



靶向调节性T细胞重塑外周免疫耐受: 研究进展与未来方向*

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【摘要】 调节性T细胞(Treg细胞)是维持机体外周免疫耐受最重要的一群免疫细胞。靶向Treg细胞重建外周免疫耐受,在自身免疫性疾病、过敏性疾病、移植物抗宿主病、器官移植排异等各种炎症性疾病的治疗中都有广阔的应用前景。但是,Treg细胞治疗在临床转化方面仍然面临诸多挑战。本综述首先回顾了Treg细胞的发现过程,总结了Treg细胞抑制免疫反应的主要机制;然后重点总结了多克隆Treg细胞治疗、抗原特异性Treg细胞治疗和低剂量IL-2治疗(low-dose IL-2 therapy)的研究进展,并整理了Treg细胞治疗相关的临床试验开展情况;最后强调了Treg细胞的稳定性维持,CAR-Treg、TCR-Treg等抗原特异性Treg细胞的制备,疾病炎症微环境的重塑,以及Treg细胞治疗“副作用”的克服等四个方面,是Treg细胞治疗临床转化的瓶颈问题和未来研究的重点方向。

【关键词】 调节性T细胞治疗 免疫治疗 自身免疫性疾病 移植物抗宿主病 Foxp3 低剂量IL-2治疗 综述

Targeting Regulatory T Cells to Remodel Peripheral Immune Tolerance: Research Advances and Future Directions

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【Abstract】 Regulatory T cells (Tregs) are the most important population of immune cells in maintaining peripheral immune tolerance in the body. Targeting Tregs to rebuild peripheral immune tolerance has shown broad potential for application in the treatment of various inflammatory diseases, such as autoimmune diseases, allergic disorders, graft-versus-host disease, and organ transplant rejection. However, substantial challenges remain in translating Treg-based therapies into clinical practice. In this review, we first summarize the discovery of Tregs and the principal mechanisms through which Tregs inhibit immune responses. Then, the research progress in polyclonal Treg-based therapy, antigen-specific Treg-based therapy, and low-dose interleukin-2 (IL-2) therapy and the implementation status of clinical trials of Treg therapies were comprehensively summarized. Finally, four issues, including maintaining the stability of Tregs, preparing autoantigen-specific Tregs, such as chimeric antigen receptor (CAR)-Tregs and T-cell receptor (TCR)-Tregs, reshaping the inflammatory microenvironment of diseases, and minimizing the potential adverse effects of Treg therapies, were highlighted as the bottleneck problems in the clinical translation of Treg therapies and priority directions for future research.

【Key words】 Regulatory T cell therapy Immunotherapy Autoimmune diseases Graft-versus-host disease Foxp3 Low-dose interleukin-2 therapy Review

免疫系统通过对抗外来致病抗原、清除自身异常细胞(如损伤细胞、癌变细胞),同时避免损害自身正常器官、组织和细胞,以维持机体健康和内环境稳态,是维护人体健康的“警察”和“军队”。然而,当免疫系统错误地

攻击人体自身正常的器官、组织或细胞,则会导致类风湿性关节炎(rheumatoid arthritis, RA)、系统性红斑狼疮(systemic lupus erythematosus, SLE)、1型糖尿病(type 1 diabetes, T1D)等自身免疫性疾病(autoimmune diseases, AIDs)的发生;当免疫系统错误地针对花粉、尘螨等一些无害抗原发生过度的免疫反应,则会引发过敏性哮喘等过敏性疾病。不仅如此,在器官移植后,免疫系统也可能激发器官移植排异,而异体造血干细胞移植后也可能会激发对受

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体宿主的免疫攻击,从而发生移植物抗宿主病(graft-versus-host disease, GVHD)。对这些疾病的治疗关键,在于降低特异性炎症反应,重塑人体外周的免疫耐受^[1]。调节性T细胞(regulatory T cells, Treg细胞)作为维持机体外周免疫耐受的主要执行细胞,在AIDs、器官移植排异、GVHD等炎症性疾病的治疗方面,具有巨大的应用潜力^[2]。

1 Treg细胞的发现和功能

1.1 Treg细胞的发现

20世纪70-80年代,研究人员猜测人体内可能存在一群能够抑制免疫反应的抑制性T细胞(suppressor T cells),但因为缺乏特异性标志物,一直没有得到实质性证实,导致该方向的研究长期停滞不前。直到1995年,SAKAGUCHI等^[3]发现CD4⁺CD25⁻T细胞能够在裸鼠中引起系统性自身免疫反应,而高表达CD25的CD4⁺CD25⁺T细胞能够抑制这些炎症,证实了CD4⁺CD25⁺T细胞对维持外周免疫耐受的关键作用,并将其正式命名为Treg细胞^[4]。随后,BRUNKOW等^[5]在2001年证明了人Forkhead box P3 (FOXP3)的基因突变是导致人类X性连锁多内分泌腺病、肠病伴免疫失调综合征(IPEX综合征)的决定性原因。两年后,SHIMON SAKAGUCHI、FRED RAMSDELL和ALEXANDER Y. RUDENSKY三个团队分别在小鼠中证实了Foxp3是Treg细胞的转录因子^[6-8]。同

年,华人学者陈万军发现转化生长因子-β(transforming growth factor-β, TGF-β)能够在活化的T细胞中诱导Foxp3的表达,并使T细胞分化为Treg细胞^[9]。自此,Treg细胞的表面标志物、转录因子和诱导分化条件都被成功发现,使研究人员可以精准鉴定、分离纯化和诱导分化Treg细胞,从而使Treg细胞的功能研究和操控Treg细胞进行免疫治疗的基础和转化研究得以迅速发展。

1.2 Treg细胞的分类和功能

Treg细胞主要在胸腺T细胞发育的阴性选择阶段,接受胸腺上皮的自身抗原呈递并被IL-2和TGF-β等细胞因子诱导发育而来(thymic regulatory T cells, tTreg细胞),也能由幼稚T细胞在外周免疫微环境中接受抗原刺激激活并被TGF-β诱导分化而来(peripheral regulatory T cells, pTreg细胞),两群Treg细胞共同维持了机体的外周免疫耐受^[10-12]。体外激活和培养幼稚T细胞诱导分化出的Treg细胞(induced regulatory T cells, iTreg细胞)功能与tTreg和pTreg细胞相似,但稳定性较差;但是,通过诱导Foxp3基因非编码序列2(CNS2)去甲基化、敲除免疫球蛋白κJ区的重组信号结合蛋白(RBPJ)基因等一些工程手段和策略可以增强iTreg细胞的稳定性和功能^[13-14]。

目前已知,Treg细胞能通过多种接触依赖和非接触依赖的方式,有效抑制T细胞和其他免疫细胞的效应功能(图1)^[15]。在接触性抑制方面,Treg细胞通过细胞毒性

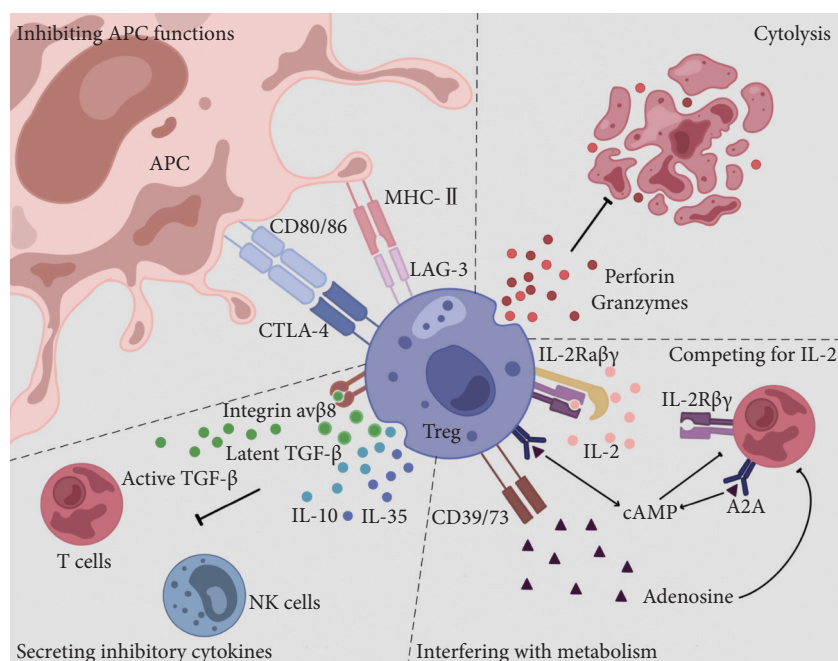


图1 Treg细胞抑制免疫反应的主要机制总结

Fig 1 Summary of the principal mechanisms by which Tregs inhibit immune responses

APC: antigen presenting cell; MHC: major histocompatibility complex; LAG-3: lymphocyte-activation gene 3; CTLA-4: cytotoxic T-lymphocyte antigen 4; IL: interleukin; TGF-β: transforming growth factor-β; NK: natural killer.

T淋巴细胞相关蛋白4(cytotoxic T-lymphocyte antigen 4, CTLA-4)和淋巴细胞活化基因3(lymphocyte-activation gene 3, LAG-3)等分子的高表达,直接抑制抗原呈递细胞的功能,从而有效抑制免疫反应。在非接触性抑制方面,如前所述,Treg细胞高表达CD25,即白细胞介素-2(interleukin-2, IL-2)受体 α 链,从而高效竞争性结合IL-2,使效应T细胞因缺乏IL-2而发生凋亡或生长抑制^[16];同时,Treg细胞能够通过分泌IL-10、IL-35和前体TGF- β 等抗炎细胞因子并诱导TGF- β 活化^[17-18],以及通过催化合成腺苷(adenosine)和环磷酸腺苷(cAMP)等代谢物^[19],直接抑制效应T细胞、自然杀伤细胞(natural killer cells, NK cells)等免疫细胞的功能;不仅如此,Treg细胞还能够通过分泌穿孔素和颗粒酶,直接杀伤炎性细胞^[20]。通过这些抑制机制的共同作用,Treg细胞能有效维持外周免疫耐受稳态。

2 Treg细胞治疗的基础和转化研究

靶向Treg细胞开展的免疫细胞治疗研究,包括了在动物疾病模型中开展的Treg细胞治疗研究和在人体中开展的临床试验研究。大量研究已证实Treg细胞治疗在AIDs、器官移植排异、GVHD等疾病的治疗中具有巨大的应用前景^[21-22]。其中,在动物疾病模型中开展的研究较为系统,我们对其三个主要研究方向进行了总结,并在此基础上总结了目前临床试验开展的整体情况。

2.1 多克隆Treg细胞治疗 (Polyclonal Treg cell therapy)

在过继性Treg细胞治疗的早期研究阶段,多克隆Treg细胞的治疗作用被广泛探索。但是,经过大量研究和探索后,研究人员发现,多克隆Treg细胞主要在AIDs的预防方面,对疾病的发生具有显著的抑制效果^[23-24]。而在已发病个体的治疗方面,仅在使用重度联合免疫缺陷小鼠(SCID小鼠)和Rag1^{-/-}小鼠构建的RA模型和结肠炎模型中被证明是有效的^[25-26],而对大多数其他已发病的AIDs动物模型的治疗效果不甚理想^[21]。其疗效欠佳的原因是多方面的,其中最关键的一点在于多克隆Treg细胞的TCR基因重排具有随机性,能够有效识别AIDs相关自身抗原的克隆比例极低。输注入体后,这些无法获得抗原刺激的Treg细胞大多会进入静息状态或发生凋亡,而真正能够识别自身抗原并发挥免疫抑制作用的Treg细胞数量十分有限。若试图通过大量输注多克隆Treg细胞提高有效克隆的数量,又可能导致全身性免疫抑制,增加感染与肿瘤发生的风险。尽管如此,由T细胞过继转移诱导的结肠炎模型是由多克隆T细胞导致的系统性炎症,多克隆Treg细胞在此疾病模型中的治疗效果相当理想和稳定,因此,该模型已成为研究Treg细胞功能最常用的模

型之一^[27]。

2.2 自身抗原特异性Treg细胞治疗 (Autoantigen-specific Treg cell therapy)

与多克隆Treg细胞治疗相比,抗原特异性Treg细胞治疗因输注的Treg细胞具有高度的抗原特异性,仅能识别AIDs相关抗原,不会增加系统性免疫抑制的风险。目前,研究人员已经在T1D、自身免疫性胃炎、多发性硬化症(multiple sclerosis, MS)、RA、器官移植排异等疾病模型中证实,与疾病相对应的抗原特异性Treg细胞对AIDs和器官移植排异具有显著的治疗效果^[28-32]。除过继性Treg细胞治疗外,还能在体内直接诱导抗原特异性Treg细胞,从而达到操控抗原特异性Treg细胞治疗AIDs的目的^[33]。使用低剂量抗原注射,能够在体内特异性诱导抗原特异性Treg细胞,从而抑制自身免疫反应^[34]。但是,通过抗原特异性Treg细胞的过继性治疗或体内诱导治疗,均高度依赖对AIDs的发病机制解析和对疾病相关抗原的鉴定。同时,如何有效扩增制备足够的抗原特异性Treg细胞也是一个巨大的挑战。

2.3 低剂量IL-2治疗 (Low-dose IL-2 therapy)

如前所述,Treg细胞能够通过高表达CD25竞争性结合IL-2,抑制效应T细胞的增殖和存活,研究人员由此探索出使用低剂量IL-2特异性扩增Treg细胞,从而抑制AIDs等炎症性疾病的策略^[35]。目前,低剂量IL-2治疗在GVHD^[36]、T1D^[37]、SLE^[38]、MS^[39]等多种疾病模型和临床试验中,被证实具有较好的治疗效果。低剂量IL-2治疗能够扩增体内的所有多克隆Treg细胞,而在治疗结束后,外周末接触抗原的Treg细胞会迅速降低^[40],从而在很大程度上避免了系统性免疫抑制风险。值得一提的是,我国在低剂量IL-2治疗的基础研究和临床转化方面,也开展了大量研究,取得了较为理想的研究进展,并已开展了多项临床试验^[41]。而通过工程化手段改造的IL-2突变蛋白、IL-2-抗IL-2免疫复合物(IL-2-mAb complexes)等可以通过提高IL-2对CD25的结合偏向性,增强其对Treg细胞的选择性并延长IL-2的半衰期,使其能更为有效地在体内扩增Treg细胞,提高对疾病的治疗效果^[39, 42]。因此,虽然低剂量IL-2治疗在疾病显著发病后的治疗效果仍存在挑战^[39],但其仍是具有较大转化价值的靶向扩增Treg细胞以治疗AIDs、GVHD等炎症性疾病的有效策略。

2.4 Treg细胞治疗的临床试验

Treg细胞治疗相关的临床试验,主要包括过继性Treg细胞治疗和低剂量IL-2治疗。例如,在美国临床试验注册中心(ClinicalTrials.gov)上,目前已注册了Treg细胞

治疗相关的临床试验112项,而与Treg细胞有关的临床试验已有700余项。在112项Treg细胞治疗相关的临床试验中,治疗AIDs的有37项,治疗器官移植排异的有28项,治疗GVHD的有27项(图2)。在Treg细胞治疗相关的

AIDs临床试验中,主要以T1D和炎症性肠病(inflammatory bowel disease, IBD)为主,分别为12项和7项;在Treg细胞治疗相关的器官移植排异临床试验中,主要以肾移植和肝移植为主,分别为17项和7项。

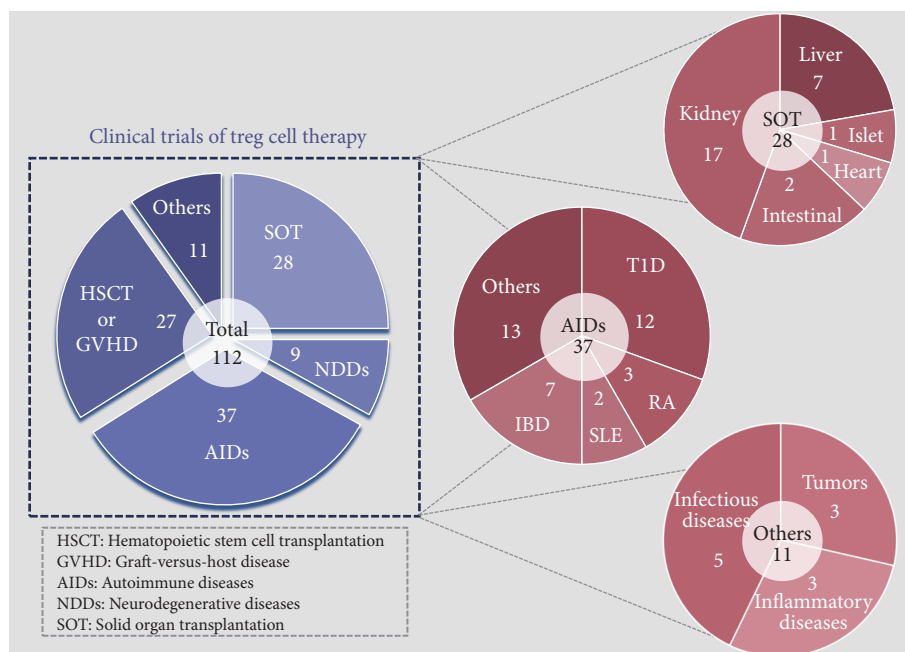


图 2 与Treg细胞治疗相关的112项临床试验统计图

Fig 2 A landscape of 112 clinical trials related to Treg cell therapy

T1D: type 1 diabetes; IBD: inflammatory bowel disease; SLE: systemic lupus erythematosus; RA: rheumatoid arthritis; These trials covered autoimmune diseases, solid organ transplantation, graft-versus-host disease, neurodegenerative diseases, and other diseases.

总体而言, Treg细胞治疗的临床转化进程显著落后于肿瘤的过继性T细胞疗法,其主要的的原因之一是患者的人组意愿不强,临床转化工作推进困难。不仅如此,除低剂量IL-2治疗外,关于过继性Treg细胞治疗的临床试验,主要使用了病人自体来源的多克隆Treg细胞扩增后回输。如前所述,即使在很多动物疾病模型中,多克隆Treg细胞治疗的疗效也不甚理想,而抗原特异性Treg细胞疗法的发展又高度依赖自身抗原的发现和抗原特异性Treg细胞制备技术的进步,这也在相当程度上限制了过继性Treg细胞治疗的临床转化进程。

3 Treg细胞治疗临床转化的技术瓶颈和未来研究重点

尽管Treg细胞治疗已取得了一系列重要研究成果,但是,截至目前,靶向Treg细胞的治疗手段仍未成功上市。除患者入组意愿低等客观原因外,有四个显著的技术瓶颈,应该成为未来研究的重点(图3)。

3.1 Treg细胞的稳定性维持

在炎症微环境中,无论是tTreg细胞、pTreg细胞还是

iTreg细胞,均能够被诱导转分化,丢失Foxp3表达并转分化为效应T细胞,这使Treg细胞治疗在体内的长期影响变得具有不确定性^[43]。近期一项研究发现,在免疫稳态条件下,成熟的Treg细胞中Foxp3的蛋白缺失只会导致很小的功能和转录组变化,似乎挑战了传统观点;但该研究同样发现,在炎症情况下, Foxp3的蛋白缺失会导致Treg细胞转录组和功能的明显改变,依然证实了Foxp3对Treg细胞功能的重要性^[44]。目前,已有不少研究发现了可以显著增强Treg细胞稳定性的关键靶点(图3)。例如, Foxp3在Treg细胞中的稳定表达依赖于Foxp3基因CNS2的去甲基化,研究发现RBPJ基因的缺失能够促进Foxp3基因CNS2的去甲基化,而Tet2能抑制小鼠Treg细胞中DNA甲基化酶对Foxp3基因CNS2区域的再甲基化,从而增强Treg细胞的功能和稳定性^[13-14, 45-46]。再如, Foxp3蛋白的琥珀酰化可阻止泛素化介导的Foxp3蛋白降解,从而稳定Treg细胞的功能,而琥珀酸盐能降低Foxp3蛋白的琥珀酰化水平导致Treg细胞Foxp3的泛素化降解^[47]。此外,通过基因工程手段,直接诱导Foxp3基因的稳定高水平表达,不仅是将非Treg细胞转化为Treg样细胞的有效策略,也

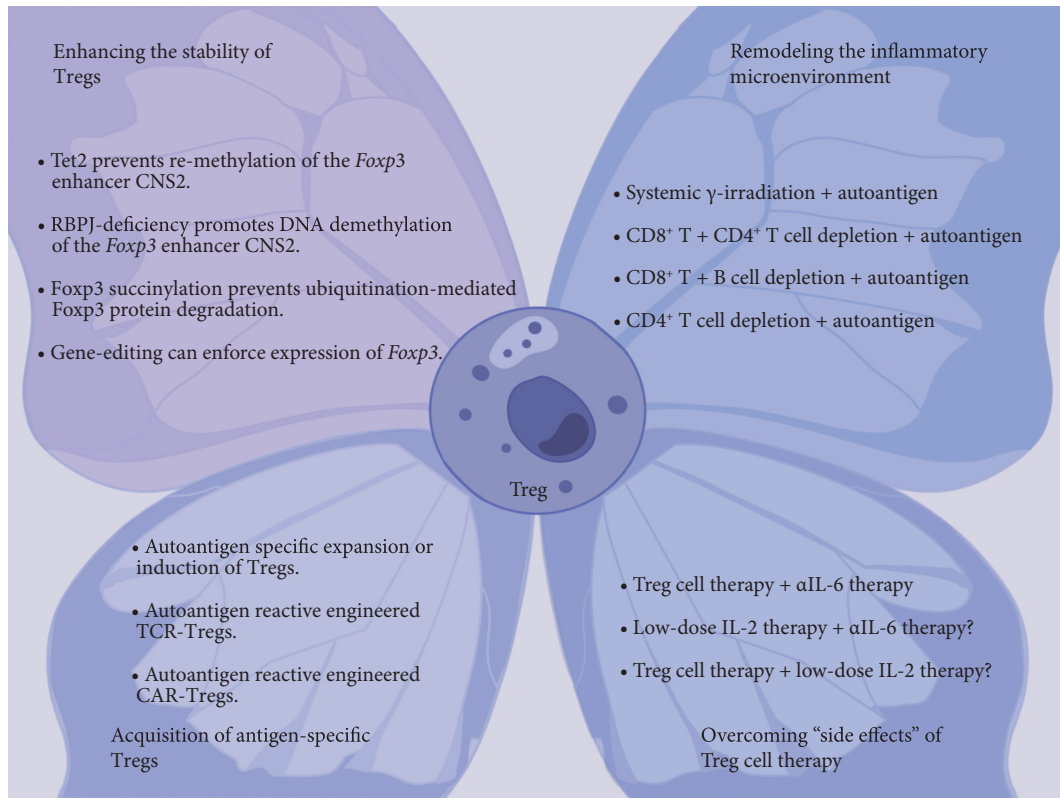


图3 Treg细胞治疗临床转化的技术瓶颈和未来研究重点

Fig 3 The bottleneck problems that need to be overcome in the clinical application of Treg cell therapy

CNS: non-coding sequence; TCR: T cell receptor; CAR: chimeric antigen receptor; IL: interleukin.

是维持Treg细胞功能和稳定性的可行手段^[48]。但是,截至目前,该领域的研究仍侧重于如何让iTreg细胞像tTreg细胞一样稳定,而tTreg细胞本身也同样能够被诱导发生转分化。因此,通过对Treg细胞稳定性的深入研究,实现其在体内的长期功能稳定,对推动Treg细胞治疗具有重要意义。

3.2 抗原特异性Treg细胞的制备

如前所述,抗原特异性Treg细胞在过继性Treg细胞治疗中具有更好的应用前景,但抗原特异性Treg细胞的制备是一项巨大的挑战。目前,抗原特异性Treg细胞的制备有三种策略,即疾病相关抗原诱导的抗原特异性Treg细胞分化和扩增,工程化的TCR-Treg细胞制备,以及嵌合抗原受体调节性T(CAR-Treg)细胞制备(图3)。在早期研究中,研究人员尝试使用患病个体来源的多克隆Treg细胞,通过低剂量抗原刺激,扩增制备抗原特异性Treg细胞,但很难达到治疗所需的细胞数量;而使用患病个体来源的多克隆T细胞,通过低剂量抗原刺激活化,并在TGF- β 、视黄酸、IL-2等诱导和扩增条件下,有望获得足量抗原特异性iTreg细胞用于疾病治疗^[49]。

与此同时,大量研究使用工程化手段,通过构建TCR转基因小鼠获得疾病相关抗原特异性Treg细胞;或将

能够特异性识别疾病相关抗原的TCR转染到多克隆Treg细胞或体外诱导的iTreg细胞中,从而制备用于免疫治疗的疾病相关抗原特异性Treg细胞^[21-22]。这些工程化的TCR-Treg细胞在AIDs、GVHD和器官移植排异中的良好治疗效果,也带动了人源Treg细胞治疗方面的研究。已有多项研究显示,人源TCR-Treg细胞能在体外有效抑制自身反应性T细胞的免疫反应^[50-52]。不仅如此,随着CAR-T细胞在血液瘤治疗中的成功,自2008年起,CAR-Treg细胞的研究也逐渐获得重视^[53]。目前,已有多项关于CAR-Treg细胞的研究证实了其在GVHD、器官移植排异等人源化小鼠中的功能^[54-55],展现出良好的应用前景。但是,目前开发的工程化TCR-Treg和CAR-Treg细胞,都携带了一个T细胞本身的随机TCR,带来了一定的交叉抑制风险^[22]。因此,如何在赋予Treg细胞自身抗原特异性的同时敲除其本身的随机TCR,是接下来需要研究的重要问题。

3.3 疾病炎症微环境的重塑

Treg细胞治疗在已显著发病个体中的治疗效果不理想,以及炎症微环境导致的Treg细胞转分化,使研究人员对疾病的炎症微环境重塑问题越来越重视。目前,对疾病微环境的重塑策略,主要包括低剂量放射治疗、T细胞或B细胞删除抗体治疗等,并已在MS、T1D、干燥综合

征、自身免疫性葡萄膜炎等多个疾病模型中展现了理想的治疗效果(图3)^[33,56-58]。通过减少炎症细胞,一方面打破了疾病的炎症微环境,降低了炎症微环境对Treg细胞转分化的诱导作用,另一方面也为Treg细胞的输注或诱导提供了条件和生长空间。TGF- β 在该策略中发挥着重要作用,例如,低剂量放射治疗诱导炎症细胞凋亡并释放大量的TGF- β ,在注射低剂量自身抗原后能有效诱导抗原特异性Treg细胞的分化^[33]。后续研究中,若能使用局部放射或局部炎症细胞清除策略,会进一步降低该策略对系统免疫的影响。除在体内直接诱导Treg细胞以抑制炎症,该炎症微环境的重塑策略,在过继性Treg细胞治疗的联合增效方面,可能也有很好的应用前景。

3.4 Treg细胞治疗“副作用”的克服

既往关于过继性Treg细胞治疗的研究,主要关注Treg细胞输注后对疾病进展的影响,以及Treg细胞在输注后的稳定性,较少关注疾病免疫微环境的全景变化。单细胞测序技术的发展为描绘过继性Treg细胞治疗后的免疫微环境景观提供了条件。我们发现,输注的Treg细胞在抑制疾病的同时,会通过竞争性抑制IL-2,引起TGF- β 和IL-6依赖的促炎性Th17细胞分化的“副作用”,从而增加疾病的复发风险^[59]。通过将Treg细胞治疗与IL-6/STAT3阻断治疗相结合,能使Treg细胞在控制炎症的同时,抑制促炎性Th17细胞分化,从而显著提升AIDs的治疗效果(图3)。目前已知,低剂量IL-2治疗能促进Treg细胞扩增,同时抑制Th17细胞的分化。因此,低剂量IL-2治疗合并IL-6/STAT3阻断治疗,或Treg细胞治疗合并低剂量IL-2治疗,以及三种策略联合的三联疗法,有望取得更为理想的治疗效果,但仍待进一步研究和验证。此外,Treg细胞治疗是否会引起免疫微环境发生其他的不良反应,也有待进一步研究。

4 结语

Treg细胞被发现30年来,围绕Treg细胞开展的免疫治疗研究蓬勃发展,并取得了一系列重要研究成果。除AIDs、GVHD、器官移植排异等炎症性疾病外,靶向清除或抑制Treg细胞在肿瘤免疫治疗方面,也有重要的应用前景^[60]。尽管Treg细胞治疗的临床转化仍然面临诸多技术挑战,我们已经掌握了未来研究的重点:一方面,通过工程化手段制备TCR-Treg和CAR-Treg并去除T细胞原有的随机TCR,同时抑制Treg细胞的转分化,能够使Treg细胞特异性地在疾病微环境中长期发挥免疫抑制功能;另一方面,在Treg细胞治疗的同时,通过重塑疾病的炎症微环境,以及靶向抑制Treg细胞治疗的“副作用”,开发以

Treg细胞治疗为基础的联合治疗策略,能够进一步提高疾病治疗效果。我们相信,随着基础研究和临床转化工作的推进,Treg细胞治疗在重塑外周免疫耐受,治疗AIDs、GVHD等炎症性疾病方面一定会成功走向临床并造福人类。

* * *

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