

1 **Doxycycline prevents matrix remodeling and contraction by trichiasis-derived
2 conjunctival fibroblasts**

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18 **Word count:** 3095

19 **Grant information:** Supported by Fight for Sight and the Special Trustees of
20 Moorfields Eye Hospital (Ref 1086), and the Moorfields Eye Hospital and UCL
21 Institute of Ophthalmology Biomedical Research Center for Ophthalmology
22 (BMRC084), the Wellcome Trust (080741/Z/06/Z) and the British Council for the
23 Prevention of Blindness (MJB). Laboratories and imaging facilities supported by the
24 Wellcome Trust and the Medical Research Council.

25

26 **Abstract**

27

28 **Purpose.** Trachoma is a conjunctival scarring disease, which is the leading infectious
29 cause of blindness worldwide. Elimination of blinding trachoma is being held back by
30 the high rate of trichiasis recurrence following surgery. There is currently no treatment
31 available to suppress the pro-fibrotic state and reduce recurrence. Although the
32 mechanisms underlying trichiasis development are unknown, the pro-fibrotic phenotype
33 has been linked to matrix metalloproteinase (MMP) expression. Doxycycline, a well-
34 known tetracycline antibiotic, can act as a broad MMP inhibitor and has showed some
35 success in preventing fibrosis in various clinical contexts. The purpose of this work was
36 to assess the anti-scarring properties of doxycycline in an *in vitro* model of trichiasis
37 fibroblast-mediated tissue contraction.

38 **Methods.** Primary cultures of fibroblasts were established from conjunctival samples
39 obtained from normal donors or during surgery for trachomatous trichiasis. The effect
40 of doxycycline on matrix contraction was investigated in our standard collagen gel
41 contraction model. Cell morphology and matrix integrity were assessed using confocal
42 reflection microscopy. Quantitative real time polymerase chain reaction (QRT-PCR)
43 and a FRET-based assay were used to measure MMP expression and activity
44 respectively.

45 **Results.** Doxycycline treatment successfully suppressed the contractile phenotype of
46 trichiasis fibroblasts, matrix degradation, and significantly altered the expression of
47 MMP1, 9 and 12 associated with the pro-fibrotic phenotype.

48 **Conclusions.** In view of the results presented here and the wider use of doxycycline in
49 clinical settings, we propose that doxycycline might be useful as a treatment to prevent
50 recurrence following trichiasis surgery.

51

52 **Introduction**

53 Trachoma is the leading infectious cause of blindness worldwide¹. The disease
54 begins with recurrent infection by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis* in early
55 childhood, promoting chronic inflammation of the upper tarsal conjunctiva, which leads
56 to progressive scarring and distortion of the eyelid. The edge of the eyelid turns in
57 (entropion), so that the lashes scratch the surface of the eye (trichiasis). This can result
58 in corneal opacity and irreversible sight loss². Trachoma is a public health problem in
59 over 50 countries, predominantly in Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East, the Indian
60 Subcontinent, South-east Asia and South America³. The most recent global estimation
61 from the World Health Organization (WHO) suggests that 40 million people currently
62 have active trachoma, a further 8.2 million have trichiasis, and 1.3 million are estimated
63 to be blind as a result¹. The WHO is leading a Global Alliance to eliminate blinding
64 trachoma by 2020. This focuses on the implementation of the SAFE Strategy: Surgery
65 for trichiasis, Antibiotics for infection, Facial cleanliness, and Environmental
66 improvements to reduce transmission of infection. However, there is growing evidence
67 that the scarring complications can progress even in the absence of detectable
68 chlamydial infection⁴, and following trichiasis surgery, the anatomical abnormality can
69 re-develop (from 10% at one year to 60% at three years), in part through an ongoing
70 immuno-fibrogenic process^{5,6}. There is currently no adjuvant treatment available to
71 suppress the pro-fibrotic state and reduce recurrence.

72

73 The mechanisms underlying post-surgical recurrence of trichiasis are not fully
74 understood. However, the dysregulated extra cellular matrix (ECM) proteolysis
75 observed following infection and inflammation is suggested to play a key role in the

76 development of fibrotic sequelae⁶. MMPs are a tightly regulated family of zinc-
77 dependent enzymes responsible for degrading structural proteins of the ECM, and are
78 produced by a variety of cell types after injury⁷. A number of MMPs have been found
79 to associate with conjunctival scarring in *in vitro* models⁸, as well as *in vivo*⁹. MMP-9
80 expression increases when conjunctival inflammation is associated with non-chlamydial
81 bacterial infection in recurrent trichiasis¹⁰, and an increased level of MMP7 gene
82 expression was also identified in trichiasis conjunctival samples¹¹. Moreover,
83 microarray analysis has confirmed the increased expression of MM7, MMP9 and
84 MMP12 in conjunctival samples from trichiasis subjects¹². Overall this suggests that
85 the accumulation of fibrotic tissue in trichiasis might be due at least in part to altered
86 MMP expression.

87

88 Doxycycline, a well-known tetracycline antibiotic, is widely used to prevent and
89 treat bacterial and parasite infection, including *Chlamydia trachomatis*. More recently,
90 its role as MMP inhibitor and in apoptosis has gathered more attention in the context of
91 vascular disease^{13, 14}, pulmonary fibrosis¹⁵, periodontitis¹⁶ as well as ocular pathology
92¹⁷⁻¹⁹. Doxycycline inhibits MMPs, and particularly MMP9, at sub-antimicrobial doses in
93 patients^{13, 14, 19, 20}. In addition, recent work suggests that doxycycline treatment can
94 dampen local²¹, as well as systemic²², inflammation, thus making it a good candidate
95 to prevent tissue remodeling and fibrosis in trachoma. Using for the first time
96 conjunctival cells directly isolated from trachomatous trichiasis-affected individuals, we
97 demonstrate that doxycycline significantly reduced collagen matrix remodeling and
98 contraction, and specifically inhibited the mRNA expression of MMP1, 7, 9 and 12
99 during contraction, suggesting that it could be a potential adjuvant treatment following
100 trichiasis surgery.

101 **Material and methods**

102

103 **Ethics Statement:**

104 This study adhered to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki. It was approved by the
105 Tanzanian National Institute of Medical Research, the Kilimanjaro Christian Medical
106 Centre, and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine Ethics Committees.
107 The study was explained to potential study participants and written informed consent
108 was obtained before enrolment.

109

110 **Clinical Samples:**

111 Conjunctival biopsies were obtained from the upper tarsal conjunctiva from Tanzanian
112 patients undergoing trichiasis surgery. All cases had tarsal conjunctival scarring with
113 entropion trichiasis. The eyelid was anaesthetized with an injection of 2% lignocaine
114 and the eye cleaned with 5% povidone iodine. A biopsy sample was taken using a 3mm
115 trephine from the tarsal conjunctiva, 2mm from the lid margin, at the junction of the
116 medial $\frac{2}{3}$ and lateral $\frac{1}{3}$ of the everted lid. The biopsies were wrapped in sterile gauze,
117 moistened with normal saline, and transported to the laboratory at +8°C.

118

119 **Cell culture and reagents**

120 The biopsies were mechanically dispersed and the tissue fragments were placed in
121 tissue culture dishes in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM) with 4.5g/L l-
122 Glutamine (PAA), supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS, Sigma), 100 IU/ml
123 penicillin, 100 ug/ml streptomycin (Invitrogen) at 37 °C with 5% CO₂. Following
124 growth from the explant, the fibroblast populations (F07, F09, F10 and F11) were
125 trypsinized and maintained routinely in the above medium. All four cell lines were

126 tested for *C. trachomatis* infection using the Amplicor CT/NG Kit (Roche Molecular
127 Systems, Branchburg, NJ) and were found to be negative. The cells were used between
128 passage 4 and 9 for all experiments. For doxycycline treatment, a stock solution of 48.7
129 mM Doxycycline hyolate (Sigma) was made in sterile ultrapure water (Millipore
130 Biocel) and added to the cell culture medium at final concentrations of 104 and 416 uM.

131

132 **Collagen contraction assay**

133 The collagen contraction assays were performed as previously described⁸. Trachoma
134 cells were seeded in a 1.5 mg/ml collagen type-I matrix (First Link Ltd) at a
135 concentration of 7x10⁴ cells/ml. The gels were detached from the edge of the well, and
136 2 mL of DMEM with/without Doxycycline was added. Gel contraction was monitored
137 daily for 7 days by digital photography. Gel areas were measured using ImageJ software
138 (<http://rsb.info.nih.gov/ij/>), and the contraction was plotted as a percentage of gel area
139 normalized to original area (day 0 measurement).

140

141 **Cytotoxicity assay**

142 Cytotoxicity was determined using a Cytotoxicity Detection Kit (LDH) (Roche), on
143 media collected at the termination of the gel contraction experiment (in phenol red-free
144 DMEM) to measure the percentage of lactate dehydrogenase activity present in the
145 samples. The gels were lysed in 2% Triton X-100 (Sigma) in phenol red free, serum
146 free DMEM for 10min to achieve the maximum LDH release. Absorbances were
147 measured at 490 nm (Fluostar Optima) and the percentage of cytotoxicity was
148 calculated according to the manufacturer's protocol.

149

150

151 **Cell and matrix imaging**

152 Following contraction for 7 days with/without 416uM doxycycline, gels were fixed in
153 3.7% paraformaldehyde (Sigma) at room temperature for 30 min, followed by
154 permeabilization with 0.5% Triton X-100 (Sigma) for 30 min, and staining with
155 rhodamine-phalloidin (Invitrogen) for 1hr ^{8,23}. Imaging was carried out on a Zeiss
156 Axiovert S100/Biorad Radiance 2000 confocal laser scanning microscope using
157 simultaneous reflection microscopy and fluorescence imaging ²³. Representative images
158 were acquired as z-stacks using a long working distance objective (Zeiss 63X/0.75 plan
159 neo fluar with correction collar). The resulting volumes were imported into Image J
160 where the fluorescence channel (F-actin staining) was compressed to a single projection
161 and merged with a representative section of the matrix.

162

163 **Quantitative Real-Time PCR**

164 Collagen gel contraction assays were ended at days 0, 3, and 7 by placing the gels
165 straight into TRIzol Reagent (Invitrogen) at 4 °C for 1hr. Control mRNA at day 0 were
166 obtained after 1hr of initial gel polymerization. Homogenization and phase separation
167 were carried out according to the TRIzol manufacturer's instructions. The aqueous
168 phase was harvested and used for RNA isolation using the RNeasy Mini Kit according
169 to the standard protocol (Qiagen). Reverse transcription was carried out using the
170 QuantiTect Reverse Transcription Kit (Qiagen) according to manufacturer's instructions.
171 MMP gene expression was measured by QRT-PCR using validated primers and probes
172 (Assay-on-Demand; Applied Biosystems). Assay identification numbers are MMP1
173 (Hs00899658_m1), MMP2 (Hs01548727_m1), MMP7 (Hs01042796_m1), MMP9
174 (Hs00234579_m1), and MMP12 (Hs00899662_m1). The HPRT1 gene was used as an
175 endogenous control to normalize sample concentration. RT-PCR reactions were

176 performed on an HT7900 Fast Real-Time PCR system (Applied Biosystems), and the
177 2(-Delta Delta C(T)) Method (Livak and Schmittgen, 2001) was used for quantification
178 of mRNA levels.

179

180 **MMP activity assay**

181 Total MMP activity was determined using a FRET-based MMP activity assay kit
182 according to the manufacturer's protocol (Abcam, ab112147). In brief, 25ul of medium
183 from control and doxycycline-treated collagen gel contraction cultures at day 0, 3 and 7
184 were added to 25ul of 2mM APMA solution and incubated at 37°C for 3hrs. 50ul of the
185 MMP Red Substrate was then added and the mix was incubated at room temperature for
186 1hr. Fluorescence was measured at Ex/Em=540/590nM (Fluostar Optima).

187

188 **Statistical analysis**

189 All graphs display mean and standard error. Statistical analysis was performed using the
190 Students t test to establish significant differences and individual P values displayed.

191

192 **Results**

193

194 **Doxycycline prevents collagen matrix remodeling and contraction by trichiasis
195 fibroblasts**

196 We used our well-characterized *in vitro* model of cell-mediated matrix
197 contraction^{8, 23-26} to assess the contractile potential of primary fibroblasts isolated from
198 the conjunctiva of patients with trachomatous trichiasis and evaluate the potential of
199 doxycycline as a modulator of contraction. As expected from their conjunctival and
200 fibrotic origin^{23, 25}, trichiasis fibroblasts (F07, F09, F10 and F11) contracted collagen
201 matrices strongly, down to 20-30% of their original size over 7 days in the presence of
202 10% serum. The application of 104uM of doxycycline for 7 days was sufficient to
203 reduce matrix contraction by 25% and more significantly, a 7-day treatment with
204 416uM of doxycycline prevented the contraction by up to 75% (Fig. 1 A). Figures 1B
205 and 1C show 2 representative contraction kinetics from F10 and F11 fibroblast lines,
206 illustrating that doxycycline treatment reduced gel contraction as early as at day 1, with
207 the effect of the drug increasing with incubation time for the higher concentration. To
208 confirm that this effect was not due to drug toxicity, a lactate dehydrogenase (LDH)
209 assay was performed on the cells within collagen gels following 7-day doxycycline
210 treatment at 104 or 416uM. We found no detectable toxicity effect for the drug at either
211 concentration (Fig. 1D).

212 We have shown previously that fibroblast-mediated gel contraction is dependent
213 on the ability of the cells to affect the organization of pericellular collagen fibers
214 through both direct mechanical pulling on the fibers to align and compact them, as well
215 as by matrix degradation through the release of MMPs^{23, 24}. To determine how
216 doxycycline prevented gel contraction, we used confocal microscopy to assess cell

217 morphology and pericellular matrix organization in the gels following doxycycline
218 treatment. As all 4 cell lines behaved identically in terms of matrix contraction and
219 response to doxycycline (data not shown), we selected 2 representative cell lines, F10
220 and F11, to perform these studies and further work. Trichiasis-derived fibroblasts had a
221 stellate appearance in the gels, with long F-actin rich protrusions, as illustrated by the
222 full projection of the cell volume²³ (Fig.2, red staining). In agreement with the toxicity
223 data, the overall morphology of the cells appeared unaltered by the doxycycline
224 treatment. Consistent with our previous work on other types of fibroblasts, the high
225 contractile profile of the trichiasis fibroblasts was linked to extensive remodeling and
226 degradation of the collagen matrix by day 7, as visualized by a lack of distinct collagen
227 fibers following confocal reflection imaging^{8,23}. Areas of dense compacted poorly
228 resolved collagen clumps could be seen as a bright white aura around the cells (Fig. 2,
229 arrows), whilst the rest of the matrix shows a fuzzy appearance, characteristic of MMP-
230 mediated degradation²³. By contrast, in presence of 416uM doxycycline, the matrix
231 fibers remained clearly defined and evidence of fiber alignment consecutive to active
232 cell pulling on the matrix can be found surrounding most of the cells (Fig. 2,
233 arrowhead).

234

235 **Doxycycline reduces MMP expression during collagen matrix contraction**

236 Our morphological analysis of the cells and matrix during contraction strongly
237 suggested that doxycycline could act through a modulation of matrix degradation and
238 thus likely MMP release. MMPs have long been connected to scarring processes. We
239 have previously shown that matrix remodeling by MMPs plays an important role in
240 tissue contraction, both in *in vitro*^{8,23}, *ex vivo*⁸, as well as in an ocular scarring model
241 in the rabbit model of glaucoma filtration surgery²⁷. In addition, our recent studies have

242 suggested a role for MMPs in the development of the fibrotic phenotype in trachoma¹⁰,
243¹¹. We thus used real-time PCR to evaluate MMP expression during matrix contraction.
244 We chose to investigate levels of MMP1 as a well known collagenase previously
245 implicated in our standard collagen contraction assay²⁶, MMP2 as a standard gelatinase,
246 and MMP7, MMP9 and MMP12 as these particular MMPs have been found enriched in
247 trichiasis samples¹². The C_T values from the RT-PCR study demonstrated that all of
248 above MMPs were present in both F10 and F11 at Day 0. MMP1 and 2 were expressed
249 at significant levels, whilst MMP7 and 9 were naturally low (Table 1). All MMPs
250 showed an increased expression during contraction in the control group, although to
251 different extent and kinetics. While MMP1, MMP2 and MMP12 showed a sustained
252 increase throughout the contraction kinetics, MMP9 expression peaked at day 3 (Fig. 3).
253 Continuous treatment with 416uM doxycycline did not significantly affect MMP2
254 expression (Fig. 3C, D). However, MMP1 (Fig. 3 A, B), MMP9 (Fig. 3 E, F) and
255 MMP12 (Fig. 3 G, H) all show a strong reduction in expression in the presence of the
256 drug. We also observed a similar trend for MMP7 in F10 (Table 1, normalized
257 expression data not shown), but could not confirm this effect in F11 due to its lower
258 expression of MMP7 and the technical limitation of RT-PCR. To confirm that the effect
259 of doxycycline on MMP gene expression led to a reduction in protein expression and
260 activity, we measured the total MMP activity released in the medium during contraction.
261 As expected, the total MMP activity releasable from the medium increased significantly
262 during contraction, particularly in F10, matching the gene expression profile (Fig. 4).
263 Treatment with doxycycline completely abrogated MMP activity, even in medium at
264 day 0, suggesting that doxycycline affected both the MMP protein levels and the
265 activity of the MMPs present in the medium.
266
267

268 **Discussion**

269

270 Using our *in vitro* model of cell-mediated matrix contraction^{8, 23-26}, we found
271 that doxycycline significantly reduced the contractile potential of primary fibroblasts
272 isolated from the conjunctiva of patients with trachomatous trichiasis, whilst presenting
273 only minimal toxicity. This low toxicity and strong effect on contraction compares
274 favorably with previously studied inhibitors of matrix contraction targeting cell division
275²⁸, matrix metalloproteinase activity^{8, 23, 29} or small Rho GTPases²⁶, which have been
276 found to prevent tissue contraction *ex-vivo*^{26, 29}, and scarring *in vivo*, both in animal
277 models²⁷ and in the clinic^{30, 31}. Our results suggest that doxycycline's effect on
278 contraction is at least partly mediated by its ability to inhibit MMP expression and
279 activity, which we have shown is a major component of the contraction process^{8, 23, 26}.
280 In addition, doxycycline appears to selectively target the expression of MMP1, 7, 9 and
281 12, which have been linked to the fibrotic phenotype in trachoma. Doxycycline has
282 previously been shown to both reduce MMPs expression levels^{32, 33}, and affect MMP
283 activity^{13, 19, 33}. In particular, it reduced MMP2 and MMP9 activity during gel
284 contraction *in vitro*³⁴ and fibrosis *in vivo*³⁵, suggesting that doxycycline's effects on
285 MMP underlies at least part of its strong effect on matrix remodeling in trachoma.
286 Whilst the doxycycline inhibition of MMP activity is known to involve zinc chelation,
287 the mechanism by which doxycycline affects MMP gene expression is still unclear.
288 However, as doxycycline appears to broadly affect the pro-inflammatory response, it
289 could affect MMP expression through a downregulation of MMP-inducing pro-
290 inflammatory cytokines^{21, 22, 32}.

291 MMP1, one of the main collagenases, has been linked to pathological processes
292 such as fibrotic diseases and cancer³⁶. Although it has not been reported in association

293 with trichiasis, our previous work with human Tenons' capsule fibroblasts has shown
294 that it is heavily expressed during matrix contraction *in vitro* and its reduction is linked
295 to a decrease in contraction²⁶, suggesting that it may also functionally facilitate the
296 matrix remodeling process during trichiasis. MMP7 is expressed in epithelia and injured
297 tissue. It plays an important role in inflammation^{37, 38}. MMP7 upregulation not only
298 participates in ECM regulation, but also correlates with many fibrotic diseases³⁹,
299 including trachoma¹¹ and tumor metastasis⁴⁰. MMP9 is a major component of ECM
300 turnover during homeostasis and conjunctival scarring⁴¹, and its expression is closely
301 linked to the degree of inflammation in the human conjunctival epithelium of children
302 with active trachoma^{42, 43}. We found here that trichiasis-derived fibroblasts express low
303 levels of MMP7 and 9. However, both MMP levels are increased transiently during the
304 contraction process, suggesting that these MMPs may be functional and activated
305 mostly at the initial stage. The extremely low expression of MMP7 in F11 might be the
306 result of the natural biological variation of F11, together with the technical limit of
307 semi-quantitative RT-PCR. MMP12 on the other hand is mainly produced by
308 macrophages, its main function including degrading elastin and taking part in pro-
309 inflammatory processes⁴⁴. Increased MMP12 expression has been reported in the
310 scarred conjunctiva of people with trichiasis either with or without inflammation¹². Our
311 results showed MMP12 has a modest but consistent increasing during the matrix
312 contraction both in F10 and F11, suggesting that it could directly contribute to matrix
313 remodeling in trichiasis. Interestingly, though doxycycline treatment was shown to
314 significantly inhibit MMP12 expression in both cell lines studied, it was significantly
315 more efficient in preventing the contraction of F11, which did not express significant
316 levels of MMP7 and MMP9. This suggests that in the absence of MMP7 and MMP9,
317 MMP12 might be a significant factor driving trichiasis fibroblast-mediated contraction.

318

319 Doxycycline's potential as a MMP inhibitor has been extensively documented
320 and it has proved useful in clinical settings^{14, 20}, with many reporting its strong effect on
321 MMP9^{13, 14, 19}. Recent work suggests that it can also modulate inflammation^{21, 22}, thus
322 making it a good candidate to prevent the immunofibrogenic process that underlies
323 recurrent trachomatous trichiasis. We present here evidence that doxycycline prevents
324 matrix remodeling and contraction by trichiasis-derived fibroblasts and leads to a
325 significant down-regulation in MMP expression in these cells. The *in vitro* model of
326 tissue contraction used here has already proved essential to the development of
327 treatments for the prevention of scarring following glaucoma filtration surgery and a
328 reasonable predictor of the clinical potential of anti-scarring treatments³⁰. In the
329 absence of any animal model for trichiasis development and recurrence, this *in vitro*
330 model may facilitate the translational pathway to modeling the pathogenesis of
331 trachoma and evaluating the effectiveness of new treatments in advance of clinical trials.
332 In view of our results and the wider use of doxycycline in clinical settings, we propose
333 that doxycycline might be useful as a treatment to prevent recurrence following
334 trichiasis surgery.

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338 **Acknowledgments**

339

340 The authors wish to thank Victor Hu for his help with the collection and testing of the
341 samples for Chlamydial infection.

342

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483

Gene	MMP1			MMP2			MMP7			MMP9			MMP12			HPRT1	
Dox	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	
F10																	
Day 0	31.1 ± 0.4	29.1 ± 2.1	25.1 ± 0.5	24.5 ± 0.6	39.6 ± 0.3	38.2 ± 0.9	39.0 ± 0.3	37.5 ± 1.0	34.8 ± 0.8	34.1 ± 0.8	29.8 ± 0.8	29.8 ± 0.8					
Day 3	23.3 ± 0.7	24.0 ± 0.5	23.4 ± 0.4	22.8 ± 0.2	35.9 ± 0.4	36.7 ± 0.7	33.9 ± 0.5	34.0 ± 0.7	31.7 ± 0.8	32.9 ± 0.7	30.9 ± 0.8	30.4 ± 0.5					
Day 7	23.0 ± 0.4	25.9 ± 0.7	22.1 ± 0.2	22.2 ± 1.2	36.3 ± 0.2	37.2 ± 1.0	34.6 ± 0.5	35.5 ± 0.9	30.3 ± 0.8	32.7 ± 0.9	30.0 ± 0.7	30.1 ± 1.0					
F11																	
Day 0	30.4 ± 0.4	29.4 ± 0.1	26.5 ± 2.3	27.7 ± 3.4	37.0 ± 0.1	n/a	40.4 ± 0.9	37.0 ± 2.6	34.4 ± 1.3	34.4 ± 1.0	31.9 ± 0.9	32.1 ± 0.8					
Day 3	26.3 ± 0.2	27.0 ± 0.5	23.5 ± 0.2	21.9 ± 0.9	41.3 ± 1.4	39.2 ± 0.6	39.0 ± 0.2	39.7 ± 0.5	34.1 ± 1.7	37.0 ± 0.4	32.0 ± 0.4	30.3 ± 1.2					
Day 7	25.6 ± 0.5	27.6 ± 0.7	23.2 ± 0.2	22.4 ± 1.3	40.8 ± 0.9	40.5 ± 0.7	39.9 ± 0.6	41.1 ± 1.3	33.6 ± 1.4	38.5 ± 0.6	32.0 ± 0.6	30.6 ± 1.6					

484

485

486 **Table1: Quantitative RT-PCR C_T values for MMP mRNA expression levels during**487 **gel contraction.** C_T values are averaged from n≥3 experiments.

488

489 **Figure legends:**

490

491 **Figure 1:** Doxycycline treatment prevents collagen matrix contraction by trichiasis
492 fibroblasts. (A) Effect of Doxycycline on trichiasis fibroblasts (pooled data for F07, F09,
493 F10 and F11) gel contraction at day7. Each data point was averaged from triplicate gels,
494 n=3. *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001. (B, C) Representative collagen gel contraction
495 profile for F10 and F11 (mean ± SEM, 3 gels each). (D) Cytotoxicity as measured by
496 LDH activity release into the medium during contraction after 7-day. The data is shown
497 as percentage cell survival (mean ± SEM, for n=3 gels each).

498

499 **Figure 2:** Doxycycline treatment prevents matrix degradation and remodeling.
500 Trichiasis fibroblasts F10 and F11 were embedded in collagen gels in medium
501 with/without 416 uM doxycycline. The gels were fixed and stained with Rhodamine
502 phalloidin after 7 days. Shown are representative images of cells embedded in the
503 matrix: red, 2D projection of the full cell F-actin volume; white, collagen matrix fibers
504 viewed using confocal reflection microscopy. Arrows show pericellular collagen fibers
505 compaction, arrowhead radial alignment consecutive to cell dynamic activity. Scale bar,
506 10 um.

507

508 **Figure 3:** Doxycycline inhibits MMP expression during contraction. Quantitative RT-
509 RCR for MMP1 (A, B), MMP2 (C, D), MMP9 (E, F) and MMP12 (G, H) mRNA
510 expression in trichiasis fibroblasts F10 and F11 during contraction with/without 416 uM
511 doxycycline. Significant differences in expression during contraction with reference to
512 the value at day 0 are expressed as *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001; significant

513 differences between control and treated samples on the same day are expressed as

514 ${}^+p<0.05$, ${}^{++}p<0.01$, ${}^{+++}p<0.001$ (mean \pm SEM, n=3 repeats).

515

516 **Figure 4:** Doxycycline inhibits MMP activity during contraction. The total MMP

517 activity released in the medium by F10 and F11 cells with/without doxycycline

518 treatment was measured at day 0, 3 and 7 during contraction using a FRET based assay.

519 MMP activity is expressed as fluorescence levels (mean \pm SEM; F10, n=3; F11 n=2).

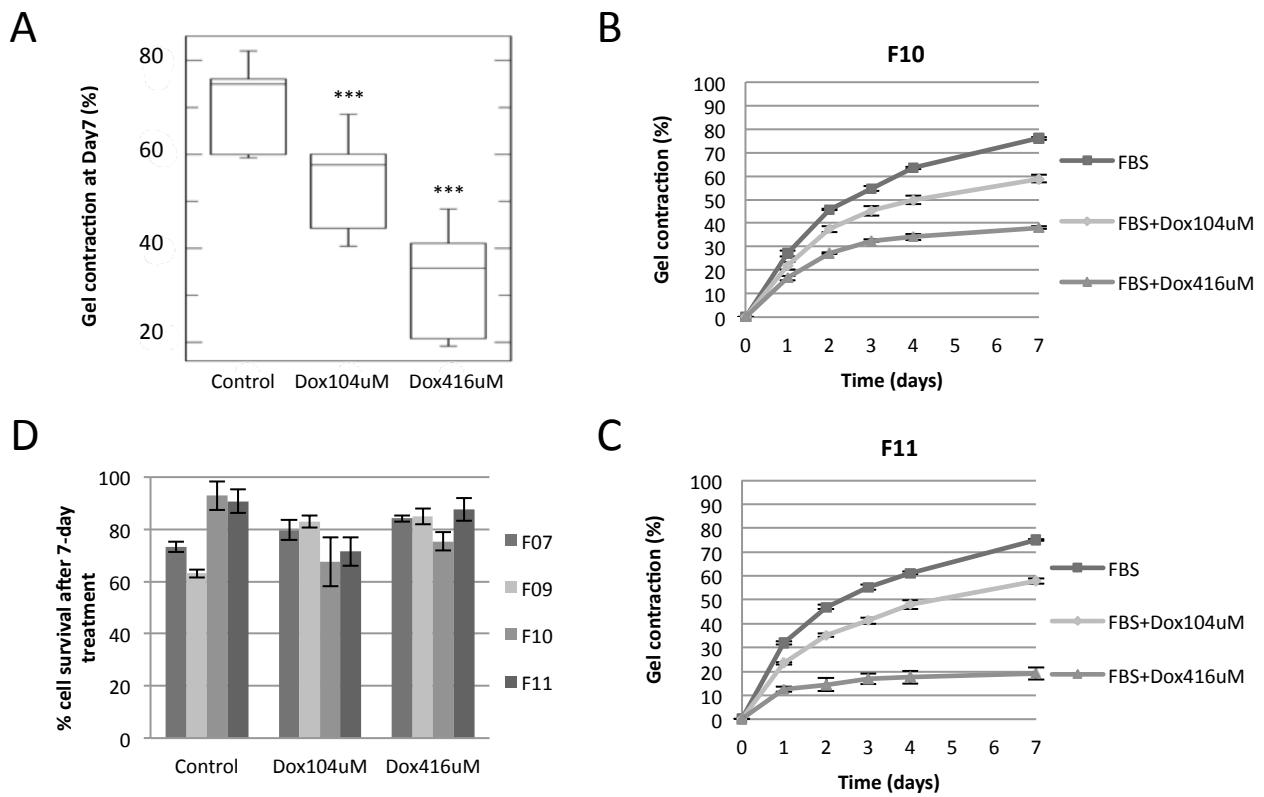


Figure 1, He et al. revised

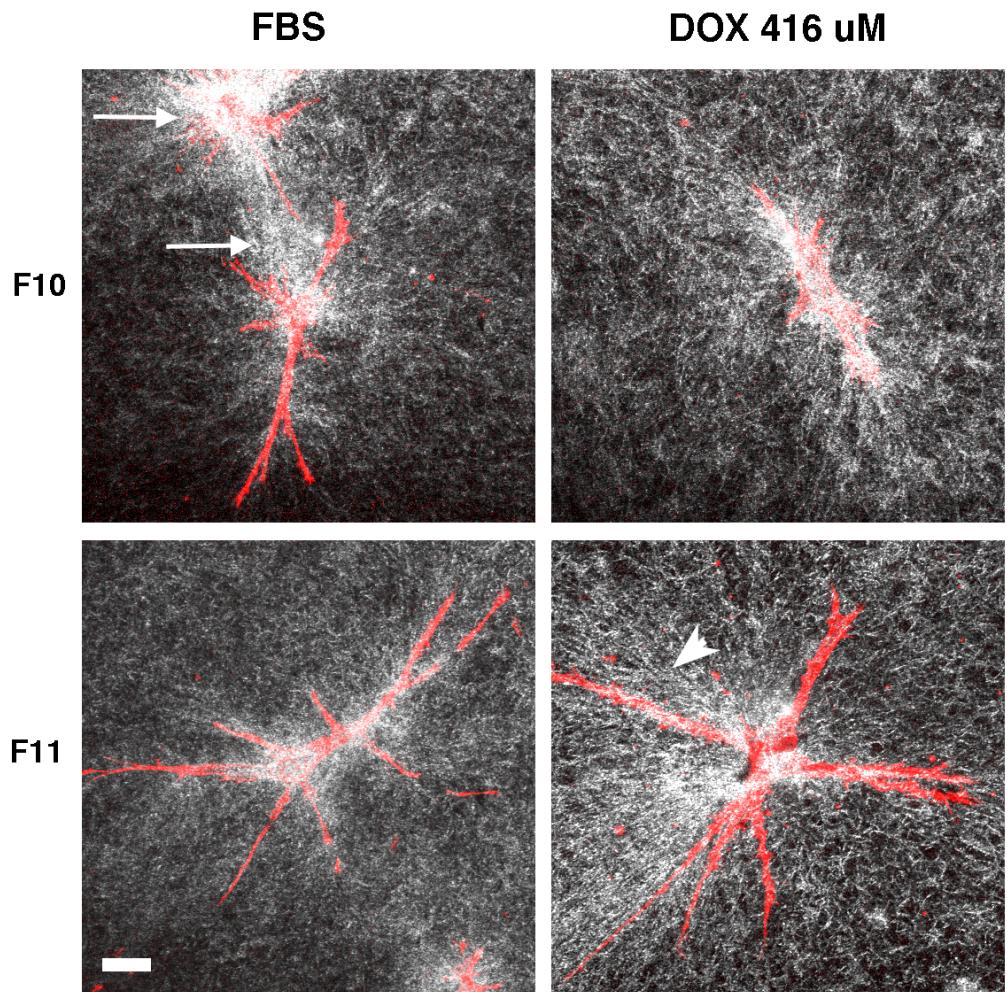


Figure 2, He et al. revised

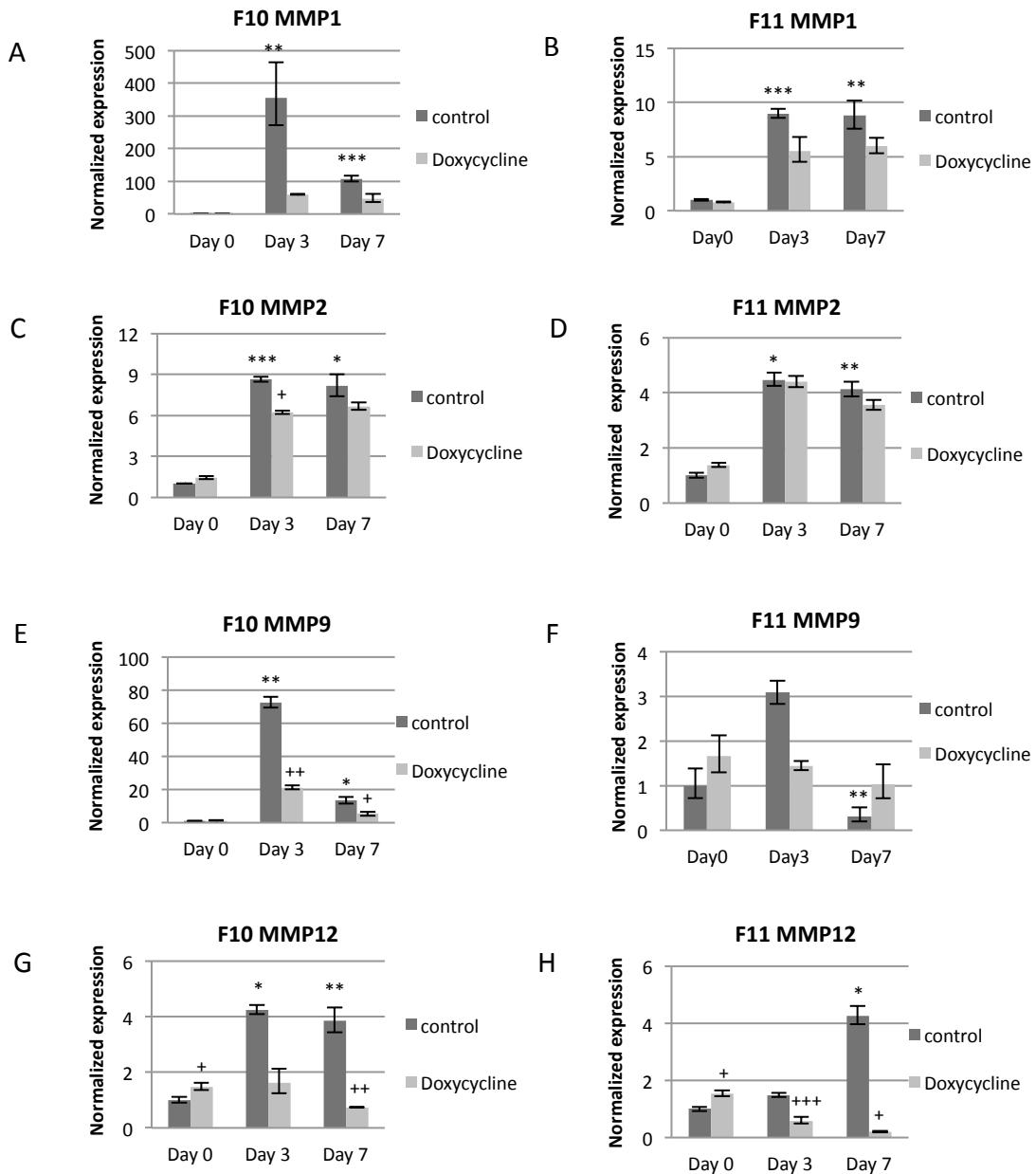
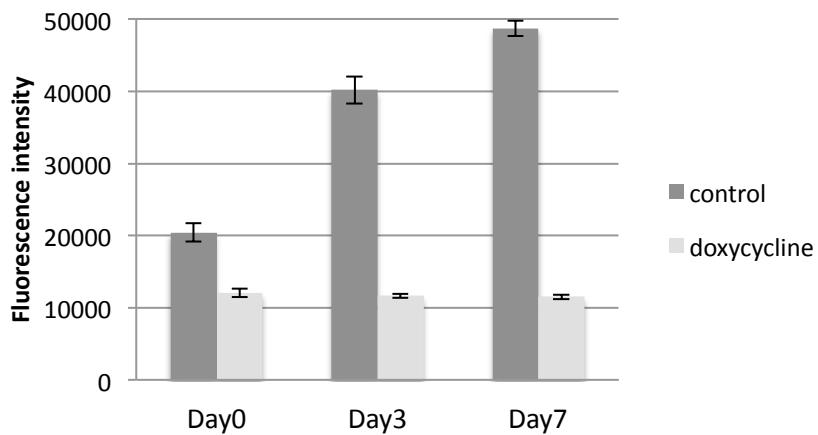


Figure 3, He et al. revised

F10



F11

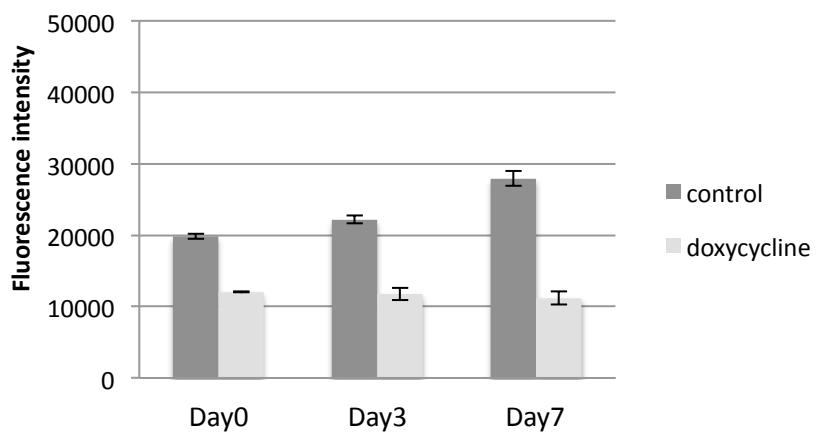


Figure 4, He et al. revised