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Late B Cell Depletion with a Human Anti-Human CD20 IgG1κ Monoclonal Antibody Halts the Development of Experimental Autoimmune Encephalomyelitis in Marmosets

Yolanda S. Kap,*†‡ Nikki van Driel,* Erwin Blezer,§ Paul W. H. I. Parren,¶ Wim K. Bleeker,* Jon D. Laman,†‡ Jenny L. Craigen,‖ and Bert A. ‘t Hart*†‡‖

Depletion of CD20+ B cells has been related to reduced clinical activity in relapsing–remitting multiple sclerosis. The underlying mechanism is not understood, because serum IgG levels were unaltered by the treatment. We report the effect of late B cell depletion on cellular and humoral immune mechanisms in a preclinical multiple sclerosis model (i.e., experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis [EAE] in the common marmoset). We used a novel human anti-human CD20 IgG1κ mAb (HuMab 7D8) that cross-reacts with marmoset CD20. EAE was induced in 14 marmosets by immunization with recombinant human myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein (MOG) in CFA. After 21 d, B cells were depleted in seven monkeys by HuMab 7D8, and seven control monkeys received PBS. The Ab induced profound and long-lasting B cell depletion from PBMCs and lymphoid organs throughout the observation period of 106 d. Whereas all of the control monkeys developed clinically evident EAE, overt neurologic deficits were reduced substantially in three HuMab 7D8-treated monkeys, and four HuMab 7D8-treated monkeys remained completely asymptomatic. The effect of HuMab 7D8 was confirmed on magnetic resonance images, detecting only small lesions in HuMab 7D8-treated monkeys. The infusion of HuMab 7D8 arrested the progressive increase of anti-MOG IgG Abs. Although CD3+ T cell asymptomatically. The effect of HuMab 7D8 was confirmed on magnetic resonance images, detecting only small lesions in HuMab 7D8-treated monkeys. The infusion of HuMab 7D8 arrested the progressive increase of anti-MOG IgG Abs. Although CD3+ T cell numbers in lymphoid organs were increased, their proliferation and cytokine production were impaired significantly. Most notable were the substantially reduced mRNA levels of IL-7 and proinflammatory cytokines (IL-6, IL-17A, IFN-γ, and TNF-α). In conclusion, B cell depletion prevents the development of clinical and pathological signs of EAE, which is associated with impaired activation of MOG-reactive T cells in lymphoid organs. 

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The online version of this article contains supplemental material.

Abbreviations used in this paper: ABL, abelson; ALN, axillary lymph node; A.U., arbitrary units; EAE, experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis; LLN, lumbar lymph node; MNC, mononuclear cell; MOG, myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein; MR, magnetic resonance; MRI, magnetic resonance imaging; MS, multiple sclerosis; MTR, magnetization transfer ratio; PK/PD, pharmacokinetic/pharmacodynamics; psd, poststimulation day; qPCR, quantitative PCR; rhMOG, recombinant human myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein; RP, red pulp; RRMS, relapsing–remitting multiple sclerosis; TE, echo time; T2W, T2-weighted; WP, white pulp.

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development of evident neurologic disease does not depend strictly on the presence of autoantibodies, because T cells specific for the MOG_{34-56} epitope can induce demyelination (21, 22). These highly pathogenic T cells, which are activated in the rhMOG EAE model, express CD56, are cytotoxic, and produce IL-17A (21, 22). Cyto-toxic CD56^+ MOG-specific T cells also are present in MS (23, 24). In marmosets, these T cells can be activated by a very mild immunization protocol that only includes MOG_{34-56} emulsified in IFA, suggesting that anti-MOG T cells are highly pathogenic and important in the pathogenic process (22).

In recent years, a panel of fully human CD20 Abs was generated in Ig transgenic mice (25). This panel included ofatumumab and HuMab 7D8, which both bind to a unique membrane-proximal CD20 epitope, comprising the small and large extracellular loops. Ofatumumab and HuMab 7D8 display superior CD20 binding and complement-dependent cytotoxicity compared with those of rituximab (25–28).

In the current study, we have induced profound B cell depletion by weekly infusion of the human anti-human CD20 mAb HuMab 7D8 starting 3 wk after the EAE induction by a single immunization with rhMOG formulated in CFA. The treatment was started simultaneously in all of the animals well after immunization (i.e., at week 3) to avoid interference with the induction of the immunopathogenic process but before the onset of overt clinical EAE. Neurological signs in the used model appear between 4 and 16 wk after immunization with rhMOG/CFA (21). The earliest responders display clinical signs already within 4 wk, suggesting that the autoimmune mechanisms needed for the induction of lesions and neurologic deficit can be induced within 4 wk after immunization.

We report that this semitherapeutic treatment schedule with HuMab 7D8, when autointerbody production is already ongoing, impaired the development of neurologic deficit. The immunological correlates of this remarkable therapeutic effect were arrest of already initiated autointerbody production and impaired activation of autoreactive T cells in lymphoid organs, read out by reduced proliferation and proinflammatory cytokine production in lymphoid organs. These data obtained in a valid preclinical model of MS contribute to a better understanding of the elusive mechanism underlying the clinical effect of B cell depletion in RRMS.

Materials and Methods

Animals

The common marmoset monkeys used in this study were purchased from two outbred colonies kept at the Biomedical Primate Research Centre (Rijswijk, The Netherlands) or the German Primate Centre Deutsches Primatenzentrum (Göttingen, Germany), respectively. Only animals that were declared healthy after the veterinarian’s physical, hematological, and biochemical checkup were included. Monkeys were pair-housed in spacious cages and under intensive veterinary care throughout the study. The daily diet consisted of commercial food pellets for New World monkeys (Rimpar, Germany). Brains were submerged in nonmagnetic oil (Fomblin; Solvay Solexis, Weesp, The Netherlands) to prevent unwanted susceptibility artifacts.

Magnetic resonance imaging

One cerebral hemisphere collected at necropsy was fixed in 4% buffered formalin and 2 wk later transferred into buffered saline containing sodium azide to allow stabilization of magnetic resonance (MR) relaxation time characteristics (31). High-contrast postmortem MR images were recorded on a 9.4 T horizontal bore nuclear magnetic resonance spectrometer (Varian, Palo Alto, CA), equipped with a quadrature coil (RAPID Biomedical, Kiprarg, Germany). Brains were submerged in nonmagnetic oil (Fomblin; perfluorinated polyether; Solvay Solexis, Weesp, The Netherlands) to prevent unwanted susceptibility artifacts.

On a sagittal scout image, 41 contiguous coronal slices of 0.75 mm were defined covering the complete brain, with the following characteristics: field of view = 25 × 25 mm; matrix = 256 × 256; zero-filled = 512 × 512;
Table I. Overview of monkeys included in the PK/PD study and the EAE study

<table>
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<th>PK/PD Study</th>
<th>EAE Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>2</td>
<td>M06050</td>
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<td>Mi013362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>M07085</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Age in months at the start of the experiment.
*M06081 died on psd 33 without EAE.
F, female; M, male.
volumetric resonance imaging (MRI) data sets were collected: Duesseldorf, Germany) for 30 min at 4°C. CD8+ cells were visualized by staining of dead cells using violet viability stain (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA), CD20 PE (H299; Beckman Coulter, Fullerton, CA), CD40FITC (B-B20; Abcam, Cambridge, MA), and washing with RPMI 1640 medium.

**Procedures and assays for the quantification of a cellular immune response**

Mononuclear cell isolation. Mononuclear cell (MNC) suspensions from the PBMCs, spleen, and bone marrow were isolated by density gradient centrifugation over lymphocyte separation medium (Axis-Shield, Oslo, Norway). Cell suspensions from axillary (ALN), inguinal, lumbar (LLN), and cervical lymph nodes were isolated by gently pressing the organ through a nylon mesh and washing with RPMI 1640 medium.

**Phenotyping with flow cytometry.** To enable visualization of residual CD20-expressing cells in the circulation or lymphoid organs of monkeys treated with HuMab T8, MNCs were subjected to an Ab stripping protocol aimed at the removal of HuMab T8. Cells (2 x 10^7) were incubated with 5 ml acidic buffer (50 mM glycine-HCl, 5 mM KCl, and 130 mM NaCl [pH 3]) for 4 min at room temperature and subsequently washed and used for flow cytometry. The flow cytometry protocol used to phenotype MNCs involved staining of dead cells using violet viability stain (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA) and washing with PBS. Detection of primary unlabeled Ab was followed by incubation with donkey anti-mouse or goat anti-rabbit, both labeled with biotin. This was revealed by incubation for 10 min and subsequently washed in PBS. Tissue sections were incubated with primary Ab overnight at 4°C in a humidified atmosphere. Primary Abs were mouse anti-human CD20 (clone L26; DakoCytomation, Glostrup, Denmark), mouse anti-human CD40 (clone B-20; Chemicon International, Billerica, MA), and rabbit anti-human CD3 (DakoCytomation). Incubations with secondary and tertiary reagents were performed for 1 h at room temperature. Between incubation steps, the slides were washed twice with PBS. Detection of primary unlabeled Ab was followed by incubation with donkey anti-mouse or goat anti-rabbit, both labeled with biotin. This was followed by incubation with HRP-labeled avidin–biotin-complex (Vectastain ABC; Vector Laboratories, Burlingame, CA). HRP activity was revealed by incubation for 10 min at room temperature with 3-amino-9-ethyl-carbazole (Sigma-Aldrich, Zwijndrecht, The Netherlands), leading to a bright red precipitate. CD40 expression was enhanced with the tyramide signal amplification kit (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA). Incubation with isotype-matched primary Ab of irrelevant specificity and omission of the primary Ab served as negative controls.

**Statistical analysis**

Data are presented as mean ± SEM of six control and seven treated marmosets. Statistical analysis was performed using Prism 5.0b for Mac

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**Table II. Primer and probe combinations for qPCR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gene</th>
<th>Forward Primer (5'-3')</th>
<th>Reverse Primer (5'-3')</th>
<th>Probe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>GGACTGAGATGCTACATAGCAA</td>
<td>GAGGTGGAGA</td>
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<td>GCTGTGCTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFN-γ</td>
<td>GCAGAGAGAGAGAGGTGAAGAGAG</td>
<td>TTGAGGTCCGCTGTTATTTA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNF-α</td>
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<td>GTCTCAGGAGGAGTCTAGCAA</td>
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</tr>
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<td>IL-7</td>
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<td>CCAAACTTCTGTGGTCTG</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL-4</td>
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<td>CTCAGCAGGACAGGAGGTTCA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL-6</td>
<td>CCAATGCTGATTTCAATAGGAGGA</td>
<td>AACACCAACACAGAGCTGGA</td>
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<tr>
<td>IL-10</td>
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<td>TCTGGAGG</td>
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<tr>
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<td>TGCGCCTTTACCAAGAAGTGTCG</td>
<td>GTAGCTGCAGGAGGAGGATT</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
OS X (GraphPad Software, La Jolla, CA). Survival was analyzed using a log-rank test. Other data were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test. A p value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

Dose finding and PK/PD of HuMab 7D8

The effective Ab dose for maximum B cell depletion from blood and lymph nodes was determined in 12 marmosets. Groups of four monkeys each received a single i.v. injection with placebo (PBS) or HuMab 7D8 at a dose of 10 or 20 mg/kg (Table I). At the indicated time points during the first (Fig. 1A) and subsequent days (Fig. 1B), small venous blood volumes were withdrawn for plasma isolation in which HuMab 7D8 levels were determined. As expected, all of the placebo-treated monkeys scored negative in the assay (data not shown). The average HuMab 7D8 levels in the 10 and 20 mg/kg dose groups measured in the 5-min blood sample were 56 and 181 μg/ml, respectively. The plasma concentration was maintained at trough level >10 μg/ml during the following 7 d.

Predictably, the CD20 molecule on B cells in the treated group may be bound by HuMab 7D8 and therefore could not bind the anti-CD20 Ab conjugate used in flow cytometry. Because anti-CD19 mAb cross-reacted only poorly with marmosets, we also have determined CD40-expressing cells to be a surrogate marker for B cell depletion. CD20 is a pan-B cell marker expressed throughout the B cell lineage with the exception of plasma cells. CD40 is expressed besides on activated APCs (dendritic cells and macrophages) also on resting and activated mature B cells but not on plasma cells.

Seven days after the single administration of HuMab 7D8, two animals of each group were sacrificed (Table I), and the extent of B cell depletion from spleen and ALN was assessed by flow cytometry. The profound depletion of CD20+ cells by both doses of HuMab 7D8 is depicted in Fig. 1C. The remaining six animals were sacrificed 62 d after HuMab 7D8 administration (Table I). Fig. 1D shows that even 2 mo after the administration of a single HuMab 7D8 dose reduced percentages of CD20+ and CD40+ cells were found in all of the lymphoid organs. However, the figure also shows that in one monkey of each group (no. 8/Mi013067 and no. 12/Mi013362) insufficient B cell depletion or partial repletion of B cells had occurred in the spleen and ALN at that time (Fig. 1D).

Anti-CD20 mAb effectively depletes B cells throughout the EAE experiment

Fourteen unrelated marmosets were immunized with rhMOG in CFA. Seven animals were selected randomly for treatment with...
HuMab 7D8 from psd 21, and also seven animals were selected for placebo treatment with PBS (Table I). On the basis of the PK/PD data, we chose to complete full B cell depletion with a single loading dose of 20 mg HuMab 7D8 per kilogram of body weight followed by a weekly i.v. maintenance dose of 5 mg/kg. This dosing regimen aimed at a plasma trough level of 5–10 μg/ml, which was described previously to be sufficient for sustained biological activity in vivo (34).

Plasma levels of HuMab 7D8 were measured every week at 7 d after i.v. administration of HuMab 7D8 or PBS. The plasma level of HuMab 7D8 remained >5 μg/ml, with the exception of one time point (day 42) in one monkey (M07075) (Fig. 2A). Every 2 wk, percentages of CD20– and CD40-expressing cells in PBMCs were determined by flow cytometry to confirm B cell depletion by HuMab 7D8. Seven days after the first dose of HuMab 7D8 (i.e., 28 d after immunization), CD20+ and CD40+ cells were almost completely depleted compared with those of the control group (Fig. 2B, Supplemental Fig. 1). Throughout the study, the percentage of CD20 remained at a very low level in the treatment group, except at psd 88. At this time point, six of the seven animals, M07095 being the only exception, contained elevated numbers of CD20+ cells in the PBMCs. However, because CD40 expression remained low at this time point, we assume that these might be immature B cells repleting the peripheral compartment (Fig. 2B, Supplemental Fig. 1).

At necropsy, the percentage of CD20+ and CD40+ cells present in the PBMCs, spleen, bone marrow, and lymph nodes were determined by flow cytometry. In the HuMab 7D8 treatment group, CD20- and CD40-expressing cells were detected, but the levels were still significantly lower than those in the control group (Fig. 2C, Supplemental Fig. 2). Also, the expression of CD19, assessed in spleen and ALN by qPCR, was significantly lower in the treatment group (Fig. 2D).

In conclusion, the chosen HuMab 7D8 dosing regimen induced profound and persistent B cell depletion from blood and lymphoid organs.

**B cell depletion prevents the development of clinical signs**

Six of the seven control animals developed clinically evident EAE characterized by overt neurologic signs above EAE score 2 from psd 55 onward (Fig. 3A). One control animal died unexpectedly at psd 33 without any detectable neurologic signs (M06081). The most likely cause of death deduced from pathology examination was cardiac failure. Therefore, this monkey was excluded from further analysis. Four of the six control animals were sacrificed with at least one paralyzed limb (para- /hemiplegia; score = 3). M02052 was sacrificed with a clinical score of 2.25, because of persistent optic neuritis, which started at psd 48, and excessive weight loss. M07048 was sacrificed at the predetermined end point psd 106 after three short-lasting episodes of ataxia (Fig. 3A).

In contrast, four of the seven animals treated with HuMab 7D8 failed to develop detectable neurologic signs (Fig. 3A). The remaining three treated animals developed neurologic signs only for one day (M07075 and M07095) or two separate days (M04096). Paralysis was observed in none of the treated animals, and all of the animals were sacrificed with a clinical score of 0 or 0.5 at the predetermined end point psd 106 (Fig. 3A). The curves for disease-free survival (i.e., time to EAE score 2.0) and overall survival (time to end point) show that the clinical differences between the two groups are highly significant (Fig. 3B). In conclusion, late B cell depletion abrogated the development of neurologic signs.

![FIGURE 2.](http://www.jimmunol.org/Downloadedfromhttp://www.jimmunol.org)
FIGURE 3. Late B cell depletion prevents the development of neurologic signs. A, The clinical scores of control (left column) and treated (right column) animals are depicted. The psd is indicated on the x-axis. Dotted lines indicate the percentage of body weight loss compared with the day of immunization (left y-axis). Solid lines indicate clinical score (right y-axis). The treatment period is indicated with a gray-shaded box. The day of sacrifice of individual monkeys is indicated in the figure with ciphers. Monkey M06081 succumbed without neurologic deficit from cardiac failure. Of the six remaining control animals, five developed sustained neurologic signs (clinical score ≥ 2). Control animal M07048 developed neurologic signs for three independent days, but postmortem MRI analysis confirmed the presence of substantial brain white matter demyelination (Fig. 4). Four of the seven HuMab 7D8-treated animals developed no neurologic signs, and three of the seven animals developed neurologic signs for only 1 or 2 d. B, Survival curves. The upper panel shows the disease-free survival, meaning the time until the animals developed EAE score 2. The lower panel is the survival time until the day of sacrifice, which was the humane or predetermined end point. B cell depletion significantly increased both types of survival (p < 0.05 log rank).
B cell depletion prevents (MRI-detectable) CNS pathology

MRI sequences of fixed hemispheres were recorded to confirm that B cell depletion not only prevented the development of neurologic signs but also of brain lesions. Fig. 4A and 4B show representative examples of T2-weighted (T2W) images and MTR images (B) of two control and two HuMab 7D8-treated animals. Fig. 4C shows that the lesion load is significantly lower in the HuMab 7D8-treated group than that in the control group. No lesions could be observed in three of the seven treated monkeys, and only very small lesions could be observed in four of the seven treated monkeys. A lower T2 and a higher MTR within the lesions of the HuMab 7D8-treated animals suggest less damage within the lesions of treated animals. \( p < 0.05 \) compared with the control group using a Mann-Whitney U test.

**FIGURE 4.** Reduced cerebral white matter lesion load in B cell-depleted EAE marmosets. A and B. Formalin-fixed hemispheres were analyzed with MRI for volume (mm\(^3\)), T2 signal intensity (ms), and MTR (percentage reduction in signal intensity) of white matter lesions. T2W images were used to calculate the volume (mm\(^3\)). White lines encircle the lesions. C. B cell depletion significantly reduced the volume of white matter lesions. Lower T2 and higher MTR within the lesions of the HuMab 7D8-treated animals suggest less damage within the lesions of treated animals.

**FIGURE 5.** Reduced plasma levels of IgG after B cell depletion. Plasma IgG levels against rhMOG and MOG 54–76, being the dominant binding site of anti-MOG IgG Ab, were determined by ELISA. Recorded OD values were transformed into A.U. (y-axis, log scale) using homemade software. A. The upper panel shows the control animals, and the lower panel shows the HuMab 7D8-treated animals with the treatment period indicated as a gray-shaded box. The psd is shown on the x-axis. Shown are the IgG levels of individual animals. B. Area under the curve was calculated for each individual animal and is depicted as mean \( \pm \) SEM. Plasma IgG levels against rhMOG and MOG 54–76 were reduced significantly after B cell depletion. Shown is mean \( \pm \) SEM. C. Reduced IgG levels also were observed in treated animals at necropsy, which reflects the peak of the disease in control animals. Results are depicted as mean \( \pm \) SEM. \( p < 0.05 \) compared with the control group using a Mann-Whitney U test. A.U., arbitrary units.
B cell depletion results in the reduction of plasma autoantibodies

The immunological hallmark and most widely accepted biomarker of B cell contribution in the EAE model is the production of autoantibodies. To obtain evidence whether B cell functionality is eliminated completely in HuMab 7D8-treated monkeys, we measured plasma levels of IgM and IgG against rhMOG and MOG54–76 every 2 wk and at the start of the treatment. Abs against MOG54–76 were measured, because this peptide comprises a dominant B cell epitope of anti-MOG Abs generated in the rhMOG-induced EAE model (21). IgM levels peaked in both groups at psd 28 and declined after that (data not shown). The levels of rhMOG or MOG54–76-specific IgG were clearly higher in the control group than those in the HuMab 7D8-treated group (Fig. 5A). Until psd 28 (i.e., 7 d after the start of the treatment), IgG levels were comparable between both groups. After psd 28, IgG levels did not increase further in the treatment group, whereas a 10-fold increase was detected in the control group (Fig. 5A). The area under the curves was calculated for each individual animal, and group means were calculated. Fig. 5B shows that IgG autoantibodies against rhMOG and MOG54–76 were significantly lower in the treatment group compared with those in the control group. Also at necropsy, a significant reduction of the autoantibodies was observed (Fig. 5C).

Effect of B cell depletion on cell numbers, T cell phenotype, and proliferation

To test the systemic effect of B cell depletion on the cellular immune compartment in the marmoset EAE model, we first analyzed the distribution of leukocyte and lymphocyte subsets. Fig. 6A shows the variation of WBC, lymphocytes, neutrophil, and monocyte numbers in the PBMCs in both groups. Increased numbers of monocytes were observed in the treatment group (Fig. 6A). At necropsy, we also observed increased absolute numbers of WBCs, lymphocytes, neutrophils, and monocytes in the treatment group, although not significant (Fig. 6B). It is of note that the cell numbers at necropsy are determined at different/individual time points (i.e., the day that each animal is sacrificed with full-blown EAE in the control group and the end of the study for treated animals).

During the study and at necropsy, the phenotype of the lymphocytes was analyzed by flow cytometry to assess the effect of B cell depletion on the T cell compartment. We observed no effect on the CD3 percentage or the CD4/CD8 ratio in the PBMCs throughout the study and at necropsy.
the observation period (Fig. 6C). At necropsy, however, higher percentages of CD3⁺ cells were observed in the PBMCs, spleen, and lymph nodes (Fig. 6D). Although we like to emphasize that this is a percentage and not an absolute number and may be caused by the depletion of the B cell population, CD3 mRNA levels also were increased significantly in the ALN (Fig. 6E). The CD4/CD8 ratio was not changed in the PBMCs or lymphoid organs at necropsy (data not shown).

Next, we analyzed the effect of B cell depletion on proliferation and cytokine production. At necropsy, we observed a higher level of proliferation in the PBMCs from the treatment group stimulated with rhMOG, MOG peptides 24–46 and 34–56, or Con A (Fig. 7A). By contrast, the proliferative responses of MNCs from monkeys in the treatment group to these Ags were lower in spleen, ALN, and LLN. It is of note that also the background proliferation and the response to OVA and Con A were reduced in these organs (Fig. 7A). No differences were observed in inguinal or cervical lymph nodes (data not shown).

The phenotype of the cells in spleen and ALN that proliferated against rhMOG was assessed with the CFSE dilution assay. We observed that depletion of CD20⁺ cells led to reduced proliferation of both CD4⁺ and CD8⁺ T cells from ALN and, albeit to a lesser extent, spleen (Fig. 7B and data not shown).

In conclusion, the late depletion of B cells has profound effects on the T cell compartment. The most obvious effect observed in blood at necropsy was increment of monocyte numbers. The numbers of CD3⁺ T cells also were increased in blood and all of the analyzed secondary lymphoid organs. The activity assessment showed that proliferation was increased in blood but decreased in the secondary lymphoid organs.

Reduced cytokine production after B cell depletion

The rhMOG-induced protein levels of IL-12 (p40/p70), IL-17A, and IFN-γ were analyzed in supernatant of rhMOG-stimulated MNC cultures. We observed IL-17A production by splenocytes in four of the six control animals and by MNCs from ALNs and LLNs from two of the six control animals in response to stimulation with rhMOG. By contrast, we observed rhMOG-stimulated IL-17A production only in splenocytes of one of the seven B cell-depleted animals (Fig. 8A). No such obvious differences between control and treated animals were observed for the production of IFN-γ and IL-12 (Fig. 8A).

Cytokine production in spleen and ALN also was analyzed at the mRNA level. In treated animals, mRNA levels of IL-10 and IL-1β were increased in ALN, and IL-7 mRNA levels were reduced in both spleen and ALN compared with those of the control animals. This indicates that B cells are an important source of IL-7 in the rhMOG-induced EAE model. No differences between treated and nontreated animals were observed for IL-17A, IFN-γ, TNF-α, IL-6, and IL-4 (Fig. 8B).

The data in the previous paragraph demonstrated that CD3⁺ T cell numbers are increased in the lymphoid organs of B cell-depleted monkeys, as also was reflected by increased CD3 mRNA levels in the ALN (Fig. 6E). For this reason, we chose to normalize the T cell cytokine mRNA levels (IL-17A, IFN-γ, TNF-α, IL-6, and IL-4) against CD3 instead of ABL. Indeed, the corrected data show reduced IL-17A, IFN-γ, TNF-α, and IL-6 levels in ALN of treated animals, suggesting less cytokine production per T cell (Fig. 8C).

In conclusion, the reduction of T cell proliferation together with the reduced cytokine production in lymphoid organs indicates that the depletion of CD20⁺ B cells impairs the activity and/or pathogenic function of cellular autoimmune mechanisms.

**B cell depletion alters the composition of T cell and B cell areas in spleen and lymph nodes**

We have investigated in more detail the effect of B cell depletion on the organization of spleen and ALN using H&E staining and immunostaining of cryosections. The anti-CD20 Ab (clone L26) used for immunostaining recognizes an intracellular epitope of CD20 (35). Therefore, this Ab does not compete with the anti-CD20 Ab administered in vivo.

The H&E staining of the spleen shows a similar structural organization in control and HuMab 7D8-treated animals. The spleen of all of the animals, except M04096, is composed of similar areas

![Figure 7](http://www.jimmunol.org/)

**FIGURE 7.** Increased T cell proliferation in blood versus reduced T cell proliferation in lymphoid organs after B cell depletion. A, Proliferation at necropsy was assessed using the incorporation of [³H]thymidine. Shown are the mean ± SEM in cpm (y-axis). Proliferation in the spleen was assessed in six of the seven HuMab 7D8-treated animals, because the spleen of M05073 could not be analyzed due to small cell numbers. Proliferation in the LLN was analyzed in four animals of each group. Increased proliferation against rhMOG and MOG peptides was observed in PBMCs of treated animals. In contrast, reduced general (no stimulation, OVA, or Con A) and MOG-specific proliferation was observed in lymphoid organs of treated animals. B, Percentage of dividing CD3⁺CD4⁺ or CD3⁺CD8⁺ cells in the ALN. Percentages of total measured events are shown in mean ± SEM. Reduced proliferation against rhMOG and OVA was observed in both T cell compartments. *p < 0.05 compared with the control group using a Mann-Whitney U test.
of white pulp (WP) and red pulp (Fig. 9). In the control animals, the WP consisted of T cell and B cell areas. In the HuMab 7D8-treated animals, the WP consisted only of T cells, even in the areas where B cells were expected (Fig. 9). M07095 showed a small area of CD20+ and CD40+ cells (data not shown), but in none of the other HuMab 7D8-treated animals CD20- or CD40- expressing B cells were observed in the WP. A few CD40+ cells were detected in the WP of HuMab 7D8-treated animals, but the morphology suggests that these were follicular dendritic cells or macrophages (Fig. 9, inset).

The structure of the medulla and the cortex in ALN was also similar in both groups as assessed by H&E staining (Fig. 9). CD3 staining shows normal structural organization in control animals. However, in the HuMab 7D8-treated animals, the number of CD3+ cells appeared to be increased in the cortex (Fig. 9), which is in line with the increased CD3 mRNA expression (Fig. 6E). A few CD20+ cells were observed in M07075 and M07095, but in the other five HuMab 7D8-treated animals, no CD20 staining was found. CD40 was detected in B cell areas of ALN of both control and HuMab 7D8-treated animals. However, in the HuMab 7D8-treated animals, we observed that the B cell areas were hypocellular compared with those of control animals. Furthermore, flow cytometry showed a reduced number of B cells, and also the morphology of the CD40+ cells suggested that these cells were not B cells.

These data demonstrate that the general structure of secondary lymphoid organs is not changed by B cell depletion. In the spleen,
are present. A few CD40+ cells are present, but these morphologically resemble follicular dendritic cells or macrophages (CD20 also stains CD40+). CD40+ cells also are observed in the medulla. CD3+ cells are confined to the T cell areas of the cortex. In the ALN of B cell-depleted animals, the B cell area is hypocellular with a few CD20+ and CD40+ cells, but the latter do not have the morphology of B cells. The number of T cells seems to be increased in the cortex of the ALN of B cell-depleted animals. RP, red pulp; WP, white pulp.

ALN was not changed by B cell depletion. In the spleen, the CD20 staining of the control animal shows a clearly demarcated B cell area in the WP that is hypocellular and only contained CD40+ non-B cells. The B cell areas appeared to be filled with T cells. In ALN, T cell numbers seemed to be increased in T cell areas, and the B cell areas were hypocellular and only contained CD40+ non-B cells.

**Discussion**

Clinical trials with a chimeric CD20 mAb have shown that depletion of B cells has beneficial effects in RRMS, while autoantibody levels were unaffected (2, 3). This observation has raised questions on the exact immunopathogenic role of B cells in MS. We have investigated in a nonhuman primate model of MS (i.e., EAE in the common marmoset) immunopathogenic mechanisms of which are altered by B cell depletion. Because the chimeric anti-CD20 mAb (rituximab) does not cross-react with marmoset CD20, we used the fully human CD20 mAb HuMab 7D8 (25, 26).

In the first part of the current study, we have analyzed the extent and duration of B cell depletion after a single i.v. dose of HuMab 7D8 at 10 or 20 mg/kg. The results demonstrate the high potency of HuMab 7D8 in the marmoset, because it induced profound and long-lasting depletion of B cells from peripheral blood as well as lymphoid organs. In the second part of the study, we have chosen a dosing regimen with a high loading dose of 20 mg/kg HuMab 7D8 for obtaining a robust B cell depletion and thereby lowering the risk of inducing neutralizing Ab, followed by a 4-fold lower weekly maintenance dose at 5 mg/kg for maintaining maximum efficacy. The data show that the applied dosing schedule completely abrogated the typical MS-like clinical and pathological signs of this EAE model. This demonstrates the high in vivo efficacy of the Ab in this model and emphasizes the important role of B cells in MS.

We observed substantially lower levels of rhMOG-specific IgG in marmosets treated with HuMab 7D8 compared with those of control animals, although the early stage production of IgM autoantibodies was unaffected. It is important to note that at the time that the HuMab 7D8 treatment was started (i.e., 21 d after immunization) the production of anti-MOG IgG production had already been initiated but had not reached peak levels. Peak levels of IgG autoantibody in the control group were reached about ∼3 wk later. The reported data suggest that the HuMab 7D8 treatment did not completely suppress anti-MOG IgG production but rather arrested the further increased production of anti-MOG IgG. The effect of B cell depletion on autoantibody production in MS is unknown. Interestingly, in systemic lupus erythematosus patients, treatment with rituximab led to suppression of IgG autoantibody production, whereas no effect was observed on total IgG serum levels (36).

The question is warranted whether the dramatic effect of HuMab 7D8 treatment on clinical scores and lesion formation in the marmoset EAE model can be attributed completely to the observed reduction of autoantibody levels. Previous research has shown that the EAE development in marmosets immunized with rhMOG in CFA involves the activation of cellular and humoral autoimmune mechanisms (32). However, we would like to emphasize that autoantibodies do not have an essential influence on the EAE course, because lesions and neurologic signs develop also in the absence of anti-MOG Abs (20–22). This is compatible with the finding that axonal injury in lesions is more linked to the presence of inflammation than the presence of demyelination (37). We like to postulate here that although the capacity of anti-MOG Abs to amplify demyelination and mild clinical signs in the marmoset EAE model has been demonstrated clearly (14, 38), they are not an indispensable factor in the immunopathogenic process.

The current study shows that depletion of CD20+ B cells induced a few changes in peripheral blood (i.e., increased numbers of monocytes and increased proliferation of MNCs against...
rhMOG and MOG peptides). A more profound effect was found in the lymphoid organs. The histological analysis of spleen and lymph nodes demonstrated that B cell depletion dramatically altered the relative proportions of B cells and T cells. Where complete depletion was expected, we had not anticipated the increase of T cells. It can be assumed safely that the altered T cell/B cell ratio changes the environmental conditions under which the activation of the MOG34-56-reactive T cells, which mediate the expression of neurologic deficit, occurs (21, 22). The immune profiling of spleen and lymph nodes indeed confirmed that although these organs contain higher percentages of CD3+ T cells, proliferation of MOG (peptide)-reactive T cells is impaired and cytokine production is skewed toward a more anti-inflammatory profile characterized by reduced IL-17A and IFN-γ and increased IL-10. The strong reduction of IL-7 production in the B cell-depleted monkeys may be of particular interest, because this is a crucial cytokine for the survival of IL-17A-producing T cells, which are thought to have a central pathogenic role in MS and EAE models (39), including the EAE model in marmosets (22). Impairment of T cell activation has been put forward as a possible explanation for the clinical effect of B cell depletion in EAE models (2, 3). Reduced T cell activity after B cell depletion has been observed in various experimental systems, including naïve mice, NOD mice, two mouse models for arthritis, and mice infected with Listeria monocytogenes (40, 41). Taken together, these data suggest that the beneficial effect of systemic B cell depletion may be mediated by mitigated T cell activation in lymphoid organs.

In view of recent data on the pathogenic function of intra-CNS-localized EBV-infected B cells in MS (42), although not confirmed by others (43, 44), it is tempting to speculate whether the clinical effect of the anti-CD20 Ab can be explained by the depletion of B cells from the CNS. Several lines of evidence indicate that MOG34-56-specific T cells, which have a role in the clinical expression of EAE in marmosets, can be activated ex vivo by EBV-transformed B cells (21, 22) (K.G. Haanstra, J.A.M. Wubben, D.M. Lopes Estevão, M. Jonker, R.Q Hintzen, and B.A. ‘t Hart., manuscript in preparation). Indeed, we have observed that the CD20+ cells that are clearly present in the CNS of EAE-affected marmosets can be activated ex vivo by EBV-transformed B cells (21, 22) (K.G. Haanstra, J.A.M. Wubben, D.M. Lopes Estevão, M. Jonker, R.Q Hintzen, and B.A. ‘t Hart., manuscript in preparation). Indeed, we have observed that the CD20+ cells that are clearly present in the CNS of EAE-affected marmosets cannot be detected in the anti-CD20 Ab-treated monkeys (data not shown). We cannot exclude, however, that this is due to masking of CD20 by the therapeutic Ab. CD40 expression cannot be used as a control, because this marker is upregulated strongly in the EAE-affected CNS and Abs for human CD19 do not cross-react with the marmoset counterpart (45).

In conclusion, we have shown that B cell depletion in the marmoset EAE model mitigated the activation of autoreactive T cells. We like to postulate that this reduction in T cell activation contributes to the remarkable clinical effect of B cell depletion, and we hypothesize that a similar T cell change occurs in MS. It is difficult to prove this directly in MS patients, because the T cell activity in lymphoid organs cannot be examined. Current clinical trials support the idea that B cell depletion is a major step in therapy development for RRMS patients. Future studies are warranted to elucidate further the Ag-presenting function of B cells, especially in the CNS, and to investigate further the organization of lymphoid organs after B cell depletion.

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Disclosures
At the time that the reported study was executed, P.W.H.I.P. and W.K.B. were employed by Gemmab Utrecht, The Netherlands, and J.L.C. was employed by GlaxoSmithKline, Stevenage, U.K.

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