

Platelet-mediated modulation of fibrinolysis

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ABSTRACT

Platelets are crucial to the hemostatic response. Their role in coagulation is well documented and they have been considered for some time to promote resistance of thrombi to fibrinolysis. Platelets confer resistance to lysis by promoting clot retraction of the immediate fibrin network and through release of PAI-1 from their α -granules. However, recent developments in the field now indicate that the role of platelets in fibrinolysis is much more diverse. Indeed, recent studies of different subpopulations of platelets that develop upon activation suggest that platelets can play varied roles in regulating hemostasis. Likewise the developments in our understanding of thrombus formation, architecture and changes in fibrin deposition and composition suggest that these different subpopulations of platelets may populate distinct areas within thrombi and potentially dictate the local hemostatic balance in these areas. This review will discuss the diverse roles of platelets in fibrinolysis and highlight the recent developments in the field and the contribution of both the intracellular pool of modulators as well as the membrane surface in regulating these processes.

INTRODUCTION

Platelets are at the nucleus of hemostasis, serving a multitude of functions to arrest bleeding and facilitate wound healing. Their vital role is evidenced by the fact that transfusion of platelets can dramatically restore hemostatic competency with higher platelet counts, correlating directly with an improvement in clinical bleeding. Interaction of platelets with the exposed components of the vessel wall post-injury generates the initial plug to limit blood loss. When platelets bind these matrix proteins they undergo rapid activation to release a host of clotting factors into the surrounding milieu. In addition, they change both the shape and composition of their membrane, allowing direct interaction with coagulation proteins. Platelets are a focal point for thrombin generation, interact directly with circulating fibrinogen facilitating generation of insoluble fibrin and act as an anchor for the growing scaffold of the clot. The crucial requirement of platelets for hemostasis is mirrored in the disease state of thrombosis where aberrant platelet function significantly augments thrombus formation with deleterious consequences. As a result, multiple antiplatelet agents are now used clinically to restrain the ability of platelets to participate in uncontrolled thrombus formation.¹ Interestingly, in addition to their fundamental role of platelets in clot formation, they contain a host of fibrinolytic factors that regulate fibrinolysis. Until recently that role has been presumed to be antifibrinolytic due to the high concentrations of fibrinolytic inhibitors, contained within platelets.²⁻⁴ More recently additional profibrinolytic functions of platelets have been described which indicate that these unique anucleate cells may mediate fibrin dissolution as well as their established role in fibrin formation.^{5,6} This review will focus on the different means by which platelets can participate in the mechanisms that regulate fibrinolysis and recent work by our laboratory

and others which suggest that platelets are central to regulation of both sides of the fibrinolytic process.

Crosstalk between fibrinolysis and clot retraction

The susceptibility of the fibrin network to lysis is dictated by its structure.⁷ Platelets actively compress and reduce clot volume via a process termed retraction thereby consolidating the integrity of the hemostatic plug.⁸ During clot retraction the fibrin network around the wound site is tightened via interactions with the integrin α IIb β 3, previously termed platelet glycoprotein IIb/IIIa. Upon platelet activation, α IIb β 3 undergoes a conformational change and binds extracellular fibrinogen⁹ which initiates α IIb β 3-mediated outside-in signalling.¹⁰ α IIb β 3 is connected to the intracellular actin cytoskeleton via talin¹¹ (Figure 1), allowing it to exert a contractile force on extracellular fibrin fibers. Platelet factor XIII-A (FXIII-A) modulates reorganization of the activated platelet cytoskeleton and α IIb β 3 within sphingomyelin-rich lipid rafts, indicating that fibrin- α IIb β 3-myosin act as an axis to support clot retraction.¹²

Retracted clots are resistant to fibrinolytic degradation¹³ and lyse more slowly than non-retracted clots¹⁴ due to condensing of cross-linked alpha-2 antiplasmin (α_2 AP)¹⁵ and reduced binding of tissue plasminogen activator (tPA) to fibrin.¹⁶ In platelet-rich clots the availability of plasminogen and plasminogen activators is reduced by clot retraction due to extrusion of these proteins. These studies indicate the integral role of platelets in clot retraction and how this impacts progression of fibrinolysis.

α -GRANULE PROTEINS

There are three types of secretory granules, namely the α -granules, dense granules and lysosomes (Figure 1). α -granules are the most abundant with around 50-80 per cell accounting for 10% of the platelet volume, in contrast dense granules comprise only 1%.¹⁷ Upon activation platelets release more than 300 proteins the majority of these arising from α -granules. α -granule content is derived by several mechanisms including biosynthesis within their precursor cells megakaryocytes¹⁸⁻²⁰, endocytosis^{21,22}, and pinocytosis,²³ at both the megakaryocyte and platelet level.

Differential packaging of α -granule proteins including von Willebrand factor (VWF), fibrinogen, vascular endothelial growth factor, endostatin, thrombospondin-1, and basic fibroblast growth factor from specific α -granule subpopulations has been reported.^{24,25} More intriguingly pro- and anti- angiogenic proteins were observed in distinct α -granule populations and were differentially released.²⁵ Indeed, a similar mechanism for storage and release of pro- and anti- fibrinolytic proteins may potentially exist and warrants further investigation. In the remainder of this section we describe fibrinolytic proteins that are both endocytosed and biosynthesized within platelets and their contribution to fibrinolysis (Table 1).

Fibrinogen

Platelets have a pool of fibrinogen which is endocytosed from plasma into platelets and megakaryocytes²⁶ and stored within α -granules and the cytoplasm. Platelet fibrinogen accounts for 3-10%^{27,28} of total platelet protein (5-25 mg/10¹¹ platelets) with approximately 25%²⁷ being found in α -granules^{29,30}. The integrin α IIb β 3 is involved in endocytosis of fibrinogen, as patients with Type 1 Glanzmann thrombasthenia (who exhibit defective copy

numbers of $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta\text{3}$) have significantly reduced levels of fibrinogen within their platelets.³¹⁻³³ In megakaryocytes, fibrinogen is endocytosed and trafficked to multivesicular bodies, which are precursors to mature α -granules.³⁴ There are potentially other receptors involved in the endocytosis of fibrinogen, such as the integrin $\alpha\text{V}\beta\text{3}$, which may facilitate binding of soluble fibrinogen to the inactive conformation of $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta\text{3}$, thereby enhancing uptake of fibrinogen.³⁵ Consistent with this hypothesis, deficiency of both $\alpha\text{V}\beta\text{3}$ and $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta\text{3}$ further attenuates fibrinogen accumulation in platelets.³⁶ Further work is required to define the receptors involved in the uptake of fibrinogen and its relative distribution within quiescent platelets. Both the cytosolic and α -granule pools of fibrinogen are released in response to platelet stimulation^{29,30} and is partially retained on the activated membrane due to its interaction with $\alpha\text{IIb}\beta\text{3}$.

Plasminogen

Plasminogen has been identified in α -granules by proteomic approaches^{37,38} but the relative amounts have not been defined, although it is reportedly released after stimulation³⁹. Plasminogen is not detected in megakaryocytes, unless cultured in plasma containing plasminogen, indicating that it is endocytosed by the cells.³⁸ There are two forms of plasminogen, the native predominant form Glu-plasminogen and the intermediate form Lys-plasminogen, which is formed by cleavage of the activation peptide from Glu-plasminogen.⁴⁰ Glu-plasminogen is cleaved at Arg561-Val562 to form two chain Glu-plasmin followed by a further cleavage at the N-terminus to form fully active lys-plasmin.^{40,41} Lys-plasminogen has a more open conformation which is more readily activated by plasminogen activators. It is presently unknown whether the α -granular pool is Glu- or Lys-plasminogen or if it differs from the plasma forms.

Inhibitors of fibrinolysis

A number of fibrinolytic inhibitors exist within platelets and as a result of this platelet-rich thrombi are reportedly more resistant to tPA-mediated lysis than erythrocyte-rich thrombi.⁴² The platelet content of thrombi and their resistance to lysis may help to explain why recanalization in some stroke patients fails.⁴³

Plasminogen activator inhibitor-1 (PAI-1)

The serine protease inhibitor, PAI-1, is the principal inhibitor of tPA and urokinase plasminogen activator (uPA). PAI-1 is abundant in α -granules (0.67 ng/10⁶ platelets) and is released upon platelet activation, accounting for the majority of circulating PAI-1.² Platelets contain PAI-1 mRNA and are capable of *de novo* synthesis of functionally active PAI *in vitro* which largely remains in an active conformation.^{44,45} Platelet PAI-1 is functionally less active than the plasma PAI-1,^{2,46} but accounts for approximately 50 % of total PAI-1 activity due to its sheer abundance.² Arterial thrombi which contain platelet dense regions⁴⁷ found to contain 2-3-fold more PAI-1 than venous thrombi.^{48,49}

Alpha 2 antiplasmin (α_2 AP)

α_2 AP is the principal inhibitor of plasmin and can be found within α -granules.^{50,51} On average there is 62 ng α_2 AP/ 10⁹ platelets which accounts for 0.05 % of the plasma level on a volume basis.⁵⁰ Platelet α_2 AP is released upon activation⁵⁰ and stabilizes platelet-rich clots against fibrinolysis.^{52,53} The contribution of the platelet pool of α_2 AP to thrombus stability may be limited, as addition of normal circulating platelet concentrations to α_2 AP-depleted plasma does not stabilize thrombi against lysis.⁵⁴ Platelet α_2 AP may potentially play a role in

maintaining the structural integrity of the platelet plug by down-regulating lysis during the initial stages of thrombus formation, rather than protecting the established thrombus against premature lysis.

Thrombin activatable fibrinolytic inhibitor (TAFI)

TAFI is a pro-carboxypeptidase that can be activated by thrombin, a reaction that is accelerated in excess of 1000-fold by thrombomodulin⁵⁵ or alternatively by plasmin.⁵⁶ The activated carboxypeptidase, TAFIa, removes C-terminal lysine residues from fibrin that has been partially degraded reducing the availability of binding sites for tPA and plasminogen.⁵⁷ TAFI is present in platelets at approximately 50 ng/ 10⁹ platelets and is released from α -granules upon activation⁴ in concentrations sufficient to down-regulate fibrinolysis of platelet-rich thrombi.⁵⁸ Megakaryocytes contain TAFI mRNA and biosynthesis of this protein is thought to account for the pool of TAFI residing in α -granules.^{4,58}

Histidine rich glycoprotein (HRG)

The plasma glycoprotein HRG plays a role in multiple physiological processes including coagulation and fibrinolysis. HRG is endocytosed by platelets and megakaryocytes⁵⁹, with this pool accounting for 0.14% of the plasma level.⁶⁰ HRG is released upon platelet activation^{59,60} and directly associates with the membrane of activated platelets.⁶¹ Interestingly, HRG^{-/-} mice exhibit longer tail bleed times, indicative of defective platelet activation, increased antithrombin activity, shorter prothrombin times and enhanced spontaneous fibrinolysis.⁶² As HRG is known to bind to fibrinogen⁶³ and is retained on the fibrin surface after clot formation⁶⁴, co-localization with fibrinogen in α -granules mean they could potentially be released as a complex following stimulation. HRG also acts as an

competitive inhibitor of plasminogen by binding to lysine binding site 1, potentially down-regulating association of plasminogen and fibrin.⁶⁵ Conversely, it is reported to tether plasminogen to the cell-surface, thereby enhancing the migratory potential of cells.⁶⁶ Further work is required the significance of this protein in regulating fibrinolysis.

Platelet C1-inhibitor

C1-inhibitor is a serpin which inhibits serine proteases of the complement, contact, and fibrinolytic systems. C1-inhibitor is contained in α -granules⁶⁷ and is secreted upon activation with a portion (23%) retained on the membrane.³ The platelet pool of C1-inhibitor is derived from megakaryocyte biosynthesis with platelets containing 62 ng/ 10⁸ platelets compared to the relatively high plasma concentration of 290 μ g/ml.³ C1-inhibitor forms a complex with tPA in situations when it is in excess over PAI-1.⁶⁸⁻⁷⁰ A recent report suggests that C1-inhibitor is the principal inhibitor of a single-site, Lys300 \rightarrow His mutant (M5) form of scuPA, which is less vulnerable to non-specific activation to uPA.⁷¹ Infusion of C1-inhibitor prior to administration of the mutant form of scuPA prevented non-specific activation of plasminogen and fibrinogenolysis whilst permitting lysis of partially-degraded fibrin.⁷²

Protease nexin-1 (PN-1)

Protease nexin-1 (PN-1), also called serpinE2, is a serpin inhibitor with a broad spectrum of substrates including thrombin, factor Xa, factor XIa and activated protein C, as well as the fibrinolytic proteins plasmin, tPA and uPA (reviewed by⁷³). Interestingly, PN-1 is the closest homologue of PAI-1⁷³ eluding to a function in regulation of fibrinolysis. It is expressed by most blood cells including platelets^{74,75} where the majority is contained within α -granules, but a small amount exists on the quiescent platelet membrane.⁷⁶ The concentrations of PN-

1 released in the secretome are relatively high (20 nmol/L per 3×10^8 platelets)⁷³ but a pool is retained on the activated membrane surface.⁷⁴ Platelet PN-1 has the capacity to inhibit both tPA-mediated fibrinolysis and directly down-regulates plasmin generation and activity on fibrin.⁷⁷ A blocking antibody to PN-1 enhances lysis of platelet-rich clots and PN-1^{-/-} mice exhibit accelerated lysis compared to wild-type.⁷⁷ Indeed, a deficiency in PN-1 significantly augments t-PA mediated thrombolysis⁷⁷ emphasizing its clear inhibitory role in fibrinolysis.

DENSE GRANULES

Dense granules (or dense bodies) are less abundant than α -granules, with only around 6-8 per platelet, at around 250 nm in size, and are identified in electron micrographs by virtue of their electron dense cores. Dense granules are comprised of cations (Ca^{2+} , Mg^{2+} , K^+), phosphates (polyphosphate (polyP) and pyrophosphate), bioactive amines (serotonin and histamine) and nucleotides (ATP, ADP, UTP, GTP). High concentrations of these constituents are achieved by active transport mechanisms which also maintains the granule lumen at a pH of around 5.4. The components of dense granules, in particular serotonin, ADP, Ca^{2+} and polyP regulate hemostasis, which will be described in more detail below.

Polyphosphate (polyP)

PolyP is an inorganic phosphate molecule comprising of a repeating units of phosphate monomers joined by phosphoanhydride bonds.^{78 79 79,80} PolyP elicits numerous effects on coagulation and fibrinolysis inducing significant augmentation of the clotting process by enhancing factor XII (FXII) activation, preventing inhibition of factor Xa (FXa) by tissue factor pathway inhibitor (TFPI), and acting as a cofactor for thrombin-mediated activation of factor XI (FXI).⁸¹ These procoagulant effects have a downstream impact on fibrinolysis by

enhancing TAFIa activation due an acceleration of thrombin generation.⁸¹ Polymer length is an critical determinant of polyP function; longer polymers are significantly more effective in activation of FXII.⁸² PolyP binds to fibrinogen⁸³ and alters the structure of the fibrin network, in doing so it attenuates binding of tPA and plasminogen to fibrin, thereby delaying tPA-mediated fibrinolysis.⁸³ PolyP binds to FXII,^{80,84} facilitates its autoactivation⁸⁴ and has been shown to augment FXII-driven coagulation.^{81,85} Despite being classified as a coagulation factor, activated FXII (FXIIa) demonstrates weak plasminogen activator activity.^{86,87} Recently, it has been shown that FXIIa can augment tPA-mediated fibrinolysis by generating additional plasmin.⁸⁸ Our recent work has shown that polyP can activate FXII⁸⁴ and subsequently acts as a cofactor in enhancing its plasminogen activator activity which is the first profibrinolytic function of polyP to be documented.

CYTOPLASMIC PROTEINS

Factor XIII (FXIII)

Activated FXIII (FXIIIa) increases the mechanical stability of clots by forming ϵ -(γ -glutamyl) lysyl bonds in fibrin⁸⁹ through cross-linking the lysine ϵ -amino group of one fibrin strand to the glutamine γ -carboxymide group of another.⁹⁰ FXIII is present in platelets⁹¹⁻⁹³ at high concentrations (around 60 fg per platelet)⁹⁴ and is largely contained within the cytoplasm.^{29,95} Unlike the heterodimer A_2B_2 form that circulates in plasma, the cellular form exists as a homodimer of FXIII-A.^{29,95} A small pool of the A_2B_2 form is reported to be contained in α -granules^{29,96} which is presumed to be taken up from plasma in association with fibrinogen.⁹⁶ Early studies indicated that FXIII-A is retained in the platelet cytoplasm following activation and is not detectable in the secretome.⁹⁷ FXIII-A does not contain an identifiable endoplasmic reticulum (ER) signaling sequence and is excluded from the ER-

Golgi pathway in nucleated cells.⁹⁸ However, it has been found to be directed toward the plasma membrane in association with Golgi vesicles in monocyte-macrophages.⁹⁹ Due to the lack of ER-leader sequence FXIII-A cannot be targeted to α -granules in nascent platelets during *de novo* synthesis in megakaryocytes. This evidence has led to the assumption that release of FXIII-A from platelets was improbable and its functions were likely to be intracellular and distinct from the role of the plasma FXIII in hemostasis. Plasma FXIII plays an essential role in the regulation of fibrinolysis where it cross-links inhibitors of fibrinolysis to fibrin, including α_2 AP¹⁰⁰, TAFI¹⁰¹, and PAI-2.¹⁰² We have shown that the antifibrinolytic function of plasma FXIIIa is mediated by cross-linking α_2 AP to fibrin¹⁰³ and in its absence thrombi lyse rapidly.¹⁰⁴ Platelet FXIII-A was shown to induce high molecular weight γ -dimer, α -polymers and α_2 AP-fibrin cross-links.^{52,53,105-107} Our work has now shown that platelet FXIII-A is externalized on the activated platelet membrane and mediates extracellular fibrin cross-linking reactions stabilizing thrombi against fibrinolysis in an α_2 AP-dependent manner.⁵⁴

Tissue factor pathway inhibitor (TFPI)

Two alternatively spliced isoforms of TFPI exist in blood: TFPI α and TFPI β .^{108,109} Platelets exclusively express the TFPI α isoform which is derived from megakaryocytes and accounts for approximately 7-10 % of the total pool of TFPI in whole blood.^{110,111} At this time, it is unknown where TFPI α is located within quiescent platelets but evidence suggests it is not found in α -granules or lysosomes, as it does not co-localize with VWF, fibrinogen, or lysosomal-associated membrane protein-1 (LAMP-1).¹¹⁰ TFPI α is exposed on the surface of platelets following strong stimulation with thrombin or dual agonists via an unknown mechanism.¹¹⁰ In addition to platelet surface expression, a soluble form of TFPI is released in

response to strong agonist stimulation, allowing accumulation of the inhibitor at sites of vascular injury to act directly on tissue factor/factor VIIa complex and attenuate thrombus propagation. TFPI-2, a homologue of TFPI-1, has recently been identified within platelets and is of megakaryocytic origin.¹¹² TFPI-2 is released from platelets in response to TRAP-6 stimulation and strongly attenuates tPA-mediated plasma clot lysis by directly inhibiting plasmin. The levels of TFPI-2 rise steadily during pregnancy potentially indicating an antifibrinolytic role for this kunitz inhibitor in control of bleeding during labour.¹¹²

FIBRINOLYTIC PROTEINS ON THE MEMBRANE SURFACE

The activated membrane surface of platelets is well documented in terms of its binding of coagulation factors, via Gla-domains and integrin binding to fibrinogen, VWF, and collagen. Perhaps less well explored is the ability of the platelet membrane to serve as a binding site for fibrinolytic proteins.

Urokinase plasminogen activator (uPA)

The plasminogen activator uPA is a 54 kDa serine protease found in urine and synthesized by fibroblast-like cells, monocytes, macrophages^{113,114}, and epithelial cells.¹¹⁵ The single chain form of uPA, scuPA, is activated to two chain uPA by cleavage at Lys158-Ile159.¹¹⁶ Normal platelets contain a small amount (1.3 ng uPA/10⁹ platelets) of uPA¹¹⁷ but negligible levels are found in megakaryocytes. Quebec platelet disorder is associated with enhanced expression and storage of uPA and manifests as delayed onset of bleeding after injury. Increased expression of uPA, develops during differentiation of megakaryocytes from hematopoietic progenitors and is linked to a tandem duplication in the *PLAU* gene.³⁸ The limited plasminogen activator concentration in normal platelets may serve a protective

function, as Quebec platelet disorder results in intracellular generation of plasmin which is associated with degradation of α -granule proteins.¹¹⁸

In sharp contrast to the inhibitory effect of platelets on t-PA- and uPA-mediated fibrinolysis we and others have shown that scuPA-mediated lysis is dramatically enhanced by platelets.^{5,119} This seems counterintuitive considering the high concentrations of fibrinolytic inhibitors in platelets, but is explained by surface-mediated reciprocal activation of plasminogen and scuPA on the membrane surface.⁵ scuPA is present on the membrane of unstimulated platelets¹²⁰, however binding is not accounted for by the known cellular receptor uPAR¹²¹, as uPAR is not expressed on platelets. Exogenous scuPA is endocytosed by platelets, by an underdetermined mechanism, which may prolong its activity.¹²² Once formed, cell-bound plasmin is protected from inhibition by α_2 AP, although (sc)uPA is susceptible to inhibition by PAI-1 and PAI-2. An additional mechanism of activation of thrombin-cleaved scuPA by platelet cathepsin C has also been described on the surface of thrombin-stimulated platelets.¹²³ Despite these lines of evidence locating (sc)uPA on the membrane of quiescent and activated platelets, the receptors responsible are still unknown.

Tissue-type plasminogen activator (tPA)

tPA, a 68 kDa serine protease, is largely produced and secreted by endothelial cells¹²⁴ however, small amounts of active tPA have been detected in megakaryocytes.¹²⁵ tPA is secreted as a single-chain form (sctPA) that is cleaved at Arg275-Ile276 to a two-chain form (tctPA). When associated with fibrin, both forms exhibit comparable activity,¹²⁶ as binding of sctPA to fibrin decreases the K_m of activation, enhancing plasmin generation and downstream fibrinolysis.¹²⁷ tPA binds to the surface of quiescent platelets potentiating

plasminogen activation approximately 8-fold.^{128,129} Reversible binding of tPA to the membrane appears to be by a single-class of saturable, low affinity binding sites that are amplified upon thrombin stimulation and partially displaced by plasminogen.^{129,130} Receptors for tPA on platelets have not been definitively identified, but annexin II has been described as a plasminogen-tPA co-receptor on endothelial cells.¹³¹

Platelet-rich regions within clots are associated with densely packed retracted fibrin fibers which attenuate tPA binding and decrease lysis front velocity.^{16,132} Interestingly, a second late phase acceleration of fibrinolysis is observed which is attributed to clustering of lysing fibers which augments the local concentration of fibrin-bound tPA.¹³² The relative contribution of fibrin versus the cell surface in accelerating local fibrinolysis is an intriguing question but one that is difficult to tackle experimentally.

PLATELET SUBPOPULATIONS

Upon activation of platelets, a number of phenotypically different subpopulations arise¹³³⁻¹³⁶ which have different functions within the microenvironment of the thrombus.

Procoagulant platelets express phosphatidylserine (PS)¹³⁷, readily binding coagulation factors, thereby enhancing thrombin generation and downstream fibrin formation.

Adherent platelets expose activated α IIb β 3, bind fibrin and other platelets thereby consolidating the thrombus and protecting against premature degradation.¹³⁸

Aggregating platelets

Aggregating platelets are PS-negative with a characteristic spread morphology (Figure 2A).

They bind fibrinogen via activated α IIb β 3 and generate fibrin on their surface.¹³⁸

Aggregating platelets expose FXIII-A in a diffuse pattern over their surface⁵⁴, whilst plasminogen and PAI-1 localize centrally over the granulomere (Figure 3).⁶ Binding of plasminogen is attenuated by blocking α IIb β 3 with tirofiban, however it is not dependent on the active conformation of the integrin. This is evidenced by the fact that plasminogen accumulates on the surface of aggregating platelets prior to PAC-1 antibody which binds only the active integrin.⁶ The functional significance of these fibrinolytic proteins in aggregating platelets requires further clarification. However, their importance in thrombus architecture and stability is exemplified by addition of abciximab, a α IIb β 3 receptor antagonist, which significantly accelerates lysis by prohibiting the interaction between fibrin(ogen) and platelets.¹³⁹

PS-exposing platelets

Upon exposure to a collagen surface or glycoprotein VI ligands, platelets initially form pseudopods and lamellipodia before morphing to a characteristic 'balloon' shape and flipping PS to the activated membrane (Figure 2B).¹⁴⁰ PS-exposing platelets, or procoagulant platelets, exhibit prolonged increases in cytosolic Ca²⁺ and support binding of the prothrombinase complex.^{136,138,141} After the appearance of aggregating platelets, which incorporate fibrinogen, further platelets are recruited that subsequently become PS-positive.¹³⁸ These platelets allow formation of 'star-like' fibrin network which emanates from the platelet surface under low shear. This process is dependent on both FXIIIa and α IIb β 3¹⁴², as in their absence fibrin fibers orientate in the direction of flow.¹⁴³ These observations indicate that PS-exposing platelets contribute to the dynamic structure of the fibrin network by guiding multi-directional fibrin polymerization and may have downstream consequences in terms of modulating fibrinolysis. Platelet FXIII-A and calpain have a role in

limiting excessive accumulation of platelets by decreasing adhesion via α IIb β 3.¹³⁴

Interfering with PS exposure on platelets impairs FXa and thrombin generation thereby downregulating thrombus formation in murine models of thrombosis.^{144,145} These thrombi are prone to embolization, exhibit reduced stability and increased susceptibility to lysis

Coated platelets

‘Coated platelets’ are procoagulant platelets produced by strong dual agonist stimulation.^{133,146,147} Coated platelets retain a ‘coat’ of cross-linked α -granule proteins on their surface^{143,146,148} which is reported to develop secondary to PS exposure.¹⁴⁹ The protein coat consist of procoagulant proteins such as factor V, VWF, and fibrinogen which are reportedly cross-linked to the surface in a FXIIIa-dependent manner. The presence of fibrinolytic proteins such as PAI-1, HRG, and plasminogen on coated platelets is less well described, but they too could be present within the ‘coat’. The percentage of coated platelet potential in individuals ranges from 15 – 53%.¹⁴⁷ The full physiological role and capacity of coated platelets is not fully understood, however, they are thought to be prothrombotic in nature.¹⁵⁰⁻¹⁵¹ Therefore, the ability to target and enhance the profibrinolytic potential of this subpopulation may have therapeutic value.

Protruding ‘cap’ on procoagulant platelets

Procoagulant PS-exposing platelets have been found to possess a protruding ‘cap’ which is rich in fibrinogen and thrombospondin.¹⁵² We have recently confirmed the presence of fibrinogen and demonstrated the localization of FXIII-A⁵⁴, plasminogen, and PAI-1⁶ in these protruding caps (Figure 3). These ‘caps’ have since been demonstrated to contain numerous coagulation factors IXa, Xa/X, Va and VIII.¹⁵³ Fibrin may act as an anchor for these

proteins within the platelet 'cap' and could potentially facilitate the transfer of platelet-derived proteins into the adjoining fibrin network. Indeed activation of platelets with TRAP-6 rather than thrombin or inhibition of fibrin polymerization with Gly-Pro-Arg-Pro reduced exposure of platelet FXIII-A⁵⁴ and attenuated plasminogen binding within the 'cap'.⁶ However, despite the presence of fibrin(ogen), α IIb β 3 appears to be in an inactive conformation. Platelets stimulated with strong dual agonists display secondary inactivation of the integrin after occupation with a ligand such as fibrinogen.^{134,146,154,155} Blocking α IIb β 3 or fibrin polymerization reduces plasminogen binding to PS-exposing platelets⁶ and consistent with this Glanzmann thrombasthenia patients who lack α IIb β 3 display reduced plasminogen binding.¹⁵⁶

These protein rich 'caps' on the surface of PS-exposing platelets are not fully understood but their collection of fibrinolytic mediators implies a functional role in fibrinolysis. Within a developing thrombus, the PS-exposing platelets are visualized as distinct non-aggregating platelets that localize in strings at the edges of clots¹³⁸ and may limit excessive clot expansion by curbing association of additional platelets while permitting further generation of fibrin. The collection of proteins in these protruding 'caps' suggest they may act as a delivery service for fibrinolytic proteins into the heart of the thrombus.

THROMBUS ARCHITECTURE, LOCALIZATION OF PLATELETS AND FIBRINOLYTIC PROTEINS

During thrombus formation a core of densely packed, highly activated platelets forms which is enveloped by a shell of loosely packed less activated platelets.¹⁵⁷ The rate of solute transport within the core of the thrombus is low¹⁵⁸ indicating that proteins associated with the platelet membrane or within the gap junctions of these tightly packed aggregates will be

retained. These platelets experience strong agonist stimulation evoking prolonged intracellular calcium spikes, shape change and rapid degranulation.¹⁵⁹ In the shell of the thrombus, platelets are less intensely stimulated, displaying only transient increases in intracellular calcium with little or no degranulation.¹⁵⁹ This is an important concept, as it indicates that platelets do not release their intracellular contents into flowing blood, but rather into the body of the thrombus where local concentrations of platelet-derived proteins are likely to define the hemostatic balance.

Upon thrombin stimulation the copy number of α IIb β 3 on the membrane increases 2-3-fold, presumably drawing from the pool within α -granules.¹⁶⁰ The concurrent sharp rise in intracellular Ca^{2+} induces the active conformation of α IIb β 3¹⁶¹ and interaction with fibrinogen.⁹ Thrombin concentrations are elevated within the core of the thrombus facilitating further fibrin formation and platelet activation thereby dictating the overall structure and its resistance to fibrinolysis.

Plasminogen associates with unstimulated platelets, but following thrombin stimulation binding is significantly augmented in a fibrin and α IIb β 3-dependent manner.^{6,162,163} An array of plasminogen receptors have been identified on different cell types and generally involve an interaction of plasminogen with C-terminal lysine residues of membrane-bound proteins.¹⁶⁴ The plasminogen content of a thrombus dictates its susceptibility to lysis¹⁶⁵ and is likely related to its ability to be retained on the surface of fibrin and cells. Our laboratory studied the localization of plasminogen in a physiological flow model of thrombus formation and lysis.⁶ Plasminogen accumulated on platelet-associated fibrin, with a smaller pool found in direct association with the platelet surface (Figure 4).⁶ Plasminogen was initially

visualized in the 'core' of the thrombus in direct association with platelets, but as time progressed it was evident at areas distal to the core localizing with fibrin; both fibrin and plasminogen accumulation in these areas was blocked by inclusion of hirudin during thrombus formation.⁶ Using this flow model we have shown that both fibrin and cellular surfaces are important for retention of plasminogen within thrombi and that its local concentration governs the rate of fibrin degradation.

Stimulation of platelets with strong dual agonists, thrombin and convulxin, generates measurable quantities of plasmin which is significantly augmented by addition of plasminogen activators.⁶ We have previously shown a relationship between platelet-associated plasminogen and scuPA⁵, as described earlier in this review. Cell-bound uPA recognizes and activates both lys-plasminogen and ϵ ACA-liganded plasminogen, which has an open conformation similar to lys-plasminogen.¹⁶⁶ Association of plasminogen with the platelet surface induces an open conformation which is more readily cleaved to plasmin.^{5,162,166-169} Platelet-bound plasminogen can also be activated by crosstalk with uPA bound to monocytes or endothelial microparticles.¹⁶⁶ tPA-mediated plasminogen activation is also enhanced by platelets and is thought to arise from an autocatalytic mechanism.¹⁶⁸ In addition to the surface enhancement of plasminogen activation, the platelet surface acts as a reservoir of plasmin that is protected from inhibition by α_2 AP thereby promoting fibrinolysis.^{170,171}

PAI-1 accumulates to high concentrations in platelet-rich thrombi^{49,165} and its concentration directly correlates with their lysability.^{165,172} PAI-1 is not cross-linked to fibrin like α_2 AP, but associates indirectly via its cofactor, vitronectin¹⁷³, which also preserves the activity of this

labile serpin inhibitor.^{174,175} Upon release from α -granules PAI-1 localizes on platelet-bound fibrin thereby increasing the local resistance of this network to fibrinolytic degradation.¹⁷⁶ TAFI is also released from α -granules in response to stimulation^{4,6} and exerts an additional antifibrinolytic function to that of the plasma pool.⁵⁸ Thrombin generation on the platelet membrane and concomitant release of TAFI with platelet-derived TM¹⁷⁷, may accelerate generation of TAFIa in platelet-rich areas. Plasmin activity generated on the surface of activated platelets⁶ may also function in local TAFI activation and indeed our laboratory has previously shown that both thrombin/TM and plasmin-mediated TAFI activation regulate thrombus lysis.¹⁷⁸ TAFIa has also been found to play a significant role in resistance of platelet-rich clots to lysis.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, dual targeting of PAI-1 and TAFIa using antibody approaches has shown to be beneficial and is currently under investigation as novel thrombolytic agent for the prevention of ischaemic stroke.^{180,181}

Platelet FXIII-A stabilizes thrombi against fibrinolysis by cross-linking α_2 AP to fibrin of plasma and platelet origin.^{52,53,105} These extracellular cross-linking reactions are achieved by translocation of FXIII-A from the cytoplasm to the outer-leaflet of the stimulated platelet membrane. FXIII-A is not detected in the secretome indicating that externalization to the membrane is sufficient for the transglutaminase to mediate extracellular cross-linking reactions.⁵⁴ The distribution of FXIII-A on the surface of platelets differed in relation to the subpopulation and further work is necessary to determine which of these is important for mediating the antifibrinolytic function of FXIII-A.⁵⁴

FINAL REMARKS AND PERSPECTIVES

Traditionally platelets were considered antifibrinolytic in nature, but their ability to harbor plasminogen, plasminogen activators, and functional plasmin on their surface mean that their role is more complex than initially perceived. Platelets are a heterogeneous population of cells that exist in different activated states, reflected in their membrane composition and morphology, and as a consequence expose different receptors, molecules and proteins on their surface. Recent advances in defining the subpopulations of platelets and the profile of fibrinolytic proteins retained on their membrane surface, or on platelet-bound fibrin, may provide clues as to how these platelets function under different conditions. Whether differential packaging and release of pro- and anti-fibrinolytic proteins from α -granules contributes to regulation of fibrinolysis in different settings remains to be established. Time-dependent surface expression of platelet-derived proteins and binding of exogenous plasma-derived proteins may impact on the function of these complex cells on fibrinolysis. Understanding the function of platelet subpopulations could allow for thrombolytic therapies to be tailored to target populations. A recent report showed that thrombolysis with scuPA fused to single chain antibody fragments (scFv), which target activated $\alpha_{IIb}\beta_3$, was dependent on platelet-bound plasminogen.¹⁸² The possibility that platelets could serve in the rapid delivery of specific pro- or anti-fibrinolytic protein packages provides an exciting opportunity to harness their potential therapeutic value.

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FIGURE LEGENDS

Figure 1: Cartoon representation of platelet structure.

A basic schematic of platelet structure indicating several membrane receptors and their ligands, including $\alpha_{IIb}\beta_3$ and its ligand fibrinogen and the PAR1 and PAR4 receptors with their ligand, thrombin. The actin cytoskeleton is attached to the inner leaflet of the platelet membrane and joins to the cytoplasmic tails of the $\alpha_{IIb}\beta_3$ receptor via clot retraction mediators such as talin and vinculin. Platelets contain a number of intracellular granules including α -granules which contain a plethora of hemostatic proteins and dense-granules which house mediators such as Ca^{2+} , serotonin and polyphosphate. Glycoprotein VI (GPVI), IX (GPIX), $1b\alpha$ (GP1b α), $1b\beta$ (GP1b β) protease-activated receptor 1 (PAR1) or 4 (PAR4), adenosine diphosphate (ADP), ADP receptors (P2Y₁ and P2Y₁₂), von Willebrand factor (vWF) and plasminogen activator inhibitor (PAI-1).

Figure 2: Cartoon representation of fibrinolytic factors bound PS-exposing and PS-negative platelet surfaces and platelet-anchored fibrin

A number of fibrinolytic mediators bind to the activated platelet surface and the surrounding fibrin network. This diagram represents the pro- (plasminogen, FXIIa) and anti-fibrinolytic factors (FXIII-A; PAI-1, C1-Inhibitor) bound to activated spread PS-negative (A) or balloon-shaped procoagulant PS-exposing platelet surface (B) and platelet-anchored fibrin (blue). Histidine rich glycoprotein (HRG), C1 inhibitor (C1 INH), plasminogen (plgn) and polyphosphate (polyP).

Figure 3 – Localization of fibrinolytic proteins in PS-exposing and PS-negative platelets.

Washed platelets (0.5×10^8 /ml) were adhered to a collagen ($0.6 \mu\text{g}$) + thrombin (3 pmol)

coated slide and stained using FITC-labeled anti-FXIII-A antibody, FITC-labeled activated $\alpha_{IIb}\beta_3$ (PAC-1) or anti-PAI-1 DyLight 488-labeled antibody. Alexa-fluor647 Annexin A5 (1/20 dilution) or Annexin A5-FITC (1/20 dilution) was used to detect phosphatidylserine (PS) where indicated. Alternatively after 40 min incubation, plasminogen-DL633 (0.8 μ M) or fibrinogen-AF647 (16.7 μ g/ml) were added. Shown are representative images ($n = \geq 3$ experiments) of differential interference contrast (DIC) of FXIII, PAI-1 or PAC-1 expression and plasminogen or fibrinogen binding on balloon shaped PS-exposing platelets (left) or spread PS-negative platelets (right). Images were obtained with a Zeiss LSM710 confocal microscope with a 63 x 1.40 oil immersion objective and were analyzed using Zen 2012 software. Scale bar = 5 μ m.

Figure 4 - Plasminogen localization within thrombi. Thrombi were formed by whole blood perfusion (1000 s^{-1}) over a collagen/tissue factor-coated surface \pm hirudin (3 μ g/ml). Platelets labeled with DiOC6 (0.5 μ g/ml) or fibrinogen-OG488 (75 μ g/ml) were included. Thrombi were perfused with plasminogen-DL-633 (0.8 μ M). Confocal z-stacks were recorded of labeled thrombi (16-bit images of 1024 x 1024 pixels; 106 x 106 mm; stack distance 0.5 mm; 50 slices). Representative images and overlays of plasminogen (blue) and platelets (green), or fibrin(ogen) (red) taken from z-stacks at the base (0 mm), center (10 mm), and top (20 mm) of thrombi before (top panel) or after (bottom panel) visible fibrin formation.

| Protein | Concentration (ng/10 ⁹ platelets) | Primary location | Biosynthesis/uptake | References |
|--------------------|---|---|---|------------|
| Fibrinogen | 52500 | α -granules, cytoplasm | platelet & megakaryocyte endocytosis | 28,183 |
| Plasminogen | ? | α -granules | megakaryocytic (platelet?) endocytosis | 37,38 |
| PAI-1 | 670 | α -granules | platelet biosynthesis | 2,44 |
| α_2 AP | 62 | α -granules | ? | 50 |
| TAFI | 50 | α -granules | megakaryocyte biosynthesis | 4,58 |
| HRG | 371 | α -granules | platelet & megakaryocyte endocytosis | 59,60 |
| C1 inhibitor | 620 | α -granules | megakaryocyte biosynthesis | 3,67 |
| PN-1 | ^b | α -granules | megakaryocyte biosynthesis | 75,76 |
| polyP ^a | 755 | dense granules | - | 79 |
| FXIII-A | 60000 | cytoplasm | megakaryocyte biosynthesis | 94 |
| TFPI | 22 | ? (not thought to be α -granules or lysozymes) | megakaryocyte biosynthesis | 110,111 |
| scuPA/uPA | 1.3 | membrane | Plasma derived | 117,122 |
| tPA | ? | membrane | Plasma derived | 128,129 |

Table 1 – Summary of fibrinolytic proteins detected in platelets. Unknown parameters are indicated by ?. ^a polyphosphate is an inorganic biomolecule. ^b the total PN-1 concentration within platelets has not been reported but the amount released by 3×10^8 platelets/ml is approximately 20 mmol/L.⁷³ Plasminogen activator-1 (PAI-1), alpha2 antiplasmin (α_2 AP), thrombin activatable fibrinolysis inhibitor (TAFI), histidine rich glycoprotein (HRG), protease nexin-1 (PN-1), polyphosphate (polyP), factor XIII-A (FXIII-A), tissue factor pathway inhibitor (TFPI), (single chain) urokinase plasminogen activator (scuPA/uPA) and tissue plasminogen activator (tPA).

Figure 1

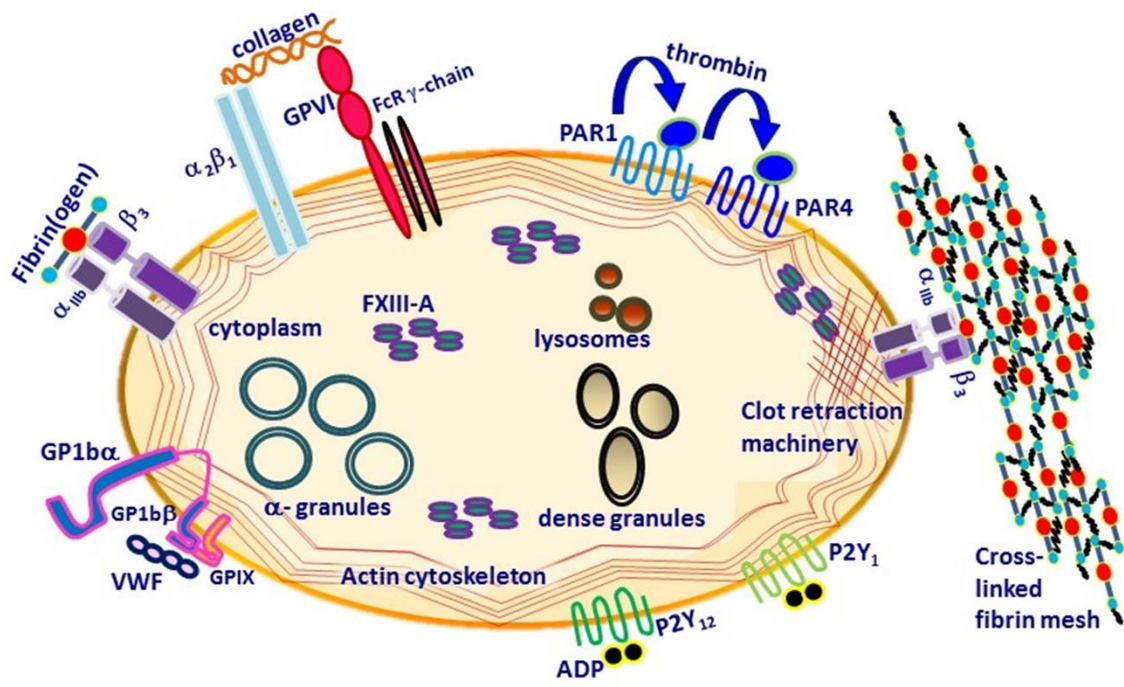


Figure 2A

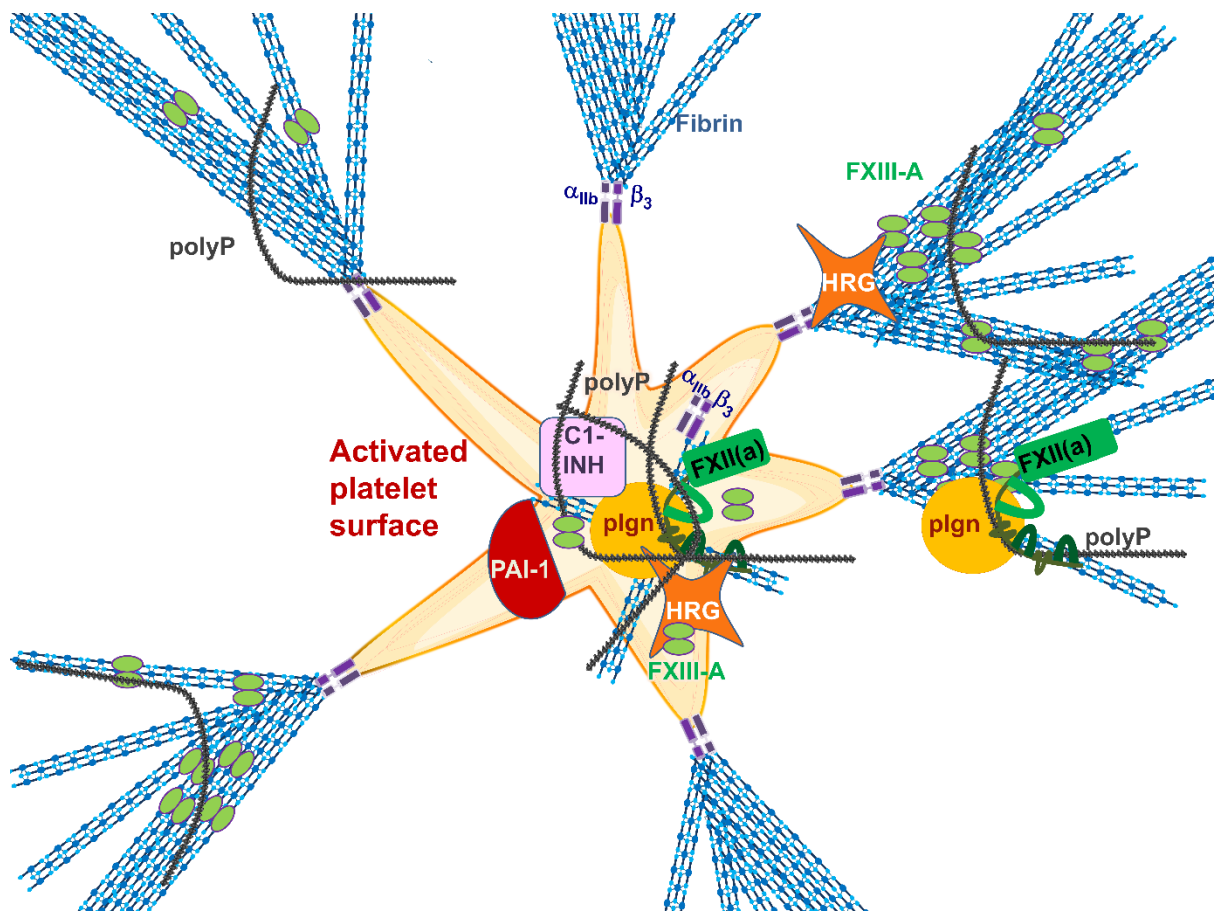


Figure 2B

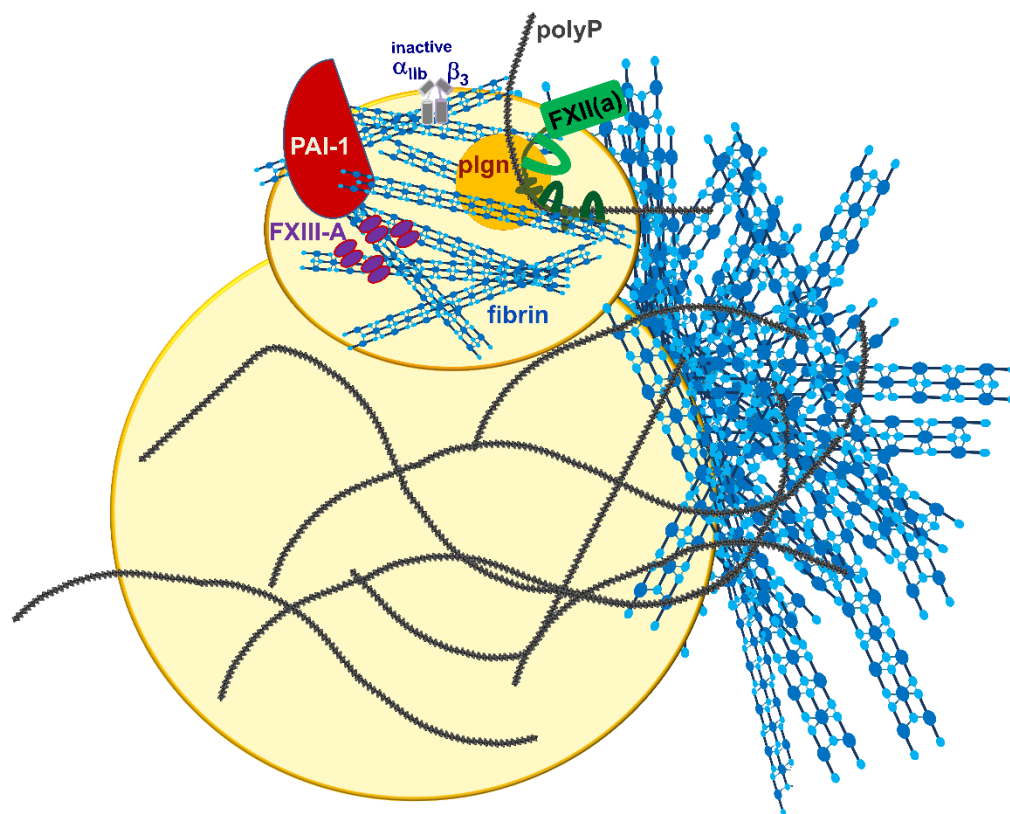


Figure 3

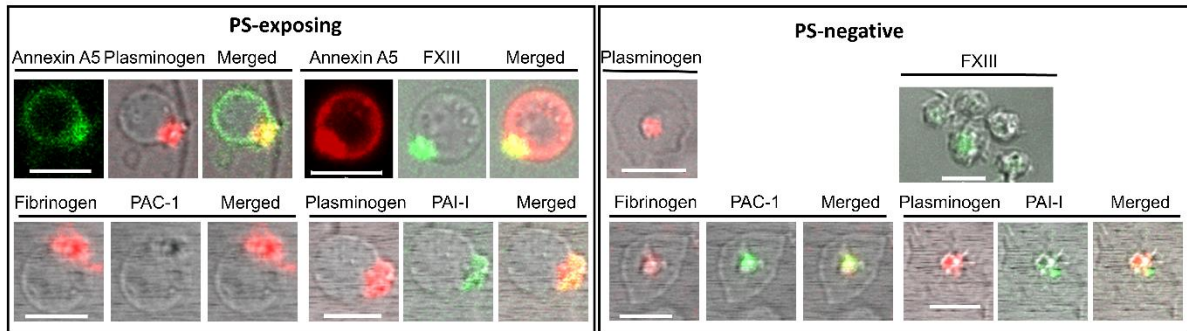


Figure 4

