

人类无精子症的遗传基础

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摘要: 精子发生的任何一步出现异常,均可能导致无精子症,进而引起男性不育。但目前人们对无精子症的致病原因了解甚少。本文在分析男性不育症的诊断和治疗现状的基础上,对无精子症的发病原因,尤其是遗传因素,进行了综述,并对相关研究的局限性予以归纳;最后,对未来研究提出了新的见解和思路,希望充分利用我们已有的资源和技术等优势,发现人类无精子症的致病原因,揭示致病机理,为相关疾病的诊治提供理论支持。

关键词: 精子发生;男性不育;无精子症;遗传因素;基因突变

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Genetic basis and mechanisms underlying human azoospermia

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Abstract: Any abnormalities occurring in spermatogenesis may lead to azoospermia, finally resulting in male infertility. However, the molecular basis and mechanisms underlying these defects remain unidentified. In this review, by analyzing the existing diagnosis and treatments of azoospermia and summarizing the latest research on human spermatogenetic abnormalities, the limitations of current investigations were summarized and new ideas were proposed for future research, in the hope of taking full

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advantages of our existing resources and technologies to discover the cause of azoospermia, reveal the pathogenesis and finally promote male reproductive health.

Key words: spermatogenesis; male infertility; azoospermia; genetic basis; gene mutation

0 引言

在不孕不育发生中,男性因素约占 50%,其中,以无精子症最为严重^[1].无精子症是指至少两次精液(包括离心后沉淀)检查均未发现精子^[2-3],其发生率约占所有男性的 1%,占男性不孕不育患者的 10%~20%^[4-5].随着 1978 年首例试管婴儿的诞生,1992 年卵细胞胞浆单精子注射(intracytoplasmic sperm injection, ICSI)的成功^[6],人类辅助生殖技术在世界范围内被迅速推广,也确实解决了部分患者的生育问题,但目前这种技术只能满足我国约 1/10(约 7.8 万人)有这类需求的患者;而且,由于无精子症治疗成功率不高,导致治疗费用昂贵,给家庭和国家带来了沉重的经济负担,在不少地方已成了家庭致贫和社会不稳定的重要原因.

无精子症治疗成功率低,主要是由于缺乏准确有效的诊断指标和方法,导致难以确认精子发生异常的原因^[7].例如在无精子症诊断中,目前采用的主要诊断指标和方法,包括病史问询、体格检查、精液常规、激素测定和染色体分析等,已 40 余年基本无变化^[8].诊断不准确造成 65% 以上的患者病因不明,无法实现对症治疗.另外,虽然部分患者可以通过 ICSI 获得孩子,但由于患者自身不育可能是遗传缺陷导致的,因此 ICSI 治疗也很可能把患者的遗传缺陷传递给下一代,进而引起后代不育^[9-11].因此,只有确定无精子症的真正致病原因(遗传改变),才能从根本上提高男性不育症的治疗成功率,为无精子症的无创诊断提供分子标志、为胚胎遗传诊断提供测试指标,以避免通过辅助生殖把患者的遗传缺陷传递给下一代,也为将来无精子症的基因治疗提供分子靶点,从而改善人类生殖健康,提高生活质量,促进家庭和谐.

1 精子发生异常与无精子症分类

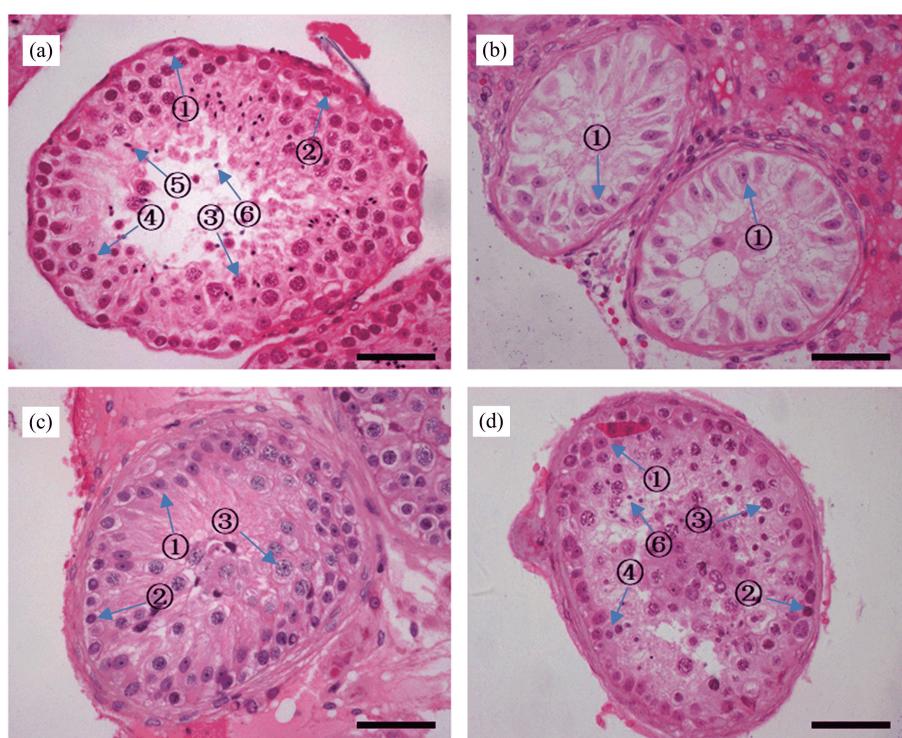
精子发生由一系列连续的过程组成,包括精原细胞增殖与分化、精母细胞减数分裂和精细胞变态

三个主要阶段^[12-14].其中,任何一个阶段出现问题,均可导致无精子症.根据其异常发生阶段的不同,又可分为唯支持细胞综合征(Sertoli cell only, SCO, 生精小管内无任何生殖细胞)、精母细胞发育停滞(spermatocyte development arrest, SDA, 精子发生停滞在减数分裂阶段)和生精功能低下(Hypospermatogenesis, HSG, 各阶段生精细胞都明显减少)等(图 1).其中对于唯支持细胞综合征、精母细胞发育停滞类患者,除采用供精治疗外,目前尚无其他治疗方法;对于生精功能低下患者,虽然可用 ICSI 技术治疗,但成功率较低.

2 染色体异常与无精子症

目前,只有 Y 染色体微缺失(Y chromosome microdeletion)或染色体异常(主要是 47, XXY, 即 Klinefelter 综合征)被证实是导致男性不育的常见遗传原因^[8,15].有数据显示,约 3% 严重少精子症(每毫升精液中精子数少于 1×10^6)患者和 10% 无精子症患者在 Y 染色体长臂上存在部分缺失^[16-17].因此,Y 染色体长臂这一区域被称为无精子症因子(azoospermia factor, AZF),主要包括 AZFa, AZFb 和 AZFc 区域^[17](图 2).AZFa 区缺失患者睾丸体积变小,临幊上多表现为唯支持细胞综合征;AZFb 区完全缺失的患者则表现为生殖细胞发育停滞在精母细胞或精细胞阶段,部分缺失的患者可表现为唯支持细胞综合征或少精子症等;AZFc 区缺失则是临幊上最为常见的 Y 染色体微缺失类型^[18].例如,一项针对 20,000 位男性 Y 染色体的分析发现,平均每 2320 位男性就存在一例 AZFc 区缺失患者,其缺失导致了约 6% 的严重精子发生异常^[19].在临幊上, AZFc 区缺失的表现呈多样化,既可导致无精子症,亦可表现为精子数目正常但形态异常.由此可见,不同类型的 Y 染色体微缺失对男性生育力的影响不尽相同,而且部分微缺失可以传递给男性后代,因此确定患者缺失的具体基因就很有必要.

特
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(a)正常人睾丸组织,曲细精管内含有各阶段生殖细胞;(b)~(d)不同类型无精子症患者睾丸切片,其中(b)图示唯支持细胞综合征患者睾丸组织,(c)图示精母细胞发育停滞患者睾丸组织,(d)图示生精功能低下患者睾丸组织.图中①支持细胞;②精原细胞;③精母细胞;④圆形精细胞;⑤延长型精细胞;⑥成熟精子.源自 <https://mcg.ustc.edu.cn/bsc/spermgene2.0/index.html>

图 1 人睾丸组织切片 HE 染色图
Fig.1 H&E staining of the human testicular tissues

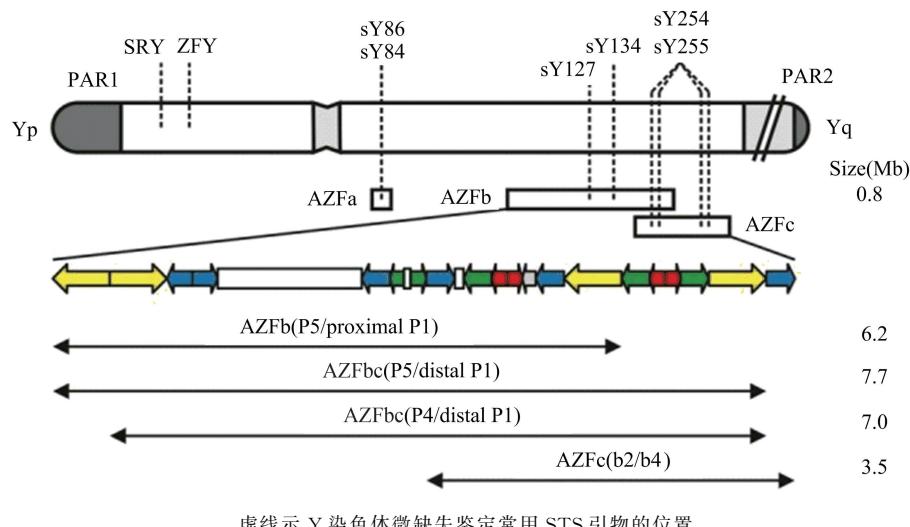


图 2 Y 染色体微缺失示意图(修改自文献[18])

Fig.2 Schematic representation of the Y chromosome and the current micro-deletion model(adapted from Ref.[18])

尽管 20 多年前就对 Y 染色体 AZF 微缺失的基因进行了报道^[20],但目前尚未完全鉴定出不同 AZF 区所含的男性生育必需基因.例如,AZFa 区缺失导致的 USP9Y 和 DDX3Y 编码序列丢失,会造成唯支持细胞综合征^[21-23];AZFb 区完全缺失则会

丢失 HSFY, EIF1AY, KDM5D, RPS4Y2, PRY 和 RBMY1 基因的所有拷贝,引起减数分裂停滞等^[24].有趣的是,仅缺失 USP9Y 或 HSFY 的男性能产生精子且可育^[25-27],表明 USP9Y 或 HSFY 并非生殖细胞存活或减数分裂所必需.但是,由于多数

患者缺失区间较大,对于缺失的其他基因是否为精子发生所必需,目前还难以利用小鼠模型进行探讨。同样,在 AZFc 区域,DAZ,CDY1 和 BPY2 等基因存在多个拷贝^[28],AZFc 大片段缺失并不会导致这些多拷贝基因完全丢失^[19],因此难以判断 AZFc 区何种基因在精子发生中有关键作用。

在临幊上,染色体核型分析通常是无精子症患者最先接受的遗传检测^[29].通过核型分析能够快速检测出迄今为止男性不育症的最常见遗传原因,即占所有无精子症患者 14% 的 Klinefelter 综合征^[30].Klinefelter 综合征患者染色体组成为 47,XXY,即比正常男性多了一条 X 染色体,因此本病又称为 47,XXY 综合征^[30].患者的睾丸小而硬,睾丸曲细精管纤维化和透明样变,基本无精子发生等^[31-32].另外,核型分析也能发现染色体平衡易位等染色体结构异常.在不育男性中,超过 1% 的无精子症患者携帯易位,这一比例是正常人群的 10 倍左右^[29].由于易位,同源染色体在减数分裂过程中无法正常配对,导致生殖细胞发育停滞,最终难以形成精子^[33].虽然越来越多的证据表明,对于 Klinefelter 综合征以及多数易位病例,减数分裂未联会染色体区基因表达异常是造成精子发生障碍的重要原因^[34],但是,染色体数目异常或易位等结构本身也可能是导致不育的重要因素,因为各种染色体数目和结构异常所涉及的基因各不相同,但都会导致精子发生障碍.因此,Y 染色体微缺失检测和核型分析是无精子症患者病因筛查的重要方法。

3 拷贝数变异与无精子症

基因组大片段的重复或缺失会造成拷贝数的变化,在遗传上又称为拷贝数变异 (copy number variant,CNV)^[35].研究发现 CNV 与无精子症的发生存在相关性,部分患者基因组上存在特异性的 CNV^[36-37].例如,Lopes 等发现染色体两个特定区段在无精子症患者基因组中缺失频率较高:其中第一个位于 Xp11.23 上,长约 100kb,包含有精子顶体相关蛋白基因 SPACA5,该区段缺失发生于 2.8% 的患者和 0.7% 对照人群;第二个则是包含有睾丸发育基因 DMRT1 的可变区段缺失,发生于 0.38% 的患者中^[38].而另一项研究则在三例无精子症患者中,发现位于 1 号染色体上长约 338kb 包含有微管相关丝氨酸/苏氨酸激酶 2 基因 MAST2 的重复^[39].值

得注意的是,这一重复序列中还包含有其他睾丸高表达但功能未知的基因,如 IPP(脑内促颗粒多肽)和 PIK3R3(磷酸肌醇-3-激酶调节亚基 3)等^[39].因此,CNV 虽然与男性不育有关,但至于重复或缺失区段中哪个/哪几个基因是导致无精子症的确切基因,还有待深入研究。

4 基因突变与无精子症

据估计,超过 2300 个基因参与了精子发生^[40-42].利用基因敲除小鼠进行的研究表明,超过 400 个基因对精子发生是必不可少的^[43-45].然而迄今为止,只有少数基因的突变被报道可能与非梗阻性无精子症相关^[15,46-48].这不仅提示,遗传突变导致了生殖细胞发育异常,进而引起无精子症;也表明,我们对导致人类精子发生异常的分子基础仍了解甚少。

人类基因组计划(HGP)和人类单倍型图谱计划(HapMap)数据的不断更新,以及深度测序(deep sequencing)技术的推广应用和费用降低,为发现导致精子发生障碍的基因突变提供了新思路、新方法.2009 年,Aston 等^[49]用该方法比较了 52 例少精子症和 40 例无精子症患者与正常男性的基因组单核苷酸多态性 (single nucleotide polymorphism, SNP)变化,发现了 20 个精子发生相关的 SNP 位点.2010 年,他们又比较了 172 个 SNP 位点在 158 例严重少精子症和 80 例正常男性中的变化,发现了一些可能与精子发生相关的位点^[50].但这些研究的主要问题在于分析的病例数太少,结果的重复性不高.在国内,Hu 等^[51]利用全基因组关联分析 (genome wide association study, GWAS),开展了全球首个大样本量(1000 例)的无精子症发生相关基因的研究,发现了 3 个与非梗阻性无精子症相关联的风险区域 1p13.3, 1p36.32 和 12p12.1.然而,这些区域虽然涉及与生殖细胞发育及精子发生相关的基因,但究竟是不是这些基因的突变导致了精子发生障碍,则无法回答。

TEX11 是第一个,也是迄今唯一一个在散发患者中发现并得到证实的功能缺失 (loss of function,LoF) 导致无精子症的致病基因^[52-53].通过靶向测序,在无精子症患者中,发现了 6 种不同的 LoF 突变,突变频率约为 1%^[52-53](表 1).其中,3 例 TEX11 突变患者的精母细胞发育障碍^[53],并与

Tex11 敲除小鼠减数分裂停滞的表型一致^[54]。另外,在 2 例患者中发现了导致 79 个氨基酸缺失 p.(Thr218_Lys296del) 的突变^[53]。或许由于这一突变未造成阅读框改变,突变携带者的症状也相对较轻,其部分生殖细胞可以完成减数分裂^[53]。

相对于从散发患者中寻找致病突变的缓慢进展,更多的无精子症潜在致病突变从带有无精子症患者的近亲婚配家系中被发现(表 1)。例如,在两个近亲结婚后代不育的家系中,发现了睾丸重要转录因子 TAF4B 和精细胞特异组蛋白去乙酰酶 ZMYND15 的突变,预测这些突变(无义和移码突变)会导致蛋白质无法正常表达,而在小鼠中这两个基因的敲除均会导致无精子症^[55]。此外,其他一些可能导致无精子症的常染色体隐性突变也被鉴定出来,包括 *TEX15*(无义突变)、*MCM8*(剪接位点突变)、*SYCE1*(剪接位点突变)、*MEI1*(错义突变)和 *NPAS2*(错义突变)等^[56-63]。需要指出的是,这些突变被认为是致病原因,主要是基于软件预测其为有害突变,至于其是否确实致病还有待进一步的功能验证。例如 *NPAS2* 基因的错义突变是否致病就有待商榷,因为 *NPAS2* 在睾丸中虽有表达,但其表达量在神经系统中最高,而且缺失 *NPAS2* 的雄鼠可育^[64]。

最近,我们在一个巴基斯坦近亲结婚、后代发

生男性不育的家系中,通过全外显子组测序,发现范可尼贫血(Fanconi anemia, FA)核心复合物成分 FANCM 的移码突变(c. 1946_1958del, p.Pro648Leufs * 16)^[65]。细胞水平研究发现该突变导致截短蛋白形成,使 FANCM 无法定位于 DNA 链间交联位点,造成 FANCD2 不能被单泛素化、FA 通路不能被激活,进而导致细胞死亡。利用携带与患者几乎一致的 *Fancm* 突变(*Fancm*^{ΔC/ΔC})小鼠进行分析,发现纯合突变小鼠存在与患者类似表型,即精子发生障碍、生育力降低。具体表现为精子数目大量减少、运动能力降低,各级生精细胞减少和圆形精细胞发育停滞。值得注意的是,所有患者和 *Fancm*^{ΔC/ΔC} 成年小鼠均无明显的出生缺陷、骨髓造血功能衰竭和肿瘤等 FA 的典型症状。由此我们首次发现, *FANCM* 纯合突变虽然导致精子发生异常,引起男性不育,但不引起骨髓造血功能衰竭。通过这项研究不难看出,只有通过细致的功能学实验,特别是利用携带患者突变的动物模型,才能确证在患者中发现的突变是否致病,从而从根本上揭示突变的致病机理。当然,不能忽视的是,对于目前发现的无精子症的致病突变,大多数还尚未在散发患者中重现,表明不同患者其致病的突变基因不同,欲揭示无精子症患者的致病原因还有大量工作要做。

表 1 已报道的人无精子症潜在致病突变

Tab.1 The reported gene mutations associated with human azoospermia

基因	全名	染色体	突变	突变类型	患者症状	参考文献	敲除小鼠表型	参考文献
<i>TEX11</i>	Testis-expressed gene 11	X	p.Asp435Leufs * 10	移码突变	减数分裂停滞	[52]	减数分裂停滞	[54]
			c.1838 - 1G>A	剪切位点	减数分裂停滞	[52]		
			c.792+1G>A	剪切位点	减数分裂停滞	[53]		
			c.1837+1G>C	剪切位点	减数分裂停滞	[53]		
			p.(Thr218_Lys296del)	框内缺失	减数分裂停滞	[53]		
			p.(Thr218_Lys296del)	框内缺失	寡精子症	[53]		
<i>TAF4B</i>	TATA-binding protein-associated factors 4B	18	p.Arg611 *	无义突变	无/寡精子症	[55]	精原细胞增殖异常	[66]
<i>ZMYND15</i>	Zinc finger MYND-containing protein 15	17	p.Lys507Serfs * 3	移码突变	精细胞停滞	[55]	精细胞停滞	[67]
<i>NPAS2</i>	Neuronal PAS domain protein 2	2	p.Pro455Ala	错义突变	无精子症	[58]	可育	[64]

续表 1

基因	全名	染色体	突变	突变类型	患者症状	参考文献	敲除小鼠表型	参考文献
Minichromosome								
MCM8	maintenance 8 homologous recombination repair factor	20	c.1954-1G>	剪切位点	无精子症	[59]	减数分裂停滞	[68]
Synaptonemal complex central element protein 1								
SYCE1	Synaptonemal complex central element protein 1	10	c.197-2A>G	剪切位点	减数分裂停滞	[56]	减数分裂停滞	[69]
TEX15	Testis-expressed gene 15	8	p.Tyr710 *	无义突变	无/寡精子症	[57]	减数分裂停滞	[70]
Meiosis-specific protein with OB domains								
MEIOB	Meiosis-specific protein with OB domains	16	p.Asn64Ile	错义突变	无精子症	[71]	减数分裂停滞	[72]
Proteasome 26 S								
PSMC3IP	subunit, ATPase, 3-interacting protein	17	p.Tyr163 *	无义突变	无精子症	[60]	减数分裂停滞	[73]
Serine protease inhibitor, kazal-type, 2								
SPINK2	Serine protease inhibitor, kazal-type, 2	4	c.56-3C>G	剪切位点	减数分裂后停滞	[62]	减数分裂后停滞	[62]
Testis expressed 14,								
TEX14	intercellular bridge forming factor	17	p.Ser241Serfs * 23	移码突变	无精子症	[71]	减数分裂停滞	[74]
Tudor domain containing 9								
TDRD9	Tudor domain containing 9	14	p.Ser241Profs * 4	移码突变	减数分裂停滞	[61]	减数分裂停滞	[75]
Meiotic double-stranded break formation protein 1								
MEI1	Meiotic double-stranded break formation protein 1	22	p.Arg1103Trp	错义突变	减数分裂停滞	[63]	减数分裂停滞	[76]
FA complementation group M								
FANCM	FA complementation group M	14	p.Pro648Leufs * 16	移码突变	无/寡精子症	[65]	各阶段生殖细胞发育异常	[77]

5 多数无精子症患者的睾丸中存在少量精子

值得注意的是,大量研究发现,在很多无精子症患者精液中虽然找不到精子,但在其睾丸组织中可看到精子^[78-79].我们对来自中国科学技术大学人类生殖疾病资源库的 5000 余例无精子症患者的穿刺或活检的睾丸组织切片进行分析发现,51% 的患者睾丸组织中可见到精子^①.考虑到睾丸穿刺和活检样本的局部性,我们认为,更多患者睾丸中是存在精子的.在临幊上,从无精子症患者睾丸中获得精子,都是通过睾丸穿刺或睾丸活检进行的^[80-84].但由于人的睾丸较大,穿刺或活检只能获取很小的组织,很容易造成睾丸取精失败.近年来兴起的睾丸显微取精,是将曲细精管从睾丸中取出、分开并在显微镜下仔

细寻找精子^[84-86],虽然提高了睾丸取精的成功率,但这种方法会导致曲细精管的断裂,对睾丸造成极大的、不可修复的创伤;而且,对于唯支持细胞综合征或精母细胞发育停滞患者,这些手术除了增加患者的身心和经济负担外,也不可能从睾丸获得精子,对其治疗没有任何意义.因此,若能准确判断无精子症的发病原因,判断其睾丸中是否有精子发生,不但有助于指导临幊医生进行诊断,进行精准的靶向取精手术,提高睾丸取精的成功率,让更多患者获得辅助生殖的机会,而且也可免除部分患者的手术痛苦,减轻经济负担.

6 无精子症患者致病原因研究的局限性

目前,对导致无精子症的基因突变仍知之甚少.

① 源自 <https://mcg.ustc.edu.cn/bsc/newcase/>.

其原因多种多样^[46-47],如:①迄今,绝大多数敲除后导致小鼠精子发生异常的基因,在无精子症患者中还未被研究;②无精子症患者虽多,但接受过遗传突变检查的还很少;③在已报道的大多数寻找无精子症患者致病突变的研究中,检测的病例数都较少,通常每项研究不足 100 例;④常常在一项研究中同时利用了多种类型的不育患者(如无精子症、少精子症、精母细胞发育完全停滞和不完全停滞等),然而不同类型的患者可能由不同的突变导致,如导致精母细胞发育停滞的突变可能并不影响精原细胞的正常发育;⑤虽然很多基因参与了精子发生,但对一个特定的基因来说,其突变率可能很低,而且可能只发生于特定类型的无精子症患者;⑥无精子症可能是多种微效基因突变的累加效应,而之前的研究每次仅检测一种或很少几种基因,从而导致对致病突变的漏检。

7 结论与展望

迄今发现的 400 多个小鼠精子发生必需基因,很少能够在不育病人中找到其突变^[87].这提示欲研究解决人类精子发生异常导致不孕不育的问题,还必须从患者(而不是动物)着手,根据患者精子发生异常的类型,对患者进行分类,并在此基础上对各类患者分别进行基因组等分析,才可能发现导致人类精子发生异常进而诱发不孕不育的变异。

我国是人口大国,不育症患者数量世界最多,并且患者类型多样。例如,我们在分析的 256 例精母细胞发育停滞患者中,发现 6 大类 20 多亚类的减数分裂异常类型^①,其中多种类型在人和动物中尚未见报道,对其深入研究有助于发现新的无精子症致病基因突变。大量研究表明,外显子序列虽然只占人类基因组的 1%,但却高度富集了致病突变^[88-89]。随着测序成本的降低,全外显子组测序已成为寻找人类致病突变的有力工具^[15,88-89],近年来运用 WES 技术成功发现人类致病突变的报道增长迅速^[90-92]。同时,一系列针对人类生殖疾病突变筛查、注释的生物信息学工具的研发^[45,93-98],也为无精子症患者致病突变的发现提供了有效的技术支持。此外,近年来基因编辑技术的发展也极大地促进了基因突变的功能验证^[99-102]。如利用果蝇全基因 RNAi 库可在短时间

内对候选致病基因的功能予以验证,基于 CRISPR/Cas9 技术可在较短时间内制备携带人类基因突变的基因修饰小鼠模型,并且可以实现对多个目的基因的编辑^[100],为在体内、从功能上确认人类精子发生障碍的致病突变,探讨发病机制提供了研究手段和动物模型。

为从根本上解决无精子症导致人类不孕不育的问题,需充分利用我国的病例资源优势,对人类精子发生障碍引发不育的异常类型予以分类,在此基础上,运用基因测序等方法发现可能导致精子发生异常的遗传改变,并结合 CRISPR/Cas9 等技术制备动物模型,以确认这些遗传改变是否导致以及如何导致精子发生障碍,从而阐明男性不孕不育的病理机制。这不仅能查明人类无精子症的病因,为无精子症的分子诊断、对症治疗和人工辅助生殖胚胎的遗传筛查提供候选分子,也将有助于阐明精子发生的调控原理。

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^① 源自 <https://mcg.ustc.edu.cn/bsc/newcase/>.

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