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Original article

Usefulness of intraoperative diagnosis of hepatic tumors located at the liver surface and hepatic segmental visualization using indocyanine green-photodynamic eye imaging

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Running title: Utility of ICG-PDE in hepatectomy

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ABSTRACT

Background  To improve the diagnostic accuracy for hepatic tumors on the liver surface, we investigated the usefulness of an indocyanine green-photodynamic eye (ICG-PDE) system by comparison with Sonazoid intraoperative ultrasonography (IOUS) in 117 patients. Hepatic segmentation by ICG-PDE was also evaluated.

Methods  ICG was administered preoperatively for functional testing and images of the tumor were observed during hepatectomy using a PDE camera. ICG was injected into portal veins to determine hepatic segmentation.

Results  Accurate diagnosis of liver tumors was achieved with ICG-PDE in 75% of patients, lower than with IOUS (94%). False-positive and false-negative diagnosis rates for ICG-PDE were 24% and 9%, respectively. New small HCCs were detected in 3 patients. The ICG fluorescent pattern in tumors was strong staining in 41%, weak staining in 13%, rim staining in 20% and no staining in 26%. Hepatocellular carcinoma predominantly showed strong staining (61%), while rim staining predominated in cholangiocellular carcinoma (60%) and liver metastasis (55%). Hepatic segmental staining was performed in 28 patients, proving successful in 89%.

Conclusion  ICG-PDE is a useful tool for detecting the precise tumor location at the liver surface, identifying new small tumors, and determining liver segmentation for liver resection.

Key words: liver tumor; indocyanine green; photodynamic eye; navigation; hepatectomy
INTRODUCTION

Hepatic resection is a useful option in the radical treatment of various liver carcinomas.\textsuperscript{1} In the surgical procedure, radical resection without residual tumor is necessary to accomplish high curative rates.\textsuperscript{2} During hepatectomy, palpation and intraoperative ultrasonography (IOUS) are essential tools to determine tumor locations and identify small tumors undetected on preoperative imaging. Enhanced US has recently been applied to examine the vascular flow for detecting liver tumors or tumor morphology.\textsuperscript{3,4} The detection of liver malignancies by US has improved dramatically with the introduction of microbubble agents. Recent reports have clarified the utility of IOUS using Sonazoid microbubbles for intraoperative diagnosis.\textsuperscript{5,6} However, detection of small lesions less than 1 cm in diameter and differential diagnosis from cirrhotic nodules on the liver surface remains difficult with US.\textsuperscript{7} Other diagnostic modalities are therefore needed to facilitate diagnosis at the liver surface.

Indocyanine green (ICG) has usually been used to examine hepatic functional reserve.\textsuperscript{8,9} After intravenous administration, ICG immediately combines with serum protein, and this combined ICG is specifically taken up by the liver and immediately excreted into bile without being metabolized.\textsuperscript{10} In a normal liver, most ICG dissipates in the blood. ICG has also been applied to detect sentinel lymph nodes in cases of breast carcinoma, with detection using a new medical imaging system applying an infrared light detector, the ICG-photodynamic eye (PDE).\textsuperscript{11} Although near-infrared light cannot be seen with the naked eye, the distribution of subtle fluorescent materials in tissues can be precisely detected using a detector of near-infrared radiation, because the ICG accumulated in tissue fluoresces under excitation by light from a laser. Applying this approach to detect ICG fluorescence improves the specificity of ICG detection compared with dye injection detected on macroscopic observation.\textsuperscript{12} ICG-PDE has also recently been applied to detect liver tumors during hepatectomy.\textsuperscript{13-17} ICG may remain in or around a liver tumor for a couple of days after administration and the
contrast between liver tumor and liver parenchyma can be marked. Accumulation of ICG might differ between histological types or levels of differentiation.\textsuperscript{13} As anatomical resection of the liver and post-hepatectomy complications are likely to affect patient survival,\textsuperscript{18-19} visualization of the precise segmentation for resection and prevention of complications are important from an oncological perspective. With intravenous or intrabiliary injection of ICG, detection of segmental fluorescence, clarification of the biliary anatomy and identification of bile leakage at the transected liver becomes possible.\textsuperscript{20-22} However, the diagnostic accuracy, limitations and clinical applications of ICG-PDE have yet to be fully clarified. We hypothesized that ICG-PDE can improve the accuracy of diagnosing liver tumors at the liver surface and that ICG navigation surgery would be feasible as an alternative to blue-dye injection, or “tattooing”, for achieving anatomical hepatectomy.\textsuperscript{23} Accurate diagnosis of tumor location and adequate segmentectomy during surgery are important for achieving complete cure.

The aim of the present preliminary study was thus to clarify various aspects of ICG-PDE imaging. For this purpose, we assessed the use of ICG-PDE in 117 patients with benign or malignant hepatobiliary diseases who underwent surgical resections by comparison with the conventional diagnostic tool of Sonazoid-IOUS, and examined the feasibility and limitations of this modality for tumor diagnosis. The possibility of applying ICG navigation to hepatectomy was also considered.
Patients and methods

Patient background

Study participants comprised 117 patients with hepatobiliary tumors who were scheduled for surgery and admitted to the Division of Surgical Oncology at Nagasaki University Hospital (NUH) between November 2009 and January 2014. In this study, all patients were also examined by Sonazoid-IOUS as a reference since 2009 after its approval by the Japanese health authorities. Liver tumors included hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) in 56 patients, intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma (CCC) in 12, colorectal liver metastasis in 36, hilar bile duct carcinoma in two, gall bladder carcinoma in four, neuroendocrine tumor in one and benign liver tumors in six (including hemangioma in two, angiomyolipoma in one, biliary adenoma in one, liver fibrosis in one and hematoma in one). Patients comprised 79 men and 38 women, with a mean (±standard deviation (SD)) age at the time of surgery of 68.6 ± 11.6 years (range, 31-85 years). Background liver disease included normal liver in 42 patients, fatty liver in seven, cancer chemotherapy-associated liver dysfunction in 11, chronic viral hepatitis in 40, cirrhosis due to viral hepatitis in 15 and obstructive jaundice in two. Operative procedures included trisectionectomy, hemihepatectomy or central bisegmentectomy in 31 patients, segmentectomy or sectionectomy in 47, limited resection in 38 and other surgery in two (including tumor biopsy in both cases). All study protocols were approved by the Human Ethics Review Board at our institution. Informed consent for data collection was obtained from each patient during this period. Anesthesia data and patient data were retrieved from the NUH database.

Procedure of Sonazoid-IOUS and ICG-PDE

Examination of IOUS and contrast-enhanced IOUS was performed using a Xario™ XG system (Toshiba Medical Systems, Tokyo, Japan) and a microconvex probe (PVT-375BT, 3.5
MHz; Toshiba Medical Systems), as well as an intraoperative probe (PLT-705BTH, 7.5 MHz). All IOUS was performed by surgeons to help determine the need for hepatectomy. For tumors located at the liver surface, the liver was covered with warm saline to reduce the air gap between the probe and liver surface. An intravenous bolus injection of 0.5 ml of perflubutane microbubbles (Sonazoid) was administered via the peripheral vein at the time of making the laparotomy incision to observe Kupffer-phase images at 1-2 h after injection, because the microbubbles remain for a long time.\(^5,6\) Liver tumors were identified as low-contrast perfusion defects compared with normal liver parenchyma. Intraoperatively, viewing of the late Kupffer-phase images was first started and main liver tumors were clearly detected as perfusion defects, appearing as ill-defined low-echoic areas. Intratumor revascularization in the arterial phase was then examined and poor vascularization was confirmed by the reperfusion technique.

ICG was intravenously injected 4-7 days before hepatectomy to examine the routine ICG retention rate at 15 min, in order to evaluate hepatic functional reserve, as a necessary step in deciding on operative indications.\(^8,9\) When ICG testing was performed over 14 days before hepatectomy, 10 ml of diluted ICG (0.5 mg/kg of ICG dissolved in distilled water) was intravenously injected the day before hepatectomy. During laparotomy, under dark conditions, a PDE camera system (Hamamatsu Photonics, Hamamatsu, Japan) (Fig. 1) was applied to detect ICG fluorescence. This system irradiated the ICG combined with serum protein with infrared light (wavelength, 750-830 nm). The excited ICG fluoresced at a wavelength of 845 nm, which was detected by the PDE detector. First, to determine tumor location, the surface of the whole liver was observed. All liver tumors and lesions newly detected by ICG-PDE were also observed by palpation and Sonazoid-IOUS again.\(^5\) Small spots of strong fluorescence less than 5 mm in diameter identified by ICG-PDE were partially resected as biopsy specimens in the present study (Fig. 2A). The pattern of fluorescent on ICG-PDE for
liver tumors was defined as: 1) strong stain (Fig. 2B); 2) weak stain (Fig. 2C); 3) rim stain around the tumor (Fig. 2D); or 4) no stain. In this study, a false-positive result was defined as positive fluorescence on ICG-PDE of a non-tumorous lesion, and a false-negative result was defined as no fluorescence on ICG-PDE of a tumorous lesion.

Subsequently, in cases requiring anatomical hepatic resection, 5 ml of ICG diluted with 100 ml of distilled water (0.25 mg/ml) was intraoperatively injected into the portal vein supplying the estimated area for liver resection under IOUS. Accompanied by macroscopic findings for ICG dye and IOUS, the area of fluorescing liver was marked by diathermy (Fig. 3A). After hepatic resection, resected tumors and surgical margins were observed for specimens and the amputated area of remnant liver. To detect bile duct leakage at the cut surface, 0.25 mg/ml of ICG was injected into the bile duct via the cystic duct and careful examination for tiny spots or extravasation of bile was performed at the cut surface (Fig. 3B).

**Statistical analysis**

All continuous data are expressed as mean ±SD. Data were compared between groups using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The chi-square test was used to compare categorical variables. Two-tailed P values <0.05 were considered significant. SPSS for Windows version 18.0 software (SPSS, an IBM Company, Chicago, IL) was used for all statistical analyses.
Results

Feasibility and diagnosis of liver tumors by ICG-PDE

Intraoperative ICG-PDE was able to be carried out for all patients without ICG-related side effects. Mean tumor size was 3.6±1.8 cm (range, 0.5-8.5 cm). Accurate diagnosis of benign and malignant liver tumors was achieved in 110 of 117 patients (94%) by Sonazoid-IOUS and 88 of 117 patients (75%) by ICG-PDE. A difference in diagnosis was seen between Sonazoid-IOUS and ICG-PDE in 27 of the 117 patients (24%). No significant relationship between tumor location and detectability of ICG-PDE was observed (data not shown).

False-positive and false-negative diagnoses by Sonazoid-IOUS numbered three (2%) and seven (6%), while those by ICG-PDE numbered 28 (24%) and 10 (9%), respectively. Reasons for lesions being technically undetectable on ICG-PDE included depth of the tumor (fluorescence was not observed in deep lesions >10 mm from the liver surface due to the limitations of fluorescent permeability) in seven patients (5.6%).

Diagnostic accuracy for malignant liver tumor in the 117 patients was compared between Sonazoid-IOUS and ICG-PDE. Sonazoid-IOUS diagnosed 109 of 111 malignant tumors and 5 of 6 non-malignant tumors. Sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value, negative predictive value and accuracy were 98%, 83%, 99%, 71% and 97%, respectively. ICG-PDE diagnosed 85 of 111 malignant tumors and 3 of 6 non-malignant tumors. Sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value, negative predictive value and accuracy were 77%, 50%, 97%, 10% and 75%, respectively. Single diagnostic accuracy for malignant liver tumors was higher for Sonazoid-IOUS than for ICG-PDE.

The ICG fluorescent pattern in liver tumors was divided into four types, as follows: strong staining in 47 patients (41%); weak staining in 15 (13%); rim staining surrounding the tumor in 25 (20%); and no staining in 30 (26%). The relationship between the ICG fluorescent pattern of the tumor lesion and the type of liver tumor is shown in Table 1.
In benign tumors, angiomyolipoma with hypervascular enhancement showed strong ICG staining, while biliary adenoma with mild vascularity showed weak homogeneous staining. Cavernous hemangioma showed rim staining. Non-tumorous lesions showed no staining. All benign lesions were able to be diagnosed by ICG-PDE.

In malignant tumors, ICG fluorescence was observed in 41 of 56 patients (74%) with HCC; strong staining was predominantly observed in these cases, representing 61%. Rim staining was observed in only one patient. ICG fluorescence was observed in 10 of 12 patients (83%) with CCC; for these cases, rim staining was predominantly observed, representing 60%. Strong staining was observed in 30%. ICG fluorescence was observed in 31 of the 36 patients (86%) with liver metastasis; these patients predominantly showed rim staining, representing 55%. Strong or weak staining was observed in 47%. One patient with neuroendocrine liver tumor with hypervascularity showed strong staining. In the gallbladder, one patient with liver bed invasion showed strong staining, but three other tumors did not show any staining. The two patients with bile duct carcinoma showed no staining without liver metastasis.

ICG-PDE fluorescent patterns for accessory benign liver lesions in patients with malignant tumors are shown in Table 2. Liver cysts showed ICG fluorescence in 7 of 12 lesions (58%), while small hemangioma showed fluorescence in 4 of 6 lesions (67%). Small spot fluorescence was observed in seven lesions and an ablated lesion showed rim staining. In cirrhotic liver, weaker, non-specific staining was seen in comparison with the fluorescence detectable in main tumors, possibly due to a delayed discharge of ICG into liver parenchyma. Bile leakage spot was observed in two cases (Fig. 2B). New small lesions of intrahepatic metastasis from the main HCC apparent only on ICG-PDE were observed in three patients. On the other hand, intrahepatic metastasis from the main HCC was not detected by ICG-PDE in four patients. Three patients showed visible tumor lesions between 5 and 8 mm in diameter.
A non-visible lesion 2 mm in diameter was histologically confirmed in the resected specimen from one patient. Strong fluorescence of macroscopic tumor thrombus in the portal trunk was achieved via the portal vein wall in two patients. Lymph node metastasis of CCC was not detected by ICG-PDE.

**Segmental visualization by fluorescent staining using ICG-PDE**

Hepatic segmental or sectional staining for ICG-PDE navigation hepatectomy was performed for 28 patients. The scheduled segmental staining could be performed in 25 patients (89%) for whom a burden of the posterior sector and caudate lobe could be counter-stained (the posterior sector was stained and the caudate lobe was not). The remaining three patients showed technical failure of scheduled segmental staining including caudate counter-staining.
Discussion

ICG-PDE has recently been applied to detect lymph nodes via the lymphatic duct in the fields of breast and digestive surgery, and to detect vascular flow in other fields of surgery. The PDE system is thus useful to observe the dynamic changes of various materials inside the body. In the hepato-biliary-pancreatic field, application of ICG-PDE has also been attempted to detect the intrahepatic tumor location, hepatic segmentation, biliary leakage and status for biliary surgery. However, to the best of our knowledge, the usefulness and reliability of ICG-PDE in this field have not been fully clarified. From previous reports, the depth of tissue detectable by ICG-PDE might be less than 10 mm (no data or references shown), so this diagnosis may be applicable only at the liver surface or on cut surfaces of hepatic parenchyma. ICG that has combined with serum protein in the liver usually washes out within several hours, but remains trapped for a long period within liver tumors such as HCC, ICC, and metastatic liver carcinomas. In the case of ICG testing, ICG is specifically collected in the liver via hepatic blood flow and the hypervascular liver area shows marked staining. ICG is then metabolized in the hepatic cells and immediately excreted into bile. However, in hypervascular tumor lesions, ICG is trapped and excretion may be delayed for a long period. However, the mechanisms underlying retention in malignancies have not yet been clarified, although ICG might be trapped in cancer cells in cases of hypervascular tumors such as HCC. This type of lesion could thus be detected using a near-infrared ray detector in the ICG-PDE system. Alternatively, Sonazoid-IOUS offers a powerful approach for imaging diagnosis to detect tumor distributions. Sonazoid became available as a contrast medium containing microbubbles in 2007, and has been widely applied for the diagnosis of liver tumors including HCC, CCC and liver metastasis. The introduction of this agent has markedly improved the accuracy of diagnosing liver tumors to levels similar to those of magnetic
resonance imaging with gadolinium ethoxybenzyl diethylenetriaminepentaacetic acid. Although even small lesions could be detected in deep areas of the liver by Sonazoid-IOUS, detection at the liver surface or on cut surfaces represent a blind spot for this approach. This modality has already been established as the conventional diagnostic tool at our institute. We therefore hypothesized that the combination of Sonazoid-IOUS and ICG-PDE would offer a more powerful diagnostic tool for the intraoperative detection of tumor distribution. However, the advantages and limitations of each modality should also be clarified.

In the present series, all liver tumors could be detected by ICG-PDE. In 117 patients, we attempted both Sonazoid-US and ICG-PDE during hepatectomy to overcome the limitation of Sonazoid-IOUS alone. Occult metastatic lesions undetected on preoperative examinations and IOUS were expected to be detected by the new powerful diagnostic tool according to the hypothesis of the present study. As a result, the overall rate of accurate diagnosis by ICG-PDE was lower than that by Sonazoid-IOUS, because of the different fluorescent rates in various tumors, tumor depth, and the limited size of small tumors. Occult intrahepatic metastasis could be observed in only three patients and the clinical significance of additional ICG-PDE was very limited. With respect to the accurate diagnosis of malignant liver tumors, Sonazoid-IOUS was more reliable and available as the conventional diagnostic tool during hepatectomy according to our results. However, the aim of the present study was to clarify the diagnostic limitations of IOUS of the liver surface combined with ICG-PDE. From this perspective, our concept of a combination method might be useful in improving surgical results.

According to recent reports, the fluorescent patterns of liver tumors vary among homogeneous strong staining, heterogeneous weak staining, staining surrounding the tumor or no staining. Such variation was confirmed in the present series. In hypervascular benign tumors, ICG fluorescence was strongly detected due to vascular retention. However,
in the non-structural area of nodular lesions, no fluorescence was observed. ICG-PDE might thus be useful for differentiation from non-tumorous lesions in the liver. Among the malignant lesions, hypervascular tumors such as HCC, some CCC and neuroendocrine tumors showed strong staining by ICG retention. In cases of liver tumor with strong fluorescence, residual tumor lesions at the resected edge were easily observed and some additional lesions could be completely resected. Among colorectal liver metastasis, vascularity was often observed around the tumor, so detecting the edge of the surgical margins might be difficult for colorectal tumors. We attempted ICG-PDE for adjacent malignancies, such as gallbladder carcinoma or bile duct carcinoma. However, ICG-PDE is not useful for detecting fluorescence of the main tumor or surrounding cancer metastasis, because of the low rate of fluorescence. Among accessory lesions, cysts and hemangiomas were identifiable from ICG-PDE, so a false-positive diagnosis must be ruled out. In benign cysts, fluorescence of ICG was caused by fluid retained in the cyst, but not by hemorrhage, and the precise mechanisms underlying this phenomenon have yet to be explained. In such accessory lesions with identification of biliary leakage spots and detection of portal vein thrombosis, the clinical usefulness of ICG-PDE has already been reported.17-22

In patients with severe liver injury such as cirrhosis or those who underwent ICG administration within a few days, multiple false-positive fluorescent spots were observed. False-positive spots have also been previously reported observed in tumor diagnosis.16 This problem remains in patients with very poor liver function who may have undergone liver transplantation,30 but few problems of false-positive areas were seen in patients indicated for hepatectomy in the present study. As shown from our results, false-positive areas were shown as tiny spots that were readily distinguished from true liver lesions. Some patients occasionally undergo ablation therapy or transarterial chemoembolization (TACE) prior to the hepatectomy. This results in alteration of the echogenicity of the treated area, appearing
as hypoechoic lesions. Accurate differentiation between necrotic lesions and viable tumors may then be difficult by conventional US. However, early vascularization in the tumor area or surrounding region is a sign of tumor viability. In the resected area after hepatectomy, subtle remnant tumor cannot be macroscopically observed intraoperatively. The cut surface under ICG-PDE showed spotted areas of remnant tumor confirmed by histological findings in some of our cases.

Anatomical resection of the liver can be needed under various circumstances, as described above. Another application of ICG-PDE is segmentation by portal injection of ICG. Tattooing or blue-dye segmentation has been applied to achieve anatomical segmentectomy or sectorectomy. With those methods, visualization of the stained area is sometimes difficult and the dye soon washes out. Segmentation using ICG-PDE might enable clearer detection, although detailed comparisons were not performed in the present study. The usefulness of ICG-PDE segmentation compared with the conventional dye method has also not yet been reported. The present series also applied ICG-PDE segmentation as a counter-stain for non-stained areas to confirm the segment to be resected in the caudate lobe or segment 8.

By injecting ICG into the bile duct, biliary fistula could be sensitively detected using the ICG-PDE system, as described in previous reports. In the present series, unexpected areas of biliary fistula could be detected by testing for bile leakage just after hepatectomy in a few cases. In one patient who underwent right hepatectomy, amputated-type biliary fistula in the remnant left caudate lobe that could not be controlled by chemical ablation or fibrin glue was able to be detected by ICG-PDE during reoperation for fixation of biliary fistula. This lesion was locally ablated and well-controlled after reoperation.

Future applications of ICG-PDE have recently been proposed. One approach is application to tumor detection during laparoscopic hepatectomy. Development of a laparoscopy-exclusive ICG-PDE system is expected. Another application is use in photodynamic therapy (PDT) to
treat ICG-accumulating liver tumors by laser excitation using light of different wavelengths. At present, although sufficient effects of PDT using ICG-PDE have not been confirmed, a recent report by Kaneko et al. showed the possibility of PDT with ICG-PDE for liver cancer in an animal model. Such a laser-applied tools could be improved for future approaches. In conclusion, we have demonstrated that ICG-PDE allows easy examination of the tumor distribution, including identification of new lesions or remnant cancer at the liver surface or cut edge after hepatectomy, for detection of the extent of portal trunk tumor thrombosis of HCC, for detection of unexpected biliary fistula, and for determination of the extent of the area to be resected by portal vein injection as a method of ICG navigation, potentially facilitating decision-making for hepatic resection. This new imaging modality could become a standard procedure combined with enhanced IOUS or palpation in patients with liver tumors who undergo hepatectomy.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.
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FIGURE LEGENDS

Fig. 1  The ICG-PDE camera system.

Fig. 2  Representative image of the ICG-PDE system during operation. A small (less than 5 mm in diameter), strongly fluorescing spot on ICG-PDE (A). The pattern of ICG-PDE fluorescence in liver tumors was defined as: 1) strong stain (B); 2) weak stain (C); 3) rim staining around the tumor (D); or 4) no stain. B and C show sections from a resected specimen.

Fig. 3  Findings of ICG dye injection in the portal vein for the targeted segment. The fluorescing area of liver (segments 7 and 8) show marked ICG fluorescence (A). To detect bile duct leakage by ICG injection into the bile duct, tiny spots or extravasation of bile were confirmed as strongly fluorescing spot lesions on the cut surface (B).
Fig. 3

A)

B)
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* Rim stain