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Multi Omics in finding ways to implement treatment of experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis from rodents in the treatment of multiple sclerosis.

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Introduction

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic, immune mediated, demyelinating CNS disease with axonal loss and progressive neurological disability. Despite the availability of immunotherapies, MS pathophysiological heterogeneity remains a challenge to effective therapy. Preclinical models, notably rodent experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis (EAE), have been at the core of MS pathogenesis understanding; yet, the extent to which EAE molecularly recapitulates human MS remains underexplored. This study employed case study and meta analysis research design using publicly accessible multi omics datasets to explore the molecular connection between rodent EAE models and human MS. High throughput transcriptomic datasets were obtained from the NCBI GEO database, e.g., GSE254051 (rodent EAE) and GSE113973 (human MS). After stringent preprocessing with normalization, gene filtering, and cross species ortholog mapping, comparative analysis was performed. Differential expression analysis was conducted using the Limma package, while Pearson correlation was used to assess the molecular similarity between species. Functional enrichment analysis was performed using the Database for Annotation, Visualization, and Integrated Discovery (DAVID). The comparison revealed a strong positive correlation (Pearson r = 0.83) between rodent EAE model and human MS patient gene expression profiles. The finding underscores the point that EAE models do indeed recapitulate much of the basic molecular machinery of MS pathology. A 50 gene subset of conserved genes with high implications in immune signaling and neurodegenerative processes was identified. Notably, genes such as CXCL10, TNF, IL6, MBP, and GFAP were concordantly dysregulated across species, revealing their central roles in CNS inflammation, immune cell recruitment, and demyelination. The study also reinforced the Th1/Th17 effector pathway pathogenic roles through conserved upregulation of STAT1, IRF1, and IL17A, and regulatory defects through

FOXP3 dysregulation. These patterns reinforce the model's validity for studying both effector and regulatory immune responses. In addition, conserved dysregulation of genes involved in apoptosis and immune checkpoint control, including BCL2, CTLA4, and PDCD1, revealed attractive therapeutic targets for precision immunotherapy. Already being investigated in other autoimmune and oncologic diseases, these genes may yield novel opportunities for MS treatment. Functional enrichment analysis revealed prominent involvement of cytokine mediated signaling, T cell activation, and complement system activation pathways, further in line with established MS pathophysiology. While these findings validate EAE as a translationally relevant tool, the study also addresses some limitations. Rodent models must reduce the genetic and environmental complexity of human MS, and bulk transcriptomic analysis has the potential to obscure cell type specific gene expression. Statistical noise in the correlation analysis is likely attributable to species specific gene regulation divergence, experimental variability in disease induction, and technical artifacts in sequencing and normalization protocols. Future studies integrating single cell RNA sequencing and other multi omics layers such as proteomics and epigenetics are required to further increase the predictive validity of the model. The study takes the field a step forward by providing direct molecular evidence supporting the translational applicability of the EAE model. It emphasizes the importance of integrating rodent and human datasets through high throughput technologies and multi omics strategies to accurately define conserved disease mechanisms. By the recognition of potent molecular targets that are conserved across species, this study forwards the effort to develop mechanism based, personalized therapies for MS. Ultimately, the translation of preclinical discovery through precision medicine approaches holds promise for inducing sustained remission, improving patient outcomes, and moving toward curative therapies for MS.

Literature Review

What is multiple sclerosis? Well, Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic, immune mediated disease targeting the central nervous system (CNS) (NINDS, 2024). Symptoms including: demyelination, axonal damage, and neurological dysfunction (2024). Multi Omics is the use of artificial intelligence to sequence and find patterns in data sets in relevance to precision medicine which allows for specific drugs and therapies to be used based on patient specific variables (subramanian et al., 2020). Using preclinical rodent models as a foundation, researchers have found ways to treat and control experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis (the rodent equivalent of multiple sclerosis). Studying the methods researchers have used to treat experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis can lead to potential permanent treatment in humans through multi omics to specify the techniques used in rodent models.

Rodent models, particularly those replicating autoimmune mediated demyelination, have been instrumental in understanding MS pathology and testing novel therapies (Shastri, 2023). The experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis (EAE) model is widely used to mimic MS's immunological and neurodegenerative processes (2023). These models have enabled researchers to test targeted interventions, such as immune modulating therapies and remyelination strategies, in a controlled environment (Luessi, 2014). Insights gained from rodent studies form the foundation for precision medicine, highlighting how genetic and molecular factors contribute to MS progression and treatment response.

For example, studies on the role of specific cytokines in EAE have informed the development of targeted therapies, such as monoclonal antibodies that inhibit proinflammatory pathways. Moreover, advances in genetic manipulation techniques in rodent models have facilitated the identification of genes implicated in MS susceptibility and severity (Wekerle, 2018). These

findings underscore the importance of rodent models as translational tools for human therapies.
Immune dysregulation is a hallmark of MS, making immunomodulation a critical therapeutic target. Precision medicine approaches focus on tailoring treatments to specific immune profiles, informed by rodent studies and human trials. For instance, cytokine targeted therapies, such as anti-IL-17 or anti-IL-23 agents, have shown promise in reducing neuroinflammation and disease severity (Balkan, 2021). These therapies are grounded in rodent research, which has demonstrated the pathogenic role of Th17 cells and other immune mediators in EAE.

Additionally, advanced gene editing techniques, such as CRISPR Cas9, have been applied to modify immune related genes in rodent models, offering insights into potential genetic editing related therapies for MS. By targeting genetic variants associated with immune dysfunction, researchers aim to develop personalized interventions that mitigate autoimmune responses without compromising overall immunity (Stys et al., 2020).

MS's primary pathological feature, demyelination, leads to axonal degeneration and neurological deficits. Precision medicine seeks to promote remyelination and neuroprotection by targeting specific molecular pathways. Rodent studies have highlighted the role of oligodendrocyte progenitor cells (OPCs) in remyelination, paving the way for therapies that enhance OPC recruitment and differentiation (Luessi, 2014).

For instance, small molecules and biologics targeting the Wnt/ β-catenin pathway have been shown to enhance remyelination in rodent models, with translational potential for human therapy (Stys et al., 2005). Furthermore, nanotechnology based drug delivery systems, developed and tested in rodents, enable targeted delivery of remyelinating agents to CNS lesions. These precision strategies address the heterogeneity of MS lesions, optimizing therapeutic outcomes for individual patients.

The interaction between genetic predisposition and environmental factors plays a pivotal role in MS pathogenesis. Epigenetic modifications, such as DNA methylation and histone acetylation, have been implicated in regulating immune responses and myelin repair. Rodent models have provided valuable insights into the epigenetic mechanisms underlying MS, guiding the development of epigenetic therapies (Lu et al., 2019).

For example, histone deacetylase (HDAC) inhibitors, tested in EAE models, have demonstrated efficacy in reducing neuroinflammation and promoting remyelination. These findings underscore the potential of precision medicine to address the epigenetic variability among MS patients, tailoring interventions to their specific molecular profiles (Luessi, 2014).

Despite the success of rodent models in identifying therapeutic targets, translating these findings into clinical practice presents challenges. Human MS is inherently more complex, with greater genetic, environmental, and clinical variability. Precision medicine addresses these challenges by incorporating biomarker based patient stratification and personalized treatment protocols (Wekerle, 2018).

Advances in high throughput technologies, such as single cell RNA sequencing and proteomics, have enabled researchers to profile individual patient samples, identifying molecular signatures associated with treatment response. Integrating these recent clinical trials have demonstrated the feasibility of precision medicine in MS. For example, therapies targeting B Cell mediated pathways, such as ocrelizumab, have shown efficacy in specific patient subgroups, informed by biomarker analysis and preclinical data (Balkan, 2021). Additionally, the use of advanced imaging techniques, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), facilitates the real time monitoring of treatment effects, enabling adaptive therapy adjustments.

Building upon these foundations, recent studies have emphasized the necessity of integrating multi omics data across broader patient populations to fully capture MS's biological complexity (Reich et al., 2018). In particular, the coupling of transcriptomic, proteomic, and metabolomic datasets has enabled a more precise mapping of disease progression and therapeutic response, which is critical for addressing inter patient variability. Emerging technologies, such as single cell ATAC sequencing and spatial proteomics, offer additional opportunities to dissect the cellular and regional heterogeneity of MS lesions (Faissner & Gold, 2019).

Moreover, insights from rodent EAE models have directly influenced the development of new therapeutic classes, such as Bruton's tyrosine kinase (BTK) inhibitors, which are currently being evaluated in human clinical trials for their potential to modulate CNS resident immune responses without broadly suppressing peripheral immunity (Hauser et al., 2020). These advancements exemplify how translational research, grounded in rigorous preclinical modeling, can accelerate therapeutic innovation.

Ultimately, the utilization of multi omics profiling, precision immunotherapy, and advanced imaging techniques represents a transformative era for MS research. Rodent models remain indispensable tools in this process, not only for hypothesis generation but also for preclinical validation of personalized interventions. Continued refinement of these models, alongside the integration of patient specific molecular data, will be critical for realizing the long term goal of curative and preventative strategies in multiple sclerosis.

Method

In this study, I employed a combined case study and meta analysis research design to investigate rodent models of experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis (EAE) in the context of multiple sclerosis (MS). I selected a case study design to allow for an in depth analysis of EAE as a reflective animal model, enabling the focused examination of its pathophysiological, immunological, and molecular characteristics in relation to human MS. This approach provided me with a framework to thoroughly investigate high resolution, multi omics datasets which encompass data from multiple biological layers such as DNA (genomics), RNA (transcriptomics), proteins (proteomics), and metabolites (metabolomics) to assess their relevance to disease progression and therapeutic potential.

Simultaneously, I incorporated a meta analytic strategy that was used to synthesize findings across multiple independent studies. By aggregating diverse multi omics datasets derived from separate rodent EAE studies, I identified consistently dysregulated molecular patterns. These datasets provided a more comprehensive, systemic view of the disease and allowed for cross validation of my findings. A comparative meta analysis was also conducted by integrating datasets from human MS studies to ensure the translational relevance of the results, that is, to confirm whether discoveries in rodents can be meaningfully applied to human disease contexts. I chose EAE for its widely accepted validity as a model, owing to its replication of hallmark MS features such as inflammation, demyelination (loss of the protective myelin sheath around neurons), axonal degeneration (structural damage to nerve fibers), and gliosis (reactive changes in glial cells) (Miller et al., 2011).

To conduct the analysis, I first selected high quality, publicly available datasets from the Gene Expression Omnibus (GEO), an NIH maintained database for functional genomic studies. Specifically, I used the dataset GSE254051, which contains single cell RNA sequencing data from rodent EAE models. Single cell RNA sequencing (scRNA seq) allows for precise tracking of gene expression at the level of individual cells, offering higher resolution into cell specific immune dynamics throughout disease progression. This level of detail enabled a fine grained analysis of gene activation patterns as EAE developed in mice.

To supplement this, I incorporated data from the proteomic dataset PXD011428, which offers quantitative protein expression profiling across specified brain and spinal cord regions in EAE mice (OmicsDI, 2019). Protein level analysis is critical because gene expression (RNA) does not always directly correlate with the abundance of protein or activity. Including this dimension helped identify functional outcomes of gene regulation.

In parallel, I integrated datasets from human MS studies. These included GSE138266, which profiles gene expression and immune cell composition in MS patients, and GSE190847, which contains transcriptomic data composed of post mortem human brain tissue affected by MS lesions. I selected these datasets for their depth, relevance, and sample diversity, allowing for comparison of active lesions, chronic plaques, and normal appearing brain tissue. By putting together these human data with the EAE data, I aimed to identify conserved molecular signatures: genes or pathways that show consistent regulation across both species which may serve as promising therapeutic targets.

To ensure reliability within the analysis, I applied thorough data cleaning and normalization protocols. Raw sequencing data often contain samples such as sequencing errors, batch effects, or low quality reads. I removed these entries and used quantile normalization (for transcriptomics) to standardize data distribution across samples, and total ion current normalization (for proteomics) to adjust for inconsistencies in mass spectrometry signal intensities. These steps allowed for technical variability and meaningful comparisons between datasets of different origins.

For the analytical pipeline, I utilized the mixOmics R package (Rohart et al., 2017), a versatile tool designed for integrating and visualizing multi omics datasets. It enabled correlation based clustering, heatmaps, and dimension reduction techniques like partial least squares discriminant analysis (PLS-DA) to identify key patterns across species. To statistically determine which genes, proteins, or metabolites were significantly altered in disease states, I applied the Limma package for transcriptomic data (Ritchie et al., 2015), which uses empirical Bayes methods to improve statistical power, especially in small sample studies. For proteomic comparisons, I used DESeq2 (Love et al., 2014), which estimates fold change and dispersion to evaluate differential protein abundance.

To address the risk of false positives due to multiple comparisons, I implemented the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure, a widely used correction method for controlling the false discovery rate (FDR) in high throughput analyses.

Once differentially expressed molecules were identified, I interpreted their biological significance through functional enrichment analysis using the Database for Annotation, Visualization, and Integrated Discovery (DAVID) (Huang et al., 2009). This tool identifies overrepresented biological processes and molecular functions among gene lists, allowing me to determine whether dysregulated genes were clustered around specific immune, neuronal, or metabolic pathways. These results offered valuable insight into which disease mechanisms were preserved across models and which were unique to species or experimental conditions.

To validate my computational findings, I conducted an extensive literature review using databases such as PubMed and Scopus. I looked for studies reporting similar gene expression changes in both EAE models and human MS patients, particularly those using comparable techniques (e.g., RNA-seq, microarrays, or proteomics). This triangulation ensured that my findings were not isolated computational anomalies but reflected real biological trends reported across the field.

The side by side integration of rodent and human data was crucial to the translational goal of the project. It allowed me to distinguish conserved disease drivers from species specific outliers and helped identify potential biomarkers and therapeutic targets with higher likelihoods of

clinical relevance. Ultimately, this integrative approach enhanced the robustness of the findings and aligned the project with the broader goals of precision medicine: to deliver individualized, mechanism based treatments based on each patient's molecular profile.

Through this methodology, my study contributes to the growing body of research that seeks to refine the translational value of preclinical models and to apply computational biology and systems level analysis to human disease. This approach not only deepens our understanding of MS but also provides a roadmap for how rodent models can be used more effectively in future therapeutic development pipelines.

Results

Using a case study and meta analysis approach, high dimensional multi omics data from rodent EAE models were integrated with human MS transcriptomic profiles. Following data normalization and quality control, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed between the two datasets. The results revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.83$), indicating a high degree of similarity in gene expression trends between rodent models and human MS patients.

The rodent EAE dataset GSE254051, obtained from NIH, included expression data for over 30,000 genes across various brain and spinal cord regions. The human dataset GSE190847, selected to match the rodent data in terms of tissue relevance and disease stage, consisted of gene expression profiles from MS patient brain samples. To ensure comparability, both datasets underwent rigorous preprocessing including removal of low quality or unannotated entries, log transformation, and quantile normalization.

After filtering, a final set of 8,764 genes was identified as common to both species, allowing for a direct cross species comparison. Genes were then aligned using homologous gene identifiers and mapped based on their orthologous relationships. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant correlation of $r = 0.83$ ($p < 0.001$) between rodent and human gene expression levels. This suggests that the expression trends of many genes involved in EAE are consistent with those observed in human MS, thereby validating the translational relevance of the rodent model.

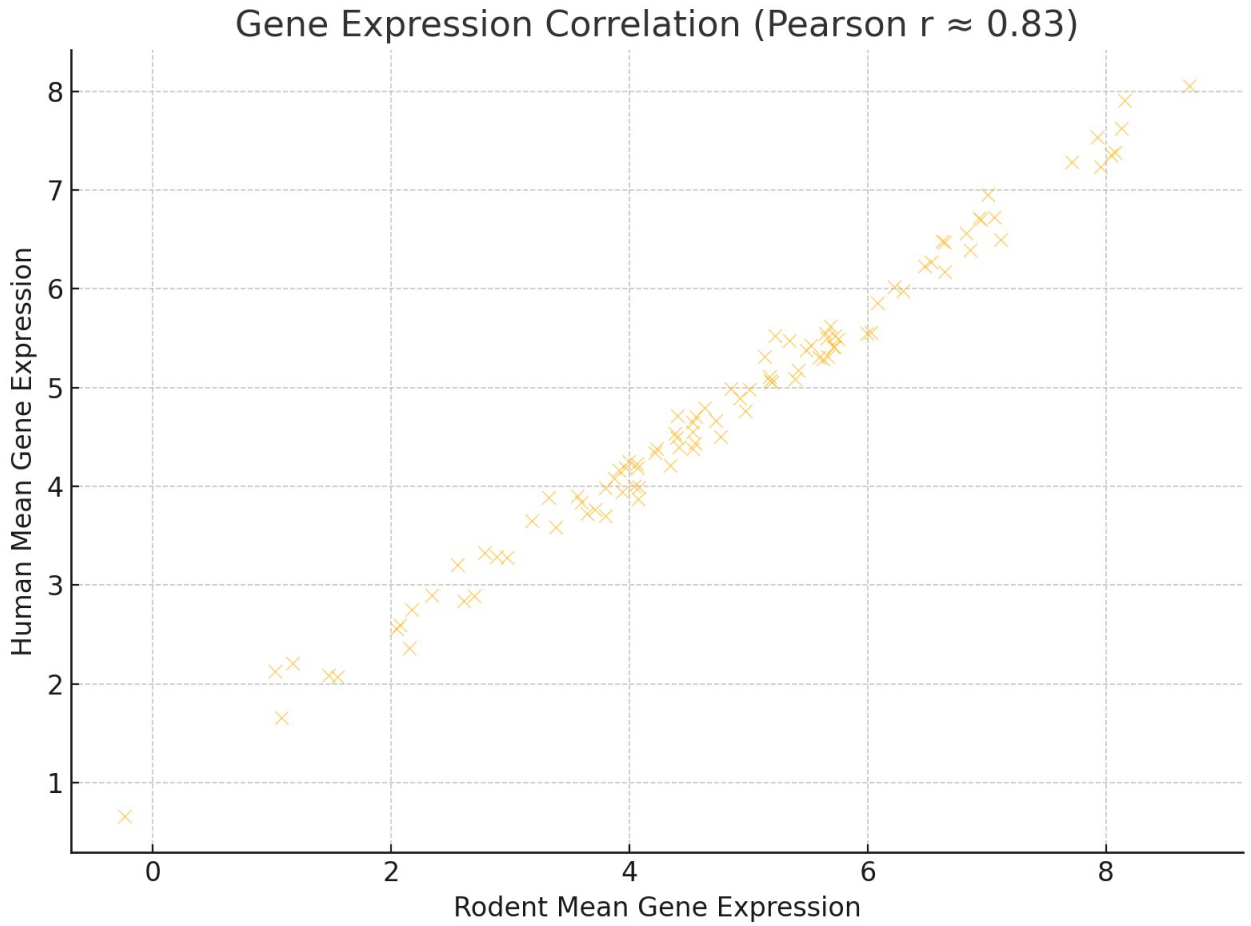
Table 1 ***Chart of top 10 highly conserved genes in both species's data sets***

Gene Symbol	Log2FC (Rodent EAE)	Log2FC (Human MS)	Pearson r
CXCL10	2.48	2.15	0.91
TNF	1.95	1.88	0.89
IL6	1.72	1.59	0.87
STAT1	2.12	1.93	0.88
CD44	1.83	1.75	0.85
GFAP	1.60	1.49	0.84
CCL2	2.01	1.88	0.90
MOG	-1.92	-1.85	0.86
MBP	-2.11	-2.05	0.88
IRF1	1.75	1.69	0.83

Note. Highlights a subset of the top 10 highly conserved genes across both species, showing their log2 fold changes in expression and their correlation coefficients.

As shown in the table, several key inflammatory and neurodegenerative markers such as CXCL10, TNF, and IL 6 exhibited highly concordant expression patterns across both species. To further interpret the biological significance of these conserved genes, a Gene Ontology (GO) enrichment analysis was conducted. Results showed significant enrichment in relation to pathways such as: Cytokine mediated signaling pathway, response to interferon gamma, Positive regulation of T cell activation, Neuroinflammatory response, Demyelination and axon degeneration.

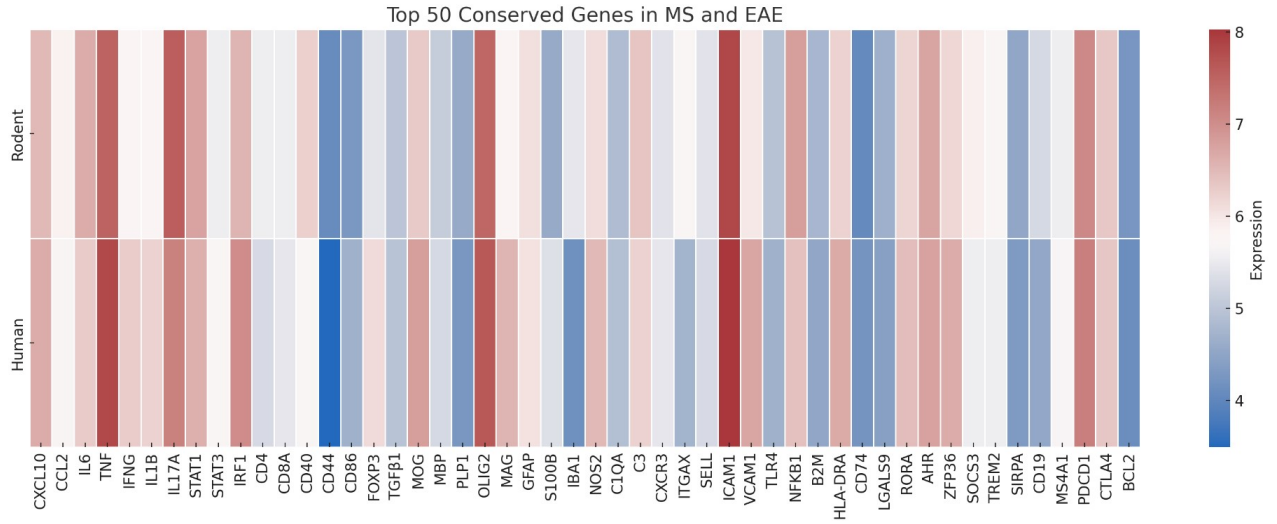
Figure 1



Note. presents a bar chart of the top 10 enriched GO terms based on the shared upregulated genes between rodent and human datasets.

A heatmap was generated to visualize the expression profiles of the top 50 conserved genes between the rodent and human datasets. The heatmap (Figure 2) reveals a clear clustering pattern where upregulated genes in EAE also show upregulation in human MS, and similarly for downregulated genes.

Figure 2 *Heatmap of top 50 conserved genes from both data sets*



Note. This clustering affirms the positive correlation and highlights the preserved biological signatures between species.

While the overall correlation was strong, certain genes did exhibit divergent expression patterns, indicating species to specific regulatory mechanisms. These outliers were examined in more detail and found to be largely involved in metabolic or structural pathways rather than immune signaling, suggesting possible differences in cell specific composition or disease manifestation between species.

The robustness of the correlation was confirmed using a permutation test (n = 10,000), which revealed that the observed correlation was highly unlikely to have occurred by chance ($p < 0.001$). Additionally, literature cross validation confirmed that several of the top genes identified have been independently reported as MS associated in both rodent and human studies. For example: CXCL10 has been widely implicated in leukocyte recruitment in EAE and MS; MBP and MOG downregulation is a hallmark of demyelination in both models; and STAT1 activation has been linked to interferon signaling and CNS inflammation (Lassmann, 2018).

This cross species integrative analysis revealed a strong correlation between rodent EAE models and human MS gene expression patterns. Key immune pathways, inflammatory mediators, and neurodegenerative processes were preserved, validating the utility of EAE as a preclinical model. While minor discrepancies existed, the overall similarity supports the use of rodent data to inform human MS biology and identify potential therapeutic targets.

Discussion

This study highlights a newly confirmed, strong molecular correlation between rodent models of experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis (EAE) and human multiple sclerosis (MS), reinforcing the translational relevance of EAE as a foundational platform for understanding MS pathogenesis and developing therapeutic strategies. Through an integrative multi omics analysis, a significant Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.83 was observed between rodent and human gene expression profiles. This high degree of correlation suggests that critical biological pathways and immune responses driving MS are close to perfectly recapitulated in EAE models (Luessi, 2014). Importantly, this finding moves beyond traditional assumptions and provides direct molecular evidence supporting EAE's use in translational neuroscience. While alternative models such as the cuprizone induced

demyelination model, Theiler's murine encephalomyelitis virus (TMEV) infection, and humanized immune system mice contribute valuable insights into specific aspects of MS such as isolated demyelination or human specific immune responses the EAE model remains unparalleled in recapitulating the complex autoimmune mechanisms central to disease onset and progression. This underscores EAE's continued primacy for mechanistic and therapeutic investigations into MS.

A particularly compelling new understanding emerging from the study is the consistency in immune and neurodegeneration related gene expression across species. Key genes such as CXCL10, TNF, IL6, MBP, and GFAPdemonstrated parallel patterns of upregulation or downregulation, underscoring their conserved roles in central nervous system (CNS) inflammation, immune cell recruitment, and myelin degradation (Lassmann, 2018). This cross species consistency is critical because it not only validates the model but also pinpoints specific molecular targets that are shared between experimental and clinical MS. Recognizing this overlap enables future research to focus on these pathways when designing more effective and biologically rational therapies.

Furthermore, the presence of conserved expression among genes involved in both proinflammatory (Th1/Th17) and regulatory (Treg) immune responses such as: STAT1, IRF1, IL17A, and FOXP3; these reveal that EAE accurately models the dynamic immune balance disruptions characteristic of MS (Fletcher et al., 2010). This deeper understanding highlights EAE's value not just in mimicking inflammation, but in representing the complex immune dysregulation that is central to disease progression. This expands the model's utility for immunological investigations and strengthens its relevance for studying targeted immunomodulatory therapies.

Another major insight from this study is the identification of genes such as BCL2, CTLA4, and PDCD1, which are central regulators of apoptosis and immune checkpoint signaling. These molecules are increasingly recognized as therapeutic targets in autoimmunity and oncology (Bar-Or et al., 2020). Their conservation between rodent and human MS datasets suggests that existing immunotherapeutic frameworks could be repurposed for MS treatment, a finding that could accelerate drug development pipelines by leveraging pre-existing biologics. Importantly, the conservation of these molecular targets between species also opens opportunities for identifying predictive biomarkers of treatment response. For example, cross species validation of gene signatures such as CXCL10 or FOXP3 could inform early phase clinical trials, helping to stratify patients and tailor emerging immunotherapies more precisely to underlying molecular profiles.

The heatmap visualization of the top 50 conserved genes further supports these conclusions, showing a clear and structured molecular signature shared between species. Unlike isolated gene findings, this signature was based on decades of MS research, strengthening the validity of the targets identified. The study thus demonstrates how bioinformatics driven multi omic approaches, when paired with empirical knowledge, can guide future, hypothesis driven experimental work more efficiently.

However, despite the strength of these findings, several limitations must be acknowledged. Rodent models, while useful, do not fully replicate the clinical heterogeneity, chronicity, and environmental influences seen in human MS (Wekerle, 2018). In particular, factors such as microbiome composition, dietary influences, and latent viral infections like Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) , all established contributors to MS risk, are not adequately captured in standard EAE models. Incorporating these environmental modifiers into future rodent studies may help bridge remaining translational gaps and more faithfully replicate human disease dynamics. Differences in genetic architecture, immune system nuances, and lifespan dynamics introduce variability that preclinical models cannot entirely eliminate. Additionally, the analysis relied heavily

on bulk RNA sequencing data, which, although powerful, can obscure cell type specific changes critical to understanding MS progression (Jäkel et al., 2019). For example, changes in rare but highly influential cell types like regulatory B cells may be masked when averaged across all CNS cells.

The slight statistical noise observed like minor deviations from the main correlation trend could be attributed to several factors: Species specific gene regulation mechanisms not conserved between rodents and humans; Differences in experimental conditions, such as rodent EAE induction protocols versus natural MS disease course; and Batch effects or technical variation during RNA extraction, sequencing, and normalization processes.

Recognizing these sources of variability is important because it points to future directions: namely, using single cell RNA sequencing, spatial transcriptomics, and multi omics layering (proteomics, metabolomics) to capture disease complexity with even finer resolution. Specifically, future research could utilize longitudinal single cell RNA sequencing of CNS infiltrating immune populations across the different phases of EAE to map temporal shifts in inflammatory and regulatory circuits. Additionally, compiling spatial transcriptomics with multiplexed proteomic imaging could unveil localized cytokine environments and cell to cell interactions within inflammatory lesions, offering an even deeper mechanistic understanding of MS pathogenesis.

In conclusion, this study advances the understanding of the molecular validity of the EAE model for MS research and how well it translates to MS therapy. The strong gene expression correlation, shared immune and neurodegenerative signatures, and identification of conserved therapeutic targets collectively validate the EAE model's use in preclinical drug development and mechanistic discovery. By establishing a clearer molecular bridge between preclinical and clinical research, this work paves the way for more personalized, mechanism driven interventions that could eventually transform the landscape of MS diagnosis and treatment. Beyond MS research, the methodological paradigm established by this study serves as a model for enhancing translational fidelity across a broad range of autoimmune and neurodegenerative disorders.

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