

**POSTER PRESENTATION**

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# The SARS coronavirus E protein interacts with the PALS1 and alters tight junction formation and epithelial morphogenesis

Kim-Tat Teoh<sup>1</sup>, Yu-Lam Siu<sup>1</sup>, Wing-Lim Chan<sup>1\*</sup>, Marc A Schlüter<sup>2</sup>, Chia-Jen Liu<sup>3</sup>, J S Malik Peiris<sup>1,4</sup>, Roberto Bruzzone<sup>1</sup>, Benjamin Margolis<sup>3,5</sup>, Béatrice Nal<sup>1,6</sup>

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Intercellular tight junctions define epithelial apicobasal polarity and form a physical fence which protects underlying tissues from pathogen invasions. PALS1, a tight junction-associated protein, is a member of the CRUMBS3-PALS1-PATJ polarity complex, which is crucial for the establishment and maintenance of epithelial polarity in mammals. Here we report that the carboxy-terminal domain of the SARS-CoV E small envelope protein (E) binds to human PALS1. Using co-immunoprecipitation and pull-down assays, we show that E interacts with PALS1 in mammalian cells and further demonstrate that the last four carboxy-terminal aminoacids of E form a novel PDZ-binding motif that binds to PALS1 PDZ domain. PALS1 redistributes to the virion assembly site, where E is enriched, in SARS-CoV-infected Vero E6 cells. Ectopic expression of E in MDCKII epithelial cells significantly alters cellular polarity and induces formation of cysts with multiple lumens. We show that E expression delays formation of tight junctions and affects the subcellular distribution of the apical and tight junction markers GP135 and ZO-1, respectively. We speculate that hijacking of PALS1 by SARS-CoV E plays a determinant role in the disruption of the lung epithelium in SARS patients.

#### Author details

<sup>1</sup>HKU-Pasteur Research Centre, Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR. <sup>2</sup>Medizinische Klinik D, Universitätsklinikum Münster, D-48149 Münster, Germany. <sup>3</sup>Department of Biological Chemistry, University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA. <sup>4</sup>Department of Microbiology, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR. <sup>5</sup>Department of Internal Medicine, University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor, MI

<sup>1</sup>HKU-Pasteur Research Centre, Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR  
Full list of author information is available at the end of the article

48109, USA. <sup>6</sup>Department of Anatomy, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR.

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