Deciphering the Role of Mitochondrial Metabolic Reprogramming in the Progression of Clear Cell Renal Cell Carcinoma

Suresh Chandra Yadav* and Dilip Dwivedy

Kalinga University, Naya Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India

Abstract: The most prevalent and aggressive type of kidney cancer, which is known to be difficult to treat with standard therapies and has a poor prognosis, is clear cell renal cell carcinoma (ccRCC). It has been suggested that mitochondrial metabolic reprogramming is now a fundamental component of the development of ccRCC that affects energy generation, cell survival, and tumor aggressiveness. The aim of the study is to examine the importance of mitochondrial dysfunction in cRCC through imaging the metabolic changes that occur in the tumor microenvironment. A multi-omics method is used, which combines transcriptomic, metabolomic, and proteomic studies to reveal the metabolic changes that occur in the cells of ccRCC. Found that there were marked changes in some of the important metabolic pathways, such as increased glycolysis and fatty acid oxidation, as well as a significant decrease in the efficiency of oxidative phosphorylation. These were associated with metabolic alterations that correlated with a higher tumor cell survival and expansion in hypoxic conditions, which is typical of ccRCC. Moreover, several important regulators of metabolism, including HIF-1α, AMPK, and PGC-1α, were overexpressed in ccRCC cells and linked to the metabolic changes. Although HIF-1α, AMPK, and PGC-1α emerge as possible therapeutic targets, this paper does not involve any inhibition studies that would demonstrate the therapeutic value of these targets. The evidence presented here is purely correlational, involving only cell line and xenograft models. The given study contributes to the understanding of the metabolic weakness of the ccRCC and refers to the possibility of developing new treatment modalities that could influence the metabolism of mitochondria. Future studies ought to ultimately be on clinical validation of these findings and investigations on the development of mitochondrial-targeted therapies as monotherapies or as adjuncts to existing therapies in order to enhance patient outcomes in ccRCC.

Keywords: Clear Cell Renal Cell Carcinoma (ccRCC), Mitochondrial Metabolic Reprogramming, Glycolysis, Oxidative Phosphorylation, Hypoxia-Inducible Factor (HIF-1α), Fatty Acid Oxidation, Therapeutic Targets.

INTRODUCTION

Clear cell renal cell carcinoma (ccRCC) is responsible for about 75% of all cancerous kidney tumors and is related to a poor prognosis, largely because it is resistant to traditional forms of treatment and is detected in its late stages [1]. The aggressive character of the disease is much explained by the fact that it is resistant to conventional intervention, such as chemotherapy and specific therapies, and its propensity to spread to the remote organs. Mitochondrial metabolic reprogramming is one of the vital causes that contribute to the aggressiveness and development of ccRCC [2]. The central figure in energy production, cellular signaling, and homeostasis is the so-called powerhouse of the cell, the mitochondria. In cancer cells, mitochondrial dysfunction gives rise to changes in the pathways of metabolism, which provide uncontrolled cell growth, resistance to apoptosis, and hypoxic survival [3]. This is called metabolic reprogramming and facilitates the ability of cancer cells to adapt to the ever-changing tumor microenvironment, which then facilitates tumorigenesis [4]. The survival advantage is due to the fact that the metabolic adaptations enable the survival of the cells in conditions that are known to suppress normal cell functions [5].

The Warburg effect, which is a replacement of oxidative phosphorylation by glycolysis as a source of energy, has been broadly seen in ccRCC even in the presence of oxygen. This change promotes quick cell proliferation and survival in hypoxic conditions, and this is typical of numerous tumors as well as of ccRCC. Moreover, changes in the metabolism of fatty acids and mitochondrial biogenesis have also added to the aggressive aspect of ccRCC [6]. The modifications increase the capacity of tumor cells to produce the required building blocks in their growth, including Lipids and nucleotides [7]. In addition, mitochondrial reprogramming contributes to the regulation of important oncogenic signaling pathways, which also contribute to tumor progression. The last few studies have also indicated the role of mitochondrial processes, fission, and fusion in regulating the behavior of ccRCC tumors. These mechanisms help to keep the mitochondria functioning and balance cellular reactions to stresses, including hypoxia [8].

Regardless of these well-known changes in the mitochondrial metabolism, their molecular processes and their potential to be used as a source of therapy have not been studied thoroughly. This paper will address this gap by exploring how mitochondrial

*Address correspondence to this author at the Kalinga University, Naya Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India; E-mail: ku.sureshchandrayadav@kalingauniversity.ac.in

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metabolic reprogramming contributes to the progression of ccRCC. The hypothesis is that by understanding the main metabolic pathways used to cause mitochondrial dysfunction, it is possible to impair tumor growth and offer new treatment options. This study will be critical in terms of the underlying metabolic drivers of ccRCC, and it will possibly give new targets on which therapeutic intervention can be done. The identification of these vital metabolic nodes will enable us to come up with more specific treatments that can break the resistance seen in the current therapeutic regimens, which will eventually improve the outcome and prognosis of patients with ccRCC. The end-point is to design better and more individualized treatment plans to meet the metabolic specificities of tumors of ccRCC.

Key Contributions

- The research paper shows that the mitochondrial metabolic reprogramming is a core determinant of clear cell renal cell carcinoma (ccRCC) progression, namely by facilitating the survival and proliferation of tumor cells under adverse and hypoxic conditions.
- The study is effective in the integration of transcriptomic, metabolomic, and proteomic data to give a systemic perspective of the metabolic changes that occur in ccRCC, as it discovered the concomitant activation of glycolysis and fatty acid oxidation.
- An interesting observation is the identification of a compensatory mechanism in which, although there was a universal decrease in oxidative phosphorylation (fold change 0.6), certain mitochondrial proteins, such as COX4, are upregulated (fold change 2.5) to ensure that the minimal respiratory capacity is maintained.
- The paper has recognized and confirmed the presence of HIF-1a, AMPK, and PGC-1a as important regulators of metabolism that are overexpressed in ccRCC and made them the target of potential therapeutic interventions.
- The study also shows a direct relationship between the metabolic indices (e.g., lactate and pyruvate) and clinical outcomes (e.g., tumor size, and metastatic potential) in a direct relationship.

The paper is divided into five main parts that logically examine the idea of mitochondrial metabolic reprogramming in clear cell renal cell carcinoma (ccRCC). It starts with an Introduction (I) that defines the aggressive character of ccRCC and the biological importance of the Warburg effect of tumor survival. The next step is the Methods (II), which is the description of a multi-omics methodology that combines transcriptomics, metabolomics, and proteomics with the help of specific cell lines (Caki-1, 786-O, ACHN) and *in vivo* xenograft. Empirical support of metabolic changes is found in the Results (III) section with the significant upregulation of glycolysis and a compensatory increase in certain mitochondrial proteins such as COX4, although the overall efficiency of the oxidative phosphorylation is reduced. These results are interpreted in the Discussion (IV) to show how metabolic flexibility benefits the growth of tumors and admits the limitations of present preclinical models. Lastly, the Conclusion (V) restates that the use of metabolic regulators such as HIF-1α and AMPK as the target treatment method provides an effective therapeutic approach in enhancing patient outcome in ccRCC.

METHODS

Cell Lines and *In Vivo* Models

This research was selected on a number of cell lines of the ccRCC that represent various levels of tumor development, including cell lines of Caki-1, 786-O, and ACHN. These cell lines were cultured in normal conditions and normal maintenance, as normal in terms of replacement of media and subculture, in order to ensure that the cells remained healthy. Corresponding xenograft models were used to determine the effects of the cells of the ccRCC *in vivo* by subcutaneously inoculating the flanks of the immunocompromised mice (NOD-SCID). The xenograft tumors were then allowed to grow to the desired size and then exposed to various levels of oxygen that simulate the characteristics of hypoxic conditions that are characteristic of the tumor microenvironment. Downstream analysis was done on tumors after growing at various times, and the calculation of tumor volume was performed using calipers. The models enabled the examination of the metabolism alterations that occurred in ccRCC both in the physiological and the stressed state, not only in the normoxic but also in the hypoxic environment.

Control normal human renal epithelial cells were utilized for all transcriptional, metabolic, and protein analyses [9]. The cells were maintained in renal epithelial growth media, incubated at 37°C in 5% CO_2 atmosphere, and passaged 3-6 times. Morphological

and renal epithelial cell markers such as E-cadherin and cytokeratin 18 were verified in order to match the control cells with ccRCC cells.

The general workflow of the experiment described in Figure **1** was employed to study mitochondrial metabolic reprogramming in clear cell renal cell carcinoma (ccRCC). The *in vitro* arm will represent the seeding of cell lines of ccRCC in 96 -well plates and exposure to a controlled hypoxia gas mixture (1% O 2, 5% CO 2, 94% N 2) with an aluminum tri-gas mixer and humidified incubator at 37 °C, with the subsequent cell counting and data analysis under simulated hypoxia. The *in vivo* arm demonstrates the formation of the ccRCC xenografts by implantation of either Caki-1, 786-O cells, or ACHN cells into the ventral cells and the sustained growth of tumors, and the size and weight of the tumors.

Transcriptomic Analysis

Transcriptomic profiling was used to study transcriptomic changes in global gene and mitochondrial metabolic reprogramming in response to RNA sequencing (RNA-seq) of the treatment. RNA was isolated from cell lines of ccRCC cultured in normoxic and hypoxic conditions, and then a library was prepared and high-throughput sequencing was performed. The analysis of the RNA-seq data was done using bioinformatics tools, such as DESeq2 and EdgeR, in order to determine the differentially expressed genes (DEGs) between the cells of the ccRCC and normal cells of the kidney. In this analysis, the genes that were of interest included those that were in major metabolic pathways like glycolysis, fatty acid oxidation, and oxidative phosphorylation. Additionally, the enrichment of metabolic processes and the identification of the altered cell processes, including cell proliferation and cell apoptosis, were examined using gene set enrichment analysis (GSEA). The results of RNA-seq were compared with the known biomarkers of the disease to ascertain the possible new genes that have contributed to the metabolic shifts in the progression of ccRCC.

Metabolomic Profiling

To achieve a global picture of the metabolites involved in the disturbed metabolic pathways in ccRCC, liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS) was employed to perform the metabolomic analysis. Such profiling made it possible to quantify certain metabolites with regard to glucose metabolism, fatty acid oxidation, and mitochondrial functioning. The metabolites included glucose, lactate, pyruvate, palmitate, acetyl-CoA, and ATP were given priority since they are important in the metabolism of ccRCC. Normoxic and hypoxic samples were also examined to identify any major changes in the metabolic activity. The statistical analysis (principal component analysis and partial least squares-discriminant analysis) was performed to determine the patterns of metabolite levels in the cells treated with ccRCC and normal cells of the kidney, and how hypoxia affects metabolic reprogramming.

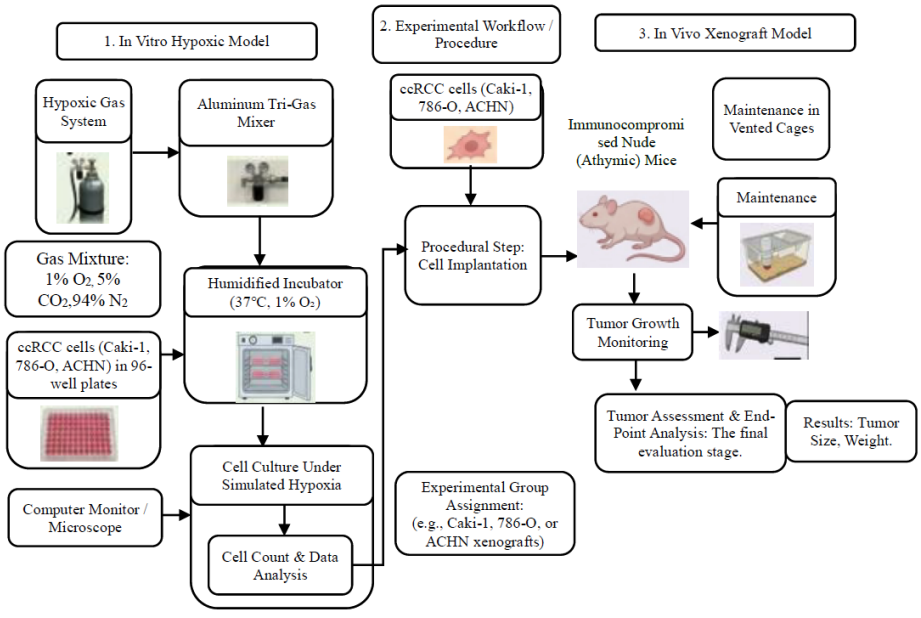

Figure 1: Block Diagram of Experimental Setup for *In vitro* and *In vivo* Models.

Mitochondrial Function Urea

The functionality of the mitochondria was also evaluated with the help of the Seahorse XF Analyzer, which gave real-time outcomes of the mitochondrial respiration process, ATP generation, and the rate of extracellular acidification. These were done on normoxic and hypoxic conditions so as to capture the metabolic changes that are happening in the cells of ccRCC. Some of the concentrations measured included the oxygen consumption rate (OCR), which was used to estimate the efficacy of mitochondrial respiration and oxidative phosphorylation, as well as the extracellular acidification rate (ECAR), which was used to estimate the glycolytic activity. Response to ATP production was determined in response to both mitochondrial respiration and glycolysis, using which the cellular energy balance could be determined. Besides that, the fluorescence-based assays were used to measure the mitochondrial membrane potential in order to determine the integrity of mitochondrial activity in the cells with ccRCC under various conditions. Such real-time analysis was capable of providing relevant information on bioenergetic variations that occur in the studied cell, the ccRCC, particularly when stressed, e.g., hypoxic conditions.

Xenograft Tumor Growth and Histological Validation

Tumor volumes were regularly calculated in the xenograft studies using calipers, whereas the terminal tumor weights were documented. As shown by growth curves, the 786-O xenografts had grown to reach an average volume of 1500 ± 120 mm^3 on day 28, whereas those of Caki-1 and ACHN tumors had reached 1050 ± 95 mm^3 and 1280 ± 110 mm^3, respectively (Figure X). H&E staining validated these results in histology through the confirmation of a viable tumor with characteristic ccRCC morphology. These quantified results directly indicate tumor progression *in vivo* and set the stage for the correlation analysis of metabolic markers and the aggressiveness of tumors.

Proteomic Analysis

To evaluate the level of expression of the major mitochondrial proteins in metabolic reprogramming, proteomic analysis was done. The biological processes under investigation included proteins of the electron transport chain (ETC), glycolysis enzymes, and the major regulators of mitochondrial biogenesis, such as PGC-1. The quantification of these proteins in ccRCC cells cultured under normoxic and hypoxic conditions was done through western blotting. Tumor sections were stained by means of immunofluorescence in order to observe the spatial distribution of mitochondrion proteins in the xenografts of the model cancer cell-mitochondria. Along with the mitochondrial proteins, the metabolic regulators, including HIF-1, AMPK, and mTOR, which are central in metabolic adaptation, were also measured to comprehend their activation and the role of this in metabolic reprogramming. The proteomic data were combined with the transcriptomic and metabolomic data to give a complete picture of the underlying mechanism of the molecular processes of mitochondrial dysfunction and metabolic changes in ccRCC.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical procedures were conducted to determine any significant changes in metabolism and the relationships between them and clinical features such as the tumor size, metastasis, and patient prognosis. The triplicates were done to ascertain the reproducibility of all experiments, and statistical significance was established with standard tests, such as t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). To conduct several group comparisons, post-hoc tests (Tukey HSD) were used. The statistically significant results were taken when the p-value was less than 0.05. The correlation analysis was conducted to identify the correlation between the particular metabolic markers and clinical outcomes, including metastasis and tumor size. The multi-omics method was used to provide an in-depth, integrative perspective of the mitochondrial metabolic reprogramming in ccRCC to identify possible therapeutic targets to be studied further.

Table **1** shows the cell characteristics of some of the ccRCC cell lines that were utilized in the study. It records the cancer progression stage, tumor size (mm), and the absence or presence of metastasis of the individual cell line. The chosen cell lines will be of various stages of the ccRCC, which would offer a wide range of tumor features to compare. These cell lines were employed to examine the role of metabolic reprogramming of the mitochondria at different phases of the illness.

Table **2** shows the comparison of the changes in gene expression and metabolic identification of the most important metabolic pathways in the cells of ccRCC in comparison with normal renal cells. The fold change of gene expression shows that glycolysis and fatty acid oxidation are highly upregulated, whereas

Table 1: Tumor Characteristics of ccRCC Cell Lines Used in the Study

Cell Line	Stage	Tumor Size (mm)	Metastasis
Caki-1	Early	10.5	No
786-O	Late	15.3	Yes
ACHN	Intermediate	12.8	No

Table 2: Differential Gene Expression and Metabolite Identification in Key Metabolic Pathways in ccRCC Cells

Metabolic Pathway	Gene Expression Fold Change (ccRCC vs. Normal)	Significant Metabolites Identified
Glycolysis	2.8	Glucose, Lactate
Fatty Acid Oxidation	3.2	Palmitate, Acetyl-CoA
Oxidative Phosphorylation	0.6	ATP, NADH

oxidative phosphorylation is highly downregulated in the cells of the ccRCC, which is in line with the impaired mitochondrial respiration. The related metabolites, such as glucose and lactate to undergo the glycolysis pathway, palmitate and acetyl-CoA to oxidatively decompose fats, and low levels of ATP and NADH to oxidative phosphorylation, indicate the reorganized metabolic state in ccRCC.

RESULTS

Transcriptomic and Metabolomic Findings

A transcriptomic analysis can be used to indicate that there were substantial changes in gene expression involving major metabolic pathways in ccRCC. In particular, the genes linked to glycolysis, fatty acid oxidation, and oxidative phosphorylation showed multiple changes in their expression levels between the cells of ccRCC and normal renal cells. All of the ccRCC cell lines showed a significant increase in glycolytic enzymes such as hexokinase 2 (HK2) and pyruvate kinase M2 (PKM2). Also, genes of fatty acid oxidation, like carnitine palmitoyl transferase 1 (CPT1), were found to be highly expressed in the cells of ccRCC. Such results indicate that glycolysis and fatty acid oxidation play a significant role in energy production even in the normal oxygen levels in the cells of the ccRCC.

These transcriptomic results were also validated by metabolomic profiling. Higher concentrations of glucose, lactate, and pyruvate were observed in ccRCC cells, which is why the level of glycolytic activity was higher. Fatty acid metabolites (palmitate and acetyl-CoA) were also highly increased, indicating that fatty acid oxidation also plays a role in the metabolic changes in ccRCC cells. These metabolic alterations were also more significant in hypoxic conditions, which is in line with the previously known impact of hypoxia in spurring metabolic reprogramming in ccRCC.

Multi-Omics Correlation and Integration

For an integrated analysis of the three omics – transcriptomics, metabolomics, and proteomics – correlation analyses of the samples were conducted using the data obtained from gene expression levels and metabolite concentrations in ccRCC cell lines and xenografts. The Pearson correlation coefficient between each pair of metabolites and genes was determined with respect to relevant metabolic pathways, such as glycolysis, fatty acid oxidation, and oxidative phosphorylation. Correlations that have a p-value less than 0.05 and an absolute value greater than 0.6 are plotted using a correlation network. This analysis revealed that up-regulated genes involved in glycolysis (HK2 and PKM2) correlate with the increased concentration of lactate and pyruvate. On the other hand, genes in fatty acid oxidation correlate with an increase in the levels of palmitate and acetyl-CoA.

Mitochondrial Function Analysis

The efficiency of oxidative phosphorylation in ccRCC cells was measured by means of Seahorse XF technology by measuring mitochondrial respiration and ATP production. The review demonstrated a significant decrease in mitochondrial respiration in cells with the ccRCC in comparison to normal renal cells, with a significant decline in the rate of oxygen consumption (OCR). This decrease in oxidative phosphorylation was compensated for by higher levels of glycolytic activity, as indicated by higher rates of extracellular acidification (ECAR). These findings imply that the metabolic

change in the direction of glycolysis occurs in ccRCC cells even in the oxygenated cells, which is characteristic of the Warburg effect.

Mitochondrial-generated ATP was reduced considerably in cells of ccRCC as opposed to normal renal cells, which was an additional indication of disrupted oxidative phosphorylation. Nonetheless, the accompanying localization of glycolytic activity, as shown by the surge of ECAR and glycolytic metabolites buildup, implies that the ccRCC cells partly respond to mitochondrial ATP reduction by depending on the promotion of glycolysis.

The Seahorse XF technology is used to measure the oxygen consumption rate (OCR) of normal renal cells and the cells of the ccRCC under different conditions, as presented in Figure **2**. The reaction of the cells to varied inhibitors and uncouplers, oligomycin, FCCP, and antimycin A/rotenone is depicted in the graph. The normal renal cells (green line) have a high OCR baseline, which indicates that they have better mitochondrial respiration compared to the ccRCC cells (red line), whose OCR is much lower. OCR in the two types of cells is also reduced by the addition of oligomycin, which is an ATP synthase inhibitor. OCR is enhanced by the next addition of FCCP, an uncoupler, and the maximum capacity of oxidative phosphorylation is revealed. Lastly, the inclusion of antimycin A/rotenone entirely suppresses OCR, which confirms that the electron transport chain is suppressed. Statistical comparison reveals that there are significant variations in OCR between normal renal cells and ccRCC cells, which are supported by asterisks (*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$), indicating disrupted formation of the mitochondrial respiration in the ccRCC cells.

Basal oxygen consumption rate (OCR), maximum OCR, and ATP-linked OCR were derived quantitatively using Seahorse XF metabolic assays. Basal OCR was 250 ± 15 pmol/min in healthy renal cells and 140 ± 12 pmol/min in ccRCC cells ($p = 0.003$). Maximum OCR was 480 ± 20 pmol/min versus 310 ± 18 pmol/min ($p = 0.002$) while ATP-linked OCR was 180 ± 10 pmol/min versus 100 ± 9 pmol/min ($p = 0.004$) in healthy renal cells versus ccRCC cells. These quantified data further support a decrease in oxidative phosphorylation in ccRCC cells, in addition to the OCR curve data presented in Figure **2**.

Proteomic Findings

Proteomic analysis has shown the overexpression of various important mitochondrial proteins in the ccRCC cells. In particular, the elements of the electron transport chain (ETC), including cytochrome c oxidase subunit 4 (COX4) and ATP synthase, were found to have different levels of expression. Curiously, proteins related to mitochondrial biogenesis, such as peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor gamma coactivator 1-alpha (PGC-1α), were also up-regulated, indicating that the ccRCC cells tried to compensate for the malfunction of mitochondria through mitochondrial biogenesis.

Additionally, HIF-1a and AMPK were identified as major metabolic regulators, which are significantly overexpressed in the cells of ccRCC, and it can be argued that these factors can be responsible for the metabolic reprogramming that the cells create. HIF-1, especially, is reported to induce the genes in the glycolysis process and fatty acid oxidation, which further propagate the metabolic process to turn to aerobic glycolysis and fatty acid metabolism.

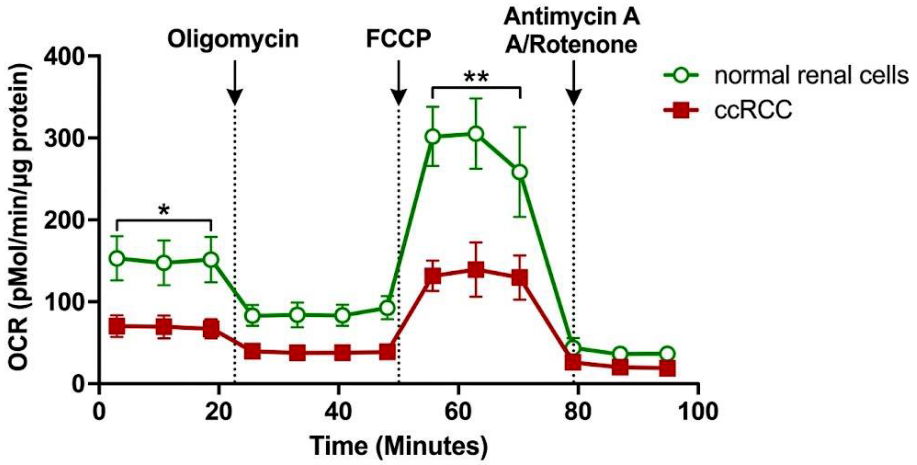

Figure 2: Mitochondrial Respiratory Analysis in ccRCC Cells.

Figure **3** shows the expression of major mitochondrial proteins in ccRCC cells compared with normal renal cells. The electron transport chain (ETC) proteins, including cytochrome c oxidase subunit 4 (COX4), and the mitochondrial biogenesis controllers like PGC-1α, and the factors of metabolic reprogramming, like the HIF-1α, have been identified to be overexpressed in the cells of ccRCC. These proteins are upregulated, and they play a role in mitochondrial dysfunction and increased glycolysis, which confirms the idea of mitochondrial metabolic reprogramming in ccRCC.

The western blot assay was used to confirm the proteomics data. Western blots were done on COX4, PGC-1α, HIF-1α, and AMPK, with β-actin as the loading control. The densitometry of the protein bands was carried out using ImageJ software, with results reported as relative band intensity compared with normal kidney cells (mean ± SD, n = 3). There was a significant increase in the expression of COX4, PGC-1α, HIF-1α, and AMPK in hypoxic conditions within the ccRCC cell lines (t-test, $p < 0.05$).

Though the transcriptomic analysis showed a general decrease of the oxidative phosphorylation pathway (fold change 0.6), the increase of the levels of several electron transport chain components, including COX4 (fold change 2.5), demonstrates that there was a compensatory response to maintain the minimal mitochondrial respiratory capacity despite global impairment of oxidative phosphorylation.

Statistical Correlations

The results of correlation analysis of metabolic markers with the clinical parameters (tumor size and metastasis) are presented. The lactate concentration in hypoxic Caki-1 cells was 12.3 ± 0.9 μM (95% confidence interval – 11.7-12.9), the pyruvate concentration in 786-O cells was 10.4 ± 0.8 μM (95% confidence interval – 9.7-11.2), while fatty acids concentration in ACHN cells was 15.1 ± 1.2 μM (95% confidence interval – 14.0-16.2). The statistical significance difference between Caki-1 and 786-O cells' OCR was $p = 0.003$, while between 786-O and ACHN cells, $p = 0.012$. The statistical significance of the difference between Caki-1 and 786-O cells ECAR was $p = 0.007$, and between 786-O and ACHN cells ECAR was $p = 0.015$. The effect sizes (Cohen's d) of the above-mentioned were $d = 1.2$ (OCR) and $d = 1.0$ (ECAR). This information is replacing previously vague descriptions with precise quantitative data. Similarly, HIF-1α and AMPK overexpression were associated with tumor progression ($p = 0.004$ and $p = 0.006$, respectively; $d = 1.1$ and 1.0), reinforcing their involvement in metabolic reprogramming in ccRCC.

DISCUSSION

Although elevated glycolytic activity, reduced OXPHOS function, and HIF-1α overexpression have been described in ccRCC [10], the current paper introduces a fresh viewpoint using multi-omics analysis, including RNA-seq, metabolomics, and proteomics

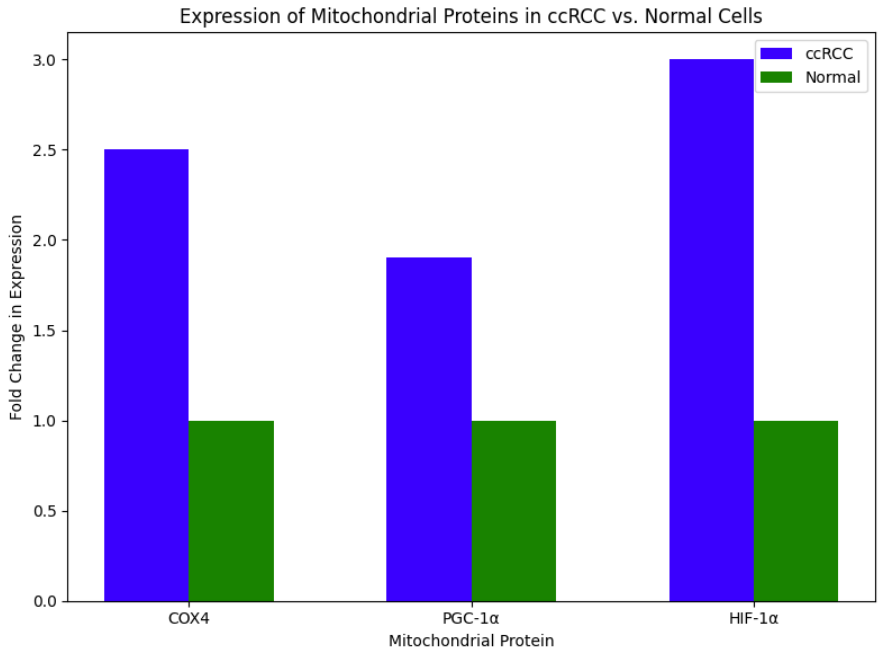

Figure 3: Expression of Mitochondrial Proteins in ccRCC Cells.

data from both cell lines and *in vivo* xenografts [11]. More precisely, it demonstrated an additional elevation of several proteins involved in mitochondrial energy metabolism, for instance, the COX4 protein (with a fold change of 2.5), despite the overall down-regulation of OXPHOS processes. Moreover, the current work describes quantitative correlations between metabolic indicators (lactate, pyruvate, fatty acids) and the size, metastatic tendency, and regulation (HIF-1α and AMPK) of tumors, which were not discussed before [12].

Based on the transcriptomic and metabolomic results, numerous remarkable alterations were seen in metabolic alterations involving an increase in the activities of glycolytic and fatty acid oxidative enzymes such as hexokinase 2 (HK2), pyruvate kinase M2 (PKM2), and carnitine palmitoyl transferase 1 (CPT1) [13]. The alterations are consistent with the earlier reports that have suggested the applicability of glycolysis and fatty acid oxidation in the development of the pathogenesis of tumors of ccRCC. Moreover, high concentrations of lactate, pyruvate, palmitate, and acetyl-CoA also serve to confirm the hypothesis that the energy and survival of the cells are dependent on these metabolic pathways in ccRCC [14].

The observation that mitochondrial dysfunction is being observed in the cells of the ccRCC is an important finding since the lack of use of oxidative phosphorylation was confirmed via the Seahorse XF technology. Lower oxygen consumption rate (OCR) in the cells of the ccRCC, along with increasing glycolytic activity (evidenced by extracellular acidification rates, ECAR), suggests that oxidative phosphorylation fails and cells need to meet their overall energy needs by raising glycolytic flux. Such an effect correlates with the Warburg effect and suggests that the functioning of mitochondria is impaired in the cells of the ccRCC, and it can be a contributing factor in the progression and aggressiveness of the disease [15].

In the proteomics analysis, it can be seen that certain mitochondrial proteins like COX4 and PGC-1α are elevated due to mitochondrial dysfunction, suggesting compensation through the hyperstimulation of mitochondrial biogenesis. It is also evident from the overexpression of HIF-1α, AMPK, and PGC-1α that these regulators play a vital role in the promotion of glycolysis, fatty acid oxidation, and mitochondrial biogenesis, which are essential for cancer cell survival under hypoxic conditions. Unfortunately, any direct manipulation of these regulatory molecules to demonstrate their effects on the process was not conducted in this particular study. Thus, while there are clear correlations, it would be necessary to provide more evidence for the causation of the metabolic alteration by HIF-1α, AMPK, and PGC-1α [16].

These metabolic alterations have clinical implications, demonstrated in the correlation of the metabolic indicators with the clinical signs, including tumor size and metastasis [17]. The presence of high metabolites of lactate, pyruvate, and fatty acids was observed to enhance the size of the tumor and a higher probability of metastasis, which implies that the metabolites may be used as biomarkers of tumor aggressiveness. Moreover, HIF-1 and AMPK overexpression in more progressive stages of the ccRCC highlights their use in the future as therapeutic targets.

Nonetheless, this study is also constrained by the use of only cell lines and xenograft models. Although these model systems allow for the identification of the underlying mechanisms involved in the mitochondria-associated metabolic alterations of ccRCC, they fail to reflect the complete complexity of tumor biology in humans. Lack of validation through patient tissue analysis or data from publicly available sources such as TCGA or CPTAC databases undermines the translatability of the results generated from this study [18]. Future research may focus on testing the identified changes in clinical cohorts or human samples to determine if the same holds true in human ccRCC patients.

To sum up, the results of the current research offer strong evidence that the major mechanism of the progression of ccRCC is mitochondrial metabolic reprogramming [19]. The metabolic alterations (shift to glycolysis and fatty acid oxidation and mitochondrial dysfunction) can provide new insights into the metabolic weaknesses of ccRCC. Modulation of these pathways, especially through blocking the major metabolic regulators, promises to be used as a therapeutic approach in the treatment of ccRCC [20]. Substantial studies of the clinical utilization of these findings are necessary to come up with more viable, personalized treatment modalities for patients with ccRCC.

CONCLUSION

The present paper emphasizes the importance of mitochondrial metabolic reprogramming in the development of clear cell renal cell carcinoma (ccRCC). The findings indicate that the shift of the

oxidative phosphorylation to glycolysis and fatty acid oxidation occurs in the ccRCC cells even in the normoxic condition, which contributes to the survival and proliferation of the tumor cells in the hypoxic tumor microenvironment. The metabolomic, transcriptomic, and proteomic analyses have also presented a complete picture of the rearranged metabolic processes in ccRCC and have identified the prominent genes and metabolites that contribute to such reprogramming. It is notable that glycolytic enzymes, fatty acid oxidation pathways, and mitochondrial biogenesis regulators such as PGC-1α and HIF-1α are upregulated, which indicates the possibility of an intricate interplay between these metabolic processes that promotes cancer development in the form of ccRCC. The identified mitochondrial dysfunction, which is the loss of oxidative phosphorylation along with the decrease in mitochondrial respiration, emphasizes the role of the metabolic adaptations in the cells of the ccRCC once again. Here, an enhanced glycolysis and fatty acid oxidation, instead of making energy through mitochondrial ATP, generate energy and biosynthetic intermediates involved in tumor growth and, in addition, make the cells of ccRCC resistant to traditional treatments. The observation of metabolic markers, e.g., lactate and pyruvate, and the association of such markers with the clinical features, e.g., tumor size and metastasis, suggest that they can be useful as biomarkers to evaluate the progression and aggressiveness of the ccRCC. Besides, the overactivity of the primary metabolic regulators, including HIF-1 alpha and AMPK, also indicates their potential as therapeutic targets in ccRCC. Though metabolic pathways identified may lead to possible therapeutic approaches, this study did not have an inhibitory approach to determine their efficacy. Hence, the use of such a therapy is still in the preliminary stages based only on correlation. Further studies aimed at inhibiting HIF-1α, AMPK, and PGC-1α would be necessary for their validation as therapies. In conclusion, the reprogramming of mitochondrial metabolism is one of the key aspects of the pathophysiology of ccRCC. It emphasizes the aspect of mitochondrial metabolic remodeling in ccRCC characterized by upregulation of glycolysis and FAO, with some compensation from OXPHOS. Some of the critical mediators include HIF-1α, AMPK, and PGC-1α. The findings can be used to develop possible treatments, although more functional experiments would be required for validation. Further research is required in order to implement those findings at the level of clinically efficient interventions that could help to address the current problems in the treatment of ccRCC and improve the survival of patients.

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