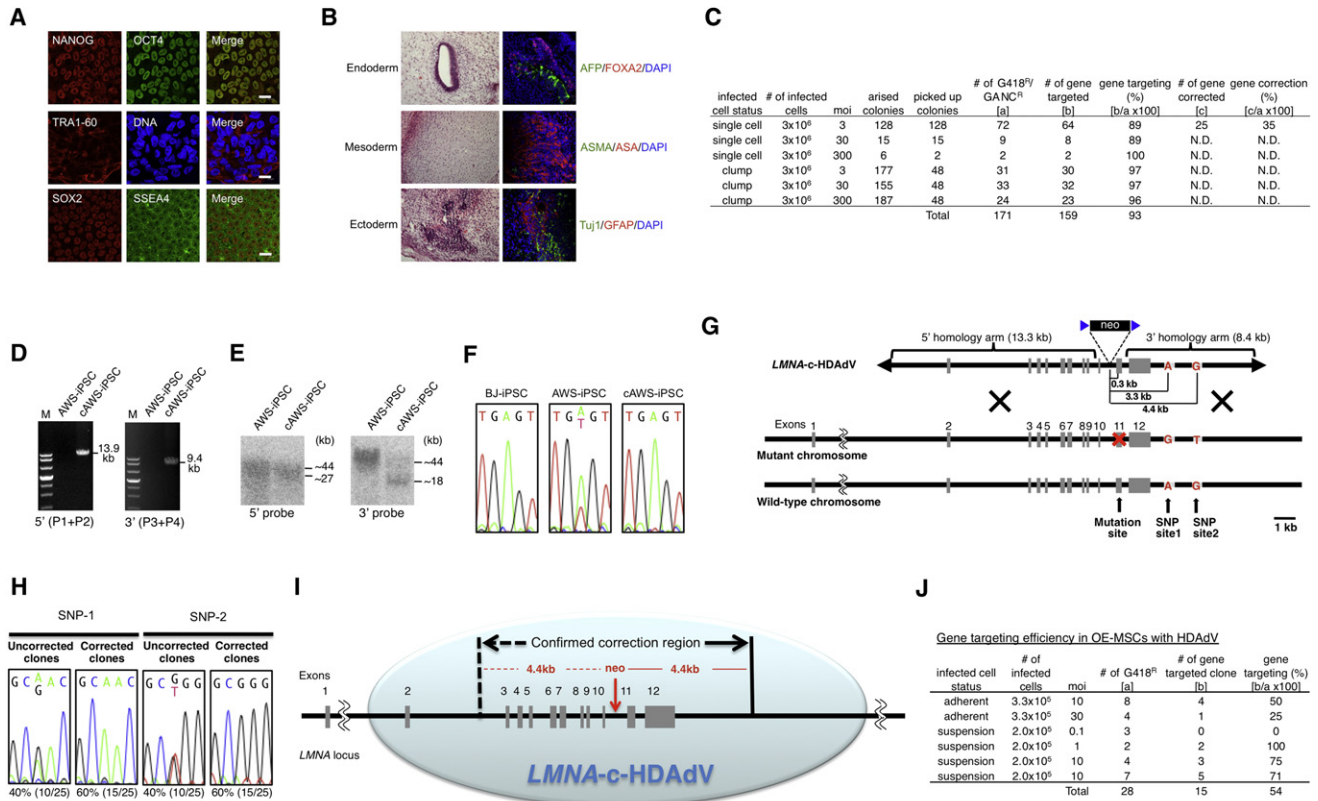


Figure 3. Editing the *LMNA* Locus in iPSCs and MSCs via *LMNA-c-HDAV*

(A) Immunostaining of different pluripotency markers in AWS-iPSCs. Nuclei were stained with Hoechst 33342. Scale bars represent 20 μ m.
 (B) H&E staining (left) and immunofluorescence (right) of three germ layer-specific markers (endoderm: AFP, FOXA2; mesoderm: ASMA, ASA; ectoderm: Tuj1, GFAP) in teratomas derived from AWS-iPSCs. Nuclei were stained with DAPI.
 (C) Gene-targeting and gene-correction efficiencies at the *LMNA* locus in AWS-iPSCs achieved by different infection conditions. N.D., not determined.
 (D) PCR analyses of AWS-iPSCs and gene-corrected AWS-iPSCs (cAWS-iPSCs) via 5' primer pair (P1 and P2; 13.9 kb) or 3' primer pair (P3 and P4; 9.4 kb). M, DNA ladder.
 (E) Southern blot analyses of AWS-iPSCs and cAWS-iPSCs. The approximate molecular weights (kb) corresponding to the bands are indicated.
 (F) Sequencing results of A1733T mutation site in exon 11 in BJ-iPSCs (wild-type), AWS-iPSCs, and cAWS-iPSCs.
 (G) Schematic molecular representation of mutation- and SNP-correction with *LMNA-c-HDAV* in AWS-iPSCs. The mutation site (A1733T) and SNP sites 1 and 2 are located 0.3, 3.3, and 4.4 kb downstream of the neo-insertion site, respectively, on the same chromosome as the AWS mutation.
 (H) Sequencing results of SNP sites 1 and 2 downstream of exon 12 in cAWS-iPSCs with and without SNP correction.
 (I) Schematic illustration of the putative gene editing capacity of *LMNA-c-HDAV* at *LMNA* locus.
 (J) Gene-targeting efficiency in OE-MSCs with *LMNA-c-HDAV* achieved by different infection conditions. All iPSCs employed represented high-passage iPSCs (>30).
 See also Figure S1.

and extensive use in regenerative medicine (Salem and Thiermann, 2010). *LMNA* mutations mainly affect mesoderm-derived tissues, such as muscle and adipocytes. Thus, *LMNA* correction on MSCs could represent an attractive alternative for therapeutic purposes (Zaremba-Czogalla et al., 2011). Because of their high cell-cycle kinetics which enables effective clonal expansion, we specifically focused on olfactory ectomesenchymal stem cells (OE-MSCs) (Delorme et al., 2010). Furthermore, OE-MSCs are easily accessible by noninvasive biopsies and therefore represent an attractive cell population for clinical applications (Delorme et al., 2010). As shown in Figure 3J and Figures S1K and S1L, *LMNA-c-HDAV* demonstrated gene-editing efficiency of 54% in wild-type OE-MSCs, without disruption of the normal lamin A/C expression. Although OE-MSCs from patients with

laminopathies are not available at this stage, our study suggests in particular the possibility that *LMNA-c-HDAV* could be used to genetically modify laminopathy-specific MSCs in the future, and more generally, the feasibility of targeting adult stem cells for gene correction.

In summary, we report the successful correction of different laminopathy-associated *LMNA* mutations in patient-specific iPSCs with a single gene correction vector. Moreover, HDAdV-based approaches efficiently target specific genomic loci on adult stem cells, a scenario not previously addressed. Our results demonstrate that the long homology arms used in HDAdVs have the capability to edit the targeted genomic locus without off-target effects and/or introduction of additional mutations, thus presenting an advantageous alternative to the use of

other gene-editing technologies (Hockemeyer et al., 2009). Although bacterial artificial chromosome (BAC)-mediated vectors also used long homology arms, their ability and efficiency to target the genome was restricted to transcriptionally active loci (Howden et al., 2011; Song et al., 2010). Here we show that LMNA-c-HDAV can specifically edit transcriptionally inactive loci with high efficiencies. Thus, the HDAV represents a robust and versatile tool that could be applied toward the correction of multiple monogenic diseases. Finally, this approach could serve to generate appropriate genotype-matched iPSC lines in disease modeling and drug discovery studies.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

Construction and Preparation of LMNA-c-HDAV

LMNA-c-HDAV was generated with a BAC clone, containing the human LMNA loci (RP11-54H19, BACPAC resources), that were modified with BAC recombineering (Datsenko and Wanner, 2000). In brief, the FRT-PGK-EM7-neo-bpA-FRT fragment was recombined into intron 10 of LMNA in the BAC clone. A total of 23.2 kb of LMNA homology, including the marker cassette, was subcloned into the HDAV plasmid pAMHDAVGT8-4 (kindly provided by Dr. Kohnosuke Mitani). The generated LMNA-c-HDAV was linearized by PmeI and then transfected into 116 cells (kindly provided by Dr. Philip Ng) in the presence of helper virus AdHPBGF35 (kindly provided by Dr. André M. Lieber) (Shayakhmetov et al., 2004). Crude virus extracts were serially amplified in 116 cells and then purified according to the method previously described (Palmer and Ng, 2004). β -gal-transducing units (btu) were determined in 293 cells to define infectious vector titers.

Immunofluorescence Analysis

4% formaldehyde in PBS was used to fix cells at room temperature (RT) for 20–30 min. After fixation, cells were exposed to 0.4% Triton X-100 in PBS for 5 min at RT. Cells were blocked with 10% FBS in PBS for 30 min and incubated with primary antibody for 1 hr at RT or overnight at 4°C. Washing was conducted with PBS followed by incubation with a corresponding secondary antibody for 1 hr at RT. Hoechst 33342 or DAPI was used to stain nuclei.

Teratoma Analysis

To test pluripotency *in vivo*, iPSC lines were injected into NOD-SCID IL2Rgamma^{null} mice (Jackson Laboratories) and teratoma formation was assessed. In short, $\sim 10^6$ iPSCs in ~ 50 μ l of hESC medium were injected into the kidney capsule or testis of anesthetized mice. Teratoma formation was monitored and animals were sacrificed ~ 6 –12 weeks after injection. Harvested teratomas were processed and analyzed by immunostaining and hematoxylin-eosin staining. All murine experiments were conducted with approval of The Salk Institute Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC).

Statistical Analysis

Results are presented as mean \pm SD. Student's *t* test was applied to all comparisons. Statistical significance was defined as $p < 0.05$.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Supplemental Information includes Supplemental Experimental Procedures, one figure, one table, and one movie and can be found with this article online at doi:10.1016/j.stem.2011.04.019.

ACCESSION NUMBERS

Microarray data have been deposited in NCBI-GEO with the accession number GSE28607.

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