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13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 Words)

The HIN-200 family are IFN-inducible proteins that share a signature 200-amino acid motif of type *a* and/or *b*. Three human (IFI16, MND4, and AIM2) and four mouse (p202, p203, p204, and D3) HIN-200 family proteins have been identified. Genes encoding HIN-200 family proteins in both mouse and human are located at chromosome 1q21-23 and form a gene cluster. HIN-200 proteins are primarily nuclear proteins involved in transcriptional regulation of genes important for cell cycle control, differentiation, and apoptosis. Our previous studies have established that p202 suppressed tumor growth, reduced tumorigenicity, induced apoptosis, and suppressed metastasis and tumor angiogenesis of many human cancer cell lines. The main goal of this project is to study the anti-tumor activity of p202 (aim 1), and the potential application to breast cancer gene therapy (aim 2). Aim 3 is based on our recent discovery of a novel human HIN-200 gene, IFIX (IFN-Inducible protein X). Our preliminary data showed the expression of IFIX is reduced in breast tumor tissues and breast cancer cell lines and that the enforced expression of IFIX in breast cancer cell lines reduces their growth and tumorigenicity. We also demonstrated the treatment efficacy of an IFIX-based gene therapy in an orthotopic breast cancer model. Together, we hypothesize that IFIX functions as a tumor suppressor and may be developed as a therapeutic agent in breast cancer treatment. The new aim will further test the above hypothesis.

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Introduction

The HIN-200 family are IFN-inducible proteins that share a signature 200-amino acid motif of type *a* and/or *b*. Three human (IFI16, MNDA and AIM2) and four mouse (p202, p203, p204, and D3) HIN-200 family proteins have been identified. (1-4 and see the appendices). Genes encoding HIN-200 family proteins in both mouse and human are located at chromosome 1q21-23 and form a gene cluster (1, 3). HIN-200 proteins are primarily nuclear proteins involved in transcriptional regulation of genes important for cell cycle control, differentiation, and apoptosis (1, 3, 4). Our previous studies have shown that p202 suppressed tumor growth, reduced tumorigenicity, induced apoptosis, and suppressed metastasis and tumor angiogenesis of many human cancer cell lines (5-8).

In search for the potential human ortholog of mouse p202, we recently identified a new member of the human HIN-200 protein family, IFIX (IFN-Inducible protein X). We found that the expression of IFIX is reduced in breast tumor tissues and breast cancer cell lines and that the enforced expression of IFIX in breast cancer cell lines reduces their growth and tumorigenicity. We also demonstrate the treatment efficacy of an IFIX-based gene therapy in an orthotopic breast cancer model. Together, our data suggest that p202 and IFIX functions as a tumor suppressor and may be developed as a therapeutic agent in breast cancer treatment.

Body

A. Objectives

- 1) Determine the Ad-p202-mediated anti-tumor activities *in vitro*.
- 2) Determine the Ad-p202-mediated anti-tumor activities *in vivo*.
- 3) Determine the anti-tumor activity of IFIX.

B. Studies and results

In the past year, we have tested the growth inhibitory activity of Ad-p202 on a panel of breast cancer cell lines. We found Ad-p202 infection resulted in growth inhibition of MDA-MB-453, but had limited effect on other cell lines. It may be due to the limited infection efficiency on these cells. Recently, we isolated IFIX, a p202-like HIN-200 gene in human. However, IFIX is not a human counterpart of p202 since they differ significantly on their protein structure. Most notably, IFIX possesses only one type a 200-amino acid motif but p202 contains both type a and b domain. The N-terminus of IFIX contains a pyrin domain but p202 does not have. We found that IFIX encodes at least 6 isoforms which are likely the results of alternative splicing. Like most of the HIN-200 family members, they are nuclear proteins. IFN- γ treatment suppresses the growth of MCF-7 and MDA-MB-468 breast cancer cells, which correlated with the induction of IFIX. Furthermore, we observed the up-regulation of p21 in IFIX stably expressed MDA-MB-468 and MCF-7 breast cancer cell lines. Most importantly, we found that IFIX expression is reduced in breast tumor tissues and breast cancer cell lines. This observation suggests that IFIX is a novel putative tumor suppressor in breast cancer. To further confirm this result, we found that the IFIX expression is reduced in a panel of commercially available breast carcinoma tissues. Like p202, our data show that IFIX possesses tumor suppressor activity in breast cancer and suggest that IFIX may be used as a therapeutic agent in cancer treatment.

The progress of each objective is discussed below:

Objective 1: Determine the Ad-p202-mediated anti-tumor activities *in vitro*.

- 1) In addition to MDA-MB-468 cells, we found Ad-p202 can inhibit MDA-MB-453 cell growth (Fig 1). However, we observed limited inhibitory effect on other breast cancer cell lines, e.g., MDA-MB-231 and MDA-MB-435. It is possible due to low infection efficiency in these cells.

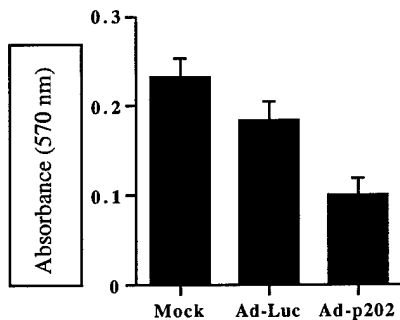


Fig.1 Ad-p202 Infection inhibits cells proliferation. MDA-MB-453 cells were infected with Ad-Luc or Ad-p202 at a MOI of 30. Cell growth was monitored after infection for 48 h by MTT assay.

- 2) A recent report has identified the NF- κ B-interacting domain on p202 (9). Now we are in a position to use this information to generate expression vectors that express the NF- κ B-binding domain and test whether this domain alone is able to sensitize cells to TNF- α -induced apoptosis.

Objective 2: Determine the Ad-p202-mediated anti-tumor activities *in vivo*.

- 1) Determination of the efficacy of a combined treatment of Ad-p202 with TNF- α in an orthotopic breast cancer animal model: in progress.

Objective 3: Determine the anti-tumor activity of IFIX.

- 1) We cloned IFIX, a novel human HIN-200 gene. We found that there are at least six IFIX isoforms (IFIX α 1, α 2, β 1, β 2, γ 1 and γ 2). Like most of the HIN-200 family members, they are nuclear proteins (please see the attached reprint, Fig 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 4 d and Fig. 8).
- 2) IFN- γ treatment suppresses the growth of MCF-7 and MDA-MB-468 breast cancer cells, which correlated with the induction of IFIX (please see the attached reprint, Fig. 5a)
- 3) We found IFIX expression is reduced in breast tumors and breast cancer cell lines. (please see the attached reprint, Fig. 4 a, b, c).
- 4) IFIX- α 1 up-regulates p21, a key cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitor, leading to cell cycle arrest. (please see the attached reprint, Fig. 7).

Key Research Accomplishments:

- 1) Infection of Ad-p202 inhibits MDA-MB-453 cells growth.
- 2) IFN- γ treatment suppresses the growth of MCF-7 and MDA-MB-468 breast cancer cells, which correlated with the induction of IFIX.
- 3) IFIX- α 1 up-regulate p21.
- 4) IFIX is down-regulated in breast tumors.

Reportable Outcomes:

- 1) **Yi Ding**, Li Wang, Li-Kuo Su, Jennifer A. Frey, Ruping Shao, Kelly K. Hunt, and Duen-Hwa Yan. Anti-tumor activity of IFIX, a novel interferon-inducible HIN-200 gene, in breast cancer. (Oncogene in press)
- 2) US Patent pending
Title: IFIX, a novel HIN-200 protein, for cancer therapy.
Inventors: Duen-Hwa Yan, **Yi Ding**, Li Wang, and Mien-Chie Hung

Training accomplishments:

- 1) A poster presentation (Abstract No. 3511) at 95th AACR meeting, Orlando, FL.
- 2) A poster presentation at Trainee Recognition 2004, U. T. M. D. Anderson Cancer center.
- 3) Attended department seminars (12:00 am-1:00pm, Wednesday), institutional seminars (12:00 am-1:00pm, Friday) and other seminars.

Conclusions:

Our studies show p202, an IFN-inducible protein, possesses pro-apoptotic and anti-tumor activities *in vitro* and *in vivo*. We found that Ad-p202 infection resulted the cell growth inhibition of another breast cancer cell line, MDA-MB-453. We will continue to investigate whether the combination of p202 and these therapeutic agents, TNF- α , CDDP, Taxol, might achieve synergistic (or additive) therapeutic efficacy *in vivo*.

We cloned a novel HIN-200 family member, IFIX. Six different alternatively spliced forms of mRNA are transcribed from the IFIX gene, which are predicted to encode six different isoforms of IFIX proteins (IFIX α 1, α 2, β 1, β 2, γ 1 and γ 2). Like most of the Hin-200 proteins, they are nuclear proteins. Previously, we have shown that the expression of IFIX is reduced in breast tumor tissues and breast cancer cell lines and that the enforced expression of IFIX in breast cancer cell lines reduces their growth and tumorigenicity. We also demonstrated the treatment efficacy of an IFIX-based gene therapy in an orthotopic breast cancer model. Here we further confirmed the down-regulation of IFIX in breast tumors, by examine the expression of IFIX using a panel of commercially available human cDNAs. We also found that IFIX- α 1 up-regulate p21, which leads to the reduction of the kinase activity of both Cdk2 and p34^{cdc2}, and the cell cycle arrest at G1 (MCF-7 cells) or G2/M phase (MDA-MB-468 cells). Together, our data suggest that IFIX possesses tumor suppressor activity in breast cancer and that IFIX may be used as a therapeutic agent in breast cancer treatment.

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Appendices

Reprint

Yi Ding, Li Wang, Li-Kuo Su, Jennifer A. Frey, Ruping Shao, Kelly K. Hunt, and Duen-Hwa Yan. Anti-tumor activity of IFIX, a novel interferon-inducible HIN-200 gene, in breast cancer. (Oncogene in press)



ORIGINAL PAPER

Antitumor activity of IFIX, a novel interferon-inducible HIN-200 gene, in breast cancer

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We identified IFIX as a new member of the hematopoietic interferon (IFN)-inducible nuclear protein with the 200-amino-acid repeat (HIN-200) family. Six different alternatively spliced forms of mRNA are transcribed from the IFIX gene, which are predicted to encode six different isoforms of IFIX proteins (IFIX α 1, α 2, β 1, β 2, γ 1, and γ 2). The IFIX proteins are primarily localized in the nucleus. They share a common N-terminal region that contains a predicted pyrin domain and a putative nuclear localization signal. Unlike IFIX α and IFIX β , IFIX γ isoforms do not have the 200-amino-acid signature motif. Interestingly, the expression of IFIX was reduced in most human breast tumors and breast cancer cell lines. Expression of IFIX α 1, the longest isoform of IFIX, in human breast cancer cell lines reduced their anchorage-dependent and -independent growth *in vitro* and tumorigenicity in nude mice. Moreover, a liposome-mediated IFIX α 1 gene transfer suppressed the growth of already-formed tumors in a breast cancer xenograft model. IFIX α 1 appears to suppress the growth of breast cancer cells in a pRB- and p53-independent manner by increasing the expression of the cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitor p21^{CIP1}, which leads to the reduction of the kinase activity of both Cdk2 and p34^{Cdc2}. Together, our results show that IFIX α 1 possesses a tumor-suppressor activity and suggest IFIX α 1 may be used as a therapeutic agent in cancer treatment.

Oncogene advance online publication, 3 May 2004;
doi:10.1038/sj.onc.1207592

Keywords: IFIX; interferon; HIN-200; p21^{CIP1}; breast cancer

Introduction

The interferon (IFN) family of cytokines is known for its growth-inhibitory activity, which plays an important role in IFN-mediated antitumor activity (Kimchi *et al.*, 1988). Proteins induced by IFN are thought to play important roles in mediating the antitumor activity of IFN (Lengyel, 1993). HIN-200 family proteins are IFN-inducible proteins that share a 200-amino-acid signature motif of type *a* and/or *b*. Three human (IFI16, MND4, and AIM2) and five mouse (p202a, p202b, p203, p204, and D3) HIN-200 family proteins have been identified (Johnstone and Trapani, 1999; Choubey, 2000). Genes encoding HIN-200 family proteins are located at chromosome 1q21–23 and form a gene cluster in both mouse and human (Johnstone and Trapani, 1999). HIN-200 proteins are primarily nuclear proteins involved in the transcriptional regulation of genes important for cell cycle control, differentiation, and apoptosis (Johnstone and Trapani, 1999; Choubey, 2000). The antitumor activity of HIN-200 proteins has been demonstrated. In particular, we have shown that p202a suppressed tumor growth, reduced tumorigenicity, induced apoptosis, and suppressed metastasis and tumor angiogenesis of human cancer cells (Wen *et al.*, 2000, 2001; Ding *et al.*, 2002). The amino-acid sequence identity between the three human HIN-200 family proteins and the mouse p202a are 40% or less, thus none of these human proteins appears to be the ortholog of p202a. In a search for potential new human HIN-200 proteins, we have identified a new member of the human HIN-200 protein family, IFN-inducible protein X (IFIX). There are at least six IFIX isoforms encoded by alternatively spliced mRNAs (Figures 1a and 2a). We show here that the mRNA level of IFIX is reduced in breast tumor tissues and breast cancer cell lines and that expression of IFIX α 1 reduces growth and tumorigenicity of breast cancer cell lines that have undetectable levels of IFIX expression. We also demonstrate the treatment efficacy of an IFIX α 1-based gene therapy in an orthotopic breast cancer model. Together, our data suggest that IFIX α 1 functions as a tumor suppressor and may be developed as a therapeutic agent in breast cancer treatment.

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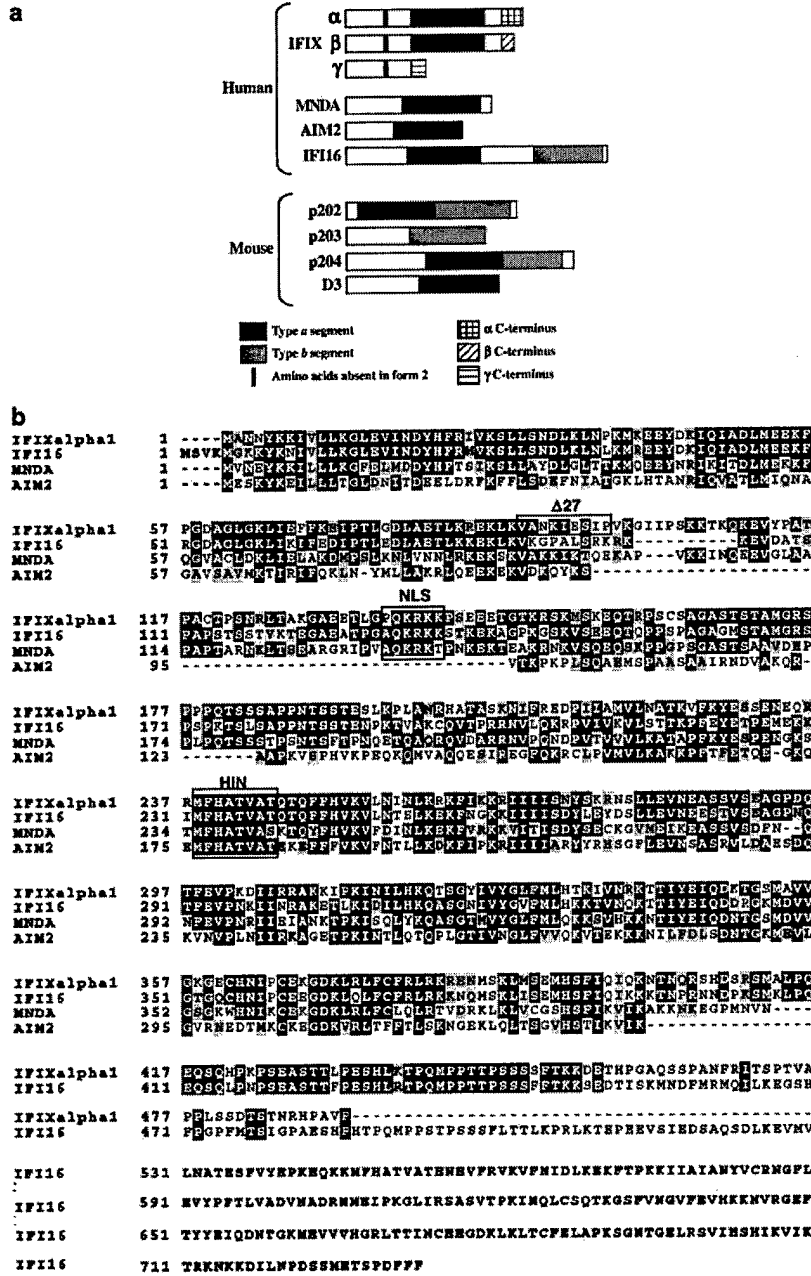


Figure 1 Characterization of IFIX. (a) Structural comparison among HIN-200 proteins. Black and gray bars indicate the type *a* and type *b* 200-amino-acid signature motifs of HIN-200 proteins, respectively. Different patterns of the C-terminus of IFIX isoforms indicate different amino-acid sequences of their C-terminal S/T/P-rich domains. The nine amino acids absent in $\alpha 2$, $\beta 2$, and $\gamma 2$ isoforms are indicated. (b) Amino-acid sequence comparison among human HIN-200 proteins. Amino acids identical or similar in at least two sequences are highlighted with black or gray background, respectively. Dashes indicate gaps introduced in the sequence to obtain the best alignment. The putative nuclear localization signal (NLS) and the nine-amino-acid deletion ($\Delta 27$) are indicated. The common MFHATVAT (HIN) in the 200-amino-acid signature motif of the human HIN-200 proteins is indicated

Results

IFIX is a novel human HIN-200 gene

To identify potential new human HIN-200 proteins, we used the amino-acid sequence of p202a to query human-specific nr, est, and htgs databases at National Center

for Biotechnology Information (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>) by using the tblastn protocol. These queries identified a new gene IFIX in addition to three previously known human HIN-200 family members, MNDA, IFI16, and AIM2. The IFIX gene is located between MNDA and IFI16 at chromosome 1q21–23.

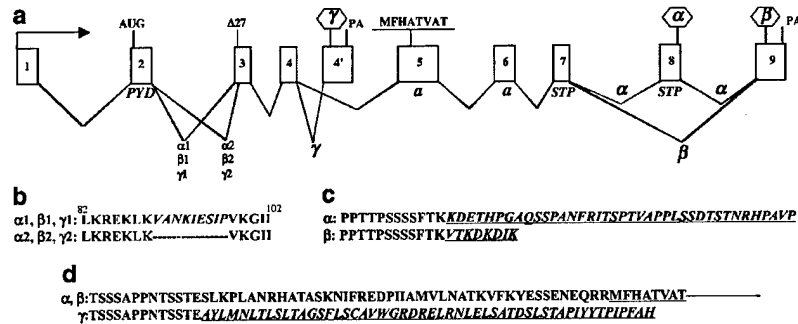


Figure 2 Structures of IFIX isoforms. *a*. Schematics of the IFIX gene. Exons of the IFIX gene are shown as open boxes and the exon numbers are indicated, the size of exons and introns are not drawn to scale. Alternative splicing events that result in various IFIX isoforms are indicated. Arrow indicates a putative transcriptional start site determined by 5' rapid amplification of cDNA ends. AUG: the translation initiation codon; PYD: the putative pyrin domain; $\Delta 27$: the 27 bp absent in the $\alpha 2$, $\beta 2$, and $\gamma 2$ isoforms; the hexagons: stop codons of the α , β , and γ isoforms; PA: polyadenylation signal; MFHATVAT: an amino-acid sequence shared among HIN-200 proteins. *a*: the type *a* 200-amino-acid repeat; STP: serine/threonine/proline-rich region. The predicted size of each isoform is as follows: $\alpha 1$, 492 aa, $\alpha 2$, 483 aa, $\beta 1$, 461 aa, $\beta 2$, 452 aa, $\gamma 1$, 246 aa, and $\gamma 2$, 237 aa. *b*: The nine amino acids (VANKIESIP) absent in isoforms $\alpha 2$, $\beta 2$, and $\gamma 2$ are italicized. *c*: The C-terminal amino-acid sequences of isoforms α and β . Amino acids different between isoforms α and β are italicized and underlined. *d*: The unique C-terminal amino-acid sequence of the γ isoforms. Amino acids of γ isoforms different from isoforms α and β are italicized and underlined. The MFHATVAT signature motif of HIN-200 proteins in α and β isoforms is underlined

The IFIX cDNAs were obtained by RT-PCR using total RNA isolated from IFN- α -treated Daudi cells. Each cDNA clone was confirmed by DNA sequencing. We identified at least six IFIX isoforms ($\alpha 1$, $\alpha 2$, $\beta 1$, $\beta 2$, $\gamma 1$, and $\gamma 2$) that are homologous to other human and mouse HIN-200 proteins (Figure 1a). The identity between the amino-acid sequence of IFIX $\alpha 1$ and other members of human HIN-200 family is: IFI16, 67%; MNDA, 53%; and AIM2, 31% (Figure 1b). IFIX is unlikely to be the human ortholog of p202a because the similarity between the amino-acid sequences of IFIX and p202a is only limited to the type *a* 200-amino-acid signature motif (Figure 1a). The IFIX isoforms are likely derived from the alternative splicing based on the comparison between the cDNA sequences and the genomic sequence (Figure 2a). IFIX $\alpha 2$, $\beta 2$, and $\gamma 2$ have a deletion of identical nine amino acids, that is, ⁸⁹VANKIESIP (resulting from alternative splicing), in their N-terminal region when compared to IFIX $\alpha 1$, $\beta 1$, and $\gamma 1$ (Figure 2b). The α and β isoforms contain a type *a* 200-amino-acid signature motif of HIN-200 proteins whereas γ isoforms do not have this motif. The C-termini of α , β , and γ isoforms are diverse due to alternative splicing (Figure 2c and d). The IFIX isoforms share a common N-terminal region, which contains a predicted pyrin domain (amino acids 3–88), a protein-protein interaction module involved in apoptotic and inflammatory signaling pathways (Fairbrother *et al.*, 2001; Martinon *et al.*, 2001; Staub *et al.*, 2001). In addition, the N-terminal region also contains a putative nuclear localization signal, ¹³⁴LGPQKRKK (Figure 1b, Dawson and Trapani, 1995). Consistent with that prediction, we found the stably transfected IFIX $\alpha 1$ as well as the EGFP-tagged IFIX $\alpha 1$, $\beta 1$, and $\gamma 1$ fusion proteins are localized in the nucleus (Figure 8a and b). Interestingly, while IFIX $\alpha 1$ and IFIX $\beta 1$ are primarily localized in the nucleoplasm, IFIX $\gamma 1$ forms a speckled nuclear pattern (Figure 8b). This observation suggests

that, like most of the HIN-200 proteins, the IFIX proteins are primarily nuclear proteins. Consistent with the notion that HIN-200 genes are IFN inducible, the IFIX mRNA levels are characteristically induced by IFN- α and IFN- γ in several human cancer cell lines of hematopoietic origin (Figure 3a). A tissue distribution study showed that IFIX mRNA (~2.4 kb) is readily detected in the spleen, lymph node, and peripheral blood leukocyte, but to a less extent in thymus, bone marrow, and fetal liver (Figure 3b). No detectable level of IFIX mRNA was found in adult brain, heart, skeletal muscle, colon, kidney, liver, small intestine, placenta, and lung (data not shown). These results suggest that IFIX expression may be involved in immune response.

IFIX is downregulated in human breast cancers

AIM2 has been suggested to play a role in tumorigenesis (De Young *et al.*, 1997). We therefore investigated whether the expression of IFIX was altered in human cancers. We examined the expression of IFIX using a panel of commercially available human cDNAs derived from 12 normal breast tissues (normal) and 12 breast carcinoma tissues (tumor) (Origene Technologies, Inc. Rockville, MD, USA see Materials and methods) by PCR using primers specific to IFIX α . As shown in Figure 4a, IFIX α expression is detectable in 10 out of 12 normal breast tissue samples. In contrast, only two out of 12 breast carcinoma tissues have detectable IFIX α expression. This result suggests IFIX is downregulated in breast tumors. We further tested this correlation in the matched normal and tumor tissues collected from five breast cancer patients by RT-PCR using primers specific to IFIX α . The expression of IFIX α was detected in all tissues examined however, the level of IFIX α in tumor tissue was lower than that in the normal tissue of each patient (Figure 4b). We also examined the

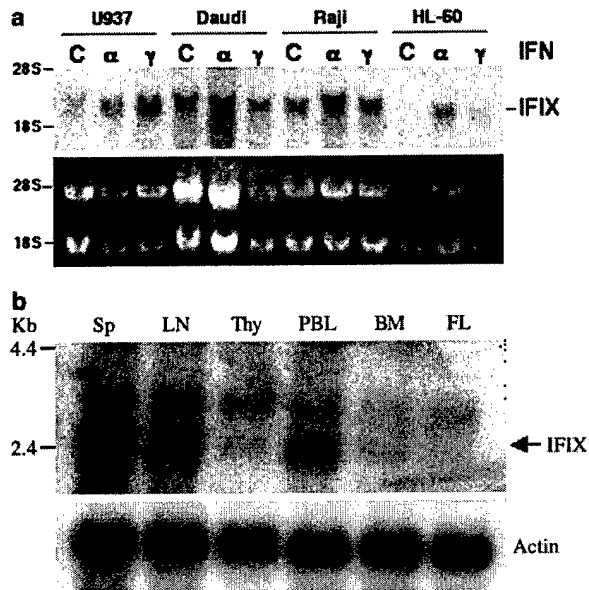


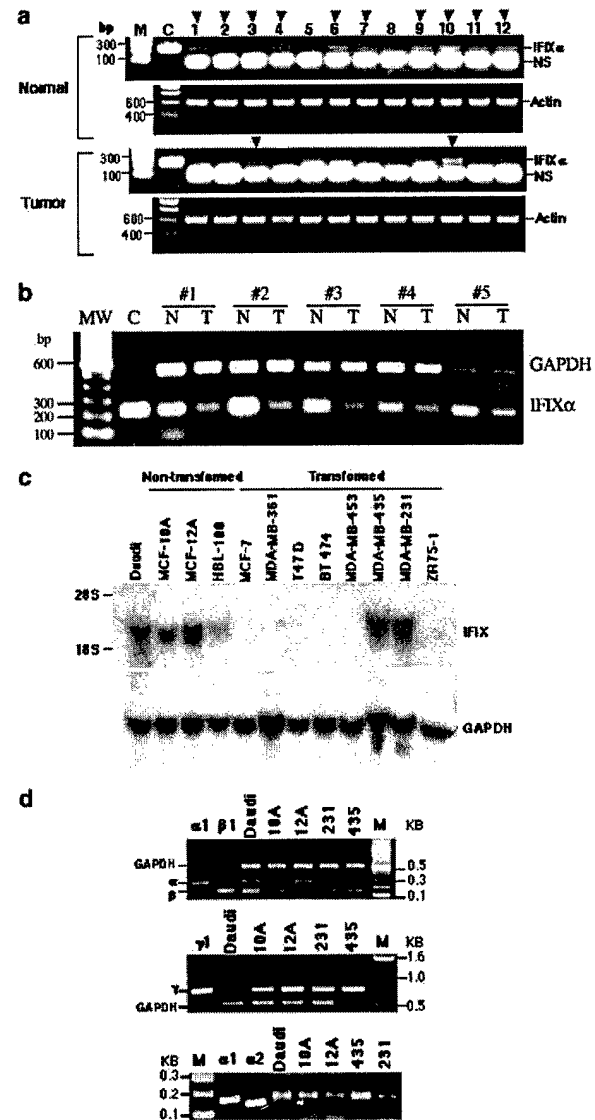
Figure 3 (a) Induction of IFIX expression by IFN. The IFIX mRNA in the indicated cell lines without treatment (c) or treated with 100 U/ml of IFN α (α) or IFN γ (γ) was detected by Northern blot analysis. The 18S and 28S rRNAs serve as loading controls. (b) IFIX expresses mainly in the secondary lymphoid organs. The Multiple Tissue Northern blot (BD Biosciences) was hybridized with an IFIX α 1 cDNA probe. The IFIX mRNA (IFIX) band is indicated. The actin mRNA served as the loading control. Sp: spleen; LN: lymph node; PBL: peripheral blood leukocyte; Thy: thymus; BM: bone marrow; FL: fetal liver. The molecular weight markers (Kb) are indicated

expression of IFIX in a panel of human breast epithelial cell lines. IFIX expression was detected in all the three nontumorigenic cell lines. In contrast, seven out of nine breast cancer cell lines did not express detectable IFIX

Figure 4 Reduced expression of IFIX in human breast tumor and breast cancer cell lines. (a) Reduced expression of IFIX in human breast tumors. The commercially available human cDNAs derived from 12 normal breast tissues (normal) and 12 breast carcinoma tissues (tumor) (Origene Technologies, Inc.) were analysed for IFIX expression by PCR using primers specific to IFIX α . The IFIX α 1 cDNA was used as a control (C). Molecular weight markers (M) are indicated. The IFIX α and β -actin specific bands are indicated. NS: nonspecific PCR products. Samples positive for IFIX α expression are indicated by solid triangles. (b) Reduction of IFIX α mRNA levels in breast cancer. The IFIX α mRNA levels in normal breast (N) and breast cancer (T) tissues from five breast cancer patients were determined by RT-PCR using primers specific to IFIX α . C, an IFIX α 1 cDNA clone used as the template in PCR. RT-PCR of GAPDH was used as a control for the RNA quality and quantity. (c) Reduction of IFIX mRNA levels in breast cancer cell lines. IFIX mRNA in 20 μ g of total RNA isolated from indicated cell lines was determined using Northern blot analysis. GAPDH mRNA on the same blot was subsequently detected to serve as an RNA-loading control. (d) The presence of IFIX isoforms in the IFIX-expressing cell lines. RT-PCR was performed using primers specific for IFIX α , β , (top panel) or γ (middle panel), and the 'form 2' (indicated by an arrowhead, bottom panel) in Daudi, MCF-10A (10A), MCF-12A (12A), MDA-MB-231 (231), and MDA-MB-435 (435). The IFIX α 1, α 2, β 1, and γ 1 cDNAs were used as controls

(Figure 4c and 7a). These data show that the expression of IFIX is reduced in breast cancer and suggest IFIX may function as a tumor suppressor. To determine the identity of IFIX isoforms in the IFIX-expressing cell lines, we performed RT-PCR using specific primers for these isoforms. As shown in Figure 4d (top and middle panels), the IFIX α , β , and γ isoforms are present in these cell lines, although the 27-bp deletion in the 'form 2' isoforms cannot be distinguished at this gel resolution.

To further determine the presence of the 'form 2' isoforms, we designed primers that flank the Δ 27 region (Figure 1b and 2a) followed by RT-PCR. Consistent with the fact that the 'form 2' isoforms were isolated from Daudi cells, the expression of 'form 2' isoforms is detectable in Daudi cells, but the expression levels are much lower than that of the 'form 1' isoforms with the 27-bp region (Figure 4d, bottom panel). However, under



our experimental conditions, the 'form 2' isoforms appeared to be not expressed or undetectable in other IFIX-expressing cell lines.

IFIX $\alpha 1$ suppresses breast cancer cell growth and tumorigenicity

As the first step to investigate the potential role of IFIX in tumor suppression in breast cancer, we use IFIX $\alpha 1$ for subsequent studies because it is the longest isoform of IFIX and possesses the most structural features among IFIX isoforms (Figure 1a and 1b). IFIX $\alpha 1$ is predicted to contain 492 amino acids with an apparent molecular weight of ~53 kDa. To investigate the possible tumor-suppressor function of IFIX $\alpha 1$, we employed two human breast cancer cell lines, MCF-7 and MDA-MB-468, which express very low levels of endogenous IFIX (Figure 4c, 5a, and 7b). Consistent with a previous report (Gooch et al., 2000), we showed that IFN- γ treatment suppressed the growth of these breast cancer cells (Figure 5a, top panel), which correlated with the induction of IFIX (Figure 5a, bottom panel). To determine whether IFIX could

suppress cell growth, we stably expressed IFIX $\alpha 1$ in MDA-MB-468 and MCF-7 cells (Figure 5b). Examination of the growth rates of the control cell lines (parental (P) and empty vector stable cell line (V)) and two independent IFIX $\alpha 1$ -expressing cell lines (X-1 and X-2) derived from MDA-MB-468 and MCF-7 cells showed that the expression of IFIX $\alpha 1$ reduced the growth of breast cancer cells (Figure 5c). The soft agar assay was used to determine the effect of IFIX $\alpha 1$ on the *in vitro* transformation property. As shown in Figure 5d, the number of foci of IFIX $\alpha 1$ -expressing derivatives (X-1 and X-2) was reduced as compared with the control cell lines (P and V). This result indicated that IFIX $\alpha 1$ suppressed the transformation phenotype of breast cancer cells and predicted a loss of tumorigenicity of IFIX $\alpha 1$ -expressing breast cancer cells. To test that possibility, the tumorigenicity of the IFIX $\alpha 1$ -expressing derivative 468-X-2 was then investigated by implanting 468-X-2 and the control, MDA-MB-468 cells into the mammary fat pad (MFP) of 6-week-old female nude mice. As shown in Figure 5e, while MDA-MB-468 cells (P) are highly tumorigenic, the tumorigenicity of 468-X-2 cells (X) is significantly reduced. Given that IFN is known to mediate growth inhibition and tumor suppression in breast cancer (Zhang et al., 1996; Coradini et al., 1998; Gooch et al., 2000), our data suggest that IFIX $\alpha 1$ is a major mediator of the tumor-suppressor activity of IFN.

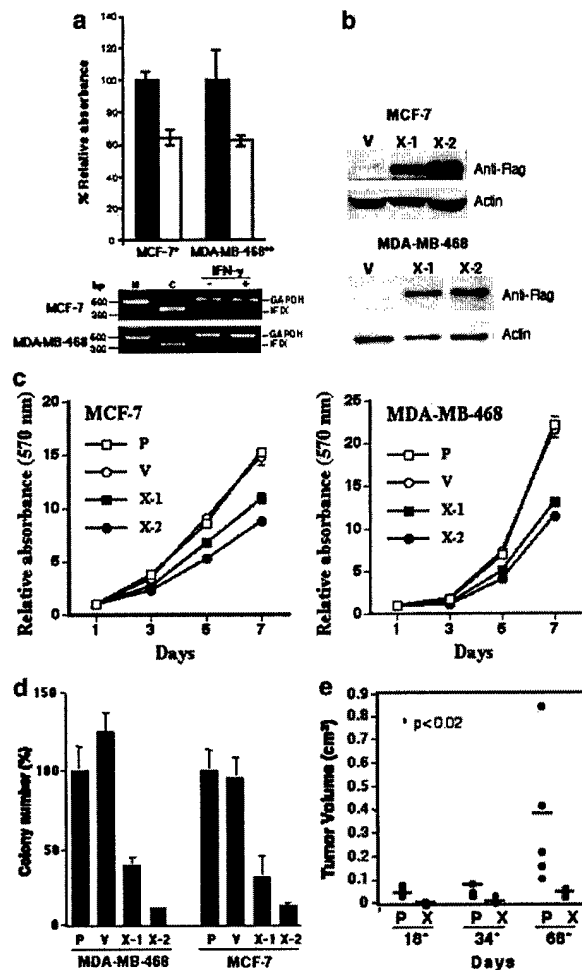


Figure 5 Suppression of the growth and tumorigenicity of breast cancer cells by IFIX $\alpha 1$. (a) IFN- γ induces IFIX expression in breast cancer cells. Top panel: MCF-7 and MDA-MB-468 cells were treated with (open bars) or without (solid bars) IFN- γ (1000 U/ml) in DMEM/F12 media containing 0.25% fetal calf serum for 48 h. The growth of the cells was measured by MTT assay. The experiment was run in triplicate and represented as the mean \pm s.d. The asterisks represent the statistically significant differences due to the IFN- γ treatment. * $P < 0.0005$, ** $P < 0.036$. Bottom panel: Total RNAs isolated from MCF-7 and MDA-MB-468 cells treated with or without IFN- γ (1000 U/ml) under the same condition as described above were analysed for IFIX expression by RT-PCR. GAPDH was used as an internal control. The IFIX $\alpha 1$ cDNA was used as a specificity control (C). Molecular weight markers (M) are indicated. (b) Expression of exogenous IFIX $\alpha 1$ in breast cancer cell lines. The Flag-tagged IFIX $\alpha 1$ in lysates from clones expressing Flag-tagged IFIX $\alpha 1$ (X-1 and X-2) and the empty vector (pCMV-Tag2B) (V) control clones were detected by Western blot using an anti-Flag antibody. The actin protein levels serve as loading controls. (c) Reduced growth rates in IFIX $\alpha 1$ stable cell lines. The growth rate of IFIX $\alpha 1$ -expressing clones (X-1 and X-2), the parental (P) and the empty vector (V) control clones was measured by MTT assay. Each measurement was made in quadruplicate. The relative absorbance at 570 nm was determined by setting the absorbance on day 1 at 1. The range of variation at some data points is too small to be seen. (d) Suppression of *in vitro* transformation by IFIX. The parental (P), the empty vector (V), or IFIX $\alpha 1$ stable cell lines (X-1 and X-2) derived from MDA-MB-468 or MCF-7 cells were seeded in soft agar and the colony number was scored at 3 weeks after seeding. The relative colony numbers of IFIX $\alpha 1$ -expressing clones are compared with that of their parental cells (100%). (e) Suppression of tumorigenicity by IFIX $\alpha 1$. 468-X-2 and the control, MDA-MB-468 (P) cells were implanted into the MFP of 6-week-old female nude mice at two sites per mouse, three mice per group. The actual size of each tumor at the indicated time points after implantation is presented. Horizontal bars indicate the average tumor size. *t*-test: * $P < 0.02$

IFIX α 1 treatment results in therapeutic efficacy

To rule out the possibility that the reduced tumorigenicity of 468-X-2 was due to clonal variation (Figure 5e) and to test whether IFIX α 1 could suppress breast tumor growth, we performed a preclinical gene therapy experiment using an orthotopic breast cancer xenograft model. Female nude mice were inoculated with MDA-MB-468 cells into their MFP and tumors were allowed to grow to 0.5 cm in diameter. Tumors were then injected with the liposome SN2 complexed with either an IFIX α 1-expression vector (CMV-IFIX α 1) or an empty vector (pCMV-Tag2B). SN2 was selected as the gene delivery system because it is a nonviral, stable liposome-forming cationic lipid formulation and has been proven to be highly efficient in gene delivery (Zou et al., 2002). As shown in Figure 6, the CMV-IFIX α 1/SN2 (X) treatment yielded significant antitumor activity as compared to the pCMV-Tag2B/SN2 (V) treatment. This observation suggests that the reduced tumorigenicity seen in 468-X-2 (Figure 5e) is likely caused by IFIX expression and not by clonal variation. More importantly, this result indicates that IFIX α 1 possesses antitumor activity and shows the feasibility of an IFIX-based gene therapy for breast cancer treatment.

IFIX α 1 upregulates p21^{cip1}

IFN-induced growth arrest is known to be associated with an elevated level of the cyclin-dependent kinase

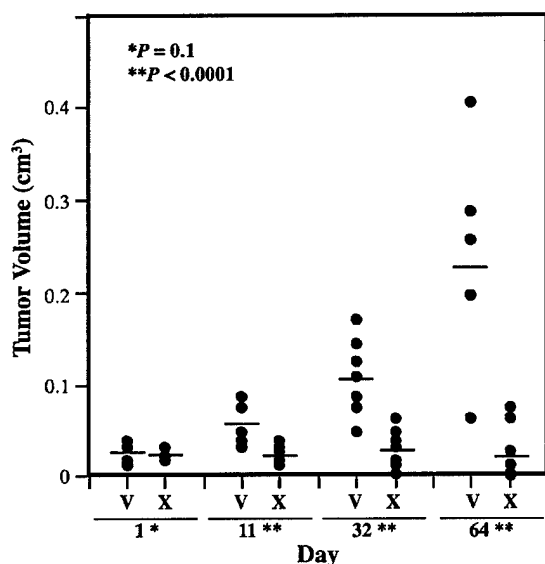


Figure 6 The antitumor effect of IFIX α 1/SN2 liposome treatment in an orthotopic breast cancer xenograft model. Orthotopic breast tumors were established by inoculating MDA-MB-468 cells into the MFP of nude mice and the treatments began at tumors about 0.5 cm in diameter. Tumors were treated twice weekly with SN2 mixed with either CMV-IFIX α 1 (X) or pCMV-Tag2B (V). The actual size of each tumor at the indicated time points after treatments begun is presented. Horizontal bars indicate the average tumor size. *t*-test: **P*=0.1, ***P*<0.0001

inhibitor (CKI) p21^{CIP1} (Naldini et al., 2002; Zhou et al., 2002). As the expression of IFIX α 1 is induced by IFN (Figure 3a and 5a), we therefore investigated the mRNA and protein levels of p21^{CIP1} in IFIX α 1 stable transfectants. As shown in Figure 7a and b, both p21^{CIP1} protein and mRNA levels are upregulated in IFIX α 1 stable cell lines (X-1 and X-2) as compared with the control cell lines (P and V). However, there are no detectable changes in the expression of other CKIs, such as p27^{KIP1}, p57^{KIP2}, and p16^{INK4a} in IFIX α 1-expressing derivatives (data not shown). Since p21^{CIP1} is a universal CKI, upregulation of p21^{CIP1} should inactivate the kinase activity of Cdk2 in IFIX α 1 stable cells. Therefore, we used an immunocomplex kinase assay to determine the Cdk2 kinase activity in IFIX α 1 stable cell lines and control cells. As expected, Cdk2 activity is reduced in 468-X-2 and MCF-X-2 as compared to their respective parental cells (Figure 7c). Western blot indicates that there are comparable amounts of Cdk2 protein used in the kinase assay. However, since MDA-MB-468 cells lack pRB and express mutant p53 (Yin et al., 2001), inhibition of MDA-MB-468 cell growth by IFIX α 1 cannot simply be attributed to the inactivation of Cdk2 leading to G1/S-phase arrest (MacLachlan et al., 1995). One possible explanation was that p21^{CIP1} also inhibits p34^{Cdc2}, a G2/M-phase Cdk (Yu et al., 1998). We examined the p34^{Cdc2} kinase activity in IFIX α 1-expressing MDA-MB-468 cells and found that it was much lower than that of the control cells (Figure 7c). This result suggests that inactivation of p34^{Cdc2} may contribute to the IFIX α 1-mediated growth inhibition in MDA-MB-468 cells. To further confirm this observation, we performed a flow cytometry analysis to determine any changes in the cell cycle distributions caused by the expression of IFIX. As shown in Figure 7d, a significant G1-phase accumulation and S-phase reduction was observed in MCF-X-2 cells. In contrast, 468-X-2 cells exhibited a significant S- and G2/M-phase accumulation. This observation not only provides an explanation for the slower growth rate of IFIX stable cell lines (Figure 5c) but also correlates with the inactivation of Cdk2, leading to G1-phase accumulation in MCF-7 in which pRB/E2F pathway is intact and the inactivation of p34^{Cdc2}, resulting in a blockage of G2/M-phase entry in MDA-MB-468 in which pRB/E2F pathway is defective. Together, the data suggest that the p53/pRB-independent p21^{CIP1} upregulation contributes to IFIX α 1-mediated antitumor activity in breast cancer cells. To test the ability of different IFIX isoforms to induce p21^{CIP1}, we transiently transfected MCF-7 cells with the plasmids encoding EGFP-tagged IFIX α 1, β 1, or γ 1 fusion protein followed by immunostaining with the p21^{CIP1}-specific antibody. As shown in Figure 8b, the expression of IFIX α 1 or β 1 mainly coincides with the expression of p21^{CIP1} in the nucleus (64 and 52%, respectively). In contrast, like the empty vector (EGFP) control, the expression of IFIX γ 1 has little effect on the expression of p21^{CIP1} (0.95 and 2%, respectively). Together with a unique speckled nuclear pattern, our observations indicate that IFIX γ 1 may function differently from IFIX α 1/ β 1, and it also suggests that the

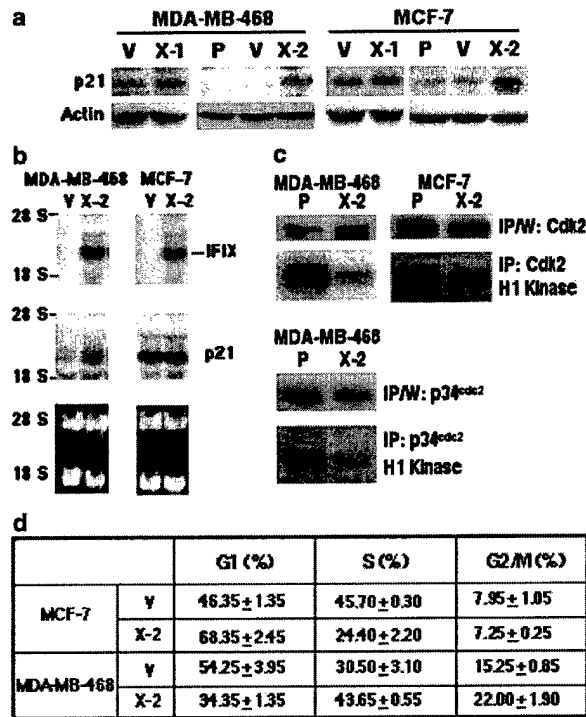


Figure 7 Upregulation of p21^{CIP1} by IFIX α 1. (a) Increased p21^{CIP1} protein levels in MDA-MB-468 and MCF-7 IFIX α 1 stable cells. Cell lysates isolated from 468-X-1, 468-X-2, MCF-X-1, MCF-X-2, and the control parental (P) and empty vector (V) cell lines were analysed by Western blot using an anti-p21^{CIP1} antibody. Actin served as the loading control. (b) Increased p21^{CIP1} mRNA levels in MDA-MB-468 and MCF-7 IFIX α 1 stable cells. Total RNA (20 μ g) isolated from 468-X-2, MCF-X-2, and the corresponding empty vector (V) control cell lines were analysed by Northern blot using an IFIX α 1 or p21^{CIP1} probe as indicated. The 18S and 28S rRNA bands on the membrane after transfer stained by ethidium bromide serve as loading control. (c) Inhibition of the kinase activity of Cdk2 and p34^{cdc2} by IFIX α 1. Cell lysates isolated from 468-X-2, MCF-X-2, and the parental (P) control cell lines were immunoprecipitated by Cdk2 (or p34^{cdc2})-specific antibody followed by Histone H1 (H1) kinase assay. Immunoprecipitation followed by Western blot (IP/W) with Cdk2 or p34^{cdc2} antibody served as the loading control. (d) IFIX expression affects cell cycle distribution. The IFIX-expressing cells (X-2) and the empty vector control cells (V) derived from MCF-7 and MDA-MB-468 cells were subjected to flow cytometry analysis. The percentage of each cell line in G1, S, and G2/M phases was calculated. This result was obtained from two independent experiments

200-amino-acid domain may be responsible for the upregulation of p21^{CIP1}.

Discussion

We identified IFIX as a new member of the human HIN-200 protein family. At least six isoforms were identified in Daudi cells. Interestingly, while the 'form 1' isoforms are present in IFIX-expressing cells such as MCF-10A, MCF-12A, MDA-MB-231, and MDA-MB-435, the 'form 2' isoforms were either missing or undetectable in these cells. A systematic analysis on

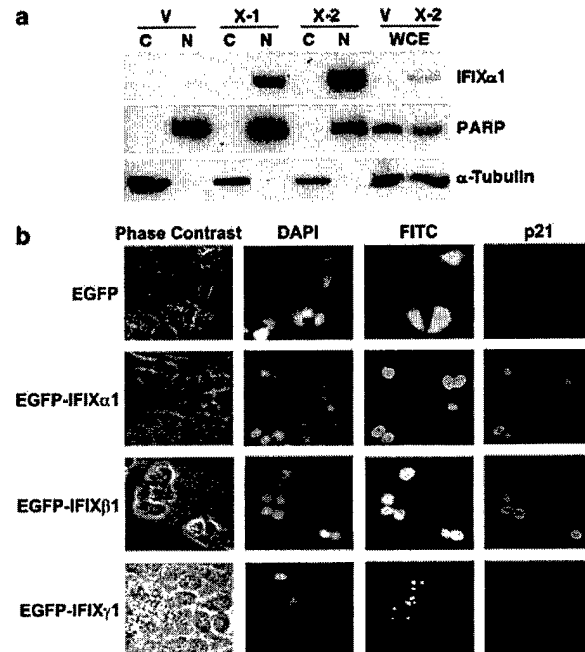


Figure 8 IFIX proteins are localized in the nucleus. (a) The stably transfected IFIX α 1 protein is localized in the nucleus. Cytoplasmic (C), nuclear (N), or whole cell extracts (WCE) isolated from MCF-X-1, MCF-X-2, or the MCF-7 empty vector control cells (V) were analysed for IFIX α 1 expression by Western blot using an anti-Flag antibody. The same blot was used to verify the quality of the extracts using the antibodies against the nuclear protein, PARP, and the cytoplasmic protein, α -Tubulin. (b) The transiently transfected IFIX α 1 protein is localized in the nucleus. MCF-7 cells were transfected with the plasmid encoding EGFP-tagged IFIX α 1, β 1, or γ 1 protein. The EGFP-expression vector serves as a control. Phase contrast, nuclear staining (DAPI), green fluorescence (FITC), and Texas Red for p21^{CIP1} staining (p21) of each transfection are shown. At 48 h after transfection, the percentage of p21^{CIP1}-positive in EGFP-positive cells was counted for each transfection: EGFP (0.95%, 1/105), IFIX α 1 (64%, 68/107), IFIX β 1 (52%, 55/106), and IFIX γ 1 (2%, 2/100). Cells were examined at \times 60 magnification

the expression of 'form 2' isoforms is required to determined whether 'form 2' expression is specific in hematopoietic cells and/or caused by IFN treatment. Using a commercial cDNA expression panel, we found that IFIX α was detectable in only two out of 12 breast carcinomas, whereas most (10 out of 12) of the normal breast tissues have detectable IFIX α expression (Figure 4a). This result was consistent with that of five pairs of matched normal versus tumor samples we collected from patients in which IFIX α expression is downregulated in all tumor samples as compared with that of the matched normal breast tissue samples (Figure 4b). Furthermore, seven out of nine breast cancer cell lines examined in this study have no detectable IFIX, while IFIX expression is readily detectable in the nontransformed breast cell lines (Figure 4c). Although it is possible that the signals on the northern blots may come from other HIN-200 genes due to sequence homology, we consider the IFIX α 1 cDNA probe used in these experiments is quite specific

based on the size and the tissue distribution patterns of IFIX mRNA. First, the size of IFIX mRNA (including all isoforms) is ~2.4 kb (between 28S and 18S) (Figure 3a and b), which would effectively rule out the HIN-200 genes MND A (2.0 kb, at 18S) and AIM2 (1.8 kb, below 18S) (De Young *et al.*, 1997). However, the size of IFI16 mRNA is ~2.7 kb, it is possible that it may migrate closely with IFIX mRNA. Second, in contrast to the expression of IFI16 mRNA in lymphoid tissues such as spleen, thymus, and peripheral blood leukocyte, and many other organs (Wei *et al.*, 2003), the expression of IFIX mRNA is clearly restricted to the secondary lymphoid organs such as spleen, lymph nodes, and peripheral blood leukocyte but not the primary lymphoid organs such as thymus and bone marrow (Figure 3b). Thus, based on the size and tissue distribution patterns of different HIN-200 mRNAs, we believe that, under our experimental conditions, the signals in the Northern blots are mainly generated from the probe hybridizing with IFIX mRNA. Albeit, we cannot rule out the possibility that the additional weak band detected above the IFIX signals in Figure 3b is IFI16 mRNA based on its slightly higher molecular weight and its expression in the thymus. The IFIX-specific antibodies are being generated to detect IFIX proteins by Western blot and immunostaining. Once these critical reagents are available, a more systematic analysis of IFIX protein expression on the breast and normal tumor tissues will be performed to confirm the RT-PCR and Northern blot data presented in this study, and to further investigate the diagnostic and prognostic values of IFIX expression in breast cancer. To understand how IFIX is downregulated in certain breast tumors or breast cancer cell lines but not in others (Figure 4a and c), further genetic and biochemical analysis is necessary.

The expression of HIN-200 was originally identified in hematopoietic cells and was thought to be restricted in this cell type (Dawson and Trapani, 1996). However, recent reports have shown that IFI16 is expressed in epithelial cells in addition to lymphoid cells (Gariglio *et al.*, 2002; Wei *et al.*, 2003). Our finding that IFIX expresses in normal breast tissues (Figure 4a and b) and nontransformed breast epithelial cell lines (Figure 4c) supports the notion that HIN-200 expression is not restricted in hematopoietic cells. Taken together, these observations suggest that IFIX may play a role in maintaining the normal growth of epithelial cells and the downregulation of IFIX expression may contribute to the uncontrolled cell growth and leads to tumorigenesis. It is intriguing that the two breast cancer cell lines that express IFIX, that is, MDA-MB-435 and MDA-MB-231, are metastatic in experimental systems (Price *et al.*, 1990; Zhang *et al.*, 1991). This observation raises a possible link between IFIX expression and metastatic potential of breast cancer cells. However, this possibility is not supported by the available information. (The manufacturer did not provide the metastasis status of patient samples used in Figure 4a.) Of the five breast tumors we collected from patients, all expressed reduced levels of IFIX (Figure 4b), including two recurrent

metastatic breast tumors in the chest wall (#1 and #2) and three primary breast tumors (#3, #4, and #5). Moreover, except the BT-474 cell line which was isolated from a solid invasive ductal carcinoma, all breast cancer cell lines used for Northern blot analysis shown in Figure 4c were isolated from metastatic breast tumors: MCF-7, T47-D, MDA-MB-435, MDA-MB-231, and MDA-MB-468 (pleural effusion); MDA-MB-361 (brain metastasis); MDA-MB-453 (effusion); and ZR-75-1 (ascitic effusion). Thus, there is no clear correlation between the expression of IFIX and the metastatic potential of breast cancer in human patients.

Compared to the control MDA-MB-468 cells (P and V), MDA-MB-468 derivatives that expressed exogenous IFIX α 1 formed fewer colonies in soft agar and resulted in tumors that grew slower in mice, suggesting that IFIX α 1 suppresses tumorigenicity (Figure 5d and e). However, the differences between IFIX α 1-expressing derivatives and their parental cells could be due to clonal difference. Moreover, although stably expressing IFIX α 1 in breast cancer cell lines are appropriate for proof-of-principle experiments, it is inappropriate for predicting treatment outcome in patients. We therefore performed an IFIX α 1-based gene therapy to determine if it would yield efficacy in an orthotopic breast cancer xenograft model. As shown in Figure 6, direct injection of IFIX α 1 complexed with the liposome SN2 into tumors yielded a significant antitumor activity as compared to the empty vector control. This result supports the notion that the reduced tumorigenicity of 468-X-2 (Figure 5e) is caused by IFIX α 1 expression and not by clonal difference. Importantly, it clearly demonstrates a feasibility of using IFIX α 1 as a potential antitumor agent. Since breast cancer is a metastatic disease, this observation should set the stage for testing the therapeutic efficacy of IFIX α 1 in systemic treatments delivered by either SN2 liposome (Zou *et al.*, 2002) or viral vectors (Ding *et al.*, 2002).

IFN has been shown to increase the expression of p21^{CIP1} and this is critical for IFN to suppress the anchorage-independent growth of breast cancer cells (Gooch *et al.*, 2000). Consistent to that observation, the expression of IFIX α 1, an IFN-inducible protein (Figure 3a and 5a), reduces the growth of breast cancer cells in soft agar (Figure 5d) and increases the expression of p21^{CIP1} (Figure 7a and b). This observation suggests that IFIX α 1 may mediate p21^{CIP1} upregulation in response to IFN. The result that IFIX α 1 is able to upregulate p21^{CIP1} in MDA-MB-468 cells, which express only mutant p53, indicates the upregulation of p21^{CIP1} by IFIX α 1 is independent of p53. The p53-independent upregulation of p21^{CIP1} has been well documented (Cox, 1997; Nadal *et al.*, 1997; Fang *et al.*, 2000; Hingorani *et al.*, 2000). In particular, our observation is reminiscent of a previous finding that overexpression of a mouse HIN-200 protein, that is, p202a, also resulted in a p53-independent upregulation of p21^{CIP1} (Gutterman and Choubey, 1999). Since the regulation of p21^{CIP1} expression could take place on transcriptional and/or posttranscriptional levels (Funk and Galloway, 1998; Dotto, 2000), further determination of the half-life of p21^{CIP1} mRNA and

protein, and the effect on the p21^{CIP1} transcriptional activity by IFIX will be necessary to elucidate the mechanism underlying the IFIX-mediated p21^{CIP1} upregulation. As expected, the upregulation of p21^{CIP1} leads to hypo-phosphorylation of pRB in IFIX-expressing MCF-7 cells (data not shown). However, since MDA-MB-468 cells lack pRB (Yin *et al.*, 2001), the inhibition of E2F/pRB pathway by p21^{CIP1} cannot account for the mechanism for IFIX-mediated growth inhibition of MDA-MB-468 cells. Our finding that the kinase activity of p34^{Cdc2} is reduced in IFIX α 1-expressing MDA-MB-468 cells (Figure 7c) suggests that IFIX α 1 may suppress the growth of MDA-MB-468 cells through the inhibition of p34^{Cdc2} kinase activity at the G2/M phase of the cell cycle by p21^{CIP1}. This interpretation is further supported by the results of flow cytometry analysis (Figure 7d) that show G1 arrest in IFIX α 1-expressing MCF-7 cells in which pRB/E2F pathway is intact because p21^{CIP1} upregulation leads to inactivation of Cdk2 and the subsequent activation of pRB, resulting in a blockage at the G1/S-phase transition (Dotto, 2000). In the case of IFIX α 1-expressing MDA-MB-468 cells, although Cdk2 is inactivated, cells progress through G1/S-phase because pRB/E2F pathway is absent. However, the upregulation of p21^{CIP1} also leads to inactivation of p34^{Cdc2}, a critical Cdk controlling G2/M transition (Doree and Hunt, 2002), resulting in S- and G2/M-phase accumulation.

Although it has been shown that two copies of the 200-amino-acid motif of a mouse HIN-200 protein are required for growth inhibition (Gribaudo *et al.*, 1999), a more recent study showed that the overexpression of a human HIN-200 protein, AIM2, which has only one copy of the type *a* 200-amino-acid motif, is sufficient to suppress cell growth (Choubey *et al.*, 2000). Thus, our findings support the notion that, at least in human HIN 200 proteins, a single 200-amino-acid motif is sufficient for growth suppression. Interestingly, IFIX γ does not have the characteristic 200-amino-acid signature motif of the HIN-200 family proteins (Figure 1a and 2d) and forms a speckled nuclear pattern (Figure 8b). Thus, it is likely that IFIX γ plays a distinct functional role from α and β isoforms. Indeed, we showed that, while IFIX α 1 or IFIX β 1 induced p21^{CIP1} expression, IFIX γ 1 did not (Figure 8b). This result also suggests the 200-amino-acid signature motif may be required for p21^{CIP1} upregulation and, possibly, growth suppression. Given that the pyrin domains are known to be involved in protein-protein interactions (Fairbrother *et al.*, 2001; Martinon *et al.*, 2001; Staub *et al.*, 2001), it is possible that IFIX γ may function as a dominant-negative protein by interacting with IFIX α/β or other pyrin domain-containing proteins.

In summary, IFIX, a newly identified HIN-200 gene, is downregulated in breast cancer. The data presented here indicate that IFIX α 1 expression is associated with growth retardation, loss of tumorigenicity, and p21^{CIP1} upregulation in breast cancer. Moreover, efficacy of an IFIX α 1-based gene therapy is demonstrated, raising the possibility of using IFIX α 1 as a therapeutic agent in breast cancer treatment.

Materials and methods

Cell lines and plasmids

MCF-10A and MCF-12A cells were maintained in DMEM/F12 media containing 5% horse serum, 10 μ g/ml bovine insulin, 20 ng/ml epidermal growth factor, 100 ng/ml cholera toxin, 0.5 μ g/ml hydrocortisone, and 250 ng/ml fungizone. Daudi, Raji, HL-60, and U937 cells were grown in RPMI medium containing 10% fetal bovine serum. All other cell lines were cultured in DMEM/F12 media containing 10% fetal bovine serum. The IFIX α 1 expression vector CMV-IFIX α 1 was constructed by inserting IFIX α 1 cDNA into pCMV-Tag2B (Flag) (Stratagene, La Jolla, CA, USA). To generate IFIX α 1 stable cell lines, CMV-IFIX α 1 was transfected into MDA-MB-468 or MCF-7 cells. After 3 weeks of G418 selection (500 μ g/ml), the G418-resistant colonies were screened for IFIX α 1 expression by Western blot using an anti-Flag antibody (M5, Sigma, St Louis, MO, USA). Control derivatives of MDA-MB-468 and MCF-7 that carry pCMV-Tag2B were similarly established. The EGFP-IFIX expression vectors were constructed by inserting IFIX α 1, β 1, and γ 1 cDNAs into pEGFP-C vectors (BD Biosciences).

Identification and cloning IFIX gene

To identify a new human HIN-200 gene that might be the ortholog of mouse p202, we first used the amino-acid sequence of p202 to query human specific nr, est, and htgs database in the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) using the tblstn protocol and identified a potential new gene located between MNDA and IFI16 at chromosome 1. As the predicted amino-acid sequence of the new gene appeared to be more homologous to human HIN-200 members than to mouse p202, we then used the IFI16 amino-acid sequence to query these same databases using tblastn. This query allowed us to extend the length of this new gene. Primers were then designed according to the sequences of this potential gene to isolate cDNA by RT-PCR.

Determination of gene expression

The expression of IFIX in cell lines was determined by using Northern blot analysis performed as previously described (Wen *et al.*, 2001). The expression of GAPDH was used as a control for RNA loading. Human cDNAs derived from 12 normal breast tissues (normal) and 12 breast carcinoma tissues (tumor) (Human Breast Cancer Rapid-Scan™ Gene Expression Panel, Origene Technologies, Inc. Rockville, MD, USA) were analysed for IFIX expression by PCR using primers specific to IFIX α under the condition suggested by the manufacturer. The IFIX α 1 cDNA was used as a DNA template for the IFIX α -specific positive control. β -actin specific primers (provided by the manufacturer) were used to amplify the β -actin-specific band as an internal control. We used RT-PCR to determine the expression of IFIX α in normal and cancerous breast tissues from five patients with various stages of breast cancer including one with only ductal carcinoma *in situ*. Total RNA was isolated from tissues using Atlas Pure Total RNA Labeling System (BD Biosciences) and reverse transcription was performed using SuperScript First-strand Synthesis System (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA). PCR was performed for 35 cycles at 94°C for 40 s, 56°C for 1 min, and 72°C for 40 s. Primers 5'-GGAACAGAGTCAG CATCC-3' (exon 7) and 5'-CTGCTGGATGGCGGTTGG-3' (exon 8) were used to amplify a 224 bp fragment specific to IFIX α (Figure 4a and b).

In addition, to detect both IFIX α (265 bp) and β (140 bp) isoforms in cell lines (Figure 4d), the following primers are used: 5'-GGAACAGAGTCAGCATCC-3' (exon 7) and 5'-GTTATTTGATATCCTTGTC-3' (exon 9). To detect IFIX γ isoforms (γ 1, 744 bp and γ 2, 717 bp), the following primers are used: 5'-TTAGAGATGGCAAATAACTAC-3' (exon 2) and 5'-TTAGTGAGCAAAGGGAATG-3' (exon 4'). To detect the expression of the 'form 2' isoforms ('form 1', 161 bp and 'form 2', 134 bp), the following primers are used: 5'-TTGGGC AACTAATAGAATTC-3' (exon 2) and 5'-GCAGGATA CACTTCTTTCTG-3' (exon 3). As a control for the quality of the RNA samples, an ~600 bp GAPDH cDNA fragment was amplified using primers 5'-TGAAGGTCGGAGTCAACG GA-3' and 5'-GGCATGGACTGTGGTCATGA-3'. To detect all IFIX isoforms (~350 bp) (Figure 5a, bottom panel), the following primers are used: 5'-TGATGGAGGAAAAGTT CC-3' (exon 2) and 5'-TGCTGGCTCCTGCAGAGC-3' (exon 4).

Determination of growth, in vitro transformation and in vivo tumorigenicity of breast cancer cells

MTT and soft agar assays were used to determine the anchorage-dependent and -independent *in vitro* cell growth, respectively, and were performed as previously described (Shao, 1997). To measure the effect of IFN- γ on cell growth (Gooch *et al.*, 2000), MCF-7 and MDA-MB-468 cells were planted in 24-well plates (18,000 cells/well) in DMEM/F12 media supplemented with 10% fetal calf serum. The next day, cells were washed in 1 \times PBS and grown in serum-free DMEM/F12 media overnight. The serum-free media was replaced with DMEM/F12 media containing 0.25% fetal calf serum. IFN- γ (1000 U/ml) was added. The growth of the cells was measured by MTT assay at 48 h. To determine tumorigenicity, 1 \times 10⁶ cells were injected into the MFP of 6-week-old female nude mice and the growth of tumors was monitored weekly. For each experiment, a cell line was injected into three mice with each mouse injected at 2 MFP.

IFIX α 1 gene therapy

One million MDA-MB-468 cells in 200 μ l of PBS were injected into a MFP of 4–5-week old female nude mice. Each cell line was injected into 5 mice with each mouse injected at 2 MFP. After the tumors grew to 0.5 cm in diameter, mice were treated twice a week by intratumoral injection. Tumor-bearing mice were randomly divided into two equal treatment groups with each tumor injected with 22.5 μ l of the liposome SN2 in 50 μ l of PBS (Zou *et al.*, 2002) mixed with 15 μ g of either CMV-IFIX α 1 or a control vector pCMV-Tag2B (100 μ l total injection volume).

Histone H1 kinase assay

Cells were lysed with RIPA-B buffer (20 mM Na₂PO₄ (pH 7.4), 150 mM NaCl, 1% Triton X-100, 100 mM NaF, 2 mM Na₃VO₄, 5 mM phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride, 1% aprotinin). Lysate containing 200–400 μ g of protein was incubated at 4°C for 1 h with 2 μ g of anti-Cdk2 antibody (Santa Cruz Biotechnology, Inc. Santa Cruz, CA, USA) or 1.5 μ g anti-p34^{Cdc2} antibody (Santa Cruz Biotech.), followed by incubation with Protein A-agarose for 2 h. The immunoprecipitates were washed twice with PBS, once with kinase buffer (10 mM Tris (pH 7.4), 150 mM NaCl, 10 mM MgCl₂, and 0.5 mM dithiothreitol), and then resuspended in 40 μ l of kinase buffer

containing 2 μ g of histone H1 (Sigma), 25 μ M ATP, and 5 μ M γ -³²P ATP. The kinase reaction was terminated by adding 40 μ l of SDS-PAGE loading buffer after a 15 min incubation at room temperature (Cdk2) or 30 min incubation at 30°C (p34^{Cdc2}). Samples were resolved by SDS-PAGE and the phosphorylated Histone H1 was visualized by autoradiography.

Western blot

The standard procedure has been described previously (Wen *et al.*, 2001). The antibodies used in this study are anti-Flag (Sigma, M5), anti- β -actin (Sigma), anti-p21^{CIP1} (Santa Cruz Biotech.), anti-poly-(ADP-ribose) polymerase (PARP) (BD Biosciences), and anti- α -Tubulin (Sigma). The cytoplasmic and nuclear extracts were isolated according to the protocol described previously (Xie and Hung, 1994).

Immunostaining

MCF-7 cells (1 \times 10⁴ in 0.5 ml) were cultured in a four-well glass chamber overnight. Cells were then transfected with 1 μ g of the plasmid encoding EGFP-tagged IFIX α 1, β 1, or γ 1 fusion protein. The EGFP expression vector serves as a control. At 48 h after transfection, cells were washed with PBS and fixed with 3% paraformaldehyde in PBS for 20 min at room temperature followed by PBS wash. The primary p21^{CIP1} monoclonal antibody (Santa Cruz Biotech.) (1:100) was incubated with the cells at 37°C for 1 h. Cells were then washed with PBS, followed by incubation with the rabbit anti-mouse secondary antibody conjugated with Texas Red (1:200) at 37°C for 45 min. After incubation, cells were washed briefly with PBS and air-dried, followed by incubation with the blue fluorescent dye DAPI (1:100 in 50% glycerol/PBS). A cover slip was placed on top of the slide for visualization by microscopy.

GenBank Accession numbers

IFIX α 1 (AY185344), IFIX α 2 (AY185345), IFIX β 1 (AY185346), IFIX β 2 (AY185347), and IFIX γ 1 (XM086611).

Note Added In Proof

During the preparation of this manuscript, a partial amino acid sequence of the N-terminal domain of IFIX protein (referred to as IFI16-like protein 1) was published (Liepinsh *et al.*, 2003).

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