Insights into the genetic architecture of osteoarthritis from stage 1 of the arcOGEN study


ABSTRACT

Objectives The genetic aetiology of osteoarthritis has not yet been elucidated. To enable a well-powered genome-wide association study (GWAS) for osteoarthritis, the authors have formed the arcOGEN Consortium, a UK-wide collaborative effort aiming to scan genome-wide over 7500 osteoarthritis cases in a two-stage genome-wide association scan. Here the authors report the findings of the stage 1 interim analysis.

Methods The authors have performed a genome-wide association scan for knee and hip osteoarthritis in 3177 cases and 4894 population-based controls from the UK. Replication of promising signals was carried out in silico in five further scans (44499 individuals), and de novo in 14534 independent samples, all of European descent. Results None of the association signals the authors identified reach genome-wide levels of statistical significance, therefore stressing the need for corroboration in sample sets of a larger size. Application of analytical approaches to examine the allelic architecture of disease to the stage 1 genome-wide association scan data suggests that osteoarthritis is a highly polygenic disease with multiple risk variants conferring small effects.

Conclusions Identifying loci conferring susceptibility to osteoarthritis will require large-scale sample sizes and well-defined phenotypes to minimise heterogeneity.

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis affecting 40% of people over the age of 70 years, and is associated with a substantial health economic burden. Osteoarthritis is thought to be caused by a complex interplay between environmental and genetic factors. As with many common complex disorders, the genetic architecture of osteoarthritis has not yet been characterised. Over the past decade, candidate gene association studies and genome-wide linkage scans have failed to identify robustly replicating osteoarthritis loci, with the notable exception of rs143383 in the GDF5 gene. A genome-wide association study (GWAS) recently reported a single novel locus associated with radiographically defined knee and/or hand osteoarthritis on chromosome 7q22 (rs3815148 in the COG5 gene), subsequently corroborated by a genome-wide association scan across four studies including the discovery set. Both established that osteoarthritis loci are represented by common variants (>0.2 minor-allele frequency), have small effect sizes (allelic OR ~1.15), and reach genome-wide significance (p<5×10⁻⁸). These associations have characteristics typical of common complex traits and require large sample sizes for their detection. To enable a well-powered GWAS for osteoarthritis, we formed the arcOGEN Consortium, a UK-wide collaborative effort aiming to scan genome-wide over 7500 osteoarthritis cases in a two-stage genome-wide association scan. Here we report the findings of our GWAS stage 1 analysis and replication studies, and describe the outcomes of statistical analyses designed to model the genetic architecture of osteoarthritis.

METHODS

An expanded description of the methods is provided in supplementary methods (available online only). The stage 1 genome-wide association scan included 3177 knee and/or hip osteoarthritis cases from the UK ascertained based on radiographic evidence of disease (Kellgren–Lawrence grade ≥2), or clinical evidence of disease to a level requiring joint replacement. Cases were genotyped using the Illumina Human610 platform (Illumina, San Diego, California, USA). We used 4894 early-access publicly available materials and methods, results and figures and tables are published online only. To view these files please visit the journal online at (http://ard.bmj.com).

For numbered affiliations see end of article

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Correspondence to
Dr J Loughlin, Newcastle University, Institute of Cellular Medicine, 4th Floor Catherine Cookson Building, Newcastle University, Medical School, Framlington Place, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4HH, UK; john.loughlin@ncl.ac.uk and E Zeggini, Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, The Morgan Building, Wellcome Trust Genome Campus, Cambridge CB10 1HH, UK; eleftheria@sanger.ac.uk

KP, LS, EZ and JL contributed equally to the study.

Accepted 11 November 2010
Published Online First 21 December 2010

http://ard.bmj.com/online-only-supplementary-materials-available/

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The genetic architecture of osteoarthritis is likely to be polygenic with multiple variants along the spectrum of allele frequencies contributing modest and small effects. Our polygene analyses support a model of osteoarthritis in which there is a substantial genetic component comprising multiple contributing variants with small effect sizes (figure 1). SNP with p values as high as 0.25 appear to contribute to the genetic component of osteoarthritis (empirical p=3×10^{-5}, based on ~35 million permutations), with the bulk of the contribution seen in the 0–0.1 p value range (empirical p=3.5×10^{-5}, ~101 million permutations). Evaluation of discreet p value bins corroborates this observation and supports a role for SNP with p values up to 0.25 (0.10>p>0.15 bin empirical p=0.06; 0.15>p>0.20 p=0.0072; 0.20>p>0.25 p=0.02), but with the major contribution coming from SNP with p<0.10 (0>p>0.05 bin p=3×10^{-5}; 0.05>p>0.10 p=0.0092). The estimated proportion of variance in disease state explained by the osteoarthritis score alleles is 3.05% (p=3.3×10^{-4} based on nine million permutations). This is in keeping with findings in other complex common diseases.7

DISCUSSION
Our stage 1 arcOGEN genome-wide association scan analysis results are in agreement with other large-scale genetic studies.3 4
Our ‘supercontrol’-based sensitivity analyses strated the utility of population-based, rather than disease-free, but primarily p<0.10) have a significantly higher case–control discriminatory capacity.

The red line represents stage 1 genome-wide association study data and shows that SNP at the tail of the p value distribution (up to p<0.25, but primarily p<0.10) have a significantly higher case–control discriminatory capacity.

Figure 1  Summary of polygene analysis results evaluating the genetic architecture of osteoarthritis. Lines in red (real data) and blue (permuted data) show mean±1 SD of the Nagelkerke’s pseudo $r^2$ statistic, which indicates the proportion of case–control status accounted for by score alleles in the single-nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) sets. The blue line represents expectation under the null hypothesis of no genetic component to the disease. The red line represents stage 1 genome-wide association study data and shows that SNP at the tail of the p value distribution (up to p<0.25, but primarily p<0.10) have a significantly higher case–control discriminatory capacity.

and clearly indicate that common SNP with large effect sizes are not likely to underpin the aetiology of osteoarthritis. The only two established osteoarthritis loci to date have small OR and our polygene analyses on common SNP suggest that the genetic architecture of osteoarthritis is likely to consist of numerous signals of similar magnitude. The significant increase in sample size with stage 2 of the arcOGEN genome-wide association scan (~2.4 times as many cases) will increase the power to detect osteoarthritis associations. In addition, large-scale international meta-analysis efforts are underway and will ensure maximal GWAS sample size. A further important parameter in enhancing power and increasing the chances of success involves the improved definition of phenotype. One of the reasons why replication of findings has been difficult to achieve in osteoarthritis could be the inherent heterogeneity of the different osteoarthritis diagnostic and study inclusion criteria used. The field is currently active in evaluating phenotype definition differences and their effects on study power.4

The Wellcome Trust Case Control Consortium first demonstrated the utility of population-based, rather than disease-free, controls in GWAS.5 Our ‘supercontrol’-based sensitivity analyses suggest that for a highly prevalent and heterogeneous disorder such as osteoarthritis, with multiple smaller effects contributing to overall susceptibility, the brute force approach of maximising sample size to balance misclassification in controls is not as successful as it has been for other common diseases, in which ‘low-hanging fruit’ discoveries (of loci with substantial effects) were robust to subtle allele frequency fluctuations.

Osteoarthritis is a heterogeneous disease characterised by variable clinical features with conceivably different genetic aetiologies.9 Although the allele score was associated with osteoarthritis, the proportion of disease variance explained cannot be highly accurately quantified, primarily because of signal attenuation (risk alleles are unlikely to be at the actual causal locus) and sampling variation. The genetic architecture of osteoarthritis is emerging as complex. Large-scale sample sizes and well-defined phenotypes will be required to gain a better understanding of this genetic component, possibly leading to optimising treatment, developing efficacious disease-modifying interventions, improving prognosis and tailoring intervention to the individual.

Funding  This study was financially supported by Arthritis Research UK.

Competing interests None.

Ethics approval This study was conducted with the approval of the Oxfordshire Research Ethics Committee C reference 07/H0606/150.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed

Author affiliations

1Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Hinxton, Cambridgeshire, UK
2NUFFIEF Department of Orthopaedics, Rheumatology and Musculoskeletal Sciences, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK
3Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK
4Department of Twin Research and Genetic Epidemiology, King’s College London, London, UK
5Department of Twin Research and Genetic Epidemiology, King’s College London, London, UK
6deCODE Genetics, Reykjavik, Iceland
7NIHR Biomedical Research Unit, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK
8MRC Epidemiology Resource Centre, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK
9Academic Rheumatology, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK
10Institute of Cellular Medicine, Musculoskeletal Research Group, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
11The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust Foundation Trust, The Freeman Hospital, Byker, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
12Centre for Integrated Genomic Medical Research, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
13Institute of Genetics and Molecular Medicine, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK
14Wellcome Trust Centre for Cell Matrix Research, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
15Academic Unit of Bone Metabolism, Department of Human Metabolism, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK
16Sheffield NIHR Bone Biomedical Research Unit, Centre for Biomedical Research, Northern General Hospital, Sheffield, UK
17Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Facility, Southampton General Hospital, Southampton, UK
18IBIB-Hospital Universitario A Coruña, Osteoarticular and Aging Research Laboratory, A Coruña, Spain
19Boston University School of Public Health, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
20Estonian Genome Center, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia
21Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia
22Estonian Biocenter, Tartu, Estonia
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Ann Rheum Dis 2011 70: 864-867 originally published online December 21, 2010
doi: 10.1136/ard.2010.141473

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