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Original Article

# Overexpression of transient receptor potential melastatin 6 during human oral squamous cell carcinogenesis

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Received 30 October 2022; Final revision received 30 October 2022

Available online 14 November 2022

## KEYWORDS

TRPM6;  
Oral squamous cell carcinoma;  
Oral potentially malignant disorders;

**Abstract** *Background/purpose:* Transient receptor potential melastatin (TRPM) channel is involved in cell proliferation and cell survival. Eight members (TRPM1–8) are within the TRPM subfamily. The current study is aimed to investigate TRPM6 expression in human oral carcinogenesis.

*Materials and methods:* Sixty-six oral squamous cell carcinomas (OSCCs), 47 oral potentially malignant disorders (OPMD) with moderate-severe epithelial dysplasia (ED), 28 OPMD with mild ED, and 33 normal oral mucosa (NOM) samples were subjected to immunohistochemical

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jds.2022.11.002>

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## Calcium channel

staining. Two human oral cancer cell lines (OCCLs), an oral premalignant cell line (DOK), and a normal oral keratinocyte culture (HOK) were used for Western blot analysis. OCCLs were evaluated for proliferation, migration, invasion assays, and intracellular calcium concentration.

**Results:** TRPM6 protein expression in OSCC was significantly increased as compared with normal samples. Protein expression of TRPM6 in OCCLs was significantly higher as compared with HOK. Significant decreases in degrees of proliferation, migration, invasion, and intracellular calcium concentration were noted in OCCLs with TRPM6 siRNA transfection as compared with those without transfection. Significantly increased TRPM6 protein level was noted in OPMD with moderate-severe ED as compared with those with mild ED.

**Conclusion:** Our results implicate that TRPM6 overexpression is potentially related to human oral carcinogenesis.

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## Introduction

Human oral squamous cell carcinoma (OSCC) is the fourth most common malignancy in Taiwan and is ranked as the fifth cancer death in males.<sup>1</sup> Some OSCCs are developed from human oral potentially malignant disorder (OPMD), especially with epithelial dysplasia (ED). Therefore, it is important to have early recognition of human OPMD.<sup>2</sup> When dysplastic alterations limited to the lower-one third of the oral epithelium, it is categorized as mild ED whilst moderate ED is regarded as dysplastic alterations were found up to the lower middle of the thickness of the oral epithelium; and severe ED as dysplastic cells occurred within lower-two thirds of the oral epithelium.<sup>3</sup>

Intracellular calcium, the most abundant and ubiquitous second messenger in human, modulates an extensive range of cellular functions, for instance, cell proliferation, cell migration, autophagy, and apoptosis.<sup>4–9</sup> There are four calcium channels or transporters controlling intracellular calcium hemostasis (Table 1).<sup>10</sup> Briefly, as summarized in Table 1, the channel (1) contributes to the release of intracellular calcium via inositol 1,4,5-trisphosphate receptor from endoplasmic reticulum (ER), and the other three channels (2), (3), and (4) contribute to the uptake of calcium back to ER and calcium influx across plasma membrane from ER.

Among the various calcium channels/transporters (Table 1), transient receptor potential (TRP) channels have not been comprehensively studied in human oral squamous

cell carcinogenesis. Mammalian TRP channels are classified into six subfamilies: C (canonical), TRPC; V (vanilloid receptor) TRPV; M (melastatin), TRPM; A (ANKTM), TRPA; P (polycystin), TRPP; and ML (mucolipin) TRPML with respect to homology and partially on channel function. For the six subfamilies of TRP channels, TRPM subfamily is proved to be involved in cell proliferation and cell survival.<sup>11</sup> To date, TRPM subfamily is identified to have a total of eight members (TRPM1 to TRPM8).<sup>11</sup> Reviewing English literature, no study has been performed for the sixth member (TRPM6) in human OPMD and OSCC; hence, the current study is aimed to evaluate TRPM6 expression during human oral squamous cell carcinogenesis.

## Materials and methods

### Immunohistochemistry

Tissue specimens were obtained from the Oral Pathology Department of our institution, with the approval of the Ethics Committee for Scientific Research on Human Beings of the institution (KMUHIRB-E(II)-20200038). Demographic data of the patients in the current study was shown in Table 2. The characteristics of the OSCC patients, including age, gender, differentiation, tumor size, histopathological lymph-node involvement, and stage were summarized in Table 3. The tissue specimens were fixed in 10% neutral buffered formalin solution for approximately

**Table 1** Summary of the four different calcium channels or transporters<sup>10</sup>.

Calcium channels or transporters	Function
(1) Inositol 1,4,5-trisphosphate (IP <sub>3</sub> ) receptor	Mediating calcium release from endoplasmic reticulum (ER)
(2) Calcium-ATPase	Pumping the return of calcium to ER (or extracellular space) from cytosol
(3) Calcium channels/transporters, which includes:	Permitting calcium influx via plasma membrane from an extracellular calcium reservoir
i. Voltage-gated calcium channel	
ii. Transient receptor potential channel (TRP)	
iii. Store-operated calcium entry (SOCE)/calcium release-activated calcium channel (CRAC)	
iv. Na <sup>+</sup> /Ca <sup>2+</sup> exchange (NCX) and purinergic receptors	
(4) Mitochondrial calcium uniporter (MCU)	Modulating influx of mitochondrial calcium

**Table 2** Demographic data of the patients in the current study.

Normal oral mucosa		OPMD with mild epithelial dysplasia		OPMD with moderate to severe epithelial dysplasia		Oral squamous cell carcinoma	
	No. (%)		No. (%)		No. (%)		No. (%)
<b>Male</b>	12	<b>Male</b>	25	<b>Male</b>	41	<b>Male</b>	62
mean age: 51.2 yr	(36.4)	mean age: 55.6 yr	(89.3)	mean age: 56.7 yr	(87.2)	mean age: 60.7 yr	(90)
range: 18–79 yr		range: 39–71 yr		range: 24–76 yr		range: 45–81 yr	
<b>Female</b>	21	<b>Female</b>	3	<b>Female</b>	6	<b>Female</b>	4
mean age: 9.3 yr	(63.6)	mean age: 56.3 yr	(10.7)	mean age: 71.3 yr	(12.8)	mean age: 72.7 yr	(10)
range: 25–81 yr		range: 31–77 yr		range: 77–90 yr		range: 69–75 yr	
<b>Total</b>	33	<b>Total</b>	28	<b>Total</b>	47	<b>Total</b>	66
mean age: 50.0 yr	(100)	mean age: 55.7 yr	(100)	mean age: 58.6 yr	(100)	mean age: 61.9 yr	(100)
range: 18–81 yr		range: 31–77 yr		range: 24–90 yr		range: 45–81 yr	

OPMD: oral potentially malignant disorders; yr: years; No.: Number.

**Table 3** Characteristics of oral squamous cell carcinoma patients for the current study.

Patient characteristics	No. (%)	Immunoscores (mean ± standard deviation)	<i>P</i> values
<b>Sex</b>	Male	62 (93.9)	9.24 ± 2.28
	mean age: 60.7 years range: 45–81 years		>0.05
<b>Age</b>	Female	4 (6.1)	8.67 ± 3.06
	mean age: 72.7 years range: 69–75 years		>0.05
<b>Age</b>	≤55 years	30 (45.5)	8.55 ± 2.98
	>55 years	36 (54.5)	9.43 ± 2.14
<b>Differentiation</b>	Well	53 (80.3)	8.96 ± 2.29
	Moderate- to poorly	13 (19.7)	11.36 ± 1.43
<b>Tumor size</b>	≤2 cm	35 (53.0)	7.92 ± 2.19
	>2 cm	31 (47.0)	10.14 ± 1.91
<b>Lymph-node metastasis</b>	Yes	27 (57.5)	10.64 ± 1.91
	No	20 (42.5)	7.84 ± 2.06
<b>Pathologic stage</b>	I + II	29 (43.9)	7.32 ± 1.70
	III + IV	37 (56.1)	10.07 ± 1.98

\*\*\*Statistically significance.

24 h, dehydrated in graded alcohols, cleaned in xylene, and embedded in paraffin for subsequent immunohistochemical staining.

Paraffin-embedded 4- $\mu$ m-thick tissue sections were stained for TRPM6 protein using a primary rabbit polyclonal anti-TRPM6 antibody (Abnova, Walnut, CA, USA; Cat. no. PAB-3252). Deparaffinization of all sections was performed through a series of xylene baths, and rehydration was implemented using graded alcohols. To retrieve the antigenicity, tissue sections were treated three times with microwave radiation in a 10 mM citrate buffer (pH 6.0) for 5 min each. The sections were then immersed in methanol containing 0.3% hydrogen peroxidase for 45 min to block the endogenous peroxidase activity, and were subsequently incubated in normal goat serum to reduce non-specific binding. Sections were finally incubated for 60 min at room temperature with primary anti-TRPM6 antibody (Abnova; 1:200) antibody.

The sections were then processed using the standard avidin-biotin peroxidase complex method with respect to the manufacturer's recommendations (Vector Laboratories).<sup>12</sup> Diaminobenzidine (DAB, Merck, Roche, CA, USA; Cat. No. 1718096) was used as a chromogen, and commercial hematoxylin was used for counterstaining. Each set of experiments included a specimen known to express TRPM6, which served as a positive control and ensured the reproducibility of the staining process. Negative controls were included following the same procedure, but with omission of the primary antibody. The scores of the percentage of positive staining (P) were classified as: 0 (<1%); 1 (1–24%); 2 (25–49%); 3 (50–74%); and 4 (75–100%), whereas the scores for the intensity of staining (I) were classified as 0, no staining; 1, light yellow color (weak staining); 2, brown color (moderately strong staining); and 3, dark brown color (strong staining). The total score was then calculated as  $P \times I$  for each section.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 4** Summary of the human oral cancer and precancer cell lines used in the current study.

Cell lines	Tumor source/characteristic	Profile	Ethnicity
Ca9-22 <sup>14</sup>	Primary OSCC from gingiva	EGF receptor produced extensively	Japanese
OECM-1 <sup>15</sup>	Primary OSCC from gingiva	A history of betel-quid chewing	Taiwanese
DOK <sup>16</sup>	Dysplastic oral keratinocyte from tongue	Mild to moderate ED, with a keratin profile similar to the original dysplasia Non-tumourigenic in athymic nude mice	Caucasian

OSCC: oral squamous cell carcinoma; EGF: epidermal growth receptor; ED: epithelial dysplasia.

Quantification of the immunohistochemical stained sections was implemented by two board certified oral and maxillofacial pathologists independently using the semi-automated image analysis software Image J Version 1.51e. When disagreement was between the two pathologists, an agreement was attained by mutual discussion.

### Cell cultures

The features of the human oral cancer cell lines (Ca9-22,<sup>14</sup> and OECM-1<sup>15</sup>) and oral precancer cell line (DOK)<sup>16</sup> are summarized in Table 4. The human oral cancer cell lines and the normal oral keratinocytes primary culture (HOK) were cultured in high-glucose DMEM (Hyclone, Logan, UT, USA) with the addition of 10% fetal bovine serum (Hyclone) and 1% penicillin-streptomycin (Hyclone) at 37 °C within a humidified 5% CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere. The culture medium was changed on every third day. The DOK was cultured in high-glucose DMEM (Hyclone) with the addition of 10% fetal bovine serum (Hyclone), 2 mM glutamine (Hyclone), 5 µg/ml hydrocortisone (Hyclone), and 1% penicillin-streptomycin (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA) at 37 °C in a humidified 5% CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere.

### Western blot

Cells of human oral cancer cell lines (Ca9-22, and OECM-1), DOK, and HOK were rinsed with phosphate buffered-saline (PBS; Sigma–Aldrich, St Louis, MO, USA) and lysed with radioimmunoprecipitation assay (RIPA) lysis buffer (Sigma–Aldrich). The lysates were subsequently centrifuged at 4 °C, 14,000 rpm, for 15 min. The protein concentrations were measured using a Thermo Pierce Protein Assay Kit. Equal amounts of protein were denatured by adding SDS running buffer (Sigma–Aldrich) and β-mercaptoethanol (Sigma–Aldrich). The samples were then analyzed by SDS-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE) (Sigma–Aldrich) on 15% gels, and the proteins were transferred onto a poly vinylidene fluoride (PVDF) membrane (Sigma–Aldrich) using Bio-Rad's transblot with the primary rabbit polyclonal anti-TRPM6 antibody (Abnova; Cat. no. PAB3252, 1: 500), with species specificity for human tissues and observed molecular weight 171 kDa, and β-actin (Sigma–Aldrich; 1: 5000), followed by horseradish peroxidase (HRP)-conjugated secondary antibodies (Sigma–Aldrich; 1: 5,000). The amount of protein was then quantified using a Fuji LAS-4000 lumino image analyzer (Fuji Photo Film Co., Tokyo, Japan). The ratio was normalized by the β-actin signal.

### Establishment of human OSCC cell cultures with *TRPM6* gene knock-down

RNA interference using commercially-synthesized *TRPM6* siRNA (sense: 5'-GCTCCCTATCTGATAACTCAA-3', anti-sense: 5'-TTGAGTTATCAGATAGGGAGC-3'; accession no. TRCN0000021588) was performed to create human oral cancer cell lines (Ca9-22, and OECM-1) with *TRPM6* gene knock-down according to the procedures described in our previous study.<sup>17</sup>

### Proliferation assay, migration assay, in vitro transwell invasion assay

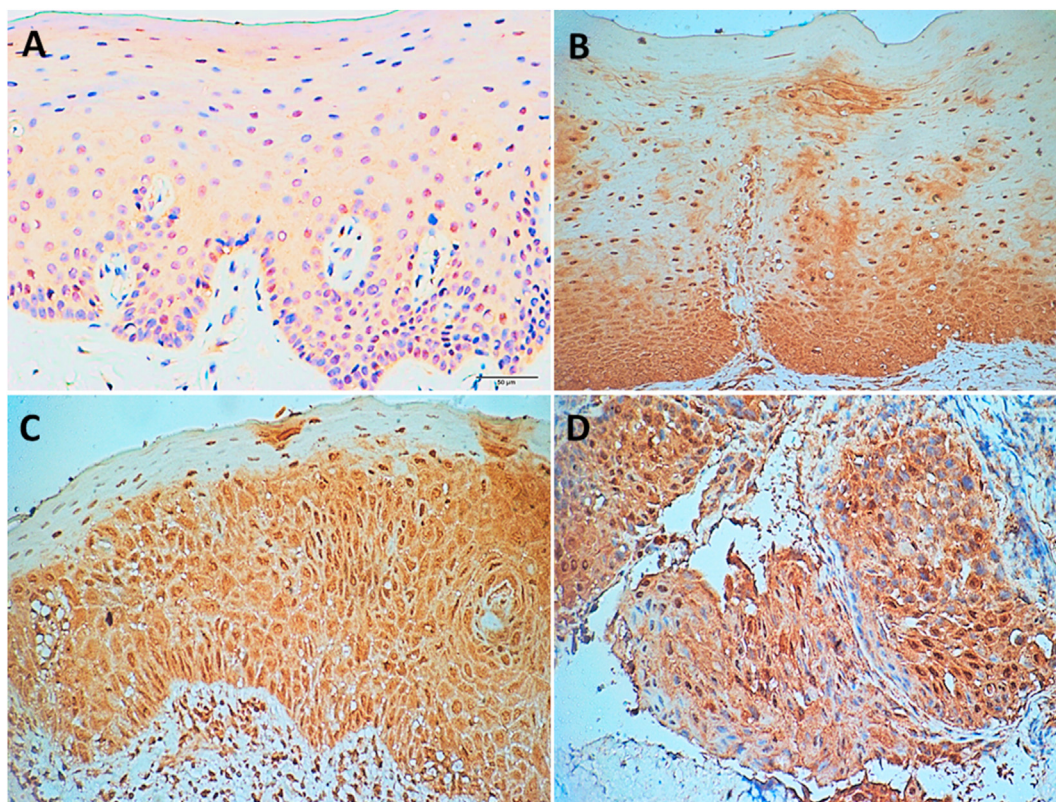
The assays for cell proliferation, migration, in vitro transwell invasion for human oral cancer cell lines (Ca9-22, and OECM-1) were examined for 48 h post-transfection of *TRPM6* siRNA using the procedures according to our previous study.<sup>17</sup>

### Intracellular calcium measurement

Cultured cells of the human OSCC cell lines (Ca9-22, and OECM-1) with and without *TRPM6* knock-down genes were loaded with 5 µM Fluo-4 acetoxymethyl ester (Invitrogen, Waltham, MA, USA) for 30 min at 37 °C following the published procedures.<sup>18</sup> It was then replaced with balanced salt solution (BSS) solution (Merck; Cat. no. 21023CM) containing 1.2 mM calcium for 15 min at room temperature. Intracellular calcium concentration was monitored by fluorescence microscopy with a 10 × objective in a single-wavelength spectrofluorometer. The excitation wavelength used was 495 nm; and the emission wavelength was 510 nm. Endoplasmic reticulum calcium store was depleted by treatment with 5 µM thapsigargin (Invitrogen) in BSS solution containing 0.5 mM EGTA (Sigma–Aldrich). Calcium entry was accomplished by addition of 2 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub> (Sigma–Aldrich). The activity was presented as Δ intensity, the difference between the basal and maximal values of F495 after addition of 2 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub> in BSS solution.

### Statistical analyses

Statistical analyses were performed using SAS Statistical Package (Version 9.1.3, SAS Institute Inc.) with statistical significance when the *P* value < 0.05. Paired t-test was used to compare the immunohistochemical expressions of *TRPM6* protein among OSCC, OPMD, and normal oral mucosa, and



**Fig. 1** (A) A representative weak staining of TRPM6 protein in human normal oral mucosa ( $\times 100$ ). (B) A representative moderate staining of TRPM6 protein in human oral potentially disorders with mild epithelial dysplasia ( $\times 100$ ). (C) A representative strong immunohistochemical staining of TRPM6 protein in human oral potentially disorders with moderate to severe epithelial dysplasia ( $\times 100$ ). (D) Representative strong immunohistochemical staining of TRPM6 protein in human oral squamous cell carcinoma ( $\times 100$ ).

to evaluate the differences in proliferation rate and degree of migration, degree of invasion, and intracellular calcium concentration between oral cancer cells with and without siRNA transfection. Chi-square analysis was used to compare the TRPM6 protein expression along with the sex, age, differentiation, tumor size, histological lymph-node involvement, and pathologic stage of the OSCC patients. Nonparametric Kruskal–Wallis tests were used to analyze the results of western blots.

## Results

### Immunohistochemistry

Weak positive membranous staining of TRPM6 protein was essentially observed in human normal oral mucosa samples (Fig. 1A) whereas moderate positive cytoplasmic staining was predominantly found in OPMD with mild epithelial dysplasia (ED) (Fig. 1B). On the other hand, strong positive cytoplasmic and nuclear staining of TRPM6 protein was also predominantly noted in OPMD with moderate to severe ED (Fig. 1C) and OSCC respectively (Fig. 1D).

Statistical analyses of the mean immunoscores (ISs) of TRPM6 protein for the patients in the current study were summarized in Table 5. There was a significant increase of the mean IS for human OSCC (T1–T4) when compared with

human OPMD with moderate to severe ED, OPMD with mild ED, and normal oral mucosa respectively. A significant increase was also noted when comparing the mean IS of human OPMD with moderate to severe ED with OPMD with mild ED. Moreover, a significant increase in the mean IS was noted when comparing cases of human OPMD with moderate to severe ED with normal mucosa samples; a significant increase of mean IS being found when comparing human OPMD with mild ED with normal mucosa samples. Additionally, there was a significant increase of the mean IS of TRPM6 protein with differentiation, tumor size, and lymph-node metastasis respectively (Table 3).

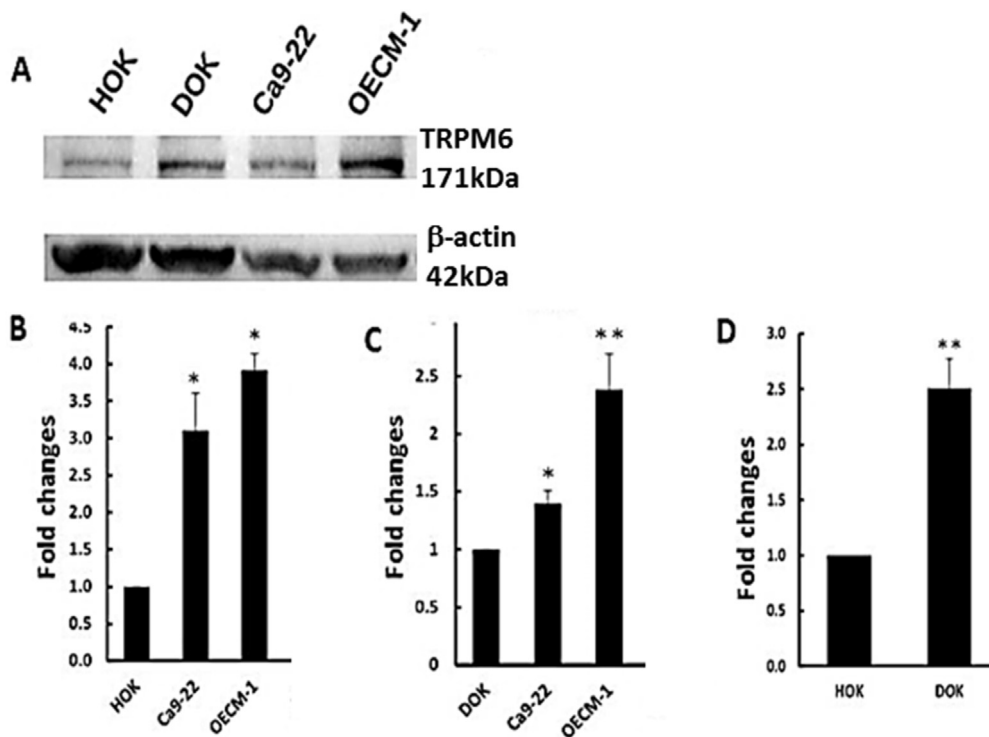
### Western blot analysis

Significant upregulation of TRPM6 protein expression in human oral cancer cell lines (Ca9-22, and OECM-1) was noted as compared with the primary culture of human normal oral keratinocytes (HOK) ( $P < 0.01$ , Ca9-22;  $P < 0.001$ , OECM-1; non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis test) (Fig. 2A and B). Human oral precancer cell line (DOK) showed significant overexpression of TRPM6 protein as compared with HOK ( $P < 0.01$ ) (Fig. 2A, D). Significant upregulation of TRPM6 protein expression of Ca9-22, and OECM-1 was also observed as compared with DOK respectively ( $P < 0.05$ , Ca9-22;  $P < 0.01$ , OECM-1) (Fig. 2A, C).

**Table 5** Statistical analyses for immunohistochemical expression of TRPM6 protein for the patients in the current study.

	P values			
	OSCC (T1-T4)	OPMD moderate to severe OED	OPMD with mild OED	NOM
OSCC (T1-T4) (9.21 ± 2.30) <sup>#</sup>		* < 0.05	*** < 0.001	*** < 0.001
OPMD with moderate to severe ED (7.81 ± 2.48)	* < 0.05		** < 0.01	*** < 0.001
OPMD with mild ED (5.33 ± 1.67)	*** < 0.001	** < 0.01		*** < 0.001
NOM (1.54 ± 1.20)	*** < 0.001	*** < 0.001	*** < 0.001	

#Values within brackets: Immunoscore (mean ± standard deviation); \*statistically significance, \*\*statistically significance, \*\*\*statistically significance (independent t-test); NOM: normal oral mucosa; OPMD: oral potentially malignant disorders; ED: epithelial dysplasia; OSCC: oral squamous cell carcinoma.



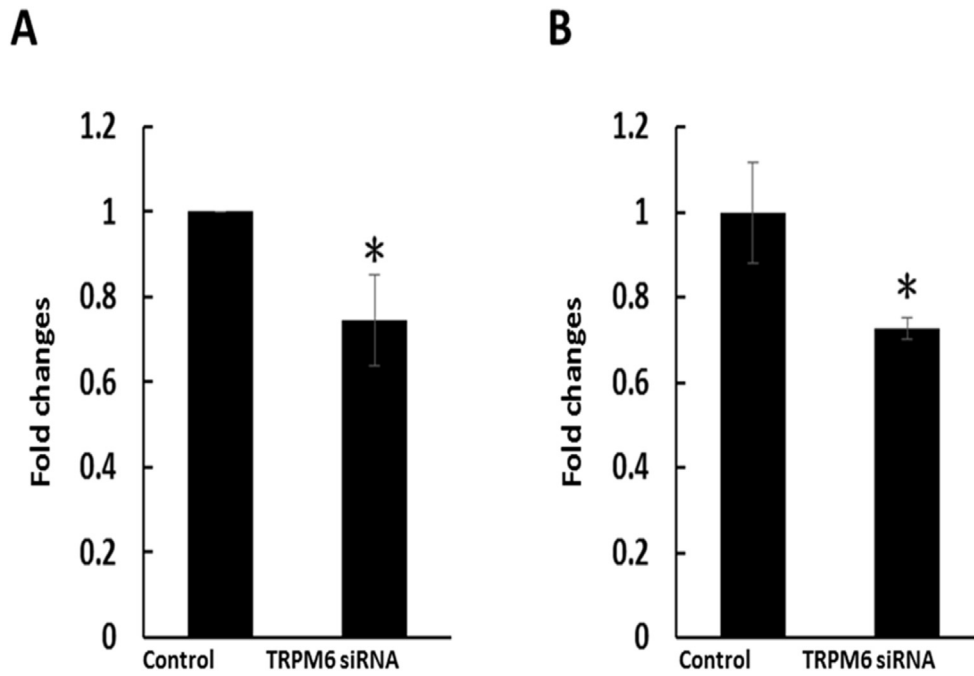
**Fig. 2** Upregulation of TRPM6 protein expression in human oral cancer cell lines (Ca9-22, and OECM-1) as compared with the primary culture of human normal oral keratinocytes (HOK). Human oral precancer cell line (DOK) showed overexpression of TRPM6 protein as compared with HOK. Upregulation of TRPM6 protein expression of Ca9-22, and OECM-1 was observed as compared with DOK respectively (A). Results were quantified using densitometric analysis, normalized by the level of β-actin, and expressed as fold change relative to the HOK (B, D) or DOK (C). Bars represent means ± standard error of the mean (\* $P < 0.05$ ; \*\* $P < 0.01$ ). A representative result of three independent experiments is shown.

### Proliferation assay of human OSCC cell cultures with *TRPM6* gene knock-down

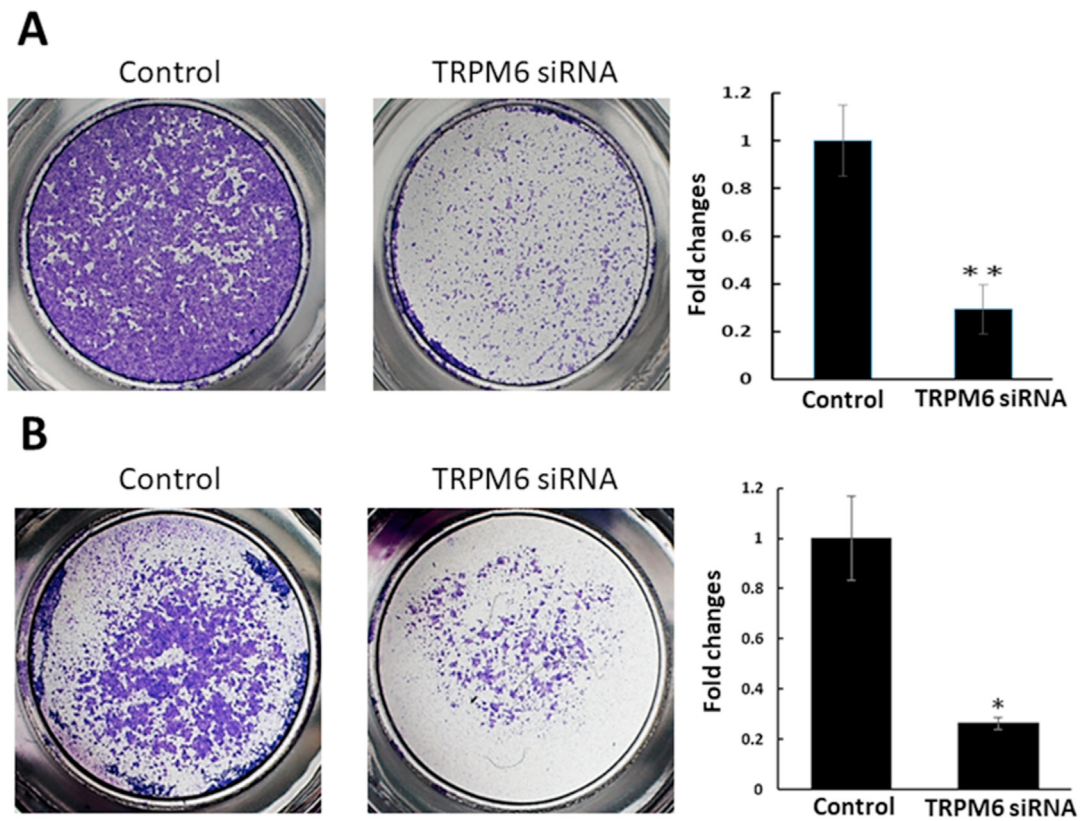
The proliferation rates of the human oral cancer cell lines Ca9-22 (Fig. 3A), and OECM-1 (Fig. 3B) with *TRPM6* siRNA transfection for 48 h respectively were significantly decreased as compared with the oral cancer cell lines without *TRPM6* siRNA transfection ( $P < 0.05$ , Ca9-22;  $P < 0.05$ , OECM-1).

### Migration assay of human OSCC cell cultures with *TRPM6* gene knock-down

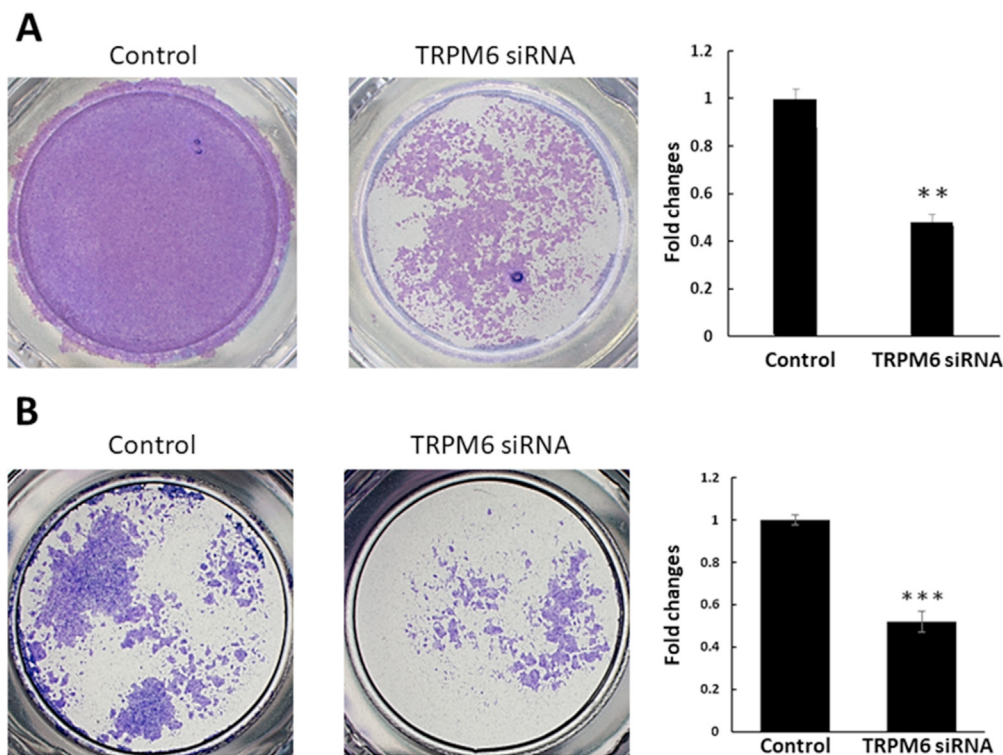
The degree of migration of the human oral cancer cell line Ca9-22 (Fig. 4A) and OECM-1 (Fig. 4B) with *TRPM6* siRNA transfection for 48 h was significantly decreased respectively as compared with the oral cancer cell lines without *TRPM6* siRNA transfection ( $P < 0.01$ , Ca9-22;  $P < 0.05$ , OECM-1).



**Fig. 3** The proliferation rates of the human oral cancer cell lines Ca9-22 (A), and OECM-1 (B) with *TRPM6* siRNA transfection respectively for 48 h were significantly lower than those of the oral cancer cell lines without *TRPM6* siRNA transfection (Control) (\* $P < 0.05$ ).



**Fig. 4** Degree of migration of the human oral cancer cell lines Ca9-22 (A), and OECM-1 (B) with *TRPM6* siRNA transfection for 48 h was significantly decreased as compared with the oral cancer cell line without *TRPM6* siRNA transfection (Control) (\* $P < 0.05$ ; \*\* $P < 0.01$ ). A representative result of three independent experiments is shown.



**Fig. 5** Degree of invasion of the human oral cancer cell lines Ca9-22 (A), and OECM-1 (B) with *TRPM6* siRNA transfection for 48 h was significantly decreased as compared with the oral cancer cell lines without *TRPM6* siRNA transfection (control) (\*\* $P < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $P < 0.001$ ). A representative result of three independent experiments is shown.

### In vitro transwell invasion assay of human OSCC cell cultures with *TRPM6* gene knock-down

The degree of invasion of the oral cancer cell line Ca9-22 (Fig. 5A) and OECM-1 (Fig. 5B) with *TRPM6* siRNA transfection for 48 h was significantly decreased respectively as compared with the oral cancer cell lines without *TRPM6* siRNA transfection. ( $P < 0.01$ , Ca9-22;  $P < 0.001$ , OECM-1).

### Intracellular calcium measurement

The degree of intracellular calcium activity in human oral cancer cell line Ca9-22 (Fig. 6A) and OECM-1 (Fig. 6B) with *TRPM6* siRNA transfection for 48 h was significantly decreased as compared with the oral cancer cell lines without *TRPM6* siRNA transfection ( $P < 0.05$ , Ca9-22;  $P < 0.05$ , OECM-1).

### Discussion

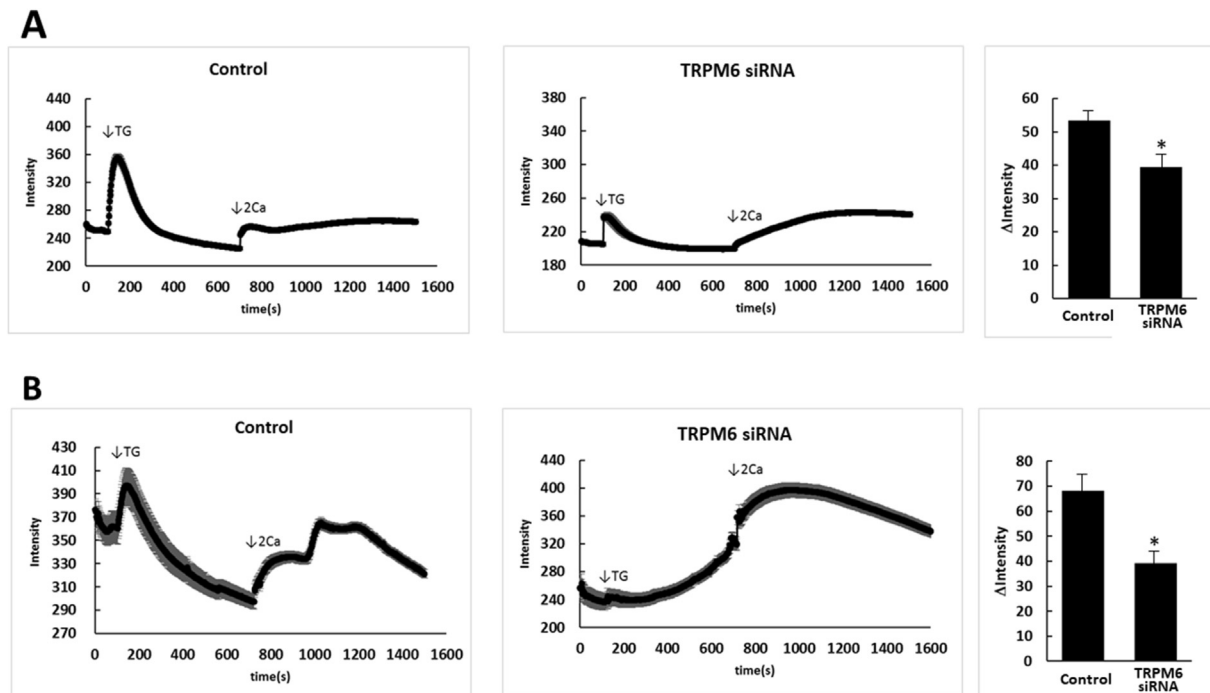
Reviewing English literature, there is no study concerning the association of *TRPM6* in human oral cancer.<sup>11</sup> Recently, only one study of *TRPM2* protein overexpression in human lingual squamous cell carcinoma was reported by Zhao et al.<sup>19</sup> In the current study, significant upregulation of *TRPM6* protein expression in human OSCC tissue specimens in comparison with human normal oral mucosa were confirmed by immunohistochemical and Western blot analyses. Compatible with the *in vivo* data, overexpression of *TRPM6* protein was also demonstrated in human oral cancer

cell lines as compared with a human normal oral mucosa primary culture. Therefore, our results are compiled to the finding of Zhao et al.,<sup>19</sup> suggesting both *TRPM2* and *TRPM6* proteins have been overexpressed in human OSCC.

Additionally, a significantly higher *TRPM6* protein expression was noted in OSCC patients with higher pathologic stage and with lymph-node metastasis in comparison with those without. Moreover, significant decreases in the proliferation rate, degree of migration and invasion of the oral cancer cells with *TRPM6* siRNA transfection were noted as compared with the oral cancer cells without *TRPM6* siRNA transfection. Taken together, the experimental evidences in the current study indicated that *TRPM6* have been associated with in human OSCC, and could have potential implication to the development of human OSCC. Thus, the current study, to the best of our knowledge, is the first experiment of *TRPM6* on human OSCC. Finally, the present study has also been the first report to confirm the intracellular calcium concentration being significantly decreased when compared *TRPM6* knock-down with the oral cancer cell lines without knock-down.

A significant overexpression of *TRPM6* protein was observed in human oral precancer cell line DOK and oral cancer cell lines as compared with the primary culture of normal oral mucosa in the current study. Upregulation of *TRPM6* protein was also noted in human oral cancer cell lines as compared with DOK. A significantly higher *TRPM6* protein expression was noted in human OPMDs with ED in comparison with human normal oral mucosa, which indicated that *TRPM6* protein could be associated with malignant progression of human OPMDs. Hence, taking the data





**Fig. 6** Degree of intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  activity in human oral cancer cell line Ca9-22 (A) and OECM-1 (B) with *TRPM6* siRNA transfection for 48 h was significantly decreased as compared with the oral cancer cell lines without *TRPM6* siRNA transfection (control) (\* $P < 0.05$ ). A representative result of three independent experiments is shown.

for human OPMDs and OSCCs altogether, the present study, to the best of our knowledge, is the first experiment to demonstrate the potential association of the over-expression of TRPM6 in human OPMD.

There is a shift of membranous staining to cytoplasmic and nuclear staining of TRPM6 proteins from normal mucosa to lesions of OPMD and OSCC, which is consistent to our previous study on another calcium channel (Orai1/STIM1) during human oral squamous cell carcinogenesis;<sup>20</sup> and it is also compatible to the findings of significant localization of TRPM2 protein in nuclei of oral cancer cells,<sup>19</sup> and of prostate cancer cells when compared with non-cancerous cells.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it is claimed that the subcellular localization of TRPM2 and TRPM6 proteins could implicate to the cancer cell proliferation.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, TRPM2, but not TRPM6, has been implicated as a potential target of treatment in some cancers;<sup>22,23</sup> additionally, autophagy-related proteins were considered being associated with prognosis and chemoresistance of gastric cancer;<sup>24,25</sup> however, these have not yet been confirmed in human oral cancer study. Furthermore, TRPM2, not yet for TRPM6, could be activated by ADP-ribose, which is a mitochondrial metabolite produced by oxidative stress.<sup>26–28</sup> Thus, further study is worthwhile to investigate whether the upregulation of TRPM6 is mediated by autophagy and mitochondrial function in human OPMD and OSCC.

In conclusion, the present study would be the first experiment to demonstrate TRPM6 overexpression during human oral squamous cell carcinogenesis. In future, we intend to investigate the potential key roles of autophagy and mitochondrial function to upregulate TRPM6 during human oral squamous cell carcinogenesis.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

## Acknowledgement

The work was supported by a grant from the Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan (MOST-109-2314-B-037-015-MY2).

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