Title: Toll-like receptor 3 L412F polymorphism promotes a persistent clinical phenotype in pulmonary sarcoidosis

Authors: Gordon Cooke¹, Ijaz Kamal²,³, Monika Strengert², Emily Hams⁴,⁵, Leona Mawhinney⁴, Aisling Tynan⁴, Ciaran O’ Reilly⁴, David N. O’ Dwyer²,³, Steven L. Kunkel⁶, Ulla G. Knaus², Denis C. Shields⁷, David R. Moller⁸, Andrew G. Bowie⁹, Padraic G. Fallon⁴,⁵, Cory M. Hogaboam⁶, Michelle E. Armstrong⁴,⁷, and Seamas C. Donnelly⁴,¹⁰.

Affiliations:
¹Department of Applied Sciences, Institute of Technology Tallaght, Tallaght, Dublin 24, Ireland.
²School of Medicine and Medical Science, College of Life Sciences, UCD Conway Institute of Biomolecular and Biomedical Research, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland.
³National Pulmonary Fibrosis Referral Centre at St. Vincent’s University Hospital, Elm Park, Dublin 4, Ireland.
⁴School of Medicine, Trinity Biomedical Sciences Institute, 152-160 Pearse Street, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland.
⁵National Children’s Research Centre, Our Lady’s Children’s Hospital Crumlin, Dublin, Ireland.
⁶Department of Pathology, University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.
⁷UCD Complex and Adaptive Systems Laboratory, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland.
⁸Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, Department of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, Maryland, USA.
⁹School of Biochemistry and Immunology, Trinity Biomedical Sciences Institute, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland.
¹⁰Department of Clinical Medicine, Trinity Centre for Health Sciences, Tallaght Hospital, Tallaght, Dublin 24, Ireland.

★ Corresponding author: Dr. Michelle E. Armstrong, School of Medicine, Trinity Biomedical Sciences Institute, 152-160 Pearse Street, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland.
E-mail: michelle.armstrong@tcd.ie. Ph: +353 1 896 4435; Fax: +353 1 896 4535.

* Senior authors contributed equally to this work.
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Running Title: TLR3 L412F promotes persistent pulmonary sarcoidosis.


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ABSTRACT

Background: Sarcoidosis is a multisystemic disorder of unknown etiology, characterised by the presence of non-caseating granulomas in target organs. In ninety percent of cases, there is thoracic involvement. Fifty to seventy percent of pulmonary sarcoidosis patients will experience acute, self-limiting disease. For the subgroup of patients who develop persistent disease, no targeted therapy is currently available.

Aim: To investigate the potential of the single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP), Toll-like receptor 3 Leu412Phe (TLR3 L412F; rs3775291), as a causative factor in the development of, and in disease persistence in pulmonary sarcoidosis. To investigate the functionality of TLR3 L412F in vitro in primary human lung fibroblasts from pulmonary sarcoidosis patients.

Methods: Cohorts of Irish sarcoidosis patients (n=228), healthy Irish controls (n = 263) and a secondary cohort of American sarcoidosis patients (n=123) were genotyped for TLR3 L412F. Additionally, the effect of TLR3 L412F in primary lung fibroblasts from pulmonary sarcoidosis patients was quantitated following TLR3 activation in the context of cytokine and type I interferon production, TLR3 expression, and apoptotic- and fibroproliferative-responses.

Results: We report a significant association between TLR3 L412F and persistent clinical disease in two cohorts of Irish and American Caucasians with pulmonary sarcoidosis. Furthermore, activation of TLR3 in primary lung fibroblasts from 412F-homozygous pulmonary sarcoidosis patients resulted in reduced IFN-β and TLR3 expression, reduced apoptosis- and dysregulated fibroproliferative-responses compared with TLR3 wild-type patients.

Conclusions: This study identifies defective TLR3 function as a previously unidentified factor in persistent clinical disease in pulmonary sarcoidosis and reveals TLR3 L412F as a candidate biomarker.
INTRODUCTION

Sarcoidosis is a multi-systemic disorder of unknown cause which is characterised by the presence of non-caseating granulomas in target organs. Ninety percent of sarcoidosis cases have thoracic involvement (1, 2). The highest annual incidence of sarcoidosis has been observed in northern European countries (5 to 40 cases per 100,000 people) (3). Phenotypically, sarcoidosis follows either an acute or chronic course. Up to seventy percent of patients present with acute sarcoidosis and experience self-limiting disease which will resolve within 1-2 years (4). In contrast, thirty to fifty percent of patients will develop persistent pulmonary sarcoidosis for which no approved treatments are currently available and corticosteroid use is the standard, non-specific treatment method (4).

Although mechanisms underlying the development of sarcoidosis are currently unknown, it hypothesized to be caused by an aberrant host immune response to unknown environmental antigens in genetically predisposed individuals. A number of alterations in sarcoidosis patients’ immune responses has been reported including, an exaggerated Th1 response, increased Th17 activity, attenuated regulatory T cell responses and oligoclonal expansion of CD4+ T cell responses, which is consistent with chronic antigenic stimulation (5-9).

To date, no specific pathogen has been identified as a causative factor in sarcoidosis. Several studies have a role for mycobacterial or propionibacterial organisms in the pathogenesis of sarcoidosis. Specifically, a meta-analysis of studies carried out between 1980 and 2006 demonstrated that 26% of all sarcoidosis tissues had evidence of mycobacterial nucleic acids (10). In the context of viral infection, seroepidemiological studies have demonstrated significant levels of antibodies to Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), rubella and parainfluenza 3 in sarcoidosis (11). However, no correlation could be made between viral antibody titre and stage of disease or activity (11).

In this study, we investigated the role of defective TLR3 in the development of persistent clinical disease in pulmonary sarcoidosis. TLR3 has previously been shown to bind dsRNA from viruses, bacteria and helminths, respectively, in addition to mRNA released from necrotic cells (2, 12-15). Specifically, here we investigated the role of the TLR3 polymorphism, Leu412Phe (TLR3 Leu412Phe, L412F; rs3775291) as a causative factor in the development of and in disease persistence in pulmonary sarcoidosis, respectively. Previously, we identified a role for TLR3 L412F in accelerated disease progression and increased risk of mortality in idiopathic pulmonary
fibrosis (IPF) (16). TLR3 L412F has also been implicated as a causative factor in a number of autoimmune and inflammatory diseases such as diabetes, systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) and rheumatoid arthritis (17-19), as well as a variety of cancers (20-24). TLR3 L412F has also been demonstrated to have either a protective or pathogenic effect in viral infection (25, 26).

In this study, we report a significant association between development of a persistent clinical phenotype in pulmonary sarcoidosis and the TLR3 L412F variant in cohorts of Irish and American Caucasians, respectively. Furthermore, activation of TLR3 in vitro in primary human lung fibroblasts from 412F-homozygous patients resulted in decreased TLR3 and IFN-β expression, reduced apoptosis and dysregulated proliferation, respectively, compared with fibroblasts from TLR3 wild-type patients. Our findings imply that defective TLR3 promotes a persistent disease phenotype in sarcoidosis and reveals TLR3 L412F as a candidate prognostic biomarker in this interstitial lung disease.
MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Subjects

A cohort of Irish Caucasian pulmonary sarcoidosis patients (n=228; Table 1) was recruited from St Vincent’s University Hospital, Elm Park, Dublin 4 (SVUH). A cohort of Irish Caucasian healthy volunteers (n = 263) was additionally recruited as a control group. Genomic DNA was obtained from the American cohort of sarcoidosis patients attending the specialized Sarcoidosis Clinic at Johns Hopkins University School, Baltimore, MA, USA (n=123; Table 1).

Diagnosis of pulmonary sarcoidosis and classification of persistent disease

Irish and American pulmonary sarcoidosis patients were diagnosed at initial hospital presentation by the same physician (S.C.D. and D.R.M), respectively, and followed-up for at least 2 years (see Supplementary Methods). Patients at 2 years follow-up were classified as having either “persistent” disease or “non-persistent” disease based on a modification of a system previously described (2)(see Supplementary Methods).

TLR3 L412F genotyping

TLR3 L412F genotyping was carried out as described by us previously in a parallel study investigating the role of the TLR3 L412F in IPF (16)(see Supplementary Methods).

Analysis of TLR3 L412F functionality in primary human lung fibroblasts from pulmonary sarcoidosis patients

Primary fibroblast cell lines were isolated from lung biopsies of sarcoidosis patients (supplied by SVUH) and cultured as described previously (27) (see Supplementary Methods). Methodology pertaining to the analysis of the effects of TLR3 L412F on fibroblast-apoptosis, -proliferation and -cytokine/interferon production, respectively, is detailed in the Supplementary Methods section.

Statistical analysis

All statistical analyses were carried out using GraphPad Instat Software (GraphPad Software Inc. CA, USA). Statistical analyses of genotype and allele frequencies were performed using two-tailed χ² tests (3 x 2 χ² tests for independence and trend, respectively, or 2 x 2 χ² test where
appropriate) or 2 x 2 Fisher’s exact tests if the \( \chi^2 \) test was inappropriate. Forward, stepwise logistic regression analysis was carried out to obtain corrected \( P \) values for appropriate confounders. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for statistical significance (two-tailed analysis) between experimental groups of three. Multiple comparisons between groups were then assessed using the Tukey-Kramer post-hoc test (for parametric analysis) or Dunn’s post-hoc test (for non-parametric analysis). Statistical significance was recorded at \( p<0.05 \).
RESULTS

TLR3 L412F (rs3775291) is not associated with development of pulmonary sarcoidosis in Irish patients

In this study, we tested for an association between TLR3 L412F and development of pulmonary sarcoidosis in an Irish case-control study of 263 control subjects and 228 sarcoidosis cases (Table 2). L412F genotype frequencies in the Irish control group and Irish sarcoidosis group were determined to be consistent with Hardy-Weinberg Equilibrium (HWE; controls: \( P=0.32 \); cases: \( P=0.72 \)). No significant association was found between development of sarcoidosis and the L412F genotypes \( [P=0.6326; \text{Odds ratio (OR) for } 412F (\text{Phe}) 	ext{ carriers: } 1.105 (95\% \text{ C.I.: } 0.774-1.578) \}; \text{OR for } \text{Phe/Phe} \text{ homozygotes (Phe/Phe): } 0.801 (\text{C.I.: } 0.387-1.660); \text{Table 2}] \) or allele frequency \( [P=0.8942; \text{OR: } 1.003 (\text{C.I.: } 0.774-1.372); \text{Table 2}] \). This indicates that the variant allele does not strongly promote development of the disease in an Irish sarcoidosis population.

TLR3 L412F promotes a persistent clinical phenotype in Irish patients with pulmonary sarcoidosis

We then tested for an association between TLR3 L412F and disease persistence in sarcoidosis. Patients were defined as having either “persistent” (n=104) or “non-persistent” (n=124) disease at 2 years post-diagnosis according to established criteria (2) (Table 2). We observed a significant association between development of a persistent disease phenotype in Irish sarcoidosis patients and 412F homozygosity \( [P=0.0095; \text{OR for } \text{Phe/Phe} \text{ homozygotes: } 5.762 (\text{C.I.: } 1.594-20.284)]; \text{Table 2}] \) and F allele frequency \( [P=0.0166; \text{OR: } 1.713 (\text{C.I.: } 1.122-2.617); \text{Table 2}] \). This suggests that TLR3 412F homozygosity may be a useful prognostic biomarker in sarcoidosis.

TLR3 L412F is associated with disease persistence in American Caucasians with sarcoidosis

To test for replication of the association between TLR3 L412F and disease persistence in Irish sarcoidosis patients, we carried out a validation study in an American cohort of sarcoidosis patients. We genotyped 123 genomic DNA samples from patients attending a tertiary referral centre for sarcoidosis (Table 1). We found a significant association between L412F heterozygosity \( [P=0.0432; \text{OR for } \text{Phe carriers: } 3.535 (\text{C.I.: } 1.246-10.029); \text{Table 3}] \) and F allele
frequency \( P=0.0221; \) OR: 2.836 (C.I.: 1.129-7.122); Table 3, respectively, and development of persistent disease in the overall American population. Further analysis of individual Caucasian American and African American cohorts revealed a significant association between disease persistence and 412F heterozygote genotype \( P=0.0114, \) OR for Phe carriers: 4.4 (CI: 1.411-13.717); Table 3 and allele frequency \( P=0.0205, \) OR: 3.175 (C.I.: 1.207-8.351); Table 3, respectively, in Caucasian Americans but not African Americans.

**Primary lung fibroblasts from TLR3 L412F homozygote sarcoidosis patients produce reduced IL-8 and IFN-\( \beta \), and have reduced TLR3 expression**

In order to elucidate the mechanisms underlying the association between development of persistent disease and TLR3 412F, we investigated TLR3 function in primary human fibroblasts from TLR3 412F wild-type (Leu/Leu) versus homozygous (Phe/Phe) sarcoidosis patients with a persistent disease phenotype. Following TLR3 activation by Poly(I:C) treatment, variant Phe/Phe fibroblasts had significantly reduced IL-8 production (Fig. 1A; NF-\( \kappa \)B-readout) and IFN-\( \beta \) expression (Fig. 1B; IRF3-readout), respectively. These findings conferred with the authors who first described the polymorphism and who reported that it resulted in defective TLR3 function via reduced NF-\( \kappa \)B and IRF3 signaling (28). In addition, following TLR3 activation by Poly(I:C) treatment, variant Phe/Phe fibroblasts also had blunted TLR3 mRNA expression compared with wild-type fibroblasts (Fig. 1C). We have also shown additionally using FACS that the upregulation of extracellular TLR3 following Poly(I:C) treatment on Phe/Phe primary lung fibroblasts was blunted compared with wild-type cells (Supplementary Fig. S1A). In contrast, levels of intracellular TLR3 expression on wild-type and Phe/Phe fibroblasts were comparable following Poly(I:C) treatment (Supplementary Fig. S1B).

**TLR3 L412F inhibits apoptosis and dysregulates proliferation in primary lung fibroblasts from homozygote sarcoidosis patients**

Here we assessed the induction of TLR3-induced apoptosis in Leu/Leu and Phe/Phe fibroblasts and found a significantly reduced ability of Phe/Phe fibroblasts to undergo late-phase apoptosis compared with wild-type cells (Fig. 2A, B). Furthermore, we also observed a decreased ability of Phe/Phe cells to reduce their proliferation in response to Poly(I:C) compared with Leu/Leu cells (Fig. 3A). Interestingly, a comparable level of reduction in fibroproliferation was observed
following treatment of primary human lung fibroblasts for 24 h with 1000 I.U./ml IFN-β in cells from Leu/Leu and Phe/Phe patients (Fig. 3B). This result suggests that the dysregulated fibroproliferation seen in TLR3 defective, Phe/Phe fibroblasts may be due to their reduced ability to produce IFN-β.
DISCUSSION

In this study, we investigated the role of defective TLR3 in the pathogenesis of pulmonary sarcoidosis. Specifically, we investigated the role of the TLR3 polymorphism, TLR3 L412F (rs3775291), as a causative factor in the development of, and in disease persistence in pulmonary sarcoidosis, respectively. Previously, we identified a role for TLR3 L412F in accelerated disease progression and increased risk of mortality in idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF) (16). In this study, we established that TLR3 L412F was not associated with development of pulmonary sarcoidosis but was significantly associated with disease persistence. Irish patients who presented with sarcoidosis, and who were TLR3 412F-homozygous, were significantly more likely to develop persistent disease. Therefore, these findings suggest that TLR3 L412F plays a broader role in interstitial lung disease and that its pathogenic effects are not limited to IPF.

In this study, the association between TLR3 L412F and disease persistence in Irish pulmonary sarcoidosis patients was validated in a modest-sized American cohort of patients, attending a tertiary referral centre. American pulmonary sarcoidosis patients who had one copy of the variant allele were almost five times more likely to develop persistent disease. Interestingly, there was also a significant association between disease persistence and race. When Caucasian American and African American populations were analysed individually, a significant association was found between the 412F allele and disease persistence in Caucasian Americans but not in African Americans. This may reflect specific genetic backgrounds in Caucasian Americans compared to African Americans which results in different spectrums of disease presentations in both populations. These novel results merit further investigation using larger cohort-size.

Here, we also report that primary lung fibroblasts from TLR3 412F-homozygous pulmonary sarcoidosis patients had reduced IL-8, IFN-β and TLR3 production or expression, reduced fibroblast apoptosis and dysregulated fibroproliferative responses compared with cells from wild-type patients, following TLR3-activation. Our findings imply that defective TLR3 promotes a persistent disease phenotype in sarcoidosis by dysregulating apoptotic and fibroproliferative processes via an IFN-β-dependent process. Thus, this study identifies defective TLR3 function as a previously undescribed factor in the development of persistent clinical disease in pulmonary sarcoidosis and reveals the TLR3 signaling pathway as a novel therapeutic target in its treatment. (see Supplementary Fig. S2 for schematic of proposed mechanism).
strength of this study lies in its exploration of the role of the change in primary lung fibroblast function in disease persistence in pulmonary sarcoidosis patients, in the context of the TLR3 L412F polymorphism. In this study, primary lung fibroblasts from three patients from each respective genotype were utilised (i.e. TLR3 Leu/Leu wild-type and TLR3 Phe/Phe homozygote patients). In future studies to investigate the role of TLR3 L412F further in the pathogenesis of persistent pulmonary sarcoidosis, and as a candidate prognostic marker, additional lung fibroblasts from wild-type and homozygote patients will be recruited. To date, no specific pathogen has been identified as a causative factor in sarcoidosis. Several studies have a role for mycobacterial or propionibacterial organisms in the pathogenesis of sarcoidosis. Previously, a human herpes 8 (HHV-8) open reading frame DNA was detected in a significantly higher proportions of sarcoid- compared with non-sarcoid lung tissue (29). However, the role of these viruses, and of EBV particularly, in the etiology of sarcoidosis remains speculative (11, 29). TLR3 was originally identified as an anti-viral receptor and was shown to bind viral dsRNA (12). More recently, the role for TLR3 in microbial infection has been expanded. TLR3 is now known to additionally bind dsRNA from bacteria and helminths (13, 14). It has also been shown to bind mRNA which has been released from necrotic cells during infection and inflammation (15). In this study, the defective function associated with the effects of TLR3 L412F in cells from 412F-homozygous patients would provide a mechanism by which bacterial or viral infection could promote a persistent clinical phenotype in sarcoidosis.

In this study, we also observed that reduced IFN-β expression or production is one of the mechanisms by which TLR3 L412F mediates its effects. In the context of IFN-β, this has been shown to directly induce apoptosis in cells following TLR3 activation in an autocrine manner (30). Interestingly, the addition of IFN-β to in vitro cultures of our 412F-homozygous cells in our study resulted in a restoration to a wild-type proliferative phenotype. With the current therapeutic use of IFN-β in a variety of cancers and autoimmune disorders, our data would support the therapeutic targeting of sarcoidosis patients exhibiting the 412F-homozygous genotype with IFN-β. Therefore, we suggest that treatment of 412F-homozygous sarcoidosis patients with persistent clinical disease with recombinant IFN-β may represent a novel treatment regimen. Other authors have reported the induction of IFN-α-induced sarcoidosis in a patient being treated for hepatitis C and the development of sarcoidosis in multiple sclerosis and myeloma patients, respectively, following recombinant IFN-β treatment (31-34). However,
previously, Charlier et al. examined a series of four patients with sarcoidosis, treated by IFN-α or IFN-β for viral hepatitis or multiple sclerosis. Interestingly, no recurrence or exacerbation of sarcoidosis had occurred at 4 years of follow-up. This study series suggests that type I IFNs do not exacerbate sarcoidosis in remission and this makes their use possible if indicated. However, their effect in persistent forms of the disease needs further evaluation (35).

Sarcoidosis can follow a variable clinical course. Historically, it is well recognised that presentation with erythema nodosum and bilateral hilar adenopathy on chest radiograph has a better prognosis (15% risk of chronicity and progression) compared to presentation with bilateral chest radiograph infiltrates (40% chance of progression). However, we are unable to stratify, with a high degree of accuracy, the prognosis of individual patients at presentation. This is a significant clinical unmet need in clinical practice and in clinical trials design. It would be of significant advantage in clinical trials if we could enrich patient recruitment favoring a more aggressive clinical phenotype. This would offer the best opportunity of assessing whether specific, proposed therapies are clinically efficacious or not. This study reveals TLR3 L412F as a candidate prognostic biomarker in pulmonary sarcoidosis.

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**Competing interests:** None.
REFERENCES


TABLE 1. Study Demographics for Irish and American Sarcoidosis Cohorts, and TLR3 L412F (rs3775291) Genotypes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Irish Sarcoidosis cases</th>
<th>American Sarcoidosis Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex, M/F</td>
<td>109/119</td>
<td>53/70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age, year range</td>
<td>32 (16-66)</td>
<td>42 (18-72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leu/Leu</td>
<td>Leu/Phe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leu/Leu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex, M/F</td>
<td>53/74</td>
<td>37/54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age, year range</td>
<td>30 (17-65)</td>
<td>42 (18-65)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 2.  
**TLR3 L412F (rs3775291) Polymorphism Frequencies in Pulmonary Sarcoidosis: Irish Case-Control and Disease Persistence Studies.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Irish Case-Control Study</th>
<th>Irish Disease Persistence Study</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leu/Leu</td>
<td>Leu/Phe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Sarcoidosis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Case</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Persistent</td>
<td>(0.53)</td>
<td>(0.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent</td>
<td>(0.56)</td>
<td>(0.37)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**P values**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Genotype</th>
<th>Trend</th>
<th>Allele</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.6326</td>
<td>0.8350</td>
<td>0.8942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odds ratio (95% C.I.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phe carrier</td>
<td>1.105 (0.774-1.578)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phe/Phe homozygote</td>
<td>0.801 (0.387-1.660)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Odds ratio (95% C.I.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Genotype</th>
<th>Trend</th>
<th>Allele</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0095</td>
<td>0.0133</td>
<td>0.0166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odds ratio (95% C.I.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phe carrier</td>
<td>1.531 (0.904-2.592)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phe/Phe homozygote</td>
<td>5.762 (1.594-20.284)</td>
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</table>

Irish Case-Control Study: L412F genotype frequencies did not differ significantly between control subjects and sarcoidosis cases: 5χ² test for independence (2 d.f.) and 6χ² test for trend (1 d.f.). Odds ratio (OR) and 95% confidence interval (C.I.) for 7Phe carriers (Leu/Phe and Phe/Phe) and 8Phe/Phe homozygotes. 9Allele frequencies did not differ significantly between subjects and cases [χ² test: P=0.8942; OR: 1.003 (C.I.: 0.774-1.372)]. Irish Disease Persistence Study: a significant association was observed between TLR3 L412F and disease persistence in Irish sarcoidosis cases. L412F genotypes were compared using: 10χ² test for independence and 11χ² test for trend, respectively. 12Logistic regression analysis was performed to calculate the adjusted P value for the confounding factors: age at diagnosis, gender and erythema nodosum positivity. OR (C.I.) for 13Phe carriers and 14Phe/Phe homozygotes. 15Allele frequencies were compared using a χ² test [OR: 1.713 (C.I.: 1.122-2.617)].
### TABLE 3. Replication study: TLR3 L412F (rs3775291) Genotype and Disease Persistence in American Pulmonary Sarcoidosis cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Leu/Leu</th>
<th>Leu/Phe</th>
<th>Phe/Phe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistent</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=82)</td>
<td>(0.67)</td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-persistent</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=41)</td>
<td>(0.88)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
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**P values (All U.S. cases)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genotype</th>
<th>0.0432 (\chi^2) (0.0077)</th>
<th>Odds ratio (95% C.I.; All U.S. cases)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phe carrier</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.353 (1.246-10.029)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phe/Phe homozygote</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.519 (0.153-15.082)</td>
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</table>

**P values (Ethnicity)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genotype</th>
<th>Caucasians (n=71)</th>
<th>African Americans (n=52)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phe carrier</td>
<td>(0.0114)</td>
<td>(0.3070)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phe/Phe homozygote</td>
<td>(0.0205)</td>
<td>(0.3204)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A significant association was detected between TLR3 L412F and disease persistence in an American cohort of sarcoidosis patients attending a tertiary referral centre. L412F genotypes were compared within the overall American (U.S.) cohort using: \(3x2\) \(\chi^2\) test for independence (2 d.f.) and \(3x2\) \(\chi^2\) test for trend (1 d.f.), respectively. OR (95% C.I.) for Phe carriers and Phe/Phe homozygotes in overall U.S. cohort. Allele frequencies were compared using a 2x2 Fisher’s Exact test (OR: 2.836; 95% CI: 1.129-7.122). Logistic regression analysis was performed to calculate the adjusted \(P\) value, using the confounding factors: age at diagnosis, gender and race. A significant risk of disease persistence was conferred by L412F genotype \(\hat{P}=0.0077\). However, a significant risk of disease persistence was also conferred by Caucasian ancestry \((p=0.0295)\) compared with African American ancestry. Therefore, further analysis was carried out for individual Caucasian and African American populations, respectively. A significant association was found between disease persistence and genotype in Caucasians but not African Americans; \(\hat{p}^{\text{C}}\). Genotype frequencies and \(\hat{a}^{\text{C}}\) allele frequencies were compared using 2x2 Fisher’s Exact tests. OR (95% C.I.) for Phe carriers and Phe/Phe homozygotes for Caucasians and African Americans, respectively.
FIGURE LEGENDS

Figure 1. Effect of TLR3 L412F on TLR3-induced IL-8, IFN-β mRNA and TLR3 mRNA in Leu/Leu and Phe/Phe primary human lung fibroblasts from pulmonary sarcoidosis patients. TLR3 L412F attenuates Poly(I:C)-driven (A) IL-8 production, (B) IFN-β mRNA and (C) TLR3 mRNA expression in primary human lung fibroblasts from Phe/Phe sarcoidosis patients compared with Leu/Leu patients at 24h post-treatment, as quantitated by ELISA and QPCR analysis, respectively. (A-C) *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001: Poly(I:C) 100 µg/ml compared with Medium-only at 24h post-treatment. ++p<0.01: Poly(I:C) 100 µg/ml in fibroblasts from Phe/Phe (n=3) compared with Leu/Leu patients (n=3). Results shown are the mean ± S.E.M. of (B, C) three or (A) six replicates from a representative of (B) two or (A, C) three separate experiments.

Figure 2. Effect of TLR3 L412F on TLR3-induced apoptotic responses in Leu/Leu and Phe/Phe primary human lung fibroblasts from pulmonary sarcoidosis patients. A significant increase in Poly(I:C)-induced (A, B) late-phase apoptosis in Leu/Leu, but not Phe/Phe, fibroblasts following 24h treatment, as quantitated by Annexin V/Propidium Iodide staining using FACS analysis. (B) *p<0.05, Poly(I:C) 100 µg/ml compared with Medium-only. ++p<0.01: Treatment with 100µg/ml Poly(I:C) in fibroblasts from Phe/Phe (n=3) compared with Leu/Leu (n=3) Results shown are the mean ± S.E.M. of (B) six or (A) five replicates from a representative of (A, B) three separate experiments.

Figure 3. Effect of TLR3 L412F on TLR3-induced proliferative responses in Leu/Leu and Phe/Phe primary human lung fibroblasts from pulmonary sarcoidosis patients. (A) Poly(I:C) treatment significantly reduces proliferation of Leu/Leu fibroblasts following 24h treatment with 1-100 µg/ml Poly(I:C), as quantitated using ³H-thymidine incorporation. The fold-decrease in Poly(I:C)-induced proliferation at 100 µg/ml at 24h is significantly more in Leu/Leu compared with Phe/Phe fibroblasts, as quantitated using ³H-thymidine incorporation. (B) Reconstitution of Phe/Phe cells with recombinant human IFN-β (1000 I.U./ml) leads to an equivalent reduction in cell proliferation in Leu/Leu and Phe/Phe cells. (A, B) *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001: Poly(I:C) 100 µg/ml compared with Medium-only. ++p<0.01: Treatment...
with 100 μg/ml Poly(I:C) in fibroblasts from Phe/Phe (n=3) compared with Leu/Leu patients (n=3). Results shown are the mean ± S.E.M. of (B) six or (A) five replicates from a representative of (A, B) three separate experiments.
A.

Relative IL-2 protein

Fold Increase

B.

Relative IFN-γ mRNA

Fold Increase

C.

Relative TLR2 mRNA

Fold Increase

Leu/Leu

Phe/Phe

190x254mm (96 x 96 DPI)
Title: Toll-like receptor 3 L412F polymorphism promotes a persistent clinical phenotype in pulmonary sarcoidosis

Authors: Gordon Cooke, Ijaz Kamal, Monika Strengert, Emily Hams, Leona Mawhinney, Aisling Tyanan, Ciaran O’ Reilly, David N. O’ Dwyer, Steven L. Kunkel, Ulla G. Knaus, Denis C. Shields, David R. Moller, Andrew G. Bowie, Padraic G. Fallon, Cory M. Hogaboam, Michelle E. Armstrong and Seamas C. Donnelly.
MATERIALS AND METHODS

Diagnosis of pulmonary sarcoidosis in Irish and American cohorts

All Irish and American patients were assessed at initial hospital presentation by the same physician, respectively (Ireland: S.C.D, SVUH; US: D.R.M., JHU) and followed up for at least 2 years. A tissue diagnosis was obtained in 90% of patients via transbronchial / bronchial / skin / mediastinal or video assisted thoracoscopic (VATS) biopsies. The remaining patients presented with a compatible clinical presentation, associated with supportive radiological and bronchoalveolar (BAL) findings (i.e. CD4/CD8 ratio > 3.5). Disease severity in sarcoidosis was assessed using chest radiographic staging. Chest radiographs (staged 0–IV, i.e. normal to fibrosis), and/or high-resolution computed tomography, determined the presence or absence of a pulmonary infiltrate or fibrosis. All patients were classified at presentation on chest radiograph based on the Scadding staging system (1). Forced expiratory volume in one second, forced vital capacity and transfer factor were also measured at recruitment and expressed as % predicted, according to international guidelines (2).

Classification of persistent or non-persistent pulmonary sarcoidosis at 2 years post-diagnosis

Irish and American pulmonary sarcoidosis patients at 2 years follow-up were classified as having either “persistent” disease or “non-persistent” disease based on a modification of a system previously described (2). Briefly, persistent disease at 2 years follow-up was defined as: (a) patients who were Scadding stage II or III on chest radiograph with associated abnormal pulmonary function parameters (FVC and/or total lung capacity and or transfer factor < 80% of predicted values), (b) Patients who were Scadding stage IV on chest radiograph, (c) patients who were prescribed corticosteroids. Corticosteroids were prescribed for patients exhibiting a significant deterioration in pulmonary physiological parameters (DLCO decrease > 15%) associated with radiographic progression (2).

Culturing of primary fibroblasts from lung biopsies from patients

Primary fibroblast cell lines were isolated from lung biopsies of sarcoidosis patients (supplied by SVUH) as follows. Briefly, lung tissue was mechanically separated into single-cell preparation and contaminating red blood cells (RBC) were lysed with hypotonic buffer (150 mM NH₄Cl, 10
mM NaHCO₃, 1 mM EDTA) for 2 min at 4°C. The remaining cells were added to 175 ml tissue culture flasks. These cells were grown at 37°C in a humidified CO₂ incubator and fed DMEM containing 1% (v/v) antibiotic-antimycotic and 15% (v/v) FBS twice weekly. All fibroblast cell lines were isolated by serial passaging (up to five times) until a >99% fibroblast population was determined using morphological and immunohistochemical staining as previously described, to ensure the relative absence of other contaminating cell types such as epithelial cells and myofibroblasts. For in vitro studies, all cell lines were used between passages 3 and 8.

**TLR3 L412F genotyping**

Genomic DNA was extracted from (i) anticoagulated whole blood collected in EDTA from cases and controls and (ii) primary human lung fibroblasts from patients with pulmonary sarcoidosis, respectively, using Qiagen Genomic DNA extraction Kits (QIAGEN Ltd, Crawley, UK). 10 ng/µl DNA samples were genotyped for TLR3 L412F using an Applied Biosciences Genotyping Assays at Medical Solutions Plc (Source BioScience, Nottingham, U.K.) according to manufacturer’s instructions and as described by us previously (3).

**Annexin V/Propidium Iodide Staining**

Primary human lung fibroblasts were plated out at 100,000 cells/wells in a 6-well plate overnight. Following treatment with 1-100 µg/ml Poly(I:C) for 24h, cells were harvested and were prepared for Annexin V/Propidium Iodide staining [Annexin V-FITC Apoptosis Detection Kit II (Calbiochem); Propidium Iodide (Merck Chemicals Ltd. Nottingham, U.K.)] as described previously (4). Stained samples were analyzed by FACS (BD Facscan Flow Cytometer, BD Bioscience, Oxford, U.K.).

**Proliferation assays**

Primary human lung fibroblasts were plated out at 100,000 cells/well in a 24-well plate overnight. Cells were then treated for 24h with 1-100 µg/ml Poly(I:C). After 16h of this treatment, 0.5 µCi/well [³H] thymidine (Amersham Biosciences, Buckinghamshire, U.K.) was added for an additional 8 h of culture. Cells were then harvested and proliferation was assessed by [³H]thymidine incorporation as described previously (5). Fibroblasts were treated with 1000 I.U./ml recombinant human IFN-β for 24h where described.
Determination of cytokine levels by ELISA
Concentrations of IL-8 and RANTES were determined in cell supernatants by ELISA (DuoSet; R&D Systems, MN, USA) according to manufacturer’s instructions, as carried out previously (6).

Quantification of IFN-β mRNA and TLR3 mRNA expression by quantitative real-time PCR (QPCR)
For QPCR analysis, primary human lung fibroblasts were plated out at 100,000 cells/well in a 24-well plate overnight. Cells were then treated for 24h with 0.1-10 µg/ml Poly(I:C) before harvesting. Three wells of a 24-well plate were pooled per sample for total RNA extraction per treatment using TRI REAGENT™ (Sigma) according to manufacturer’s instructions. First-strand cDNA synthesis and subsequent QPCR for IFN-β mRNA expression was performed (Stratagene MX3000P Real-Time PCR System; Stratagene, CA, USA) as described previously (5).

Quantitation of intracellular and extracellular TLR3 protein expression on in primary pulmonary fibroblasts by flow cytometry analysis.
TLR3 protein surface expression was examined by flow cytometry analysis using a Beckman Coulter Cyan™ADP flow cytometer. In brief, cells were cultured in 24 well culture plates and treated with incremental doses of poly(I:C) for 24 h. Cells were washed with sterile PBS and dissociated using 200 µl of Trypsin-EDTA at 37°C. DMEM was added to neutralise Trypsin-EDTA. Two wells were pooled for an approximate total of 100,000 cells/ml. Cells were centrifuged at 1000rpm to pellet cells. The supernatant was discarded and the washing process was repeated twice more. For extracellular TLR3 protein staining the cell pellet was suspended in binding buffer to an approximate final concentration of 1-5 x10⁶ cells/ml. This consisted of 5% fetal calf serum solution in PBS at 4°C. Subsequently, 199 µl of cell suspension was transferred to a clean tube and add 1 µl TLR3 antibody labelled with FITC Mouse anti human (ab45053). Then samples were mixed gently and incubated for 20 min at room temperature. The cells were washed with 1X binding buffer and centrifuge at 1000 rpm to pellet the cells. The supernatant was discarded and cells were re-suspended gently in 300 µl and analysed by flow cytometry or fluorescence microscopy. Software utilised for analysis was Summit 4.3 (Daco).
FIGURE LEGENDS

Figure S1. Effect of TLR3 L412F on Poly(I:C) induced intracellular and extracellular TLR3 expression in Leu/Leu and Phe/Phe primary human lung fibroblasts from pulmonary sarcoidosis patients. (A) A significant increase in Poly(I:C)-induced extracellular TLR3 expression was observed in Leu/Leu, but not Phe/Phe, fibroblasts following 24h treatment, as quantitated using FACS analysis. (B) Increased Poly(I:C)-induced intracellular TLR3 expression in Leu/Leu and Phe/Phe fibroblasts following 24h treatment, as quantitated using FACS analysis and expressed as fold-increase in mean channel fluorescence (MCF) in treated cells compared with medium-only cells. **p<0.01, ***p<0.001: Poly(I:C) 10 and 100µg/ml compared with Medium-only, respectively. Results shown are the mean ± S.E.M. of three replicates from a representative of two separate experiments.

Figure S2. Schematic of the putative effects of the TLR3 L412F polymorphism in the pathogenesis of self-limiting and persistent pulmonary sarcoidosis via an-IFN-β dependent mechanism. The results from this study have led us to the hypothesis that when pulmonary sarcoidosis is caused in TLR3 L412F wild-type patients (TLR3Leu/Leu) by an unknown TLR3-dependent antigen (e.g. viral or bacterial dsRNA, or mRNA released from necrotic cells during inflammatory damage), this leads to the activation of TLR3 and subsequent production of IFN-β, increased fibroapoptosis and decreased fibroproliferation, respectively. This stabilizes the fibroblast pool and results in a self-limiting pulmonary sarcoidosis in TLR3 L412F wild-type patients. In contrast, the induction of pulmonary sarcoidosis by an unknown TLR3-dependent antigen in TLR3 L412F defective patients (TLR3Phe/Phe) leads to significantly lower activation of the TLR3 signalling pathway, with a subsequent production of low levels of IFN-β production, a failure to induce fibroapoptosis and to reduce fibroproliferation, respectively. This results in the development of a persistent clinical phenotype in TLR3 L412F defective patients and progressive pulmonary sarcoidosis.
Fig. S1
Unknown TLR3-dependent antigen:
  • Viral dsRNA
  • Bacterial dsRNA
  • mRNA from necrotic cells

Pulmonary Sarcoidosis

TLR3<sup>Leu/Leu</sup> (Wild-Type)
  - High IFN-β
  - Fibroapoptosis
  - Fibroproliferation
  - Limited Fibrosis / Disease resolution
  - Self-limiting Pulmonary Sarcoidosis

TLR3<sup>Phe/Phe</sup> (Defective)
  - Low IFN-β
  - Apoptosis-resistant fibroblasts
  - Dysregulated fibroproliferation
  - Promotes Fibrosis
  - Persistent Clinical Disease / Progressive Pulmonary Sarcoidosis

Fig. S2
REFERENCES


