

Dephosphorylation of PKC δ by protein phosphatase 2Ac and its inhibition by nucleotides

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Received 29 January 2002; accepted 14 February 2002

First published online 4 March 2002

Edited by Giulio Superti-Furga

Abstract The protein phosphatases PP1_c, PP2A_c and PP2C α are shown to dephosphorylate protein kinase C δ (PKC δ) *in vitro*; of these PP2A_c displayed the highest specific activity towards PKC δ . The role of PP2A_c in the dephosphorylation of PKC δ in cells was supported by the demonstration that these proteins could be co-immunoprecipitated from NIH3T3 cells. However the observation that binding of Mg-ATP to PKC δ could protect the enzyme from dephosphorylation by PP2A_c *in vitro* indicates that an additional input/factor is required for dephosphorylation *in vivo*. © 2002 Federation of European Biochemical Societies. Published by Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

Key words: Protein kinase C δ ; Protein phosphatase; PP1; PP2C; PP2A; Dephosphorylation

1. Introduction

The protein kinase C (PKC) family of lipid-dependent serine/threonine kinases are known to play key roles in a whole range of cellular functions, including cell growth, differentiation and apoptosis. To unravel the molecular mechanisms underlying the diverse roles of the different members, it is important to define how each PKC isoform is regulated. In this regard much effort has been directed at defining the effectors involved in receptor-dependent activation. However it is evident that regulated loss of function, i.e. desensitisation, is critical in the response of cells. This is exemplified by the action of the PKC activator bryostatin I which can block responses to the PKC activator tetradecanoyl phorbol acetate (TPA), and induces an anomalous biphasic degradation of PKC δ [1]. This demonstrates clearly that the response of cells is dependent on the timing of PKC activation.

For PKC α , induced degradation appears to require the traffic of the membrane-associated protein to a perinuclear region, where dephosphorylation occurs, followed by ubiquitin conjugation and degradation through a proteasomal mechanism [2–5]. Evidence on the degradation of PKC δ indicates that this protein also undergoes dephosphorylation prior to a ubiquitin-dependent degradation [6]. The degradation of PKC (cPKC and nPKC isotypes) is not only a function of chronic pharmacological activation, but occurs in response to sustained activation by hormones and growth factors [7,8]. In

particular for PKC δ this process is under cell cycle control. PKC δ overexpression induces a cell cycle arrest consistent with the notion that PKC δ degradation may contribute to cell cycle progression (recently reviewed [9]). However the mechanisms involved in this are unknown.

The mammalian cell contains four subfamilies of serine/threonine protein phosphatases, PP1-like, PP2A-like, PP2B and PP2C, which are responsible for the dephosphorylation of cellular proteins involved in a whole host of functions such as the regulation of cell metabolism, DNA replication, cell cycle control, development and transformation [10]. Both PP1 and PP2A exist in the cell as a variety of holoenzyme complexes, and are major phosphatases in the cell [11,12]. Dimeric PP2B, otherwise known as calcineurin, requires Ca²⁺/calmodulin binding for activation and hence is an important player in Ca²⁺ signalling [13]. Unlike the above protein phosphatases, PP2C is a monomeric protein that is characterised by its dependence on Mg²⁺ or Mn²⁺ for activity. Although the functional roles of mammalian PP2C are not well defined, it is known to associate with p38 kinase and inhibit the p38 and JNK stress-activated MAP kinase pathway [14]. Studies to date analysing the mechanism of dephosphorylation of PKC have implicated the role of phospho-serine/threonine protein phosphatase PP2A. A heterotrimer form of PP2A was seen to dephosphorylate PKC α *in vitro* and inhibitors to PP2A have been shown to induce hyperphosphorylated forms of PKC α (and also PKC δ and ϵ) [2,3,15,16].

The studies here describe the specificity of protein phosphatases *in vitro* towards the dephosphorylation of PKC δ . This indicates that PP2A is likely to play the key role *in vivo* and this conclusion is supported by demonstration that PKC δ and PP2A can be co-immunoprecipitated from cells. However the protective effect of Mg-ATP *in vitro* implies that there must be a further regulatory step in initiating dephosphorylation *in vivo*.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. *In vitro* protein phosphatase treatment of PKC δ

As described previously [17], baculovirus-expressed PKC δ is phosphorylated at three regulatory phosphorylation sites (see Section 3). To assess the dephosphorylation of these sites, baculovirus-expressed recombinant PKC δ (Panvera) was treated with purified protein phosphatases. PP1_c and PP2A_c were purified from rabbit skeletal muscle [18]. The dimeric (PP2A_D) and trimeric (PP2A_{T55} and PP2A_{T72}) holoenzyme forms with respectively PR55/B and PR72/B' as the third variable subunit, were also purified from rabbit skeletal muscle [19]. PP2C α was expressed and purified as a GST fusion protein from

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bacteria [20]. A total reaction volume of 50 μ l was set up to contain the following: 20 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.5), phosphatidylserine (PtdSer) and TPA (25 μ g PtdSer, 2 μ M TPA final), 8 ng–1 μ g phosphatase (as indicated), 100–500 ng PKC δ recombinant protein; incubations were carried out at 30°C. The reactions were stopped by the addition of 4 $\times$ SDS sample buffer, boiled and stored in liquid nitrogen. Samples were separated by SDS-PAGE for subsequent analysis by Western blotting.

2.2. Western blotting

Protein samples in SDS sample buffer were separated on 10% SDS-PAGE and transferred onto polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF) membranes (Millipore) using a wet transferring system (Bio-Rad). Membranes were blocked for 1 h at room temperature in PBS buffer containing 0.1% Tween 20 and 5% (w/v) skimmed milk powder [21]. When probing for phosphorylation sites, skimmed milk powder was substituted by 3% BSA. Membranes were incubated with primary antibody, either anti-PKC δ monoclonal (Transduction labs.) or polyclonal antiserum (1 in 5000) raised in rabbit against a synthetic peptide [22]. Phosphorylation-specific antisera (1 in 3500) were incubated in the presence of dephospho-peptide overnight at 4°C [23]. The membranes were washed, incubated with secondary antibody conjugated to HRP and cross-reactivity was visualised using an enhanced chemiluminescence (ECL) detection system (Amersham Pharmacia). For a quantitative comparison of protein bands, an exposure of film within the linear range was scanned with the Adobe UMAX magic scan, and relative band intensities calculated using NIH image software.

2.3. Phosphatase activity assays

Protein phosphatase activity was determined either by using phosphorylase as a substrate as described in the protein phosphatase assay system (Life Technologies), or using *p*-nitrophenylphosphate (*p*NPP) as substrate. Using *p*NPP as substrate, a dilution of the phosphatase was added to a reaction mixture containing 25 mM Tris (pH 7.5), 2 mM MgCl₂ and 10 μ M *p*NPP in a total volume of 1 ml. The reactions were carried out at room temperature and the optical density (OD) readings were taken at 420 nm at 30 s intervals.

2.4. Cell culture and transfection

NIH3T3 mouse fibroblasts were maintained in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM) supplemented with penicillin (60 μ g/ml), streptomycin (100 μ g/ml), and 10% (v/v) foetal calf serum in a 10% CO₂ humidified incubator at 37°C. The adherent cells were passaged three times a week by detaching cells with 0.25% (v/v) trypsin/versene and seeded at a density of 2×10^5 cells/ml. Cells (35 mm/100 mm plates) were transfected using Lipofectamine reagent (Gibco BRL) with 1–5 μ g of plasmid DNA (myc-PKC δ in pEFLink or GFP-PKC δ in pEGFPC3 as indicated) for 6–18 h. Following transfection, the cells were placed in fresh low serum medium (0.05% FCS) and incubated for a further 24 h prior to experimentation. Whole cell extracts were harvested in 4 $\times$ SDS sample buffer. Samples were boiled to 95°C and stored at –20°C or in liquid nitrogen (when analysing for phosphorylation status of proteins) prior to loading on SDS-PAGE.

2.5. Immunoprecipitation

Following a rinse with cold PBS, cells were scraped into 500 μ l lysis buffer (20 mM Tris (pH 7.5), 2 mM EDTA, 0.2 M NaCl, 10 mM benzamidine, 0.2 mM PMSF, 10 μ g/ml leupeptin, 100 μ g/ml aprotinin, 10 μ M microcystin LR and 1% Triton X-100 (Sigma and Alexis)) for a 100 mm dish. Samples were snap frozen in liquid nitrogen and homogenised using a glass Dounce homogeniser. After pre-clearing insoluble material, the lysate was incubated with 5–10 μ g of antibody, followed by incubation with protein-G-Sepharose beads (Sigma). The beads-antibody complex was carefully washed three times in lysis buffer, boiled in SDS sample buffer and the immunoprecipitated proteins were subjected to SDS-PAGE. PP2A_c was detected with a monoclonal antibody to PP2A_c (S. Dilworth, manuscript in preparation).

3. Results

3.1. Dephosphorylation of PKC δ in vitro

In order to assess the intrinsic specificity of different classes of protein phosphatase towards PKC δ , purified proteins were

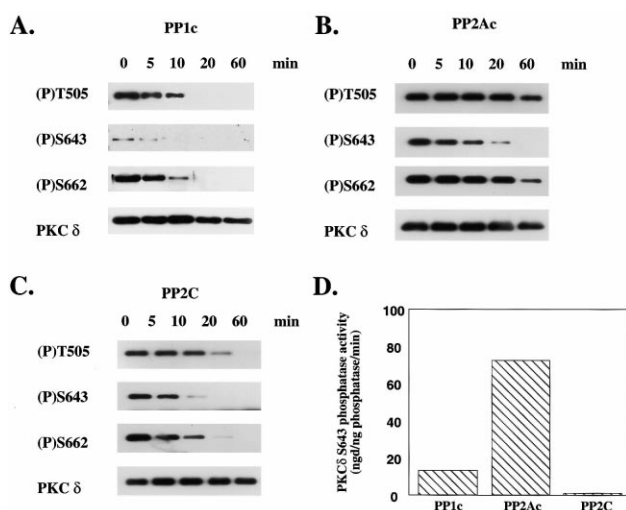


Fig. 1. Effect of protein phosphatases against PKC δ . Purified protein phosphatases were incubated with human recombinant PKC δ (500 ng) at 30°C for the times indicated in the presence of TPA (2 μ M) and PtdSer (PS; 25 μ g). Phosphatases and concentrations were as indicated in the panels. Reactions were stopped by addition of SDS sample buffer and analysed by Western blotting for phosphorylation at T505, S643 and S662 and also for PKC δ protein load. A: PP1_c 125 ng was used; B: PP2A_c 8 ng; C: PP2C 1000 ng; D: quantitation showing the specific activities of the three phosphatases indicated.

tested in vitro. The dephosphorylation of the three critical Ser/Thr phosphorylation sites occupied in baculovirus-expressed PKC δ (T505, S643, S662) was monitored using site-specific antibodies. The phosphatase activities were titrated against PKC δ such that similar activities were compared (note the very different protein concentrations; see below). As illustrated in Fig. 1A–C, the purified catalytic subunits of PP1 (A), PP2A (B) and PP2C (C) all were able to dephosphorylate PKC δ in vitro. Furthermore none of these phosphatases displayed any marked site specificity, although in each case the S643 site, which resides within the sequence ...KPQLS(P)FSDK... was the most rapidly dephosphorylated.

Despite the similar site specificity of these three phosphatases the specific activities varied greatly. Based upon the initial rates of dephosphorylation of PKC δ determined by scanning densitometry of linear exposures, the relative specific activities of PP2C:PP1_c:PP2A_c are 1:13:72.

In view of the relative selectivity of PP2A_c for PKC δ the activities of various PP2A holoenzyme forms were tested. The heterodimer and heterotrimeric complexes can have profound effects upon PP2A_c specificity/activity [24–26]. As shown in Fig. 2, none of the oligomeric forms tested showed any significant difference in site selectivity for PKC δ dephosphorylation. Furthermore the relative rate of dephosphorylation of these complexes compared to PP2A_c varied by no more than 1.4-fold.

3.2. Nucleotide inhibition of PKC δ dephosphorylation

The conditions providing optimum dephosphorylation of PKC δ in vitro is the TPA-induced active conformer, consistent with the TPA-induced effect in vivo. However, in vivo, substrates as well as allosteric activators are present. Surprisingly, inclusion of Mg-ATP in the in vitro incubation of PKC δ with PP2A completely blocked PKC δ dephosphorylation (Fig. 3A). This effect of Mg-ATP was not due to rephos-

phorylation of these sites by PKC δ itself or a contaminating kinase activity since it was also observed with Mg-ADP and the non-hydrolysable Mg-AMPPNP. Furthermore although unliganded ATP can inhibit PP2A [27], this was not a direct effect on PP2A itself since at these Mg²⁺ and ATP concentrations no significant inhibition of PP2A phosphatase activity was observed (Fig. 3B). This potent effect of Mg-ATP in protecting PKC δ from dephosphorylation implies that in vivo either a different phosphatase activity is involved or that a further component/event is required to facilitate dephosphorylation.

3.3. Dephosphorylation of PKC δ in NIH3T3 cells

To distinguish whether or not PP2A is responsible for the activation-induced dephosphorylation of PKC δ in vivo, we investigated this response in intact cells. A role for PP2A action on PKC δ was consistent with the finding that TPA-induced PKC δ dephosphorylation was significantly inhibited at low concentrations of calyculin A (data not shown) or okadaic acid as judged by immunoreactivity and reduced migration of the protein (Fig. 4A). This effect was most evident at the activation loop (T505) and autophosphorylation (S643) sites. The hyperphosphorylated, slower migrating form of PKC δ induced by both okadaic acid (Fig. 4A) and calyculin A (data not shown) is likely to reflect phosphorylation at sites other than T505, S643 and S662, since these migrate more slowly than the initial phosphorylated protein. To assess the one class of protein phosphatase not tested in vitro the effects of the PP2B inhibitor cyclosporin A were investigated [28]. It

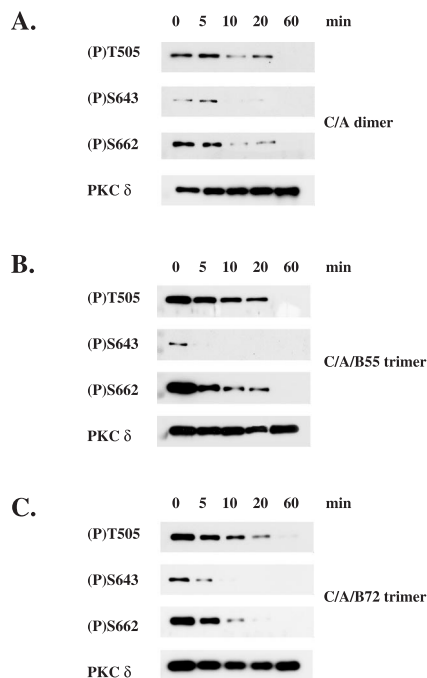


Fig. 2. Dephosphorylation of PKC δ by dimer and trimer forms of PP2A in vitro. Different PP2A_c complexes (100 ng normalised to catalytic subunit content) were incubated with human recombinant PKC δ (50 ng) at 30°C for the times indicated in the presence of TPA (2 mM) and PtdSer (25 mg). Reactions were stopped by addition of SDS sample buffer and analysed by Western blotting for phosphorylation at T505, S643 and S662 and also for PKC δ protein load. A: PP2A (C/A) dimer. B: PP2A (C/A/B55) trimer. C: PP2A (C/A/B72) trimer.

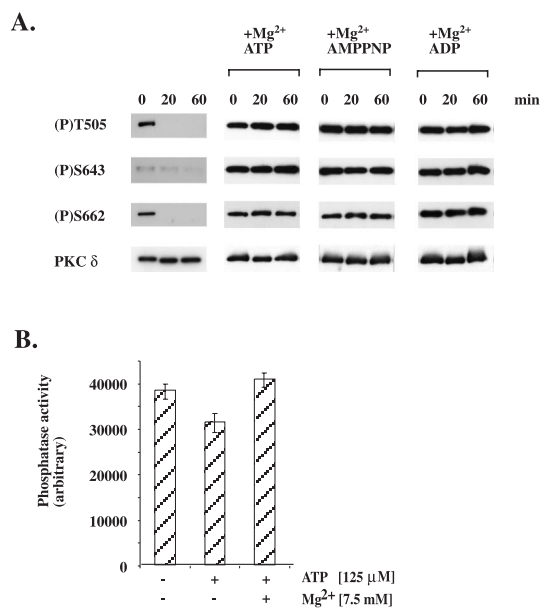


Fig. 3. Nucleotides prevent the dephosphorylation of PKC δ by PP2A. A: Different nucleotides (ATP, AMPPNP, ADP all at 125 μM final) and Mg²⁺ (7.5 mM), were present in the treatment of human recombinant PKC δ (500 ng) with PP2A (100 ng C/A/B55 trimer). Incubations were carried out at 30°C for the times indicated in the presence of TPA (2 μM) and PtdSer (25 μg). Reactions were stopped in SDS sample buffer and analysed by Western blotting for phosphorylation at T505, S643 and S662 and also for PKC δ protein load. This is representative of several similar experiments. B: The phosphatase activity of PP2A (2 ng C/A/B55 trimer, within the linear range) against phosphorylase A was monitored in the presence or absence of Mg²⁺/ATP as indicated. Four independent experiments were performed.

was found that cyclosporin A did not effect the rate of degradation nor did affect the migration of PKC δ (Fig. 4B).

To determine more directly the potential for PP2A to account for TPA-induced PKC δ dephosphorylation, association between these two proteins was investigated. Subconfluent NIH3T3 cells were maintained in reduced serum overnight and then stimulated with TPA. Lysates were prepared and PKC δ immunoprecipitated and immunoblotted for PP2A_c. The 37 kDa catalytic subunit of PP2A was found associated with PKC δ and this was enhanced following TPA stimulation (Fig. 4C). This association supports the notion that PP2A plays the major role in TPA-induced PKC δ dephosphorylation.

4. Discussion

The evidence presented here demonstrates that of the protein phosphatases tested, PP2A_c and complexes thereof are the most efficient in dephosphorylating PKC δ in vitro. Furthermore the effects of inhibitors and more directly the demonstration of a complex between PKC δ and PP2A_c indicate that this catalytic activity is likely to be responsible for activation-induced dephosphorylation in vivo.

All the phosphatases tested displayed similar site specificity with the S643 site being the most sensitive to their action. Given the rather different primary sequence specificities exhibited by these proteins in other contexts it is surmised that this site may need to be dephosphorylated prior to the others, i.e. that dephosphorylation is ordered. This would be consistent

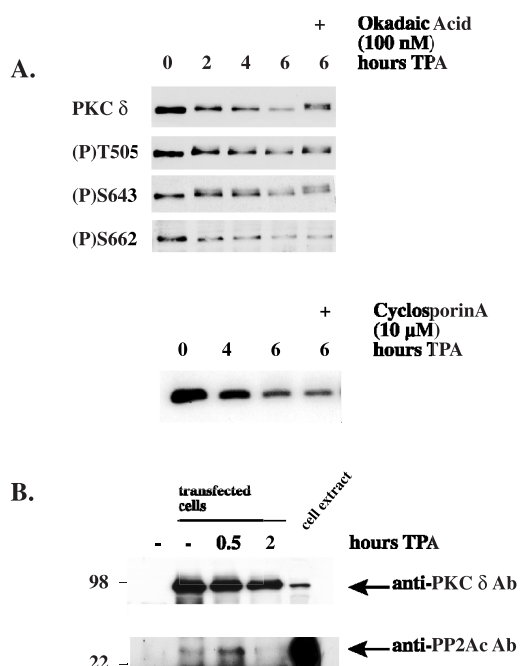


Fig. 4. Dephosphorylation of PKC δ in NIH3T3 cells. A: PKC δ over-expressing NIH3T3 cells were pre-treated with okadaic acid (100 nM) for 30 min prior to TPA stimulation (400 nM). Cell extracts were analysed by Western blotting for PKC δ protein expression and phosphorylation at T505, S643 and S662 at the times indicated. B: NIH3T3 cells were transiently transfected with GFP-tagged PKC δ . Cells (untransfected and transfected) were serum starved for 24 h followed by stimulation with TPA (400 nM) prior to immunoprecipitation of GFP-PKC δ using anti-GFP antibody. Immunoprecipitates were analysed by Western blotting for PKC δ protein (using anti-PKC δ antibody) and for the association of the PP2A $_c$ protein.

with the properties of PKC α where a mutual dependency on site occupation has been described [29,30]. The implication here is that for PKC δ the S643 is the most susceptible and that once removed the others become 'available'.

Activation of PKC requires the combinatorial effects of allosteric activators and phosphorylations in the catalytic domain. Kinase activity is also known to be required for their subsequent downregulation and degradation [6]. In addition to controlling activity, phosphorylations of PKC α co-operate to stabilise the kinase, keeping it in a phosphatase-resistant state [29]. The work described here suggests that binding of nucleotide can also keep PKC δ in a phosphatase-resistant state. Since the intracellular ATP concentration is relatively high (~ 1 mM), the finding that Mg-ATP (or related nucleotides) can induce a phosphatase-resistant state for PKC δ is of particular note. In further studies it was also observed that peptide/protein substrate binding to PKC δ (histone III S, protamine sulphate or a pseudo-substrate peptide), was sufficient to protect the kinase from dephosphorylation by PP2A (data not shown). It is surmised that PKC δ adopts a closed phosphatase-resistant conformation upon substrate (protein/Mg-ATP) binding. Thus, for PKC δ to become dephosphorylated in vivo a conformational change is required; this might be associated with a substrate release factor or through an independently induced change in conformation.

PP2A has previously been shown to be in multi-protein complexes with other protein kinases so that it has the ability

to dephosphorylate. This includes p70S6K and CAM kinase IV [31,32]. These interactions, as that described here, provide direct evidence on the action of PP2A in the inactivation of these protein kinases. Whether these complexes are formed with the same PP2A subunits remains to be elucidated. Whilst it might be argued that PKC δ interaction with a particular complex of PP2A $_c$ might by-pass the resistance to dephosphorylation induced by substrate, the fact that PKC δ is in part complexed to PP2A prior to activation indicates that in fact an additional regulatory input is required for this purpose.

In conclusion, the evidence here indicates that PKC δ dephosphorylation and hence inactivation is effected by PP2A with which it forms a complex. Furthermore, this dephosphorylation requires an additional input in vivo to overcome the nucleotide/substrate bound state of the kinase.

Acknowledgements: This work was supported in part by the European Community, grants BMH-CT98-3328 and QLK3-CT-2000-01038.

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