

# Endogenous lung epithelial stem/progenitor cell compartments differ in cystic fibrosis and normal mice

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## Introduction:

We have recently described a population of endogenous lung epithelial stem/progenitor cells (EpiSPC) in the adult lung of normal mice (1). EpiSPC self-renew and give rise to airway and alveolar epithelial cells when co-cultured with lung stromal cells and in a 3-dimensional organotypic culture assay providing evidence for the existence of an EpiSPC hierarchy in the lung (Figs 2-4) (1). We have utilised these assays in this study to analyse the comparative incidence and proliferative potential of EpiSPC in the trachea of CF mice and wildtype littermates.

## Methods:

We excised and disaggregated the lungs and conducting airways from CF (UNC) colony mice that were heterozygous for the CFTR mutation (CFTR<sup>+/ΔF508</sup>) or homozygous CF (-/-) and from CF (FABP) colony mice. The sorted CD45<sup>neg</sup> CD31<sup>neg</sup> EpCAM<sup>pos</sup> Sca-1<sup>low</sup> α6-integrin<sup>pos</sup> β4-integrin<sup>pos</sup> CD24<sup>low</sup> cells isolated from these three groups of mice were then cultured in a matrigel-based clonogenic assay to quantify the number of EpiSPC colonies.

## Background and Results:

### The lung epithelial colony-forming cell assay:

CD45<sup>neg</sup>CD31<sup>neg</sup>EpCAM<sup>pos</sup>CD24<sup>low</sup> colonies (CFU) comprising cells of both airway and alveolar epithelial lineages when co-cultured in matrigel with Sca-1<sup>pos</sup>CD31<sup>neg</sup> mesenchymal cells and mesenchyme.

### Multi-lineage potential

expression profiling of epithelial cells during the assay we have observed an increase in airway epithelial cells in the trachea of cystic fibrosis mice. We detected a 3 fold and a 2.4 fold increase in airway epithelial cells in the incidence of EpiSPC in the CF(UNC) and CF(FABP) mice respectively. Clonal heterogeneity in the adult lung (Fig 3) multilineage stem cells give rise to lineage-restricted airway and alveolar progenitor cells that differentiate into all the cell types in the adult lung (Fig 3).

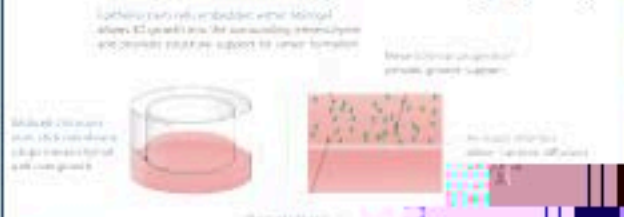


Figure 1: Schematic description of the lung EpiSPC assay system.



Figure 2: The clonal assay reveals an obligatory relationship between epithelial cells and mesenchymal support. There is a linear relationship between the number of epithelial cells and the number of colonies formed. Fixed colonies demonstrate multi-lineage potential. Increased complexity of the colonies is observed in CF(UNC) and CF(FABP) mice.

## Summary:

These preliminary findings are consistent with the notion that an expanded and dysregulated airway EpiSPC compartment of CF mice could contribute to airway remodeling. These techniques may also be applied to help understand CF lung pathogenesis in models more similar to humans and that are able to recapitulate CF airway disease development more closely than in normal mice.

## References:

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