

# Evaluation of combination effects of 2-methoxyestradiol and methoxyamine on IUdR-induced radiosensitization in glioma spheroids

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**Background:** Glioblastoma is the most common and most malignant cancer of central nervous system. Targeted radiotherapy is an effective method toward its treatment. Iododeoxyuridine (IUdR) is a halogenated thymidine analogue known to be effective as a radiosensitizer in human cancer therapy. In this study we have evaluated the combination effects of 2-Methoxyestradiol, an inhibitor of hypoxia inducible factor 1 $\alpha$  (HIF-1 $\alpha$ ) and Methoxyaminem, an inhibitor of base excision repair (BER) pathway on radiosensitization of IUdR in glioblastoma spheroid culture. **Materials and Methods:** The cytotoxic damages of DNA in U87MG cell line were compared using colony formation assay. Experiments were performed in large spheroids with a diameter of approximately 350 $\mu$ m. **Results:** Evaluation of the effects of IUdR with 2ME2 and MX pretreatment on spheroid cultured cell followed by ionizing irradiation showed more enhancement (p $\leq$ 0.001) IUdR induced-radiosensitization. These results introduced a key role for 2ME2 in IUdR related studies. **Conclusion:** Pretreatment of tumor cells with IUdR, MX and 2ME2 before irradiation enhances tumor radiosensitization and may improve therapeutic index for IUdR and 2ME2. *Iran. J. Radiat. Res., 2010; 7 (4): 211-216*

**Keywords:** Hypoxia-inducible factor-1 $\alpha$ , IUdR, radiosensitization, spheroid, methoxyamine, 2-methoxyestradiol.

## INTRODUCTION

Malignant gliomas are the most common adult primary brain tumors, occurring at a rate of five out of 100000 human populations a year <sup>(1)</sup>. Normally, surgery followed by radiotherapy is the first treatment strategy <sup>(2)</sup>; however, normal tissue tolerance is the most important obstacle against solid tumor radiation therapy as well as gliomas <sup>(3)</sup>.

In recent years, combine treatments using chemical/biological agents and radiotherapy have been employed to either

increase tumor radiosensitivity, or diminish ionizing radiation side effects. Iododeoxyuridine (IUdR) is a thymidine analogue, known as a potential radiosensitizer for human cancers therapy. It incorporates into DNA instead of thymidine during replication and sensitizes the cells to ionizing radiation. Although the biochemical mechanism of IUdR induced radiosensitivity is not understood, it is presumed that IUdR sensitizes the cells through enhancing formation of DNA single and double strand breaks <sup>(4, 5)</sup> where the extent of radiosensitization correlates with the level of IUdR-DNA incorporation <sup>(6, 7)</sup>.

Like solid tumors, the multicellular spheroid cultures represents cell-cell contact <sup>(8, 9)</sup>, individual hypoxic cell populations <sup>(10)</sup>, and cycle times that range from as those of exponential monolayer rates through an essentially non dividing state <sup>(11)</sup>. A research conducted on the growth of human glioma cells in these two systems showed different degrees of sensitivity to radioionated IUdR <sup>(12)</sup>. Several authors have reported higher radioresistance of cells in spheroids compared with monolayer cultures <sup>(13, 14)</sup>. We have also found out that the DNA damages are strongly diminished in large volume spheroids in comparison with the small one which has been due to the existence of G<sub>0</sub>/hypoxic cells in large spheroids unabling to absorb IUdR <sup>(15)</sup>. So the application of these data in tumors including hypoxic/G<sub>0</sub> arrested cells, with no

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DNA replication, leads to deficiency in IUdR uptake and therefore inability to induce radiosensitivity consequently. Recent data have shown that 2-Metoxyestradiol (2ME2) inhibits hypoxia inducible factor-1 $\alpha$  (HIF-1 $\alpha$ ). HIF-1 $\alpha$  is a transcriptional activator that functions as a master regulator of cellular and systemic oxygen homeostasis<sup>(16)</sup>. 2ME2 is an endogenous metabolite of estrogen that has both angiogenic and antitumor effects. The ability of 2ME2 to inhibit HIF-1 $\alpha$  correlates with its microtubule depolymerization effects<sup>(17)</sup>. So the present study was designed to search on radiosensitization effect of IUdR as a radiosensitizer and MX plus 2ME2 as BER and HIF-1 $\alpha$  inhibitors, respectively. The experiment was done on U87MG cells, cultured in spheroid culture model. This study was performed on 350 $\mu$ m spheroids regarding the fact that G<sub>0</sub> cells were mostly in the same spheroids size.

One of the well known and reliable methods in radiobiological studies is colony formation assay. Colony formation assay is an *in-vitro* cell survival assay based on ability of a single cell to grow into a colony. The assay essentially tests every cell in the population for its ability to undergo unlimited division. Colonogenic assay which is used in this study is the method to determine cell reproductive death after treatment with ionizing radiation. It can also be used to determine the effectiveness of other cytotoxic agents<sup>(18)</sup>.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Cell line

Human glioblastoma cell line U87MG was provided by Pastor Institute of Iran. This cell line was maintained in MEM (GIBCO) supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS) (GIBCO), 500U/ml of penicillin/ 200 mg/lit of streptomycin (SIGMA).

### Monolayer culture

Cells were cultured as monolayer at a

density of 31250 cells/ml in T-25 tissue culture flasks (NUNC). Cultures were maintained at 37°C in a humidified atmosphere of 5% CO<sub>2</sub>. Cultures were propagated and cells were harvested by trypsinizing cultures with 1mM EDTA/ 0.25% Trypsin (w/v) (SIGMA) in Phosphate Buffer Saline (PBS).

### Spheroid culture

Spheroids were initiated using the Liquid Overlay technique<sup>(19)</sup>. Cells were seeded into 100 mm plates coated with a thin layer of 1% agar (Bacto Agar, Difco, Detroit, MI) with 10ml of MEM supplemented with 10% FBS. The plates were incubated at 37 °C in a humidified atmosphere of 5% CO<sub>2</sub>. Half of the culture medium was replaced with fresh medium twice per week.

### Drug-radiation treatment

The 350 $\mu$ m diameter formed spheroids were treated with IUdR, MX, 2ME2 67h before being exposed to ionizing radiation. The concentration of the chemical was 1 $\mu$ M, 6mM and 250 $\mu$ M, respectively, in MEM containing 10% FBS. After the treatment time, the medium containing drugs was removed and the cultures were washed 3 times with PBS and the spheroids were immediately irradiated using <sup>60</sup>Co source (Theratron 760) at a dose rate of 109.29c Gy/min for 2 Gy. For radiation treatment, 4 tissue culture flasks were put under collimator of equipment at 65cm distance of the head simultaneously, and the field size and the period of irradiation were 20×10 cm<sup>2</sup> and 1.83min, respectively.

### Colony formation assay

After drug treatment and irradiation, to achieve single cells, spheroids were trypsinized with 300  $\mu$ l of trypsin in 5 minutes. Then, single cells plated for colony formation tests. In day 10 after plating, cultures washed 3 times with PBS, fixed with 2% formaldehyde in PBS for 15 min, stained with 0.5% crystal violet, and colonies were counted by invert microscope

(Olympus).

In order to evaluate the ability of cells to form colonies, different concentration of individual cells (2000, 3000, 5000, 7500, 10000 cells) from spheroid seeded into 60mm plates with 10ml of MEM supplemented with 10% FBS. Plating efficiency were calculated, using the following equation:

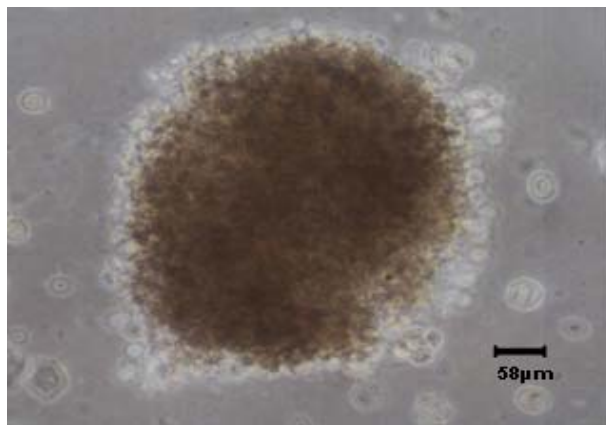
$$PE (\%) = \left( \frac{\text{the number of colonies}}{\text{the number of seeded cells}} \right) \times 100$$

### Statistical analysis

Data were given as mean values $\pm$ SEM, with "n" denoting the number of experiments. One way Anova (Analysis of Variance, non parametric) was considered appropriate and applied. A value of  $p \leq 0.05$  was considered to be significant.

## RESULTS

The U87MG cells were able to form spheroids in liquid overlay cultures. Figure 1 shows the phase contrast micrograph of the spheroid in 350  $\mu$ m in diameter. The volume doubling time (VDT) calculated from the U87MG spheroid was  $\sim 67 \pm 0.91h$  <sup>(15)</sup> which was applied for drug treatment time, consequently.

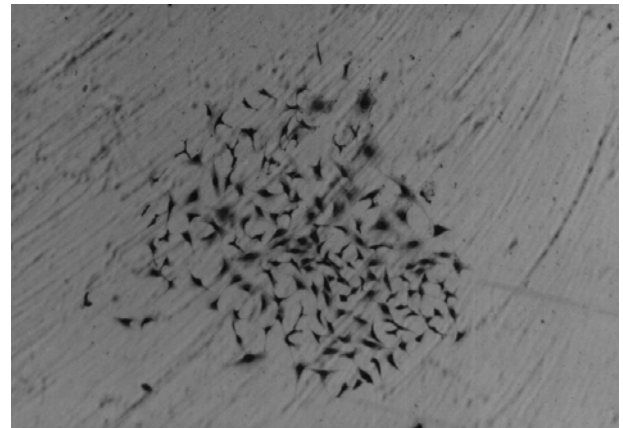


**Figure 1.** Phase contrast micrographs of U87MG spheroids. 350 $\mu$ m spheroid on the day 24<sup>th</sup> after initiation of measuring the diameters.

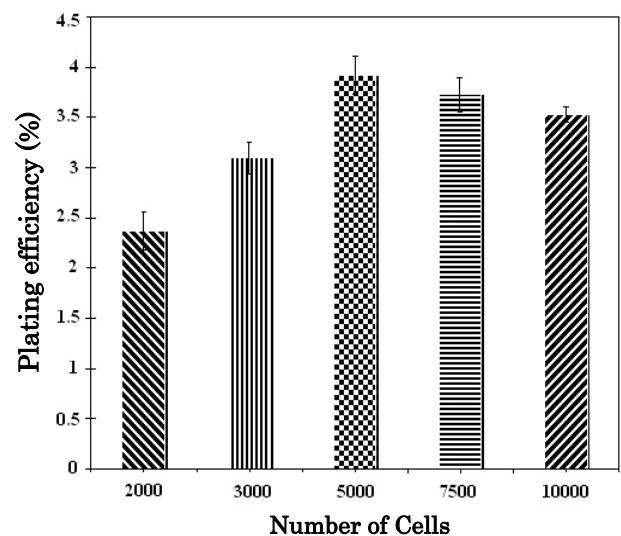
In the first treatment time, i.e.  $67 \pm 0.91h$ , the spheroids were treated with 2ME2 to inhibit HIF-1 $\alpha$  activities producing until the formation of 350 $\mu$ m spheroids.

Then, spheroids were treated with IUdR + MX, IUdR + 2ME2 and IUdR+MX+2ME2 for next VDT. Finally, after drug treatment and irradiation, the numbers of colonies were counted for the evaluation of radiosensitization effects. The average of maximum and minimum of numbers of formed colonies were 150 and 17, respectively.

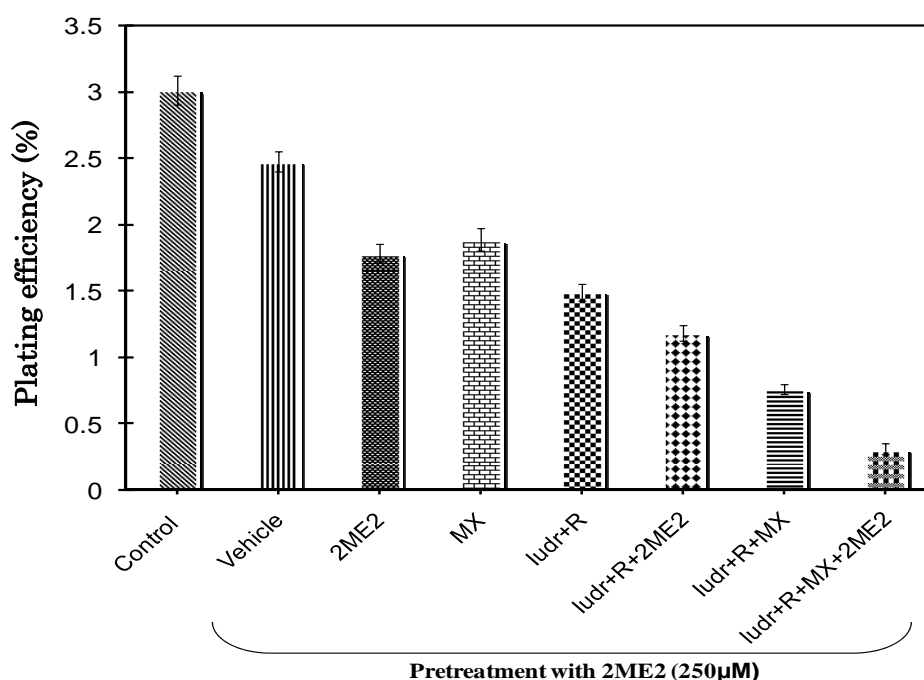
Figure 2 shows a cell population containing more than 50 cells which indicating a standard colony of U87MG cell. Based on the results of colony formation of different pre-cultured cells, the optimum cell number to perform colony from spheroids was  $\sim 5000$  per 60 mm dishes. The results are shown clearly in figure 3.



**Figure 2.** A colony formatted by an invert microscope of U87MG cell line.



**Figure 3.** Plating efficiency using U87MG cells of spheroid culture in MEM supplemented with 10% FBS in different concentrations. Mean  $\pm$  SEM of 3 experiments.



According to figure 4, colonies formed from the control and experimental groups were significantly decreased ( $p < 0.001$ ). In the third group, 2ME2 treated cultures, were damaged significantly ( $p < 0.001$ ), and the increase was more or less the same as MX results treated. Consequently, IUdR/MX and IUdR/2ME2 treatments showed more damages (less colonies) ( $p < 0.005$ ) in comparison with the control group which was treated without IUdR. There was also a big difference, in IUdR/MX/2ME2 group in comparison with the control as well as other groups ( $p < 0.001$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Methoxyamine (MX) as a BER inhibitor, shown to mediate by tight binding to AP sites generated by cleavage of BER glycosylases and rendering the phosphodiester bonds adjacent to the AP site refractory to the catalytic activity of AP endonuclease<sup>(20, 21)</sup>, resulting well blockage of BER pathway. In our previous study, it has shown that MX increased DNA damages thorough enhancing of DNA strand breaks in spheroid cultures of U87MG cell lines<sup>(15)</sup>. However IUdR with

MX radiosensitization studies, are restricted to *in-vitro* researches on monolayer culture cells from human colon cancer<sup>(20-22)</sup>. Therefore, first; it remains unclear whether these results could be extended into tumor *in-vivo*; second, based on high proliferation property of brain tumors, which makes them a good candidate for IUdR applications, is it possible to achieve the same results obtained from colon cancer cells. To answer these two important questions, we have studied the radiosensitization effects of IUdR/MX on glioma spheroid cell culture.

Spheroid cultures are interesting and valuable *in-vitro* model systems which allow many properties of *in-vivo* tumor systems to be studied quantitatively<sup>(9-11)</sup>. Tumor hypoxia may be back to hypoxia inducible factor-1 $\alpha$  (HIF-1 $\alpha$ ) which is found in mammalian cell cultured under reduced O<sub>2</sub> tension (23). Recent studies have shown that HIF-1 $\alpha$  is responsible for arresting endothelial cells at G<sub>0</sub> phase<sup>(16)</sup>, resulting in the reduced proliferation of cells and the hypoxia-induced death may be involved by suppression of anti-apoptotic molecule, bcl-2<sup>(14,16,23)</sup>. Studies have also demonstrated that increasing the size of DU-145 prostate multicellular tumor spheroids decreases the



pericellular oxygen pressure and generation of reactive oxygen species, whereas the  $\alpha$ -subunit of HIF-1 is up-regulated<sup>(24)</sup>.

Furthermore, over-expression of HIF correlates with metastasis decreased response to radiation and chemotherapy. Recent data have shown that 2ME2 inhibits HIF-1 $\alpha$  in cancer cell lines. 2ME2-mediated decrease in cellular HIF-1 $\alpha$  levels leads to inhibition of its nuclear translocation, inhibition of VEGF transcription and a decrease in VEGF secretion. Over 60 genes have been identified as HIF-1 target genes. Under hypoxic condition 2ME2 down-regulates HIF-1 $\alpha$  protein levels in human umbilical vein endothelial cells, as well<sup>(17, 25)</sup>. In this study, we hypothesized that inhibition of HIF-1 $\alpha$  using 2ME2 would be effective in IUdR/MX radiosensitization within blockage of G<sub>0</sub> arrests and consequently, in IUdR uptake in glioma spheroids.

Using colonogenic assay (figure 4), vehicle has shown significant more cell damages in comparison with control, which might have been due to pretreatment with 2ME2 resulting to cell apoptosis. Also, the result showed that IUdR pretreatment sensitized cells to ionizing radiation significantly, and the degree of radiosensitization was further increased, when cells were pretreated with IUdR/MX and IUdR/2ME2 in comparison with control. In IUdR/MX pretreatment group first: MX increased IUdR-DNA incorporation which resulted in IUdR-induced radiosensitization, and second: MX inhibited short-patch BER by blocking APE activity that increase SSBs and DSBs generated during BER. MX stabilized AP sites and blocked cleavage of the phosphodiester bond which reduced the BER intermediate. In IUdR/2ME2 pretreatment group, first: 2ME2 inhibited expression, and activation of HIF-1 $\alpha$  proteins, cells passed synthesis phase, uptook IUdR and sensitized to ionizing radiation, and second: 2ME2 inhibited cell cycle progression in the G<sub>2</sub>-M phase via disruption of microtubule elongation. As we

know, G<sub>2</sub>-M phase is a radiosensitive phase of the cell cycle, thus 2ME2 also acts as a radiosensitization. Besides, IUdR/MX/2ME2 have the most radiosensitization effect comparing with control and the other groups. However, these favorable results need a comprehensive molecular biology experiments. According to our results and former studies outcome, the HIF-1 $\alpha$ , as a responsible protein for G<sub>0</sub>/G<sub>1</sub> arrest, inhibited by 2ME2 and, therefore, increase cell proliferation and IUdR-DNA incorporation. HIF-1 $\alpha$  as a key factor to open a gate for IUdR related studies at least in brain tumors, may improve therapeutic index for clinical radiation.

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