MAPT p.V363I mutation
A rare cause of corticobasal degeneration

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Neurol Genet 2019;5:e347. doi:10.1212/NXG.0000000000000347

Abstract

Objective
Patients with corticobasal syndrome (CBS) present with heterogeneous clinical features, including asymmetric parkinsonism, dyspraxia, aphasia, and cognitive impairment; to better understand the genetic etiology of this rare disease, we undertook a genetic analysis of microtubule-associated protein tau (MAPT).

Methods
We performed a genetic evaluation of MAPT mutations in 826 neurologically healthy controls and 173 cases with CBS using the Illumina NeuroChip genotyping array.

Results
We identified 2 patients with CBS heterozygous for a rare mutation in MAPT (p.V363I) that is located in the highly conserved microtubule-binding domain. One patient was pathologically confirmed and demonstrated extensive 4-repeat-tau-positive thread pathology, achromatic neurons, and astrocytic plaques consistent with corticobasal degeneration (CBD).

Conclusions
We report 2 CBS cases carrying the rare p.V363I MAPT mutation, one of which was pathologically confirmed as CBD. Our findings support the notion that this rare coding change is pathogenic.
Corticobasal syndrome (CBS) is a rare neurologic disease that presents with heterogeneous motor symptoms and cognitive impairment. A high misdiagnosis rate due to clinical heterogeneity limits efforts to extend disease-modifying therapy trials to this patient population. Improving the diagnostic accuracy of complex neurodegenerative syndromes is an important, yet unmet need in the research community.

Although understanding of the genetic underpinnings of CBS is limited, rare mutations in the microtubule-associated protein tau (MAPT) gene are implicated as a cause of CBS and related tauopathy spectrum disorders. One of these MAPT mutations is the variant p.V363I (rs63750869; c.1087G>A: NM_005910.5), located in the MAPT microtubule-binding domain. Previously described in a small number of patients with clinical tauopathy phenotypes (table 1), the mutation is present at a very low frequency in population databases and is hypothesized to be a disease-causing mutation with decreased penetrance rather than a rare polymorphism. The rare nature of the mutation makes it difficult to demonstrate disease segregation, and in silico prediction algorithms of this mutation are inconclusive (table e-1, links.lww.com/NXG/A162).

We describe 2 CBS cases who were found to carry the rare p.V363I MAPT mutation. In addition, we summarize the clinicopathologic features of previously reported cases with a coding mutation at the MAPT p.V363 residue. One of our CBS cases had postmortem confirmation, which found abundant four-repeat tau accumulations consistent with corticobasal degeneration (CBD). As a pathologically confirmed case with this rare missense mutation, this case provides supporting evidence for the pathogenic nature of the p.V363I MAPT mutation.

Methods

Study population
Case 1 is a 73-year-old, right-handed, white woman who presented to the NIH Clinical Center in Bethesda, MD, for participation in genetic research. She was diagnosed with probable CBS based on the consensus criteria. A commercial genetic panel (Invitae, San Francisco, CA) that included screening of the genes CHCHD10, DCTN, FUS, GRN, TARDBP, VCP, UBQLN2, TBK1, PSEN1, PSEN2, APP, and MAPT had previously identified that she was a carrier of the MAPT p.V363I variant. Case 2 was identified by querying a research database for the presence of the MAPT p.V363I variant. This database contains genotype information on European-ancestry individuals, including 826 neurologically healthy controls and 961 patients with frontotemporal dementia (FTD) spectrum disorders (n = 772 cases with progressive supranuclear palsy [PSP], n = 173 patients with CBS/CBD, n = 41 patients with FTD; sample characteristics are summarized in table e-2 [links.lww.com/NXG/A162]; source of samples and number of samples per disease are described in table e-3). Case 2 was clinically diagnosed with hemiparkinsonism, primary progressive aphasia, and probable CBS.

Bioinformatic analysis
To better understand the effects of the p.V363I variant, a systematic literature review was conducted and summarized in table 1. In silico predictive tools (SIFT, PolyPhen2, FATHMM-XF, M-CAP, MutationTaster, CADD, ClinVar, and ClinPred) were applied to classify the MAPT p.V363I mutation. Sequence conservation analyses were performed in T-Coffee. A previously described, cryo-electron microscopy structure of the tau protofibril was used for 3-dimensional protein modeling (figure 1). Allele frequency differences between CBS cases and neurologically healthy
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Clinical features</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>AAO</th>
<th>AAD</th>
<th>FH</th>
<th>Neuroimaging finding(s)</th>
<th>Genetics</th>
<th>Haplotype</th>
<th>Pathology</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>MRI: bilateral parietal atrophy</td>
<td>p.V363I</td>
<td>H1/H1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>This report</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>CBS and PPA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Late 50s</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>p.V363I</td>
<td>H1/H1</td>
<td>CBD</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>This report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>FTD (behavioral variant)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>MRI: bilateral frontotemporal atrophy</td>
<td>p.V363I</td>
<td>H1/H1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Anfossi et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>PPA (semantic variant)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>MRI: asymmetric temporopolar atrophy</td>
<td>p.V363I</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Bessi et al.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>PCA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>p.V363I</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Rossi et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>FTD, PPA (nonfluent variant), and CBS</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>MRI: mild left frontal atrophy</td>
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<td>H1/H1</td>
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<td>Rossi et al.</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>MRI: slight, asymmetric atrophy of posterior temporoparietal and occipital lobes; white matter abnormalities</td>
<td>p.V363I</td>
<td>H1/H1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Rossi et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>PSP</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>MRI: midbrain atrophy</td>
<td>p.V363A</td>
<td>H1/H1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Rossi et al.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: AAD = age at death; AAO = age at onset; CBS = corticobasal syndrome; CBD = corticobasal degeneration; DAT scan = dopamine transporter scan; FDG = fluorodeoxyglucose PET; FH = family history; +/− = present/absent; FTD = frontotemporal dementia; MAPT = microtubule-associated protein tau; NA = not available or not applicable; PCA = posterior cortical atrophy; PPA = primary progressive aphasia; PSP = progressive supranuclear palsy; SPECT = single-photon emission computed tomography.
controls were determined using a Fisher exact test with a significance threshold of 0.05.

**Neuropathology**

The brain of case 2 was pathologically evaluated at the Neurological Tissue Bank of the IDIBPAS Biobank in Barcelona, Spain, after obtaining written informed consent from the patient’s relatives for use of tissue for diagnostic and research purposes. Hematoxylin and eosin staining was performed after standard formalin fixation and paraffin block sectioning of multiple cortical and subcortical brain areas. Immunohistochemistry was performed using phospho-tau (Ser202 and Thr205) monoclonal antibodies (AT8; 1:2000; Thermo Scientific, Rockford, IL) and anti-4R-tau (RD4) antibodies. In addition, selected areas were stained for βA4-amyloid (6F/3D 1:400; Dako, Glostrup, Denmark), α-synuclein (KM51 2:200; Novocastra, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK), and TDP43 protein (2E2-E3 1:500; Abnova, Taipei, Taiwan) for identification of concomitant pathologies.

**Data availability**

Deidentified data are available upon request from qualified investigators.

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**Results**

**Genetic characteristics**

In a cohort of 173 CBS cases, we identified 2 patients who were heterozygous for the rare p.V363I (c.1087G>A: NM_005910.5) mutation located in the highly conserved microtubule-binding domain of **MAPT** (Fisher exact test comparing CBS cases with neurologically healthy controls \( p = 0.0299 \)). Both patients were homozygous for the H1 **MAPT** haplotype and carried no pathogenic mutations in **PGRN** or **C9orf72**. The patients’ **APOE** genotypes were ε3/ε3. The **MAPT** p.V363I mutation was absent in ~1,800 additional samples, including 826 neurologically healthy controls and 984 cases with diverse frontotemporal degeneration spectrum disorders. Bioinformatic predictions demonstrated that SIFT, PolyPhen2, MutationTaster, and ClinPred categorized the variant as tolerated and benign, whereas ClinVar, FATHMM-XF, M-CAP, and CADD predictions suggested a likely pathogenic mutation (table e-1, links.lww.com/NXG/A162).

**Clinicopathologic features**

Case 1 is a 73-year-old, right-handed, white woman with a medical history of hypertension, coronary artery disease, an
old segmental left parietal stroke at age 54 years that resolved without residual neurologic deficits, and major depressive disorder. She was diagnosed with CBS at age 70 years after developing progressive right-sided impairment of her dexterity, slowed gait, and imbalance resulting in backward falls. A levodopa trial up to a maximum dose of 450 mg daily yielded no benefits. Over the course of 3 years, she gradually developed dysarthria, severe gait dysfunction rendering her wheelchair-bound, asymmetric parkinsonism, hand dystonia, apraxia, impaired word retrieval, and executive dysfunction. Her neurologic examination demonstrated bradyphrenia with a tendency to perseverate. She had severe ideomotor apraxia that was more prominent in her dominant hand. She was neglecting her right-sided space. Her speech was moderately dysarthric. Cranial nerve examination showed slowed, hypometric saccades (vertical more than horizontal), severe axial and right-sided rigidity with only mild rigidity on the left, bradykinesia, and dystonia with high-frequency/low-amplitude tremor in her right hand. She had agraphesthesia and astereognosis in her right hand. Reflexes were brisk throughout. Primitive reflexes, including grasp and palmo-mental reflexes, were present. She was unable to stand without assistance and would spontaneously fall without support. MRI of the brain demonstrated bilateral parietal atrophy with proportional, ex vacuo dilatation of the lateral ventricles. Her family history was notable for parkinsonism in her father (age at onset ~65 years). No DNA was available from her father to test for segregation. The patient is alive after a 3-year disease duration.

Case 2 was a white woman who presented in her late 50s with primary progressive aphasia, left-sided parkinsonism, and CBS. The disease progressed to complete anarthria and severe dysphagia. She died at age 62 years. Clinical data on this case were limited. She had no known family history of dementia. The patient’s neuropathologic findings were notable for widespread, 4-repeat-tau-positive inclusions in cortical and subcortical regions, including neurons and glial cells, consistent with CBD (figure 2). Frequent achromatic neurons were detected in frontal, parietal, and cingular cortices. These were...
associated with focal superficial spongiosis, diffuse neuronal loss, astrogliosis, and microglial activation in cortical areas, including the motor cortex, and diffuse gliosis of the underlying white matter. Prominent neuronal loss was noted in the globus pallidus and in the substantia nigra. Immunohistochemistry revealed astrocytic plaques, abundant pretangles, ballooned neurons, and neuropil threads in the cortex, abundant threads and pretangles in her basal ganglia, and prominent white matter pathology with widespread threads and coiled bodies involving also the brainstem. Remarkably, there was also prominent involvement of the hippocampus, including the granule cells of the dentate gyrus, without grain pathology. Co-comitant pathologies included a moderate amount of diffuse βA4-amyloid deposits and few cored plaques in cortical areas, as well as few neuronal and glial cytoplasmic TDP43 protein inclusions in the globus pallidus, without frontal, temporal, or hippocampal involvement. No α-synuclein aggregates were identified.

Discussion

We describe 2 CBS cases carrying the rare p.V363I MAPT mutation located in the conserved microtubule-binding domain. One of the 2 cases was pathologically confirmed, demonstrating widespread, 4-repeat-tau-positive neuronal and glial pathology consistent with CBD. This report describes the pathology present in a p.V363I MAPT mutation carrier providing further support for the notion that this variant is likely disease causing. To date, this coding mutation has been described in 7 neurodegenerative disease cases with heterogeneous presentations, including FTD, primary progressive aphasia, and posterior cortical atrophy (table 1).6,8–10 Another mutation at the same residue (p.V363A) has been described in a single case with clinically diagnosed PSP.10 Of interest, all cases were female, had ε3/ε3 APOE genotypes, and were homozygous for the MAPT H1 haplotype. The average age at onset was 57 years, ranging from 46 to 70 years. The 2 CBS cases presented here extend the disease onset. This wide age spectrum is consistent with the pattern seen in tauopathies associated with MAPT mutations and could indicate a decreased, age-related penetrance.24

Among the cases, the initial disease manifestations were quite varied, including gait disturbances, memory deficits, and personality changes. This heterogeneity is not unusual for patients with MAPT mutations.25 The p.V363I mutation is present in 3 of 62,784 people in the NHLBI TopMed Bravo database (bravo.sph.umich.edu/freezels/hg38/; allele frequency: 0.0000239; date accessed: October 14, 2018) and in 2 of 60,702 individuals in ExAC (allele frequency: 0.0000167, data accessed: October 14, 2018).26 The very rare presence within population databases might be explained by incomplete penetrance and late disease onset. In addition, limited in vitro analyses in 1 case demonstrated that this mutation leads to an increased propensity for microtubule polymerization and the formation of tau protein oligomers.10 Because of the lack of familial genetic data, we were not able to test for disease segregation, and this has not yet been reported by other investigators.

We present a pathologically confirmed patient with a p.V363I MAPT mutation. The neuropathologic findings of this case were consistent with CBD. An additional p.V363I carrier was identified with a CBS phenotype. This mutation was absent in neurologically healthy controls. Considering previous reports on mutation carriers with information about sequence conservation, functional studies, and pathologic confirmation, we nominate the MAPT p.V363I change as a likely disease-causing mutation. Identifying additional cases with this mutation will be important to understand the natural history and penetrance of this familial disease.

Acknowledgment

The authors thank all the subjects who donated their time and biological samples to be a part of this study. They thank the NIH NeuroBrainBank and the IDIBAPS Brain Bank, Barcelona, Spain, for contributing brain tissue samples. This study used tissue samples and data provided by the Michigan Brain Bank, the Michigan Alzheimer’s Disease Center (5P30 AG053760), and the Protein Folding Disorders Program. This study used samples from the NINDS Repository at Coriell (catalog.coriell.org) and clinical data. The authors are grateful to the Banner Sun Health Research Institute Brain and Body Donation Program of Sun City, Arizona, for the provision of human brain tissue. The Brain and Body Donation Program is supported by the NINDS (U24 NS072026 National Brain and Tissue Resource for Parkinson’s Disease and Related Disorders), the National Institute on Aging (P30 AG19610 Arizona Alzheimer’s Disease Core Center), the Arizona Department of Health Services (contract 211002, Arizona Alzheimer’s Research Center), the Arizona Biomedical Research Commission (contracts 4001, 0011, 05-0901, and 1001 to the Arizona Parkinson’s Disease Consortium), and the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson’s Research. The authors thank the Kathleen Price Bryan Brain Bank at Duke University Medical Center, the Harvard Brain Bank, and the Georgetown University Brain Bank for the provision of tissue and DNA samples. Tissue for this study was provided by the Newcastle Brain Tissue Resource, which is funded in part by a grant from the UK Medical Research Council (G0400074), by NIHR Newcastle Biomedical Research Centre and Unit awarded to the Newcastle upon Tyne NHS Foundation Trust and Newcastle University, and as part of the Brains for Dementia Research Programme jointly funded by Alzheimer’s Research UK and Alzheimer’s Society. The authors thank members of the North American Brain Expression Consortium for providing DNA samples on neurologically healthy controls. Tissue samples for genotyping were provided by the Johns Hopkins Morris K. Udall Center of Excellence for Parkinson’s Disease Research (NIH P50 NS38377) and the Johns Hopkins Alzheimer Disease Research Center (NIH P50 AG05146).
Study funding
This work was supported in part by the Intramural Research Programs of the NINDS and the National Institute on Aging (NIA) (project numbers Z01-AG000949 and 1ZIA NS003154). This study was partially supported by a CurePSP research grant (Cure PSP grant no.: S15-14; 2013-2015) to PP. EG received support from a grant from the Marató de TV3 (grant no. 20141610).

Disclosure
Disclosures available: Neurology.org/NG.

Publication history
Received by Neurology: Genetics March 10, 2019. Accepted in final form May 15, 2019.

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References


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*Neurol Genet* 2019;5;
DOI 10.1212/NXG.0000000000000347

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