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MORPHOLOGICAL BASES OF REPARATIVE REGENERATION AND FIBROSIS AFTER MYOCARDIAL INFARCTION

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Abstract Background: Myocardial infarction (MI) produces irreversible cardiomyocyte loss followed by a coordinated inflammatory and reparative response. Objective: To synthesize the cellular, molecular, and histomorphological basis of post-infarction reparative healing and fibrosis. Methods: A narrative analytical review of international experimental and clinical publications, Uzbekistan-based histology educational literature, national cardiovascular policy documents, and official epidemiological data was performed. Results: Three overlapping stages were identified: inflammatory clearance of necrotic tissue, proliferative granulation tissue formation, and collagen-rich scar maturation. Macrophage plasticity, resident fibroblast activation, TGF-β/SMAD signaling, myofibroblast differentiation, and extracellular matrix turnover underpin these changes. Histology, collagen-specific stains, and immunohistochemistry characterize their spatial and temporal patterns. A comparative table and a conceptual clustered-bar figure summarize the findings without representing uncollected patient-level data. Conclusion: Reparative fibrosis is structurally necessary after MI, but excessive matrix deposition and adverse remodeling can impair ventricular function. Integrated morphologic and molecular phenotyping provides a basis for future regional studies.

Keywords: myocardial infarction; reparative regeneration; scar; cardiac fibrosis; fibroblast; myofibroblast; collagen; histology; TGF-β.

INTRODUCTION

Myocardial infarction interrupts coronary perfusion and causes ischemic cardiomyocyte necrosis. Because adult human cardiomyocytes have limited replacement capacity, restoration of myocardial architecture proceeds predominantly through connective-tissue repair rather than regeneration of a fully contractile muscle mass (1, 2). The resulting collagenous scar preserves wall continuity and prevents rupture, yet it alters stiffness, impulse propagation, and geometry. These dual consequences make the morphology of scar formation central to cardiovascular pathology.

Reparative regeneration is used here in its pathological-anatomical sense: replacement of lost tissue by a mechanically competent fibrous scar, not de novo production of normal myocardium. Recognition of this distinction is essential because successful wound closure does not necessarily equal restoration of contractile function. Following infarction, the extent of ischemia, reperfusion, neurohumoral activation, and systemic comorbidities modify repair kinetics and determine late remodeling (2–4).

The aim of this article is to systematize post-MI cellular and molecular repair mechanisms, identify stage-specific histological markers, and outline reproducible parameters for future morphometric studies. The review also highlights the relevance of Uzbekistan's cardiovascular prevention and diagnostic priorities (12–17).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prabhu and Frangogiannis described infarct repair as a tightly coupled transition from innate inflammation to granulation tissue formation and scar stabilization (1). Frangogiannis outlined how cardiomyocyte damage-associated signals initiate inflammatory recruitment and how inflammatory resolution enables reparative signaling (2, 3). Extracellular matrix remodeling is not merely passive

deposition: matrix fragments, matricellular proteins, integrins, and proteases regulate migration and phenotype of reparative cells (4).

Resident cardiac fibroblasts make a major contribution to injury-activated myofibroblasts, although their identification requires careful choice of markers and species-specific interpretation (5). In lineage-tracing studies of mouse infarction, Fu and colleagues described proliferative fibroblasts, contractile myofibroblasts, and stable matrifibrocytes as distinct differentiation states (6). These studies provide a mechanistic framework; their exact day-by-day timing cannot automatically be transferred to human autopsy specimens.

The cytokine network is bidirectional: early neutrophils and inflammatory monocytes clear necrotic debris, while reparative macrophage populations promote fibroblast growth, vascular organization, and matrix accumulation. Sustained inflammatory signaling, inadequate resolution, or excessive transforming growth factor β (TGF-β) activity may contribute to infarct expansion and remote interstitial fibrosis (1–4, 7). Studies of collagen cross-linking further emphasize that matrix quality, not simply absolute collagen area, determines tensile stability (4, 8).

Uzbekistan-based histology textbooks provide relevant tissue-level terminology and diagnostic background (11), while local health policy and national statistics establish clinical and public-health context (12–17). These domestic sources are contextual and educational rather than direct experimental evidence for the cellular mechanism of MI scar formation; the mechanistic conclusions therefore rest chiefly on the international research sources.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article is a structured narrative review, not a prospective clinical study. Ten international scientific sources and seven Uzbekistan-based educational, statistical, or official policy sources were considered. Literature was grouped by (a) infarct injury and inflammation, (b) fibroblast activation and granulation tissue, (c) extracellular matrix synthesis and remodeling, and (d) histological detection of repair. Mechanistic statements were compared across reviews and experimental lineage-tracing studies. The local documents were used solely for educational and healthcare-system relevance.

The proposed morphology assessment framework includes hematoxylin-eosin (H&E) for myocyte necrosis and cellular infiltrates; Masson trichrome or picrosirius red for collagen distribution; α-smooth muscle actin (α-SMA) and periostin for activated reparative stromal cells; CD68 for macrophages; CD31 for microvessel density; and collagen I/III immunostaining or polarized microscopy where technically available. Because α-SMA also labels vascular smooth-muscle cells, anatomical localization and combined markers are necessary. Tissue age, fixation, sampling zone, and reperfusion status must be recorded before quantification.

No patient specimens, animal experiments, measured morphometry, or original statistical hypothesis tests were performed for this paper. Diagram 1 is an explicitly illustrative ordinal representation of phase-related prominence derived from the literature, not numerical evidence or a clinical dataset.

RESULTS

Literature synthesis identifies three overlapping morphologic phases. During the inflammatory stage, coagulative necrosis, interstitial edema, neutrophilic infiltration, and progressive macrophage accumulation are most characteristic. Clearance of necrotic cardiomyocytes and extracellular matrix debris prepares the infarct bed for granulation tissue. Reperfusion may modify the distribution of hemorrhage and inflammatory cells, which complicates attempts to date infarcts from histology alone (1–3).

In the proliferative stage, endothelial sprouts and neovessels emerge alongside spindle-shaped fibroblasts and activated myofibroblasts. TGF-β/SMAD signaling, angiotensin II, mechanical loading, and locally produced growth factors promote extracellular matrix synthesis. Fibronectin and provisional matrix components precede increasing collagen accumulation. The infarct border zone may exhibit viable hypertrophied cardiomyocytes adjacent to new fibrous tissue and persistent inflammation (4–6).

With maturation, cellularity and vascular density typically decline while collagen fibers become denser, more organized, and progressively cross-linked. Mature scars provide tensile stability but do not restore normal myocardial contractility. Interstitial fibrosis in remote myocardium and geometric ventricular remodeling may further reduce compliance. The scar is biologically active, and specific fibroblast states can persist beyond early healing (4, 6, 8).

Table 1. Main stages and morphological correlates of post-infarction repair

Phase	Dominant cells	Histological features	Practical readout
Inflammation	Neutrophils, macrophages	Necrosis, edema, debris clearance	H&E, CD68
Proliferation	Fibroblasts, myofibroblasts, endothelial cells	Granulation tissue, capillaries, initial collagen	α-SMA, periostin, CD31
Maturation	Scar fibroblast states	Dense aligned collagen, fewer cells	Trichrome, picrosirius red

The three-stage classification is useful for describing repair, but the phases overlap and vary with infarct size, treatment, reperfusion and patient characteristics. Therefore, descriptive staging is preferable to assigning an exact infarct age from a single histological field (1, 3).

Table 2. Selected pathways, markers, and interpretive limitations

Pathway / marker	Role in healing	Interpretive caution
TGF-β / SMAD	Fibroblast activation; collagen synthesis	Context- and time-dependent
α-SMA / periostin	Activated myofibroblast phenotype	α-SMA is not fibroblast-specific
MMP / TIMP balance	Matrix degradation and stabilization	Activity differs from protein abundance
CD68 / CD31	Macrophage presence / vascularity	Marker staining alone does not prove function

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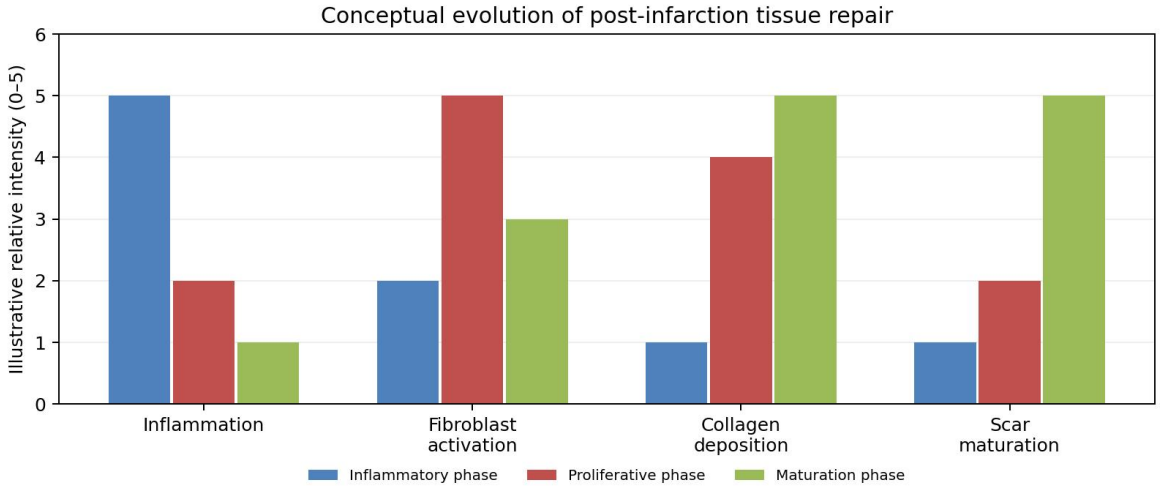


Figure 1. Schematic, literature-informed ordinal profiles (0–5), not measured values. The grouped columns imitate the supplied visual style.

The chart depicts the expected relative prominence of inflammation, fibroblast activation, collagen deposition, and scar maturation across the three broad healing phases. It should not be interpreted as patient-derived measurements, effect sizes, or validated scores. Its purpose is to visualize the shift from cellular injury response to matrix-dominated repair (1, 4, 6).

DISCUSSION

A critical distinction emerges between protective reparative fibrosis and maladaptive fibrotic remodeling. In the infarct core, replacement scar is necessary to withstand systolic loading. In border and remote zones, chronic profibrotic activity may be associated with electrical heterogeneity, stiffness, and progressive dysfunction. Targeting fibrosis indiscriminately could weaken the repair response, particularly during early scar formation (1, 4, 7).

Myofibroblasts are a central bridge between injury sensing and structural repair. Their contractile apparatus, secretion of type I and III collagens, and interactions with mechanical stress govern scar quality. Yet a single-marker approach risks classifying pericytes or vascular muscle cells as myofibroblasts. Multiplex immunophenotyping, standardized image analysis, and sampling across core, border, and remote myocardium can improve validity. Human and animal data should remain explicitly differentiated (5, 6, 8).

For future autopsy-based studies, a feasible protocol would sample at least three topographic compartments, record the clinical infarct interval and therapeutic context, and quantify collagen area fraction with a prespecified thresholding method. The same specimens could be evaluated for macrophage density, α-SMA-positive interstitial cells, microvascular density, and surviving cardiomyocyte architecture. Blinded scoring by two observers and interobserver agreement would strengthen reproducibility; association with infarct age or outcomes would require an appropriately powered prospective or retrospective dataset.

The domestic context is important: Uzbekistan policy prioritizes cardiovascular prevention, specialized care, and diagnostic quality (12, 15), while official statistics document the substantial burden of circulatory-system mortality (13, 14). These sources support the relevance of myocardial pathology research but do not validate specific histological effect sizes. This distinction should be preserved in manuscripts submitted to OAK-recognized journals.

CONCLUSION

Post-myocardial-infarction healing is a sequential but overlapping process of necrotic-tissue clearance, fibroblast-rich granulation, and collagen scar maturation. Macrophages, resident cardiac fibroblasts, TGF-β-linked signaling, and extracellular matrix turnover form the core cellular-molecular network. Histological and immunohistochemical interpretation must account for tissue compartment, injury timing, species differences, and marker specificity. Reparative scar formation is indispensable for structural integrity, whereas persistent or excessive fibrosis can contribute to adverse remodeling. Further human tissue studies with transparent sampling and quantitative morphometry are required to test the proposed framework.

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