



**GENE EXPRESSION OF THE RENIN-ANGIOTENSIN SYSTEM IN THE
SPONTANEOUSLY HYPERTENSIVE RAT**

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ABSTRACT

The principal aim of the studies described in this thesis was to examine the gene expression of the renin-angiotensin system (RAS) in the spontaneously hypertensive rat (SHR) and the normotensive Wistar-Kyoto rat (WKY).

(1) The technique of *in situ* hybridisation was used in order to determine the cellular localisation of the gene expression of the RAS in kidney and liver in the pre-hypertensive and established phases of hypertension and to determine whether the sites of expression of the RAS in vascular tissue were similar in hypertensive and normotensive rats. The developmental regulation of kidney renin gene expression in the SHR was similar to that seen in the WKY. No differences in the cellular localisation of angiotensinogen mRNA in liver was noted at any age in both SHR and WKY. ACE mRNA expression in liver and kidney was also similar in the two rat strains. In the mesenteric vascular bed of both SHR and WKY, angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE) was expressed in the endothelium and smooth muscle layer of the blood vessels as well as in the surrounding adipose tissue. Angiotensinogen expression was noted in the smooth muscle and surrounding adipose tissue, while renin mRNA was inconsistently demonstrated in the smooth muscle layer only. ACE mRNA was also demonstrated in the adipocytes of human subcutaneous and extra-peritoneal adipose tissue.

(2) The mRNA expression for renin, angiotensinogen and ACE was determined in the kidneys and livers from SHR and WKY during chronic treatment with captopril and following its withdrawal. Chronic captopril treatment was associated with a dramatic rise in renin mRNA in the kidney and an elevation in mRNA for ACE in the liver. The release from captopril treatment was associated with a reversal of the increase in kidney renin mRNA but no reversal of the sustained elevation of ACE mRNA in the liver. *In situ*

hybridisation revealed a localisation of renin to the area of the juxtaglomerular apparatus in the kidneys from untreated animals, but recruitment of vascular sites of renin expression in kidneys from captopril-treated animals. In kidneys from released animals, renin mRNA expression was once again confined to the juxtaglomerular apparatus. ACE mRNA was expressed in hepatocytes throughout the livers from animals in all treatment groups. The results highlight a differential effect of captopril withdrawal upon the gene expression of the components of the renin-angiotensin system in kidney and liver.

(3) Neonatal sympathectomy did not influence the gene expression of the RAS components in the kidneys, livers and the mesenteric vascular bed from adult SHR and WKY. ACE activity in plasma, kidney, liver, aorta, lung, skeletal muscle and brain from adult animals was also not affected by neonatal sympathectomy. The accumulation of AII into aorta, mesenteric artery and its branches, kidney and skeletal muscle was not influenced by innervation, hyperinnervation or sympathectomy which indicates that, unlike adrenaline, the facilitation of sympathetic transmission by AII does not involve a process of uptake of the peptide into sympathetic nerves.

(4) The ACE gene was expressed at a similar level in livers and kidneys from both SHR and WKY, despite the fact that the corresponding ACE activity was at least an order of magnitude lower in livers when compared with kidneys. The possibility that endogenous ACE inhibitory activity was present in the liver was investigated by examining the effect of liver homogenates on plasma ACE activity. The effect of hepatotoxicity on plasma ACE activity was also studied, in order to determine whether the liver was a source of circulating ACE. Liver homogenates from both WKY and SHR, when added to plasma, significantly decreased the measurable ACE activity in it by 41% and 50% respectively. When liver homogenates were pre-incubated with the sulphhydryl-blocking drug 5,5'-dithiobis-(2-nitro benzoic acid) (DTNB, 5 mM), the inhibitory effect of the homogenate

on plasma ACE was significantly reduced. Plasma ACE activity was not influenced by carbon tetrachloride-induced hepatotoxicity in either rat strain. In contrast, there was a four-fold increase in liver ACE activity which was not associated with a significant change in the ACE mRNA levels or a significant change in the inhibitory activity of liver homogenates. The results indicate that hepatic ACE activity is subject to endogenous inhibition and suggest that there is an uncoupling of ACE gene expression and activity in the liver.

DECLARATION	ii
PUBLICATIONS IN SUPPORT OF THIS THESIS	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
ABBREVIATIONS	viii
CHAPTER 1	
INTRODUCTION	
<i>1.1 Hypertension - definition and aetiology</i>	2
<i>1.2 The Renin-Angiotensin System (RAS)</i>	3
<i>1.2.1 Production and actions of angiotensin II</i>	3
<i>1.2.2 Renin</i>	5
<i>1.2.3 Angiotensinogen</i>	6
<i>1.2.4 Angiotensin converting enzyme</i>	7
<i>1.2.5 Angiotensin receptors</i>	11
<i>1.2.6 The RAS in essential hypertension</i> <i>-therapeutic RAS inhibitors</i>	12
<i>1.3 Animal models of hypertension</i>	14
<i>1.3.1 The spontaneously hypertensive rat (SHR)</i>	14
<i>1.3.2 The RAS in the SHR</i>	15
<i>1.4 Gene expression of the RAS</i>	17
<i>1.4.1 Regulation of gene expression</i>	17
<i>1.4.2 Localisation of gene expression</i>	20

1.5 The effect of ACE inhibition on the gene expression of the RAS	22
1.5.1 Blood Pressure	22
1.5.2 Gene expression	24
1.6. The sympathetic nervous system (SNS)	26
1.6.1 The SNS in human primary hypertension	26
1.6.2 Interactions between the RAS and the SNS	27
1.6.3. The SNS in the SHR	28
1.7 Introduction summary	31
1.8 Aims	32
CHAPTER 2	
METHODS	
2.1 Animals	35
2.1.1 Source of animals and housing conditions	35
2.1.2 Blood pressure measurements	36
2.1.3 Tissue collection	36
2.2 Biochemical analyses	36
2.2.1 Angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE) activity	36
2.2.2 Protein	38
2.2.3 Noradrenaline	39
2.2.4 Angiotensin II uptake	40
2.2.5 Alanine aminotransferase (AlaAT) activity	41
2.3 RNA analyses	42
2.3.1 Quantification of nucleic acids	43
2.3.2 Mini Gel Electrophoresis	43

2.3.3 Preparation of hybridisation probes	44
2.3.4 RNA isolation	48
2.3.5 Slot analysis	49
2.3.6 Northern analysis	50
2.3.7 Hybridisation	50
2.3.8 Autoradiography	51
2.3.9 Quantification of mRNA levels	51
2.3.10 In situ hybridisation	52
2.4 Statistical analyses	54

CHAPTER 3

LOCALISATION OF THE GENE EXPRESSION OF THE RAS IN SHR AND WKY USING *in situ* HYBRIDISATION

3.1 Introduction	56
3.2 Methods	57
3.2.1 Animals	57
3.2.2 Verification of probes	58
3.2.3 In situ hybridisation	58
3.3 Results	59
3.3.1 Preliminary experiments	59
3.3.2 Verification of probes	61
3.3.3 Renin expression in kidney and liver	62
3.3.4 Angiotensinogen expression in kidney and liver	62
3.3.5 ACE expression in kidney and liver	62
3.3.6 RAS expression in vascular tissue	63
3.4 Discussion	73

CHAPTER 4**THE EFFECT OF CHRONIC CAPTOPRIL TREATMENT AND ITS WITHDRAWAL ON THE GENE EXPRESSION OF THE RAS IN THE SHR**

<i>4.1 Introduction</i>	81
<i>4.2 Methods</i>	82
<i>4.2.1 Treatment of animals and removal of tissues</i>	82
<i>4.2.2 Biochemical and RNA analyses</i>	83
<i>4.2.3 Statistical analyses</i>	83
<i>4.3 Results</i>	83
<i>4.3.1 Blood pressure development</i>	83
<i>4.3.2 ACE activity</i>	84
<i>4.3.3 Slot analyses</i>	87
<i>4.3.4 In situ hybridisation</i>	88
<i>4.4 Discussion</i>	92

CHAPTER 5**THE EFFECT OF NEONATAL SYMPATHECTOMY ON THE RAS IN ADULT SHR**

<i>5.1 Introduction</i>	99
<i>5.2 Methods</i>	100

5.2.1 <i>Treatment of animals and removal of tissues</i>	100
5.2.2 <i>Biochemical and RNA analyses</i>	101
5.2.3 <i>Statistical analyses</i>	102
5.3 Results	102
5.3.1 <i>Blood pressure development</i>	102
5.3.2 <i>NA concentration</i>	103
5.3.3 <i>ACE activity</i>	103
5.3.4 <i>Slot analyses</i>	104
5.4 Discussion	112

CHAPTER 6

IS ANGIOTENSIN II TAKEN UP INTO SYMPATHETIC NERVES?

6.1 <i>Introduction</i>	117
6.2 <i>Methods</i>	118
6.2.1 <i>Animals, treatments and tissue collection</i>	118
6.2.2 <i>NA determination</i>	118
6.2.3 <i>AII uptake</i>	119
6.2.4 <i>Statistical analyses</i>	119
6.3 <i>Results</i>	119
6.3.1 <i>Tissue NA concentration</i>	119
6.3.2 <i>AII uptake</i>	120

6.4 Discussion

124

CHAPTER 7

EXPRESSION AND ACTIVITY OF HEPATIC ACE

<i>7.1 Introduction</i>	127
<i>7.2 Methods</i>	128
<i>7.2.1 Animals and tissue treatments</i>	128
<i>7.2.2 Biochemical analyses</i>	129
<i>7.2.3 RNA analyses</i>	130
<i>7.2.4 Statistical analyses</i>	130
<i>7.3 Results</i>	130
<i>7.3.1 Comparison of kidney and liver ACE</i>	130
<i>7.3.2 Endogenous inhibitory activity</i>	132
<i>7.3.3 Hepatotoxicity and ACE activity</i>	135
<i>7.4 Discussion</i>	144

CHAPTER 8

THE EXPRESSION AND LOCALISATION OF THE ANGIOTENSIN
CONVERTING ENZYME mRNA IN HUMAN ADIPOSE TISSUE

8.1 Introduction	149
8.2 Methods	149
8.2.1 <i>Patients and tissue treatments</i>	149
8.2.2 <i>RNA analyses</i>	149
8.3 Results	150
8.3.1 <i>RNA recovery</i>	150
8.3.2 <i>Northern analysis</i>	150
8.3.3 <i>Localisation of ACE mRNA</i>	150
8.4 Discussion	150
CHAPTER 9	
GENERAL CONCLUSIONS	156
BIBLIOGRAPHY	162
APPENDICES	182