

Suppression of adriamycin resistance in osteosarcoma by blocking Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway

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Abstract. – **OBJECTIVE:** Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway plays a role in regulating cell proliferation and apoptosis, and is correlated with tumor onset, progression and drug resistance. B-cell lymphoma 2 (Bcl-2) is an anti-apoptotic factor inducing tumor cell drug resistance. Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway can modulate Bcl-2 expression. This study established a cell model of drug resistance using adriamycin (ADM) treatment. Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway was intervened to discuss its role in drug resistance of osteosarcoma cells.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: Expression of β -catenin and Bcl-2 was compared between U2OS and hFOB1.19 cells. ADM resistance cell line U2OS/ADM was established for comparing β -catenin and Bcl-2 expression. Cell counting kit-8 (CCK-8) assay was used to test cell proliferation, followed by flow cytometry for apoptotic rate under ADM concentration. U2OS/ADM cells were further treated with si- β -catenin and/or β -catenin inhibitor XAV939. β -catenin and Bcl-2 expression were measured, and cell proliferation, apoptosis were measured by CCK-8 and flow cytometry.

RESULTS: Comparing to hFOB1.19 cells, U2OS cells had significantly elevated β -catenin and Bcl-2 expression. U2OS/ADM cells had higher β -catenin and Bcl-2 expression than U2OS, plus lower ADM sensitivity and suppressed apoptotic rate. Transfection of si- β -catenin and XAV939 suppressed β -catenin and Bcl-2 expression, and significantly enhanced ADM sensitivity and ADM-induced apoptosis.

CONCLUSION: Up-regulation of β -catenin plays a role in promoting expression and downstream apoptotic factor Bcl-2, and in enhancing ADM resistance of osteosarcoma U2OS cells.

Keywords:

β -catenin, Bcl-2, Adriamycin, U2OS, Osteosarcoma.

Introduction

Osteosarcoma is one of the primary malignant bone tumors derived from mesenchymal cells

commonly in adolescents, with features including high malignancy, rapid disease progression and high mortality¹. There are a certain number of patients suffering from failure of treatment due to tumor metastasis or recurrence. Drug resistance (DR) is an important reason for treatment failure. Adriamycin (ADM) is a common chemotherapy drug for treating various tumors including osteosarcoma. With its wide application, drug resistance for osteosarcoma has become severe². Wnt/ β -catenin is a signal pathway with high conservation in evolution, and is widely involved in regulation of cell proliferation, apoptosis, differentiation and development. Abnormal activation of Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway plays a role in occurrence and progression of multiple tumors such as pulmonary carcinoma³, breast cancer⁴, and liver cancer⁵. Moreover, Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway is also correlated with mediation of osteoblast differentiation and bone formation^{6,7}. β -catenin is the core protein in Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway. Enhanced activity of Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway as induced by up-regulation of β -catenin is involved in occurrence of osteosarcoma⁸ and tumor progression or metastasis⁹. Previous studies showed that abnormal elevated activity of Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway is correlated with lower chemotherapy sensitivity of multiple tumors including colorectal carcinoma¹⁰, pancreatic cancer¹¹, oral cavity cancer¹² and glioma¹³. Multiple mechanisms participate in tumor cell drug resistance, including drug intake and metabolism, and excluding cell proliferation and apoptosis. Among those apoptosis escape and suppressed apoptosis are important mechanisms for tumor cell drug resistance. B-cell lymphoma 2 (Bcl-2) is an important anti-apoptotic factor in regulation of mitochondrial dependent apoptotic pathway¹⁴. Up-regulation of Bcl-2 can induce lower cell apoptosis and is closely correlated with acquire-

ment of drug resistance of tumor cells¹⁵. Various studies showed that the activation of Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway plays a role in up-regulating expression of anti-apoptotic factor Bcl-2 and suppressing cell apoptosis^{12,16}. This study established ADM resistant cell model by drug treatment, and intervened Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway in those cells to investigate the role of Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway in drug resistance of osteosarcoma cells.

Materials and Methods

Major Reagent and Materials

Human osteosarcoma cell line U2OS and normal human osteoblast cell line hFOB1.19 were purchased from Yuxin Biotech (Guangzhou, China). RPMI 1640 medium, Dulbecco's Modified Eagle Medium (DMEM)/F12 medium, fetal bovine serum (FBS), streptomycin-penicillin mixture and L-glutamine were purchased from Gibco (Grand Island, NY, USA). G418 was obtained from Amresco Inc. (Solon, OH, USA). Trizol and Lipofectamine 2000 were purchased from Invitrogen Life Technologies (Carlsbad, CA, USA). Reverse transcription reagent and SYBR Green dye were purchased from TaKaRa (Dalian, China). PCR primers were synthesized by Sango Co. Ltd. (Tokyo, Japan). Mouse anti-human β -catenin monoclonal antibody, β -catenin siRNA sequence and negative control (NC) sequence, were purchased from Santa Cruz Biotechnology (Santa Cruz, CA, USA). Mouse anti-human β -catenin and β -actin polyclonal antibody were purchased from Active Motif (Saranac Lake, NY, USA). HRP labeled secondary antibody was purchased from Chengxin Biotechnology (Shanghai, China). ADM was purchased from Hengrui Pharma (Shanghai, China). Counting kit-8 (CCK-8) reagent was obtained from Toyobo Co. Ltd. (Osaka, Japan). Annexin V-FITC/PI cell apoptosis assay kit was purchased from BD Biosciences (San Jose, CA, USA). β -catenin inhibitor XAV939 was obtained from Selleck Chemicals (Houston, TX, USA).

Cell Culture

U2OS and hFOB1.19 cells were kept in RPMI 1640 medium containing 10% FBS and 1% streptomycin, in an incubator with 5% CO₂ at 37°C. After paving all dishes, cells were passed at 1:4 ratio. hFOB1.19 cells were kept in DMEM/F12 medium

containing 10% FBS, 2.5 mM L-glutamine and 0.3 mg/ml G418, and in an incubator with 5% CO₂ at 34°C. After paving all dishes, cells were passed at 1:4 ratio.

Induction of U2OS/ADM Resistant Cell Line

U2OS cells were treated with 0.2 μ M ADM as the starting concentration. 24 h later, ADM was washed out, for changing fresh medium. When cells status returned to normal, ADM drug concentration gradually increased to 2.0 mg/ml. Those cells that can normally grow in 2.0 μ M ADM were named as U2OS/ADM.

Assay for Drug Sensitivity

U2OS and U2OS/ADM cells were treated for 48 h with different concentrations of ADM. CCK-8 reagent was then added to observe absorbance values at 450 nm (A₄₅₀) of each well. Inhibition rate (%) = $1 - \frac{A_{450}(\text{drug treatment group})}{A_{450}(\text{control group})} \times 100\%$. IC₅₀ value was calculated as the drug concentration required for 50% cell growth. Resistance index (RI) = IC₅₀ of drug resistant cells / IC₅₀ of home-type cells.

siRNA Treatment and Grouping

In vitro cultured U2OS/ADM cells were divided into three groups: si-NC transfection group; si- β -catenin group; and si- β -catenin + XAV939 treatment group. 72 hours after transfection, cells were collected for assay. Sequences were: si- β -catenin sense, 5'-CAGGG GGUUG UGGUU AAGCU CUUdTdT-3'; si- β -catenin anti-sense, 5'-AAGAG CUUAA CCACA ACCCC CUGdTdT-3'; si-NC sense, 5'-UUCUC CGAAC GUGUC ACGUdTdT-3'; si-NC anti-sense, 5'-ACGUG ACACG UUCGG AGAAAdTdT-3'.

Quantitative Real-time PCR (RT-PCR) for Gene Expression

PrimeScript RT reagent kit was used to synthesize cDNA by reverse transcription using RNA extracted by Trizol method as the template. Using cDNA as the template, PCR was performed with TaqDNA polymerase. In a 10 μ l PCR reaction system, 5.0 μ l 2 \times SYBR Green RT-PCR Master Mix, 0.5 μ l of forward/reverse primers, 1 μ l Template RNA and ddH₂O, were added. PCR conditions were: 95°C for 5 min pre-denature, followed by 40 cycles each containing 95°C 15 s denature, 58°C 30 s annealing and 72°C 30 s elongation. PCR was performed on ABI ViiA 7 fluores-

cent quantitative PCR cycler. Primer sequences used were: β -catenin_F: 5'-AGGAC CACCG CATCT CTACA T-3'; β -catenin_R: 5'-GCAGT TTTGT CAGTT CAGGG A-3'; Bcl-2_F: 5'-GGT-GG GGTCA TGTGT GTGG-3'; Bcl-2_R: 5'-CG-GTT CAGGT ACTCA GTCAT CC-3'; β -actin_F: 5'-GAACC CTAAG GCCAA C-3'; β -actin_R: 5'-TGTC ACGCAC GATTT CC-3'.

Western Blot

Cells were collected and extracted for proteins using sodium lauryl sulfate (SDS) lysis buffer. After testing for quality and concentration, 40 μ g samples were loaded and separated in 10% sodium lauryl sulfate polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE). Proteins were then transferred to membrane, which was blocked in 5% defatted milk powder under room temperature incubation. Primary antibody (β -catenin at 1:300, Bcl-2 at 1:200, β -actin at 1:500) was added for 4°C overnight incubation. After phosphate-buffered saline tween-20 (PBST) rinsing, horse radish peroxidase (HRP) labeled secondary antibody (1:10000 dilution) was added for 1 h incubation. The membrane was rinsed in PBST and developed by enhanced chemiluminescence (ECL) method. After exposure and fixation, the image was scanned and saved for data.

CCK-8 Assay for Cell Proliferation Activity

All cells were collected, digested, and seeded into 96-well plate, which was incubated for 24, 48 or 72 h. 10 μ l CCK-8 was added during continuous incubation. Absorbance values at 450 nm (A450) were measured. Relative proliferation

activity = (A450 of treated cells – A450 of blank group) / (A450 of control group – A450 of blank group) * 100%.

Cell Apoptosis Assay

Cells were digested in trypsin and were collected. After re-suspension in Binding Buffer, 5 μ l Annexin V-FITC and 5 μ l PI were serially added. Beckman Coulter Gallios flow cytometer was used to test cell apoptosis.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS 18.0 (SPSS Inc., Cary, NC, USA) was used for statistical analysis. Data is presented as mean \pm standard deviation (SD). Comparison of measurement between groups was performed by student's t-test. Statistical significance was defined when $p < 0.05$.

Results

Elevated β -catenin and Bcl-2 Expression in Potent Proliferation Ability in U2OS Cells

qRT-PCR results showed that, compared to hFOB1.19 cells, U2OS cells had significantly elevated β -catenin and Bcl-2 mRNA levels (Figure 1A). Western blot results also showed significantly higher β -catenin and Bcl-2 protein levels in U2OS cells compared to hFOB1.19 cells (Figure 1B). CCK-8 assay showed significantly potentiated proliferation potency of U2OS cells than hFOB1.19 cells (Figure 1C). These results showed possible correlation between β -catenin up-regulation and osteosarcoma occurrence.

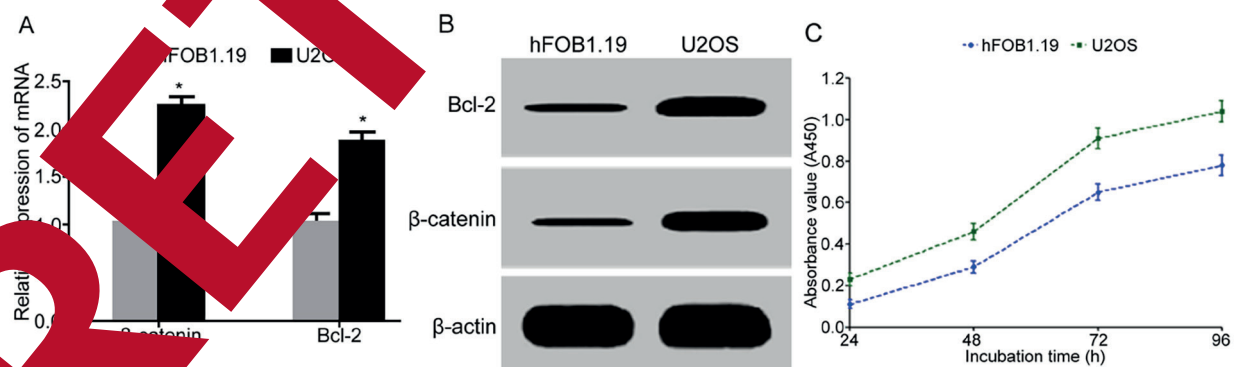


Figure 1. Elevated β -catenin and Bcl-2 expression with potent proliferation ability in U2OS cells. **(A)** qRT-PCR for gene expression; **(B)** Western Blot for protein expression; **(C)** CCK-8 assay for cell proliferation activity. *, $p < 0.05$ comparing between U2OS cells and hFOB1.19 cells. Bcl-2: B-cell lymphoma 2; CCK-8: cell counting kit-8; qRT-PCR : quantitative Real-time PCR.

Correlation between β -catenin and Bcl-2 up-regulation with U2OS Cell Drug Resistance

CCK-8 assay showed significantly lower proliferation activity of U2OS cells under various concentrations of ADM compared to U2OS/ADM cells (Figure 2A). IC₅₀ of U2OS cells was 0.157 mg/l, whilst U2OS/ADM cells had IC₅₀ value at 4.282 mg/l. U2OS/ADM cells had RI₅₀ of 27.27 compared to parental U2OS cells. Under treatment by 0.157 mg/l ADM, U2OS cells had significantly higher apoptotic rate than U2OS/ADM cells (Figure 2B). qRT-PCR results showed significantly elevated expression of β -catenin and Bcl-2 mRNA in U2OS/ADM cells compared to

U2OS cells (Figure 2C). Western blot results showed significantly higher β -catenin and Bcl-2 protein expression in U2OS/ADM cells compared to U2OS cells (Figure 2D).

Suppression of β -catenin Expression Enhanced ADM Sensitivity of U2OS/ADM Cells

Setting ADM concentration at 2.0 mg/l, we observed change of ADM resistance of U2OS/ADM cells after inhibition of β -catenin expression. Results showed that after enhancing β -catenin expression, U2OS/ADM cells had increased Bcl-2 expression (Figure 3A). Under 2.0 mg/l ADM, U2OS/ADM cells had weakened proliferation

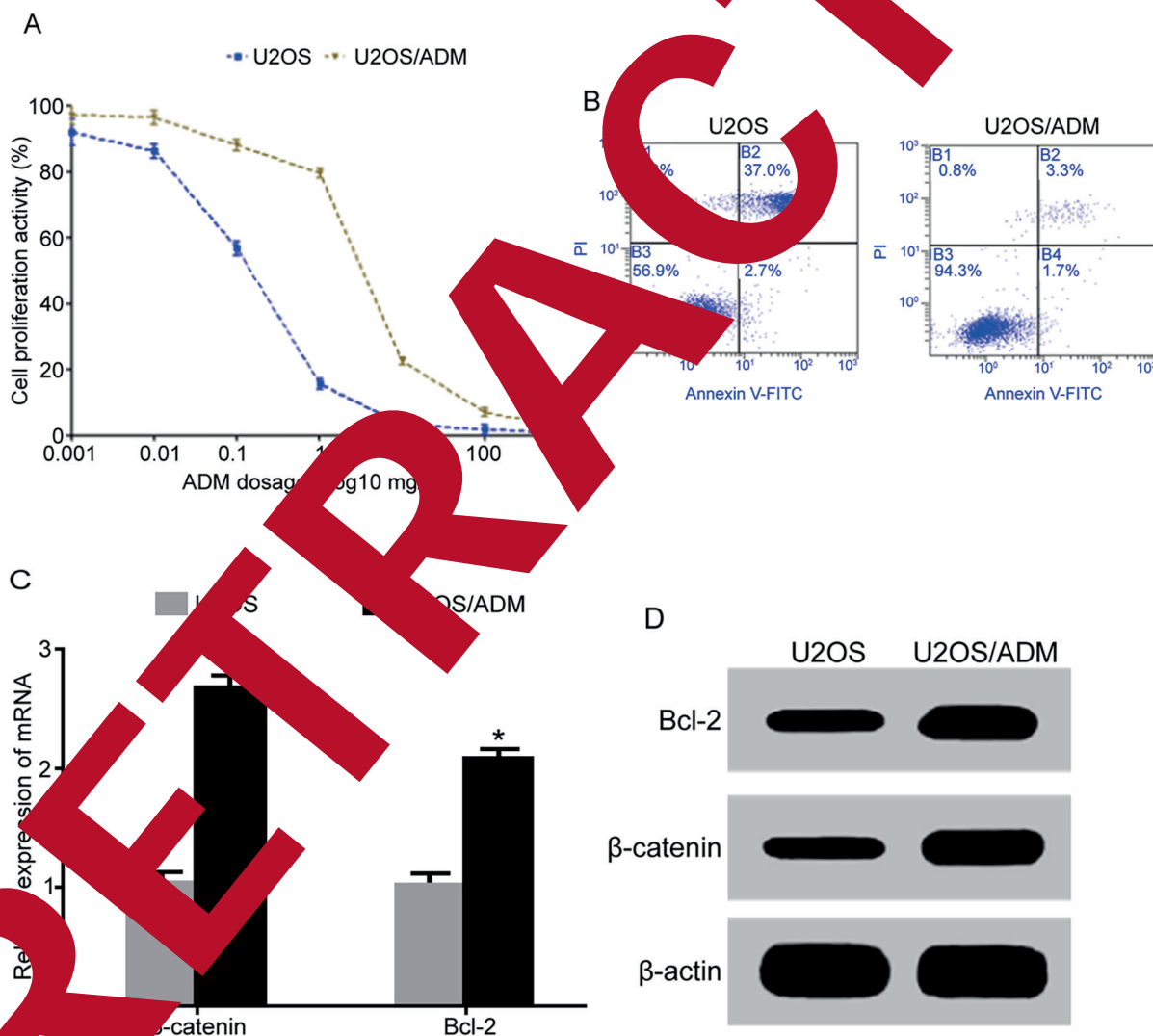


Figure 2. Correlation between β -catenin and Bcl-2 up-regulation with U2OS cell drug resistance. (A) CCK-8 assay for cell proliferation activity; (B) Flow cytometry for cell apoptosis; (C) qRT-PCR for gene expression; (D) Western Blot for protein expression. *, $p < 0.05$ comparing between U2OS cells and hFOB1.19 cells. Bcl-2: B-cell lymphoma 2; CCK-8: cell counting kit-8; qRT-PCR: quantitative Real-time PCR.

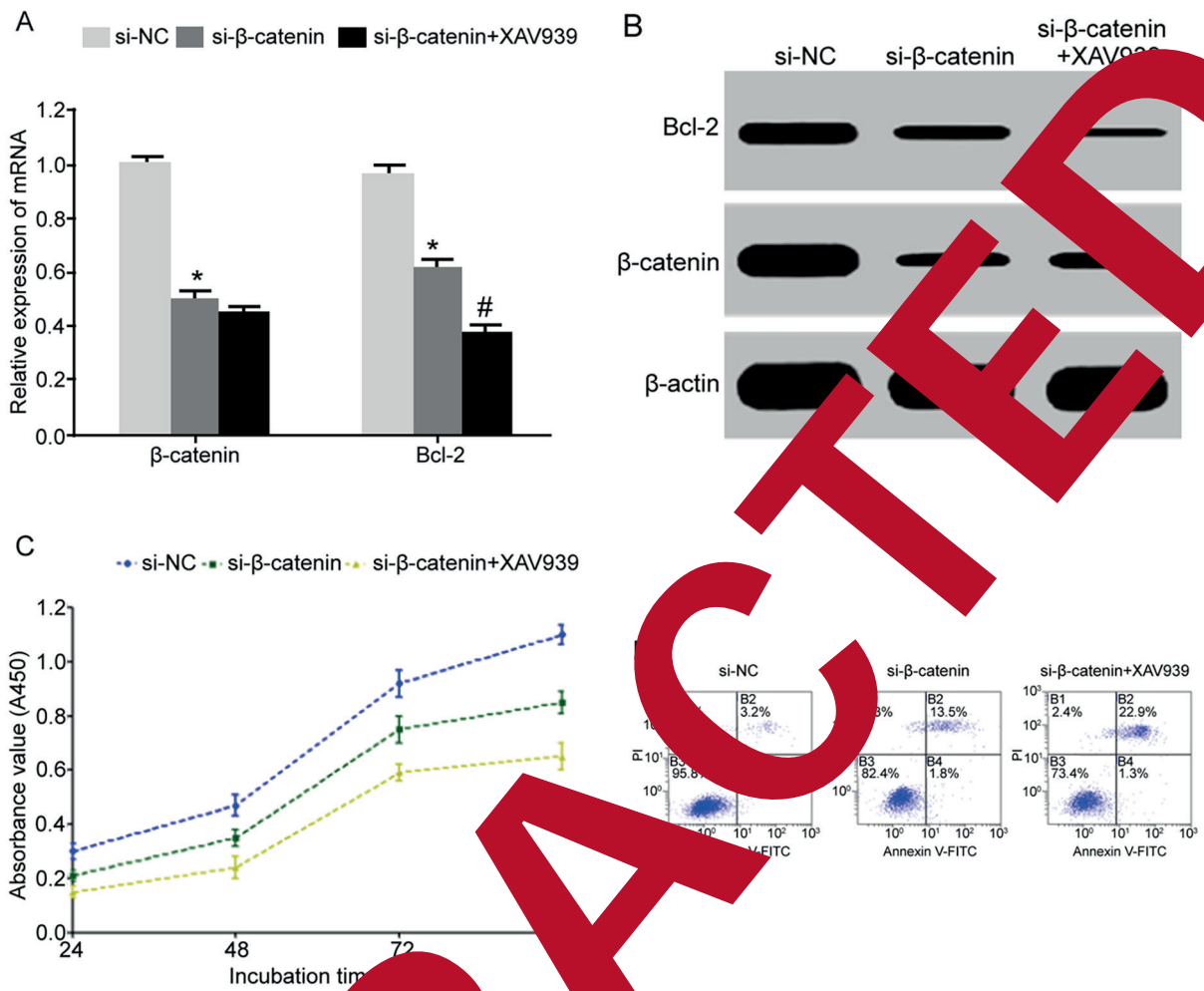


Figure 3. Suppression of β -catenin expression enhanced ADM sensitivity of U2OS/ADM cells. **(A)** qRT-PCR for gene expression; **(B)** Western Blot for protein expression; **(C)** CCK-8 assay for cell proliferation activity; **(D)** Flow cytometry for cell apoptosis. *, $p < 0.05$ comparing between si- β -catenin and si-NC group; #, $p < 0.05$ comparing between si- β -catenin + XAV939 and si- β -catenin group. ADM: adriamycin; FITC: fluorescein isothiocyanate; qRT-PCR: quantitative Real-time PCR; CCK-8: cell counting kit-8; ADM: adriamycin; qRT-PCR: quantitative Real-time PCR.

potency (Figure 2C). ADM significantly enhanced cell apoptosis (Figure 2D) after silencing β -catenin expression, β -catenin inhibitor XAV939 was further added to suppress Bcl-2 activity (Figure 3A and 3B). Those cells had more apoptosis after ADM induction and more potent inhibitory effects on proliferation (Figure 3C).

Discussion

Wnt signal pathway is a highly conserved signaling pathway in evolution, and consists of canonical and non-canonical signal pathway. Canonical Wnt signal pathway is closely correlated with tumor onset, progression and metastasis, and is the most widely studied signal pathway

so far¹⁷. β -catenin protein is firstly identified as cell adhesion protein molecule. Expression level of β -catenin largely determines Wnt/ β -catenin signal activity, and is the core regulatory factor in canonical Wnt signal pathway¹⁸. Without signal stimuli, Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway is at test phase, and β -catenin can be degraded to keep relatively lower cytoplasmic level¹⁹. When Wnt signal pathway is activated, Wnt protein can pass the signal to degradation complex via a series of downstream proteins, impeding degradation complex function and phosphorylated degradation of β -catenin, therefore elevating its cytoplasmic expression. β -catenin further enters into cell nucleus, where it can form transcription complex with T-cell factor/lymphoid enhancing factor (TCF/LEF) to initiate transcription and

expression of multiple downstream target genes, thus modulating cell growth, proliferation, apoptosis, differentiation and invasion²⁰. Bcl-2 protein family can be classified into anti-apoptotic factors and pro-apoptotic factors based on differential functions. B-cell lymphoma 2 (Bcl-2) is the most important and widely studied in Bcl-2 family, and can inhibit mitochondrial dependent cell apoptosis pathway¹⁴. Previous studies have shown important regulatory functions of Bcl-2 induced cell apoptosis in acquirement of drug resistance in cervical cancer²¹, gastric carcinoma²² and pulmonary cancer²³. Multiple researches showed the role of Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway activation in up-regulating anti-apoptotic factor Bcl-2 expression and decreasing cell apoptosis^{12,16}. This study generated an ADM-resistant cell model by drug treatment, and intervened Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway activity, to investigate its role in drug resistance of osteosarcoma cells. Results of this study showed that compared to normal human osteoblast cells hFOB1.19, osteosarcoma cells U2OS showed significantly elevated β -catenin mRNA and protein expression. Bao et al²⁴ showed significantly elevated β -catenin expression in tumor tissues of osteosarcoma cells, and its close correlation with distal metastasis and histo-pathology grading. β -catenin expression level can also work as a predictive index of patient's survival and prognosis. Lu et al²⁵ also showed abnormally elevated β -catenin expression in osteosarcoma tissues, and its close correlation with distal metastasis, clinical stage, and patient's survival or prognosis. In this study, osteosarcoma cells had abnormally elevated β -catenin expression, indicating the role of β -catenin up-regulation in pathogenesis mechanism of osteosarcoma, as similar with Bao et al²⁴ and Lu et al²⁵ who revealed the correlation between β -catenin up-regulation and osteosarcoma occurrence. Moreover, this study also showed significantly higher Bcl-2 expression in osteosarcoma U2OS cells than that in hFOB1.19 cells, as consistent with β -catenin expression pattern. These results indicated the role of β -catenin up-regulation in enhancing Bcl-2 expression. In addition, this study revealed the role of β -catenin up-regulation in increasing anti-apoptotic factor Bcl-2 expression and inhibiting osteosarcoma MG63 cell apoptosis, as consistent with our observation showing elevation of both β -catenin and Bcl-2 in osteosarcoma cells. In a comparison between parental cells and drug resistant cells, we found significantly higher β -catenin and Bcl-2 expression in U2OS/ADM cells com-

pared to their parent drug sensitive cells U2OS. Under IC₅₀ concentration of ADM, apoptotic rate of U2OS was significantly higher than that of U2OS/ADM, but with minor effects on apoptosis of U2OS/ADM cells. Results showed the correlation between β -catenin and Bcl-2 up-regulation with not only osteosarcoma pathogenesis, but also drug resistance of osteosarcoma cells. Martins-Neves et al²⁷ showed that chemotherapy drug treatment significantly enhanced transduction activity of Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway in osteosarcoma cells MNNG-HOS, and up-regulated expression of drug resistant protein P-gp, thus making chemotherapy failure, and enhanced expression of stem transcription factor insulin-like growth factor 1 to endow their features of cancer stem cells. In this study, chemotherapy reagent treatment further elevated β -catenin expression in osteosarcoma cells, as consistent with Martins-Neves et al²⁷. Further results showed that, after suppression of β -catenin expression by siRNA, drug resistant cells U2OS/ADM showed significantly lower Bcl-2 expression and weakened proliferation ability, plus enhanced sensitivity for ADM-induced cell apoptosis. The combination of β -catenin inhibitor XAV939 treatment further suppressed Bcl-2 expression and weakened proliferation ability of U2OS/ADM cells, and enhanced apoptosis. These results showed that long-term of ADM treatment up-regulated expression of β -catenin and downstream anti-apoptotic factor Bcl-2 in osteosarcoma cells, thus enhancing ADM resistance of cells. On the other hand, inhibition of β -catenin expression or activity can somehow weaken ADM resistance of osteosarcoma cells. Zhang et al²⁸ showed that inhibition of β -catenin expression significantly weakened malignant biological features of sarcoma MG63 cells including migration and motility. Ma et al²⁹ showed the correlation between β -catenin up-regulation plus enhanced activity of Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway and potentiated proliferation and invasion potency of osteosarcoma cells. The inhibition of Wnt/ β -catenin signal pathway activity or β -catenin expression could weaken proliferation or invasion potency of osteosarcoma cells. Liu et al³⁰ found that interference of β -catenin expression by siRNA significantly suppressed proliferation or migration of osteosarcoma U2OS and MG63 cells. Xu et al²⁶ found that after inhibition of β -catenin expression or activity using Polydatin, osteosarcoma MG63 cells showed significantly increased apoptosis. Li et al³¹ showed that over-expression of metalloprotease TIKI2 for suppressing Wnt/ β -catenin

activity played an important role in inhibiting osteosarcoma cell proliferation, clonal formation or migration. Martins-Neves et al²⁷ found that the inhibition of β -catenin expression or activity significantly weakened acquirement of stem property of MNNG-HOS cells after chemotherapy, or their transformation towards tumor stem cells with lower drug sensitivity. This study supported Martins-Neves et al²⁷ results from another perspective. Li et al¹² also showed the role of β -catenin over-expression in enhancing Bcl-2 expression and enhancing chemotherapy drug resistance of tumor cells. This study revealed the role of β -catenin in down-regulating Bcl-2 expression and weakening chemotherapy resistance of tumor cells, further supporting Li et al¹² study.

Conclusions

Up-regulation of β -catenin plays a role in enhancing expression of downstream anti-apoptotic factor Bcl-2, potentiating ADM resistance of osteosarcoma U2OS cells.

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Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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