



结肠腺癌患者DCAF4-MEN1-hTERT轴的蛋白表达水平与其临床病理特征及预后的关系*

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【摘要】目的 探究结肠腺癌患者DNA损伤结合蛋白1和cullin 4相关因子4(DCAF4)-复合物通过降解肿瘤抑制因子menin 1(MEN1)-人端粒酶逆转录酶(hTERT)轴蛋白表达水平与临床病理特征及预后的关系。**方法** 纳入结肠腺癌患者94例,采用免疫组化检测患者癌组织及癌旁组织样本中DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT的表达情况。比较结肠腺癌患者不同病理分级及不同T分期之间DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT蛋白表达水平,用Spearman秩相关进行相关性检验,再对DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT表达水平与结肠腺癌患者总生存期的影响进行生存分析。**结果** 结肠腺癌患者癌组织中DCAF4、MEN1蛋白表达水平(10.83 ± 2.89 ; 9.71 ± 3.57)高于癌旁组织(2.39 ± 1.57 ; 4.92 ± 2.71 , $P < 0.001$)。同时,Ⅱ级结肠腺癌患者DCAF4表达水平(14.16 ± 4.67)低于Ⅲ级患者(20.79 ± 5.06 , $P < 0.01$),MEN1表达(10.74 ± 3.06)高于Ⅲ级患者(8.07 ± 2.88 , $P < 0.001$)。与携带野生型BRAF基因结肠腺癌患者(5.47 ± 1.81)相比,携带突变型BRAF基因患者DCAF4蛋白表达评分更高(9.30 ± 0.42 , $P < 0.001$),而两者的MEN1和hTERT蛋白表达评分差异无统计学意义。MEN1表达与PD1阳性率相关(Spearman $\rho = 0.219$, $P = 0.034$)。与T2期患者(3.93 ± 2.47)相比,T3期患者hTERT蛋白表达评分更高(6.25 ± 3.04 , $P < 0.05$)。生存分析显示MEN1、hTERT、DCAF4表达与患者总生存无显著关联。**结论** 高表达DCAF4、hTERT,低表达MEN1与不良临床病理特征有关,但与预后关系不显著。

【关键词】 结肠腺癌 DNA损伤结合蛋白1和cullin 4相关因子4(DCAF4) 肿瘤抑制因子menin 1(MEN1) 人端粒酶逆转录酶(hTERT) 临床病理特征 总生存

Protein Expression Levels of the DCAF4-MEN1-hTERT Axis in Patients With Colon Adenocarcinoma and Their Relationship With Clinicopathological Characteristics and Prognosis

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[Abstract] Objective To explore the relationship between the expression levels of DNA damage binding protein 1 and cullin 4-related factor 4 (DCAF4) complex, which degrades the tumor suppressor menin 1 (MEN1)-human telomerase reverse transcriptase (hTERT) axis protein, and the clinicopathological characteristics and prognosis of patients with colon adenocarcinoma. **Methods** Ninety-four patients with colon adenocarcinoma were included. The expression of DCAF4, MEN1, and hTERT in cancer tissues and adjacent tissues was detected by immunohistochemistry. The expression levels of DCAF4, MEN1, and hTERT in patients with different pathological grades and T stages were compared. Spearman rank correlation was used for correlation analysis, and survival analysis was conducted to investigate the impact of DCAF4, MEN1, and hTERT expression levels on the overall survival of patients with colon adenocarcinoma. **Results** The expression levels of DCAF4 and MEN1 proteins in cancer tissues of colon adenocarcinoma patients (10.83 ± 2.89 ; 9.71 ± 3.57) were higher than those in adjacent tissues (2.39 ± 1.57 ; 4.92 ± 2.71 , $P < 0.001$). The expression level of DCAF4 in patients with grade Ⅱ colon adenocarcinoma (14.16 ± 4.67) was lower than in patients with grade Ⅲ (20.79 ± 5.06 , $P < 0.01$). The expression level of MEN1 in patients with grade Ⅱ colon adenocarcinoma (10.74 ± 3.06) was higher than in patients with grade Ⅲ (8.07 ± 2.88 , $P < 0.001$). Compared with patients with wild-type BRAF gene colon adenocarcinoma (5.47 ± 1.81), patients with mutant BRAF gene colon adenocarcinoma had a higher DCAF4 protein expression score (9.30 ± 0.42 , $P < 0.001$), while the difference in MEN1 and hTERT protein expression scores between the two groups was not statistically significant. MEN1 expression was correlated with PD1 positivity rate (Spearman $\rho = 0.219$, $P = 0.034$). Compared with T2 stage patients (3.93 ± 2.47), T3 stage patients had a higher hTERT protein expression score (6.25 ± 3.04 , $P < 0.05$). Survival analysis showed that MEN1, hTERT, and DCAF4 expression were not significantly associated with overall survival.

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5.06, $P < 0.01$), while the expression of MEN1 (10.74 ± 3.06) was higher than in patients with grade III (8.07 ± 2.88 , $P < 0.001$), while there was no statistically significant difference in the protein expression scores of MEN1 and hTERT between the two groups. Compared with colon adenocarcinoma patients carrying the wild-type *BRAF* gene (5.47 ± 1.81), those with the mutant-type *BRAF* gene had a higher expression score of DCAF4 protein (9.30 ± 0.42 , $P < 0.001$). The expression of MEN1 was correlated with the positive rate of PD1 (Spearman $\rho = 0.219$, $P = 0.034$). Compared with patients in stage T2 (3.93 ± 2.47), patients in stage T3 had a higher expression score of hTERT protein (6.25 ± 3.04 , $P < 0.05$). Survival analysis showed that the expressions of MEN1, hTERT, and DCAF4 were not significantly associated with overall survival. **Conclusion** High expression of DCAF4 and hTERT, as well as low expression of MEN1, is associated with unfavorable clinical and pathological features but has no significant relationship with prognosis.

[Key words] Colonic adenocarcinoma DNA damage-binding protein 1 and cullin 4-associated factor 4 (DCAF4) Tumor suppressor menin 1 (MEN1) Human telomerase reverse transcriptase (hTERT) Clinicopathological characteristics Overall survival

结肠癌是全球范围内最普遍的消化系统恶性肿瘤之一,每年约有110万新发病例和57万死亡病例^[1-3]。结肠腺癌是结肠癌中最常见的亚型^[4-5],尽管医学治疗在不断进步,但结肠腺癌患者的生活质量和预后仍面临挑战,5年生存率较低^[6-7]。结肠腺癌的发病机制高度复杂,涉及多种因素的共同作用,包括染色体不稳定性、抑癌基因异常变化、癌基因激活,以及微小RNA(microRNA)和长链非编码RNA(LncRNA)的表达失调等,这些因素均在推动肿瘤发生发展过程中扮演着重要角色^[8-10]。尤为关键的是,这些影响因子的活性和功能在很大程度上受到蛋白质修饰的精细调控,其中泛素化和磷酸化是最为重要的修饰方式^[11-14]。

泛素连接酶通过特异性地修饰靶标蛋白,在调节基因组稳定性、细胞增殖、转移以及耐药性等方面发挥着至关重要的作用,从而在多种癌症的发生发展过程中占据核心地位^[15-17]。近期,本研究团队系统解析了4A/4B cullin-RING泛素连接酶(cullin-RING ligase 4, CRL4)在结肠腺癌发病机制中的功能。前期研究发现,在结直肠癌中,炎症微环境激活致癌基因*c-Myc*,特异性上调CRL4^{DCAF4}E3连接酶活性,介导肿瘤抑制因子ST7的泛素化,驱动肿瘤发生^[18]。在此基础上,团队进一步揭示CRL4^{DCAF4}E3连接酶还可靶向降解另一关键抑癌因子menin 1(MEN1),进而解除其对端粒酶催化亚基人端粒酶逆转录酶(human telomerase reverse transcriptase, hTERT)转录的抑制,最终导致hTERT重新激活与肿瘤细胞永生^[19]。

值得注意的是,本课题组在体外及动物模型中充分验证了上述CRL4^{DCAF4}-MEN1-hTERT信号轴^[9],但其在临床患者群体中的临床意义尚未明确。具体而言,DNA损伤结合蛋白1和cullin 4相关因子4(DNA damage binding protein 1 and cullin 4-related factor 4, DCAF4)、MEN1和hTERT在癌组织中的表达水平以及是否与特定临床病理

特征相关等问题均缺乏来自临床标本的直接证据。这些问题对于评估该轴作为预后生物标志物和新型治疗靶点的转化潜力至关重要。因此,基于前期明确的机制基础,本研究纳入94例结肠腺癌患者,采用免疫组织化学染色技术检测了癌组织及癌旁组织中DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT的表达水平,并系统收集了患者的临床病理特征及预后资料,旨在从临床层面深入探讨DCAF4-MEN1-hTERT轴在结肠腺癌中的作用,以期DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT作为潜在治疗靶点提供更为充实的线索及坚实的临床证据,从而助力结肠腺癌的精准治疗和预后评估策略的发展。

1 资料与方法

1.1 实验设计

本实验回顾性分析结肠腺癌组织芯片(HCoLA180Su21, 上海芯超生物科技有限公司)患者临床病理资料,采用免疫组化法检测结肠腺癌组织和癌旁组织的DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT表达情况,分析DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT与结肠腺癌病理特征及预后的关系。

1.2 患者资料分析

回顾性分析临床资料,纳入结肠腺癌患者94例,纳入标准:①所有受试者均通过病理及免疫组化检测确诊为结肠腺癌,符合《中国结直肠癌诊疗规范》标准^[20];②未合并肠道炎性疾病、肠功能紊乱等并发症。排除标准:①病理及随访信息不完整者;②合并有其他恶性肿瘤者;③合并重要器官严重功能障碍;④为哺乳期或妊娠期妇女。本研究经上海芯超生物科技有限公司伦理会批准同意(编号:YBM-05-02),收集患者临床基线信息、病理资料及预后相关信息,分析各病理特征与DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT表达的关系。随访时间为2012年3月-2018年7月。

1.3 免疫组化染色

采用免疫组化法检测DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT表达

情况。其中DCAF4(ab130417)、MEN1(ab92443)及hTERT(ab216625)抗体购自abcam公司。标本经体积分数为10%的中性甲醛溶液固定,常规脱水后进行石蜡包埋,免疫组化染色,具体操作步骤严格遵循试剂盒说明书进行。

1.4 免疫组化结果判定

用双盲法由两位从事病理科工作多年资深病理学医师进行阅片并评分,有意见分歧的病例,由第三位医师进行综合判断。在DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT阳性颗粒密集部位随机选取5个视野,计数染色情况,取均值。结果判定:①染色强度:无色、浅黄色、黄色、棕黄色和棕褐色分别得0、1、2、3和4分;②阳性细胞比例:阳性表达率0%、25%、50%、75%、100%分别得0、1、2、3和4分;两者乘积为最终评分,总分范围0~16分。

1.5 随访

患者出院后采用电话或复诊等方式进行随访,并于2018年7月31日截止,具体频次遵循术后2年内每3个月随访1次,2年以上每6个月随访1次,随访时间14~63个月中位时间51个月。总生存(overall survival, OS)为研究终点,OS定义为患者根治术后至死亡或末次随访时间^[21]。

1.6 统计学方法

采用SPSS24.0统计软件进行数据分析。经Shapiro-Wilk检验不服从正态分布的计量资料采取中位数表示,多组间比较采用方差分析(ANOVA),Games-Howell检验分析不同病理分级三种蛋白表达差异,Dunn检验(Bonferroni校正)分析不同肿瘤浸润深度蛋白表达差异,癌与癌旁间差异使用配对t检验分析,独立两组间比较采用Mann-Whitney U检验。使用Spearman秩相关系数评估非正态分布数据间相关性,利用Kaplan-Meier法分析DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT与结肠腺癌患者OS的关系。 $P<0.05$ 为差异有统计学意义。

2 结果

2.1 患者基本临床信息

见表1。患者的中位年龄为65岁(29~86岁),17例(18.1%)存在神经侵犯,32例(34%)存在血管侵犯,52例(55.3%)肿瘤浆膜层浸润。其中58例(61.7%)病理分级为Ⅱ级,29例(30.9%)为Ⅱ~Ⅲ级,7例(7.4%)为Ⅲ级。多数患者肿瘤大小在10~70 cm³之间(52例)。

2.2 结肠腺癌患者癌与癌旁组织的DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT蛋白表达水平差异

见图1。在结肠腺癌组织中,DCAF4和MEN1蛋白染色深染,大量细胞呈现明显阳性,且阳性信号弥漫分布于整个组织切片中;而在癌旁组织中,两者染色均较浅,阳

表 1 结肠腺癌患者病理特征 (n=94)
Table 1 Pathological characteristics of patients with colon adenocarcinoma (n = 94)

Pathological characteristics	Data
Age/yr., $\bar{x} \pm s$	64.1 $\pm$ 13.0
Nerve invasion/case (%)	
Negative	77 (81.9)
Positive	17 (18.1)
Vascular invasion/case (%)	
Negative	62 (66)
Positive	32 (34)
Pathological grading/case (%)	
Ⅱ	58 (61.7)
Ⅱ - Ⅲ	29 (30.9)
Ⅲ	7 (7.4)
Tumor size/case (%)	
< 10 cm ³	19 (20.2)
10 - 70 cm ³	52 (55.3)
> 70 cm ³	23 (24.5)
Tumor infiltration/case (%)	
Serosal layer	52 (55.3)
Muscular layer	9 (9.6)
Outer layer of serosa	33 (35.1)

性细胞数量较少。进一步分析发现DCAF4和MEN1蛋白在癌组织中的表达评分(10.83 $\pm$ 2.89; 9.71 $\pm$ 3.57)均高于癌旁组织(2.39 $\pm$ 1.57; 4.92 $\pm$ 2.71, $P<0.001$),提示这两种蛋白可能参与了结肠腺癌的病理生理过程。而hTERT蛋白在癌组织与癌旁组织中的表达评分无显著差异。

2.3 不同病理分级结肠腺癌患者之间DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT蛋白表达水平差异

见图2。DCAF4蛋白在病理分级Ⅱ级结肠腺癌患者中的表达评分最低(14.16 $\pm$ 4.67),而在病理分级Ⅲ级患者中表达评分最高(20.79 $\pm$ 5.06, $P<0.01$),与结肠腺癌的病理分级呈正相关,说明DCAF4蛋白在维持肿瘤细胞的恶性表型方面发挥作用,可能引起患者预后不良。MEN1蛋白在Ⅱ级结肠腺癌患者中的表达评分最高(10.74 $\pm$ 3.06),而在Ⅲ级患者中最低(8.07 $\pm$ 2.88, $P<0.001$),呈现出与DCAF4蛋白相反的趋势。hTERT蛋白在不同病理分级的结肠腺癌患者中的表达评分无显著差异。

2.4 不同BRAF基因的结肠腺癌患者DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT蛋白表达水平差异

与携带野生型BRAF基因结肠腺癌患者(5.47 $\pm$ 1.81)相比,携带突变型BRAF基因患者DCAF4蛋白表达评分更高(9.30 $\pm$ 0.42, $P<0.001$),表明DCAF4可能对结肠腺癌

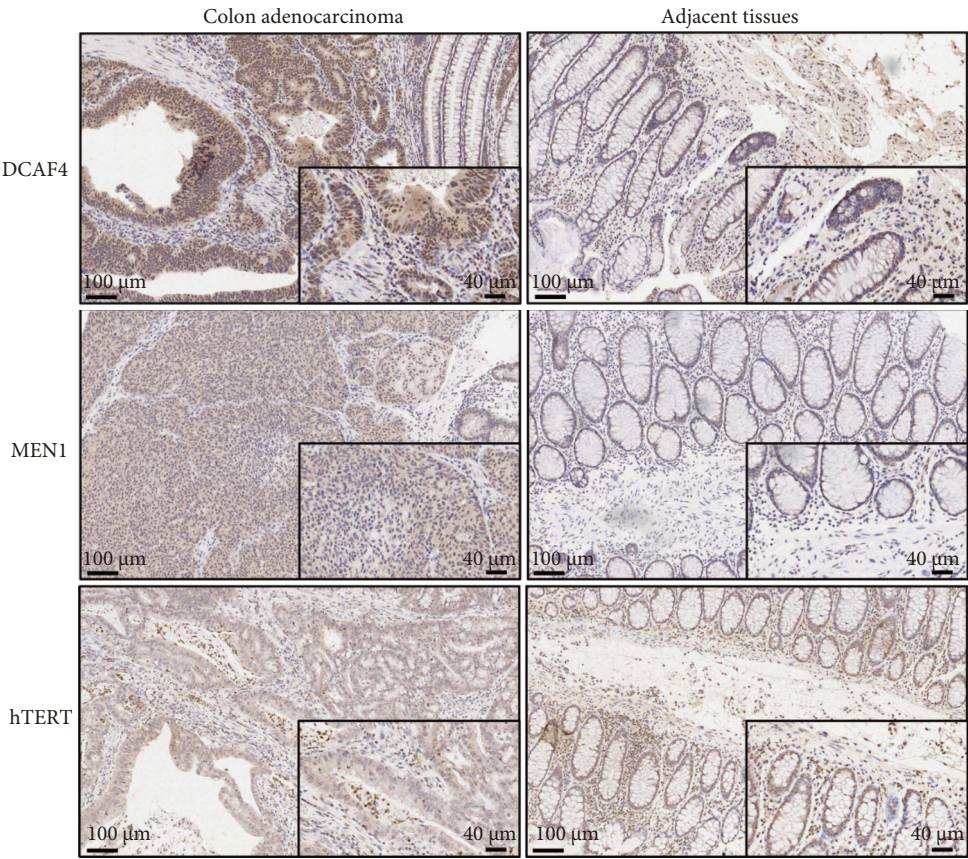


图 1 结肠腺癌患者癌与癌旁组织的DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT蛋白表达的免疫组化染色图

Fig 1 Immunohistochemical staining images of DCAF4, MEN1, and hTERT protein expression in cancer and adjacent tissues from patients with colon adenocarcinoma

DCAF4: DNA damage binding protein 1 and cullin 4-related factor 4; MEN1: menin 1; hTERT: human telomerase reverse transcriptase.

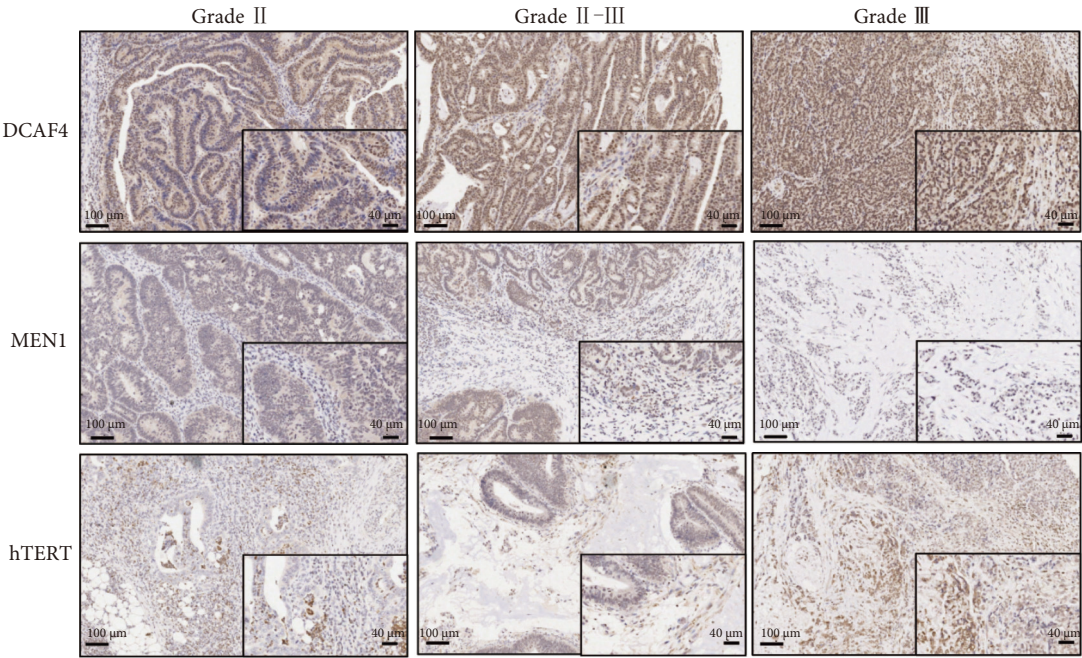


图 2 不同病理分级结肠腺癌患者之间DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT蛋白表达的免疫组化染色图

Fig 2 Immunohistochemical staining images of DCAF4, MEN1, and hTERT protein expression in colon adenocarcinoma patients with different pathological grades

患者的预后产生不良影响。野生型和突变型*BRAF*基因患者中MEN1(10.20 ± 3.22 和 8.6 ± 1.01 , $P = 0.23$)和hTERT(6.80 ± 3.15 和 8.40 ± 1.78 , $P = 0.16$)蛋白评分差异无统计学意义。

2.5 结肠腺癌患者DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT蛋白表达评分与PD1阳性率的关系

对患者DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT蛋白表达评分与PD1

阳性率的关系进行了相关性分析(图3),发现MEN1表达与PD1阳性率呈正相关(Spearman $\rho = 0.219$, $P = 0.034$)。

2.6 不同T分期结肠腺癌患者之间DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT蛋白表达水平差异

与T2期患者(3.93 ± 2.47)相比, T3期患者hTERT蛋白表达评分更高(6.25 ± 3.04), 差异有统计学意义($P < 0.05$) (图4)。

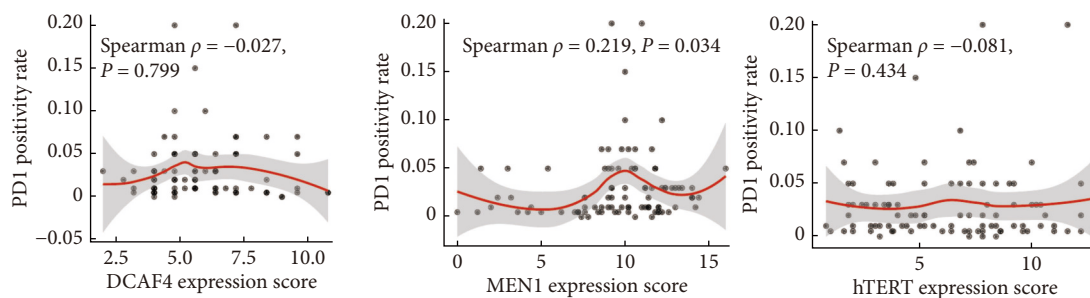


图3 结肠腺癌患者DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT蛋白表达评分与PD1阳性率的相关性

Fig 3 Correlation between the expression scores of DCAF4, MEN1, and hTERT proteins in patients with colon adenocarcinoma and the positive rate of PD1

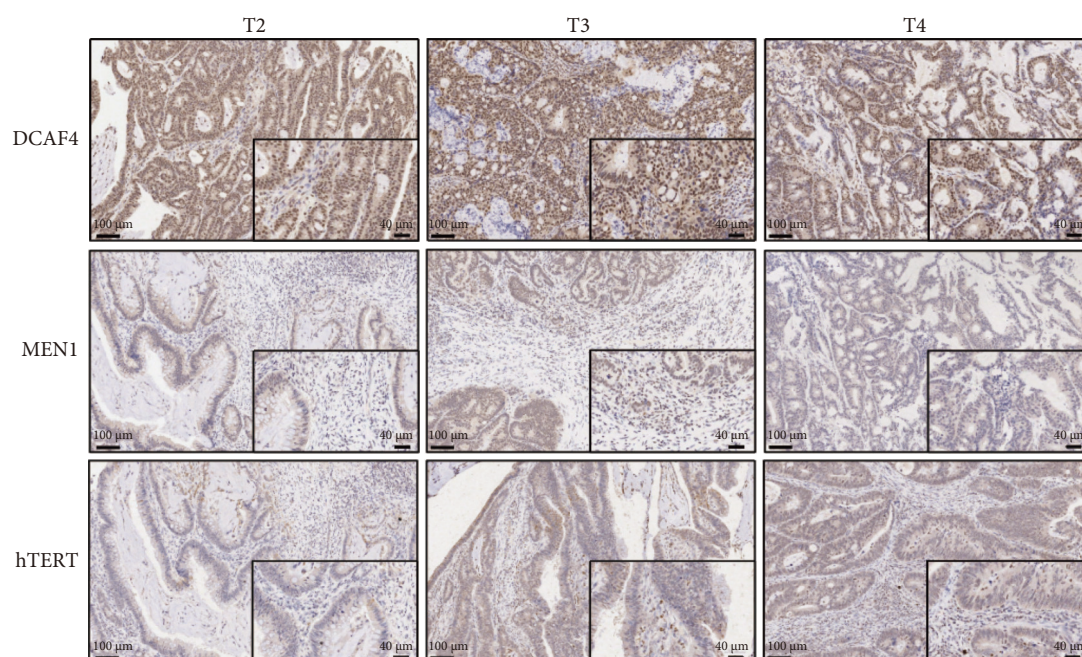


图4 不同T分期结肠腺癌患者DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT蛋白表达的免疫组化染色图

Fig 4 Immunohistochemical staining images of DCAF4, MEN1, and hTERT protein expression in patients with different T stages of colon adenocarcinoma

2.7 结肠腺癌患者DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT蛋白表达水平与生存预后的关系

见图5。以蛋白表达评分中位数水平将患者分为高表达组和低表达组。与DCAF4低表达组患者相比, DCAF4高表达组患者生存率较低, 但差异无统计学意义($P = 0.167$)。不同MEN1、hTERT蛋白表达水平患者生存率无显著差异。

3 讨论

历史上, 端粒酶曾被寄予厚望, 被视为极具潜力的癌症治疗靶标, 众多研究致力于探索其在肿瘤治疗中的应用前景^[22-24]。然而, 随着研究的不断深入, 直接靶向端粒酶的策略遭遇了诸多棘手的挑战^[25], 这促使科研人员将目光转向其他潜在的治疗途径。

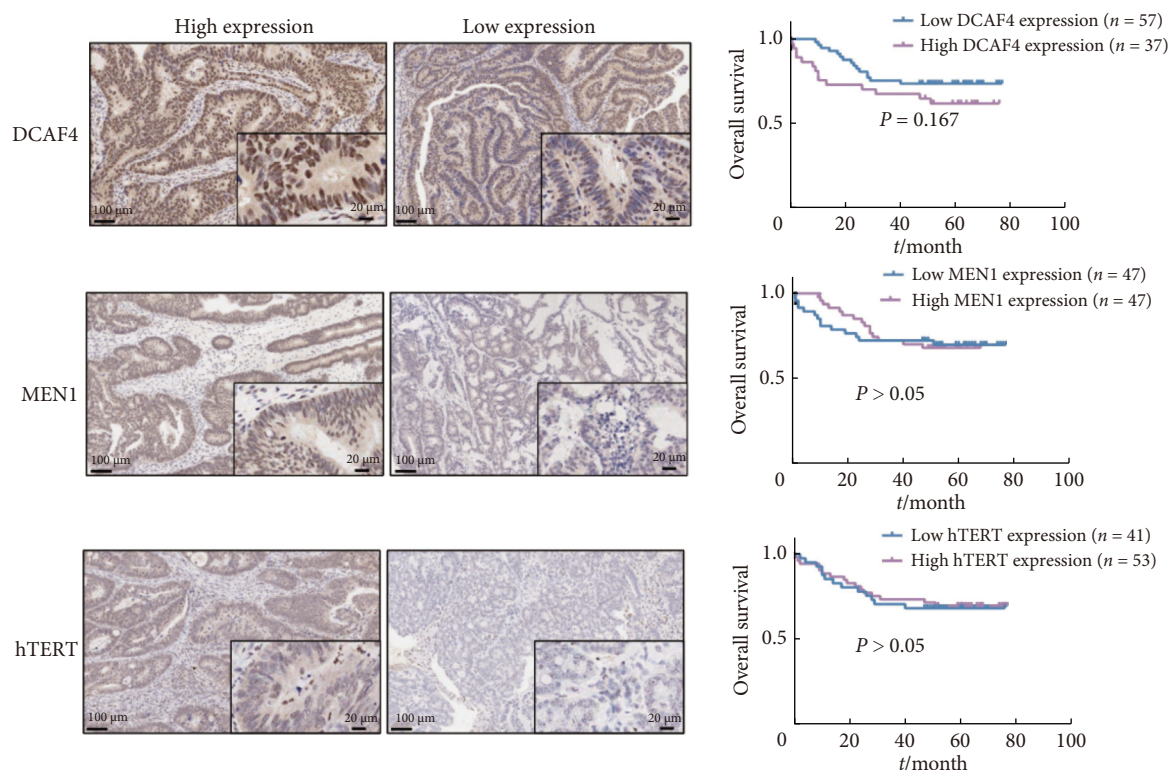


图 5 DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT蛋白表达水平与结肠腺癌患者的生存预后的关系

Fig 5 The relationship between the expression levels of DCAF4, MEN1, and hTERT proteins and the survival prognosis of colorectal cancer patients

本课题组近期在*Carcinogenesis*发表的研究首次系统阐明了在结肠癌细胞中,炎症微环境通过激活CRL4^{DCAF4}E3泛素连接酶介导肿瘤抑制因子MEN1的泛素化降解,进而解除了MEN1对hTERT转录的抑制作用,最终驱动细胞永生化和恶性增殖^[19]。该研究在体外及动物模型中完整揭示了CRL4^{DCAF4}-MEN1-hTERT这一全新的致癌信号轴。然而,该轴在结直肠癌患者组织中的表达谱、临床相关性及其预后价值仍有待于在临床层面进行系统验证。在此背景下,本研究从临床角度出发,对DCAF4、MEN1及hTERT的表达与结肠腺癌患者的病理特征之间的关系展开了进一步的探究。本研究发现,DCAF4蛋白的表达水平与病理分级呈正相关,而MEN1与之相反,与本团队之前的细胞和动物实验结果一致^[19]。在结肠腺癌患者中,*BRAF*基因突变,尤其是V600E替代,是一种较为常见的突变类型,约10%的转移性结肠腺癌患者携带该突变,且这一突变已被证实是预后不良的重要标志^[26]。本研究发现,携带突变型*BRAF*基因的结肠腺癌患者中,DCAF4蛋白表达评分更高,这提示DCAF4蛋白高表达的患者可能面临更差的预后。而T3期患者比T2期患者表现出更高的hTERT蛋白表达评分,表明hTERT蛋白高表达与肿瘤的浸润深度、侵袭性相关。该结果与本团队前期开展的体内体外研究^[19]高度一致,进一步支持

DCAF4-MEN1-hTERT轴作为潜在临床治疗靶标的重要价值。此外,本研究还发现DCAF4蛋白高表达的结肠腺癌患者生存率低于DCAF4蛋白低表达患者,尽管这一差异尚未达到统计学显著性水平,但这一趋势可能与本研究样本量有限有关,仍提示了DCAF4在结肠腺癌预后评估中的潜在价值。

T细胞免疫在介导肿瘤免疫反应中扮演着不可或缺的关键角色^[27-29]。本研究发现MEN1表达与PD1阳性率呈显著正相关,这种调控可能与免疫细胞的浸润和免疫微环境的改变有关。这一结果提示,在MEN1高表达的结肠腺癌患者中,除了单独靶向DCAF4-MEN1-hTERT轴进行治疗外,还可以考虑联合免疫治疗,靶向PD1等免疫检查点,从而有望显著增强治疗效果,为结肠腺癌的综合治疗提供了新的思路和策略。

综上所述,我们基于团队此前的细胞和动物层面的研究,从临床层面进一步证实了结肠腺癌患者组织中高表达DCAF4、hTERT,低表达MEN1蛋白与不良临床病理特征之间有联系。DCAF4-MEN1-hTERT轴作为新的治疗靶点和临床指标,具有广阔的应用前景。此外,本研究还提示,在靶向MEN1进行治疗时,联合免疫疗法可能会取得更理想的治疗结果。然而,需要指出的是,本研究的研究对象来源于单中心,且样本量相对有限,这可能在一

一定程度上限制了研究结果的普遍性和可靠性。因此, 未来仍需开展多中心、大样本的研究来进一步验证本研究的发现。

* * *

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