**Ectopic Engrailed 1 expression in the dorsal midline causes cell death, abnormal differentiation of circumventricular organs and errors in axonal pathfinding**

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**SUMMARY**

A series of gain- or loss-of-function experiments performed in different vertebrate species have demonstrated that the Engrailed genes play multiple roles during brain development. In particular, they have been implicated in the determination of the mid/hindbrain domain, in cell proliferation and survival, in neurite formation, tissue polarization and axonal pathfinding. We have analyzed the consequences of a local gain of En function within or adjacent to the endogenous expression domain in mouse and chick embryos. In WEXPZ.En1 transgenic mice (Danielian, P. S. and McMahon, A. P. (1996) Nature 383, 332-334) several genes are induced as a consequence of ectopic expression of En1 in the diencephalic roof (but in a pattern inconsistent with a local di- to mes-encephalon fate change). The development of several structures with secretory function, generated from the dorsal neuroepithelium, is severely compromised. The choroid plexus, subcommissural organ and pineal gland either fail to form or are atrophic. These defects are preceded by an increase in cell death at the dorsal midline. Comparison with the phenotype of Wnt1sw/sw (swaying) mutants suggests that subcommissural organ failure is the main cause of prenatal hydrocephalus observed in both strains. The formation of the posterior commissure is also delayed, and errors in axonal pathfinding are frequent. In chick, ectopic expression of En by in ovo electroporation, affects growth and differentiation of the choroid plexus.

Key words: Engrailed, Dorsal midline, Hydrocephalus, Choroid plexus, Pineal gland, Subcommissural organ, Axonal pathfinding, Posterior commissure, Cell death, Swaying, In ovo electroporation, Mouse

**INTRODUCTION**

The assembly of neural circuits in the vertebrate nervous system begins with the generation of functionally distinct neuronal cell types along the rostrocaudal and dorsoventral axes of the neural tube. Patterning of cellular identity is thought to depend on intrinsic differences in the character of neural progenitors as well as regional differences in environmental signals (Lee and Jessell, 1999). Among the developmental control genes that become expressed in a spatially restricted pattern during neural plate induction are the two Engrailed homeodomain-containing genes. In mouse, En1 and En2 are expressed from the 1- and 5-somite stages, respectively, in two dorsolateral patches of cells in the anterior neuroepithelium, which subsequently fuse ventrally to mark a broad band that will give rise to the mid-hindbrain junction. Following neural tube closure, En protein expression remains centered around the constriction (where it persists throughout development) and includes a large portion of the mesencephalon and most of rhombomere one. In the adult brain, En expression is limited to neuronal groups in the pons, the substantia nigra and to cells of the cerebellum (Davis and Joyner, 1988; Davis et al., 1991; McMahon et al., 1992). Gene inactivation experiments have demonstrated that En1 has an early crucial role in the specification of the mes-metencephalic region (Wurst et al., 1994) and is an early target of Wnt1 signaling (Danielian and McMahon, 1996) and that En2 is involved in the patterning of cerebellar foliation (Joyner et al., 1991; Millen et al., 1994). The development of mes-metencephalic derivatives is controlled by a mechanism sensitive to the dosage of En proteins (reviewed by Wassef and Joyner, 1997). Finally, the two En proteins have extensive functional overlap (Hanks et al., 1995).

In chick, retrovirus-mediated misexpression of En genes (Friedman and O’Leary, 1996; Itasaki and Nakamura, 1996; Logan et al., 1996; Shigetani et al., 1997; Shamim et al., 1999) within the developing mesencephalon results in disruption of the gradient of cytoarchitectonic differentiation of the optic tectum, aberrant arborizations and perturbed targeting of the nasal axons and complete degeneration of the temporal axons. Misexpression of En2 in the diencephalon by in ovo electroporation causes a rostral shift of the di/mesencephalic boundary and transformation of dorsal diencephalon into tectum (Araki and Nakamura, 1999). Similarly, ectopic
expression of En2 in medaka fish leads to activation of mesencephalic markers in the diencephalon (Ristoratore et al., 1999). Thus, En misexpression within a domain of competence causes an identity change towards a more caudal phenotype.

To investigate whether ectopic and constitutive expression of En in a defined and restricted domain resulted in an identity change of the cells misexpressing the protein or whether the cells tolerated the presence of ectopic En and regulated according to their environment, we took advantage of a transgenic mouse line expressing En1 in the dorsal midline from the diencephalon through the spinal cord (Danielian and McMahon, 1996). We show that the prenatal hydrocephalus reported in this line (Danielian and McMahon, 1996; Rowitch et al., 1999) is a consequence of the ectopic expression of En1, which affects the differentiation of dorsal circumventricular organs and the choroid plexus, the main site of production and secretion of the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). To corroborate our findings, we analyzed the development of these organs in Wnt1sw/sw mutant embryos exhibiting documented abnormalities in the dorsal midline. Finally, to evaluate the effects of ectopic En expression in a different species, we misexpressed the En2 gene in the developing chick embryo by in ovo electroporation and show that En misexpression in chick mimics some of the phenotypic manifestations of the murine transgene.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Animals**

Mouse lines used in this study have been previously described: WEXPZ.En1 (Danielian and McMahon, 1996), maintained on a wild-type outbred (OF1) background (the dosage of Wnt1 is normal); Wnt1tm1sw (purchased from the Jackson Labs); En1lacZ (Hanks et al., 1995); En1tm1 (Hanks et al., 1995). The oligonucleotides 5'-TTT AAC -3' and 5'-GAT CCA GCG ATA CAG CTC GTC-3' amplify a lacZ-specific product in WEXPZ.En1 animals. Wnt1tm1sw embryos were genotyped as described by Bally-Cuif et al. (1995).

**Cell death assays**

To detect dying cells, we injected Nile Blue Sulfate (NBS; 1:1000 w/v in ddH2O) into the ventricles of E9.5-E15.5 embryos dissected in PBS. We also labeled dissected neural tubes as whole mounts using Terminal-UTP-Nick-End-Labeling (TUNEL) as described by Conlon et al. (1997). We also assessed neuronal death using the fluorophore TMR red 38°C and staged according to Hamburger and Hamilton (1951). We injected the DNA solution (at 1 mg/ml) containing 0.25% Fast Green (Sigma) as a tracer, into the lumen of the neural tube and applied three 30-msecound 25 V pulses from an electroporator BTX-20 with electrodes CUY610 (φ 0.5 mm; gap 4 mm; TR Tech Co., Tokyo, Japan). Embryos were incubated for appropriate times and fixed in 4% paraformaldehyde. Typical survival rate was about 72% at 48 hours postelectroporation but declined thereafter.

**Expression vectors**

We used three plasmids: pTLmEn2m and pTLmEn2SRm (Joliot et al., 1998), respectively encoding myc-tagged versions of the wild-type and a mutant chick En2 protein and the unrelated pAdRSV GAL IX, encoding β-galactosidase (gift from P. Gilardi-Hebenstreit).

**RESULTS**

**Expression pattern of the WEXPZ.En1 transgene**

To investigate the effects of ectopic and constitutive expression of the En1 gene in the dorsal midline, we took advantage of the WEXPZ.En1 transgenic line, which expresses the En1 gene under the control of a 5.5 kb 3' Wnt1 enhancer element (Danielian and McMahon, 1996). This enhancer is activated at least as early as the 1-somite stage (Echerald et al., 1994); therefore, the onset of overexpression of En1 in the transgenic embryos coincides with the earliest stage of endogenous En1 expression in a broad region of the anterior neural plate. Cells with endogenous expression of En1 also express the transgene; importantly, a rostral population of cells expresses En1 ectopically, but only transiently. At the 3-somite stage the En1 expression domain has extended so that its anterior limit approximately coincides with that of Wnt1 at the anterior margins of the midbrain. By the 8-somite stage, most midbrain cells express elevated levels of En1 and, in addition, scattered groups of cells at the choroid plexus/cerebellar boundary also express En1 ectopically. At the 15-somite stage expression of the transgene in the midline has extended into the diencephalon and down to the spinal cord and, by E9.5, becomes refined to the dorsal midline (from the prosomere 2/3 boundary through the spinal cord; see Rubenstein et al., 1994 for nomenclature).
and to a narrow ring of expression just anterior to the isthmus, essentially recapitulating the expression pattern of Wnt1. Ectopic expression of En1 along the dorsal midline persists throughout embryogenesis and into at least the first postnatal week (unpublished observations) as opposed to endogenous expression in the roof plate, which by E10.5 is confined to the posterior half of the mesencephalon, and becomes rapidly restricted to its caudal third (Fig. 1).

Embryos of the WEXPZ.En1 line exhibit prenatal hydrocephalus. In man, perinatal hydrocephalus results from an obstruction in CSF flow into the circulation, failure of CSF resorption through the arachnoid granulations or, occasionally, oversecretion of CSF (Rowland et al., 1991). In the transgenic embryos, aqueductal stenosis is centered around the mid-hindbrain junction; ectopic expression of En1 from the transgene (red) is restricted to the dorsal midline from the diencephalon to the spinal cord (except of the midline of the cerebellar plate) and to a ring just anterior to the isthmus. (B) Pattern of expression of En1 in E8.5 wild-type (bottom) and transgenic (top) littermates. Arrowheads indicate the sites of ectopic expression of En1. (C) Ventral view of bisected brains of E15.5 wild-type (right) and transgenic (left) littermates. Ectopic expression of En1 at the midline of the dorsal neural tube (arrowhead) persists in the transgenic embryos.

Fig. 1. Expression of the transgene. (A) Schematic representation of a E10.5 embryo, lateral view. Endogenous expression of En1 (blue) is centered around the mid-hindbrain junction; ectopic expression of En1 from the transgene (red) is restricted to the dorsal midline from the diencephalon to the spinal cord (except of the midline of the cerebellar plate) and to a ring just anterior to the isthmus. (B) Pattern of expression of En1 in E8.5 wild-type (bottom) and transgenic (top) littermates. Arrowheads indicate the sites of ectopic expression of En1. (C) Ventral view of bisected brains of E15.5 wild-type (right) and transgenic (left) littermates. Ectopic expression of En1 at the midline of the dorsal neural tube (arrowhead) persists in the transgenic embryos.

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En expression in the dorsal diencephalic midline results in cell death and errors in axonal pathfinding

The first apparent morphological manifestation of the transgene was a shape change of the anterior diencephalon, where, starting at E10.5, two bilateral bulges formed in dorsal p2 (Fig. 2A,B). The dorsal midline of the diencephalon and anterior mesencephalon appeared wider and was frequently spotted with many large cell aggregates in the transgenic embryos (Fig. 2J inset, compared to wild-type littermates, I inset). To evaluate their nature, we analyzed cell death. In the transgenic embryos, Nile blue sulfate staining revealed necrotic cells at the roof and the border of the fourth ventricle at E9.5, and increased numbers of necrotic cells in the midline of the mid- and anterior mesencephalon and diencephalon at E10.5 and E11.5 (Fig. 2C,D; top). At E12.5, necrotic cells persisted in the midline, in particular at the site of the pineal anlage, where they remained evident at E13.5; no differences in cell death were detected among littermates at subsequent developmental stages (not shown). We confirmed that the aggregates were composed of apoptotic cells by the TUNEL assay (Fig. 2C,D; bottom).

The expression of several markers of the dorsal midline over its entire length (Bmp6, Bmp7, Gdf7, Mxsl) was not affected in transgenic embryos. EphrinA5, known to be ectopically activated as a result of En protein misexpression (Logan et al., 1996), was detected rostral to its normal expression domain along the entire length of the diencephalic midline in E11.5-E16.5 transgenic embryos (Fig. 2E,F). Mesencephalic or isthmic markers, such as Pax5 (our observations) and Fig8 (our observations and Danielian and McMahon, 1996) were not affected. In contrast, the expression of cadherin 8 was downregulated in the midline cells of the rostral mesencephalon at E13.5, and expression of cadherin 11 was abolished from the dorsal midline in transgenic neonates (not shown). In the diencephalon, expression of Tcf4 was not affected and expression of Pax6 in p1 and p2 was maintained in transgenic embryos at E10.5 and E11.5. Importantly, no induction of endogenous En1, detectable by ectopic X-gal staining, was observed adjacent to the diencephalic midline in WEXPZ.En1; En1Lki/+ embryos (not shown). The pattern of activation and repression of different markers implied that, although mis-specified, the diencephalic roof plate cells failed to adopt a well-defined alternative fate as a consequence of En1 misexpression.

The formation of the posterior commissure (pc) was delayed in the transgenic embryos. In wild-type embryos, the pc neurons project dorsally to cross the roof plate in the caudal diencephalon (p1) at E10.5 (Mastick and Easter, 1996). In transgenic littermates, dorsally projecting axons remained far from the midline as if they were repelled by it, as evidenced by immunohistochemistry with the anti-neurofilament antibody 2H3 and the neural-specific anti-class III -tubulin antibody TUJ-1 (Fig. 2G,H). The pc axons still failed to reach the midline in the transgenic embryos at E11.5 (Fig. 2I,J), an observation consistent with the ectopic activation of ephrinA5, known to have repellent effects (see Discussion). Nevertheless, by E13.5, the pc axons succeeded in crossing the midline, albeit irregularly (Fig. 2K,L). They fasciculated forming tight bundles and exhibited navigation defects, frequently turning rostrally and caudally (not shown). We analyzed the expression of markers that could account for the eventual crossing of the pc axons. EphA4, a receptor for ephrinA5, was undetectable in caudal p1 at E10.5 or E11.5, but clearly evident at E13.5, both in wild-type and
transgenic embryos, coinciding with the crossing of the pc axons in the latter (not shown). Reelin, which encodes a secreted protein of the extracellular matrix, was induced at ectopic locations in the dorsal diencephalon of transgenic embryos, and appeared to contour the tight bundles of axons labeled by DiI (Fig. 2M,N,O,P).

Therefore, ectopic expression of En1 in the dorsal midline resulted in increased cell death and mis-specification of midline cells, which displayed ectopic activation of a number of genes. As a consequence, the dorsally projecting axons of the pc fasciculated abnormally and displayed errors in pathfinding.

**Ectopic En1 interferes with differentiation of circumventricular organs**

We examined whether the development of dorsal neural tube derivatives was affected by the ectopic expression of En1 at the midline. The SCO primordium is closely associated with the posterior commissure at E10.5 (Rakic and Sidman, 1968) and appears as an indentation in the ventricular surface. In wild-type embryos (K,M,O), the axons of the posterior commissure cross perpendicular to the midline in thin regular bundles. In transgenic embryos (L,N,P), pc axons cross the midline in thick irregular bundles and follow aberrantly oriented trajectories (arrowheads in P). Reelin mRNA (blue) is detected by in situ hybridization in M-P. Reelin-expressing cells (arrowhead in N) are found clustered around the tight axonal bundles in transgenic embryos.
Ectopic Engrailed-1 in the dorsal midline

compromised in the transgenic embryos, as was indicated both by morphological criteria and expression data. Expression of Otx2 failed to outline the pineal primordium in the transgenic embryos, already evaginating in the wild type at E11.5 (not shown). The pineal anlagen is marked by an interruption in Gdf7 staining of the midline at E12.5 and E13.5 (our observations); in transgenic embryos, expression of Gdf7 was continuous (Fig. 3A,B). The dorsalmost aspect of the evaginating pineal was marked by cadherin 8 in the wild type; this staining was absent from transgenic pups (E). Note the underdevelopment of third ventricle choroid plexus (arrowheads in D and E). (F,G) Coronal sections of P0 brains, treated for the immunocytochemical detection of SCOSpondin, a specific marker of the secretory cells of the SCO. Very few cells are detected in transgenic (G) compared to wild-type brains (F). (H,I) In situ hybridization of cadherin 11 in coronal sections of P1 brains. The pineal gland (asterisk) labeled in wild-type (H) is not detected in transgenic pups (I).

Therefore, ectopic expression of En1 in the dorsal midline caused impaired development of circumventricular organs.

**Ectopic En1 results in impaired development of the choroid plexus**

Growth and patterning of the choroid plexus were affected in the transgenic embryos, as demonstrated by the expression of Ttr (a marker of choroid plexus epithelial cells (CPE) from the onset of their differentiation; Murakami et al., 1987; Thomas et al., 1989) and Ig2 (an early marker of the invading mesenchymal cells, later also expressed by the gradually maturing CPE; Stylianopoulou et al., 1988; Cavallaro et al., 1993). In the fourth ventricle, the developing CPE was significantly reduced, starting at E10.5; in the caudal part, expression of Ttr was limited to a thin bilateral domain (Fig. 4A). At E11.5, the expression domain of Ttr remained smaller than wild type rostrally, and it was confined to the edges of the tela choroidea caudally (Fig. 4B,C). In addition, the vascularization of this structure was less extensive in the transgenic embryos compared to wild-type littermates, as visualised by intraventricular injection of India ink (not shown). At E12.5 the developing choroid plexus had started folding in wild type, but remained thin and stretched in transgenic embryos. At all subsequent stages, the choroid plexus of the fourth ventricle neither invaginated, nor arborized properly (Fig. 4G,H). Similarly, in the diencephalon, the CPE was reduced in transgenic embryos from the earliest stage of Ttr expression in this region (E11.5); the choroid plexus failed to fully expand and remained atrophic (Fig. 4E,F). In contrast, no differences between wild-type and transgenic littermates were observed in the expression domain of Ttr in the telencephalon, where the choroid plexus developed properly (not shown).

**Choroid plexus and circumventricular organs are affected in swaying mutant embryos**

In an attempt to understand the mechanism by which En1 affected the differentiation of circumventricular organs and the choroid plexus, we investigated the development of these organs in mutant embryos exhibiting abnormalities in the dorsal midline. In the Wnt1 mutant embryos, differentiation of the dorsal midline is affected (Shimamura et al., 1994); importantly, the dosage of En protein is altered (McMahon et al., 1992); and because of the deletion of both the mesencephalon and rhombomere 1 (McMahon and Bradley,
In the rostral diencephalon at this stage, the medial expression of CPe primordia was displaced rostromedially; scattered cells normally occupied by the cerebellar plate and, in addition, cells mid-hindbrain. At E11.5, CPe tissue had extended into the area atrophic at late stages of gestation.

We also investigated the development of the choroid plexus in Wnt1\textsuperscript{sw/sw} mutant embryos. We found that the SCO did not differentiate normally (as indicated by the expression pattern of Gdf7 at E12.5; Fig. 3C). The pc appeared to cross the midline normally and expression of reelin was unaffected at E13.5. The pineal evagination was, at best, never as developed as in wild type (likely reflecting the phenotypic severity of the hypomorphic mutation) and the pineal gland was swaying in mutant embryos. At late stages of gestation, by these criteria, the leptomeninges did not appear affected in Wnt1\textsuperscript{sw/sw} mutant embryos.

Therefore, the differentiation of circumventricular organs and the choroid plexus was affected in swaying embryos with a mutation interfering with correct development of the dorsal midline, but was normal in En1 mutant embryos.

**Neural crest derivatives in WEXPZ.En1 transgenic mice**

We investigated whether ectopic En1 expression affected derivatives of the cephalic neural crest implicated in the etiology of hydrocephalus, such as the meninges covering the anterior brain (Le Douarin and Kalcheim, 1999). To evaluate cranial bone development, we compared the skeletons of a total of nine wild-type and eight transgenic littermates postnatal weeks 2 and 3, after staining with Alcian Blue and Alizarin Red. Differences were observed in the shape and size of various bones. In the transgenic animals, the interparietal bone was larger, the parietal bone was shorter and the supraoccipital bone was smaller than wild type. The lambdoid and sagittal sutures were wider in the transgenic
Contrary to what is observed in the mouse, the caudal part of the choroid plexus was slightly affected. In contrast, only 11% (2 out of 18) and 10% (1 out of 10) of the embryos electroporated with the β-galactosidase or the mutated-En2 expression plasmids respectively, had a wavy border at E6; expression of Ttr was unaffected (Fig. 5C,D,E).

Therefore, ectopic expression of En in the developing chick embryo affected the growth at the border of the tela choroidea and the expression of markers of the differentiating choroid plexus, much as ectopic expression of En in the mouse embryo disrupted the development of the choroid plexus.

**DISCUSSION**

We have analyzed the effects of ectopic expression of Engrailed in the dorsal midline of the developing mouse embryo. We show that constitutive expression of Engrailed causes mis-specification of roof plate cells, which in turn perturb the navigation of commissural axons, and interferes with the development of structures deriving from the dorsal neuroepithelium. These defects are preceded by a localized increase in cell death. We propose that prenatal hydrocephalus develops in this transgenic line as a consequence of subcommissural organ failure. Ectopic En1 in the dorsal midline of the diencephalon prevents differentiation of the SCO and pineal gland and results in hydrocephalus

Ectopic expression of En1 in the dorsal midline results in prenatal hydrocephalus, which gets worse and persists into adulthood. In available animal models of hydrocephalus, the disease develops postnatally and usually displays incomplete penetrance and variable expressivity. It has been attributed to increased secretory activity of the choroid plexus (E2F-5 mutants; Lindeman et al., 1998) or abnormal differentiation of the meninges (hy3; Berry, 1961). Prenatal hydrocephalus in the ch/ch mutant (Gruneberg, 1943) results from an inhibition of CSF flow into the subarachnoid space caused by a mutation in the gene Mf1 affecting arachnoid cell differentiation (Kume et al., 1998).

In the WEXPZ-En1 line, prenatal hydrocephalus is most likely caused by the failure of SCO differentiation and is possibly influenced by the abnormal differentiation of the choroid plexus, the main site of CSF synthesis and secretion.
reported in the embryos. Severe underdevelopment or loss of the pc has been
the posterior commissure is affected in the WEXPZ.En1
pathfinding
En1 ectopic expression causes errors in axonal
SCO does not differentiate normally in Wnt1sw/sw
fetal hydrocephalus (Castaneyra-Perdomo et al., 1994). The
in size of the SCO has been reported in two cases of human
congenital hydrocephalic rats and mice have smaller than
1990; Perez-Figares et al., 1998) and several spontaneous
congenital hydrocephalic rats and mice have smaller than
normal SCO, or even lack this structure completely (Takeuchi et al., 1987, 1988; Yamada et al., 1992). Moreover, a reduction
in size of the SCO has been reported in two cases of human
fetal hydrocephalus (Castaneyra-Perdomo et al., 1994). The
SCO does not differentiate normally in Wnt1sw/sw embryos either (this study); indeed, the Wnt1 mutant embryos (and the
rare adult survivors) exhibit hydrocephalus in the caudal region
of the cerebral hemispheres and the midbrain (Thomas and
Capacchi, 1990). Our results provide evidence that Wnt1 is
required for the differentiation of the SCO. SCO agenesis in
transgenic embryos could be a consequence either of increased
cell death, or of a change in the developmental fate of cells
destined to participate in SCO formation due to their
maintaining En1 expression. The former is more probable, as
increased cell death in the dorsal midline precedes the
generation of SCO precursors in the primitive ependymal zone
(E11; Rakic and Sidman, 1968).

The calvarial bone alterations in the transgenic animals are
likely secondary to hydrocephalus. A dome-shaped head is
associated with hydrocephalus in rats (Park and Nowosielski-
Slepowron, 1979) and in various mutant mice. Much of the
head skeleton is generated by cephalic neural crest (Le Douarin
and Kalcheim, 1999) and in various mutant mice. Much of the
expression of En2 at E2 (but also in 5 out of 17 embryos misexpressing β-
galactosidase) (not shown); overexpression of En at early
stages can therefore interfere with the development of some
neural crest derivatives.

Differentiation of the pineal anlagen is compromised in the
transgenic embryos and the newborn pups lack a pineal gland.
The pineal primordium appears as a midline evagination of the
diencephalic roof (Calvo and Boya, 1981). Evagination does
not take place in the transgenic embryos, possibly because
pineal precursors are eliminated by excessive cell death.
Alternatively, the maintenance of En expression prior to and
during the evagination process, may alter the adhesive
properties of the precursor cells and interfere with pineal
morphogenesis.

**En1 ectopic expression causes errors in axonal pathfinding**

The posterior commissure is affected in the WEXPZ.En1
embryos. Severe underdevelopment or loss of the pc has been
reported in the Small eye /Pax6 mutant embryos (Stoykova et
al., 1996; Mastick et al., 1997; Grindley et al., 1997) and,
interestingly, in rats and mice with spontaneous congenital
hydrocephalus (Takeuchi et al., 1987; Yamada et al., 1992). In
contrast, the pc is expanded caudally up to the fourth ventricle
choroid plexus in the Pax2/Pax5 double homozygous mutants,
in a domain coinciding with the expansion of Pax6 expression
(Schawrz et al., 1999). In transgenic embryos, the pc axons
form tight bundles and either cross the midline irregularly, or
take a longitudinal turn and fail to cross altogether; Pax6
expression in caudal p1 is not affected, but both ephrinA5 (this
study) and ephrinA2 (Lee et al., 1997) are ectopically
expressed in a narrow stripe of cells along the dorsal midline
of the anterior mesencephalon; ephrinA5 alone is also induced in
the midline of the diencephalon (this study). It is well
documented that ectopic Engrailed results in transcriptional
activation of both genes in the chick (Logan et al., 1996;
Shigetani et al., 1997). Both ligands repel retinal axons in vitro
(Davenport et al., 1998; Gao et al., 1998) and exert an
inhibitory effect on neurite outgrowth (Ohta et al., 1997; Yue
et al., 1999); ephrinA5 induces apoptotic cell death (Yue et al.,
1999). Thus, activation of ephrinA ligands in the midline may
indirectly lead to cell death and may also have a repellent
effect on the dorsally projecting axons of the pc. EphA4, a
receptor for ephrinA5, is expressed in the region of the pc at
E13.5 but not at E10.5 (our observations) and could function
to titrate out the initial inhibitory effect of the ligands. Reelin,
an extracellular matrix protein involved in cell adhesion, is
also upregulated in cells surrounding the tight axonal bundles
of the posterior commissure revealed by DII tracing. It is
possible that the mere presence of reelin enables these tight
bundles to cross the midline. Finally, it is intriguing to note
that solubilized proteins secreted by the SCO inhibit the
aggregation of cortical neurons in culture (Gobron et al.,
1996). Failure of SCO differentiation in the transgenic
embryos may therefore allow the pc axons to aggregate, since
the secretory cells of the SCO project processes dorsally
(Rodriguez et al., 1998), and are in close apposition with pc
fibers (Rakic and Sidman, 1965).

**Overexpression of En disrupts choroid plexus development**

Ectopic expression of En1 in the transgenic embryos interferes
with choroid plexus differentiation and growth in the third and
fourth ventricles. Not surprisingly, the choroid plexus of the
lateral ventricles is not affected, as no ectopic En1 expression
occurs in the developing telencephalon. Likewise, ectopic
expression of En2 in the chick disrupts the normal morphology
of the border of the tela choroidea and the differentiation of
choroid plexus epithelial cells. In both cases, ectopic En
protein likely interferes with the differentiation program of the
border cells expressing it and leads to impaired growth and
incorrect development of the mature choroid plexus. Because
choroid plexus differentiation is affected, synthesis and/or
secretion of proteins into the CSF may also be affected, thus
indirectly contributing to hydrocephalus.

The events leading to the formation of the choroid plexus
(CP) are not well understood. A transition in the arrangement
of the neuroepithelial cells from pseudostratified to simple
columnar is the first morphological evidence of choroid plexus
differentiation (Sturrock, 1979) and epithelial-mesenchymal
inductive interactions between the developing CPe and the
invading mesenchymal cells are thought to control its differentiation (Birge, 1961, 1962; Wilting and Christ, 1989). In both mouse and chick, differentiation of the CPe in the fourth ventricle starts laterally, adjacent to the Wnt1-expressing border, and caudal to the edge of the cerebellar plate, as indicated by the expression pattern of Trr. Growth factors expressed in the invading mesenchymal cells (such as Igf2) could act as inducers and members of the Wnt family may be components of a signaling system operating at the border of the tela chooroidea. In fact, Wnt factors are known to be involved in epithelial-mesenchymal interactions (Herzlinger et al., 1994; Kispert et al., 1998; Patapoutian et al., 1999) and expression of the Wnt2b, Wnt3a and Wnt5a genes is required at the hem of the embryonic cerebral cortex for the correct development of the telencephalic choroid plexus (Grove et al., 1998). Early differentiation of the choroid plexus is perturbed in the Wnt1neo/neo mutant diencephalon and metencephalon. This early phenotype could, in part, be explained by increased cell death, documented in Wnt1neo/neo embryos along the most anterior edge of the dorsal metencephalon at E9.5 (Serbedzija et al., 1996) and functional redundancy between Wnt family members expressed at the midline may account for the relatively mild phenotype observed at late developmental stages.

Taken together, these observations suggest that the dosage of Wnt1 and En proteins is important for the regionalization of the choroid plexus, by analogy to the well-established idea that they are crucial for the establishment of the cerebellar territory and the correct development of the cerebellum (reviewed by Wassef and Joyner, 1997).

Engrailed as a repressor of diencephalic fate

Ectopic expression of Engrailed in the diencephalon was recently shown to result in activation of mesencephalic markers in chick (Araki and Nakamura, 1999) and medaka fish (Ristoratore et al., 1999). In chick, ectopic En2 caused an early repression of Pax6, subsequent activation of mesencephalic markers, and only transient activation of thalamic markers (Araki and Nakamura, 1999). Thus, it was proposed that En normally acts to repress the diencephalic fate. Ectopic expression of En1 in the diencephalic midline of the WEXPZ.En1 embryos results in transcriptional activation of ephrin-A5, but there is no ectopic expression of other mesencephalic or thalamic markers. In addition, there is no induction of endogenous En1 next to the diencephalic midline and expression of Tcf-4 is normal. These observations suggest that although the roof plate cells no longer retain a diencephalic character, they do not adopt a mesencephalic fate either. It is worth mentioning that in chick, cells at the diencephalic midline also escaped reprogramming following ectopic expression of En2 (Araki and Nakamura, 1999).

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