



# Immunologists' Perspectives on Monogenic Inflammatory Bowel Diseases

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## Abstract

Inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD) encompass a group of chronic inflammatory disorders primarily impacting the gastrointestinal system, and they may also affect other organ systems. While common forms of IBD typically arise from multifactorial causes, there exists a subset of patients with single gene defects known as monogenic IBD (mIBD). Over 100 genes have been associated with mIBD, spanning various biological pathways which affect various tissues; the immune system is the most commonly involved, but more rarely, the intestinal epithelium is the primarily affected compartment. Timely diagnosis hinges on awareness and the application of contemporary molecular techniques. Due to the diverse range of causes, managing mIBD requires a multidisciplinary approach. Conventional treatments often fall short, necessitating a personalized strategy that considers the multifaceted nature of mIBD presentations and the diverse etiologic factors. In recent times, novel therapies have emerged, targeting specific causative genes or affected pathways. This discussion delves into the fundamental aspects of mIBD, with particular emphasis on recent breakthroughs in the field, encompassing newly identified gene defects and innovative management strategies.

**Keywords:** Inflammatory bowel diseases, monogenic defects, immune system, multidisciplinary approach, personalized medicine

## Introduction

### Inflammatory Bowel Disorder

Inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD) are a heterogeneous group of chronic inflammatory conditions resulting from dysregulation of the mucosal immune system and the gut microbiota. This leads to chronic inflammation and damage to the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, which severely impacts an individual's quality of life (1,2). There are several factors that contribute, solely or combined, to IBD pathogenesis in susceptible individuals. This complex interaction makes IBD a multifactorial disorder. These factors include immune system disturbance, gut microbiome imbalance,

environmental factors, intestinal barrier dysfunction, and genetic predisposition (3,4).

Traditionally, IBD is classified into two main categories: Crohn's disease (CD), characterized by a discontinuous pattern of inflammation that can affect any part of the GI tract, and ulcerative colitis (UC), characterized by a continuous inflammation extending from the rectum to the colon (5,6). In addition to UC and CD, IBD-undetermined (IBDU) has been used to describe the disease in patients who present with clinical similarities to UC and CD but do not clearly fit into either group (7,8). Interestingly, IBDU is more common in pediatric patients than adults (9). The clinical manifestations of IBD can occur at any age and vary depending on the



specific type of IBD. Moreover, the severity and frequency of these symptoms can fluctuate over time, with the episodes of flares and periods of remission (10,11).

Previous epidemiological studies showed increased IBD incidence and prevalence worldwide, affecting developed and developing nations (12-15). Studies from Asia explored the impact of IBD in different regions, including East Asia (16-20), Southeast Asia (21,22), South Asia (23,24), West Asia (25,26), and Central Asia (27). A modeling study has predicted that IBD prevalence will have increased in Asia and Iran by 2035 (28). Turkish studies have found that IBD incidence is less than in Northern and Western Europe but similar to that in the Middle East (29,30). Furthermore, studies from Europe have reported that around 0.2% of the population is affected by IBD (31). In the United States, about 1.3% of adults have been diagnosed with IBD during their lifetime (32), and up to 25% of patients were diagnosed before the age of 20 years (33). This pattern of increasing prevalence is not limited to the adult population but has also been observed in the pediatric population.

### **Classification of Pediatric Inflammatory Bowel Disorder**

Childhood-onset of IBD is frequently associated with more severe disease symptoms, faster disease progression, and greater treatment resistance than adult-onset IBD (33,34). Therefore, there was a need to establish a revised classification system to account for pediatric IBD manifestations. The Paris classification is a pediatric IBD classification system that is derived from the Montreal classification, which was designed to categorize IBD in adults. The Paris classification categorized pediatric IBD based on age of onset, disease site or extent, behavior, and growth (35). Childhood-onset IBD has been categorized into five distinct groups. Pediatric-onset IBD refers to those patients who received an IBD diagnosis before their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, whereas patients diagnosed before the age of ten years are classified as Early Onset-IBD (EO-IBD). Patients who are diagnosed before the age of six years are classified as Very Early Onset-IBD (VEO-IBD), and children who are diagnosed before the age of two years are classified as infantile-onset IBD (IO-IBD). However, patients who experience the disease within the first 27 days of life are referred to as neonatal-onset IBD (36). There is a growing literature suggesting that early onset IBD is more likely to be associated with a Mendelian disease.

## **Monogenic Inflammatory Bowel Disorder Pathogenesis**

### **Genetic Overview of Monogenic Inflammatory Bowel Disorder**

Various attempts have been made to analyze and comprehend the genetic component of IBD. Twin and

family studies were the earliest types of studies that provided evidence to support the role of genetics in IBD pathogenesis (37-41). Subsequently, genome-wide association studies (GWAS) were employed to explore the genetic influence on adult-onset IBD. GWAS studies have revealed more than 200 genetic loci associated with IBD, many of which are shared by CD and UC (42-44).

As opposed to polygenic IBD, monogenic IBD (mIBD) is caused by rare single-gene mutations that can be inherited in a Mendelian manner. Patients with mIBD are more likely to have treatment-resistant disease that might not respond well to conventional therapies. Therefore, some mIBD patients might require different treatment options, such as other immunosuppressive or anti-inflammatory drugs, hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT), or surgical intervention (45-47).

Several approaches have been used throughout the years to discover rare genomic variations in IBD. Techniques such as targeted genetic sequencing and next-generation DNA sequencing have been critical in identifying these rare variants and improving our understanding of their clinical relevance to mIBD. This progress in the genetics of IBD has allowed for more accurate diagnoses, better-personalized treatment options, and improved management methods for individuals affected by monogenic forms of IBD (2).

The following sections will focus on selected genes recently discovered to be associated with monogenic forms of IBD, grouped as per their functional impact in the GI tract. A full updated list of mIBD genes is listed in Table 1.

### **Epithelial Barrier Dysfunction**

The epithelial lining of the GI tract is formed by specialized epithelial cells, which play a crucial role in maintaining an intact mucosal barrier. This barrier protects the intestinal epithelium by preventing direct contact between the intestinal epithelium and luminal contents (48). Genetic studies in IBD revealed mutations in genes involved in maintaining a functional epithelial lining, especially in patients with VEO-IBD patients. Earlier studies revealed several gene mutations impacting epithelial barrier function, which were associated with mIBD and IBD-like manifestations, such as *IKBKKG*, *ADAMI7*, *COL7A1*, and *GUCY2C* (49). Here, we will discuss a few novel mutations reported recently.

Anterior gradient 2 (*AGR2*) gene mutations are an example of a genetic variation that leads to a potential disruption in intestinal barrier function. *AGR2* is expressed in goblet cells and is important for the production of the mucus layer in the GI tract. It is involved in the processing of mucin (50) and in maintaining endoplasmic reticulum (ER) homeostasis (51,52). A recent study has

**Table 1.** Monogenic IBD gene list

Biological pathway	Gene	Disease	GI related clinical manifestations	Reference
<b>Epithelial barrier dysfunction</b>	<i>AGR2</i>	Enteropathy caused by AGR2 deficiency, Goblet cell Loss, and ER Stress (EAGLES)	Infantile-onset IBD	(53)
	<i>TTC7A</i>	TTC7A Deficiency	Enterocolitis, severe apoptotic	(55,166-169)
	<i>IKBKG</i>	NF-κB essential modulator (NEMO) deficiency	Enterocolitis	(170,171)
	<i>COL7A1</i>	Dystrophic epidermolysis bullosa	Enterocolitis	(171)
	<i>FERMT1</i>	Kindler syndrome	Ulcerative colitis	(107)
	<i>ADAM17</i>	ADAM-17 deficiency	Enterocolitis	(172)
	<i>GUCY2C</i>	Familial diarrhea	Enterocolitis	(173,174)
	<i>SLC9A3</i>	Congenital Diarrhea	Congenital sodium diarrhea osmotic or secretory	(175)
	<i>IL37</i>	IL-37 deficiency	Infantile ulcerative colitis	(61)
	<i>PI4KA</i>	PI4KA deficiency	Multiple intestinal atresia and combined immunodeficiency	(56)
<i>ELF4</i>	Deficiency in ELF4, X-linked (DEX)	Gastrointestinal inflammation with oral ulcerations	(70)	
<i>WNT2B</i>	WNT2B deficiency	Neonatal onset chronic diarrhea	(176)	
<b>Immunoregulation</b>	<i>FOXP3</i>	IPEX	Enterocolitis	(118-121)
	<i>IL2RA/CD25</i>	IPEX-like	Enterocolitis	(122,123)
	<i>STAT1 GOF</i>	IPEX-like	Enterocolitis	(124)
	<i>MALT1</i>	MALT1 deficiency (IPEX-like)	Enterocolitis	(177)
	<i>STAT3 GOF</i>	STAT3	Enterocolitis	(178)
	<i>JAK1 GOF</i>	JAK1	Enterocolitis	(179)
	<i>PTPN2</i>	PTPN2 deficiency	Severe autoimmune enteropathy, IPEX-like symptoms	(135)
	<i>BACH2</i>	BACH2-related immunodeficiency and autoimmunity (BRIDA)	Infancy-onset colitis	(180)
	<i>IL2RB</i>	IL-2RB deficiency	Infantile enteropathy	(131,132)
	<i>IL10RB</i>	IL-10Rb deficiency	Crohn's disease	(40,63,181-193)
<i>IL10</i>	IL-10 deficiency			
<b>T and B-cell defects</b>	<i>LRBA</i>	LRBA deficiency	Crohn's like Enterocolitis	(128-130,194-197)
	<i>CTLA4</i>	CTLA4 deficiency	Crohn's disease	(125,127)
	<i>IL21</i>	IL-21 deficiency	Crohn's like Enterocolitis	(198-200)
	<i>WAS</i>	Wiskott Aldrich syndrome	Ulcerative colitis-like	(109,201)
	<i>CD40LG</i>	Hyperimmunoglobulinemia	Mouth and colitis	(115)
	<i>AICDA</i>	Hyperimmunoglobulinemia	Crohn's-like Mouth and enterocolitis	(116)
	<i>BTK</i>	Bruton's agammaglobulinemia	Crohn's-like colitis	(113,114)
	<i>DCLRE1C \ ARTEMIS</i>	Artemis-deficiency combined immunodeficiency	Crohn's like Enterocolitis	(202,203)
	<i>PIK3R1</i>	PI3K activation syndrome	Colitis	(204)
	<i>PIK3CD</i>	PI3K activation syndrome	Colitis	(205)
<i>ZAP70</i>	SCID	Colitis	(102)	
<i>RAG2</i>	Leaky SCID	Colitis	(103,104)	
<i>IL2RG</i>	SCID/Omenn	Colitis	(105)	
<i>LIG4</i>	Leaky SCID	Colitis	(106,107)	

**Table 1. Continued**

	<i>ADA</i>	SCID	Colitis	(108)
	<i>CD3<math>\gamma</math></i>	SCID	Enterocolitis; Perianal disease.	(101)
	<i>ICOS</i>	ICOS deficiency	Enterocolitis	(110-112)
	<i>DKC1</i>	Hoyeraal Hreidarsson syndrome	Enterocolitis with ulcerations and strictures	(206-208)
	<i>RTEL1</i>	Hoyeraal Hreidarsson syndrome	Colitis/enteropathy	(209,210)
	<i>TGFBR1</i>	Loeys-Dietz syndrome	Colitis	(211)
<b>T and B-cell defects</b>	<i>TGFBR2</i>	Loeys-Dietz syndrome	Colitis	(211)
	<i>TGFB1</i>	TGF- $\beta$ 1 deficiency	Chronic active pancolitis with encephalopathy	(212)
	<i>ZBTB24</i>	Immunodeficiency centromeric instability, facial anomalies (ICF) syndrome	Colitis	(213)
	<i>RIPK1</i>	RIPK1 deficiency	Pancolitis, Ulcers Oral lesions; Perianal disease	(214)
	<i>CASP8</i>	Caspase-8 deficiency	Crohn's like pancolitis; Strictures; Fistulas; Perianal disease	(215)
	<i>CYBB</i>			
	<i>CYBA</i>			
	<i>NCF1</i>	CGD	Crohn's-like colitis	(216-219)
	<i>NCF2</i>			
	<i>NCF4</i>			
	<i>SLC37A4</i>	Glycogen Storage Disease Type 1 b	Crohn's-like colitis with ulcerations; Strictures; Perianal fistula	(220-222)
	<i>G6PC3</i>	Congenital neutropenia	Crohn's-like colitis with Strictures; Oral and genital aphthous ulcerations	(223-226)
<b>Phagocyte defects</b>	<i>ITGB2</i>	Leukocyte adhesion deficiency 1	Crohn's like with stenosis\Strictureing phenotype; Lip ulcer	(227,228)
	<i>NPC1</i>	Niemann-Pick type C disease	Crohn's	(229-231)
	<i>CYBC1</i>	CYBC1 deficiency	Chronic granulomatous disease	(232)
	<i>PRKCD</i>	PRKCD deficiency	CGD Like symptoms	(75)
	<i>TLR4</i>	TLR4 deficiency	Crohn disease associated with complex perianal fistulizing disease	(78)
	<i>MD2</i>	human MD2 deficiency	Very early onset inflammatory bowel disease	(77)
	<i>FMNL2</i>	FMNL2 deficiency	Crohn's disease	(233)
	<i>XIAP</i>	X-linked lymphoproliferative syndrome 2 (XLP2)	Crohn's like granulomatous colitis	(81,82,234-238)
	<i>HPS1</i>	Herman-sky-Pudlak syndrome	Crohn's like enterocolitis; Perianal fistula/ abscess	(89,91,92,239-242)
	<i>HPS4</i>	Herman-sky-Pudlak syndrome	Crohn's like enterocolitis; Perianal fistula/ abscess	(89,91,241)
	<i>HPS6</i>	Herman-sky-Pudlak syndrome	Enterocolitis	(90)
<b>Hyperinflammatory and autoinflammatory</b>	<i>MVK</i>	Mevalonate kinase deficiency	Severe neonatal onset ulcerative colitis; enterocolitis; Strictures; Adhesions; Perforations; deep ulcers	(83-86,90,243,244)
	<i>PLCG2</i>	Phospholipase Cy2 defects	Infantile-onset ulcerative colitis and early onset enterocolitis	(245)
	<i>MEFV</i>	Familial Mediterranean fever	Infantile or toddler-onset patchy colitis with white; exudate; Nodularity; Anal fissures	(87,88)
	<i>STXBP2</i>	Familial hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis type 5	Enterocolitis	(93-95)

Table 1. Continued

<b>Hyperinflammatory and autoinflammatory</b>	<i>STXBP3</i>	STXBP3 deficiency	Refractory infantile-onset IBD	(96)
	<i>TRIM22</i>	TRIM22 defect	Granulomatous Crohn's colitis; Severe perianal disease	(246)
	<i>SLCO2A1</i>	Prostaglandin Transporter Deficiency	Chronic non-specific multiple ulcers of the small intestine (CNSU)	(247,248)
	<i>CARD8</i>	CARD8 deficiency	Crohn's disease	(99,100)
	<i>CDC42</i>	NOCARH syndrome	Intestinal bleeding, associated with persistent/chronic diarrhea; unremitting neonatal enterocolitis	(249)
	<i>SYK GOF</i>	GOF SYK systemic inflammation	Colitis	(97)
<b>Other</b>	<i>SKIV2L</i>	Trichohepatoenteric syndrome	Enterocolitis within weeks of life	(250-252)
	<i>TTC37</i>	Trichohepatoenteric syndrome	Infantile-onset diarrhea	(251,252)
	<i>ARPC1B</i>	ARPC1B deficiency	Colitis	(253)
	<i>CD55</i>	CHAPLE syndrome	Enterocolitis with ulcers in terminal ileum	(149-153)
	<i>IPO8</i>	IPO8 deficiency	Severe colitis	(254)
	<i>IFIH1</i> (viral sensing)	MDA5 deficiency	VEOIBD	(255)

GOF: Gain of function. Adopted and updated from Ouahed et al. (256) with recently reported novel genes incorporated according to classification suggested by Azabdaftari et al. (47)

found a biallelic mutation in the *AGR2* gene in two siblings, resulting in infantile-onset IBD (53). Al-Shaibi and colleagues demonstrated that the mutation led to loss of *AGR2* function, which resulted in elevated ER stress and inflammation and a reduction in mucin and goblet cells. As a result, the integrity of the intestinal barrier was compromised, contributing to IBD pathogenesis. Interestingly, the patient's clinical data are consistent with the phenotype observed in *AGR2* knockout mice, further supporting that the *AGR2* mutation was the disease-causative variant (53).

Phosphatidylinositol 4-kinase IIIa, encoded by the *PI4KA* gene, has also recently been associated with mIBD. PI4KA forms a complex with Tetratricopeptide Repeat Domain 7 (TTC7) and FAM126 to synthesize the membrane phospholipid phosphatidylinositol 4-phosphate (PI4P). PI4P is crucial in many cellular functions, including membrane trafficking, vesicular transport, and intracellular signaling pathways (54,55). Additionally, it contributes to the adhesion, survival, and polarization of epithelial cells (55). Both PI4KA and TTC7A are expressed in enterocytes and play an important role in enterocyte survival and function. Mutations in either *PI4KA* or *TTC7A* disturb these cellular processes, contributing to the development of IBD and other disorders (55-57). Biallelic mutations in the *PI4KA* gene were noted in several patients who presented with complex phenotypes of neurological abnormalities, immunodeficiency, and intestinal disease within the first weeks or year of life (56,58). The finding of intestinal disease in human PI4KA deficiency is consistent with previous research on PI4KA mutant mice, which developed a severe

intestinal phenotype characterized by extensive mucosal epithelial degeneration (59). TTC7A deficiency, caused by homozygous or compound heterozygous damaging variants, also results in a severe form of monogenic VEO-IBD. Disease from TTC7A deficiency may present as early as the neonatal period with severe apoptotic enterocolitis, intestinal atresia, and severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID) (55,57).

Interleukin (IL)-37, an IL-1 family cytokine, has anti-inflammatory properties and is expressed in various human tissues and cells (60). A recent study has found a homozygous loss-of-function IL-37 mutation in a 4-month-old Turkish male with infantile UC. Functional analysis demonstrated that the mutant allele expressed an unstable protein that could not inhibit proinflammatory signals resulting in activated hyperinflammatory macrophages. Furthermore, the patient responded well to immunosuppressive treatment, which resolved all GI symptoms (61). This differs from patients with IL-10 signaling defects, in which standard treatments are generally not effective, thus requiring allogeneic HSCT to induce remission (40,62-65).

ELF4 is an X-linked ETS (Erythroblast Transformation Specific) transcription factor gene that regulates both adaptive and innate immunity. It has a wide range of functions, including regulating the development of the natural killer cells (NK) (66) and the proliferation of CD8<sup>+</sup> T-cells to control their expansion (67). ELF4 is also a key transcription factor in the type 1 interferon (IFN) response to viral infection (68). Moreover, ELF4 is regarded as an anti-inflammatory regulator since it suppresses CD4<sup>+</sup> T-cell



differentiation to Th17 cells (69). Patients with mutations in the *ELF4* gene have been reported recently. Tyler and colleagues were the first to identify a loss-of-function variant in *ELF4* in three unrelated patients with mucosal inflammation. For example, one patient developed fever, inflammation in the GI tract, and mouth ulcers at the age of 2 years (70). A colonoscopy showed inflamed mucosa with neutrophilic infiltration, as well as elevated expression of IL-17A and ROR $\gamma$ T. Furthermore, the patient's cells showed a low number of NK cells, memory B-cells, and slightly increased numbers of naive CD4<sup>+</sup> and CD8<sup>+</sup> cells. Further *in vitro* functional investigation on patient cells and on animals demonstrated that the *ELF4* deficiency resulted in increased inflammatory Th17 cell responses, which stimulated neutrophil recruitment and promoted mucosal and intestinal inflammation. In addition, it led to a hyperinflammatory state in macrophages (70).

### Phagocytic Dysfunction

Innate immunity in the gut involves several phagocytic cells. The main function of these cells is to maintain intestinal homeostasis through eliminating microbes, triggering inflammatory cytokine release, and recruiting immune cells to the region (71). Multiple studies have discovered various disorders with impairments in phagocytic function caused by gene mutations, which can affect host defense against infections.

Chronic granulomatous disease (CGD) is characterized by defects in phagocytic activity. Approximately 50% of CGD patients develop intestinal inflammation that resembles the disease in IBD patients (72). Genetic mutations in *CYBA*, *CYBB*, *NCF1*, *NCF2*, *NCF4*, and *CYBC1* have been identified in CGD patients (73). These genes encode the NADPH oxidase complex's components, and loss of activity in any of these genes results in phagocyte NADPH oxidase deficiency and impaired reactive oxygen species (ROS) generation (74). This leads to an increased susceptibility to bacterial and fungal infections. A recent study has revealed that mutations in the *PRKCD* gene causes impaired activation of the NADPH oxidase complex (75). *PRKCD* encodes protein kinase C delta (PKC $\delta$ ), and it regulates B-cell homeostasis as well as apoptosis, cell development, proliferation, and cell survival in a variety of cells, including lymphocytes and phagocytes (76). Neehus and colleagues reported that patients with the *PRKCD* mutation had childhood-onset autoimmunity and recurrent infection, particularly GI infections, similar to those with CGD. Functional investigations revealed that the patients' phagocytic cells had a substantial impairment in ROS production and neutrophil extracellular trap formation after being stimulated with phorbol 12-myristate 13-acetate (PMA). This suggests that protein kinase C (PKC) is essential in activating the NADPH oxidase complex, which

may contribute to their CGD-like infectious manifestation (75).

Mutations in Myeloid differentiation protein 2 (*MD2*) and Toll-Like Receptor-4 (*TLR4*) were recently found in patients with IBD and shown to impair *TLR4* signaling (77,78). Under physiological conditions, *MD2* and CD14 serve as *TLR4* coreceptors and bind lipopolysaccharide (LPS). This causes Myeloid differentiation primary response-88 (MyD88) to be recruited to the Toll/IL-1 receptor (TIR) domain, which subsequently triggers the activation of the mitogen-activated protein kinases (MAPKs) and nuclear factor-kappa B (NF $\kappa$ B) pathways (77-79). In parallel, LPS-binding protein (LBP) mediates LPS transfer to CD14, and then CD14 presents LPS to the *MD2-TLR4* complex. This results in *MD2-TLR4* complex internalization and activation and promotes *TLR4* endocytosis and TBK1-IKK $\epsilon$ -IRF3-IFN- $\beta$  pathway activation (80). Dysfunction of the *TLR4* signaling pathway might result in a dysregulated inflammatory response in the intestine. A biallelic LOF mutation in *MD2* was discovered in a patient with infantile colitis since the age of 4 months, as well as a sibling with pneumonia and recurrent otitis media. *TLR4* endocytosis, NF $\kappa$ B and MAPK signaling, cytokine production, and bacterial handling were all found to be impaired in the patient (77). Another study investigated a biallelic *TLR4* mutation in a patient who presented with complex perianal CD and found that the *TLR4* deficiency caused impaired LPS-stimulated cytokine responses while maintaining antimicrobial activity towards salmonella (78). In both studies, the *MD2* or *TLR4* mutations were associated with incomplete penetrance and/or variable expressivity since not all carriers of the mutations experienced symptoms to the same degree (77,78).

### Autoinflammation and Hyperinflammation

Patients with autoinflammatory and hyperinflammatory disorders present with IBD-like symptoms due to intestinal inflammation. Mutations in several genes such as the *XIAP* (81,82), *MVK* (83-86), *MEFV* (87,88), *HPS1,4,6* (89-92), or *STXBP2* (93-95) have been documented to lead to inflammatory disease. Recently Ouahed et al. (96) found novel heterozygous or biallelic variants in *STXBP3* (*Syntaxin-Binding Protein 3* gene) associated with VEO-IBD, sensorineural hearing impairment, and immune dysregulation. Functional analysis of the affected patients showed that *STXBP3* expression was reduced in the blood. Knockdown of *STXBP3* in an intestinal epithelial cell line resulted in delayed formation of a cellular monolayer and impaired polarization, which suggests that *STXBP3* might have a role in maintaining the polarity and integrity of the epithelial barrier (96).

A new monogenic cause of IBD has recently been reported by Wang et al. (97), who identified patients with

monoallelic missense gain of function (GOF) mutations in *SYK* (Spleen tyrosine kinase). These patients presented with multiorgan inflammation. *SYK* is a cytosolic non-receptor protein tyrosine kinase (PTK) that serves as a downstream signaling molecule for various immune cell receptors. In addition, *SYK* is important for the activation, differentiation, proliferation, and survival of B-cells (98). The GOF mutations in *SYK* resulted in constitutive activation of *SYK* and its downstream signaling pathways, resulting in hyperinflammatory responses and immunodeficiency. Interestingly, the study showed that knock-in mice with a *SYK* gain-of-function mutation did not develop spontaneous intestinal inflammation, suggesting that *SYK* hypersensitivity requires other factors to initiate prominent intestinal inflammation. This could explain the variable manifestations that were seen among the cases with *SYK* gain-of-function variants since they exhibited mild and/or intermittent intestinal symptoms (97).

In another recent study, Mao et al. (99) have investigated a mutation in Caspase Recruitment Domain Family Member 8 (*CARD8*) and its involvement in the IBD pathogenesis. *CARD8* is a negative regulator of NLRP3 inflammasome activation and IL-1 $\beta$  production (99,100). Mao et al. (99) reported that a patient with a dominant-negative mutation in *CARD8* developed CD-like intestinal inflammation. The molecular investigation showed that mutant *CARD8* failed to interact with NLRP3, resulting in increased inflammasome activation and enhanced IL-1 $\beta$  secretion, thus leading to intestinal inflammation (100).

### Immune Dysregulation

The homeostasis of the immune system is maintained through a balance of activation and repression. Effector and memory immune cells activate the system, whereas regulatory T-cells suppress it. Dysregulation of the immune system contributes to the development of IBD.

Several gene mutations have been extensively studied as causative agents of T and B-cell defects which contribute to various manifestations of intestinal inflammation. Mutations in genes, including *CD3 $\gamma$*  (101), *ZAP70* (102), *RAG2* (103,104), *IL2RG* (105), *LIG4* (106,107), *ADA* (108), can lead to SCID. Deleterious mutations in the *WAS* gene lead to Wiskott-Aldrich Syndrome (WAS), a rare X-linked Primary Immunodeficiency (PID), in which patients also frequently suffer from a wide range of autoimmune manifestations (109). In addition, mutations in the inducible T-cell co-stimulator (*ICOS*) gene result in Common Variable Immunodeficiency (CVID), characterized by a defect in generating class-switched memory B-cells and hypogammaglobulinemia. Patients with *ICOS* mutations often experience enteropathy, lymphoproliferative diseases, autoimmune disorders, and respiratory infections (110-112). Furthermore, previous

studies have reported mutations causing primary humoral immune deficiencies and immunoglobulin deficiency in genes, such as *BTK* (113,114), *CD40LG* (115), and *AICDA* (116), which can also lead to enteropathy.

Regulatory T-cells (Treg cells) contribute to immune homeostasis by maintaining immune tolerance and preventing an exaggerated immune response (117). Dysfunction of these cells is seen in immune dysregulation, polyendocrinopathy, enteropathy, X-linked (IPEX) syndrome. The syndrome is characterized by severe enteropathy, lymphoproliferation, chronic dermatitis, autoimmune endocrinopathies including early onset type I diabetes mellitus, and other autoimmune manifestations (118). The classical IPEX is caused by deleterious mutations in the transcriptional factor Forkhead box protein P3 (FOXP3), which is crucial for Treg development (119-121). IPEX-like disorders are caused by a number of mutations that have an effect on Treg function and differentiation, and their manifestations resemble FOXP3 deficiency. *IL2RA/CD25* deficiency (122,123) and *STAT1* GOF (124) are examples of IPEX-like disorders. Mutations in the *CTLA4* (125-127) and *LRBA* genes (128-130) can also lead to IPEX-like disease due to immune system hyperactivation and Treg dysfunction.

Recently, mutations in *IL2RB*, which encodes for IL-2R $\beta$ , have been identified to lead to an IPEX-like disorder (131,132). IL-2 is a cytokine produced mainly by T-cells, which has many functions, including promoting lymphocyte expansion, the development and survival of Treg cells and T helper cell subsets, as well as the activation of cytotoxic effector cells (133). IL-2RB is essential for the signaling of IL-2 and IL-15 and plays a critical role in peripheral tolerance (134). IL-2RB dysfunction leads to autoimmune and immunodeficiency disorders (131,132). Two independent studies found *IL2RB* mutations in patients presenting with enteropathy, allergies, skin abnormalities, and infection. Fernandez et al. (131) showed that this mutation led to IL-2R $\beta$  expression reduction and dysregulated IL-2 and IL-15 signaling, as well as impaired NK cell responses, leading to an IPEX-like syndrome. The cohort study by Zhang et al. (132) consisted of patients with three different IL2R $\beta$  mutations, each resulting in disease via a different biochemical mechanism. Patients with the p.L77P IL-2R $\beta$  mutation showed impaired IL-2R $\beta$  surface expression, reduced IL-2 signaling in T-cells, and increased cytolytic activity of NK cells. Patients with the p.S40L IL-2R $\beta$  allele had decreased IL-2 binding, while patients with the p.Q96\* IL-2R $\beta$  stop-gain mutation had no IL-2R $\beta$  expression and IL-2 signaling. Nonetheless, all these mutations resulted in IL-2R $\beta$  deficiency and dysregulation of the immune system.

IPEX-like disease can also be caused by dysregulation of the JAK-STAT pathway. A recent study has reported

a mutation in tyrosine-protein phosphatase non-receptor type 2 (*PTPN2*) in a patient who has suffered from severe chronic secretory diarrhea and eczema since the age of three months (135). *PTPN2* is a negative regulator of the JAK-STAT pathway, and its dysfunction has been implicated in various disorders, including IBD, inflammatory disorders, and tumor development (136). Through functional analysis, Parlato et al. (135) demonstrated that *PTPN2* deficiency led to JAK/STAT pathway hyperactivation. These findings suggest that suppressing JAK/STAT activation may minimize intestinal inflammation and that JAK-STAT signaling dysregulation plays a role in IPEX-like pathogenesis.

Furthermore, genes of the NF- $\kappa$ B signaling pathway have been associated with the etiology of mIBD. NF- $\kappa$ B signaling is an important cellular signaling pathway that regulates innate and adaptive immune functions, as well as acts as a key regulator of inflammatory reactions. It also maintains epithelial integrity and intestinal immune homeostasis (137). *CARMIL2* is a protein that plays a role in cytoskeletal organization and cell migration. It acts as a scaffold to mediate CD28 signaling and stimulate the NF- $\kappa$ B pathway in T-cells for activation and differentiation (138,139). Recent studies have shown that *CARMIL2* loss of function contributes to the pathogenesis of primary immunodeficiency and VEO-IBD (138-141). Caspase activation and recruitment domain 11 (*CARD11*) is another scaffold protein involved in the activation of the NF- $\kappa$ B pathway and the activation and differentiation of immune cells. Mutations in *CARD11* were also shown to be associated with a diverse spectrum of human disease manifestations, including VEO-IBD (142,143).

### Complement Overactivation and mIBD

The complement system is a complex network of extracellular proteins, which regulates both the innate and the adaptive branches of the immune system. It functions to eliminate pathogens and clear immune complexes, apoptotic cells, and cellular debris (144,145). Activation of the complement system generates biologically active peptides known as anaphylatoxins, which modulate immune responses (146). Complement activation is carefully regulated by endogenous inhibitors, including cell surface glycoproteins like CD55 (also known as decay accelerating factor or DAF), CD46, and CD59, which shield normal hematopoietic, endothelial and epithelial cells from damage caused by complement (147).

Intestinal lymphangiectasia is an important cause of protein-losing enteropathy, a condition characterized by the loss of serum proteins through the GI tract (148). In 2017, the identification of “CD55 deficiency with hyperactivation of complement, angiopathic thrombosis, and PLE (CHAPLE disease, OMIM #226300)” unveiled

that one of the causes of this disorder was an overactive complement system due to a deficiency in the *CD55* gene (149,150). The primary characteristics of this disease encompass severe protein-losing enteropathy arising from primary intestinal lymphangiectasia (PIL), accompanied by symptoms such as diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain, edema, recurrent infections due to low levels of gamma globulins, and severe, often life-threatening thromboembolic complications (148,149,151). The disease may present as early-onset IBD, with characteristic intestinal ulcers resembling CD. In a group of 16 CHAPLE patients, a complement inhibitor antibody, eculizumab, was used on an off-label basis and consistently reversed all manifestations of the disease, corrected abnormalities in the serum protein composition, and induced a positive shift in gut microbial composition towards a healthy state (152). Remarkably, a novel subcutaneously administered C5-blocking antibody called pozelimab has received approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in the CHAPLE disease (153).

## Presenting Features of Monogenic Inflammatory Bowel Disease

### Age at Onset Matters

IBD predominantly exhibits a polygenic nature, with monogenic causes representing a minority of all IBD cases. A recent study by Crowley et al. (154) in Canada focused on 1,000 children aged 0-18 years, who were diagnosed with IBD. Surprisingly, only 3% of these children were found to have a monogenic basis for their IBD. Even when examining the subset of Very Early Onset IBD patients, those under 6 years of age, only 7.8% were identified as having mIBD. These findings suggest a correlation between an earlier onset of symptoms and a heightened likelihood of monogenic etiologies being responsible for the condition (154).

### The Interplay Between mIBD and Inborn Errors of Immunity

The bulk of genes implicated in the pathogenesis of mIBD primarily serve roles in host defense or immune regulation. Consequently, the majority of mIBDs are categorized as “Inborn Errors of Immunity”, previously known as “Primary Immunodeficiencies”. Conversely, in a smaller subset of mIBDs, the primary issue lies in epithelial dysfunction. In these instances, the heightened inflammation stems from the inherent malfunction of the intestinal epithelium (155).

When viewed from the perspective of Inborn Errors of Immunity (IEI), it becomes apparent that approximately one-third of these conditions impact the GI system (GIS) (156). These IEIs often result in inflammatory damage



within the GI tract, leading to a clinical presentation that is endoscopically indistinguishable from polygenic IBD (157).

## Differential Diagnosis and Treatment in Monogenic Inflammatory Bowel Disorders

### Roles of Different Disciplines in Managing mIBD

Pediatricians, gastroenterologists, immunologists, and medical geneticists all play pivotal roles in diagnosing and managing potential cases of mIBD. However, determining the appropriate referral pathway for these patients can be challenging, given the rarity of mIBD.

Given that mIBD typically presents early in life, pediatricians are often the initial point of contact for patients. The pediatrician's expertise in history-taking, physical examination, and clinical judgment significantly influences the timeliness of receiving appropriate care. However, due to the frequent diagnostic delays associated with IEB, individuals with mIBD may endure a considerable period of undiagnosed illness before obtaining an accurate diagnosis (158). Studies indicate that the average time from the onset of symptoms to diagnosis for IBD patients is approximately 4-8 months for polygenic IBD cases (159). However, for mIBD cases, patients may endure years without a correct or any diagnosis, leading to ineffective treatments. These delays can lead to inappropriate patient management and treatment failures.

For example, certain IEB conditions that manifest as mIBD may necessitate an allogeneic HSCT. Ideally, this procedure should be performed when the patient is in optimal overall health, typically during the early stages of the disease, before any organ deterioration has occurred. Diagnostic delays may result in a missed opportunity window, rendering HSCT impractical.

Efforts to raise awareness about mIBD manifestations among primary care physicians and pediatricians must be prioritized. Furthermore, it is crucial to provide comprehensive information about the subsequent diagnostic and management steps that a typical mIBD patient will undergo. Highlighting the multidisciplinary approach to managing this condition is of utmost importance, as every member of the healthcare team plays a pivotal role at various stages of the process, from planning initial clinical tests to coordinating consultations with specialists and facilitating connections with specialized centers capable of conducting advanced molecular investigations. After connecting the subject with the core specialists' team, future management plans can be meticulously organized, taking into account the prevailing conditions in the local environment.

Considering that polygenic IBD is notably more prevalent than mIBD (154), pediatricians and primary caregivers should initially contemplate the likelihood of

polygenic IBD. Arguably the most significant distinguishing factor between mIBD and polygenic IBD is the age at which it presents, with the likelihood of mIBD rising in younger age groups (155).

A gastroenterologist can perform a GI tract endoscopy to identify lesions, inflammation, anatomical variations, and defects. Tissue examination provides vital information about the nature of inflammation and helps narrow the differential diagnosis. A definitive diagnosis often requires a tailored approach that considers the entire clinical picture and the results of prior investigations.

It is imperative to recognize that specific indicators may prompt a physician to give greater consideration to immunodeficiencies as a primary differential diagnosis. As up to one-third of all IEB cases present with GI symptoms (157), investigating the possibility of IEB becomes pivotal in identifying the underlying cause of the patient's GI issues. Warning signs of immunodeficiency should be carefully considered in this context (160). These signs include severe infections, delayed recovery from infections, recurrent thrush or yeast infections, persistent diarrhea, poor growth in children, persistent fatigue, susceptibility to unusual infections, autoimmune disorders, increased allergies, or oncologic manifestations (160).

A set of initial laboratory assessments, including a complete blood count, inflammatory markers, lymphocyte subsets, and immunoglobulin levels, should be conducted at baseline for patients with suspected IBD. Any hints of IEB should be meticulously assessed. Additionally, more advanced immune investigations, such as neutrophil oxidative burst or deeper immune phenotyping, can be performed with a high index of suspicion. Family history is a vital component of the medical history, especially if a relative has exhibited similar symptoms. Physicians should inquire about sibling deaths and any history of undiagnosed IBD within the family. Given that most mIBDs are inherited in an autosomal recessive manner, a thorough family history can lead to a correct diagnosis (155).

### Monogenic IBD in Adults

While mIBD typically manifests early in life, certain mIBD types may present later. Examples include Hermansky-Pudlak syndrome (HPS) and familial GUCY2C diarrhea syndrome, which may not develop IBD until adulthood. Additionally, patients with the XIAP, CGD, and haploinsufficiency of A20 (HA20) subtypes can experience the onset of IBD at various ages, ranging from infancy to their third decade of life (161).

### Refractory IBD Cases

Cases of refractory IBD, which do not respond to conventional therapies, should raise suspicion of mIBD. In such instances, considering a referral to an immunologist

is advisable. The decision to proceed with an extensive diagnostic evaluation hinges on the patient's comprehensive clinical profile and the results of laboratory investigations. If the clinical judgment of an immunologist suggests a substantial probability of an Inborn Error of Immunity or an epithelial barrier dysfunction, genetic testing may be warranted.

### **Extraintestinal Manifestations**

Extraintestinal manifestations can occur in both monogenic and polygenic IBD patients. In cases of polygenic IBD, these manifestations are often typical and familiar to physicians and include joint issues, skin problems, eye inflammation, mouth sores, and occasionally neurological symptoms (162). However, in mIBD, a broader range of multisystem involvement may occur. IEI are characterized by autoimmunity, increased susceptibility to infections, an elevated risk of cancer, and allergies. Additionally, hematological disorders can be observed in IEI (160). Consequently, patients may initially present in medical specialties other than pediatrics, gastroenterology, and immunology, such as hematology, dermatology, pulmonology, and infectious diseases.

Autoimmunity in mIBD encompasses a wide spectrum of conditions, including autoimmune hepatitis, arthritis, type 1 diabetes mellitus, hypothyroidism, psoriasis, autoimmune hemolytic anemia, autoimmune neutropenia, immune thrombocytopenic purpura, uveitis, primary sclerosing cholangitis, vasculitis, autoimmune pancreatitis, autoimmune growth hormone deficiency, glomerular nephropathy, nephrotic syndrome, and autoimmune lymphoproliferative syndrome (161). As patients usually present with overlapping signs and symptoms, understanding the phenotypic correlation with molecular etiology is crucial. Thorough evaluation, including immunological assessment, is warranted in such cases.

Given that mIBD primarily affects the immune system, it is advisable to consider an immunology referral when there is suspicion of a monogenic etiology. The multifaceted nature of this condition necessitates the involvement of immunologists in managing its intricate clinical course and associated complications.

In addition to the intrinsic immune abnormalities associated with mIBD, a subset of mIBDs can result in GI protein leakage, leading to a secondary immune deficiency state (163). Such conditions are also categorized as protein-losing enteropathy (PLE). It is important to note that PLE is not a single disease but rather a syndrome encompassing various intestinal and extraintestinal disorders. When a patient presents with PLE, etiological investigations should encompass the broad spectrum of potential causes (151).

The malabsorption triggered by PLE or other forms of

mIBD can lead to nutritional deficiencies and exacerbate immune dysfunction. This combination can result in a severe immune deficiency, making patients highly susceptible to severe multisystemic infections. The specific infectious agents involved may vary depending on the type of immunity affected and the pathways involved in the disease's progression. This knowledge guides immunologists in prescribing appropriate antimicrobial prophylaxis targeted at the expected infectious agents.

Immunologists also play a pivotal role in devising treatment strategies for disease modification. Nowadays, there are numerous therapeutic options available that specifically target the immune pathways primarily responsible for driving the disease process. These treatments can include immune-modifying pharmacotherapeutics or curative therapies such as HSCT or gene therapy (160). Such interventions not only reverse the intestinal pathology but also provide a cure for extraintestinal manifestations.

Collaboration between immunologists and gastroenterologists is crucial for providing comprehensive care to patients. Immunologists should consider referring IBD patients to gastroenterology for endoscopy and further evaluation. Even when the GI system is not the primary focus in cases of IEI, it is important for the managing immunologist to recognize the high likelihood of future GI involvement. Any GI complaints, even if mild, should prompt consideration of a gastroenterology referral. The threshold for referring to gastroenterology can be lowered to include cases of simple acute diarrhea or mild failure to thrive. Given the likelihood of eventual GI involvement in IEI, this should remain on the immunologist's radar.

Gastroenterologists possess expertise in nutrition, particularly when it comes to managing cases of failure to thrive. While this is a common issue in various childhood chronic illnesses, in mIBD, nutritional deficiencies can be severe enough to result in stunted growth and significant failure to thrive. Gastroenterologists can effectively manage the patient's diet and provide essential nutritional support. Therefore, prompt referral to gastroenterology is crucial for minimizing growth delays. Early referral to gastroenterology offers the patient a better chance to catch up with their peers in terms of growth and development.

In some cases, immune suppression treatment may be suitable for mIBD patients, especially when inflammation is severe. Gastroenterologists play a key role in making decisions about immune suppression and selecting the appropriate immunosuppressant, dosage, and duration of therapy.

### **Genetic and Immunological Testing Guidelines**

Immunological and genetic testing is necessary for accurate diagnosis of monogenic IBD's since they often involve inherited mutations in immunological pathways.

Genetic testing in the context of IBD is becoming the routine clinical practice, whereas in the past, it was merely a tool for research. However, for most of the world, genome-wide analysis is either very expensive to put in routine clinical practice or not available at all (47).

The approach to diagnosis varies from center to center and from country to country in the case of mIBD. Sometimes, it is the immunologist who takes the lead, while other times, it is the gastroenterologist who manages the patient primarily. Immunologists focus on various aspects, including the immunology profile and identification of affected immune compartments. Geneticists play a crucial role in determining the diagnostic tests needed for identifying the genetic basis of the condition.

Recent guidelines published by the British Society of Gastroenterology and Pediatric Gastroenterology recommend genetic testing for all patients with IBD under the age of 2 years. For patients aged 2-6 years, genomic testing should be considered if any of the genomic testing criteria are met. These criteria encompass infection susceptibility with abnormal laboratory tests indicative of primary immunodeficiency, inflammatory features such as autoimmune manifestations or hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis, congenital multiple intestinal atresias or diarrhea, early-onset malignancy, family history of suspected mIBD, and interventions with irreversible consequences. Supportive features include a family history suggestive of a genetic disorder, failure to thrive or growth delay, severe perianal disease and impaired wound healing, and IBD refractory to multiple therapies (155).

Immunological testing can be a valuable diagnostic tool for mIBD, and it should be left to the discretion of immunologists to determine which patients should undergo specific immunologic investigations. In certain disorders, immunologic studies can effectively establish the molecular diagnosis, with genetic studies serving as confirmatory measures. Notable examples include SCID, CGD where phagocyte oxidative burst testing is pivotal, and CHAPLE disease, where CD55 staining is diagnostic. Additionally, antibody deficiency disorders like CVID can often be diagnosed through immunologic studies (160).

Furthermore, the presence of certain syndromic features may suggest complex immune disorders, leading to focused diagnostic testing using relevant assays. Examples of this include Hermansky Pudlak syndrome, characterized by oculocutaneous albinism and a bleeding diathesis, and NEMO deficiency, marked by ectodermal dysplasia and susceptibility to infections.

Unfortunately, for most mIBDs, functional immunological assays are unavailable, and diagnosis primarily relies on genetic testing (47). The number of genes associated with mIBD is over 100 and the

numbers are still growing. To address the wide range of potential diagnoses, high-throughput tests, such as those employing Next Generation Sequencing, are increasingly being utilized.

Panel sequencing, whole exome sequencing (WES), and whole genome sequencing (WGS) are widely employed in genetic analysis at numerous research and clinical centers. These techniques serve distinct purposes: panel sequencing concentrates on a predefined set of genes, WES delves into the protein-coding regions of an individual's genome, and WGS scrutinizes the complete genome, encompassing both coding and non-coding regions.

While these powerful diagnostic tools are becoming more accessible, significant challenges persist in the realm of molecular diagnosis. Typically, bioinformatic analyses unveil a set of genetic variants, which are nucleotide changes rarely encountered in the general population. Frequently, the observed variants in the patient are novel, with no previous record, and *in silico* tools may provide conflicting interpretations regarding their pathogenicity. In such instances, determining a definitive diagnosis becomes an immensely difficult and time-consuming process. It is possible that the efforts required to validate candidate gene variants identified in the clinical setting may surpass the available resources, including both human expertise and funding, particularly in research settings. We should actively seek comprehensive solutions to address these challenges, with collective efforts aimed at effectively tackling the complexities of molecular diagnosis. Key components for advancing our capacity to diagnose and comprehend mIBDs include collaboration, standardization, leveraging advanced technology, and a steadfast commitment to enhancing genetic knowledge.

### Precision Medicine for Monogenic IBD

The treatment landscape for IBD is complex and multidimensional. Differentiating between polygenic and mIBD is essential for selecting appropriate treatment strategies. Standard treatments for IBD are not often effective in mIBD cases. For some forms of mIBD, certain standard IBD therapies may even be considered contraindicated. For instance, infliximab treatment was found to predispose CGD patients to more severe infections, although it was effective in controlling intestinal inflammation (164).

Monogenic IBD patients may require tailored approaches, including immune-suppressive therapies or targeted immunological treatments. Collaborative decision-making involving gastroenterologists, immunologists, and geneticists is crucial in determining the most suitable treatment plans for each patient's unique situation.

Thanks to advances in genomics, there are now more



precise treatments for mIBD. By identifying the specific genetic causes, we can tailor therapies to each patient, using medications that target particular pathways, NSCT, or gene therapy. There are various treatment options available because mIBD results from a range of underlying factors that cause inflammation. One particularly promising treatment is allogeneic HSCT. Some examples of precision medicine treatments include HSCT for IL-10 signaling defects, recombinant human IL-18 binding protein for XIAP deficiency, CTLA4 fusion protein for CTLA4 insufficiency, empagliflozin for G6P metabolism defects, and gene therapy for CGD (165). A C5-blocking antibody, pozelimab, which was recently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), can effectively cure the complement-mediated protein-losing enteropathy called CHAPLE disease (153).

### Conclusion

The management of IBD patients requires a multidisciplinary approach involving pediatricians, gastroenterologists, and immunologists. Early identification and proper referral are crucial, especially when considering the possibility of mIBD. By following these recommendations alongside their clinical judgment, healthcare professionals can collaborate to provide optimal care and enhance outcomes for patients with IBD.

### Authorship Contributions

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