

Molecular cloning and functional expression of a novel potassium channel β -subunit from human atrium

Kumud Majumder^{a,**}, Mariella De Biasi^{a,b}, Zhiguo Wang^a, Barbara A. Wible^{a,*}

^aDepartment of Molecular Physiology and Biophysics, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX 77030, USA

^bDepartment of Pharmacology, University of Padua, Largo Meneghetti 2, 35131 Padua, Italy

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Abstract We report the cloning and functional expression of a novel K⁺ channel β -subunit from human atrium, hKv β 3. hKv β 3 is highly homologous to the two β -subunits cloned from rat brain, Kv β 1 and Kv β 2, but has an essentially unique stretch of 79 N-terminal residues. Upon expression in *Xenopus* oocytes, hKv β 3 accelerates the inactivation of co-injected hKv1.4 currents and induces fast inactivation of non-inactivating co-injected hKv1.5 currents. By contrast, hKv β 3 had no effect on hKv1.1, hKv1.2, or hKv2.1 currents. Thus, hKv β 3 represents a third type of K⁺ channel β -subunit which modulates the kinetics of a unique subset of channels in the Kv1 subfamily.

Key words: Potassium channel; β -Subunit; Human heart; cDNA cloning; *Xenopus* oocyte

1. Introduction

Voltage-gated ion channels are formed by a pore-forming α -subunit the functional characteristics of which may be modified by one or more accessory proteins [1]. In the case of Na⁺ channels, the kinetic properties of the α -subunit may be altered by one or more β -subunits [2]. For Ca²⁺ channels, a variety of accessory proteins, including $\alpha_2\delta$, γ , and four different β -subunits have been described [1]. K⁺ channels have been shown to associate with accessory subunits as well [3,4], and two members of a new family of β -subunits which interact with K⁺ channels have recently been cloned [5,6]. Rat brain Kv β 1 introduces inactivation into a non-inactivating delayed rectifier K⁺ channel, Kv1.1, and accelerates the inactivation of a fast-inactivating K⁺ channel, Kv1.4, while no effect on K⁺ channel kinetics has been described for Kv β 2 [6]. K⁺ channels constitute the most diverse group of ion channels [7,8], and modulatory β -subunits might serve to increase the functional diversity of K⁺ currents. Thus, characterizing the interaction of β -subunits with K⁺ channel gene products is a critical step in determining the molecular composition of individual native K⁺ currents.

Cardiac K⁺ currents are crucial to the maintenance of the complex electrical activity of the heart [9]. A variety of K⁺

channel genes are expressed in the heart [10], yet little is known about the molecular basis of individual cardiac K⁺ currents. Here we have examined human atrium for the presence of K⁺ channel β -subunit sequences, and report the cloning of a novel member of this family, hKv β 3. Through heterologous expression in *Xenopus* oocytes, the functional effects of this accessory subunit on a number of human K⁺ channels, including the voltage-gated channels hKv1.1, hKv1.2, hKv1.4, hKv1.5, and hKv2.1, have been examined. We find that hKv β 3 specifically modulates the kinetics of hKv1.5 and hKv1.4. The existence of multiple β -subunits with specific functional effects on K⁺ channel subsets brings a new perspective to the search for the link between K⁺ channel gene products and native currents.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Cloning of hKv β 3 from human atrium

Specimens of atrial appendages were obtained from adult patients undergoing coronary bypass surgery. Total RNA was extracted using RNA-Stat 60 (Tel-Test Inc., Houston, TX) according to the manufacturer's protocol. Poly(A)⁺ RNA was isolated from total RNA with the oligo-dT-based Messenger RNA Isolation Kit (Stratagene). A mixture of oligo(dT)₁₂₋₁₈ primers and random hexamers [pd(N)₆] was used to prime first strand cDNA synthesis from 10 μ g poly(A)⁺ RNA using the TimeSaver cDNA Synthesis Kit (Pharmacia). Construction of the cDNA library was done with the cDNA Synthesis Kit from Stratagene. 120 ng of double-stranded cDNA (>700 bp), following fractionation on Sephacryl S-400, was ligated to 1 μ g EcoRI-CIAP treated λ -ZAPII vector (Stratagene). The ligation product was packaged in Phagemaker In Vitro Packaging System (Novagen), and resulted in 1×10^6 independent recombinant clones. The unamplified library was screened at low stringency for sequences homologous to bovine Kv β 2. The probe, bovine Kv β 2 cDNA [1], was obtained by RT-PCR from bovine brain poly(A)⁺ RNA (Clontech), and ³²P random prime labelled (Multiprime DNA Labeling System; Amersham). Hybridization was for 16–18 h at 45°C in RapidHyb buffer (Amersham) at a probe concentration of 3×10^6 cpm/ml, and the filters were washed at 45°C with $1 \times$ SSC, 0.1% SDS ($1 \times$ SSC contains 150 mM NaCl, 15 mM sodium citrate, pH 7.0). Three positive clones were isolated, and the pBluescript SK(–) plasmids excised from λ -ZAPII. The clone with the longest insert, 2.6 kb, was sequenced in its entirety in both directions, and found to contain a single open reading frame encoding 408 amino acids with homology to rat and bovine Kv β subunits.

2.2. Expression of hKv β 3 cRNA in *Xenopus* oocytes

To boost the expression of hKv β 3 in oocytes, the hKv β 3 cDNA was subcloned into an expression vector which contains a poly(A)⁺-tail, A⁺-pCRII [14]. The coding region of hKv β 3 was amplified by PCR to facilitate cloning into the *Apal*–*EcoRI* sites of A⁺-pCRII. The hKv β 3 PCR product was sequenced completely and found to be identical to the original clone.

Complementary RNA (cRNA) for injection into oocytes was prepared as previously described following linearization of the plasmid with *Bam*HI [10]. The origin of the cDNAs co-injected with hKv β 3 is as follows. hKv1.5 was previously cloned in our laboratory [11], and subcloned into A⁺-pCRII for oocyte expression. hKv1.4 was obtained by RT-PCR of human heart total RNA using oligonucleotides derived

*Corresponding author. Fax: (1) (713) 798-3475.

**Present address: Department of Cell Biology, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX, USA.

Abbreviations: SDS, sodium dodecyl sulfate; NMDG, *N*-methyl-D-glucamine; MES, 2(*N*-morpholino)ethanesulphonic acid; HEPES, *N*-2-hydroxyethyl-piperazine-*N'*-2-ethanesulfonyl acid; SSC, saline-sodium citrate; PCR, polymerase chain reaction; RT-PCR, reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction; kb, kilobase pairs; bp, base pairs; N- terminal, amino-terminal.

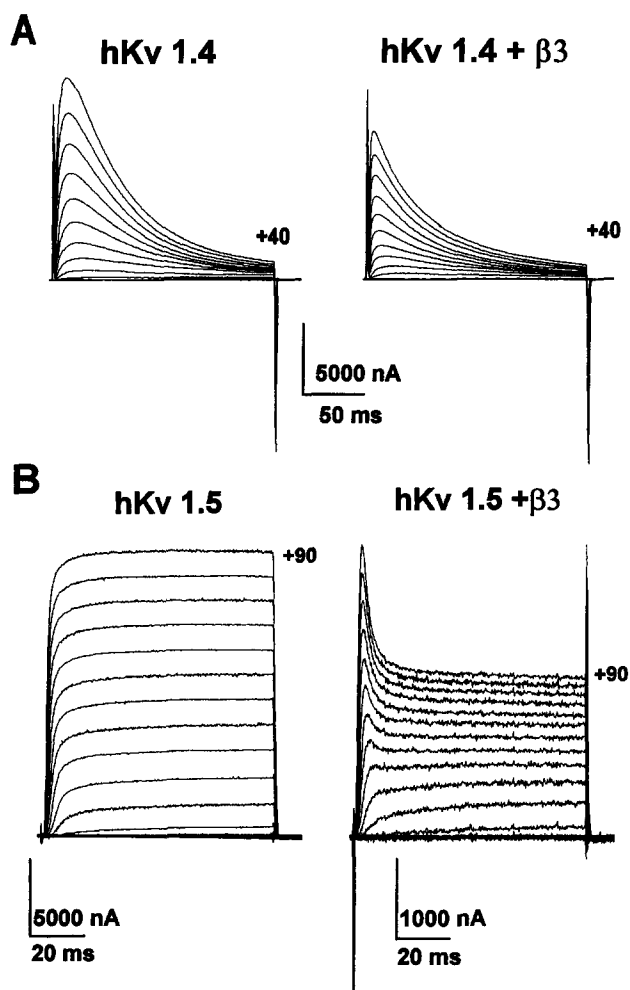


Fig. 2. Effect of hKv β 3 on human K⁺ channels hKv1.4 and hKv1.5. (A) Families of currents recorded from hKv1.4 (left) and hKv1.4 co-expressed with hKv β 3 (right), stepping from -60 mV to $+40$ mV with 10 mV steps from a holding potential of -80 mV. (B) K⁺ currents recorded from oocytes injected with hKv1.5 (left) and hKv1.5 plus hKv β 3 (right). The recordings were obtained by stepping from a holding potential of -80 mV with 10 mV steps from -60 mV to $+90$ mV. A P/4 subtraction was used to correct for leakage and capacitance currents only in the record in the left panel.

we heterologously expressed hKv β 3 in *Xenopus* oocytes in the presence of a variety of K⁺ channel subunits. Initially we examined the interaction of hKv β 3 with a fast inactivating channel, hKv1.4, which expresses an A-type current when expressed in *Xenopus* oocytes (Fig. 2A, left). When co-injected with hKv β 3, inactivation of hKv1.4 currents was accelerated at potentials ranging from $+20$ to $+80$ mV (Fig. 2A, right). The currents were best fitted to a double exponential function. The faster time constant was 2–3 times smaller than that calculated for hKv1.4 alone (at $+70$ mV, $\tau_1 = 13.5 \pm 1.9$ ms for hKv1.4 plus hKv β 3 compared to 39.8 ± 10.2 ms for hKv1.4 alone, $P < 0.01$; at $+40$ mV, $\tau_1 = 22.8 \pm 3.6$ ms for hKv1.4 plus hKv β 3 compared to 39.9 ± 5.8 ms for hKv1.4, $P < 0.05$; $n = 5-8$). The slower time constant, τ_2 , was also decreased in the presence of hKv β 3 (at $+70$ mV, $\tau_2 = 62.1 \pm 3.0$ ms for hKv1.4 plus hKv β 3 compared to 117.4 ± 31.8 ms for hKv1.4 alone, $P > 0.05$; at $+40$ mV, $\tau_2 = 77.8 \pm 5.8$ for hKv1.4 plus hKv β 3 compared to

119.5 ± 27.5 for hKv1.4 alone, $P > 0.05$; $n = 5-8$). In comparison, when fitted to a single exponential, Kv β 1 decreases the τ_1 of Kv1.4 approximately six-fold at $+50$ mV [6].

We also examined the effects of hKv β 3 on the delayed rectifier hKv1.5, which exhibits little inactivation during a 200 ms pulse (Fig. 2B, left). Upon co-expression with hKv β 3, fast inactivation of the whole-cell currents appeared (Fig. 2B, right; $n = 16$) at very depolarized potentials ($+30$ to $+90$ mV): $13.0 \pm 0.2\%$ and $36.0 \pm 0.2\%$ of the whole-cell currents were inactivated at $+40$ mV and $+90$ mV, respectively ($n = 25$). The current decay was best fitted with a double exponential function. The faster time constant (τ_1) (3.83 ± 0.1 ms at $+90$ mV; 3.50 ± 0.2 ms at $+40$ mV; $n = 11$) was not voltage-dependent ($P > 0.05$), whereas the slower time constant (τ_2) was voltage-dependent with values of 39.7 ± 4.3 ms at $+90$ mV and 94.0 ± 10.7 ms at $+40$ mV ($P < 0.001$; $n = 11$). In addition, unlike hKv1.4, the level of hKv1.5 currents appeared to be five- to ten-fold lower in the presence of hKv β 3. The reason for this effect is presently unknown.

Of the channels examined in the Kv1 subfamily, hKv β 3 was specific for hKv1.4 and hKv1.5. Two other human channels, hKv1.1 and hKv1.2, generate non-inactivating delayed rectifier currents when expressed in oocytes, but, as illustrated in Fig. 3A and B, no inactivation was observed at potentials up to $+80$ mV ($n = 31$ and 20 , respectively) when either channel was co-expressed with hKv β 3. Furthermore, hKv β 3 had no observable effect on the expression levels of either Kv1.1 or Kv1.2 currents.

The specificity of hKv β 3 was further confirmed in co-injection experiments with the voltage-gated delayed rectifier, hKv2.1. No effects on inactivation or level of expression of whole-cell currents were observed when hKv β 3 was co-injected with equal amounts of hKv2.1 cRNA (Fig. 3C; $n = 8$). We also examined two inward rectifiers which share homology in the H5 or putative pore region with voltage-gated K⁺ channels, IRK1 [17] and hIRK, cloned from human atrium [18]. No kinetic changes in the presence of hKv β 3 at potentials ranging from -120 mV to $+50$ mV were observed (data not shown). Finally, currents from oocytes injected with hKv β 3 resembled those of uninjected oocytes (Fig. 3D).

The human heart clone, hKv β 3, constitutes the third member of a newly described β -subunit gene family. hKv β 3 affects the kinetic properties of hKv1.5 and hKv1.4, both of which are expressed in heart [19]. Kv1.2 and Kv2.1 are also expressed in heart [19], yet, interestingly, hKv β 3 has no apparent effect on the inactivation properties of these two channels or on hKv1.1, which is abundantly expressed in the brain [20]. Thus, hKv β 3 is able to differentially affect members of the Kv1 subfamily.

The specificity of hKv β 3 is different from that observed for rat brain Kv β 1, which introduces fast inactivation into Kv1.1 and accelerates the inactivation of Kv1.4 [6]. The proposed mechanism for Kv β 1 induced inactivation is through a ball peptide-like sequence in the N-terminus. hKv β 3 is identical to Kv β 1 except in the N-terminal region, however, sequence alignments within this region indicate that hKv β 3 may actually possess two ball peptide-like sequences. Mutational analysis in this region may bring insight into the mechanism and specificity of hKv β 3.

For heart, one of the unanswered questions is the molecular nature of the channels that underlie the transient outward current, I_{to} [21,22]. Heteromultimeric assembly of specific K⁺ channel subunits has been shown to generate inactivating currents

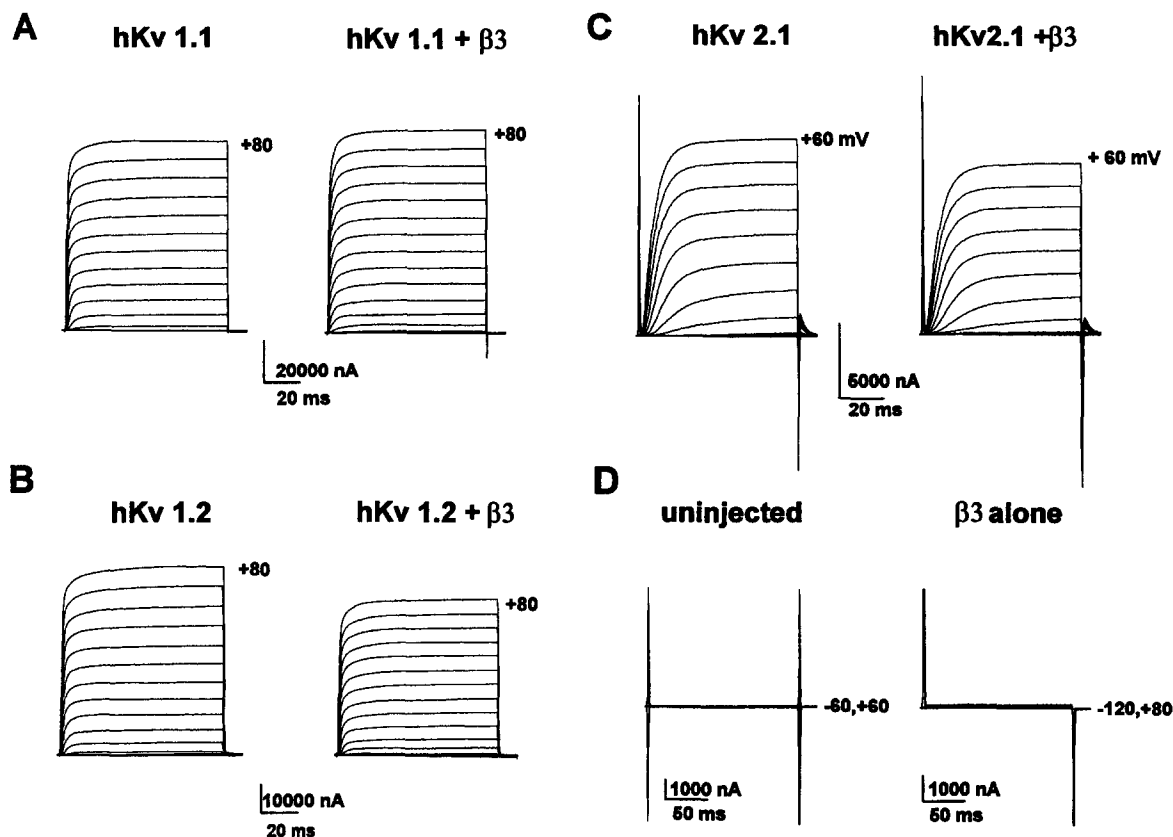


Fig. 3. Effects of hKvβ3 on hKv1.1, hKv1.2 and hKv2.1. (A) hKv1.1 (left) and hKv1.1 plus hKvβ3 currents recorded with 10 mV steps from -60 mV to $+80$ mV from a holding potential of -60 mV. P/4 subtraction was performed to correct for leakage and capacitance currents. (B) hKv1.2 (left) and hKv1.2 plus hKvβ3 (right) currents elicited by the same pulse protocol described in A. A P/4 subtraction protocol was also applied to these records. (C) Whole-oocyte currents recorded from hKv2.1 alone (left) or in the presence of hKvβ3 (right) with 10 mV steps from -60 mV to $+60$ mV from a holding potential of -60 mV. (D) Currents recorded from either un.injected oocytes (left) or oocytes injected with cRNA encoding hKvβ3 alone.

which resemble, but do not reproduce entirely, the properties of native I_{to} [23]. The interaction of endogenous cardiac β -subunits with K^+ channel gene products might provide the missing molecular component of I_{to} currents.

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