Enhanced Wnt signaling improves bone mass and strength, but not brittleness, in the Col1a1<sup>+/mov13</sup> mouse model of type I Osteogenesis Imperfecta

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1. Introduction

1.1. Osteogenesis Imperfecta (OI) represents a genetically heterogeneous group of disorders that have skeletal fragility as a principal component

The clinical severity of OI ranges from mild to severe. Newborns with the most severe forms of OI have prenatal-onset skeletal deformities and do not survive the neonatal period, whereas adults with the mildest forms of OI typically have no deformity and normal life expectancy [1]. Mutations in COL1A1 or COL1A2, which encode the \( \alpha_1(I) \) and \( \alpha_2(I) \) chains of type I collagen, are the most common cause of OI. A specific class of mutations in COL1A1 is a frequent cause of mild OI (OI type I) [2]; this class of mutations result in functional haploinsufficiency for the \( \alpha_1(I) \) chain and includes COL1A1 nonsense, frameshift, and whole-gene deletion mutations.

OI type I is the most prevalent form of OI and ~40% of patients with OI type I have functional haploinsufficiency [3]. Despite being called “mild,” patients with OI type I have significant skeletal involvement. In a cohort of 86 individuals with COL1A1 haploinsufficiency, 70 of whom were ≤21 years old, the mean lumbar spine bone mineral density was –3 standard deviations (SD) and the mean height was –1 SD compared to controls [3]. Data from children in this cohort were used to determine an annualized fracture rate of 0.77 fractures/child/year, which is a 95-fold increase compared to the fracture rate in controls [3]. Data from children in this cohort were used to determine an annualized fracture rate of 0.77 fractures/child/year, which is a 95-fold increase compared to the fracture rate in controls [3].

Additional text follows...
vertebral fractures/individual [3]. Therefore, children and adults with OI type 1 would benefit from therapies that increase their skeletal strength.

1.2. Current therapies for OI include bisphosphonates

Bisphosphonates that increase bone mass, and presumably bone strength, by reducing osteoclast-mediated bone resorption have been given to patients with mild OI. The efficacy of bisphosphonate therapy in reducing fracture rates in all types of OI is unclear, although some pediatric patients benefit [4–6]. Since the principal effect of bisphosphonate therapy is anti-catabolic, the effectiveness of bisphosphonates for reducing fracture risk in adults with OI is uncertain [7].

Anabolic therapeutic agents that increase osteoblast activity in bone could benefit children and adults with OI. Recombinant human parathyroid hormone (teriparatide) therapy has been shown to increase bone mass and reduce fracture risk in men and women with age-related bone loss [8,9]. Although teriparatide is presently contra-indicated in children with OI, two studies tested teriparatide efficacy in adults with OI. An 18-month-long, open label intervention trial was performed in 13 post-menopausal women with OI type I and significant increases in spine areal BMD (aBMD) and the bone anabolic biomarker P1NP were observed [10]. Among participants with OI type I in an 18-month long, double-blind, placebo-control trial, the 24 participants who received teriparatide had significantly increased spine and hip aBMD and spine volumetric BMD compared to those who receive placebo [11]. Unfortunately neither study was sufficiently powered to determine if teriparatide therapy affected fracture rates.

1.3. Wnt signaling is important for bone mass and strength

Studies in humans and mice indicate that the Wnt signaling pathway is anabolic in bone [12]. Mutations that interfere with Wnt signaling through the low density lipoprotein related protein 5 (LRP5) receptor reduce bone mass and bone strength, whereas these bone properties are improved by mutations that increase Wnt signaling. Two monoclonal antibodies, blosozumab and romosozumab, that increase Wnt signaling by interfering with Sclerostin, an endogenous LRP5 inhibitor in bone, are in clinical trials for age-related osteoporosis (www.clinicaltrials.gov), and could be considered for patients with OI. Therefore, we and other investigators have been performing proof-of-principle studies looking at the effect of enhancing Wnt signaling in mouse models of OI [13–15]. Improved bone mass and bone strength have been observed in mice with moderate forms of OI treated with Sclerostin neutralizing antibodies [13,14], and in mice that have moderate OI and an allele of the Wnt co-receptor LRP5 (Lrp5+/p.A214V) that makes the receptor resistant to Sclerostin [13].

1.4. Enhancing Wnt signaling may improve bone properties in OI type 1

The present study examines the effect of using the Lrp5+/p.A214V allele to enhance Wnt signaling in the Col1a1+/Mov13 mouse strain, which models the most common type (type I) of OI in humans. Col1a1+/Mov13 mice are heterozygous for a retroviral insertion in Col1a1 gene that prevents mRNA expression in osteoblasts, thereby causing haploinsufficiency [16]. The type 1 collagen in the bone of the mice is qualitatively normal, but reduced in quantity [17]. Bone quality is also abnormal, with Col1a1+/Mov13 mouse bones having lower matrix to mineral ratios and lower post-yield deformation compared to wild-type mice [17,18].

Herein, we compare the bone properties of littermate mice with wild-type (Col1a1+/+;Lrp5+/+), OI (Col1a1+/−;Lrp5+/+), OI + HBM (Col1a1+/−;Lrp5+/−;p.A214V), or HBM (Col1a1+/−;Lrp5+/−;p.A214V) alleles.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Mouse strains and genotyping

All experimental techniques involving animals were approved by the Boston Children’s Hospital Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee. Col1a1+/Mov13 mice have been previously described [16], and were obtained on a fixed C57BL/6 background (JAX Stock # 000664) from The Jackson Laboratory (Bar Harbor, ME) [16]. Lrp5+/−;p.A214V mice have been previously described [19], and have been maintained on a fixed 129/SvJ background. Tail snip DNA was recovered for PCR genotyping using the HotSHOT method [20]. Genotyping was performed as previously described [19] (www.jax.org).

2.1.1. Mouse care and handling

Male Col1a1+/Mov13 mice were mated with female Lrp5+/−;p.A214V mice to generate wild-type (WT), OI, OI + HBM, and HBM offspring. Offspring of both sexes were genotyped between 8 and 14 days-of-age, weaned before 28 days-of-age, and then group housed as same-sex litters. At 7-weeks-old, mice of both sexes were given an intraperitoneal (IP) injection of calcine green (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO; 10 mg/kg) followed 4 days later by an IP injection of alizarin complexone (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO; 20 mg/kg). When 8-weeks-old, measures of bone mineral density (BMD) and bone mineral content (BMC) were obtained with the Piximus II dual energy X-ray absorptiometer (GE Lunar, Madison, WI, USA) and the mice were euthanized. Femurs and the 5th lumbar vertebrae were immediately removed and dissected free of soft tissues. Each animal’s left femur and vertebrae were fixed in 10% formalin and the right femur was wrapped in sterile phosphate buffered saline (PBS)-soaked gauze (Gibco-Life Technologies, Grand Island, NY), and stored frozen at −20 °C.

2.2. Assessment of bone properties

MicroCT (μCT) measurements of the left femur (midshaft cortical bone and distal trabecular bone) and 5th lumbar vertebra from both male and female animals were performed as previously described [13,19]. After μCT measurements were obtained, the left femur from male mice was embedded in methyl methacrylate, sectioned, and imaged for quantitative histomorphometry as previously described [19,21].

The right femur from male and female animals was used for biomechanical testing in a three-point bending assay as previously described [13,19]. Briefly, the frozen femur was brought slowly to room temperature (∼1.5 h) in a saline bath, positioned with the posterior side down across the two bottom supports of the three-point bending apparatus and mounted in a Bone Electroforce 3200 electromagnet test machine (Bose, Eden Prairie, MN), which has a force resolution of 0.01 N. Each femur was loaded to failure in monotonic compression using a crosshead speed of 0.2 mm s−1, during which force and displacement measurements were collected every 0.005 s.

Three longitudinal sections were cut from the left femur of male mice previously embedded in methyl methacrylate and mounted directly onto BaF2 windows for the Fourier transform infra-red spectroscopic imaging (FTIRI). Using a Spectrum 300 (Perkin Elmer, CT, USA) infrared spectrometer and microscope, images were acquired at 3 different trabecular and cortical sites for each bone as previously described [22].

2.3. Statistical analyses

Bone density and strength properties were tested for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk W statistic and no significant departures or outliers were detected for males or females on any parameter [23]. Therefore, two-way mixed model analysis of variance (ANOVA) with genotype and treatment as factors was applied with Bonferroni correction to compare groups and assess genotype effects [24]. The sample
sizes of 8–16 animals per group for each sex provided 80% power \((\alpha = 0.05, \beta = 0.2)\) for detecting mean differences of 30% (moderate effect sizes of 0.8 or larger) at 8 weeks of age (version 7.0, nQuery Advisor, Statistical Solutions, Saugus, MA). All data, except where indicated, are presented as mean ± 1 SD with two-tailed \(p < 0.05\) considered statistically significant. FTIR cortical and trabecular measures were compared using ANOVA based on a generalized linear modeling approach with a repeated-measures within-subjects factor in order to account for the triplicate measurements per animal and the Wald chi-square test to assess differences between the OI + HBM and OI groups. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software (version 19.0, SPSS Inc./IBM, Chicago, IL).

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. An Lrp5 HBM allele improved bone density in mild OI caused by a Col1a1\(^{Mov13}\) allele

Total body bone mineral density did not differ between WT and OI littermates, consistent with the mild phenotype of this mouse model, but was significantly increased in OI + HBM mice for both sexes (Fig. 1A). MicroCT studies also detected no significant differences between OI and WT littermates with respect to femoral trabecular bone volume/total volume (BV/TV) for female mice or midshaft cortical volume for both sexes (Fig. 1B, D); data which are consistent with prior studies that suggested Col1a1\(^{+/Mov13}\) mouse long bones undergo adaptive changes that reduce the effect of Col1a1 haploinsufficiency on long bone mass and strength [18,25,26]. In contrast, the vertebral trabecular BV/TV was significantly lower in female OI compared to WT mice \((p < 0.01)\) and trended toward being lower in the male OI mice \((p = 0.09)\) (Fig. 1C). Importantly, mice of both sexes with OI + HBM had significant increases in femoral and vertebral trabecular BV/TV and femoral cortical volume when compared to same-sex OI or WT mice (Figs. 1 and 2). Trabecular number and thickness was increased in both male and female mice at the lumbar spine and in male mice at the distal femur. Trabecular thickness, but not number, was increased in female mice at the distal femur. Increased polar moment of inertia (pMOI) was seen in bones from mice of both sexes with the HBM mutation with or without an OI allele (Table 1).

#### 3.2. Mineralizing surface ratios were increased in OI+HBM mice compared to WT mice

Quantitative histomorphometry was performed on femur sections from at least 3 male WT, OI, OI+HBM and HBM mice (Table 1). Mice with OI + HBM had significantly increased periosteal and endocortical mineralizing surface/total surface ratios compared to WT mice, but not compared to OI mice. The latter result may reflect the adaptive bone growth changes that were previously described in Col1a1\(^{+/Mov13}\) mice [26].

#### 3.3. Bone strength was increased in OI + HBM mice

Three point bending studies revealed that OI femurs tended to have significantly higher stiffness (for males), ultimate force (for both sexes), and energy to ultimate force (for females) values compared to WT femurs (Fig. 3). Again, these changes likely reflect adaptive long bone changes. The OI + HBM male mice exhibited further increases in ultimate force and energy to ultimate force values compared to OI mice, and male and female mice with the OI + HBM allele had significantly

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**Fig. 1.** An Lrp5 HBM allele increases bone density in mice with a Mov13 OI allele. Graphs depicting mean (±SD) measures of total body bone mineral density (A), distal femur trabecular bone volume/total volume (B), lumbar spine bone volume/total volume (C), and midshaft femur cortical volume (D), in female (open bars) and male (shaded bars) 8-week-old WT, OI, OI with HBM and HBM mice. Genotypes, WT or heterozygous mutant (OI or HBM, with respect to Col1a1 and Lrp5), are indicated, as is the number (N) of animals with each genotype that were studied. Brackets indicate comparisons and p values between mice with the indicated genotypes. NS – not significant.
increased bone stiffness, ultimate force, and energy to ultimate force when compared to their WT counterparts (Fig. 3). As was previously reported[18], we observed that OI mice of both sexes had significantly reduced post-yield displacement compared to WT mice and, importantly, this reduction in post-yield displacement was not improved in OI + HBM mice (Fig. 3D).

3.4. Mineral-to-matrix ratio was unaffected by an Lrp5 HBM allele
FTIRI data from femurs of male mice reveal no significant differences between mice with an OI allele and those with both an OI allele and an Lrp5 HBM allele at all measures of cortical bone (Table 2). Notably, there was no difference in mineral-to-matrix ratio, which

Table 1
Femur and lumbar spine μCT and quantitative histomorphometry data from mice with different sexes and genotypes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WT</th>
<th>OI</th>
<th>OI + HBM</th>
<th>HBM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Femur μCT data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>N = 11</td>
<td>N = 14</td>
<td>N = 8</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tb·N (1/mm)</td>
<td>3.58 (0.26)</td>
<td>3.28 (0.31)</td>
<td>3.72 (0.47)</td>
<td>4.46 (0.43)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tb·Th (μm)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.001)</td>
<td>0.05 (0.12)*</td>
<td>0.09 (0.02)**</td>
<td>0.07 (0.01)**‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pMOI</td>
<td>0.34 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.43 (0.11)*</td>
<td>0.56 (0.10)**</td>
<td>0.47 (0.08)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>N = 12</td>
<td>N = 16</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
<td>N = 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tb·N (1/mm)</td>
<td>4.08 (0.30)</td>
<td>4.06 (0.58)</td>
<td>4.82 (0.80)**</td>
<td>5.27 (0.39)**‡‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tb·Th (μm)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.01)</td>
<td>0.06 (0.02)**</td>
<td>0.10 (0.10)**</td>
<td>0.07 (0.01)**‡‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pMOI</td>
<td>0.47 (0.18)</td>
<td>0.56 (0.14)</td>
<td>0.70 (0.13)**</td>
<td>0.77 (0.12)**‡‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertebra μCT data</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>N = 11</td>
<td>N = 12</td>
<td>N = 8</td>
<td>N = 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tb·N (1/mm)</td>
<td>4.95 (0.55)</td>
<td>3.72 (0.24)**</td>
<td>4.86 (0.35)**‡‡</td>
<td>6.29 (0.64)**‡‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tb·Th (μm)</td>
<td>0.05 (0.004)</td>
<td>0.05 (0.010)</td>
<td>0.08 (0.01)**‡‡</td>
<td>0.08 (0.01)**‡‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>N = 11</td>
<td>N = 15</td>
<td>N = 10</td>
<td>N = 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tb·N (1/mm)</td>
<td>5.10 (0.23)</td>
<td>3.94 (0.27)**</td>
<td>5.07 (0.54)‡‡</td>
<td>6.28 (0.31)**‡‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tb·Th (μm)</td>
<td>0.048 (0.01)</td>
<td>0.06 (0.01)*</td>
<td>0.09 (0.01)**‡‡</td>
<td>0.09 (0.02)**‡‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative histomorphometry data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>N = 3</td>
<td>N = 4</td>
<td>N = 4</td>
<td>N = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PsMAR (μm/day)</td>
<td>41.09 (26.98)</td>
<td>60.10 (10.26)</td>
<td>74.55 (19.73)*</td>
<td>73.40 (13.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PsBFR (μm³/μm²/year)</td>
<td>1.81 (0.15)</td>
<td>2.33 (0.75)</td>
<td>2.43 (0.74)</td>
<td>2.50 (0.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EcMAR</td>
<td>51.17 (28.42)</td>
<td>67.90 (5.77)</td>
<td>97.57 (6.61)**</td>
<td>89.54 (5.77)**‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EcbFR (μm³/μm²/year)</td>
<td>1.91 (0.94)</td>
<td>1.70 (0.19)</td>
<td>1.39 (0.08)</td>
<td>1.36 (0.15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| p 0.05 compared to WT, ** p 0.01 compared to OI, ‡p 0.05 compared to OI, ‡‡p 0.01 compared to OI.

N = represents the number of animals studied. Mean values (±SD) are shown. Significant differences (*, **, ‡, and ‡‡) are noted between mice with specific genotypes. Note that femur trabecular thickness (Tb·Th) and polar moment of inertia (pMOI) are significantly increased in OI + HBM compared to OI mice. Also note that OI + HBM mice have increased vertebral trabecular number (Tb·N) and Tb·Th compared to OI mice. No significant differences were detected between male OI + HBM and OI mice for quantitative histomorphometry measures of periosteal (Ps) and endochondrial (Ec) mineralizing surface/bone surface (MS/BS), mineral apposition rate (MAR) and bone formation rate (BFR).
characterizes tissue mineral content and is directly related to ash weight, in either cortical or trabecular bone (Table 2). There were significant differences in carbonate-to-phosphate peak area ratio, collagen cross-link intensity ratio and acid phosphate substitution intensity ratio in trabecular bone suggesting the \textit{Lrp5} HBM mutation alters the mineral lattice, crystal structure and collagen cross-links, at least in trabecular bone (Table 2).

4. Discussion/conclusions
4.1. The Col1a1+/Mov13 mouse models several features of human OI type I

Although adaptive changes in the shape of the long bones of growing \textit{Col1a1} +/\textit{Mov13} mice enable the bones to achieve comparable bone strength compared to WT mice, \textit{Col1a1} +/\textit{Mov13} mice still incorporate

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FTIRI data</th>
<th>OI (N = 6)</th>
<th>OI + HBM (N = 6)</th>
<th>p-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cortical bone</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral-to-matrix</td>
<td>8.2 (7.8–8.6)</td>
<td>7.9 (7.5–8.3)</td>
<td>0.256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbonate-to-phosphate</td>
<td>0.0047 (0.0045–0.0049)</td>
<td>0.0048 (0.0046–0.0051)</td>
<td>0.520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collagen cross-link intensity</td>
<td>4.4 (4.0–4.7)</td>
<td>4.1 (3.8–4.4)</td>
<td>0.520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral crystallinity intensity</td>
<td>1.22 (1.20–1.23)</td>
<td>1.24 (1.21–1.27)</td>
<td>0.179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acid phosphate substitution intensity</td>
<td>0.49 (0.48–0.51)</td>
<td>0.46 (0.43–0.49)</td>
<td>0.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trabecular bone</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral-to-matrix</td>
<td>7.2 (6.9–7.5)</td>
<td>6.8 (6.4–7.3)</td>
<td>0.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbonate-to-phosphate</td>
<td>0.0041 (0.0038–0.0041)</td>
<td>0.0045 (0.0043–0.0046)</td>
<td>0.009*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collagen cross-link intensity</td>
<td>4.6 (4.2–5.0)</td>
<td>4.1 (3.8–4.4)</td>
<td>0.034*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mineral crystallinity intensity</td>
<td>1.11 (1.09–1.31)</td>
<td>1.24 (1.22–1.27)</td>
<td>0.199</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acid phosphate substitution intensity</td>
<td>0.58 (0.54–0.62)</td>
<td>0.52 (0.50–0.54)</td>
<td>0.011*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( N \) = represents the number of mice studied. Mean values (95% confidence interval) are shown. Significant differences between mice were only observed in the trabecular bone compartment, and did not involve the mineral to matrix ratio.

* Indicates significance of \( p < 0.05 \).
less type I collagen in their mineralized tissue, have vertebra with lower trabecular BV/TV, and have long bones with lower post-yield deformation in 3-point (this study) and 4-point bending assays [18,26]. We observed that all mice with OI and an Lrp5 HBM allele had significant increases in femoral and trabecular BV/TV compared to mice with OI alone, and that male OI + HBM mice had significantly increased bone strength. However, the increase in bone strength we observed appears solely related to increased bone mass and/or adaptive changes in bone geometry, not bone quality since the post-yield displacement in OI + HBM mice was not affected. These data are consistent with studies examining the effects of enhanced Wnt signaling in other mouse models of OI, which revealed primarily increased bone formation rather than improved bone quality [13,14].

4.1.1. An Lrp5 HBM allele does not improve bone quality in mice with a Col1α1ΔMon15 allele

There was no significant difference in the mineral-to-matrix ratio of bones from mice with OI compared to those with both OI and an Lrp5 HBM allele by FTIRI, supporting the lack of improvement in bone quality seen by three-point bending. This poor bone quality is similar to what is seen in bones treated with bisphosphonates, the current standard of care for OI. However, bisphosphonates are anti-catabolic and thus do not induce bone formation [27]. The anabolic nature of enhanced Wnt signaling suggests these therapies could be particularly useful in patients with limited mobility who are unable to accrue bone mass through weight bearing.

4.2. Enhancing Wnt signaling may improve outcomes in patients with OI type I

Type I OI accounts for ~ 2/3 of all reported cases of OI [2,3]. Vertebral compression fractures are a common complication in patients with OI type 1 [3]. The significant increase in trabecular bone BV/TV we observed in the OI + HBM mouse could mean that fewer vertebral compression fractures will occur in patients with OI type 1 treated with agents that enhance Wnt signaling. Therefore, our data support the concept of enhancing Wnt signaling to increase bone mass and bone strength in patients with OI type 1. Further benefits in patients with OI will likely be achieved when strategies for improving bone quality, in addition to bone quantity, become clinically feasible.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the other members of their laboratories for technical support, Animal Resources at Children’s Hospital for assistance with DEXA analysis and mouse care. This work was supported by the following grants: Osteogenesis Imperfecta Foundation Michael Geisman Fellowship (CMJ), Pediatric Endocrinology Society Research Fellowship (CMJ), Howard Hughes Medical Institute Medical Research Fellows Program (MAS), NIH grants AR063813 (CMJ), AR53237 (AGR), and AR062326 (MLW) and Howard Hughes Medical Institute (MLW). At the time these studies were performed, none of the authors reported any financial or other conflicts of interest.

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