Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA
Vol. 93, pp. 11179–11184, October 1996
Neurobiology

Structural recovery in lesioned adult mammalian spinal cord by x-irradiation of the lesion site

(axotomized corticospinal neurons/corticospinal tract regeneration/cavitation)

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Communicated by Philip Siekevitz, The Rockefeller University, New York, NY, June 7, 1996 (received for review February 21, 1996)

ABSTRACT **Mechanical injury to the adult mammalian spinal cord results in permanent morphological disintegration including severance/laceration of brain-cord axons at the lesion site. We report here that some of the structural consequences of injury can be averted by altering the cellular components of the lesion site with x-irradiation. We observed that localized irradiation of the unilaterally transected adult rat spinal cord when delivered during a defined time-window (third week) postinjury prevented cavitation, enabled establishment of structural integrity, and resulted in regrowth of severed corticospinal axons through the lesion site and into the distal stump. In addition, we examined the natural course of degeneration and cavitation at the site of lesion with time after injury, noting that through the third week postinjury recovery processes are in progress and only at the fourth week do the destructive processes take over. Our data suggest that the adult mammalian spinal cord has innate mechanisms required for recovery from injury and that timed intervention in certain cellular events by x-irradiation prevents the onset of degeneration and thus enables structural regenerative processes to proceed unhindered. We postulate that a radiation-sensitive subgroup of cells triggers the delayed degenerative processes. The identity of these intrusive cells and the mechanisms for triggering tissue degeneration are still unknown.**

Mechanical injury to the adult mammalian spinal cord results in permanent disruption of the cord continuity and in morphological disintegration at the lesion site (1–3). This physical disruption and the apparent lack of structural recovery are due to the long-lasting degenerative processes that seem to be triggered around the site of lesion (3, 4). The cellular components that trigger these degenerative sequelae are still unknown.

Manipulation of the cellular environment by x-irradiation provides an excellent insight into the specific role of individual cell types within the tissue under normal and pathological conditions. X-irradiation has been used to determine patterns of cytogenesis and morphogenesis in developing mammalian central nervous system (CNS) (e.g., see refs. 5 and 6). A localized and timed x-irradiation during CNS morphogenesis also enabled the selective removal of the glia limitans and the demonstration of its role as a protective layer of the CNS from invading "foreign" cells (7).

We have used x-irradiation as a tool for selective removal of reactive cells generated in response to CNS injury, thus demonstrating that the pathological consequences in lesioned adult rat olfactory bulb can be averted (8). We found in the severed olfactory bulb that irradiation delivered within a defined time-window, 2–3 weeks postinjury (PI), substantially altered the cellular composition around the site of incision; formation of reactive astrocytes and concomitantly the degenerative structural consequences of injury were abolished, including the cavitation and death of the axotomized principal neurons which were prevented (8).

Here, our objective was to examine whether irradiation treatment, which elicited beneficial effects in the lesioned olfactory bulb (8), would facilitate in sectioned adult rat spinal cord recovery processes, specifically, the restitution of structural continuity and the regrowth of severed corticospinal (CS) axons into the distal stump. For this purpose, the lesion consisted of a complete transection of the left side (hemisection) extending always over into the right side of the spinal cord at low thoracic level (Fig. 1). This injury resulted in localized degeneration and cavitation around the site of incision and in complete severance of the left and right CS axonal tracts (9, 10). Analysis for recovery was performed exclusively on the left hemicord and on the left CS tract. Morphological recovery was determined by histological analysis of each of the lesion sites; this analysis was performed on serial longitudinal sections of the cords using the central canal as a natural marker delineating the border between the two sides (Fig. 1). Regeneration of the severed CS axons into the distal stump was examined by axonal dye transport—i.e., quantitatively by retrograde double-labeling of the CS neurons and qualitatively by anterograde tracing of the CS axons. In addition, we examined the natural course of degeneration and cavitation at the site of lesion with time after injury. Short accounts of this study have appeared in abstract forms (11–13).

METHODS

Injury. Adult Sprague–Dawley female rats (Charles River Breeding Laboratories), 3–6 months old, were anesthetized with 7% chloral hydrate injected i.p. (0.6 ml per 100 g of body weight), and with Stadol (butorphanol) injected s.c. (0.02 mg per 100 g of body weight). Under aseptic conditions, the spinal cord was exposed by laminectomy at vertebral level T12 and then by slitting the overlying menninges. The entire left hemicord at T12–T13 was transected, first with a microblade and then with microscissors, cutting also the lateral and ventral menninges but avoiding the posterior artery; the incision always extended half-way into the right side of the cord (Fig. 1). In certain experiments (as indicated), after cutting the cord the suture–loop procedure was performed. A loop was made with a suture around the cord tissue which remained intact, and the loop-enclosed tissue was cut with scissors. To create a loop around the tissue, the surgical microneedle attached to the suture #8-0 was threaded from left to right underneath the

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Abbreviations: CS, corticospinal; CNS, central nervous system; DL–CS, double-labeled CS; FB, fast blue; HRP, horse-radish peroxidase; PI, postinjury; diI, 1,1′-dioctadecyl-3,3,3′,3′-tetramethylindocarbocyanine perchlorate.

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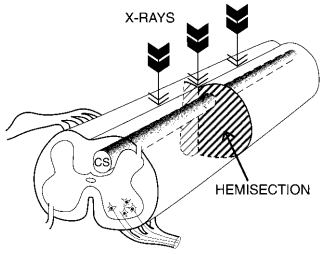

FIG. 1. Experimental paradigm. Approaching from the left, about ¾ of the cord was cut at T12–T13; therefore the left side of the cord was completely cut (hemisection). In the rat, the crossed CS tracts descend in the dorsal funiculus (9), and the CS tracts are completely crossed below midthoracic level (10). Thus, this hemisection severed the entire left CS tract. X-irradiation was centered around the lesion site. For histology, a piece of the cord containing the incision site was serially sectioned in a longitudinal plane.

dorsal artery and inserted into the center of the right side of the cord, then pushed straight down toward the bottom of the spinal cavity, and then laterally and up surrounding with the suture the entire left side and part of the right side of the cord. Upon completion of the injury, the site of incision was covered with a piece of Durafilm (Codman & Shurtleff, Randolph, MA) (14), and the cavity created due to the laminectomy was filled with Gelfoam (Upjohn). The overlying back muscles were sutured, the skin was closed with surgical wound clips, and the rat was given a s.c. injection of long-acting penicillin (300,000 units). When needed, bladders were expressed manually until their automatic function was resumed.

Radiation. Irradiation was delivered by an x-ray generator, a hybrid orthovoltage unit operating at 320 kVp, 10 mA with 0.5 mm Cu filtration, at a dose rate 149 cGy/min, at a distance of 50 cm from the skin. Treatment was delivered through a posterior approach (Fig. 1) while the rat is anaesthetized and shielded with lead except for the exposed treatment field, the dimensions of which were 25 mm × 20 mm (length × width).

Histology. Anaesthetized rats were perfused with a phosphate-buffered saline solution and then with a solution of 6% formaldehyde in phosphate-buffered saline (8). After removal from the vertebrae and the skull, appropriate tissue samples were further fixed and frozen (15). Frozen cord samples were cryostat-sectioned in a longitudinal plane; the serially collected sections were kept at −20°C until processed. For routine analysis cord sections (15–20 μm thick) were stained with thionin and examined by light microscope.

Retrograde Double-Labeling of CS Neurons. Two different dyes were applied at distinct times PI for the differential labeling in the motor cortex of axotomized and regenerated CS neurons. First, to label the axotomized CS neurons by retrograde axonal transport, we applied at the time of injury into the cut 1,1′-dioctadecyl-3,3,3′,3′-tetramethylindocarbocyanine perchlorate (diI) (red), which labels the plasma membrane (16) and is long lasting (17). Second, to label the CS neurons whose axons regenerated to a certain region distal to the initial cut, we applied after the recovery period into that region in the distal stump fast blue (FB) (blue), which labels the cytoplasm (18). Immediately following injury a pledget of Gelfoam soaked with 2.5 μl of 0.3% diI (Molecular Probes) suspension in 0.15 M NaCl and 2% Triton X-100 (17) was inserted into the site of lesion for 15–20 min. Two to 3 months after injury, the distal cord (L3–L5) was exposed by laminectomy. A 1% aqueous solution of FB (Sigma) was injected into the left hemicord, in 5–6 lateral spots, at a distance of 8–10 mm distal to the lesion site; a total of 1.5 μl FB was injected per spinal cord, and 4 days later the cord and brain were fixed and processed for analysis. Since in the rat the left CS tract is completely crossed below midthoracic level (10), the analysis to determine its regrowth was performed only in the right brain

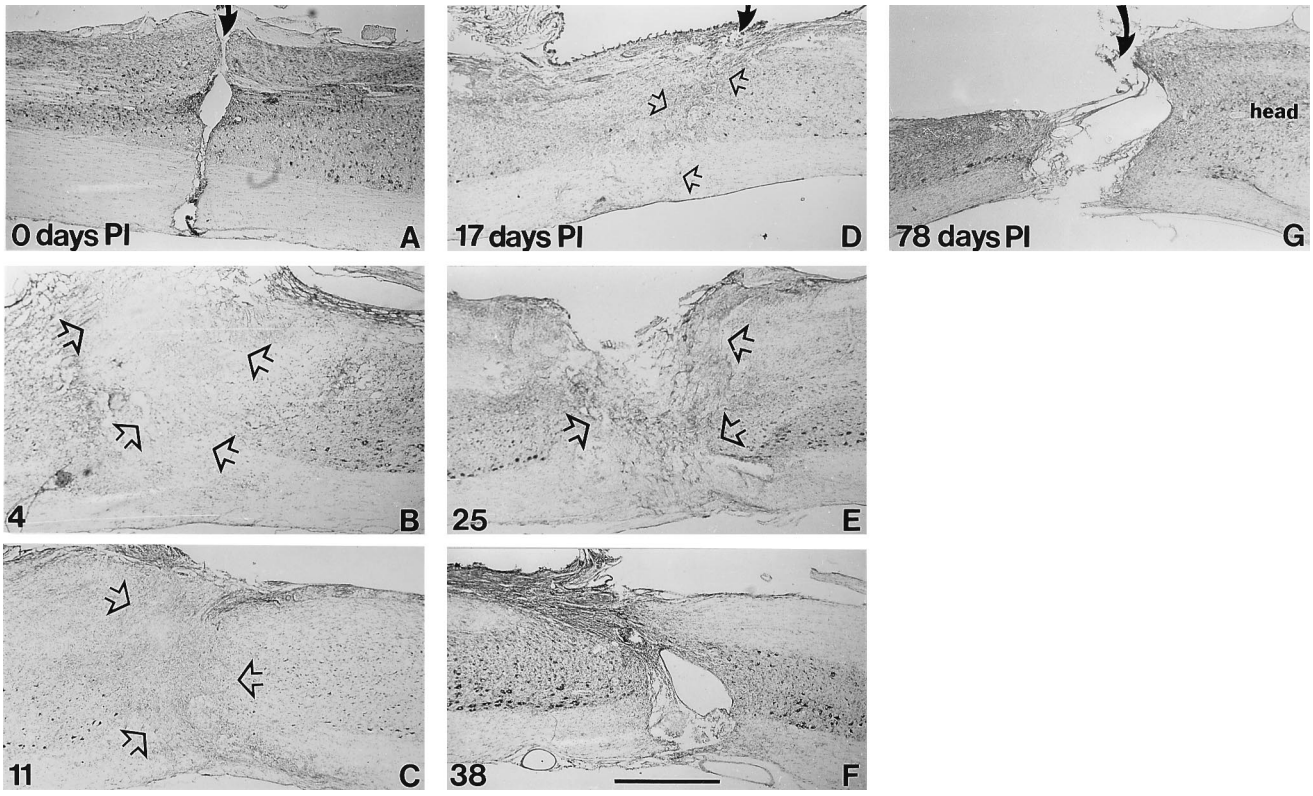

FIG. 2. Temporal consequences of transection—intrinsic morphological features at the site of incision of untreated cords (*A–G*) at days 0, 4, 11, 17, 25, 38, and 78 PI. Micrographs of thionin-stained sagittal sections through lesioned cords (taken at 0.75–0.9 mm from the lateral edge). Indicated are the site of incision (arrows) and the edges of the cord stumps (clear arrows). Note that by day 11 PI (*C*) the two stumps seem to be reconnected while the first signs of degeneration are detected by day 25 PI (*E*). (Bar = 1 mm.)

hemisphere. The right brain hemisphere was sagittally cryostat-sectioned (25 μm thick); sections were coverslipped with 50% glycerol in phosphate-buffered saline and examined with a Zeiss microscope equipped with epi-illumination optics with an exciter-barrier filter combination for fluorescent dyes.

Anterograde Labeling of CS Axons. The tracer, horse-radish peroxidase (HRP), was injected into the motor cortex; labeled CS axons were visualized in cord sections in regions around and distal to the cut. Two to 3 months PI, the dorsal surface of the right hemicortex of anaesthetized rats was exposed by a craniotomy. A total of 1.6 μl (per cortex) of 30% HRP (Boeringher Mannheim) was injected into 6–7 separate spots aligned parallel to the midline, from bregma anterior-posterior +1 to −4 mm, at 2 mm from the midline. Two days later rats were fixed and the cords were collected, frozen, and horizontally sectioned (30 μm thick). Animal fixation and processing of the slide-mounted sections for HRP histochemistry with tetramethyl benzidine as substrate were performed (19). HRP labeled axons were visualized under dark-field illumination microscopy. Since this method cannot distinguish between severed and intact axons, the cord injury in this experiment included the suture–loop procedure, which assures complete severing of the left CS tract.

RESULTS

The Critical Time-Window for Preventing Tissue Degeneration. The end result of transection of the spinal cord is a morphological disintegration at the lesion site and a large cavitation (Fig. 2*G*). Histological examination of the time course of the sequelae of lesion (Fig. 2) suggests that the onset of the degenerative processes occurs sometime at the end of the third week PI. Initially, a normal course of wound healing events was observed similar to that seen in most nonneural tissues. At the first few days PI, the two cord stumps appeared to be swollen and separated by a gap (Fig. 2*B*); then the gap vanished and the stumps appeared to be connected (Fig. 2*C*), and later, at days 17–19 PI, the cord seemed to be fused with very little signs of the initial cut (Fig. 2*D*). The decay processes were first noticeable during the fourth week PI as discrete sites of tissue disintegration (Fig. 2*E*); these presumably propagated at later periods (second month PI) resulting in two cord stumps separated by a large cavity (in the millimeter range) (Fig. 2 *F* and *G*). Innate structural recovery events during the second and third week PI similar to those described here were previously observed in a crushed rat spinal cord (20).

The effectiveness of the timing of radiation in preventing tissue degeneration in the lesioned spinal cord was examined in treated and untreated cords at 60 days PI. We selected a radiation dose and time points based on data obtained previously in the lesioned olfactory bulb (8). The lesioned cords were irradiated with a single dose of 10 Gy at the first, second, third, and fourth week PI (n = 24), and were compared with unirradiated lesioned cords (n = 8). Irradiation within this period (6–31 days PI) seemed to attenuate the decay process (Fig. 3), as the normally occurring cavitation (e.g., Fig. 2*F*) was not manifested as yet. Radiation was effective in preventing tissue degeneration when applied within the third week PI; its maximal effect was exerted when applied at days 17–18 PI (Fig. 3*B*). In this optimal range, degeneration was confined to a few small pockets and the gap between the cord stumps was minimal (a few cells' size). Radiation delivered either before (Fig. 3*A*) or beyond the third week PI (Fig. 3*C*) was ineffective in preventing the structural decay or in decreasing its size (in the millimeter range). In addition, we examined for gliosis in the above samples and found that timed irradiation reduced/eliminated reactive astrocytes in the lesioned cord in a similar manner to that found in the lesioned olfactory bulb (8)—i.e., optimal timing during the third week PI. Thus, it appears that the two periods, the period in which transient structural recovery is observed (Fig. 2*D*) and the period in which irradiation can prevent gliosis and tissue degeneration (Fig. 3*B*), are identical.

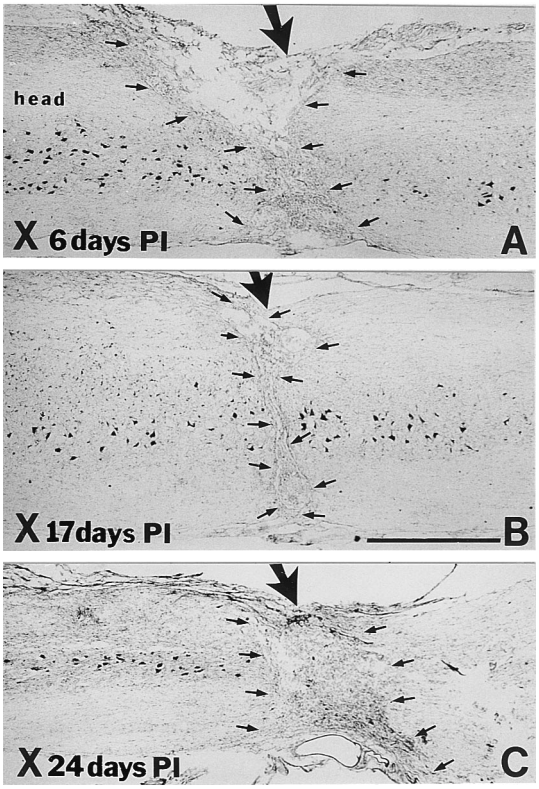

FIG. 3. The critical time-window for preventing tissue degeneration. Morphology of the lesion sites (arrow) in thionin-stained sagittal sections through three lesioned cords which were irradiated at days 6 (*A*), 17 (*B*), and 24 (*C*) PI. Tissue disintegration seen between the edges of the two stumps (small arrows) is extensive in the lesioned cords treated on days 6 and 24 PI; in contrast, it is minimal in the cord irradiated on day 17 PI. (Bar = 1 mm.)

Irradiation Restitutes Permanent Structural Continuity. We next examined the effectiveness of radiation in preventing the degenerative processes when delivered under optimal conditions. The lesioned cords were irradiated on days 17–18 PI with a single dose of 20 Gy, which is within the optimal dose range (17–23 Gy) for eliciting structural recovery in the olfactory bulb (8). In all treated cords (n = 31), degeneration and cavitation were prevented to a variable degree as compared with untreated cords (n = 26); in some (n = 4), a marked structural continuity was established as illustrated in Fig. 4. For comparison, in the control unirradiated lesioned cord a continuous cavity of up to 1 mm in width occupied most of the left hemicord (Fig. 4 *B–E* and *DD*). In contrast to the control, in the irradiated lesioned cord there was partial preservation of tissue morphology, cavitation was diminished (Fig. 4 *Ax–Ex* and *DDx*), and structural continuity was established. In this treated cord, within a large portion (40%) of its left side structural continuity was established (Fig. 4 *Bx–Ex*), and, as shown in the next section, about a third of its severed CS axons regrew back to their general projection field, 9 mm distal to the cut.

Regeneration of Severed CS Axons Beyond the Lesion Site. Following x-ray therapy of the lesion site, some of the severed CS axons regrew across the lesion site and into the distal stump as was determined using retrograde and anterograde axonal dye-transfer procedures. The degree of regrowth 8–10 mm past the lesion site of the severed CS axons in irradiated (n = 23) and control untreated (n = 8) rats was determined by the retrograde double-labeling procedure. Treated lesioned cords

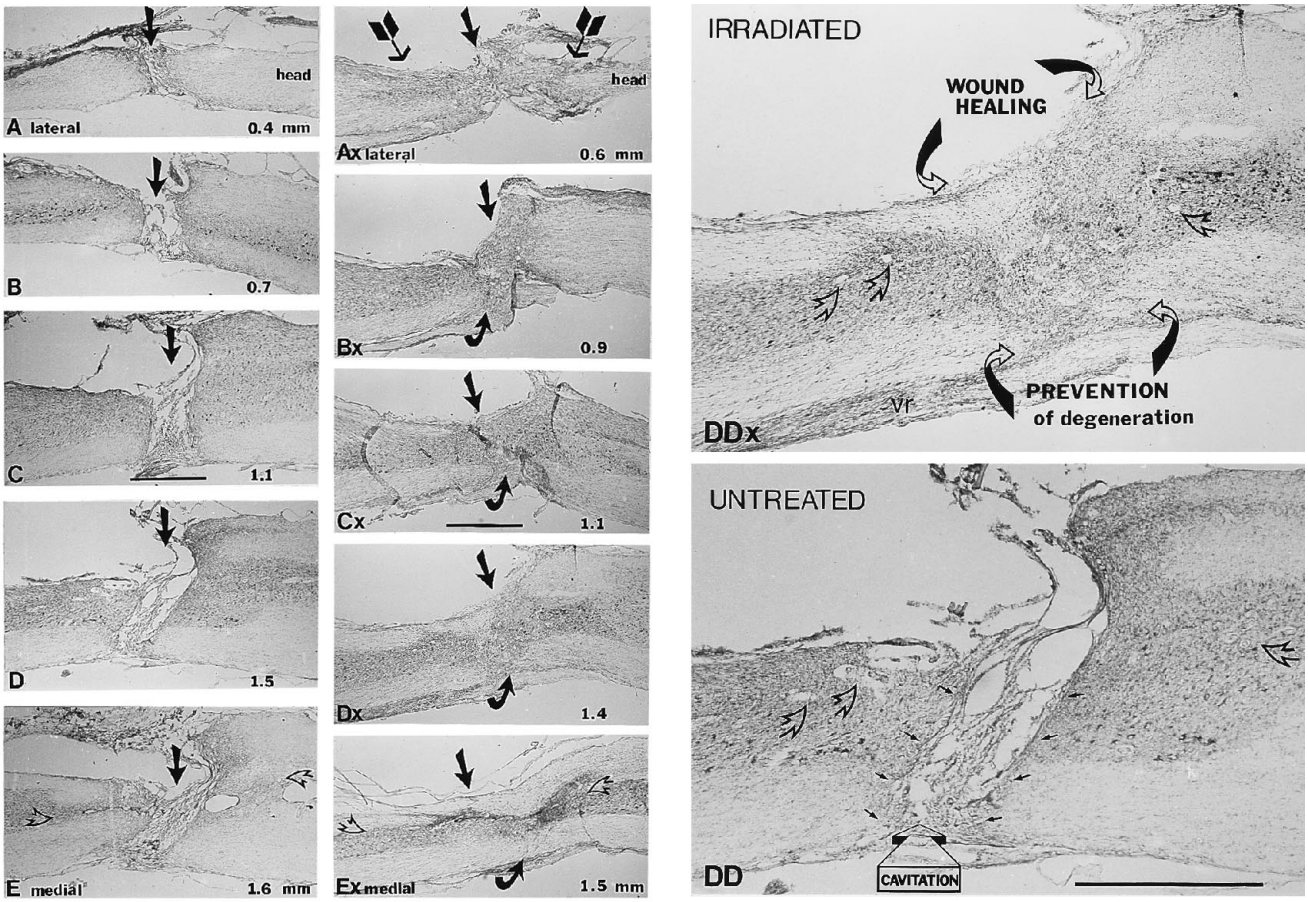

FIG. 4. Restitution of structural continuity. A serial reconstruction of the site of lesion of two transected hemicords, one untreated (*A–E*) and one irradiated 18 days PI (*Ax–Ex*) analyzed at 78 days PI and 86 days PI, respectively. (*A–E* and *Ax–Ex*). Composites of thionin-stained sagittal sections taken from regions situated at different distances (mm) from the lateral edge of each of the hemicords. (*DDx* and *DD*). High magnification micrographs of the lesion site in an irradiated and a control cord-sections seen in *Dx* and *D*, respectively. Indicated are entry (straight arrows) and exit (curved arrows) of incision, the central canal (clear arrowheads), and a ventral root (vr). In the untreated cord, the stumps with a scar tissue at their edges (small arrows) are separated by a cavity filled with extracellular matrix (*DD*); this cavity extends throughout the entire volume of the injured hemicord (*A–E*). In contrast, in the irradiated cord (tailed arrows) tissue decay was prevented and structural continuity was established (*DDx*) within a large portion of the lesioned hemicord (*Cx–Ex*). (Bars = 1 mm.)

received a single dose of either 15, 17.5, 18.5, or 20 Gy at 18 days PI; selection for treatment and type of treatment was randomized. The total number of double-labeled CS (DL–CS) neurons (Fig. 5 *A* and *B*) in the right cortex of each of the rats were counted, and the corresponding individual sums were plotted in Fig. 5*C*. (This counting was performed on alternate sections to avoid counting the same cell twice thus yielding approximately half the actual sum.) In addition, the total numbers of the CS neurons projecting normally to and/or passing the sites of application of the first (T12–T13) and second dye (L3–L5) were determined in normal intact rats by retrograde labeling; these sums are 1600 and 600, respectively, and are in good agreement with comparable numbers in the literature (21). The estimated values of the degree of recovery, i.e., degree of regrowth of the severed CS axons to L3–L5 region, were expressed as percentage of DL–CS out of 600.

A marked increase in the sums of DL–CS neurons was observed in a third of the rats irradiated with 17.5–20 Gy as compared with the control group (Fig. 5*C*), showing that these rats had ''good'' recovery values—i.e., 20–59% of the axotomized CS neurons regrew their axons back to their general target field. Very few DL–CS neurons (12 ± 10) were found in control rats whose lesioned cords were not irradiated; this amounts to a mean recovery value of 2 ± 1.67%, which statistically is not different from a zero recovery. Irradiation with 15 Gy did not result in a change in the number of DL–CS neurons (7 ± 6) or in mean recovery value (1.16 ± 1.05%) as compared with the control group. In contrast, in the 17 rats treated with 17.5–20 Gy statistical paired comparisons test for change in recovery values shows that this treatment resulted in effective recovery of the severed CS axons as compared with the control group; the group's mean difference in recovery values is 10.9 ± 4.8% (*t* test, $P < 0.01$). Further analysis of these rats shows that 8 of 17 did not have any recovery and that 7 of 17 had a mean recovery value of 27.6 ± 16.3% which is significantly ($P < 0.005$) different from the mean value in the control group. Finally, a correlation was found between axonal recovery as measured by the sums of DL–CS neurons and the restoration of structural continuity at site of incision. For example, the rats whose cords are seen in Fig. 4 were also analyzed for axonal regeneration; the irradiated rat (Fig. 4 *Ax–Ex*) had 205 DL–CS neurons (34.16% recovery) compared with only 22 DL–CS neurons found in the untreated rat (Fig. 4 *A–E*)—i.e., a 9.3-fold increase in the treated rat.

The following additional observations suggest that the first retrograde-labeling was specific due to axotomy, and that the second labeling was specific and due to regrowth of the severed axons into the distal stump and not due to diffusion of the dye. First, no cells were found within the cortex that were only labeled with the second dye. Secondly, the diI-labeled neurons in the motor cortex (e.g., Fig. 5*A*) were found to be restricted topologically within a longitudinal band whose location and size fits well with the reported topology of the CS neurons projecting to the lumbosacral cord (22, 23). This band was

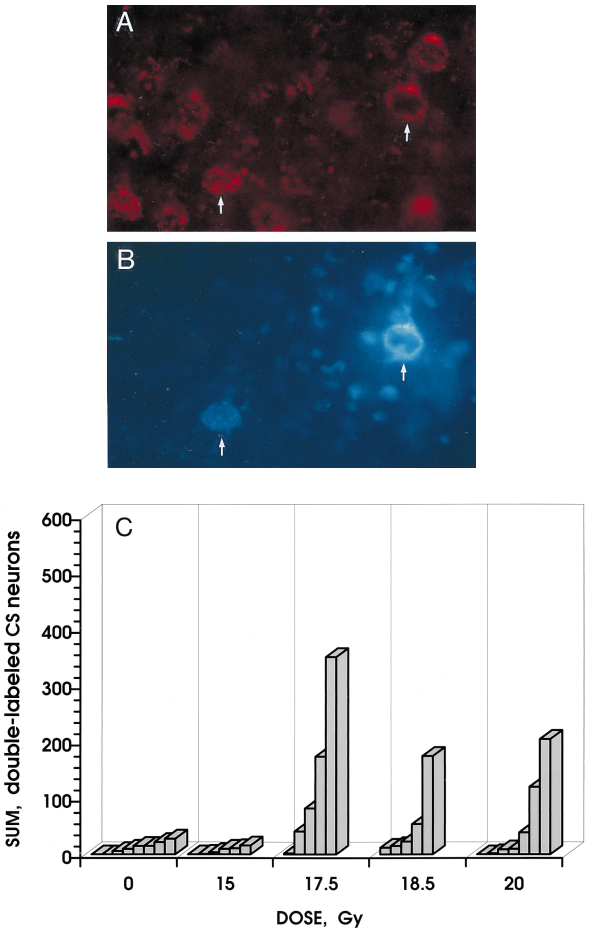

FIG. 5. Degree of recovery of axotomized CS neurons—retrograde double-labeling. Micrographs of a cortical section (*A* and *B*) taken from rat with lesioned and irradiated cord; this section was photographed for diI labeling (red) (*A*) and for FB labeling (blue) (*B*). Seen in this section are 11 diI-labeled CS cells (i.e., axotomized) (*A*) but only 2 of them (arrows) are double-labeled; these 2 cells (in *B*) are also labeled by FB (arrows) (i.e., regrown axons 10 mm into the distal stump). Note the FB-labeled dendrites surrounding the neuron on the right (*B*). (*C*) The individual sums of the DL–CS neurons in each of the rats (bars) with lesioned cords which were untreated ($n = 8$) and treated ($n = 23$) with different doses of x-rays are plotted. Our measured number of 600 CS neurons projecting normally to the application site of FB was used as the maximal expected sum of DL–CS neurons. Cord injury in the 18.5-Gy-treated group included also the suture–loop procedure, and two rats of the 15-Gy-treated group were analyzed at 41 days PI. Note the increase in the sums of DL–CS in the groups treated with 17.5–20 Gy.

≈2-2.2 mm wide and aligned in parallel to the midline at 0.8–1.0 mm from it. Furthermore, within this band a large portion of the DL–CS neurons (Fig. 5 *A* and *B*) were located caudally and closer to the midline, at sites projecting to the sacral cord (22). Finally, it was found in all cords that FB diffused up to 2 mm from its injection site—i.e., 6–8 mm away from the lesion site.

Data obtained with the axonal tracing method (Fig. 6) confirm and are consistent with those obtained with the neuronal labeling procedure. These data suggest that when structural continuity was established, the majority of the severed CS axons regenerated into the distal stump and terminated their regrowth at L1–L2 (lumbar enlargement), while only a small portion extended all the way to the sacral cord. The pattern and extent of regrowth of the severed CS axons beyond the lesion site were examined in irradiated ($n = 9$) and control ($n = 8$) lesioned cords 2–3 months PI. Radiation (20 Gy) was delivered at 17–18 days PI, and selection for

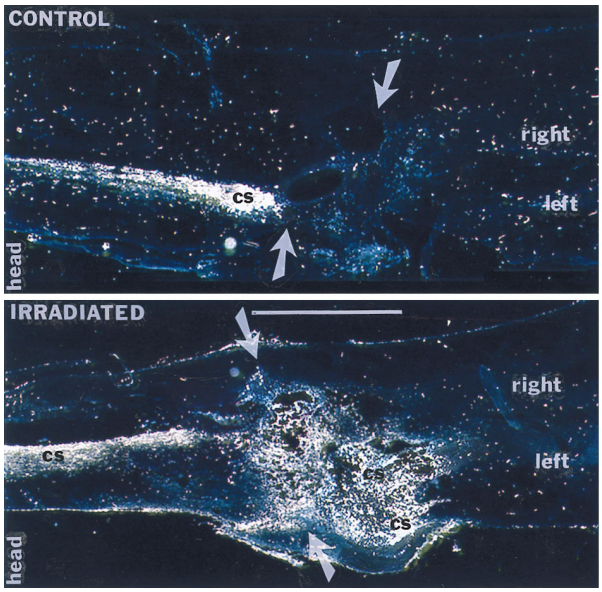

FIG. 6. The terrain of regrowth of severed CS tract. Dark-field micrographs of horizontal cord sections in which the HRP-labeled CS axons are depicted as bright-yellowish granular strings; however, due to the low-magnification, an individual axon cannot be discerned here (here, the tract contains ≈3000 axons). Sections were taken 90 days PI from an untreated cord (*Upper*) and an irradiated cord (*Lower*). Images were computer-generated by combining from different tissue sections the areas around the lesion site which contained high density of labeled axons. These areas were condensed into a single two-dimensional section, thus showing the majority of the severed CS axons and their terrain of regrowth. In both cords, anterior to the cut (arrows) only the left CS tract (cs) is labeled, seen as a white ribbon on a dark background. In the control cord (*Upper*) the CS axons did not cross the lesion site (arrows) and are found in front of the cavity. In the treated cord (*Lower*) structural continuity was established and the severed CS axons (cs) crossed the lesion site (arrows) and grew bilaterally ≈2.5 mm into the distal stump covering there an extensive area. (Bar = 2 mm.)

treatment was randomized. The severed CS axons regrew across the lesion site and extended into the distal portion of the cord (Fig. 6 *Lower*) in those irradiated lesioned cords in which a marked structural continuity was obtained ($n = 4$). It appears that a large portion of the severed CS axons crossed the lesion site and regrew for at least 2–3 mm deep into the distal stump; however, these were no longer confined to a discrete tract location (Fig. 6 *Lower*). The regenerated CS axons extended bilaterally into the white matter; they also grew into the grey matter and terminated there, and some reached distances of at least 12 mm distal to the cut (data not shown). In contrast to the irradiated cords, in the untreated lesioned cords the severed CS axons did not cross the lesion site and remained at the edge of the cavity anterior to the cut (Fig. 6 *Upper*).

In evaluating the potential beneficial effects of irradiation, one should bear in mind that the distortions in the pattern of axonal regrowth are due in part to the experimental conditions which were designed to assure severance leading to misalignment of the cord stumps. It is assumed that upon proper alignment of the cord stumps the severed axonal fibers will have a better opportunity to reinnervate their target fields. Further, the incidence of an "excellent" structural recovery as seen in Fig. 4 is ≈11.5% (7/61). It is assumed that enhancing the extent of structural recovery would be followed by an increase in incidence and degree of recovery of the severed CS tract. Preliminary data show that the variability in the degree of structural recovery is related in part to the closing of the wound. The incidence and degree of structural recovery are increased when the pressure on the tissue is reduced.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that irradiation can substantially alter the cellular response and sequelae after injury in lesioned adult mammalian spinal cord, and that this capacity is time-dependent. It shows that appropriate irradiation leads to restitution of structural continuity. Data described here and in an accompanying paper (24) suggest that prevention of tissue degeneration and establishment of structural continuity are a sufficient requirement for the severed CS axonal tracts to regrow, traverse the lesion site, extend deep into the distal stump, and reestablish synaptic connectivity with neurons within the target field in the distal cord stump.

Several conclusions can be inferred from the data presented here; some of these conclusions are also supported by observations published by us and others. First, the adult mammalian spinal cord appears to have innate mechanisms necessary for recovery from mechanical injury (1, 4, 20). Second, a distinctive feature of the spinal cord is the existence of a latent degenerative pathway which is triggered after recovery processes are already in progress. Third, this degenerative pathway can be suppressed by x-irradiation and the intrinsic recovery repertoire can proceed unhindered (8). Fourth, timing of the treatment after the injury is a most crucial factor in overcoming the degenerative process; in the rat, it is during the third week after injury.

The phenomena of initial regeneration and delayed degeneration were described by Ramón y Cajal as abortive regeneration (1). He noted that at first there is a constructive process in the severed fiber tracts of injured spinal cord, and that the degenerative response in the regrowing axons is triggered only by the third week after injury. A similar time-course on the molecular level was observed in axotomized rubrospinal neurons in which mRNA levels of proteins required for axonal regrowth were elevated during the first week and were reduced only by the second week after axotomy (25). Presumably, axonal regeneration is halted by the ensuing tissue degeneration.

The cellular events that trigger tissue degeneration and cavitation in injured CNS are still unknown, even though it has been known for almost a century that these are related to the degree of damage caused to the vascular system—i.e., cavitation is minimal when the cut is in parallel to the blood vessels (1). Our observations that the degenerative response can be permanently prevented by timed irradiation imply that cells that are eradicated by irradiation are those which trigger the degenerative pathway. Our data in the olfactory bulb (8) and here show a correlation between the prevention of degeneration and of cavitation and the elimination/prevention of gliosis. These suggest that glial scarring may play a primary role in initiation of the degenerative responses—e.g., by preventing appropriate revascularization (26) it would be inducing necrosis. At present our study does not identify which of the cell types—e.g., microglia/macrophages, astrocytes—are directly affected by the irradiation or which of these are involved in initiating tissue degeneration. Regardless of the mechanism, our findings provide sufficient grounds for developing x-irradiation into a posttraumatic therapeutic procedure for facilitating the innate constructive processes in injured spinal cord.

This paper is dedicated to the late Alex Mauro whose scientific enthusiasm, intellectual support, and unfailing encouragement provided the only resources to pursue this research. N.K. is indebted and grateful to Joshua Lederberg, Jerome Posner, and Torsten Wiesel for devoting their time to helpful and critical discussions of the data and experimental design during the course of this study. We are thankful to Jim Palmer who participated in the early phases of the study for excellent technical assistant, and to Mimi Halpern and Patricia Wade for their comments and suggestions in reading earlier versions of the paper.

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