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CXC Chemokine Receptors in the Tumor Microenvironment and an Update of Antagonist Development



Yang Xun, Hua Yang, Jiekai Li, Fuling Wu, and Fang Liu

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Abstract Chemokine receptors, a diverse group within the seven-transmembrane G protein-coupled receptor superfamily, are frequently overexpressed in malignant tumors. Ligand binding activates multiple downstream signal transduction cascades that drive tumor growth and metastasis, resulting in poor clinical outcome. These receptors are thus considered promising targets for anti-tumor therapy. This article reviews recent studies on the expression and function of CXC chemokine receptors in various tumor microenvironments and recent developments in cancer therapy using CXC chemokine receptor antagonists.

Keywords CXC antagonists · CXC chemokine receptors · Tumor microenvironment

Abbreviations

ADAM10	Disintegrin-like metalloproteinase 10
Akt	Protein kinase B
AML	Acute myeloid leukemia
CCRCC	Clear cell renal cell carcinoma
CLL	Chronic lymphocytic leukemia
CRPC	Castrated-resistant prostate cancer
CTL	Cytotoxicity T-cell
CXCR	CXC chemokine receptor
DLBCL	Diffuse large B-cell lymphoma
ECM	Extracellular matrix
EGFR	Epidermal growth factor receptor
EMT	Epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition
ERK	Extracellular signal-regulated kinase
HCC	Hepatocellular carcinoma
HER2	Epidermal growth factor receptor type 2
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IgG	Immunoglobulin G
IL	Interleukin
JNK	c-Jun N-terminal kinases
MAPK	Mitogen-activated protein kinase
MDSC	Myeloid-derived suppressor cells

MMP	Matrix metalloproteinases
NHERF1	Na ⁺ /H ⁺ exchanger regulatory factor 1
NHL	Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
NK	Natural killer
NKT	Natural killer T-cell
NSCLC	Non-small cell lung cancer
PD-1	Programmed death-ligand 1
PDAC	Pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma
PI3K	Phosphoinositide 3-kinase
PMN	Polymorphonuclear
PTEN	Phosphatase and tensin homolog
sCXCL16	Soluble CXCL16
STAT	Signal transducers and activators of transcription
TAK1	Transforming growth factor- β -activated kinase 1
TAM	Tumor-associated microglia/macrophage
T _{fh}	T-follicular helper cells
TIL	Tumor-infiltrating lymphocyte
TM-CXCL16	Transmembrane CXCL16
TNBC	Triple-negative breast cancer
T _{reg}	Regulatory T-cells
T _{rm}	Resident memory T-cells
VEGF	Vascular endothelial growth factor

1 Introduction

Tumor development is strongly dependent on factors in the surrounding matrix or tumor microenvironment, including anchored and diffusible signaling factors such as hormones, growth factors, and cytokines. These factors collectively constitute a complex molecular network, regulating tumor cell proliferation, motility, and survival. The relationship between tumor cells and the microenvironment has been equated to that between seed and soil, as the seed can only grow in congenial soil (Kenny et al. 2007). Nowadays, tumor microenvironment has been intensively studied as a hot spot in aiding the development of anti-tumor drugs, among which the roles of chemokines and their receptors have attracted many attentions.

The chemokine receptors constitute a large and diverse subgroup within the seven-transmembrane G protein-coupled receptor superfamily. Based on the sequence of conserved cysteine residues at the N-terminal of the ligand molecule, these receptors are divided into four subtypes, CR, CCR, CXCR, and CX3CR, where C is cysteine and X is an arbitrary amino acid. Chemokine receptors bind specific ligands and transmit extracellular information into cells through structural changes of the G protein to regulate cell growth, differentiation, and apoptosis among other functions under physiological and pathological conditions (Fig. 1).

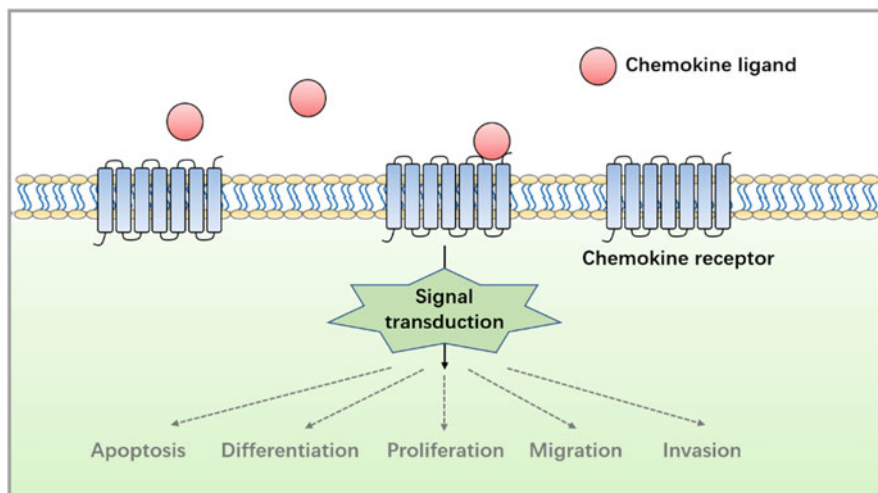


Fig. 1 Chemokine ligand–receptor regulatory mechanisms. Chemokine ligands (red) bind to receptors (blue) to induce signal transduction pathways that activate a myriad of physiological and pathological processes

Chemokine receptors are expressed in many tumors and are strongly linked to malignancy. For example, CCR7 promotes lung cancer cell proliferation and lymph node metastasis (Zhang et al. 2013), CX3CR1 expression is associated with poor prognosis of colorectal cancer (Erreni et al. 2010), and CCR2 contributes to the changes in CD4⁺/Gr myelogenous cell number and influences tumor load in colorectal cancer liver metastasis (Zhao et al. 2013). CXC chemokine receptors (CXCRs) (Table 1) in the tumor microenvironment act as seminal regulators of tumor progression by binding to unique ligands or subgroups of ligands (Fig. 2). This review focuses on the expression and function of CXCRs in various tumor microenvironments as well as on the development of CXCR antagonists as anti-tumor drugs.

2 CXCR1 and CXCR2

2.1 Cell Signaling Induced by CXCR1 and CXCR2

CXCR1 and CXCR2 are closely related receptors, also known as interleukin-8-receptor A and B, respectively, as both bind interleukin (IL)-8 (CXCL8). These receptors share 77% sequence homology and an ELR motif immediately adjacent to the CXC motif, and both receptors bind CXCL6 and CXCL8, while only CXCR2 binds CXCL1–3, CXCL5, and CXCL7. Two conserved domains at the CXCR2 carboxyl end (ILXLL and PDZ-ligand domains) are critical for signal transduction (Baugher and Richmond 2008). The three dimensional structures of monomeric