

## Molecular and cell biology/synaptic disruption

## Role of extracellular vesicles in early synaptic dysfunction in AD

Ilaria Prada<sup>1</sup> | Martina Gabrielli<sup>1</sup> | Giulia D'Arrigo<sup>1</sup> | Ottavio Arancio<sup>2</sup> |  
Claudia Verderio<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup> CNR-Institute of Neuroscience, Milan, Italy<sup>2</sup> Columbia University, New York, NY, USA

## Correspondence

Ilaria Prada, CNR-Institute of Neuroscience,  
Milan, Italy.Email: [ilariaprada@gmail.com](mailto:ilariaprada@gmail.com)

## Abstract

**Background:** Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a progressive neurodegenerative disorder associated with amyloid- $\beta$  ( $A\beta$ ) and tau protein accumulation. Synaptic dysfunction is an early mechanism in AD which involves progressively larger areas of the brain over time. However how synaptic dysfunction starts and propagates is unknown. The hypothesis we are testing is that extracellular vesicles (EVs) released by microglia exposed to and carrying  $A\beta_{42}$  ( $A\beta$ -EVs) may be responsible for these early events in AD.

**Method:** Combining optical manipulation and time lapse imaging to place single EVs on RFP-positive cultured neuron dendrites and test their effects on the synapse, we show that  $A\beta$ -EVs rapidly alter dendritic spine morphology (a structural correlate of synaptic strength) locally at the site of interaction.

**Result:**  $A\beta$ -EVs induce a significant increase in the density of immature protrusions around the contact site ( $<7 \mu\text{m}$  from the contact point) starting 2 min after EV adhesion, compared to EVs released by microglia not exposed to  $A\beta_{42}$  (ctrl-EVs). Almost no alteration was detected far from the contact site ( $>60 \mu\text{m}$ ).

**Conclusion:** Employing the same methodologies, we are currently monitoring  $A\beta$ -EV-neuron dynamics at the neuronal surface, to test whether  $A\beta$ -EVs may propagate dendritic spine alterations to adjacent regions over time, contributing to the spreading of synaptic deficits. Our data provide evidence of the involvement of microglial EVs in early synaptic dysfunction in AD, paving the way for novel therapeutic strategies.