



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Immunohistological composition of peri-implantitis affected tissue around ceramic implants—A pilot study

Tobias Fretwurst¹ | Janina Müller¹ | Lena Larsson² | Peter Bronsert³ |
Derek Hazard⁴ | Rogerio M. Castilho^{5,6} | Ralf Kohal⁷ | Katja Nelson¹ |
Gerhard Iglhaut¹

¹ Department of Oral and Craniomaxillofacial Surgery, Translational Implantology, Center for Dental Medicine, University Medical Center, Freiburg, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

² Department of Periodontology, Institute of Odontology, Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

³ Institute of Surgical Pathology, University Medical Center, Freiburg, Germany, Tumorbank Comprehensive Cancer Center Freiburg, Medical Center-University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany, Faculty of Medicine, University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

⁴ Institute of Medical Biometry and Statistics, Faculty of Medicine and Medical Center, University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

⁵ Department of Periodontics and Oral Medicine, University of Michigan School of Dentistry, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

⁶ Laboratory of Epithelial Biology, Department of Periodontics and Oral Medicine, University of Michigan School, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

⁷ Department of Prosthetic Dentistry, Center for Dental Medicine, University Medical Center Freiburg, Freiburg, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

Correspondence

Tobias Fretwurst, Department of Oral and Craniomaxillofacial Surgery/Translational Implantology, Center for Dental Medicine, University Medical Center Freiburg, Hugstetter Straße 55, D-79106 Freiburg, Germany.
Email: tobias.fretwurst@uniklinik-freiburg.de

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Abstract

Background: Aim of the pilot study was the histologic classification of the inflamed peri-implant soft tissue around ceramic implants (CI) in comparison with titanium implants (TI).

Methods: Peri-implant tissue were retrieved from 15 patients (aged 34 to 88 years, seven males/eight females) with severe peri-implantitis (eight CI, seven TI). The peri-implant soft tissue samples were retrieved from the sites during scheduled removal of the implant and prepared for immunohistochemical analysis. Monoclonal antibodies (targeting CD3, CD20, CD138, and CD68) were used to identify T- and B-cells, plasma cells and macrophages. Quantitative assessment was performed by one histologically trained investigator. Linear mixed regression models were used.

Results: A similar numerical distribution of the cell population was found in peri-implantitis around CI compared with TI. CD3 (TI, 17% to 85% versus CI, 20% to 70% of total cell number) and CD138 (TI, 1% to 73% versus CI, 12% to 69% of total cell number) were predominantly expressed. Notably, patient-individual differences of numerical cell distribution were detected. Co-localization of B- and T-lymphocytes was observed.

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Conclusions: Peri-implantitis around CI in comparison with TI seems to have a similar histological appearance. Differences in cellular composition of peri-implantitis lesions might also depend on the patient's specific immune status and not only on the material used.

KEYWORDS

ceramic, immunohistology, implantology, peri-implantitis, titanium, zirconia

1 | INTRODUCTION

Oral implants enlarge the treatment options to replace missing teeth and have been proven to be successful as shown in systematic reviews with long-term follow-up.^{1,2} Although survival rates appear convincing, peri-implantitis around dental implants is a challenge in daily practice, with a prevalence around 20%.³ The prevalence rate of peri-implantitis is highly variable and seems to be affected by clinical case definition and local factors such as implant characteristics.⁴ Peri-implantitis is defined by the Consensus Conference of the American Academy of Periodontology and the European Federation of Periodontology as a “plaque-associated pathological condition occurring in tissues around dental implants, characterized by inflammation in the peri-implant mucosa and subsequent progressive loss of supporting bone”.⁵ However, current articles with varying evidence consider additional trigger mechanisms for peri-implant bone loss, such as prosthetic, surgical, and biomechanical factors.^{6–9} For the identification of possible etiologic factors of a disease it is necessary to study the immunohistological composition as known from studies regarding aseptic loosening of orthopedic implants.¹⁰ The cellular composition of peri-implantitis around titanium implants is characterized by the existence of neutrophils, macrophages, and/or T- and B-cells.¹¹ The infiltrated connective tissue (ICT) in peri-implantitis is more than twice as large as the ICT of periodontitis and presents a significantly higher number of CD68 and myeloperoxidase-positive cells.¹¹ Further, current histological studies showed a distinct macrophage M1 polarization compared with periodontitis.^{12,13}

Even though titanium and its alloys are the most commonly used materials for oral implants and its components, ceramic oral implants are increasingly being placed.¹⁴ Three zirconia-containing ceramic systems are established in implant dentistry: yttrium-stabilized tetragonal zirconia polycrystals (Y-TZP), alumina-toughened zirconia (ATZ) and zirconia-toughened alumina (ZTA).¹⁵ Currently, there are mainly one-piece implants on the dental market, however more and more two-piece ceramic implants are available.^{16–18} To produce a roughened zirco-

nia surface, sintering particles onto the implant surface, nanotechnology, laser technology, sandblasting, or sandblasting and acid etching with a mixture of hydrofluoric and sulfuric acid have been used leading to different manufacturer dependent microtopographies.¹⁹ Y-TZP has been described to exhibit various benefits including excellent biocompatibility.²⁰ Since zirconia implant surfaces show a difference in biofilm formation in comparison with titanium implant surfaces, the peri-implant immunological cellular response might be different between titanium and zirconia implants.¹⁸ Peri-implantitis also occurs around ceramic implants but due to missing data the prevalence is unknown.^{3,18} To date, there is no histological analysis of the tissues around ceramic implants with signs of peri-implantitis. Although there might be some similarities between the clinical appearance of peri-implantitis around titanium and ceramic implants, a congruence between these conditions hasn't been shown on a histological level to date.

The aim of this pilot study was the histologic classification of the inflamed peri-implant soft tissue around ceramic implants in comparison with titanium implants.

2 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was approved by the ethics committee of the University Medical Center Freiburg, Germany (Ethik-Kommission Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg) No 337/04. This study was performed in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration of 1964, as revised in 2013 and with EQUATOR (Enhancing the QUALity and Transparency Of health Research) guidelines.²¹ Before enrollment, the patients received information regarding the purpose of the study and signed an informed consent. All patients were consecutively enrolled in two study centers (Department of Oral and Craniomaxillofacial Surgery/Translational Implantology and the Department of Prosthetic Dentistry, University Medical Center Freiburg, Germany). Screw-retained and cemented restorations were included. None of the patients had a known systemic disorder (e.g., diabetes mellitus) that could have affected the periodontal and peri-implant tissue conditions.

2.1 | Inclusion criteria

Soft tissue samples were taken from patients with severe peri-implant disease around ceramic and titanium rough implants with indication for explantation, diagnosed by clinical investigation and radiographic bone destruction (bone loss of greater than two thirds of the implant length or mobility with or without suppuration) according to the definition by Lang et al.²² Prosthetically restored implants were included which had received the restoration >12 months prior.

2.2 | Exclusion criteria

Immunosuppressed, irradiated patients or patients with current chemotherapy were excluded as well as patients aged <18 years. Nicotine users and patients with generalized active periodontal disease were excluded in the present study.

2.3 | Retrieval and processing of biopsies

The retrieval of biopsies was performed as described earlier.⁷ Briefly, the biopsies were obtained at the time of surgical removal of the implant. The intervention was performed under local anesthesia with Ultracain DS forte.* A circular incision and two releasing incisions mesial and distal of the implant were performed with a scalpel (15c).[†] A mucoperiosteal flap was mobilized and a clamp and a scalpel were used to remove the inflammatory tissue as a biopsy which was histologically processed. For further processing the biopsies were fixed in 3,5% neutral buffered Formalin.[‡]

Subsequently, the biopsies were embedded in paraffin[§] and cut with a rotary microtome into serial sections of 2- μ m thickness using the Leica microtome.^{||}

2.4 | Immunohistochemical analysis

Sections were de-waxed and incubated in DIVA antigen retrieval solution[#] at 60°C overnight. The sections were incubated with a primary antibody for 30 minutes followed by incubation with Envision HRP labeled

polymer^{||} for 30 minutes. Positive cells were detected using DAB substrate.^{**} The chosen antibodies^{††} were CD3 1:200 (T-lymphocyte), CD20 1:400 (B-lymphocyte), CD138 1:50 (plasma cell, clone MI15), CD68 1:200 (macrophage, clone PG-M1). Counterstaining was performed with hematoxylin.^{‡‡}

2.5 | Histological analysis

The prepared serial sections were digitized via the Panoramic SCAN device and investigated by a Panoramic Viewer (3DHISTECH, Budapest, Hungary). Every sample was filled and covered with 20 randomly selected ROIs (Region of Interests) (Fig. 1). The ROIs comprised a size of 500 \times 800 μ m at a magnification of \times 15.5. Pictures of the ROIs were taken and antibody positive cells in the ROIs were counted using ImageJ (NIH, Bethesda, USA). The results were assessed by a trained investigator (JM). The investigator was masked to clinical patient characteristics.

2.6 | Statistical analysis

For descriptive analyses, the mean, median, and standard deviation were computed. Box and stacked plots were used for graphical presentations.

Linear mixed regression models were used to check for differences among the log-transformed cell counts with regard to implant material (ceramic and titan), as well as differences among the cell counts with regard to cell type (CD3, CD20, CD68, and CD138) within each material. All of the aforementioned linear mixed models were adjusted for region of interest. To correct for the multiple testing problem, the results of pairwise comparisons were adjusted by the method of Scheffe. The calculations were performed with the statistical software STATA 15.1.

3 | RESULTS

Biopsies of the peri-implant tissue were retrieved from 15 patients (aged 34 to 88 years, six males/nine females) with severe peri-implantitis (eight ceramic implants, seven titanium implants) (see Table S1 in online *Journal of Periodontology*). The presence of macrophages, B-Lymphocytes, T-Lymphocytes, and plasma cells was identified in all samples. Micrographs illustrating

* Sanofi Aventis, Frankfurt, Germany

† KLS Martin Group, Tuttlingen, Germany

‡ Otto Fischer, Saarbrücken, Germany

§ Engelbrecht Medizin- und Labortechnik, Edermünde, Germany

|| Leica RM2255, Wetzlar, Germany

Biocare Medical, Concord, CA

|| DakoCytomation A/S, Glostrup, Denmark

** DakoCytomation A/S, Glostrup, Denmark

†† DakoCytomation A/S, Glostrup, Denmark

‡‡ DakoCytomation A/S, Glostrup, Denmark

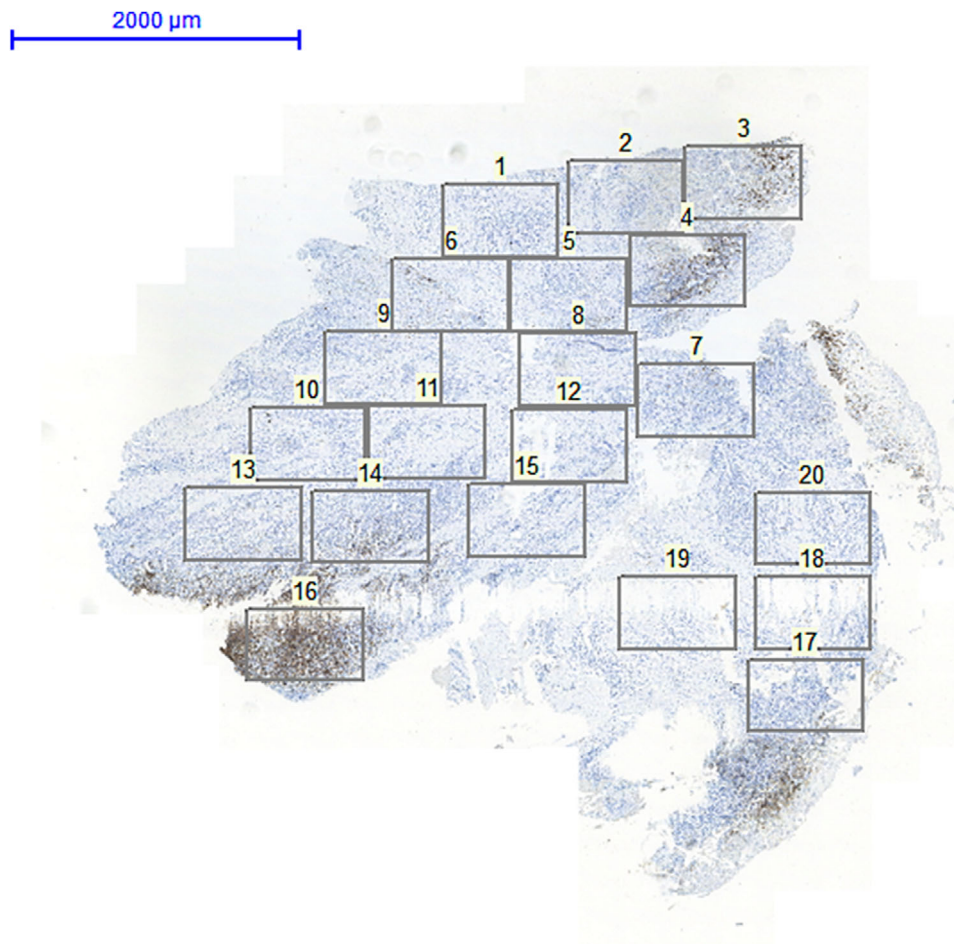


FIGURE 1 Histomorphometric analysis was performed in 20 randomly selected ROIs (Region of Interests). The ROIs comprised a size of $500 \times 800 \mu\text{m}$ at magnification of $\times 15.5$. Pictures of the ROIs were taken and positive cells in the ROIs were counted using ImageJ. The results were evaluated by one histological trained investigator (JM)

peri-implantitis lesions for both implant materials are presented in Figure 2. The predominant cell-type in peri-implantitis lesions around ceramic implants were plasma cells CD138 (mean 53%), followed by T-lymphocytes CD3 (mean 32%), B-lymphocytes CD20 (mean 10%) and macrophages CD68 (mean 5%) (Table 1). There was no significant difference regarding the total number of stained cells in peri-implantitis lesions around ceramic implants in comparison with titanium implants ($P > 0.05$) (Fig. 3, see Table S2 in online *Journal of Periodontology*). In 249 of 300 (83%) ROI, there was a co-appearance of CD3 and CD20 (see Figure S1 in online *Journal of Periodontology*).

Interestingly, a high interindividual variation regarding the prevalence of the cell-type was observed in both materials. The range in the ceramic group was for CD3-positive cells 20% to 70%, CD20-positive cells 3% to 22%, CD68-positive cells 2% to 10% and CD138-positive cells 12% to 69% of all cells, whereas in the titanium group: CD3, 17% to 85%; CD20, 3% to 18%; CD68, 1% to 26%;

TABLE 1 p50, SD, minimum (min) and maximum (max) cell count for each antibody used

	n	p50	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Titanium						
CD3	7	928	2,483	2,395	34	6,215
CD20	7	179	477	634	2	1,663
CD68	7	431	489	435	5	1,032
CD138	7	2,663	4,612	7,985	11	22,340
Ceramic						
CD3	8	2,915	3,755	2,241	2,324	8,980
CD20	8	533	1,165	1,212	340	3,283
CD68	8	519	529	252	238	907
CD138	8	7,111	6,128	4,397	419	13,477

CD138, 1% to 73% (see Table S2 in online *Journal of Periodontology*). Interindividual differences in the immunohistological cellular composition of the biopsies evaluated might also hint to an influence of the patient-specific

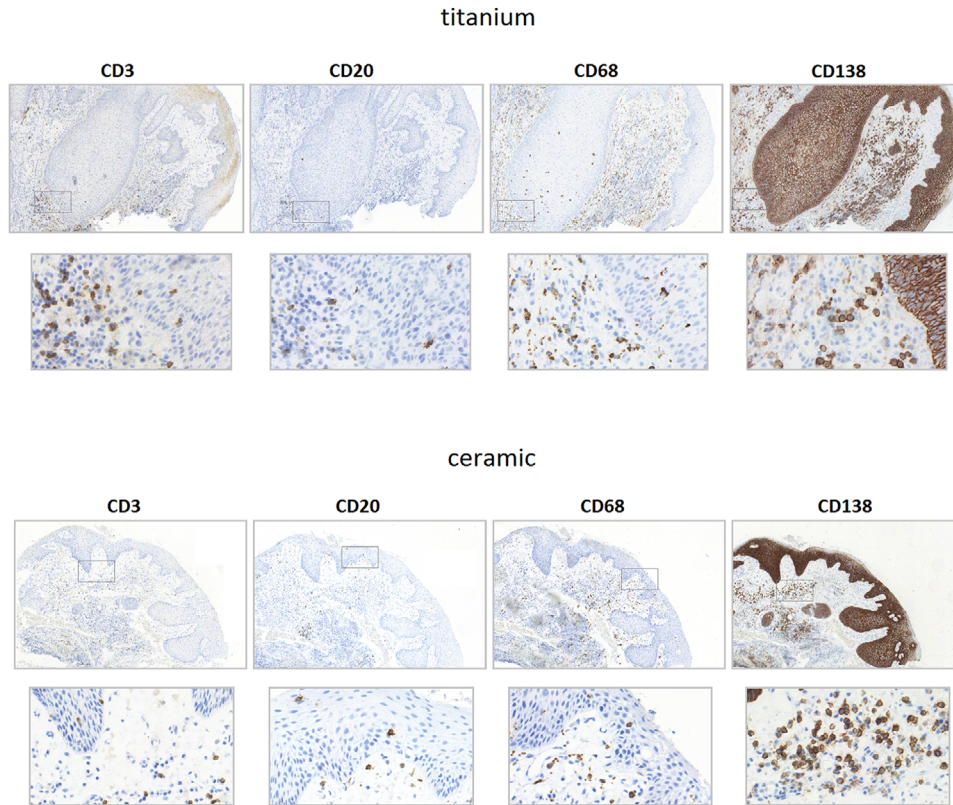


FIGURE 2 Biopsies retrieved from peri-implantitis tissue around titanium and ceramic implants. Staining was performed using hematoxylin and immunostaining against CD3, CD20, CD68, and CD138. Magnification ×5 and ×40, respectively

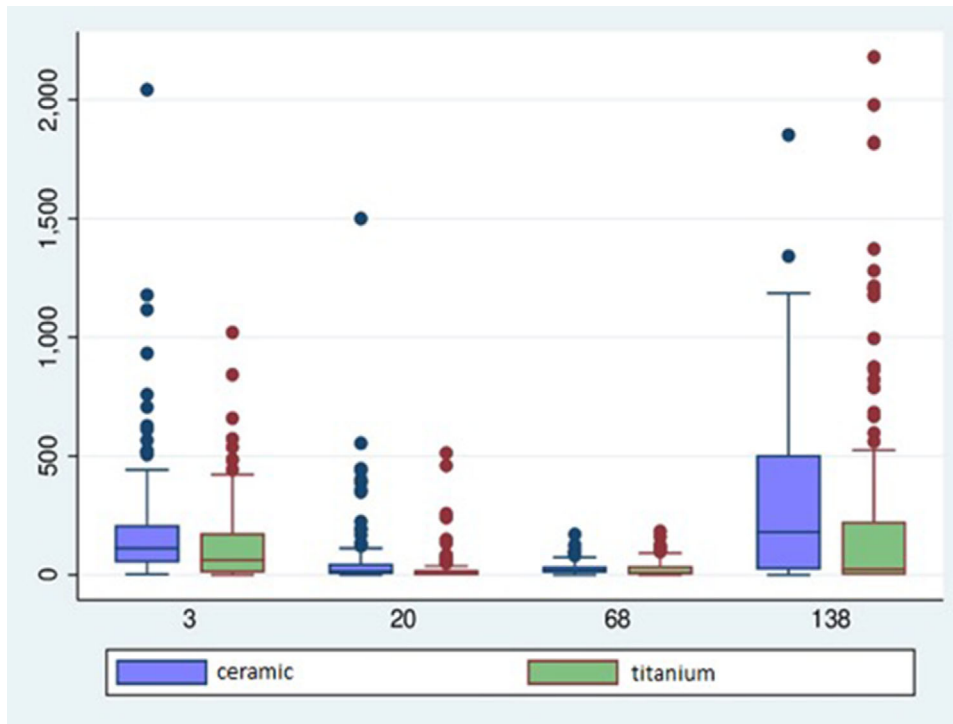


FIGURE 3 Biopsies derived from tissue around ceramic and titanium implants demonstrated the same numerical distribution of cell population (CD3, CD20, CD68, CD138). Cell count of each antibody in peri-implantitis around ceramic (blue) and titanium (green) implants

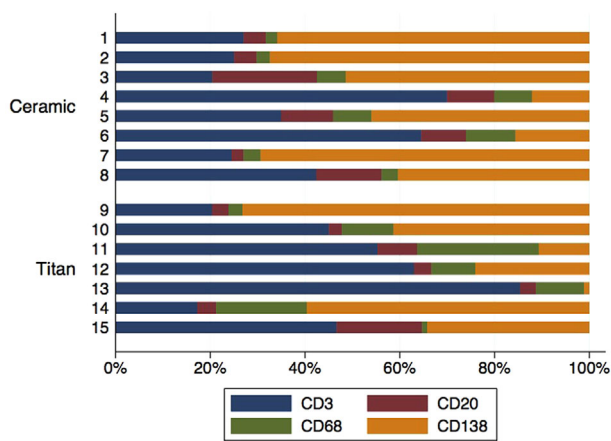


FIGURE 4 Stacked plot demonstrated a patient-specific immune response. Percentage distribution of cells stained with CD3, CD20, CD68, and CD138 for each patient (patients 1 to 15)

immune status rather than only the implant material used (Fig. 4).

4 | DISCUSSION

The cellular composition of tissue with peri-implantitis around zirconia-based implants has never been explored before. The specific interaction of inflammatory cells in tissue with peri-implantitis and their impact on peri-implant osseous breakdown with regard to the implant material is still unknown.^{11,23} The present pilot study demonstrated that there is a similar histological appearance of peri-implantitis lesions around ceramic and titanium implants in the soft tissue. The most predominant cells found for both materials were plasma cells (CD138) followed by T-lymphocytes (CD3). The mean distribution of cells observed in this study is in accordance with the results Carcuac and Berglundh presented for peri-implantitis around titanium implants (mean CD138, 33%; CD3, 21%; CD68, 11%; CD 20, 7%).¹¹ However, the latter authors provided mean values and analyzed solely titanium samples. Information regarding individual variations of the patients' immune response was not reported. In the present study, an interindividual distinction regarding cell-type frequency on the patient level was seen irrespective of the implant material. The current results may suggest that an immune response is associated with patient-specific parameters rather than with implant materials.

The present immunohistological data display the late phase of peri-implantitis (with indication of implant removal) with the differentiation of B cells and the existence of antibody-secreting cells (plasma cells) verified by CD138 staining.^{24,25} Antibody-secreting cells

are fundamental in humoral immunity by secreting antibodies which prevent bacterial adherence, promote phagocytosis, and activate the complement system.²⁶ Interestingly, the T-cell arm of the immune response is activated in this stadium of peri-implantitis as well, demonstrated by the amount of expressed CD3-positive T cells. T cells are able to differentiate into various different subsets. Basically, CD8-positive T cells showed a cytotoxic potential acting to kill cells that have been infected with intracellular microbes and tumors. CD4-positive T cells are designated as helper cells as they are responsible to regulate the cellular (B-cell help) and humoral immune responses (delayed-type hypersensitivity).²⁷ Since the aim of the present study was a general overview of inflammatory cell appearance in peri-implant tissue around two implant materials, a T-cell subset characterization was not performed. A detailed lymphocyte characterization should be performed in future studies to discriminate this lymphocyte-driven inflammation process.

Since variations regarding cell-type distribution on the patient level were detected, the present results may suggest an immune response associated with patient-specific parameters like implant biofilm/oral microbiome composition, different implant surface characteristics, different anatomical features like bone quality and soft tissue condition, different and/or combined etiology pathways and individual genetic and epigenetic immunological conditions.^{5,9,28} Further, the histological samples may have been taken at a different stages of peri-implant inflammation, a classification between clinical diagnostic parameters and histological appearance seems difficult. In the field of periodontology it is well accepted that patient individual genetic and epigenetic patterns lead to a different immunological potential based on histone modification and DNA methylation with varying expression levels of cytokines, chemokines and toll-like receptors of the oral epithelia.²⁸ For peri-implantitis similar mechanisms are suspected but not sufficiently examined.²⁹ Orthopedic studies revealed typical histological patterns in low- and high-grade infections around orthopedic prostheses consisting of neutrophil granulocytes, plasma cells as well as small lymphocyte aggregates, whereas in particle-induced aseptic lesions macrophages and multinucleated giant cells can occupy more than 20% of the lesion depending on particle size and configuration.¹⁰ High amounts of macrophages (up to 26%) in some patients of the present study may suggest a particle/ion related etiology for this patient subgroup. Tissue retrieval studies in orthopedics found a predominance of M1 macrophages in response to wear particles and an in-vitro study based on genome-wide microarray and a multiplex cytokine assay demonstrated that the response to titanium particles is determined by



the state of macrophage polarization.^{30,31} Recent studies demonstrated a specific immunological macrophage polarization pattern comparing periodontitis and peri-implantitis lesions whereas peri-implantitis lesions display a higher number of macrophages coupled with a distinct macrophage pro-inflammatory M1 polarization signature.^{12,13} A particle-triggered mechanism involved in peri-implantitis lesions around titanium implants is being discussed, but an unidirectional causal relationship between titanium particles in the peri-implantitis lesions and onset or progression of peri-implantitis disease has not been proven.^{32,33} Influence of metal particles and ions on peri-implant biofilm and their possible role in the development, formation and production of extracellular polysaccharides is discussed in current research.³⁴ In the peri-implant mucosa of zirconia ceramic implants, zirconia elements have been detected as well, however the origin and influence of metal or ceramic ions or particles on peri-implantitis remains unclear.¹⁷ Furthermore, the host-response and interaction between lymphocyte- and monocyte-macrophage lineage as well as the influence of nano- and microparticles on the microbial biofilm and cytokine release in peri-implant inflammation is not elucidated and future studies could shed more light on the etiological discussion.⁹

Within this study, the first histological comparison of human peri-implantitis lesions around ceramic and titanium implants was performed. However, we have to acknowledge several limitations. First, this pilot study has only a small number of samples. Due to the limited sample size conclusions have to be drawn carefully but could help optimize the study protocol in future studies with a larger sample size. In the current study Y-TZP implants of a single manufacturer and type (one-piece implants) were examined. To validate the present findings, peri-implantitis around different ceramic implant systems with different surface treatment like sandblasting, etching, and special coatings of the implant as well as different modification of the implant material like ATZ should be considered in future clinical studies.³⁵ All implant samples for this investigation were obtained from patients with severe peri-implantitis (late phase of peri-implantitis) with the indication for removal of the implant. A comparison between clinical conditions at explantation and histological appearance cannot be performed, since the definition of Lang et al. was used as general end point in the present study.²² In future studies the clinical conditions (e.g., attached gingiva, prosthetic restoration, grafting procedures) and histological appearance could be considered as well as the clinical conditions at implant placement and at the time of implant removal compared. The complete clinical history of implants from placement to removal would be preferential but can only be acquired if the patients have

not been referred solely for the surgical removal of the implant.

A conclusion concerning the etiology of peri-implantitis, conversion of mucositis into peri-implantitis, early peri-implantitis, and histological progression pattern of peri-implantitis cannot be derived from the available samples, mainly due to ethical concerns of sample harvesting.

Within this investigation, it could be demonstrated that the immunohistological cellular composition seems to exhibit interindividual differences and is not only associated with the implant material. Profound research with a higher patient sample size is, therefore, needed for thorough understanding of the pathogenesis of peri-implantitis in general and of peri-implantitis around ceramic implants in particular. With such knowledge, the clinicians might find an optimal treatment modality to manage this difficult-to-treat disease.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

Soft tissues obtained from peri-implantitis lesions around ceramic implants in comparison with titanium implants seem to have a similar histological appearance at time of implant removal. Differences in the immunohistological cellular composition of the biopsies evaluated might also hint to an influence of the patient-specific immune status rather than only the implant material used.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Tobias Fretwurst, Katja Nelson, and Gerhard Iglhaut conceptualized and shared their idea regarding surgeries, funding acquisition, validation, administration, and writing. Ralf Kohal conceptualized surgeries, review, and



editing. Janina Müller, Lena Larsson, and Peter Bronsert helped in immunohistological analysis and review and editing. Rogerio M. Castilho helped in review and editing. Derek Hazard helped in statistics statistics. All authors corrected and approved the final manuscript.

ORCID

Tobias Fretwurst  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4769-7610>

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

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