

Localization of mRNAs encoding the α -subunits of signal-transducing G-proteins within rat brain and among peripheral tissues

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Received 10 August 1987

The sequence of the mRNAs which encode the α -subunits of the signal-transducing G-proteins G_s , G_o and two forms of G_i (termed G_{i1} and G_{i2}) have recently been reported. Based on rat sequences we prepared oligodeoxynucleotide probes for measurement of these mRNAs in rat brain and peripheral tissues. The relative abundance of these mRNA species in brain was $G_s > G_o \sim G_{i2} > G_{i1}$. The G_s and G_{i2} mRNAs had somewhat lower levels in heart, kidney and liver than in brain, and G_o and G_{i1} mRNAs were not detected in the peripheral tissues. Using in situ hybridization we localized each of these mRNAs within slices of the rat brain. The patterns of distribution of G_s and G_{i2} mRNA were very similar, but very different from that of G_o and G_{i1} mRNA. These data illustrate that receptor-effector coupling G-proteins are regionally specialized in their expression. This regional specialization may reflect a selective coupling of individual G-proteins with the various neurotransmitter receptors and effector pathways.

G-protein; Signal transduction; Neurotransmitter receptor; Hybridization; mRNA

1. INTRODUCTION

Signal transduction by many neurotransmitter receptors is mediated by a family of structurally related GTP-binding proteins (G-proteins). The best characterized G-proteins regulate adenylate cyclase activity. β -Adrenergic and various neuropeptide receptors stimulate adenylate cyclase by coupling with the G-protein G_s . Muscarinic,

somatostatin, α_2 -adrenergic and opiate receptors inhibit adenylate cyclase by coupling with the G-protein G_i . G_s and G_i each consist of an α -, β - and γ -subunit. The β -subunits are identical for G_s and G_i while the α -subunits are similar but structurally distinct. A third G-protein, named G_o , has recently been purified from brain, it has an identical β -subunit to G_s and G_i and an α -subunit which is more similar to G_i than to G_s [1–3].

A number of other receptor-mediated events have been attributed to G-proteins. Examples include: (i) stimulation of phospholipase C activity by serotonin [4] and bradykinin receptors [5]; (ii) opening of K^+ channels by γ -aminobutyric acid and serotonin receptors [6]; and (iii) inhibition of voltage-dependent Ca^{2+} channels by noradrenalin, γ -aminobutyric acid [7] and somatostatin [8]. Many of these responses to receptor activation are

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Abbreviations: G_s and G_i , the G-proteins that stimulate and inhibit adenylate cyclase, respectively; G_o , an abundant G-protein of brain

blocked by pertussis toxin and mimicked by guanine nucleotides. Since both G_i and G_o , but not G_s , are sensitive to pertussis toxin the precise identity of the G-protein or proteins which mediate these events is unknown [1–3].

Two events mediated by receptors have recently been examined in detail. In pacemaker cells of the heart, muscarinic receptors open K^+ channels via a G-protein [9], and in pertussis toxin-treated cells G_i is more potent than G_o in reconstituting the ability of the receptor to couple to the channel [10]. Similarly, in neuroblastoma \times glioma hybrid cells opiates inhibit Ca^{2+} channels via a G-protein. After the cells are treated with pertussis toxin, however, G_o is more potent than G_i in reconstituting receptor coupling [11].

While G-proteins are essential for signal transduction by neurotransmitter receptors, little is known about the distribution of G-proteins within the nervous system. Antibodies to G_o have recently been used to map its distribution in the brain using immunohistochemistry [12]. Similar antibodies have not been available for use in the mapping of G_s and G_i . An alternative method for determining the regional specialization of G-protein expression is the use of in situ hybridization histochemistry to map the distribution of mRNAs which encode these proteins. Since the α -subunits of the individual G-proteins are unique, localization studies can focus on these structures.

Nucleotide sequences of cDNAs coding for the α -subunits of many G-proteins have recently been determined. The sequences of rat [13], mouse [14], human [15,16], and bovine G_s [17,18]; rat [13] and bovine G_o [19]; bovine rod [20–22] and cone [23] transducins; and bovine [24], human [25], rat [13] and mouse [14] G_i have been reported. For G_o and G_s the protein sequences predicted from cDNAs are almost completely conserved across species. In the case of G_o , the predicted sequences agree with sequences derived from purified proteins [13,20]. The amino acid sequence of G_s has not been chemically determined, but the identity of G_s clones has been verified by indirect methods [18] and by transfection of G_s -deficient cyc^- cells with G_s cDNA [26].

The identification of cDNAs encoding G_i α -subunits is more problematic. Several distinct cDNA clones have been obtained from rat [27] and human [25,28] libraries. While all of the isolated

G_i cDNAs predict proteins with strong homology (they are more similar to each other than to G_o , the transducins and G_s), not all of them agree in sequence with proteins already purified. Finally, none of the clones have yet been shown to encode proteins which inhibit adenylate cyclase.

The anomalies in G_i sequences can be reconciled if one postulates the existence of multiple forms of G_i . We call the bovine [24] and human [28] G_i sequences G_{i1} . These sequences, obtained from brain cDNA libraries, agree precisely with the chemically determined sequence of G_i from rat [13] and bovine [24] brain. We term the G_i cloned from rat C6 glioma [13], mouse macrophage [14] and human monocyte [25] libraries G_{i2} . G_{i1} , G_{i2} and a third G_i -like sequence have been cloned from a rat olfactory mucosa library [27]. Based on the rat cDNA sequences, we prepared oligodeoxynucleotide probes to identify mRNA encoding G_s , G_o , G_{i1} and G_{i2} . We used these probes to map the distribution of mRNA coding for these proteins within brain and among peripheral tissues.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Probes

The synthetic oligodeoxynucleotide probes were complementary to bases encoding amino acids 379–394 of G_s (5'-GAGCAGCTCGTATTGGCGAAGATGCATGCCCTGGATGATGTCACGGCA-3'), 118–133 of G_{i1} (5'-GTCCTTCCACAGTCTCTTTATGACGCCGCGGAGCTCCGCGGT-CATAAA-3') and 109–124 of G_{i2} (5'-AGGTCTTCCGGAAGCATGCCTTGCTCCTCGGCAGC-ACAGGACAGTGCG-3') and 108–123 of G_o (5'-GTTCTGCAGAGAATGGTTTCAGTGTCCTCCATGCGACTCACCACGTCAC-3') mRNA [13,27]. These regions were selected because of the lack of homology among the mRNAs within these regions. The oligodeoxynucleotides were made on an Applied Biosystems DNA synthesizer and purified on an 8% polyacrylamide/8 M urea preparative sequencing gel. The probes were labeled by tailing the 3'-end with terminal transferase (Bethesda Research Laboratories) and deoxyadenosine triphosphate labeled in the α -position with ^{35}S for in situ hybridizations and ^{32}P for Northern blots ($^{35}S > 1000$ Ci/mmol, $^{32}P > 3000$ Ci/mmol, New England Nuclear). Using a sequencing gel we have observed that the most com-

mon length of our oligonucleotide 3'-tails was 10 bases.

2.2. *In situ* hybridization

Our methods for *in situ* hybridization were similar to those developed for measurement of neuropeptide mRNA expression [29]. We have previously applied these methods to measurement of mRNAs encoding the α -subunit of transducin, the G-protein of photoreceptor rods [30,31]. Male Sprague-Dawley rats (200–300 g, NIH) were killed by decapitation and the brains were removed, frozen on dry ice and stored at -80°C until sectioned. 12- μm sections were cut and thaw-mounted onto gelatin-coated slides. The sections were then warmed for 2 min at 40°C and stored at -80°C until use. Before hybridizations, sections were warmed to room temperature and then fixed in 4% formaldehyde in phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) for 5 min. Sections were rinsed in PBS and incubated in 0.25% acetic anhydride in 0.1 M triethanolamine/0.9% NaCl (pH 8) for 10 min at room temperature and then transferred through 70 (1 min), 80 (1 min), 95 (2 min), and 100% ethanol (1 min), 100% chloroform (5 min), 100 and 95% ethanol and air-dried. Hybridizations were performed in $4 \times \text{SSC}$ ($1 \times \text{SSC} = 0.15 \text{ M NaCl}$, 0.015 M sodium citrate, pH 7.2), 50% formamide, $1 \times \text{Denhardt's}$ (0.02% Ficoll, 0.02% polyvinylpyrrolidone, 0.02% bovine serum albumin), 250 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ sheared single-stranded salmon sperm DNA, 100 mM dithiothreitol, and 10% dextran sulfate. 1×10^6 dpm oligodeoxynucleotide probe in 50 μl buffer were applied to each section. Sections were covered with a parafilm coverslip and incubated overnight at 37°C in a humid chamber. The coverslips were removed and the sections rinsed in four 15-min changes of $1 \times \text{SSC}$ at 55°C , then twice in the same buffer for 30 min at room temperature, dipped in water and air-dried. Autoradiographic localization of bound probe was performed by exposure of the sections to X-ray film for 1–5 weeks. For higher resolution, the sections were then dipped into NTB3 nuclear emulsion (Kodak) and exposed for 3–6 weeks at 4°C . Tissue was stained with cresyl violet.

2.3. RNA extraction and Northern blots

For extraction of RNA, the whole brain was

homogenized in guanidinium thiocyanate (329) and total RNA separated on a cesium trifluoroacetate (Pharmacia) gradient. Approx. 5 μg denatured total RNA was loaded on an agarose gel containing formaldehyde. After elec-

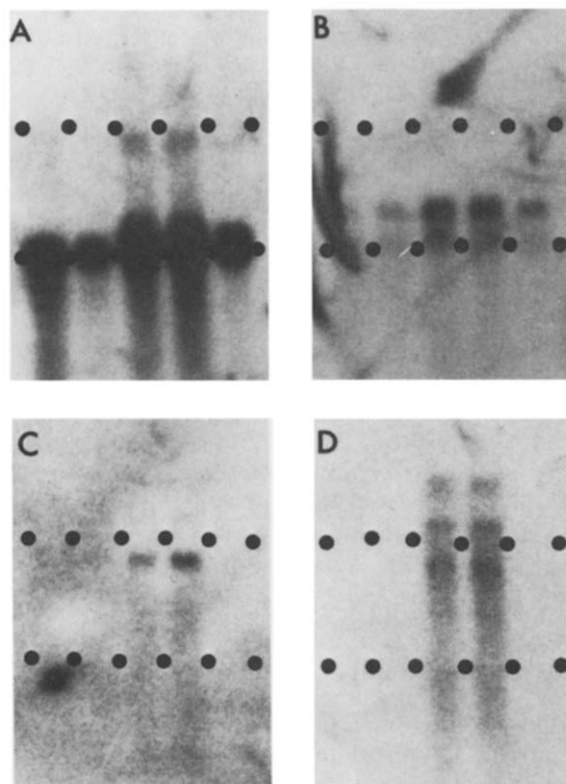


Fig.1. Northern blots of RNA hybridized with oligonucleotide probes directed to the α -subunits of (A) G_s , (B) G_{i2} , (C) G_{i1} and (D) G_o mRNA. 5 μg total RNA extracted from (left to right) heart, kidney, cerebral cortex, cerebellum, and liver and separated on a denaturing agarose gel. Identical RNA preparations were used for each blot. To confirm RNA transfer and integrity, each gel was stained with ethidium bromide and the transferred ribosomal bands photographed (the positions of the ribosomal bands are indicated by circles). Slightly more ribosomal RNA ($\sim 15\%$) was observed on the liver than the other blots. $1-2 \times 10^6$ dpm/ml probe was hybridized with each blot overnight at 37°C . The blots were washed at $\sim 20^{\circ}\text{C}$ below the theoretical melting temperature (55°C , $1 \times \text{SSPE}$) of the cDNA-mRNA hybrids. The blots were exposed to X-ray film for ~ 7 days at -70°C with two intensification screens.

trophoresis, RNA was transferred to Genescreen (NEN) and baked for 2 h at 80°C. The blots were prehybridized in 4 ml hybridization buffer [50% formamide, 1 × Denhardt's, 1 × SSPE (1 × SSPE = 0.5 M NaCl, 10 mM sodium phosphate, 1 mM EDTA), 250 µg yeast tRNA, 500 µg single-stranded salmon sperm DNA] for 8 h and then hybridized with 3 ml probe at a concentration of $1-2 \times 10^6$ dpm/ml for 20 h. Blots were then washed in 1 × SSPE, 0.2% SDS five times at 55°C for 15 min, and then twice in the same buffer at room temperature for 30 min. Wash protocols for both in situ and blot hybridizations used conditions ~20°C below the theoretical melting temperature of the oligodeoxynucleotide-mRNA hybrids [33]. Autoradiographic localization of bound probes was performed by exposure of the blot to X-ray film.

3. RESULTS

Northern blot analysis of several tissues with each of our oligodeoxynucleotide probes is illustrated in fig.1. Each probe was hybridized with 5 µg total RNA extracted from heart, kidney, cerebral cortex, cerebellum, and liver. The G_s probe labeled two mRNA species: an abundant species of ~1900 bases and a much less abundant one of ~3900 bases. The G_{i2} probe labeled mRNA with a size of ~2300 bases. G_s and G_{i2} mRNAs were most abundant in brain, and their concentrations were similar in the cerebellum relative to the cerebral cortex. G_s and G_{i2} mRNA were also abundant in the heart, kidney and liver. The G_{i1} probe labeled a single mRNA species of ~4000 bases. The G_o probe labeled three mRNA species, the most abundant had a size of ~3500 bases. Unlike G_s and G_{i2} mRNA, G_{i1} and G_o mRNA concentrations

were higher in the cerebellum than the cerebral cortex, and were not detectable in the peripheral tissues. The relative abundance of mRNA detected with the probes in brain was $G_s > G_o \sim G_{i2} > G_{i1}$.

The distribution of cells labeled with the G_s , G_o , G_{i2} , and G_{i1} probes in sagittal and coronal sections of rat brain is illustrated in fig.2. As was the case in the septal nucleus, the G_s and G_{i2} mRNAs had the same regional distribution in all brain regions examined, and as in the case of Northern blots, G_s mRNA was more abundant than G_{i2} mRNA. These mRNAs were abundant in the ependymal lining of the ventricles and choroid plexus, hippocampus (fields CA 1-4 being higher than the dentate gyrus), cerebellum (cortical layers and lateral nuclei) and cerebral cortex. Within the cerebral cortex these mRNAs were least abundant within a central layer. As was the case in Northern blots, the levels of G_s and G_{i2} mRNA were similar in the cerebellum relative to the cerebral cortex. High concentrations of these mRNAs were also observed in the globus pallidus, primary olfactory cortex, various nuclei of the thalamus, subthalamic nuclei and brain stem. A low density of mRNA was observed in the regions rich in white matter such as the corpus callosum and anterior commissure and portions of the cerebellum. The caudate putamen and olfactory tubercle also contained a relatively low concentration of G_s and G_{i2} mRNA.

The distributions of G_{i1} and G_o mRNA in similar sagittal and coronal sections of rat brain are also illustrated in fig.2. Like G_s and G_{i2} mRNAs, G_{i1} and G_o mRNAs were abundant in the cerebral and cerebellar cortices, hippocampus, and primary olfactory cortex. Unlike G_s and G_{i2} mRNAs, G_{i1} and G_o mRNAs were much more abundant in the cerebellar cortex than the cerebral cortex and had low abundance in the central and

Fig.2. Sections of rat brain were hybridized with probes directed to mRNAs coding for G-protein α -subunits. 12-µm sagittal (A,C,E,G) and coronal (B,D,F,H) sections were hybridized with the G_s (A,B), G_{i2} (C,D), G_{i1} (E,F) and G_o (G,H) probes. A central nucleus of the cerebellum is indicated by a horizontal arrow in A, C, E and G. A central layer of the cerebral cortex (cx) is illustrated by a vertical arrow in all sections. The ependymal lining of the ventricles and choroid plexus is illustrated by a triangle in all sections. The caudate putamen (cp) and globus pallidus (gp) are illustrated by vertical arrows in D, F and H. The hippocampus (h) is labeled in E and F. The 35 S-labeled probes were incubated with the sections overnight. The sections were washed at ~20°C below the theoretical melting temperatures of the probe-mRNA hybridizations, dried and exposed to X-ray film for 4 weeks. The sagittal and coronal sections approximate brain levels (lateral 3.4 mm and interaural 6.2 mm) as indicated [41].

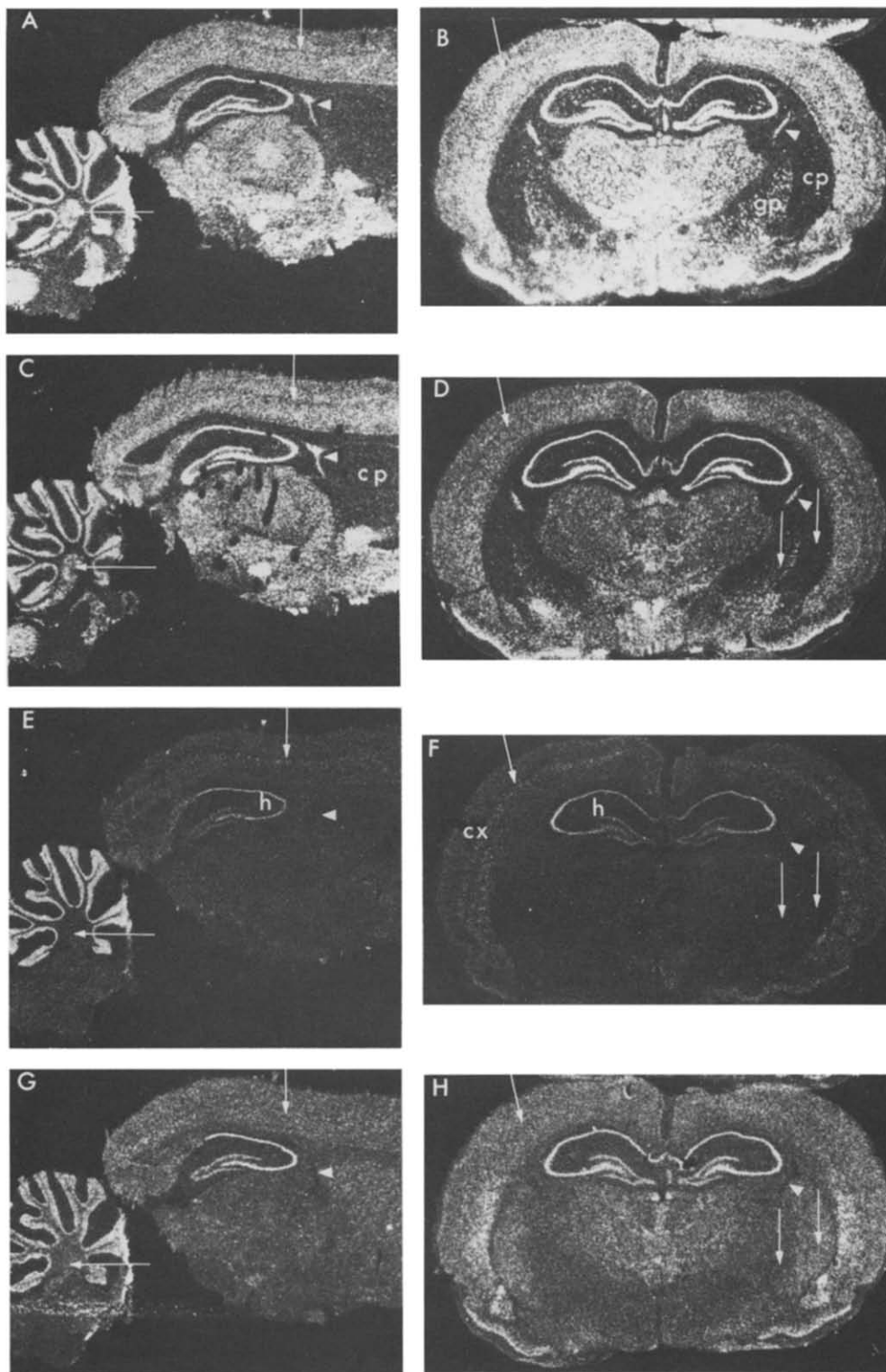


Table 1

Relative abundance of mRNAs coding for G-proteins in brain and peripheral tissues

	G _s	G _{i2}	G _{i1}	G _o
Cerebral cortex	++++	+++	++	+++
Hippocampus	++++	++++	+++	++++
Caudate putamen	+	—	—	+++
Globus pallidus	++++	+++	—	—
Cerebellum	++++	+++	+++	+++
Cortex	++++	+++	+++	+++
Lateral nuc.	++++	+++	—	—
Choroid plexus	++++	+++	—	—
Liver	+++	++	—	—
Heart	+++	++	—	—
Kidney	+++	++	—	—

Data were collected from Northern blots and in situ hybridizations. Relative amounts of the mRNAs were evaluated by visual inspection of the autoradiograms

lateral nuclei of the cerebellum, and the ependymal lining of the ventricles. Unlike the other mRNAs, G_{i1} mRNA showed a distinct layered pattern of expression within the cerebral cortex, with a central layer having the most mRNA. Unlike the other mRNAs, G_o mRNA was highly abundant in the claustrum and amygdala, relatively abundant in the caudate putamen, and had low abundance in the globus pallidus. In general, G_o mRNA was more homogeneously distributed than G_s, G_{i1} and G_{i2} mRNAs in the rat brain. A summary of the distributions of G-protein mRNAs as determined from Northern blots and in situ hybridization is presented in table 1.

4. DISCUSSION

The specificity of cDNA-mRNA hybridizations was verified in several ways. (i) All of the probes were complementary to regions of the G-protein mRNAs which showed the least homology between each other [13], and the hybridizations and washes were performed under conditions which precluded hybridization of the probes to the related mRNAs. (ii) Using stringencies of hybridization identical to those used for in situ hybridizations, all of the probes identified mRNA species on Northern blots with the same size as previously reported using

long cloned probes [14–18,24,25,27,28]. We suggest that the additional, larger, mRNA species observed with the G_s and G_o probes may represent unprocessed RNA transcripts. (iii) The patterns of in situ hybridizations were compared with data which we have previously collected using similar methods to localize other mRNAs present in brain (i.e. neuropeptides [29]) and not present in brain (i.e. transducin and opsin [30,31]). All of the patterns reported here are unique for G-protein mRNAs, and nonspecific binding of oligonucleotides to lipids and other non-mRNA species were not detectable at the exposure times used (defined with the probes to the mRNAs not present in brain).

Clearly, the G-protein mRNAs are heterogeneously expressed in the rat brain and have widely differing concentrations. The relative abundance of these mRNAs is surprising in light of the concentrations of the proteins for which they encode, i.e. G_o > G_i > G_s [34]. The relative abundance of G_{i1} vs G_{i2} protein is unknown, however, since G_{i1} has the sequence which has been determined from protein purified from brain, it is probable that G_{i1} is more abundant than G_{i2}. The lack of concordance in the mRNA and protein levels implies that the proteins are turned over at different rates and/or these mRNAs have markedly different translational efficiencies.

The pattern of distribution of G_s mRNA is in striking contrast to the pattern of distribution previously reported for [³H]forskolin binding sites. [³H]Forskolin binds with high affinity to a complex between G_s and adenylate cyclase, and these sites are highly enriched in the caudate putamen relative to the cerebral cortex and globus pallidus. Furthermore, lesion studies indicate [³H]forskolin binding sites are synthesized by neurons intrinsic to the caudate putamen [35]. Thus, the levels of expression of G_s mRNA may not be directly related to the density of complexes between G_s and adenylate cyclase. It is tempting to speculate that in the cortex and globus pallidus G_s may complex with some effector protein in addition to adenylate cyclase. These interpretations must be considered with caution as [³H]forskolin binding sites have not been extensively characterized in terms of a possible molecular diversity and whether they are universally associated with adenylate cyclase.

The coexpression of G_s and G_{i2} mRNAs in all of

the brain regions examined suggests that the transcription of these two mRNAs is related. The coexpression of G_s and G_{i2} mRNA, but not G_{i1} mRNA, also provides indirect evidence that of the two G_i mRNAs, G_{i2} mRNA is more likely to be functionally associated with G_s , for example as an inhibitor of adenylate cyclase. In addition to adenylate cyclase inhibition, purified G_i -like proteins have been shown to couple with K^+ channels [10]. Since G_{i1} mRNA is highly enriched in neuronal tissues, and neuronal tissues would be expected to be enriched with respect to these K^+ channels, it is tempting to suggest that G_{i1} may be associated with this or other effectors enriched in neurons. A similar relationship is suggested by the high abundance of G_o mRNA in the brain relative to the peripheral tissues, as G_o couples with certain calcium channels [11] and these calcium channels are associated with neuronal tissues. Of course these tentative assignments of function must be tested using transfection of G-protein cDNAs and reconstitution of expressed or highly purified G-proteins.

The regionally specialized expression of G_s and G_{i2} mRNA vs G_o and G_{i1} mRNA strongly suggests that different neuronal pathways may predominantly use distinct G-protein-mediated signal-transduction systems. This regional expression of G-protein mRNAs may be related to both the neurotransmitter and effector phenotypes of cells within the individual brain regions. For example, in the caudate putamen cells predominantly synthesize mRNA encoding G_o , suggestive of a role for G_o in signal transduction of neurotransmitter receptors in the caudate. An analogous cell-specific expression of G-proteins has recently been shown in the retina. Transducin consists of two forms, one of which is expressed exclusively in cones and the other in rods [36].

These global relationships should only be considered as first approximations as all of the brain regions examined are complex mixtures of many cell types. Perhaps the most powerful predictions from these data will only be made when individual receptors and receptor mRNAs are colocalized with G-proteins and G-protein mRNAs within cells which have been defined in terms of their neurotransmitter and effector phenotypes. Work with neuropeptide mRNAs [29], protein kinase C mRNAs [37], rat muscarinic receptor mRNAs [38],

and brain nicotinic receptors [39,40] indicates the feasibility of this approach.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Noel Buckley for help with RNA preparations, R. Reed and D. Jones for unpublished information concerning the sizes of the mRNA species as determined with long cDNA probes and the sequence of rat G_{i1} , and M.J. Brownstein, J. Axelrod and W. Klee for critically reading the manuscript.

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