

Leukocyte-endothelium interactions in cutaneous inflammatory processes

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Introduction

Migration of leukocytes into soft tissues is a pivotal event in inflammatory responses involving all organs. These processes are crucial in host responses to injury or infection as highlighted by the inherited disease "leukocyte adhesion deficiency", in which failure of migration results in recurrent life-threatening soft-tissue infections [72]. Alternatively, leukocyte migration may contribute to the pathology of many disorders, including inflammatory cutaneous diseases.

As first witnessed by Cohnheim in 1889 [15] and later by Clarke in 1935 [14] using intravital microscopy, the first step in leukocyte localisation to sites of inflammation is "margination", an event whereby leukocytes leave the central stream of blood flow in post-capillary venules. Leukocytes then interact with endothelium by "rolling" along the luminal surface, a process which occurs within minutes of the inflammatory stimulus. As the inflammatory process progresses, the number of rolling cells increases and their velocity decreases, until they come to a halt, or "arrest". As a consequence of these events, leukocytes may then migrate through endothelial cell junctions along the vessel wall and into tissues, a process termed "diapedesis". Cohnheim [15] remarked "we have here to deal with a molecular change of the vessel walls". One hundred years later, the molecular basis for leukocyte interaction with endothelium is being established.

These events are clearly highly relevant to leukocyte recruitment into skin. For leukocytes to gain access to the dermis and epidermis, they must first leave the circulation, by adhering to and migrating through dermal blood vessel walls, and subsequently migrate through cutaneous structures along chemotactic gradients to the inflammatory focus. Studies suggest that migration is not random but controlled by precise processes, regulating recruitment of appropriate leukocyte subpopulations. For example, cutaneous lymphocytic inflammation is characterised by T cell accumulation, whereas in the gut B cell accumulation predominates.

This chapter examines the molecular basis of leukocyte-endothelium interactions and their relevance to cutaneous inflammatory processes.

In vitro molecular basis for leukocyte adherence to endothelial cells

Leukocyte adherence to post capillary venular endothelium is a critical step in localisation of leukocytes at sites of inflammation [10]. These events are mediated via interactions between adhesion receptors on circulating leukocytes and their ligands induced by a variety of pro-inflammatory factors on activated endothelial cells. Characterisation of the molecules responsible for these events has been elucidated using static in vitro models of adhesion whereby purified peripheral blood leukocytes and/or leukocyte cell lines adhere to monolayers of human umbilical vein endothelial cells (HUVEC). To date at least five separate adhesion ligands have been characterised on activated HUVECs, namely intercellular adhesion molecule 1 (ICAM-1; CD54) [66], intercellular adhesion molecule 2 (ICAM-2) [74], endothelial leukocyte adhesion molecule 1 (ELAM-1; LECAM-2) [8], vascular cell adhesion molecule 1 (VCAM-1; INCAM-110) [57] and granule membrane protein (GMP)-140(CD62; LECAM-3; PADGEM) [25] (Table 1).

ICAM-1, ICAM-2 and VCAM-1, all members of the immunoglobulin gene superfamily, are single chain molecules characterised by repeated immunoglobulin-like extracellular domains: ICAM-1 has five, ICAM-2 has two and VCAM-1 has six. Both ICAM-1 and ICAM-2 serve as ligands for lymphocyte function-associated antigen (LFA)-1 (CD11a/CD18) [73, 74], a $\beta 2$ integrin comprising two

Table 1. Vascular adhesion molecules

Name	Synonyms	Ligand	Cell type
Selectins			
ELAM-1	LECAM-2 E-Selectin	Sialyl Lewis X CLA	Neutrophil, Monocyte Memory T cell
GMP-140	LECAM-3 P-Selectin CD62 PADGEM	Sialyl Lewis X	Neutrophil
Immunoglobulins			
ICAM-1	CD54	LFA-1 (CD11a/CD18) Mac-1 (CD11b/CD18)	All leukocytes Neutrophil, Monocyte
ICAM-2		LFA-1	All leukocytes
VCAM-1	INCAM-110	VLA-4 (CD49d/CD29)	Lymphocyte, Monocyte, Eosinophil

non-covalently linked peptide chains expressed on the surface of all leukocytes. Adherence between LFA-1 and ICAM-1 is dependent on leukocyte activation [18], which increases avidity of LFA-1 for ICAM-1, but not increased surface expression of LFA-1. In addition, ICAM-1 serves as a ligand for a second $\beta 2$ integrin, MAC-1 (CR3, Mo-1; CD11b/CD18) [16] expressed predominantly on the surface of monocytes and neutrophils. VCAM-1 was initially described and functionally characterised by screening an interleukin (IL)-1 HUVEC expression library utilising a functional assay for cell-cell adhesion [57]. It acts as a ligand for the $\beta 1$ integrin very-late activation antigen 4 (VLA-4; CD49d/CD29), at a site separate from the fibronectin binding domain [20]. VLA-4 is maximally expressed on memory-type T lymphocytes and also on eosinophils and monocytes.

Both ELAM-1 and GMP-140 belong to a family of molecules called selectins or Lec-Cams [71]. Structural analysis of these molecules reveals an extracellular N-terminal domain homologous to a variety of calcium-dependent lectins, coupled to an epidermal growth factor-like domain of amino acids that is followed by short consensus repeat motifs, as found in complement-activation regulatory proteins. Both ELAM-1 [46] and GMP-140 [43] recognise sialylated derivatives of the Lewis X oligosaccharide (sLx) on the surface of leukocytes, particularly that associated with the selectin LECAM-1 [59]. To date, GMP-140 has been shown to act solely as a ligand for neutrophils while ELAM-1 binds neutrophils, monocytes and memory T lymphocytes [60, 69]. It has been suggested that ELAM-1 may act as a skin-specific addressin for skin homing memory T cells as identified by the monoclonal antibody HEC4-52 [58], which recognises the epitope responsible for ELAM-1 binding [7].

The dynamics of surface expression of these adhesion ligands on HUVECs is specific for each molecule, with induction of selectins (GMP-140 and ELAM-1) preceding immunoglobulin (ICAM-1 and VCAM-1) expression. GMP-140 is stored in cytoplasmic Weibel-Palade bodies of endothelial cells and within minutes of stimulation of HUVECs *in vitro* by acute inflammatory mediators, e.g. histamine, GMP-140 is translocated to the cell surface [34] allowing neutrophils to bind. Within 1 h expression is down-regulated. In contrast ELAM-1 requires *de novo* gene transcription and protein synthesis. After stimulation of HUVECs by so-called “primary cytokines” IL-1 and tumour necrosis factor (TNF)- α , ELAM-1 mRNA is detectable by 1 h, and surface expression maximal at 4 to 6 h; neutrophil binding parallels ELAM-1 expression [9]. Like ELAM-1, VCAM-1 [57] and ICAM-1 [65] induction requires *de novo* protein synthesis, although ICAM-1 is basally expressed on unstimulated HUVECs. Activation by IL-1 or TNF- α , and in the case of ICAM-1 also interferon (IFN)- γ , of HUVECs results in mRNA detection by 2 h and persistence until at least 72 h. ICAM-1 acts as a ligand for all leukocytes, whereas VCAM-1 binds lymphocytes and eosinophils only [17]. ICAM-2 differs from ICAM-1 in that constitutive expression by HUVECs is stronger but does not appear to be regulated by cytokines [74]. The dynamics of induction of these adhesion molecules may explain why neutrophils accumulate before lymphocytes at sites of inflammation. The significance of these cytokines to inflamed skin and other pro-inflammatory molecules responsible for endothelial activation and adhesion molecule expression will be discussed later.

The studies outlined above provide much information on the molecular basis for interactions between leukocytes and activated endothelial cells and also demonstrate that selectin- and integrin-mediated pathways are distinct, as indicated by the fact that monoclonal antibodies to each are additive in their inhibition of neutrophil-HUVEC adhesion [11]. Furthermore, when shear forces to simulate blood flow are applied to HUVEC monolayers, selectin-mediated adhesion increases while integrin-mediated adhesion decreases [70]. To assess the dynamics and relative contribution of each pathway in the accumulation of leukocytes at sites of inflammation *in vivo*, recent experiments *in vitro* using artificial lipid bilayers containing adhesion molecules [44] and *in vivo* experiments with blocking antibodies and intravital microscopy [80] have been employed. These demonstrate that under flow conditions similar to those found in post-capillary venules two critical and obligatory interactive phases between neutrophils and endothelial cells operate. Step one involves neutrophils rolling along the luminal surface of activated endothelium, a process which is reversible and selectin (GMP-140, ELAM-1) dependent. Step two, involving irreversible binding and arrest of neutrophils on endothelium followed by diapedesis through the vessel wall is mediated by ICAM-1/LFA-1 interactions and requires prior selectin-mediated adhesion events and neutrophil activation, e. g. by exposure to various neutrophil chemotactic substances including IL-8 (see below).

The relevance of such processes to accumulation of neutrophils at sites of infection is highlighted by the inherited disease "leukocyte adhesion deficiency" (LAD), where affected individuals genetically lack CD18 antigen and consequently develop recurrent life-threatening soft-tissue infections [72]. The sequence of events responsible for lymphocyte/endothelial cell interactions *in vivo* at sites of inflammation are not yet fully elucidated, although as shown above it is likely that similar molecules are involved in the process.

Molecular basis of cutaneous inflammation

Accumulation of leukocytes into skin involves three distinct phases, namely (a) recruitment, (b) retention and (c) return to circulation [51]. The initial step in their recruitment into inflamed skin is their interaction with post-capillary venular endothelium in the dermis. These endothelial cells differ from large vessel HUVECs in that they represent microvascular endothelium (human dermal microvascular endothelial cells, HDMEC). Although more difficult to isolate and culture, HDMEC responses to cytokine stimulation are similar to those observed for HUVEC, with up-regulation of ICAM-1, VCAM-1 and ELAM-1 in response to IL-1 and TNF- α [45, 76]. Certain differences, however, exist: in particular there is stronger constitutive expression of ICAM-1 on HDMECs [76], which is paralleled *in vivo* by expression of ICAM-1 on dermal vascular cells in normal skin [28] (see below).

Cytokines, including IL-1, TNF- α and IFN- γ , which play an important role in endothelial activation *in vitro*, are produced by many cell types within human skin (see below) and are thought to be critical to the pathogenetic mechanisms of many cutaneous inflammatory diseases [5, 52]. An important experimental

approach has been to determine the local effects of these cytokines administered intradermally on human skin *in vivo*. Direct intradermal injection of recombinant human IFN- γ produces a significant perivascular infiltrate consisting of lymphocytes and monocytes with few neutrophils. Concomitantly ICAM-1 [2], but not ELAM-1 [31], is up-regulated on endothelium as would be predicted from *in vitro* studies. Short-term organ culture experiments in which 2-mm punch biopsies of normal skin are immersed for 48 h in RPMI medium containing IFN- γ also lead to enhanced ICAM-1 expression and increased lymphocyte adhesion as assessed by frozen-section adherence assay [53]. Recombinant human TNF- α intradermally leads to a biphasic response. At early time points (6 h), the infiltrate is predominantly neutrophilic, whereas later (6 days), lymphocytes predominate. ELAM-1, ICAM-1 and VCAM-1 are up-regulated in both groups, indicating that *in vivo* dynamics may differ from those observed *in vitro* [32]. In similar experiments performed in baboons, comparable results were achieved when IFN- γ or TNF- α were administered separately. When administered together, the cytokines acted synergistically [50], as has also been reported for ICAM-1 and leukocyte chemotactic factor mRNA production in cultured human keratinocytes [3]. Since recombinant IL-1 is not available for administration to humans, autologous stratum corneum-derived IL-1a has been extracted biochemically and re-injected into volunteers [30]. In parallel with *in vitro* studies, ELAM-1, VCAM-1 and ICAM-1 were up-regulated, and a neutrophilic infiltrate was observed at 6 h. Later time points were not examined.

Cytokine production in skin has been detected in a number of inflammatory conditions, including allergic contact dermatitis (ACD) and psoriasis [1, 52]. To determine whether endothelial adhesion molecule expression is altered in inflamed skin, biopsies of ACD, inflammation following UVB radiation and Mantoux reaction have been examined immunohistochemically. These experimentally induced conditions allow the dynamics of adhesion molecule expression to be assessed *in vivo*. Elicitation of poison ivy/oak (rhus, urushiol) ACD leads to rapid up-regulation of ELAM-1, VCAM-1 and ICAM-1 by 8 h and more intense expression at 24–48 h, paralleling the inflammatory infiltrate [29]. Following two minimal erythema doses (m. e. d.) of UVB radiation, ELAM-1 is up-regulated by 6 h, maximal at 24 h and has returned almost to basal levels by 72 h [56]. VCAM-1 was not induced and little change was observed in ICAM-1 expression, although this may reflect the strong constitutive expression observed on dermal vascular endothelium in normal skin, and the relative insensitivity of the experimental system to discern changes in intensity of expression. In contrast, Mantoux reactions produced up-regulation of both ELAM-1 and VCAM-1 by 6 h, with maximal expression persisting to 72 h [56], probably reflecting stimulus (*i. e.* antigen) persistence. These studies highlight two important points: firstly, adhesion molecule expression parallels the inflammatory infiltrate, and, secondly, distribution and dynamics of expression vary between inflammatory stimuli. Alterations in endothelial cell adhesion molecules are also observed in chronic inflammatory conditions including psoriasis, lichen planus and atopic dermatitis where ICAM-1 is up-regulated [28] and ELAM-1 chronically expressed [31, 60].

The studies detailed above provide evidence at the phenotypic level for the involvement of endothelial cell adhesion molecules in a range of acute and chronic

inflammatory skin conditions. Further evidence for their importance is provided by functional studies on murine and human tissue. Using an *in vitro* lymphocyte/frozen-skin-section adherence assay it has been shown that lymphocytes specifically adhere to psoriatic endothelium, particularly within the papillary dermis, compared to normal skin [67]. Memory helper T lymphocytes (CD4⁺, CDw 29⁺) adhered most prominently [13], a point of considerable interest since this T cell subset preferentially accumulates in psoriasis and other inflammatory skin diseases as determined by immunohistochemical analysis [58]. Using blocking antibodies to LFA-1 (ICAM-1 receptor on lymphocytes), 40% of binding activity can be inhibited [13], indicating an important role for this molecule. Furthermore, high endothelial venules which are adapted to support lymphocyte migration into lymphoid tissue, are observed in psoriatic dermis, and may specifically represent the sites of leukocyte recruitment in lesional skin [36]. Frozen-section adherence studies performed on sensitised human skin 18–24 h following topical urushiol (rhus dermatitis) application demonstrate that lymphocyte adhesion to endothelium can be blocked by monoclonal antibodies to VLA-4 and LFA-1, but is not influenced by antibodies to ELAM-1 [55]. An important role for integrins in mediating recruitment of lymphocytes in skin is suggested by studies in mouse ACD [21]. Lymphocytes extracted from sensitised mice can transfer immunity to syngeneic animals, which upon ear challenge develop swelling. If, however, lymphocytes are incubated with specific integrin receptor peptide sequences, then transfer of immunity is abrogated.

Initiators of dermal endothelium activation (Fig. 1)

Adhesion of circulating leukocytes to blood vessels requires activation of endothelial cells and concomitant adhesion molecule expression. *In vitro* and *in vivo* studies outlined above indicate that this results from the action of soluble inflammatory mediators including peptides (e. g. cytokines), lipid mediators (e. g. PAF) and complement factors (e. g. C5a). Virtually all resident cell types including bone marrow-derived cells, fibroblasts and nerve fibres in the dermis, and keratinocytes in the epidermis, synthesise and release mediators capable of activating endothelium. The relative role of each cell type and mediator is likely to depend upon the underlying pathophysiology of the disease or, in the case of injury or infection, the source and type of initiating agent. Production of factors that inhibit adhesion molecule expression including IL-1 receptor antagonist (IL-1 RA) [33] and transforming growth factor-beta (TGF- β) [24] by resident cells may also be pivotal in delineating the inflammatory responses to various stimuli.

In normal human dermis, blood vessels are surrounded by a cuff of perivascular bone marrow-derived cells such as connective tissue mast cells and helper T lymphocytes. However, most abundant are dendritic cells of macrophage/monocyte lineage. The immunological importance of these cells is indicated by surface expression of LFA-1, ICAM-1 [12] and VCAM-1 (R. W. Groves, unpublished observation) while characterisation is made possible by their cytoplasmic staining for factor XIIIa antigen [35]. By immunohistochemistry, dermal dendrocytes have

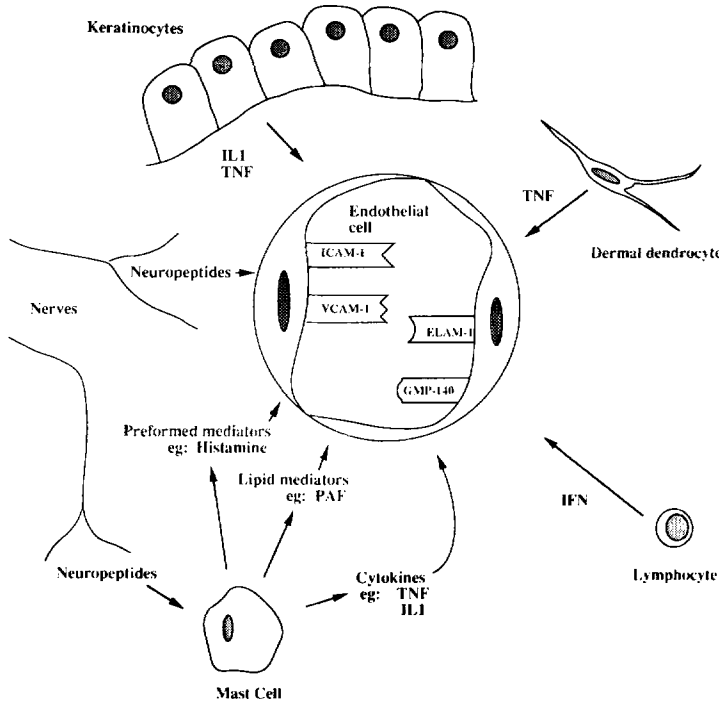


Fig. 1. Schematic representation of potential pathways of vascular endothelium activation in skin. Activated endothelium is indicated by adhesion molecule expression: on *left* of vessel lumen, immunoglobulin (ICAM-1, VCAM-1), on *right*, selectins (ELAM-1, GMP-140). Resident cells potentially responsible for providing activation signals are depicted together with examples of mediators. (Figure courtesy of Dr. C. H. Smith)

been show to express TNF- α , a potent activator of endothelium, in psoriasis [54]. Characterisation of the complete cytokine profile of these cells will only be possible once isolation and culture can be performed.

Dermal mast cells in normal skin have also been demonstrated by in situ hybridisation to contain TNF- α mRNA and by immunohistochemistry to contain TNF- α protein in cytoplasmic granules [81]. Furthermore, degranulation by various secretagogues leads directly to TNF- α release and ELAM-1 production by endothelial cells [81]. Other important mediators produced by mast cells include PAF, histamine and LTB₄. In vitro studies demonstrate that murine mast cells produce a range of pro-inflammatory cytokines including TNF- α , IL-1, IL-4 and GM-CSF that may effect endothelial adhesion [64]. That these are of relevance in vivo is suggested by the marked dermal inflammatory infiltrate that results from intradermal injection of mast cell degranulators [38].

Whilst mast cell degranulation may occur in response to specific cross-linkage of the Fc receptor for IgE, an increasing number of non-IgE-specific stimuli are now recognised including neuropeptides [23, 47]. Morphological and functional evidence [22] suggest that cutaneous sensory afferent peptidergic nerves form neuroeffector junctions with mast cells. Neuropeptides, such as substance P,

released in response to various noxious stimuli thus up-regulate ELAM-1 expression, and possibly other adhesion molecules, as a consequence of mast cell degranulation [49]. Some also appear to exert direct effects on endothelium: neuropeptide Y, a peptide co-localised with noradrenaline in sympathetic nerves mediates enhanced neutrophil adhesion to isolated endothelial cells by a mechanism independent of protein synthesis or ICAM-1 expression [75]. These findings represent a potentially important link between neurogenic stimuli and inflammation particularly since the number of neuropeptides isolated from human skin continues to increase. Many have already been implicated in human cutaneous disease: increased levels of vasoactive intestinal polypeptide have been demonstrated in both atopic dermatitis and psoriasis [19], whilst pretreatment of skin with capsaicin, which depletes cutaneous nerves of neuropeptides, completely abrogates the physical urticarias [79].

Helper T lymphocytes upon activation may also produce a range of cytokines including IFN- α , TNF- α and IL-4 that affect endothelial activation. The roles of IL-1, TNF- α and INF- γ have already been discussed but there is now increasing evidence for an important modulatory role for IL-4 (also produced by mast cells). In vitro, IL-4 increases binding of T cells to HUVECs but inhibits binding of neutrophils [77]. This event is enhanced by the addition of TNF- α and is mediated via induction of VCAM-1 [78]. The possibility exists, therefore, that diseases in which T cells are prominent but neutrophils sparse may be characterised by IL-4 as an important mediator.

In inflammatory dermatoses involving the epidermis, such as psoriasis, atopic dermatitis, ACD and lichen planus, most dermal inflammatory events occur with dermal papillae. Phenotypic changes of adhesion molecule expression occur on papillary endothelium [1] and functional frozen-section adhesion studies demonstrate that this is the maximal site of lymphocyte adhesion [67]. Under such conditions, epidermal keratinocytes are uniquely situated to provide stimuli required for endothelial cell activation. In a spatial alignment analogous to Bowman's capsule of renal glomeruli, interactions between keratinocytes and endothelial cells, mediated by cytokines [5], are likely to provide the molecular basis for the morphological description of the squirting papilla of Pinckus and Mehregan observed in psoriasis and seborrhoeic dermatitis [61].

Although the primary function of keratinocytes is to provide the structural integrity and barrier function of the epidermis, it is increasingly apparent that they play a major role in cutaneous immune responses. Studies have shown that after appropriate stimulation in vitro, multipassaged normal human keratinocytes produce a range of cytokines, including IL-1 [48], IL-6 [39], IL-8 [4], TNF- α [40], GM-CSF [41], MCAF [6] and TGF- α [63], of which IL-1 and TNF- α are particularly potent inducers of endothelial cell adhesion molecule expression. Recent studies in mice demonstrate that administration of anti-TNF- α antibodies prior to elicitation of contact dermatitis abrogates the inflammatory response [62]. Furthermore, by Northern blot analysis, TNF- α mRNA increases in ear skin following application and by in-situ hybridisation TNF- α mRNA is detectable in basal keratinocytes as well as some dermal cells [62]. In humans, TNF- α has been detected in keratinocytes by immunochemistry in experimental patch test reactions (rhus/urushiol dermatitis) [29]. In vitro, potent stimulators for keratinocyte TNF- α

production include UVB [40] and urushiol [5], both of which provoke cutaneous inflammation *in vivo*.

IL-8 is a further cytokine produced by keratinocytes [4] in response to a variety of stimuli, including urushiol and UVB, which can be detected in psoriasis [26, 54, 68] and contact dermatitis [29] *in vivo*. As well as being chemotactic for neutrophils and T cells [42], a critical role for this cytokine in modulating neutrophil-endothelium interactions has recently been established (effect on T cell adhesion has not been reported). IL-8 induces rapid shedding of neutrophil LECAM-1 (GMP-140/ELAM-1 ligand) and up-regulation of β 2-integrins, thus permitting arrest and diapedesis through the vessel wall [37]. Evidence exists that IL-8 may also be involved in the subsequent loss of adhesion to endothelium [27], allowing neutrophils to then migrate through tissue. Although studies have implicated IL-8 derived from endothelium in these processes, the spatial relationship between keratinocytes and vascular endothelium in dermal papilla suggests a crucial role for keratinocyte-derived IL-8 in these processes.

Conclusions

It is over 100 years since an active role for vascular endothelium was first established in leukocyte localisation to sites of inflammation. A critical part of this process is now known to be mediated via adhesion interactions between receptors on circulating leukocytes and their ligands, particularly ELAM-1, VCAM-1 and ICAM-1 induced on activated endothelium, allowing leukocytes to ‘roll’, ‘arrest’ and subsequently undergo ‘diapedesis’ through the vessel wall towards the inflammatory focus.

There is increasing evidence linking such mechanisms to leukocyte recruitment into inflamed skin. Intradermal injections of pro-inflammatory cytokines (IL-1, TNF- α , IFN- γ) directly induce dermal vascular endothelium adhesion molecule expression which is paralleled by accumulation of a dermal inflammatory cell infiltrate. In experimentally induced cutaneous inflammation, e. g. ACD and UVB radiation exposure, up-regulation of vascular endothelial ICAM-1, VCAM-1 and ELAM-1 expression is observed. Alterations in adhesion both at the phenotypic and functional level are also observed in many other disorders including the inflammatory dermatoses for example psoriasis, lichen planus and atopic dermatitis.

Adhesion molecule expression by endothelium requires activation of these cells by soluble inflammatory mediators including peptides (cytokines), lipid mediators and complement factors. Important constituents of normal human skin that may contribute to this process include fibroblasts, mast cells, dermal dendrocytes and epidermal keratinocytes. The relative role of each cell type and mediator is likely to depend upon the underlying pathophysiology of the disease or the source and type of the initiating agent.

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