Aim: To evaluate the possibility of translocating autologous peripheral retinal pigment epithelial (RPE) cells and enhance their adhesion to improve functional outcome after choroidal neovascular membrane extraction in patients with subfoveal neovascular membranes.

Methods: A prospective, non-controlled surgical study in eight consecutive patients operated between February and July 2001 with final data monitoring in July 2002. All patients had mixed subfoveal membranes of 2–4 disc diameters. Functional tests included Snellen vision and central fixation testing. During vitrectomy, after the extraction of the neovascular complex, $8 \times 10^6$–$16 \times 10^6$ RPE cells were removed from the periphery and translocated under the macula following the submacular injection of 2 µg of poly-1-lysine to promote adhesion of the cells.

Results: With a follow up ranging from 3 months to 16 months, a pigmented area was seen in the extraction bed of the neovascular membrane in only one patient. Fixation was at the edge of the extraction bed in three patients. Vision remained the same in five patients and deteriorated in three (all with retinal detachment). Retinal detachment due to proliferative vitreoretinopathy occurred in three patients.

Conclusions: The translocation of autologous peripheral RPE cells after membrane extraction was technically possible in a sterile manner, but was associated with a high proliferative vitreoretinopathy rate and in the present series had no measurable positive effect on functional outcome.

Consequently, other modifications to recreate the underlayer under the macula have included the injection of a homologous fetal cell patch. Its lack of success was partly attributed to a chronic host versus graft rejection. Recently, Weichel et al reported the lack of functional improvement after the injection of HLA matched homologous RPE cells.

Therefore, several authors used autologous cells: full thickness en bloc translocation of adjacent macular choroid-choriocapillary-Bruch’s membrane and RPE—translocation by blunt needle aspiration and reinjection of mid-peripheral RPE cells—as well as the translocation of IPE cells. For the last two approaches, however, adherence of the injected cells to the damaged Bruch’s membrane remains uncertain.

We have chosen to translocate peripheral autologous RPE cells. We further tried to enhance RPE cell adherence by the use of poly-1-lysine. Here we report the results of this approach in a case series of eight patients with a subfoveal neovascular membrane.

Patients and methods

Patients with a subfoveal choroidal neovascular membrane that was more than 50% occult on fundus fluorescein angiography (FFA) and larger than 2 disc diameters, with or without submacular blood, were eligible for RPE translocation. Eight patients were included in the study, from 29 January 2001 to 2 July 2001. This study had been approved by the institutional board and written informed consent was obtained from all patients, in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.

Preoperative examination included history taking, Snellen vision and a dilated pupil fundus examination, including FFA. Postoperative visits were scheduled at 1, 3, and 6 weeks,
3, 6, 9, and 12 months. The final date of monitoring was 30 July 2002. During each visit Snellen vision testing and a comprehensive examination were performed. At 3, 6, and 12 months fundus pictures were taken and central fixation was tested with the smallest spot (500 μm) of the Haag-Streit slit lamp.

Preoperative measures

Three weeks preoperatively argon green laser coagulation retinopexy was performed to wall off the inferior peripheral retina in preparation of the planned peripheral retinectomy. Three hours before surgery, blood was collected from the patient to obtain autologous serum after clotting.

Surgery

After the induction of a posterior vitreous detachment a complete vitrectomy was performed and a peripheral retinal detachment was created in the walled off inferior retina by the transretinal injection of Ringer’s solution into the subretinal space. The detached retina was removed up to the ora serrata with the vitrectome. If the patient was phakic, lensectomy was performed at this stage.

Harvesting and analysis of RPE cells

We modified a bent 21 gauge aspiration canula by placing a Nylon 8-0 loop on top and connected it to a 10 ml syringe. The RPE cells were gently scraped off Bruch’s membrane and aspirated through the canula. We collected 20 ml Ringer/RPE aspirate. The cell aspirate was injected into a closed sterile 30 ml centrifuge tube and autologous serum (10%) was added to prevent adherence of the cells to the tubing. After centrifuging (3 g, 5 minutes) within a sterile holder the supernatant was aspirated by the surgeon. The cell pellet was resuspended in the remaining drop of supernatant and supernatant was aspirated by the surgeon. The cell pellet was centrifuging (3 g, 5 minutes) within a sterile holder the supernatant was aspirated by the surgeon. The cell pellet was resuspended in the remaining drop of supernatant and aspirated in a subretinal canula with a 3 mm silicone tube transparent extension. The cells remaining in the centrifuge tube were counted in a counting chamber, analysed for viability (morphology by phase contrast microscopy, trypan blue exclusion staining) and seeded into culture discs after the addition of Dulbecco’s modified essential medium (DMEM).

Through a paramacular retinotomy the choroidal membrane was removed from the subretinal space with a subretinal forceps. Poly-l-lysine (0.2 ml, 0.1 mg/ml) was injected under the macula through the existing retinotomy. We tried to minimise reflux through the retinotomy by injecting through a 3 mm silicone tube transparent extension. The cells remaining in the centrifuge tube were counted in a counting chamber, analysed for viability (morphology by phase contrast microscopy, trypan blue exclusion staining) and seeded into culture discs after the addition of Dulbecco’s modified essential medium (DMEM).

An argon green laser was used in the other seven patients (table 1).

DISCUSSION

For patients with large, occult subfoveal membranes with or without subretinal blood present, there is no evidence based treatment available. We have translocated autologous peripheral RPE cells to try and improve both the reported autologous RPE18 and IPE19 injection approaches: the latter by choosing RPE cells that may be more likely to take over macular RPE functions than IPE cells20-22; the former by harvesting cells in a manner that would allow us both to collect a greater number of cells and examine these cells for viability in each patient. As to the site of harvesting RPE we chose the inferior retina to minimise the handicap of the resulting scotoma. The disadvantage of having an inferior retinectomy (while the tamponades used had their major effect in the superior half of the retina) was partly overcome by having a formed laser retinopexy at the time of surgery.
We aspirated a fairly large number of cells which we showed in a parallel study to be able to survive the aspiration-centrifugation-injection treatment. On cytospin preparation these cells showed RPE specific staining with cytokeratin 8/18 monoclonal antibodies (van Meurs et al., ARVO abstract 2002, no 683). In that study, however, RPE cells from patients with ARMD (although viable as evaluated by trypan blue exclusion) were unable to grow to confluence.

The number of cells we analysed per patient for quality control varied from 12.5×10^5 to 70×10^5, but this number of analysed cells was only a small portion of the number of cells actually reintjected. As the average size of the denuded area after the extraction of the choroidal membrane was approximately 4 disc areas with an estimated cell number of 7×10^4 RPE cells, the transplanted number of RPE cells would be sufficient if not excessive to repopulate the damaged submacular area.

Adhesion of loose clumps of cells to the damaged Bruch’s membrane is important for their survival and is likely to be a problem for the cells we and others have injected. It was uncertain, however, whether the injection site into the vitreous cavity and contributed to the reflux problem and might increase the chance of RPE cells to the retina, thereby accelerating PVR. (4) By using lighter than water tamponades, the retinectomy was brought into contact with the aqueous phase containing inflammatory cells and RPE cells. Indeed, the pigmentation noted in patient 8 may not be pigment due to RPE cell proliferation: non-pigmented RPE cells from patients with visible pigmentation. In three patients their fixation was on the edge of the extraction bed in one patient. As we did not perform fluorescein angiograms to exclude recurrent membranes and our follow up was relatively short (12–18 months), we may be underestimating the rate of recurrence.

Disappointingly, translocated RPE cells were ophthalmoscopically not detectable in seven patients. Several factors may have played a part: reflux to the vitreous cavity preoperatively or postoperatively, because the retinotomy site was not adequately closed and adhesion of the RPE cells to an underlayer never occurred; a rapid clearance of the RPE cells by an inflammatory response secondary to the mechanical removal of the subretinal membrane; loss of pigment due to RPE cell proliferation: non-pigmented RPE cells. Indeed, the pigmentation noted in patient 8 may not be related to the translocated cells, but may merely be a reaction to surgical extraction. Functionally, vision stabilised in five patients; fixation was on the edge of the extraction bed in three patients, but not over the pigmented area in the one patient with visible pigmentation. In three patients their decrease of vision was caused by retinal detachment.

In conclusion, although we were able to translocate RPE cells in a sterile manner, our findings do not support our assumption that the translocated RPE cells would improve on the functional results of simple membrane extraction. Because of the modest results we obtained in the patients without complications, as well as the severe complications we encountered in others, we have stopped this approach until we have learned more about means to promote the survival of transplanted RPE cells under the macula.

**Authors’ affiliations**

J C van Meurs, G S Baarsma, The Rotterdam Eye Hospital, Schiedamsevest 180, 3011 BH, Rotterdam, Netherlands

E ter Averst, L J Hofland, Department of Immunology, Erasmus Medical Center, 3011 BH, Rotterdam, Netherlands

P M van Hagen, Department of Ophthalmology, University Hospital, Leuven, Belgium

P M van Hagen, Department of Internal Medicine, Erasmus Medical Center, 3011 BH, Rotterdam, Netherlands

C M Mooy, Department of Pathology, Erasmus Medical Center, 3011 BH, Rotterdam, Netherlands

R W Kuipers, Department of Ophthalmology, Erasmus Medical Center, 3011 BH, Rotterdam, Netherlands

T Boks, Sterilization Unit, Erasmus University Medical Center, 3011 BH, Rotterdam, Netherlands

P Stalmons, Department of Ophthalmology, University Hospital, Leuven, Belgium

**REFERENCES**


4. Bressler NM. Verteporfin therapy of subfoveal choroidal neovascularization in age-related macular degeneration: two-year results of a randomized clinical trial including lesions with occult with no classic choroidal neovascularization.


Autologous peripheral retinal pigment epithelium translocation in patients with subfoveal neovascular membranes

J C van Meurs, E ter Averst, L J Hofland, P M van Hagen, C M Mooy, G S Baarsma, R W Kuijpers, T Boks and P Stalmans

Br J Ophthalmol 2004 88: 110-113
doi: 10.1136/bjo.88.1.110

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://bjo.bmj.com/content/88/1/110

These include:

References
This article cites 27 articles, 3 of which you can access for free at:
http://bjo.bmj.com/content/88/1/110#BIBL

Email alerting service
Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

Topic Collections
Articles on similar topics can be found in the following collections
Retina (1608)
Vitreous (147)
Ophthalmologic surgical procedures (1223)

Notes

To request permissions go to:
http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions

To order reprints go to:
http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/