Gel-on-Brush Model of Airway Surface of the Lung: its Predictive Role in Chronic Pulmonary Disease

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Clearance of mucus is the primary defense mechanism that protects airways from inhaled infectious and toxic agents. The current two-layer Gel-on-Liquid model in which a gel-like mucus is propelled on top of a “watery” periciliary layer (PCL) surrounding the cilia does not adequately describe efficient mucociliary clearance in health nor properly predict failure of mucus clearance in disease. We propose and provide evidence for a qualitatively different Gel-on-Brush model with a gel-like mucus layer in contact with a “brush-like” periciliary layer, composed of macromolecules tethered to the airway surface. The relative osmotic moduli of the mucus layer to the “brush-like” PCL layer explain both the stability of mucus clearance in health and its failure in airway disease. Our Gel-on-Brush model of airway surface layer opens important new directions for treatments of airway disease.

1This work was supported by Cystic Fibrosis Foundation (RUBINSTEIN07XX0, BUTTON07XX0, and BUTTON11G0); NSF CHE-0911588, DMR-0907515, DMR-1121107, DMR-1122483, and CBET-0609087; and NIH K01DK080847, P50HL107168, R01HL077546, and P01HL34322.

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Date submitted: 08 Nov 2011