

TRAPPC2L-related disorder: first homozygous protein-truncating variant and further delineation of the phenotype

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- 1 TRAPPC2L-related disorder: first homozygous protein-truncating variant and
- 2 further delineation of the phenotype
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- 18 Running title: Further delineation of the TRAPPC2L-related disorder
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ABSTRACT/SUMMARY

2 The TRAPP (TRAfficking Protein Particle) complexes are evolutionarily conserved

tethering factors, involved in the intracellular transport of vesicles for secretion and

autophagy processes. Pathogenic variants in eight genes (of 14) encoding TRAPP

proteins are involved in ultra-rare human diseases, called TRAPPopathies. Seven of

them are autosomal recessive neurodevelopmental disorders with overlapping

7 phenotypes. Since 2018, two homozygous missense variants in *TRAPPC2L* have been

8 reported in five individuals from three unrelated families with early-onset and

9 progressive encephalopathy, with episodic rhabdomyolysis. We now describe the first

pathogenic protein-truncating variant in the *TRAPPC2L* gene found at a homozygous

state in two affected siblings. This report provides key genetic evidence invaluable to

establishing the gene-disease relationship for this gene and important insights into the

13 TRAPPC2L phenotype. Regression, seizures, and postnatal microcephaly initially

described are not constant features. Acute episodes of infection do not contribute to the

neurological course. HyperCKemia is part of the clinical picture. Thus, TRAPPC2L

syndrome is mainly characterised by a severe neurodevelopmental disorder and a

variable degree of muscle involvement, suggesting that it belongs to the clinical entity of

rare congenital muscular dystrophies.

INTRODUCTION

The TRAPP (Trafficking Protein Particle) complexes are tethering factors allowing initial contact between the carrier and the target membrane. They are one of the components that ensure the specificity of protein distribution in different intracellular compartments of eukaryotic cells. From yeast to humans, TRAPP heteromeric complexes are evolutionarily conserved (1). They are composed of eight core subunits and six complex-specific subunits. In humans, there are two TRAPP complexes: TRAPP II and TRAPP III. The common core is composed of TRAPPC1, TRAPPC2, TRAPPC3, TRAPPC4, TRAPPC5, TRAPPC6A, and TRAPPC6B. In addition, TRAPP II includes TRAPPC9 and TRAPPC10 while TRAPP III includes TRAPPC8, TRAPPC11, TRAPPC12, and TRAPPC13. They act as guanine nucleotide exchange factors for Rab proteins which regulate the secretory and endocytic recycling pathways. It has been shown that the TRAPP core acts on both Rab1 and Rab11 while the TRAPP III complex is specific to Rab1, and that the additional subunits of each specific complex contribute to define Rab specificity (2).

High-throughput DNA sequencing for patients with rare and severe disorders has led to the identification of pathogenic variants in eight TRAPP genes resulting in a range of human disorders named TRAPPopathies: *TRAPPC2* (3), *TRAPPC2L* (4), *TRAPPC4* (5), *TRAPPC6B* (6), *TRAPPC9* (7), *TRAPPC10* (8), *TRAPPC11* (9), and *TRAPPC12* (10). Seven of them are autosomal recessive neurodevelopmental disorders with overlapping phenotypes. Their study helped to understand the function of TRAPP subunits and demonstrated that there is no clear correlation between the phenotypes associated with specific or core subunits of theses complexes.

The *TRAPPC2L* gene (Trafficking Protein Particle Complex 2-Like, MIM*610970) encodes a core subunit of the TRAPP complexes. To date, two pathogenic missense variants in this gene were identified in five patients from three unrelated families (4,11). The common feature is a neurodevelopmental disorder starting in the first year of life. However, important differences were noted regarding the clinical presentation. Two patients showed regression and episodes of rhabdomyolysis during acute infectious episodes, while the other three patients had a moderate non-syndromic intellectual

- disability from the outset (**Table S.1**). Thus, a detailed description of additional patients
- 2 is important to better define the phenotype, in particular muscle alteration. Here, we
- 3 report two siblings in whom we identified a homozygous nonsense variant in
- 4 TRAPPC2L, thus further clarifying the gene-disease relationship and the phenotype
- 5 associated with this gene.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

8 Patients

- 9 Two siblings with a neurodevelopmental disorder were referred to the Medical Genetics
- 10 Department of La Timone Marseille Public University Hospital in 2009. Peripheral blood
- samples were collected from the affected siblings IV-3 and IV-4, their healthy brother IV-
- 12 2, and their parents III-6 and III-7 (Figure 1.A). Written informed consent for genetic
- analyses and publication was obtained for each individual.
- DNAs were prepared, stored, and delivered for research by the Biological Resource
- 15 Center of La Timone Marseille Public University Hospital, according to the French
- regulation (CRB AP-HM Biobank; NF S96-900 & ISO 9001 v2015 Certifications).

17 Genetic analyses

- 18 Array CGH and Intellectual Disability (ID) gene panel Sequencing
- 19 Patient IV-3 was first analyzed with routine CGH testing using 4x180K whole-genome
- 20 oligonucleotide microarray and SureSelect XT Inherited Diseases Panel sequencing
- 21 (Agilent Technologies, Santa Clara, CA, USA) following the manufacturer's protocol.
- 22 Next-Generation Sequencing
- 23 Whole-exome sequencing of proband IV-3, his father (III-7), and a healthy brother (IV-2)
- 24 (Figure 1.A) was performed using the SeqCap EZ MedExome sequencing kit (Roche
- NimbleGen, Basel, Switzerland) following standard protocols. Paired-end 2x75 base-
- 26 pair (bp) sequencing was performed on a NextSeg 500 sequencing apparatus (Illumina
- 27 Inc., USA). Sequencing data were analyzed according to an autosomal recessive
- inheritance pattern. Validation and segregation analysis of the TRAPPC2L variant was
- done by Sanger sequencing using the following primers: TRAPPC2L-F:
- 30 TGTGTGTATGTGGCAAGGTC and TRAPPC2L-R: GTGGCTTTAAAACCTCTGCC. No
- 31 other candidate variant has been identified.

RESULTS

Clinical findings

- 4 The patients were born after uneventful pregnancies to healthy consanguineous parents
- 5 (Figure 1.A).
- 6 Patient IV-3 is a boy born at term. Birth measurements were within the normal range:
- 7 weight 3.450 kg (45th percentile), height 47.5 cm (5th), and OFC 35 cm (48th). Hypotonia,
- 8 poor contact, and developmental delay were noticed during the first months of life. From
- 9 2 to 6 years, growth measurements were normal. Walking and language were absent.
- 10 Stereotyped hand movements and self-injurious behavior were observed. Mild
- dysmorphic features including oval and floppy face, strabismus, prominent nose, and a
- wide mouth with everted inferior lip, hyperlaxity, and OFC remained normal. At the last
- medical evaluation, the patient had severe intellectual disability (ID) with no walking or
- speech. Brain MRI scan (age 1-3 years) showed non-specific anomalies with delayed
- myelination and thin corpus callosum. The patient underwent surgery for hip dysplasia
- due to joint hypermobility (**Figure 1.B**).
- 17 Patient IV-4 is a girl born at term. Birth measurements were within the normal range:
- weight 3.660 kg (77th percentile), height 47 cm (6th), and OFC 35 cm (67th). She had a
- 19 severe developmental delay with her first assisted steps acquired at age 7-9 years.
- 20 Many clinical signs were shared with her brother such as the presence of stereotyped
- 21 hand movements, behavioral problems, normal OFC, hyperlaxity, mild dysmorphic
- features, and non-specific brain MRI abnormalities (Figure 1.C). At last medical
- evaluation, OFC was 51 cm (– 0.68 SD). She was able to walk without support. When
- standing, a hyperlordosis was noticeable. She could make vocal contact but had no
- 25 clear speech.

26 Metabolic screening

- 27 In patient IV-3, a full metabolic screen, including amino acid chromatography, organic
- 28 acid chromatography, and acylcarnitine profile was performed in early childhood. The
- results were normal, and the tests were not repeated in the younger sister (patient IV-4).

30 Genetic analyses

- 1 In patient IV-3, array-CGH and ID gene panel sequencing did not reveal any candidate
- 2 variants. Whole Exome Sequencing on the proband (IV-3), his healthy father (III-7) and
- 3 his healthy brother (IV-2) lead to the identification of a unique homozygous variant in the
- 4 TRAPPC2L gene: NC_000016.9:g.88926373C>T(GRCh37/hg19),
- 5 NM_016209.3:c.367C>T, NP_057293.1:p.(Gln123Ter). It is a protein-truncating variant
- 6 (PTV) located in exon 4 (out of 5). Segregation analysis using Sanger sequencing
- 7 showed that the variant is homozygous in both affected siblings (IV-3 and IV-4) and
- 8 heterozygous in all unaffected individuals tested (III-6, III-7, and IV-2). This variant is
- 9 absent from gnomAD (v2.1.1 and v3.1.2) and ClinVar databases. The Combined
- 10 Annotation Dependent Depletion (CADD) score of this variant is 41.

Additional testing in patients following the identification of the TRAPPC2L

nonsense variant

- 14 Serum creatine kinase (CK) are molecules of 360 amino acids, formed by a dimer of 2
- subunits: M (muscular) and B (brain). There are 3 isoenzymes of CK resulting from the
- 16 combination of these subunits: CK-BB, CK-MB and CK-MM. Only total CK and CK-MB
- are routinely measurable. An elevated MB-CK level usually reflects damage to the heart
- 18 muscle. However, skeletal muscle contains about 7% of MB-CK. Thus, intense
- 19 muscular exercise or chronic muscular disease can sometimes be the cause of an
- 20 abnormal CK-MB. Both patients showed elevated levels of total CK over the course of
- 2.5 years, with a maximum of 927 U/L for patient IV-3 and 2489 U/L for patient IV-4
- 22 (Figure S.1). CK-MB levels were above the normal range in both patients, without any
- cardiac damage: 14.7 μ g/l in IV-4 and 7.1 μ g/l in IV-3, for a normal range < 4.87.
- 24 Muscle biopsy was performed in patient IV-4, at age 8-10 years. The morphology was
- 25 normal, without histoenzymatic alterations. The different proteins involved in the
- 26 dystrophin membrane complex were normally expressed (dystrophins, sarcoglycans,
- 27 dystroglycans, merosin, utrophin). In addition, the expression of caveolin-3, dysferlin,
- and emerin was also normal.
- 29 Congenital disorders of glycosylation (CDG) were investigated by western blot and 2D
- 30 electrophoresis of glycoproteins in patient IV-4. The results did not reveal any major
- variation in protein glycosylation, thus excluding CDG I or IIa.

DISCUSSION

TRAPPC2L gene (Figure 2).

The TRAPPC2L protein is a core subunit of TRAPP complexes that are tethering factors ubiquitously expressed in tissues and highly conserved between species. Only 2 homozygous missense variants in the *TRAPPC2L* gene have been identified in 3 unrelated families so far. Functional studies have shown their impact on TRAPP complex assembly and membrane trafficking between the endoplasmic reticulum and the Golgi (4,11). Herein, we report 2 siblings presenting with a severe neurodevelopmental disorder and the p.(Gln123Ter) nonsense variant in the

Genetic evidence is one of the main lines of evidence used to determine the link between a given gene and a phenotype. According to the Clingen clinical validity framework, the level of evidence is limited to support a gene-disease relationship for the TRAPPC2L gene due to the small number of patients reported (12). Thus, the formal variant ACMG/AMP classification is not possible for the identified variant (13,14). Once the gene-disease relationship is established for the TRAPPC2L gene, the following ACMG codes could be attributed: (1) PVS1_strong since nonsense-mediated mRNA decay is not predicted for this nonsense variant as it is located 8bp from the end of the second-to-last-exon. However, there is no loss of function (LoF) variant in the exon 4 in population databases and this specific exon is present in all biologically-relevant transcripts. In addition, the variant is predicted to remove 12% of protein (17 amino acids); (2) PM2 since this variant is absent from the gnomAD (v2.1.1 and v3.1.2); (3) PP4 since the phenotype of the patients matches previously described patients with TRAPPC2L variants: and (4) PP1 moderate since the variant segregates with the disease in this family. This report of two additional patients provides key genetic evidence that will be invaluable to establish the gene-disease relationship for TRAPPC2L.

Since childhood, the two siblings have been regularly monitored and there has been no evidence of clinical worsening after acute infectious episodes or seizures. Both have slow development but no regression. This presentation is consistent with those of the last 3 siblings by Al-Deri et al. (11). However, it contrasts with the 2 unrelated patients reported by Milev et al. who had a major regression with acquired microcephaly after acute febrile episodes, and seizures (4) (Table S.1). We confirm that regression, seizures, and postnatal microcephaly are not constant features of the TRAPPC2L syndrome. Acute episodes of infection do not contribute to the neurological course of all patients, and therefore it is not always a progressive encephalopathy.

The identification of the TRAPPC2L variant warranted the exploration of muscle function in patients although there was no evidence of rhabdomyolysis or myopathy. Serum CK and CK-MB isoform were persistently elevated in both patients. In patient IV-4 who acquired walking ability, values were higher and muscle biopsy was normal. These results are consistent with those of Milev et al : one patient had intermittent elevated CK levels up to 1000 IU/I and non-specific myopathic damage on muscle biopsy; the other had normal intermittent CK levels and normal muscle biopsy (4). In Al-Deri et al. report, the CK test and muscle biopsy were not performed (11) (Table S.1). According to the European Federation of Neurological Societies (EFNS), hyperCKemia is defined as the presence of serum total CK values beyond 1.5 times the upper limit of normal in at least 2 measurements (15). Serum total CK elevation is most often due to myopathies and sustained elevation of CK-MB isoform raises suspicion for noncardiac causes, in particular muscular dystrophy. HyperCkemia values fluctuate depending on the degree of muscular damage, disease course, and absolute muscle mass (16,17). These elements may explain the variability observed between the different reports. We confirm that hyperCKemia is part of the clinical picture of TRAPPC2L syndrome (Figure **S.1**). Muscle biopsy does not bring any additional argument, at least in the first decades of life. Serum CK test will provide support in the interpretation of variants of unknown significance in the TRAPPC2L gene. Newly diagnosed patients should have regular CK testing and, if anormal, be referred to a specialist of neuromuscular diseases.

- 1 Together, hyperCKemia associated with congenital hypotonia, joint hyperlaxity, and
- 2 autosomal recessive inheritance suggest congenital muscular dystrophies (CMD). CMD
- 3 are heterogeneous neuromuscular diseases that present at birth or in early childhood.
- 4 In general, muscle biopsy is consistent with the presence of dystrophic myopathy.
- 5 However, clear dystrophic features are not always present in the early stages. High-
- 6 throughput DNA sequencing has led to a better characterization of CMD and the
- 7 phenotypic spectrum is broader than originally described. Rare CMD do not fit into any
- 8 of the classic categories (18,19). Interestingly, individuals with biallelic pathogenic
- 9 variants in the *TRAPPC11* gene have a muscle phenotype ranging from limb-girdle
- muscular dystrophy to more severe forms of congenital muscular dystrophy (9,20). As
- 11 for TRAPPC2L, affected individuals presented with motor delay, and elevated serum
- 12 CK. Muscle biopsies from patients with TRAPPC11 showed dystrophic changes and
- abnormalities in dystrophy associated proteins that were not identified in TRAPPC2L
- 14 patients. The study of the structure of metazoan TRAPP complexes showed that
- 15 TRAPPC2L interacts with TRAPPC11 (21). We suggest that TRAPPC2L syndrome may
- belong to the clinical entity of rare CMD, and that the defect in association with
- 17 TRAPPC11 may explain the similarities in phenotypes.

This work provide provides evidence in favor of the *TRAPPC2L* gene-disease relationship and important insights into its phenotype that will help the diagnosis and management of this ultra-rare disease. To date, all reported *TRAPPC2L* variants have

management of this ultra-rare disease. To date, all reported TRAPPC2L variants have

been associated with neurodevelopmental disorders and hyperCKemia. Further studies

to investigate the specific functional effects of each variant on the TRAPP complex may

24 explain the observed clinical heterogeneity.

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- 3 insights into congenital muscular dystrophies. We are grateful to the Genomics and
- 4 Bioinformatics facility (GBiM), from the U 1251/Marseille Medical Genetics lab, for
- 5 performing the NGS analysis.

COMPETING INTERESTS

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CONTRIBUTION

- 14 FR, MA, and CMR drafted and wrote the manuscript in consultation with all authors.
- 15 FR, SS and BC provided clinical care. CMR, PC and FM performed research WES
- analyses. MA, FR, SS and BC performed clinical and pathological phenotyping. SG, JM,
- 17 FM, LV, and BC contributed with interpretation and discussion of results. FR, MA and
- 18 CMR generated figures and supplementaries. FR coordinated the study. LV provided
- 19 financial support for the research analysis.

20 ETHICS STATEMENT

- 21 This study has been approved by the scientific committee of the Assistance Publique
- Hôpitaux de Marseille (PADS22-337). Each of the cases in this study has given their
- consent to participate in the study and to have their data processed for publication.
- 24 According to the applicable legislation, this study does not require any additional
- regulatory process, therefore the solicitation of an ethics committee is not required.

LEGENDS TO FIGURES

- 27 Figure 1: Family pedigree, clinical and MRI findings in the patients. A. Family
- pedigree. Patients IV-3 et IV-4 are indicated with round and square filled in black.

- 1 Individuals III-1, III-2, III-3 indicated with round and squares filled in gray have been
- 2 diagnosed with another genetic condition. **B.** Patient IV-3. Clinical features were noted
- 3 several times between 2-8 years old: oval and floppy face, strabismus, prominent nose,
- 4 and a wide mouth with everted inferior lips, hand-to-mouth movements, and absence of
- 5 microcephaly. Brain MRI (sagittal section) at 2-3 years-old showed non-specific
- 6 anomalies with delayed myelination and thin corpus callosum. **C**. Patient IV-4. Clinical
- 7 features, shared with her brother, were noted several times before her 10th: stereotyped
- 8 hand-to-mouth movements, absence of microcephaly, mild dysmorphic features. Brain
- 9 MRI (sagittal section) at 1-2 years-old showed thin corpus callosum and non-specific
- 10 MRI abnormalities.
- 11 Figure 2: Scheme of TRAPPC2L gene showing the homozygous variants
- identified in published patients and those of our study. The variant identified in
- patients of our study is located above the gene, and those previously reported are
- underneath the gene. Reference transcript: NM_016209.3/NP_057293.1.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

- **Table S.1**: clinical detail of patients and review of the literature.
- Figure S.1: CPK measurements of IV-3 and IV-4 patients over time (period of 2.5
- **years).** CK normal range is <171 U/L, represented by a dotted line. In the non-walking
- 20 patient IV-3, CK levels were slightly elevated. In the walking patient IV-4, CK levels
- were much higher with a fluctuation over time. During this period, patient IV-3 was 12 to
- 22 14 years old, and patient IV-4 was 9 to 11 years old.

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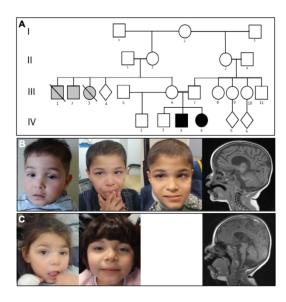


Figure 1. Family pedigree, clinical and MRI findings in the patients. A. Family pedigree. Patients IV-3 et IV-4 are indicated with round and square filled in black. Individuals III-1, III-2, III-3 indicated with round and squares filled in gray have been diagnosed with another genetic condition. B. Patient IV-3. Clinical features were noted several times between 2-8 years old: oval and floppy face, strabismus, prominent nose, and a wide mouth with everted inferior lips, hand-to-mouth movements, and absence of microcephaly. Brain MRI (sagittal section) at 2-3 years-old showed non-specific anomalies with delayed myelination and thin corpus callosum. C. Patient IV-4. Clinical features, shared with her brother, were noted several times before her 10th: stereotyped hand-to-mouth movements, absence of microcephaly, mild dysmorphic features. Brain MRI (sagittal section) at 1-2 years-old showed thin corpus callosum and non-specific MRI abnormalities.

338x190mm (117 x 117 DPI)

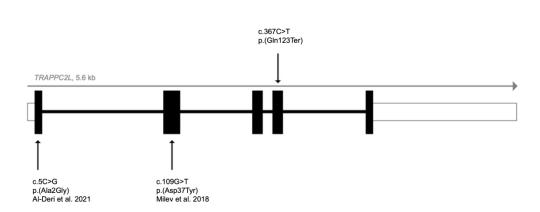


Figure 2. Scheme of TRAPPC2L gene showing the homozygous variants identified in published patients and those of our study. The variant identified in patients of our study is located above the gene, and those previously reported are underneath the gene. Reference transcript: NM_016209.3/NP_057293.1.

338x190mm (217 x 217 DPI)

Individuals Age/sex **Ancestry** Variant (NM_016209.3/NP_057293.1) Prenatal and perinatal DD (age of onset) Acute encephalopathy Regression intermittent CK levels intermittent CK-MB levels Muscle biopsies Brain MRI (age) **Motor milestones** Microcephaly Speech **Tetraplegia Dystonia** Seizure Vision anomalies Other

Genetic analyses

IV.3

M/ Early 10s

North African
c.367C>T:(p.Gln123
Unremarkable
+ (< 12 mo)

up to 927 IU/I
elevated (14.7 µg/I)
NA
non-specific anormal
Never achieved independent walking
Non-verbal
strabismus
rray-CGH ID gene panel sequencing, WES

DD: developmental delay; yo: years old; mo: months old; CK: creatine kinase;

		Al-deri et al. 2021		
D/ 4	11.0			
IV.4	II.2	II.3	II.4	
F/ Before 10th	F/ Late 30s	F/ Late 30s	M/ Early 30s	
		Ashkenazi Jewish		
Ter)		c.5G>C:p.(Ala2Gly)		
		Unremarkable		
+ (< 12 mo)	+ (12 mo)	+ (4 mo)	+ (6 mo)	
_	_	-	-	
up to 2489 IU/I	NA	NA	NA	
elevated (7.1 μg/l)	NA	NA	NA	
normal	NA	NA	NA	
llies	NA	NA	normal (1-2 yo)	
steps at 8, independent w	ent walkintly at 12 mo never crawled motor delay, walked crawled at 18 mo, wa			
-	NA	NA	NA	
Non-verbal	Seve	Severe expressive impairment		
-	-	-	-	
-	-	-	-	
-	-	-	-	
-	-	-	-	
-	-	-	-	
WES	chromosome analysis, Fr	chromosome analysis, Fragile-X testing and clinical exome sequencing		

NA: not available; WES: whole exome sequencing

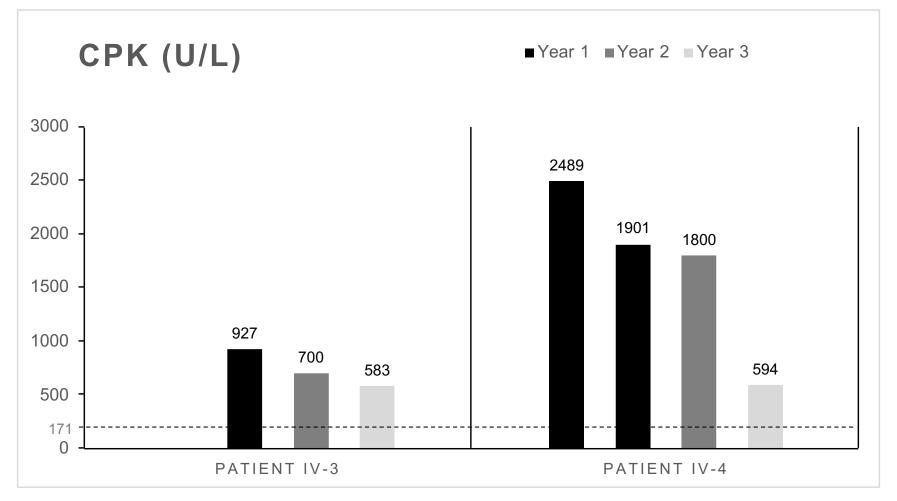


Figure S.1: CPK measurements of IV-3 and IV-4 patients over time (period of 2.5 years). CK normal range is <171 U/L, represented by a dotted line. In the non-walking patient IV-3, CK levels were slightly elevated. In the walking patient IV-4, CK levels were much higher with a fluctuation over time. During this period, patient IV-3 was 12 to 14 years old, and patient IV-4 was 9 to 11 years old.