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Invited talk: Molecular imaging of human stem/progenitor cells for pro-regenerative purposes

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We have used human stem/progenitor cells of myogenic origin (with mostly CD56+, desmin-positive characteristics) either alone or together with mesenchymal stem cells (MSC) to be applied in the mouse post-infarction heart model (immunocompromised SCID mice) when tracking them in situ in medium and long-term imaging system. In order to differentiate between myoblasts and MSC/s we have used two types of bioluminescent markers (firefly luciferase versus nanoluc) with two different molecular promoters incorporated to the stem cells while delivering the cells intramyocardially to post-infarcted heart using four variants of cellular therapies. We have found by bioluminescent imaging that in a group of mice with post-infarcted heart the highest signal was obtained when myoblasts were applied together with MSC/s vs myoblasts alone ($p < 0.0001$). This could be a promising strategy for pro-regenerative future clinical trials. For a long cell imaging we additionally used [18F]-FHBG PET/CT model when applying stem cells with molecular double promoter/reporter sequence that could either link flushed 18F isotopes with FDG (fluorodeoxyglucose) for cell viability. In vivo PET/CT and MRI revealed precise measurement of reporter probes signaling incorporated into the cells for as long as 6 weeks of monitoring.

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