

see commentary on page 951

Clinicopathological characteristics of patients with IgG4-related tubulointerstitial nephritis

Takako Saeki¹, Shinichi Nishi², Naofumi Imai², Tomoyuki Ito¹, Hajime Yamazaki¹, Mitsuhiro Kawano³, Motohisa Yamamoto⁴, Hiroki Takahashi⁴, Shoko Matsui⁵, Shinji Nakada⁶, Tomoki Origuchi⁷, Akira Hirabayashi⁸, Noriyuki Homma⁹, Yutaka Tsubata¹⁰, Takuma Takata¹¹, Yoko Wada², Akihiko Saito¹², Sachiko Fukase¹³, Kunihiro Ishioka¹⁴, Kana Miyazaki¹⁵, Yasufumi Masaki¹⁶, Hisanori Umehara¹⁶, Susumu Sugai¹⁷ and Ichiei Narita²

¹Department of Internal Medicine, Nagaoka Red Cross Hospital, Nagaoka, Niigata, Japan; ²Division of Clinical Nephrology and Rheumatology, Niigata University Graduate School of Medical and Dental Sciences, Niigata, Japan; ³Division of Rheumatology, Department of Internal Medicine, Graduate School of Medical Science, Kanazawa University, Kanazawa, Ishikawa, Japan; ⁴First Department of Internal Medicine, Sapporo Medical University School of Medicine, Sapporo, Japan; ⁵First Department of Internal Medicine, University of Toyama, Toyoma, Japan; ⁶Department of Japanese Oriental Medicine, University of Toyama, Toyoma, Japan; ⁷Department of Health Sciences, Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Nagasaki University, Nagasaki, Japan; ⁸Department of Nephrology and Rheumatology, JA Hiroshima General Hospital, Hiroshima, Japan; ⁹Department of Internal Medicine, Niigata Prefectural Shibata Hospital, Shibata, Niigata, Japan; ¹⁰Department of Internal Medicine, Niigata Prefectural Central Hospital, Joetsu, Niigata, Japan; ¹¹Department of Internal Medicine, Nagaoka Chuo General Hospital, Nagaoka, Niigata, Japan; ¹²Department of Applied Molecular Medicine, Niigata University Graduate School of Medical and Dental Sciences, Niigata, Japan; ¹³Department of Internal Medicine, Yamagata Prefectural Central Hospital, Yamagata, Japan; ¹⁴Department of Nephrology, Shonan Kamakura General Hospital, Kamakura, Kanagawa, Japan; ¹⁵Department of Hematology and Oncology, Mie University Graduate School of Medicine, Tsu, Mie, Japan; ¹⁶Department of Hematology and Immunology, Kanazawa Medical University, Kahoku-gun, Ishikawa, Japan and ¹⁷Department of Internal Medicine, Kudo General Hospital, Kaga, Ishikawa, Japan

IgG4-related disease is a recently recognized multi-organ disorder characterized by high levels of serum IgG4 and dense infiltration of IgG4-positive cells into several organs. Although the pancreas was the first organ recognized to be affected by IgG4-related disorder in the syndrome of autoimmune pancreatitis, we present here clinicopathological features of 23 patients diagnosed as having renal parenchymal lesions. These injuries were associated with a high level of serum IgG4 and abundant IgG4-positive plasma cell infiltration into the renal interstitium with fibrosis. In all patients, tubulointerstitial nephritis was the major finding. Although 14 of the 23 patients did not have any pancreatic lesions, their clinicopathological features were quite uniform and similar to those shown in autoimmune pancreatitis. These included predominance in middle-aged to elderly men, frequent association with IgG4-related conditions in other organs, high levels of serum IgG and IgG4, a high frequency of hypocomplementemia, a high serum IgE level, a patchy and diffuse lesion distribution, a swirling fibrosis in the renal pathology, and a good response to corticosteroids. Thus, we suggest that renal parenchymal

lesions actually develop in association with IgG4-related disease, for which we propose the term 'IgG4-related tubulointerstitial nephritis.'

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IgG4-related disease represents a recently recognized group of multi-organ diseases characterized by a high level of serum IgG4 and dense infiltration of IgG4-positive cells into multiple organs.^{1–3} The condition was first described in relation to the pancreas (that is, autoimmune pancreatitis (AIP)),⁴ and has since been expanded to various organ systems. At present, many other inflammatory conditions affecting multiple organs are considered to fall within the category of IgG4-related disease,^{1–3} including sclerosing cholangitis,⁵ sialadenitis,^{2,6} retroperitoneal fibrosis,⁷ interstitial pneumonitis,⁸ inflammatory pseudotumor,^{1–3} and periaortitis.⁹ Although much attention is now being focused on these conditions, and the number of case reports of IgG4-related disease has been increasing, there are still few clinicopathological data on the involvement of organs other than the pancreas. The aim of this study was to elucidate the clinicopathological characteristics of renal parenchymal lesions associated with IgG4-related disease.

Correspondence: Takako Saeki, Department of Internal Medicine, Nagaoka Red Cross Hospital, Senshu 2-297-1, Nagaoka, Niigata 940-2085, Japan.
E-mail: saekit@nagaoka.jrc.or.jp

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RESULTS

Patient profiles

Patients were all Japanese (20 men and 3 women) with an average age of 65.2 ± 10.1 (40–83) years at the time of diagnosis of renal disease. Although seven patients fulfilled the criteria for Sjögren's syndrome, as revised by the Japanese Ministry of Welfare in 1999, none of them met the criteria for systemic lupus erythematosus, anti-neutrophil cytoplasmic antibody (ANCA)-related vasculitis, rheumatoid arthritis, or sarcoidosis. None of the organ specimens showed any evidence of malignant lymphoma by the DNA PCR method or immunohistochemistry. At the time of diagnosis of renal involvement, one patient had been treated with low-dose corticosteroid (prednisolone 2.5 mg daily) because of AIP (patient 5 in Table 1). Three patients had been treated with the corticosteroid because of AIP (patients 19 and 22 in Table 1) or idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura (patient 8 in Table 1), but the treatment was discontinued when they developed renal involvement. The other 19 patients had not received corticosteroids or immunosuppressants before the appearance of renal lesions.

Clinical features

Of the 23 patients, 22 (95.7%) had some accompanying extrarenal lesions: sialadenitis in 19 (82.6%), lymphadenopathy in 10 (43.5%), AIP in 9 (39.1%), dacryoadenitis in 7 (30.4%), lung lesions (interstitial pneumonitis and nodular lesions) in 6 (26.0%), and others in 3 (pseudotumor of the liver, prostatitis, and idiopathic thrombotic purpura) (Table 1). Among the extrarenal lesions, 15 (represented in bold in Table 1) had been recognized before diagnosis of the renal lesions, and 10 of these 15 lesions in patients 3, 5, 8, 19, and 22 had improved with steroid therapy, or spontaneously, at the time of diagnosis of the renal lesions. The other 39 lesions were diagnosed at the same time as the renal lesions. Clinical symptoms were mostly associated with extrarenal lesions, such as gland swelling and lymphadenopathy. Fever, arthralgia, skin eruption, and edema were observed in 3, 5, 1, and 2 patients, respectively. In 21 of the 23 patients, the renal lesions were observed by physicians because of urinary abnormalities, renal dysfunction, and/or abnormalities revealed by radiological examinations, including computed tomography (CT) and gallium citrate scintigraphy, during follow-up or further examinations of the IgG4-related extrarenal lesions. In patients 13 and 14, renal lesions were observed because of renal dysfunction in the absence of extrarenal lesions. The results of renal histological and laboratory findings alerted the attending physicians to IgG4-related disease, who then carried out measurements of serum IgG4 levels and IgG4 immunostaining. (Additional gallium citrate scintigraphy showed gallium-67 accumulation of both the salivary glands in patient 13.)

Laboratory findings at the time of diagnosis of the renal lesions

Urinary protein excretion was <0.3 g/day in 19 of the 23 patients (Table 1). Urinary protein excretion >1.0 g/day was

shown in two patients with membranous nephropathy (patients 14 and 22). Hematuria (urinary red blood cells >3 per h.p.f. (high-power field)) was shown in eight patients. Although mostly mild, hematuria with urinary red blood cells >20 per h.p.f. was evident in three patients with glomerular lesions (patients 14, 22, and 23). Hematological examinations revealed anemia (hemoglobin <10.0 g/dl) in only one patient (hemoglobin 9.0 g/dl in patient 20). Although white blood cell counts were within the normal range in most patients (mild leukocytosis was observed in 2 patients), eosinophilia (eosinophils $>5\%$) was observed in 11 patients (47.8%). Platelet counts were within the normal range in all patients. Renal function varied from normal to renal failure (serum creatinine 0.67–6.87 mg/dl). Elevated creatinine levels (serum creatinine >1.2 mg/dl) were shown in 13 of the 23 patients. Abnormal liver function at the time of diagnosis of the renal lesions was observed in three patients; AST (aspartate transaminase) 53 IU/l (range: 13–33), ALT (alanine transaminase) 101 IU/l (range: 10–47), ALP (alkaline phosphatase) 914 IU/l (range: 115–359) in patient 4, AST 16 IU/l, ALT 20 IU/l, ALP 573 IU/l in patient 5, and AST 55 IU/l, ALT 115 IU/l, ALP 1690 IU/l in patient 22. Pancreatic swelling due to AIP had improved by this time in patients 5 and 22, and no patient showed CT abnormalities in the liver or pancreatobiliary system.

All patients showed elevated levels of serum IgG (2721–8841 mg/dl, mean 4836 ± 1499 mg/dl, normal range 870–1700). Although serum IgA and IgM levels were within the normal ranges in all patients, elevation of the serum IgE level (272–4442 IU/ml, normal range <250 IU/ml) was observed in 10 of 14 evaluated patients (71.4%). Serum IgG4 levels before steroid therapy ranged from 587 to 4630 mg/dl (mean 1520 ± 909 , normal range <105 mg/dl). In 16 of the 23 patients (69.6%), the serum CH50 level was found to be decreased, together with a reduction in the serum level of C3, C4, or both. In two patients (nos 20 and 21), only the C3 level was decreased. The rheumatoid factor was positive in 7 of 18 evaluated patients (38.9%). Although anti-nuclear antibodies were positive in 69.6%, anti-SS-A, anti-SS-B, anti-Sm, and anti-RNP antibodies were all negative, and the levels of anti-DNA antibodies were not increased in any of the patients. The level of CRP was <1.5 mg/dl in 22 of the 23 patients, and 8.7 mg/dl in 1 patient (patient 7). Cryoglobulin, M-protein, myeloperoxidase-ANCA, and proteinase-3-ANCA were not observed in any of the patients.

Imaging studies

CT revealed abnormal renal parenchymal lesions in 16 of the 23 patients (69.6%) (Table 1). Among them, diffuse swelling of the bilateral kidneys was evident in seven patients. Patchily distributed hypoattenuated lesions in the renal cortex, being single or multiple, round or wedge shaped, were found in 10 patients (Figure 1). Renal pelvic tumor and caliectasis were observed in addition to the renal parenchymal lesions in patients 2 and 4, respectively. In patient 1, thickening of the renal pelvic wall was observed, although no renal

Table 1 | Clinicopathological features of 23 patients with IgG4-related tubulointerstitial nephritis

No	Age/sex	Renal biopsy findings	U-Pr/U-B	Cr at biopsy	IgG (N870-1700)	IgG4 (M < 105)	IgE (N < 250)	Low CH50	Low C3	Low C4	ANA	RF	Extrarenal lesions	Renal CT findings	Tx of pre-/post-biopsy	Cr at 1 M after Tx	References
1	58/F	TIN	0.23 g/day/(±)	0.67	7319	4630	4442	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	(+)	La, Sa, AIP, Ly	Thickening of renal pelvis	(-)/PSL40	0.59	
2	76/F	TIN	(-)/(-)	0.69	2721	769	267	(-)	(-)	(+)	(+)	(-)	La, Sa, Ly, Lu	Pa, pelvic tumor	(-)/PSL20	0.64	
3	76/M	TIN	(-)/(-)	0.71	3486	1030	NA	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(-)	Sa, AIP	Pa	(-)/(-)	0.69	Saeki et al. ^{33,34}
4	40/F	TIN	(-)/(-)	0.74	3450	2400	272	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	La, Sa, Lu	Pa, S, caliectasis	(-)/Pulse+PSL60	0.58	Shimoyama et al. ³⁵
5	52/M	TIN	(-)/(-)	0.80	3180 ^a	1430 ^a	NA	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	(+)	Sa, AIP, Lu	Pa	PSL2.5/PSL10	0.7	Nakamura et al. ³⁶
6	56/M	TIN+mesPGN	(+)/(+)	0.9	5680	1920	248	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(-)	La, Sa, Ly	Pa	(-)/PSL50	0.9	Yamamoto et al. ³⁷
7	70/M	TIN	(±)/(-)	0.9	3496	623	NA	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(-)	AIP	S	(-)/PSL30	0.8	
8	61/M	TIN	(-)/(-)	1.09	6569	730 ^a	1049 ^a	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	Sa, AIP, ITP, Ly	Pa	(-)/PSL60 ^b	0.97	Saeki et al. ^{14,33,34}
9	74/M	TIN	(+)/(+)	1.1	4387	1320	560	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	Sa	S	(-)/PSL30	0.9	Nakada et al. ³⁸
10	58/M	TIN	(-)/(-)	1.15	2850	1470	456	(-)	(-)	(-)	(+)	NA	Pseudo-tumor (liver)	Pa	(-)/PSL30	1.06	
11	62/M	TIN+IgAGN	(-)/(+)	1.3	8194	NA	704	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	La, Sa, AIP, Ly	S	(-)/Pulse+PSL30	1.1	
12	75/M	TIN	(+)/(+)	1.34	5380	587	NA	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	Sa, Ly, Lu	Pa	(-)/PSL30	1.14	
13	68/M	TIN	(-)/(-)	1.37	2995	670	2323	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(-)	Sa	Normal	(-)/PSL40	1.19	Saeki et al. ^{14,33}
14	83/M	TIN+MN	2.3 g/day/(3+)	1.48	3144	924	32	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	NA	(-)	Normal	(-)/PSL40	1.39	Saeki et al. ³⁹
15	60/M	TIN	(-)/(-)	1.7	8841	1028	NA	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(-)	Ly, Lu, Sa	Normal	(-)/PSL30	NA	Takamura et al. ⁴⁰
16	60/M	TIN+mesPGN	(+)/(±)	1.75	5188	305 ^a	NA	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	Sa, Ly	S	(-)/PSL50	1.55	Saeki et al. ^{14,33,34}
17	61/M	TIN	NA	2.0	8005	2390	858	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(-)	Sa, Ly	S	(-)/unknown	NA	Saeki et al. ³³
18	55/M	TIN	(+)/(+)	2.1	5040	1780	NA	(-)	(-)	(-)	(+)	(+)	AIP, Sa	Pa	(-)/PSL40	1.3	
19	69/M	TIN	0.25 g/day/(±)	2.36	4001	1340	NA	(+)	(+)	(+)	(-)	NA	AIP	Normal	(-)/PSL30 ^b	2.1	
20	64/M	TIN	NA	2.9	5100	1360	92	(-)	(-)	(+)	(+)	(-)	La, Sa	Normal	(-)/PSL50	NA	
21	76/M	TIN	0.3 g/day/(+)	5.4	2963	1800	125	(-)	(+)	(-)	(-)	(-)	Sa	Normal (nonenhanced)	(-)/PSL40	2.9	
22	78/M	TIN+MN	1.4 g/day/(2+)	6.17	3731	1860	NA	(+)	(+)	(-)	(-)	(-)	Sa, AIP	Pa	(-)/PSL20 ^b	HD	Saida et al. ¹⁰
23	68/M	TIN+endocap	(2+)/(2+)	6.87	4661	1120	335	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(-)	La, Sa, Ly, Lu, P	S (nonenhanced)	(-)/PSL30	1.45	

Abbreviations: ANA, antinuclear antibody; Cr, serum creatinine (mg/dl); CT, computed tomography; endocap, endocapillary hypercellularity; IgAGN, IgA nephropathy; IgG, serum IgG (mg/dl); IgE, serum IgE (IU/ml); IgG4, serum IgG4 (mg/dl); Low CH50,C3,C4, low titer of serum CH50,C3,C4; M, month; mesPGN, mesangioproliferative glomerulonephritis; MN, membranous nephropathy; NA, not available; pre-/post-biopsy, pre-renal biopsy/post-renal biopsy; RF, rheumatoid factor; TIN, tubulointerstitial nephritis; Tx, treatment; U-B, hematuria; U-Pr, proteinuria.
^aValue under steroid therapy. AIP, autoimmune pancreatitis; ITP, idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura; La, dactyloadenitis; Lu, lung lesion; Ly, lymphadenitis; P, prostatitis; Pa, patchy lesion; PSL, prednisolone mg/day; S, diffuse swelling; Sa, sialadenitis (bold and italic extrarenal lesions were diagnosed before diagnosis of renal lesion).
^bHistory of steroid treatment. HD, hemodialysis.



Figure 1 | Contrast-enhanced renal CT findings in patients with IgG4-related nephropathy. (a) Multiple wedge-shaped low-attenuation lesions in both renal cortices are evident (arrows, patient 3); (b) A tumor-like less-enhanced mass (arrow) is evident in the left kidney (patient 8). CT, computed tomography.

parenchymal lesion was evident. Gallium citrate scintigraphy was performed before therapy in 17 patients (nos 2–9, 11–18, and 21), and all but 2 (nos 2 and 14) showed gallium-67 accumulation in both the kidneys. Gallium citrate scintigraphy performed during therapy showed no gallium-67 accumulation in the kidneys (patients 10 and 21).

Renal pathology

Tubulointerstitial nephritis was a dominant feature in all patients (Table 1). Light microscopy demonstrated dense cell infiltration with fibrosis and tubular atrophy. The infiltrate was predominantly composed of plasma cells and lymphocytes, and also eosinophils in some patients. Distribution of the lymphoplasmacytic infiltration was not only diffuse but also patchy, sometimes with a clear margin (Figure 2a and b). Tubule atrophy or diminishment developed according to the severity of cell infiltration and fibrosis. In the fibrotic interstitium, collagen fibers exhibited a swirling pattern or an arabesque outline in periodic acid-methenamine silver-stained preparations, and inflammatory cells infiltrated the collagen fibers, producing a characteristic pattern (Figure 2c and d). On light microscopy, the glomeruli were unremarkable in 18 patients, except for evidence of focal global sclerosis. One patient (no. 14) showed membranous

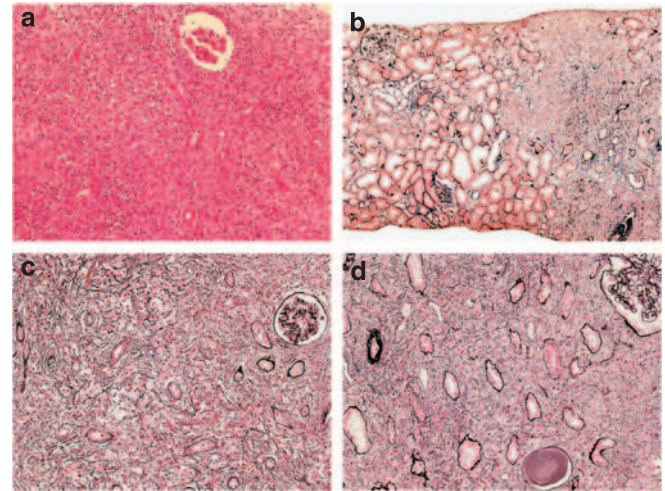


Figure 2 | Light microscopy findings in the renal tissues. (a) Diffuse marked renal interstitial inflammation consisting of lymphocytes and plasma cells with fibrosis is demonstrated, and most tubules are diminished (patient 8, HE; original magnification $\times 200$); (b) Patchy distribution of dense lymphoplasmacytic infiltrates with irregular fibrosis, showing a clear margin (patient 16, PAM-Masson; original magnification $\times 80$); (c, d) Collagen fibers exhibit a swirling pattern or an arabesque outline in a PAM-stained preparation, and the inflammatory cells show infiltration into the collagen fibers (panel c; patient 13, PAM-Masson; original magnification $\times 200$, panel d; patient 21, PAM-Masson; original magnification $\times 250$). HE, hematoxylin and eosin; PAM, periodic acid-methenamine.

nephropathy. Mild mesangioproliferative glomerulonephritis was evident in three patients (nos 6, 11, and 16), and focal segmental endocapillary hypercellularity was observed in one (no. 23). Direct immunofluorescence was evaluated in 14 patients (nos 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, and 22). In three patients (nos 1, 18, and 21), deposition of immunoglobulins and complement components was not confirmed in the glomeruli or the interstitium. In the patient with membranous nephropathy (no. 14), diffuse and global IgG and C3 deposits along the glomerular capillary walls, and focal deposits of IgG and C3 along the tubular basement membranes were observed. In patient 22, no deposition was observed in the glomeruli, and parts of the tubular basement membranes were positive for C3 deposition. Although the glomeruli on light microscopy were also unremarkable in the patient, electron microscopy revealed segmental sub-epithelial deposits on the glomerular basement membranes, and therefore, we diagnosed the patient as having tubulointerstitial nephritis with membranous nephropathy.¹⁰ In three patients with mild mesangioproliferative glomerulonephritis (nos 6, 11, and 16), no apparent deposit was evident on the tubular basement membranes. In two of these patients (nos 6 and 16), mild IgG and IgA deposits (IgA was not dominant) were observed in the mesangial areas. In the other patient (no. 11), dominant IgA deposition was observed in the mesangial area, and we diagnosed the patient as having tubulointerstitial nephritis with IgA nephropathy. In four of

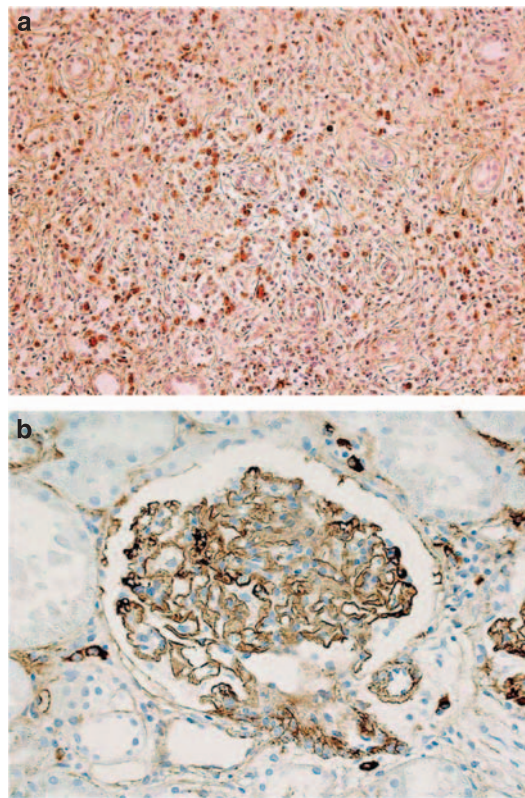


Figure 3 | Immunostaining of IgG4 in renal tissues. (a) Numerous IgG4-positive plasma cells are evident in the renal interstitium (patient 13, original magnification $\times 250$); (b) In the patient with membranous nephropathy (patient 14), diffuse staining of glomerular capillary walls is also shown in addition to the IgG4-positive infiltrating plasma cells in the renal interstitium (original magnification $\times 400$).

the other six patients (nos 5, 9, 13, and 19), segmental staining for IgG or C3 was shown in the glomeruli, with no deposits on the tubular basement membrane; faint or mild segmental mesangial staining for IgG in patients 5, 9, and 19, and mild segmental staining for C3 along the glomerular capillary wall in patient 13. In the other two patients (nos 2 and 10), nonspecific faint segmental staining for C3 was evident on the tubule basement membranes, without any deposits in the glomeruli.

Immunostaining for IgG4 revealed infiltration of numerous IgG4-positive plasma cells (IgG4-positive plasma cells/IgG-positive plasma cells $>40\%$; IgG4-positive plasma cells >10 per h.p.f.) into the renal interstitium (Figure 3a). In the patient with membranous nephropathy (no. 14), IgG4 immunostaining also showed diffuse reactivity in the glomerular capillary walls, and focal staining of the tubule basement membrane, in addition to the infiltrating plasma cells (Figure 3b).

Treatment and course

The treatment regimen was decided according to the opinion of each attending physician (Table 1). Of the 23 patients, 21 were treated with prednisolone (initial dose 10–60 mg/day)

for renal lesions. Intravenous methylprednisone pulse therapy (500–1000 mg for 3 days) was also conducted in three patients. One patient (no. 3) was followed up without therapy because both AIP and renal lesions improved spontaneously. Among patients treated with corticosteroid, the clinical data after 4 weeks were evaluable in 19. In 18 of those patients, abnormalities of renal function, complement level, and imaging features were all improved by therapy. Extrarenal lesions were also improved. In one patient with renal failure (no. 22), renal function did not recover, and maintenance hemodialysis became necessary.

DISCUSSION

Lesions of the kidney associated with IgG4-related disease include those affecting the renal parenchyma, and lesions of other areas.^{7,11} Renal parenchymal lesions associated with IgG4-related disease were first described in 2004 as case reports of tubulointerstitial nephritis associated with AIP.^{12,13} Thereafter, the number of case reports of tubulointerstitial nephritis associated with IgG4-related disease has been increasing,^{14–18} although most of such cases have been accompanied by AIP and their number is still limited.

The clinicopathological features of IgG4-related disease have been described most extensively for cases with pancreatic involvement (that is, AIP).^{19–22} It predominantly affects middle-aged to elderly men. The clinical symptoms are mild and the condition usually comes to clinical attention because of imaging abnormalities of the pancreas or obstructive jaundice. In most patients, extrapancreatic lesions, such as sclerosing cholangitis, sclerosing sialadenitis, lymphadenopathy, and retroperitoneal fibrosis occur during the clinical course, sometimes simultaneously and often metachronously.²³ Laboratory examinations reveal characteristically increased levels of serum IgG and IgG4 (increased serum IgG4 is observed in 68–90% of Japanese patients with AIP),²² and a recent study has shown that the serum IgE level is also frequently elevated.²⁴ Antinuclear antibodies and rheumatoid factor are often positive, but anti-SSA and anti-SSB antibodies are negative,²¹ and hypocomplementemia is observed in 17–36% of the patients.²⁵ CT scan or magnetic resonance imaging shows diffuse pancreatic enlargement or focal masses. Corticosteroid therapy is usually quite effective for normalizing pancreatic lesions, and also the clinical and laboratory parameters. Histopathologically, dense lymphoplasmacytic infiltration, swirling or storiform fibrosis, and abundant IgG4-positive plasma cell infiltration revealed by IgG4 immunostaining are characteristic, and several studies have shown that IgG4-related disease shows similar pathological features, regardless of the specific type of organ involved.^{8,26} In this study, we diagnosed 23 patients as having renal parenchymal lesions associated with IgG4-related disease on the basis of the renal pathological features described above, in addition to high levels of serum IgG4. As an elevated serum IgG4 level is characteristic of IgG4-related disease, but not diagnostic (sensitivity 75%, specificity 93% in AIP),²⁰ histopathological examination including IgG4

immunostaining is useful for diagnosis of this disease in addition to an elevated serum IgG4 level. Although 14 of the 23 patients did not have any pancreatic lesions, the clinical features were quite uniform and similar to those shown in AIP. Our results suggested that renal parenchymal lesions actually developed in association with IgG4-related disease, but not in association with AIP.

Tubulointerstitial nephritis is caused by various factors, including infections, drug reactions, urinary tract obstruction, autoimmune conditions, plasma cell dyscrasias, and metabolic disorders. Many patients in the present series showed hypergammaglobulinemia, hypocomplementemia, and positivity for anti-nuclear antibodies, being reminiscent of systemic lupus erythematosus, but none of them met the criteria for it. Although seven of the patients fulfilled the ordinary criteria for Sjögren's syndrome, typical Sjögren's syndrome does not show elevation of the serum IgG4 level and abundant IgG4-positive plasma cell infiltration.³ Recent studies have shown that there are considerable differences between IgG4-related disease and Sjögren's syndrome, although distributions of the involved organs are similar,^{2,3} and therefore it is important to recognize IgG4-related disease and to distinguish it from Sjögren's syndrome.²⁷ The clinical symptoms, laboratory findings such as hypocomplementemia, a low CRP level and negativity for ANCA, and also radiological findings, differed from those of drug-induced tubulointerstitial nephritis, infection, and ANCA-related vasculitis. The clinicopathological features of tubulointerstitial nephritis associated with IgG4-related disease are thus unique and distinct from those of other renal diseases.

Despite the characteristic clinicopathological features, the pathogenesis of IgG4-related disease remains poorly understood, although autoimmune or allergic mechanisms have been discussed.^{5,19,20} Cornell *et al.*²⁸ demonstrated IgG4 immune-complex deposition in the renal tubule basement membranes of patients with tubulointerstitial nephritis associated with AIP, suggesting an immune-complex mechanism. In the present series, an apparent deposition of immune complex on the tubular basement membranes was evident in only one of the patients with membranous nephropathy by direct immunofluorescence. On the other hand, the relationship between glomerular lesions and IgG4-related disease is also poorly understood. Although the major pathological feature of this disease is tubulointerstitial nephritis, the glomeruli were also affected in a small number of cases in this study, and this has also been described previously,^{12,15,29,30} membranous nephropathy being the most frequent feature among them. The significance of IgG4 has been documented in idiopathic membranous nephropathy, in which the predominance of Th2 cytokines is a common feature,^{31,32} and also in IgG4-related disease,⁵ suggesting a possible relationship between them. In view of the possible association of renal lesions with IgG4-related disease, glomerular lesions should be examined closely in addition to interstitial lesions. Further large-scale and

detailed clinicopathological studies including electron microscopy examinations will be necessary to elucidate the pathogenesis of IgG4-related renal lesions.

As the concept of IgG4-related disease was proposed relatively recently, it remains largely unrecognized by most clinicians. However, accurate diagnosis of IgG4-related disease is very important because steroid therapy is usually quite effective.^{19–22} In this study, the renal lesions had improved with corticosteroid therapy in most patients at the time of the 4-week follow-up. However, renal function did not recover in one patient (no. 22) with renal failure.¹⁰ Although in this study we were unable to characterize the clinicopathological differences between patients with better or worse renal function, because it was a retrospective analysis and only one patient showed worsened renal function after treatment, it is important to be aware that renal failure may also occur in IgG4-related disease if the diagnosis is delayed. Nephrologists should be aware of the condition in patients with tubulointerstitial nephritis, and measure the serum IgG4 level, especially when there is associated sialadenitis, lymphadenopathy, hypergammaglobulinemia, eosinophilia, hypocomplementemia,⁴¹ and a patchy lesion distribution. In addition, clinicians should be vigilant for the development of renal lesions at any time when following the course of involvement of other organs in patients with any IgG4-related disease, such as AIP. In five of the present patients, renal lesions developed during remission of the condition in other organs.

In conclusion, renal parenchymal lesions associated with IgG4-related disease appear to have characteristic clinicopathological features in comparison with those of other renal diseases, and therefore we propose the term 'IgG4-related tubulointerstitial nephritis' for this condition.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Patients and methods

A total of 153 patients with suspected IgG4-related disease were collected retrospectively from 22 collaborating institutions in Japan between September 2004 and August 2009, among whom 30 were diagnosed as having renal parenchymal abnormalities by their physicians. Among these 30 patients, we diagnosed 23 as having renal parenchymal lesions associated with IgG4-related disease. (In Table 1, patients nos 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13–16, 18 and 22 have been previously reported in references 10, 14, and 33–40.) The diagnosis was based on a high serum IgG4 level (> 135 mg/dl) and numerous infiltration of IgG4-positive plasma cells into the renal interstitium (IgG4-positive plasma cells/IgG-positive plasma cells > 40%; IgG4-positive plasma cells > 10 per h.p.f.) with fibrosis. Although the serum IgG4 level was not measured in one patient, we also diagnosed this patient as having renal parenchymal involvement associated with IgG4-related disease because of the presence of tubulointerstitial nephritis with infiltration of numerous IgG4-positive plasma cells into the renal interstitium with typical AIP and Mikulicz's disease. In the other 7 of 30 patients, renal parenchymal abnormalities were diagnosed on the basis of radiographic abnormalities. Five of these patients were diagnosed as having IgG4-related sialadenitis and dacryoadenitis and showed multiple hypoattenuating lesions in the renal cortex by contrast-enhanced

CT, with normal urinalysis values and normal renal function. One other patient (under hemodialysis) was diagnosed as having IgG4-related sclerosing cholangitis and end-stage renal disease, with evidence of a mass lesion in the right kidney by nonenhanced CT. Renal biopsy was not performed in these six patients. Another patient showed a right renal mass lesion and a high serum IgG4 level, with normal urinalysis values and mild renal dysfunction. As the tissue obtained by CT-guided renal biopsy of the mass lesion did not include any renal parenchyma, even though marked lymphoplasmacytic infiltration was observed in the adipose tissues, we excluded this patient.

In the 23 patients diagnosed as having renal parenchymal lesions associated with IgG4-related disease, we retrospectively examined the clinical features, data from laboratory and imaging studies, and the clinical response to treatment. Whole-body CT imaging was evaluated in all patients (contrast-enhanced CT in 21 patients). Gallium citrate scintigraphy was performed in 19 of the 23 patients, before therapy in 17 and during therapy in 2. The diagnosis of AIP was made in accordance with the 2006 Japan Pancreas Society revised criteria.⁴² Sialadenitis and dacryadenitis were diagnosed on the basis of physical findings, and the results of imaging studies (CT and gallium citrate scintigraphy) and/or biopsy.

The study was approved by the review board of the Nagaoka Red Cross Hospital and the boards of the various collaborating institutions. All data and samples from patients were collected with their informed consent, and the research was conducted in compliance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Renal pathology

Renal pathological examination was conducted at the request of the attending physicians because of urinary abnormalities, renal dysfunction, and/or radiological abnormalities. Renal tissues were obtained by nondirected medical needle biopsy in 21 patients, by open biopsy of the mass lesion in 1 patient (no. 8), and by autopsy in 1 patient (no. 3), who died of lung cancer. All renal tissue specimens were examined by light microscopy. Direct immunofluorescence studies were conducted in 17 patients, and we evaluated 14 specimens because 3 were considered inadequate. For routine light microscopy studies, renal biopsy specimens were fixed in formalin or alcohol-Bouin, embedded in paraffin, and stained with hematoxylin and eosin, periodic acid-Schiff, periodic acid-methenamine silver, and Masson's trichrome. For immunostaining, formalin-fixed, paraffin-embedded biopsy specimens were cut into 3- μ m thick sections, and the sections were immunostained using anti-IgG antibody (Dako, Glostrup, Denmark) and mouse monoclonal antibody against human IgG4 (Zymed Laboratory, San Francisco, CA, USA, or The Binding Site, Birmingham, UK). For direct immunofluorescence studies, tissues were snap frozen, and sections were treated with fluorescein isothiocyanate-conjugated rabbit anti-human IgG, IgA, IgM, C1q, C3c, or fibrinogen (Dako, Carpinteria, CA, USA).

DISCLOSURE

All the authors declared no competing interests.

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