



## Minireview

GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis: Review of clinical, molecular, and therapeutic aspectsNicola Brunetti-Pierri<sup>a</sup>, Fernando Scaglia<sup>a,b,\*</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of Molecular and Human Genetics, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX 77030, USA<sup>b</sup> Texas Children's Hospital, Houston, TX 77030, USA

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## ABSTRACT

GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis is a lysosomal storage disorder due to deficiency of the β-galactosidase enzyme. This deficiency results in accumulation of GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosides and related glycoconjugates in the lysosomes leading to lysosomal swelling, cellular damage, and organ dysfunction. The disease is lethal in the infantile and juvenile forms. To date, up to 102 mutations distributed along the β-galactosidase gene (*GLB1*) have been reported. This review gives an overview of the clinical and molecular findings in patients with GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis. Furthermore, it describes therapeutic approaches which are currently under investigation in animal models of the disease.

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GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis (MIM# 230500) is a lysosomal storage disorder due to deficiency of the β-galactosidase enzyme (E.C. 3.2.1.23) which hydrolyzes the terminal β-galactosyl residues from GM<sub>1</sub> ganglioside, glycoproteins, and glycosaminoglycans [1] (Fig. 1). The incidence of GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis has been estimated to be 1 in 100,000–200,000 live births [2]. Although the disorder is panethnic, an increased prevalence has been found in Brazil (1:17,000) [3,4], in the Roma population (1:10,000) [2,5], in the Maltese Islands (1:3700) [6], and in a Cypriot population [7].

GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis can be classified into three types based on the clinical phenotype: (1) type 1 or infantile form with onset between birth and 6 months, rapidly progressive with hypotonia, severe central nervous system (CNS) degeneration and death by 1–2 years of age; (2) type 2 late infantile or juvenile with onset between 7 months and 3 years, lag in motor and cognitive development, and slower progression; and (3) type 3 adult or chronic variant with late onset (3–30 years), a progressive extrapyramidal disorder due to local deposition of glycosphingolipid in the caudate nucleus [8]. Adult patients have been mostly reported in the Japanese population. The severity of each type is inversely related to the residual activity of the mutant β-galactosidase enzyme [9]. β-galactosidase deficiency is also responsible for Morquio disease type B (MIM# 253010) characterized by marked skeletal abnormalities, corneal clouding, cardiac involvement, increased urinary excretion of keratan sulfate but no clinical signs of storage in neural tissues. However, the demarcation between GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis

and Morquio B can be often obscured as in patients displaying mental regression and the skeletal abnormalities of Morquio B.

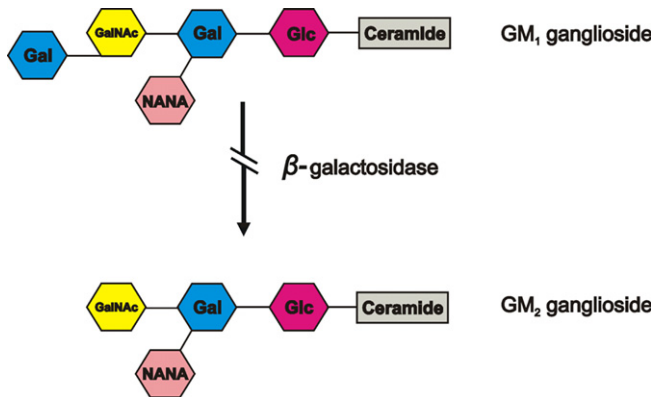
The deficiency of β-galactosidase enzymatic activity, but in combination with neuraminidase deficiency, is also present in a different disorder, galactosialidosis (MIM# 256540) [10,11] due to a defect in the protective protein/cathepsin A (PPCA) [12] stabilizing the β-galactosidase/neuraminidase complex [13]. The clinical presentation of galactosialidosis partially overlaps with GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis. However, the predominant clinical manifestations of galactosialidosis are attributed to the severe neuraminidase deficiency rather than the partial deficiency of the β-galactosidase enzyme.

## Disease pathogenesis

The clinical manifestations of GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis result from the massive storage of GM<sub>1</sub> ganglioside and related glycoconjugates in different tissues and particularly in the CNS (Figs. 1–3). However, the molecular mechanisms leading to the disease pathogenesis are still incompletely understood. Neuronal cell death and demyelination accompanied by astrogliosis and microgliosis are usually observed in areas of severe neuronal vacuolation. Neuronal apoptosis, endoplasmic reticulum (ER) stress response [14,15], abnormal axoplasmic transport resulting in myelin deficiency [16], and disturbed neuronal–oligodendroglial interactions [17,18] have been proposed as possible pathomechanisms involved in GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis. Furthermore, inflammatory responses are considered to contribute to the pathogenesis and/or disease progression [19]. More recently, an activation of autophagy leading to mitochondrial dysfunction in β-galactosidase deficient mouse brains has been implicated in the disease pathogenesis [20].

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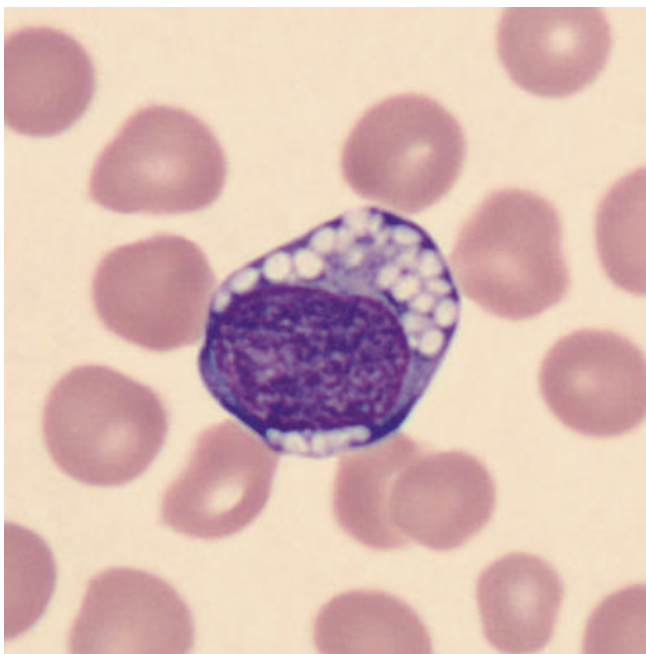
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**Fig. 1.** Biochemical defect in GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis.  $\beta$ -galactosidase enzyme hydrolyzes the terminal  $\beta$ -galactosyl residues from GM<sub>1</sub> ganglioside. Lack of  $\beta$ -galactosidase leads to massive accumulation of GM<sub>1</sub> ganglioside. Abbreviations: Glc, glucose; Gal, galactose; GalNAc, N-acetylgalactosamine; NANA, N-acetylneuraminic acid.

### Clinical features

The clinical suspicion of GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis is usually based on the presence of signs of storage such as coarse facial features, gingival hypertrophy, corneal clouding, cherry-red macula, hepatosplenomegaly, vacuolated lymphocytes, and skeletal dysostosis in addition to a history of psychomotor regression. In the absence of these findings the diagnosis is more elusive. To determine the prevalence of the “cardinal features” in GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis, we have searched the Medline database and analyzed the published cases of infantile, juvenile, and adult or chronic variant GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis. The search was performed with the key words “GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis” and “beta-galactosidase deficiency”. The reference lists of the reports thus retrieved were also scrutinized. We analyzed published cases with sufficient clinical data, and with a diagnosis of GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis confirmed by either biochemical assay of  $\beta$ -galactosidase and neuraminidase and/or by *GLB1* molecular anal-



**Fig. 2.** Photomicrograph of May-Grunwald-Giemsa stained blood film showing one lymphocyte with many large bold vacuoles.

ysis. A total of 209 patients met our selection criteria; 130 were infantile, 23 juvenile, and 56 adult GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis. Data were analyzed for clinical features and molecular findings. The main clinical features are listed in Table 1. As expected, we found that signs and symptoms of the CNS involvement were invariably present in all cases. In the infantile form, although present with high prevalence, the classic features seen in storage disorders such as coarse facial features (87%), cherry-red macula (59%), hepatosplenomegaly (85%), skeletal dysostosis (82%) were not constantly present, at least at the time of the diagnosis. Macular cherry-red spot, hepatosplenomegaly, and skeletal involvement had higher prevalence in the infantile form compared to the juvenile form (Table 1). Cardiomyopathy has been reported in patients with all three forms and it is overall present in about one third of the cases. About 6% of the infantile cases presented at birth with hydrops fetalis and there have been very few case reports of extensive Mongolian spot [21–24] or angiokeratoma [25].

### Biochemical defect

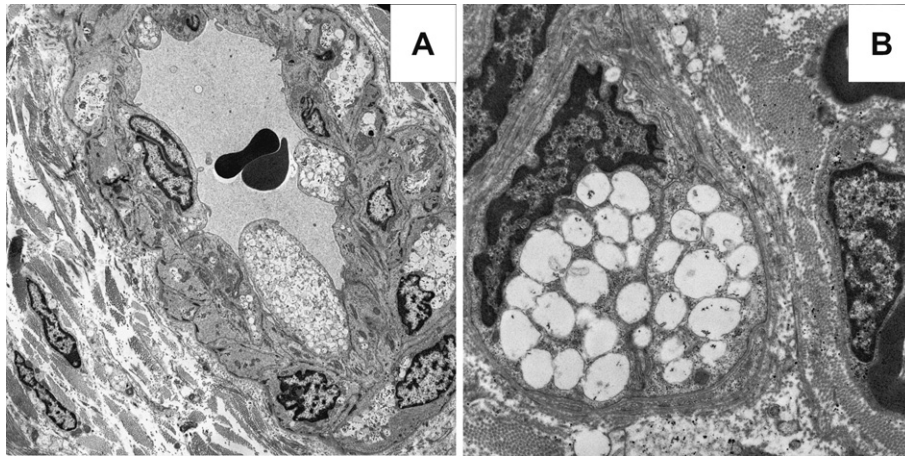
$\beta$ -galactosidase is synthesized as an 85-kDa precursor that is post-translationally glycosylated to an 88 kDa form and processed into the mature 64 kDa lysosomal enzyme [13]. The enzyme in lysosomes is complexed with two other hydrolases: PPCA and neuraminidase. In white blood cells and fibroblasts,  $\beta$ -galactosidase enzyme activity is deficient in both GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis and galactosialidosis. Nevertheless, galactosialidosis can be distinguished biochemically from GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis because it presents with normal  $\beta$ -galactosidase activity in serum or plasma while enzyme activity is deficient in GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis [26]. However, a definitive diagnosis is based on measurement of neuraminidase activity. Due to its instability, neuraminidase is not measured in leukocytes [27] and its activity has to be determined in fibroblasts. Alternatively, the diagnosis of GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis can be confirmed by  $\beta$ -galactosidase gene (*GLB1*) molecular testing.

Residual  $\beta$ -galactosidase activity in fibroblasts from patients, measured using the artificial 4-methylumbelliferyl  $\beta$ -galactopyranoside substrate, varies from 0.07–1.3% of control values in infantile patients to 0.3–4.8% in the juvenile form and up to 9% in adults. Residual  $\beta$ -galactosidase activities in Morquio B disease fibroblasts range between 1.3 and 7% of the normal [28].

### *GLB1* mutations in GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis

*GLB1* maps to the short arm of chromosome 3 and contains 16 exons. It gives rise to two alternatively spliced mRNAs: a transcript of 2.5 kb encoding the lysosomal enzyme and a transcript of 2.0 kb, encoding the elastin binding protein (EBP), a major component of the nonintegrin cell surface elastin receptor complex localized on the cell surface [29,30]. In the 2 kb transcript, exons 3, 4, and 6 are missing, and exon 5 has a different reading frame giving rise to a unique stretch of 32 amino acids that allows EBP to bind tropoelastin [31,32]. Although EBP may have some role in the development of GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis and Morquio B, its potential role is still under discussion [33,34] and the relationship between *GLB1* mutations, GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis and Morquio B disease is still unclear.

A total of 102 mutations have been reported in *GLB1* [2,5,7,26,32–62]. The reported mutations are summarized in Fig. 4. There is extensive molecular heterogeneity in GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis, hindering a clear genotype/phenotype correlation. Of the 102 reported mutations, 78 are missense/nonsense mutations, 10 are splicing mutations, 7 are insertions, and 7 are deletions. Some mutations such as R59H have higher prevalence especially among Brazilians, Iberian, and Roma patients [2,5]. Missense/nonsense mutations are primarily located in exon 2, 6, and 15 (Fig. 1)



**Fig. 3.** Electron Microscopy in GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis. (A) Vacuolar appearance of endothelial cells, pericytes, and smooth muscle cells of a capillary (B) Schwann cell with extensive vacuolization.

**Table 1**

Clinical features in patients with infantile, juvenile, and adult GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis (review of the literature)<sup>a</sup>.

	Infantile (n = 130)		Juvenile (n = 23)		Adult (n = 56)	
<i>Pregnancy</i>						
Hydrops	8/130	6%	—	—	—	—
IUGR	2/130	1%	—	—	—	—
<i>General</i>						
Dysmorphic features	90/103	87%	10/15	66%	2/7	28%
Localized edema	3/130	2%	—	—	—	—
<i>Neurological</i>						
Hypotonia	107/111	96%	11/22	50%	—	—
Hypertonia	3/111	3%	1/22	4%	—	—
Developmental delay/Mental retardation	115/115	100%	22/23	96%	—	—
Seizures	10/115	9%	4/22	18%	1/36	3%
Extrapyramidal signs	—	—	—	—	23/36	64%
Dystonia	—	—	—	—	8/36	22%
Gait disturbances	—	—	—	—	16/36	44%
Speech difficulties	—	—	—	—	12/36	33%
<i>Other system involvement</i>						
Cherry-red spot	50/84	59%	3/17	18%	1/27	4%
Cardiomyopathy	18/53	34%	3/8	38%	3/8	38%
Hepatosplenomegaly	104/122	85%	6/20	30%	1/26	4%
Skeletal abnormalities	62/76	82%	11/16	69%	36/38	95%

IUGR: intrauterine growth retardation.

<sup>a</sup> Cases of GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis from the medical literature were reviewed. With the exception of the features of hydrops, IUGR, and localized edema, the denominator indicates the number of cases in which the feature was commented upon.

suggesting that the regions encoded by these exons may have important catalytic and/or regulatory functions.

### Therapeutic approaches

At present, only symptomatic and supportive therapy is available for patients with GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis. Different strategies have been explored to treat this disease and they include bone marrow transplantation (BMT), gene therapy approaches, and substrate reduction therapy. The availability of small and large animal models has facilitated the exploration of experimental therapies. In animals, naturally occurring GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis has been recorded in cats, dogs, sheep, and calves [8]. In addition, a mouse model lacking a functional  $\beta$ -galactosidase gene has been generated by homologous recombination and embryonic stem cell technology [63,64], and a mouse model lacking an original  $\beta$ -galactosidase gene that expresses the R201C mutation has been also developed as an appropriate model of human disease [65].

Allogenic BMT has been attempted in a child with infantile GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis. However, despite complete normalization of white

blood cell  $\beta$ -galactosidase levels the patient continued to deteriorate neurologically [66]. Imino sugars inhibiting ganglioside biosynthesis have been investigated in rodents and have resulted in reduction of gangliosides accumulation in the CNS suggesting that substrate deprivation therapy may be a potentially effective early intervention therapy for GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis [67,68].

Gene therapy is a promising approach for the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases that are caused by a single-gene defect. Correction of the enzyme deficiency and reduction in glycosphingolipid accumulation have been shown in  $\beta$ -gal<sup>-/-</sup> mice following intravenous injection of an adenoviral vector or intracerebroventricular injection of an adeno-associated virus (AAV) expressing the mouse  $\beta$ -galactosidase [69,70]. However, these approaches are still far from reaching clinical application. Instead, a recently developed strategy using chemical chaperones appears to be more rapidly available for clinical translation. In this approach, a chemical chaperone (*N*-octyl-4-epi- $\beta$ -valienamine, NOEV) is used to stabilize the mutant  $\beta$ -galactosidase protein for restoration of enzyme activity [65]. Oral treatment with NOEV in mice carrying the mutant gene resulted in marked increase of the enzyme activity,



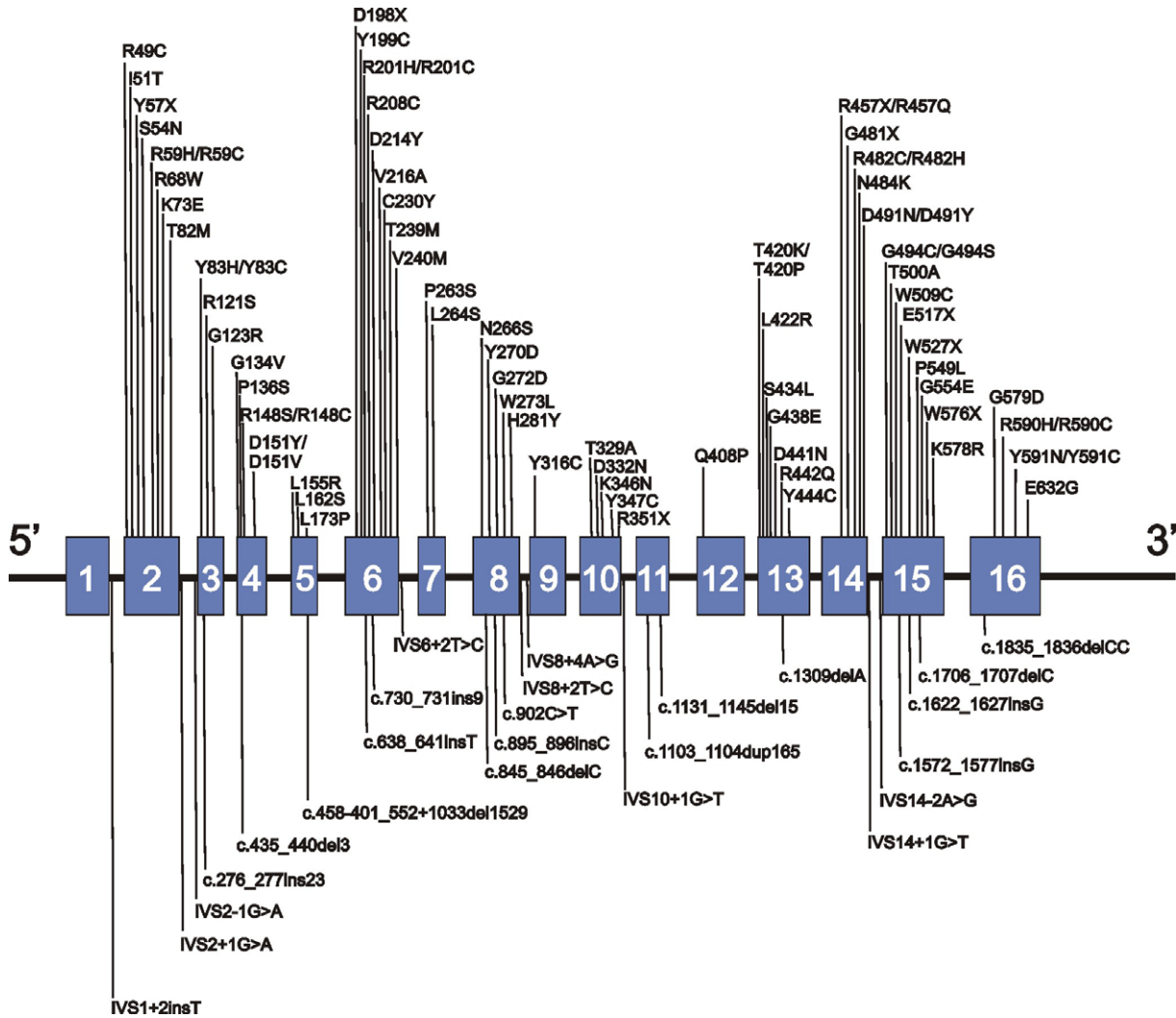


Fig. 4. Summary of the genetic mutations reported in the *GLB1* gene. A total of 102 mutations have been reported [2,5,7,26,32–57,59–62]. Some mutations resulting in higher residual enzymatic activity (p.Y83C, p.Y83H, p.R201H, p.W273L, p.T420K, p.N484K, p.T500A) have been associated with Morquio B phenotype [5,51,56,58,74].

reduction in CNS GM<sub>1</sub> ganglioside content, and prevention of neurological deterioration [65,71]. However, this molecular therapy will be effective only in patients with some level of  $\beta$ -galactosidase expression. Nevertheless, it could represent the first step towards an effective treatment of the disease. In the perspective of future available therapies, having biomarkers to evaluate the efficacy of new treatment strategies is important. Thus far, CSF biomarkers (GM<sub>1</sub> ganglioside concentration, AST, LDH, neuron-specific enolase and myelin basic protein) and brain Proton Magnetic Spectroscopy indexes (*N*-acetylaspartate, myoinositol) have been proposed to monitor investigational approaches for GM<sub>1</sub> gangliosidosis [72,73].

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