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BACKGROUND

To investigate the mechanisms for the emergence of identical sequences on ART, we identified 14 patients with clonal HIV sequences during long-term therapy and determined their relationship to CD4+ T cell count and HIV DNA copy number.

METHODS

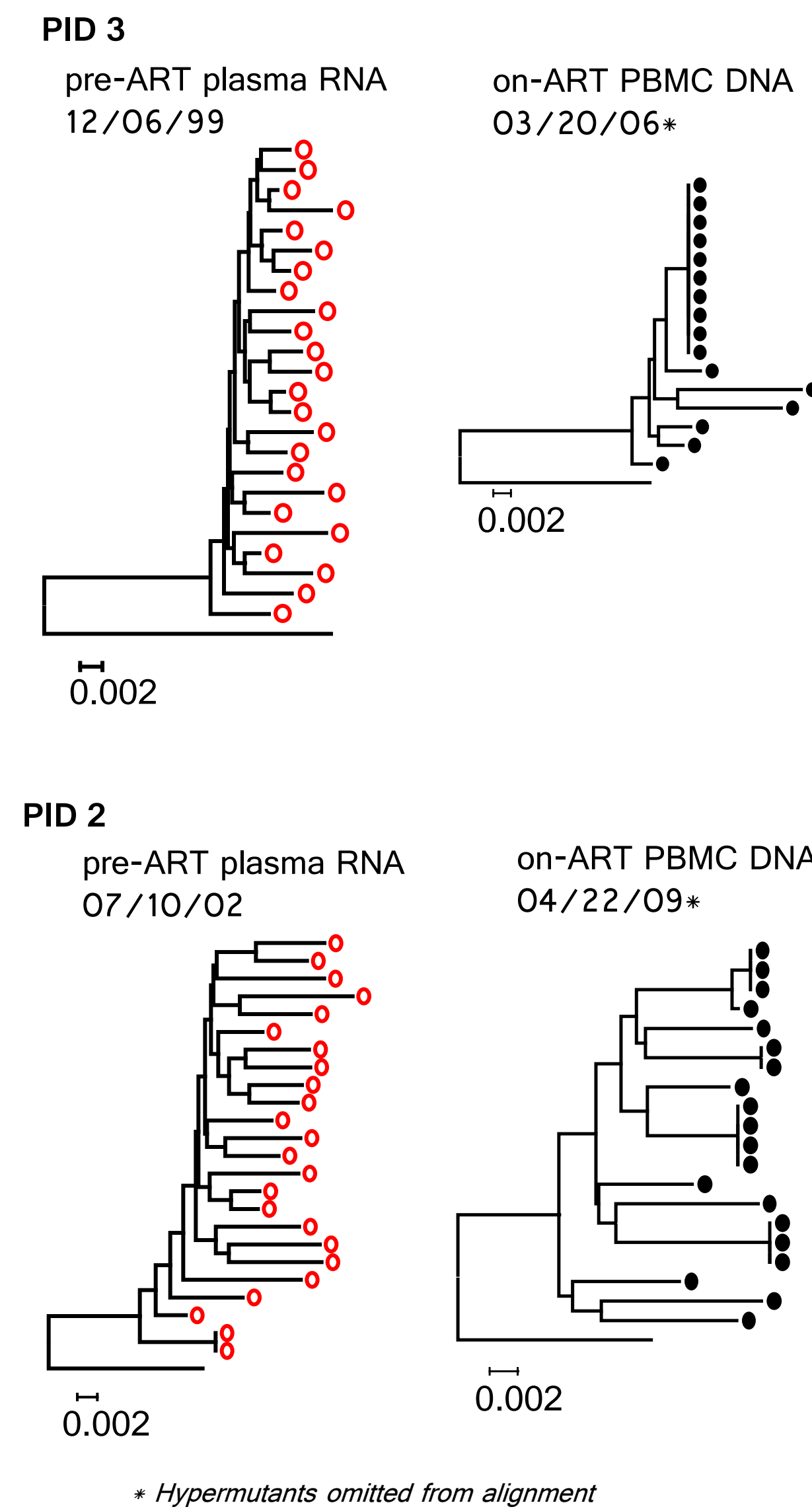
Single-genome *pro-pol* sequences from PBMCs were obtained from 14 subtype B-infected patients at the time of initiating ART and during suppression for 4-12 years. Clusters of identical sequences were identified and the proportions of identical sequences were plotted against baseline CD4+ T cell count and HIV DNA copy number and change in CD4+ T cell count on ART. Estimates for the total number of CD4+ T cells with clonal proviruses were determined by multiplying the fraction of identical sequences by the normalized HIV DNA copy number per million CD4+ T cells and the estimated number of total body CD4+ T cells.

CONCLUSIONS

Analyses of the genetics of HIV proviruses during ART suggests a relationship between the total DNA copy number pre-ART and the change in the CD4+ T cell count on ART with the emergence of identical sequences during therapy in those patients initiating ART with very low CD4+ T cell copy number. This finding suggests that increasing numbers of CD4+ T cells on ART is due, in part, to the expansion of infected cells. Estimates on the number of CD4+ T cells carrying identical HIV proviruses suggests that infected cells expand massively before and during ART generating billions of new infected cells from a single initial infection event despite effective ART.

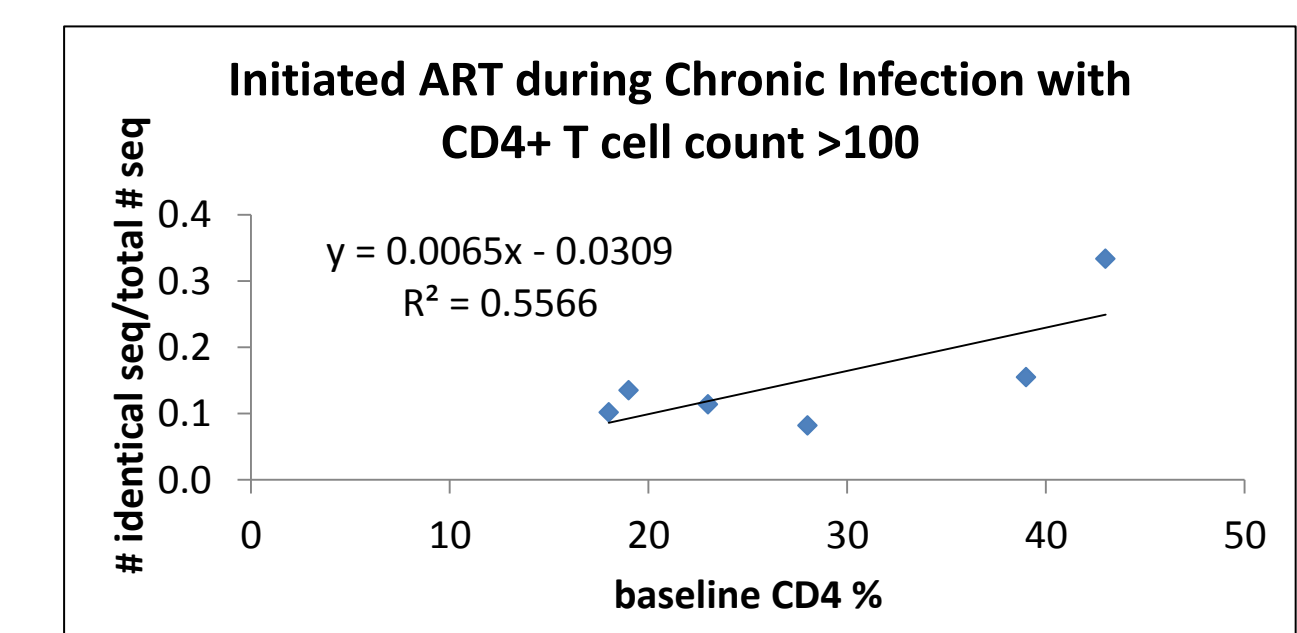
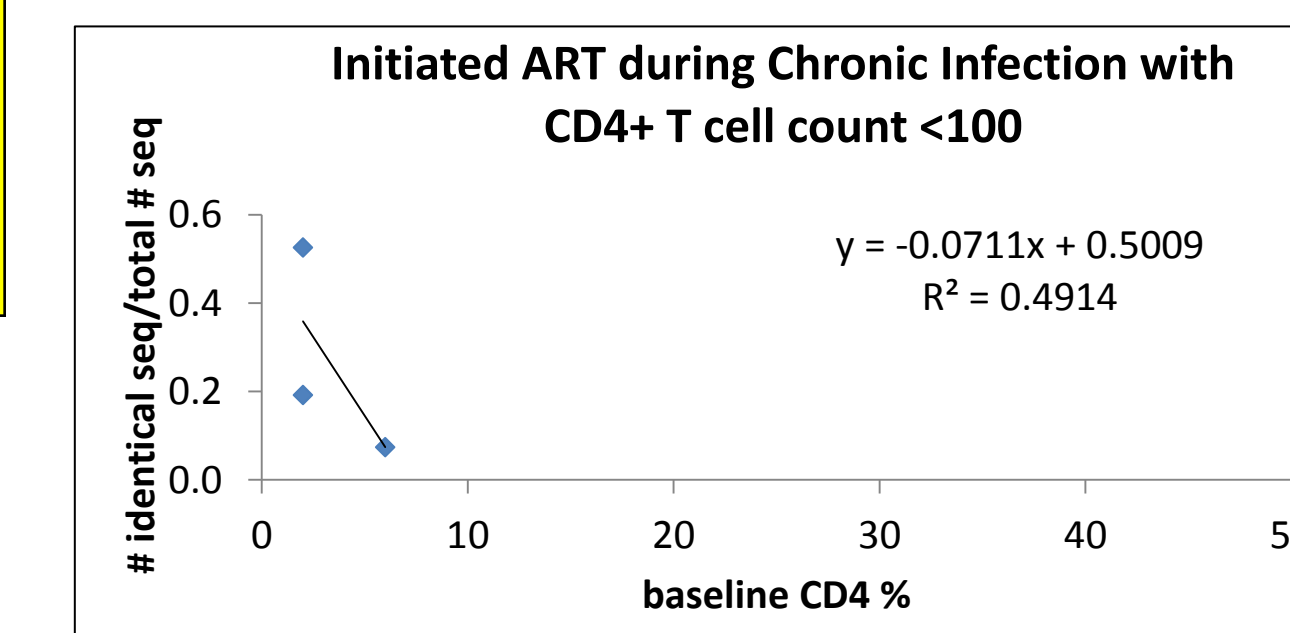
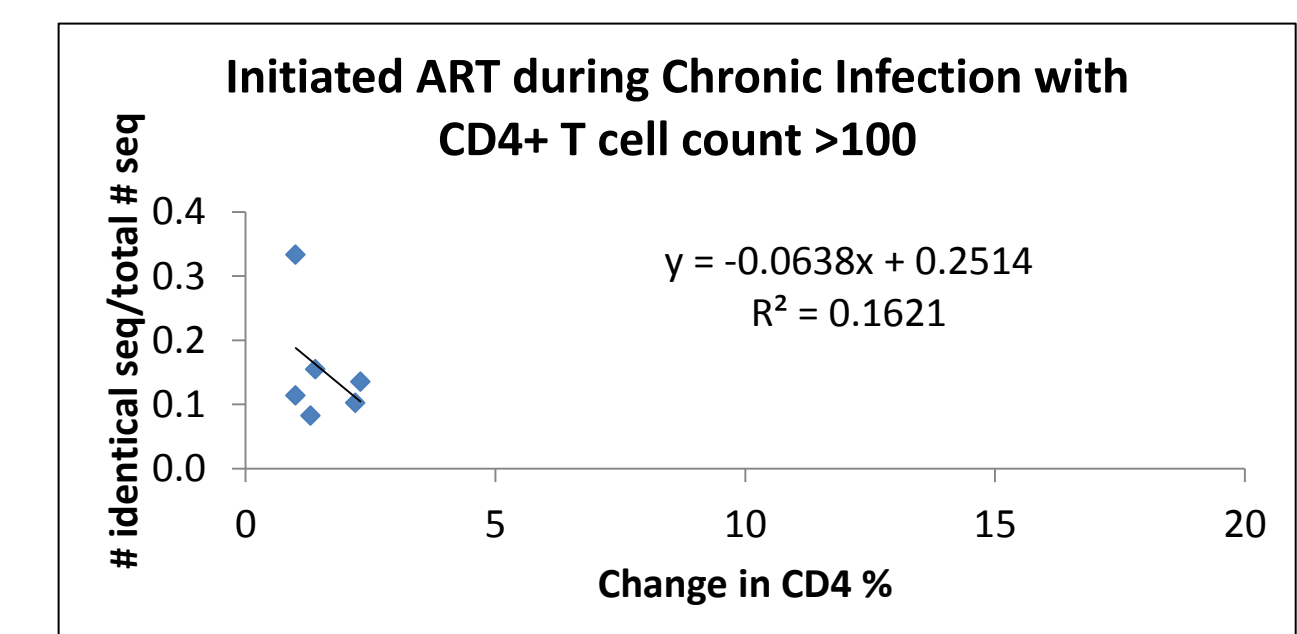
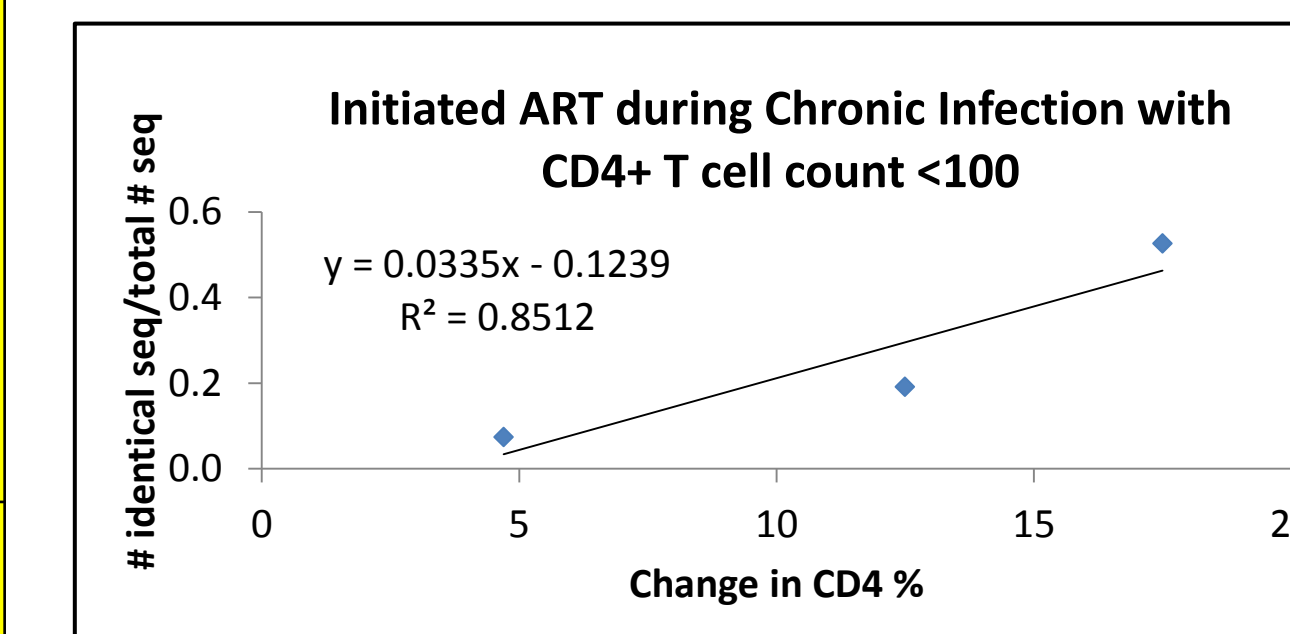
The fraction of identical sequences in PBMCs during long-term ART ranged from 7% to 55% of the total HIV DNA. In 3/13 patients who started therapy during chronic infection with T cell counts <100/ul, there was an apparent positive relationship between the change in CD4+ T cells following ART initiation and the emergence of identical sequences and a negative relationship with the HIV DNA copy number. There was no obvious relationship between the CD4+ T cell count or the HIV DNA copy number in patients who initiated ART during chronic infection with >100 CD4+ T cells/ul or in patients who initiated ART during early infection. Estimates of the total body number of CD4+ T cells carrying clonal HIV sequences ranged from 1.3x10⁹ to 6.9x10¹⁰.

RESULTS



PID	patient description	proportion of identical sequences after long-term ART	DNA copies/CD4+ cells after long-term ART	CD4+ cells/ul after long-term ART	total cell volume	Estimated # blood cells producing identical sequences	Estimated # CD4+ cells containing identical sequences
1	Initiated ART during chronic infection with CD4+ T cell count <100	0.074	658	288	5000	7.01E+07	3.51E+09
2		0.191	1046	539	5000	5.40E+08	2.70E+10
3		0.526	1071	495	5000	1.39E+09	6.97E+10
4		0.333	169	699	5000	1.97E+08	9.84E+09
5		0.155	453	1289	5000	4.52E+08	2.26E+10
6	Initiated ART during chronic infection with CD4+ T cell count >100	0.135	81	493	5000	2.68E+07	1.34E+09
7		0.114	246	279	5000	3.90E+07	1.95E+09
8		0.102	328	782	5000	1.31E+08	6.54E+09
9		0.082	212	674	5000	5.87E+07	2.93E+09
10		0.548	209	691	5000	3.95E+08	1.98E+10
11	Initiated ART during early infection	0.161	562	404	5000	1.83E+08	9.13E+09
12		0.423	131	484	5000	1.34E+08	6.69E+09
13		0.429	329	562	5000	3.96E+08	1.98E+10

PID	duration of HIV infection at start of ART	baseline CD4 %	Change in CD4 %	total # identical/ total seq	chronic <100 vs. chronic >100	chronic vs. early
1	Chronic infection; CD4+ T cell count <100	6	4.7	0.074	p=0.033	p=0.05
2		2	12.5	0.191		
3		2	17.5	0.526		
4	Chronic infection; CD4+ T cell count >100	43	1	0.333		
5		39	1.4	0.155		
6		19	2.3	0.135		
7		23	1	0.114		
8		18	2.2	0.102		
9		28	1.3	0.082		
10	Early infection	28	1.7	0.548		
11		17	1.7	0.161		
12		23	1.8	0.423		
13		30	1.6	0.429		



Acknowledgements

We thank Connie Kinna, Sue Toms Fand Valerie Turnquist for administrative support, and Valerie Boltz, Ann Wiegand, Francesco Simonetti, Junko Hatori, and Shawn Hill for useful discussions.