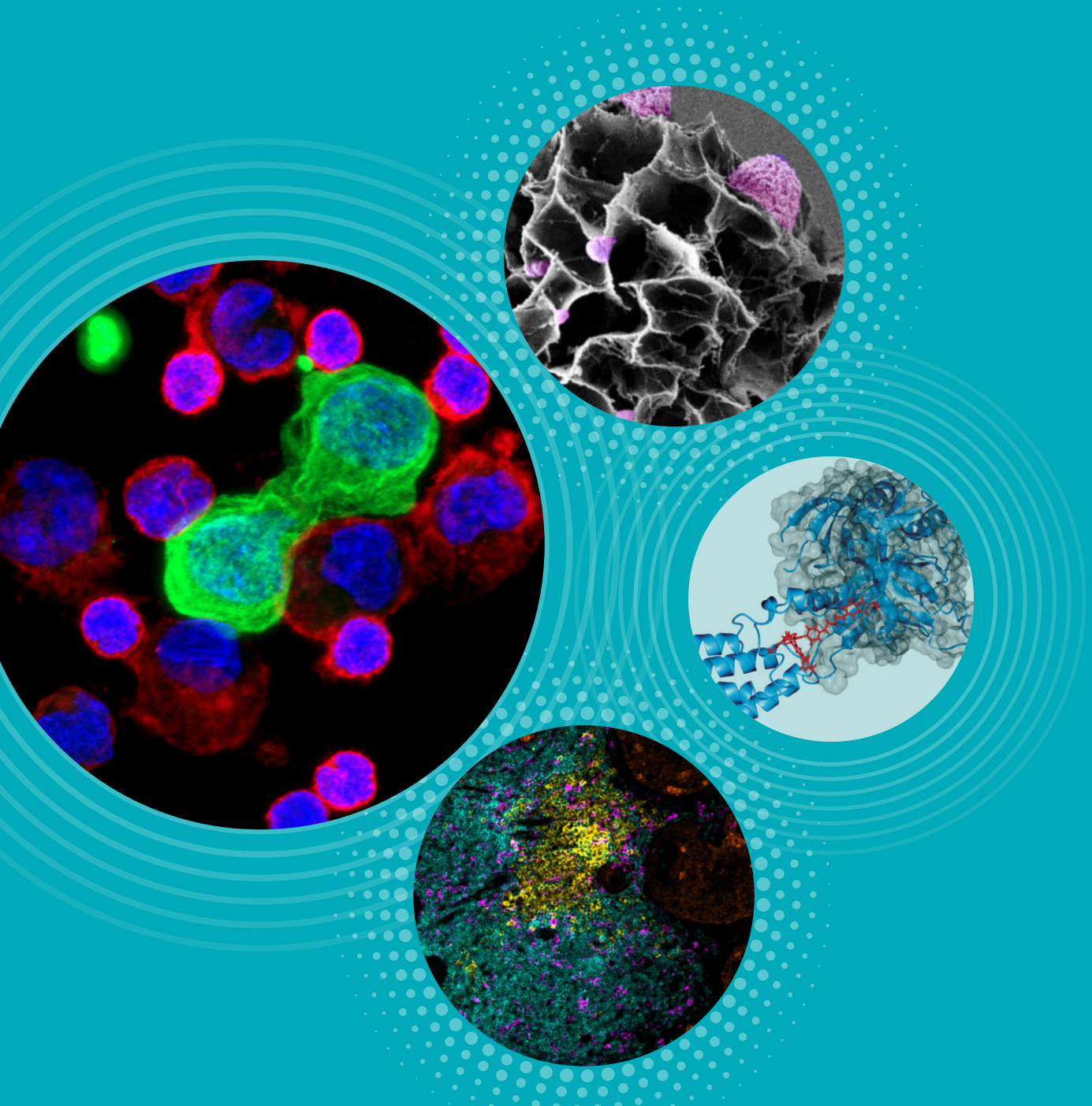
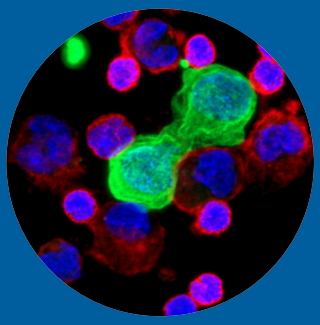
Mass General Brigham
Mass General Cancer Center

KRANTZ FAMILY
Center for Cancer Research

Annual Report 2024-2025



Featured images from front cover



Tumor Cell-based Liquid Biopsy: Enriched Tumor Cells (EpCAM-green) from a gastric cancer patient, surrounded by lymphocytes and macrophages (CD45/CD68-Red). Cell nuclei are shown in blue.

Image courtesy of the Avanish Mishra laboratory

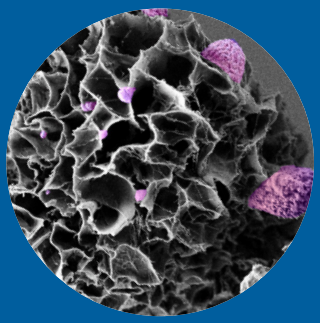
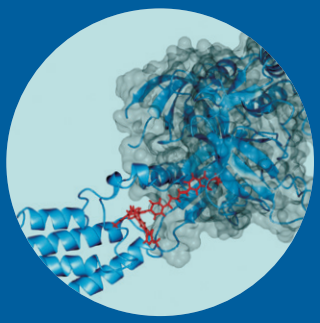


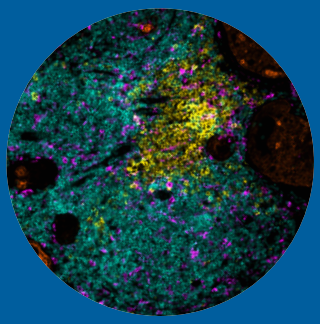
Image from a scanning electron microscope, detailing the surface of a hydrogel bead (large ruffled surface) with extracellular vesicles bound to the surface (purple colored particles). These stimuli-responsive beads were generated using a microfluidic device, allowing for the rapid isolation of these cancer biomarkers from the urine of a bladder cancer patients.

Image courtesy of Dr. Raheel Ahmad, Shannon Stott laboratory, in collaboration with the David Miyamoto laboratory



Structural model of the ternary complex formed by a novel chemical degrader of the acetyltransferases CBP/ p300 (dCBP-1) developed by the Ott laboratory. dCBP-1 (in red) induces degradation of CBP/ p300 by acting as a 'molecular glue' between an E3 ubiquitin ligase and the bromodomain of CBP/p300.

Model generated by Jan F. Sayilgan, PhD. Courtesy of the Mike Lawrence and Christopher Ott laboratories



Multiplex immunofluorescence to detect changes in the immune landscape in head and neck tumors: Tertiary lymphoid structure containing CD3+ (cyan) T cells, CD20+ (yellow) B cells and CD68+ (purple) macrophages bordering CK+ (orange) adenoid cystic carcinoma cells.

Image courtesy of Annie Li, MD, of the John Iafrate laboratory

Contents

Reports from the Principal Investigators

Director's Message

I am pleased to share with you the **2024 Krantz Family Center for Cancer Research Annual Report** which highlights a remarkable year of growth, discoveries and collaborations.

In 2023, the transformative gift from Jason and Keely Krantz has allowed us to start a new phase of expanded and accelerated cancer research, transcending conventional boundaries. We have launched ambitious collaborative projects supported through our Quantum and Breakthrough Awards, along with Spark pilot grants and Advanced Technology Grants. These Awards have enabled our scientists to create multidisciplinary teams and take on major challenges in cancer research, with the resources to accelerate their success and impact.

The first-year recipients of the Quantum Award (Drs. Bar-Peled, Lawrence and Ott) have combined their expertise in chemical biology, proteomics, biochemistry and bioinformatics to identify and target uniquely vulnerable sites on transcription factor proteins that are implicated in different types of cancer with a goal to develop new classes of anti-cancer drugs. Three teams have received the Breakthrough Awards. They are using their expertise to optimize and regulate CAR T-cells to improve the cells' ability to kill cancer cells (Drs. Jan, Manguso, Maus and Sen); expand the use of adoptive T-cell therapy in treatment of melanoma (Drs. Boland, Jenkins, and Sade-Feldman); and investigate metabolomics and its role in cancer metastasis (Drs. Bardeesy and Mostoslavsky). Multiple Spark and Advanced Technology Grants have been given out for projects that apply imaging and deep computational learning to uncover new scientific insights into the biological drivers and vulnerabilities of cancer including DNA damage, chromatin regulation, and the immune microenvironment.

Over the past year, our Krantz Center investigators published over 300 manuscripts. Among many highlights are Dr. Maus' first-in-human clinical trial of a bispecific antibody-secreting CAR-T cell for treatment of Glioblastoma (Choi et al, *NEJM* 2024); Dr. Bardeesy's discovery of the impact of mutant IDH1 on tumor immunity (Wu et al, *Science* 2024); Dr. Motamedi's finding that RNA quality control factors nucleate heterochromatin silencing (Khanduja et al, *Cell* 2024); Dr. Manguso's uncovering of the efficacy of PTPN inhibition (Baumgartner et al, *Nature* 2023) and Dr. Jenkins' discovery of TBKI inhibition (Sun et al, *Nature* 2023), both for immune checkpoint modulation. Dr. Bar-Peled received the highly competitive 2024 Howard Goodman Fellowship from MGH for his work on identifying a nuclear to mitochondrial ROS sensing pathway and creating a cysteine ligandability drug map (Zhang et al, *Cell* 2023 and Takahashi et al, *Cell* 2024); Dr. Rheinbay was awarded the 2024 Martin Prize by MGH for most impactful publication in fundamental research for defining the role of Y chromosome genes in cancer (Qi et al, *Cell* 2023); and Dr. Brastianos received the 2024 MGH Celebration of Science Award for her practice changing clinical trial of BRAF targeted therapy for papillary craniopharyngiomas (Brastianos et al, *NEJM* 2023). These and other publications from our faculty are described in this Annual Report. In addition, we are proud to welcome in 2024 three new faculty members to the Krantz Center: Drs. Mark Leick, Avanish Mishra and Mikołaj Słabicki, with research interests in CAR-T biology, microfluidics engineering, and functional cancer drug screens, respectively.

Cancer research is constantly advancing, driving fundamental innovations that connect new scientific knowledge with medical applications. With the commitment of our scientists, the support of our generous donors, and motivated by the urgent need to transform the care of patients with cancer, the Krantz Center is proud to report on this year's progress and scientific discoveries.

Thank you for your interest in our work.

Daniel A. Haber, MD, PhD
Director, Krantz Center for Cancer Research
Director, Cancer Center
Massachusetts General Hospital
Harvard Medical School

Daniel Haber photo by Scott Eisen

Inspired by the vision, creativity, care and leadership that define the spirit of the Mass General Cancer Center,

JASON R. AND KEELY F. KRANTZ

are honored to name the

KRANTZ FAMILY CENTER FOR CANCER RESEARCH

With the enduring intent that this philanthropic endeavor will pioneer impactful advances in cancer detection, treatment and prevention, and enable scientists to launch bold and innovative research to vanquish this disease.

Jason and Keely Krantz photo by Austin Wilder/Catalumet Creative

The Krantz Family Center for Cancer Research Awards Fund was established to accelerate groundbreaking cancer research and drive discoveries that will produce fundamental changes in our understanding of cancer biology and how we treat cancer patients. The inaugural awards include:

2023 Quantum Award

Liron Bar-Peled, PhD, Michael Lawrence, PhD, and **Chris Ott, PhD**
The Transcription Factor Therapeutics Initiative.

2023 Breakthrough Awards

Max Jan MD, PhD, Robert Manguso, PhD, Marcela Maus MD, PhD, and Debattama Sen PhD
Identifying regulators of CAR T cell persistence and cytotoxicity.

Genevieve Boland MD, PhD, Russ Jenkins MD, PhD and Moshe Sade-Feldman, PhD
Defining the landscape of response and resistance to adoptive T cell therapy in melanoma.

Nabeel Bardeesy, PhD, and Raul Mostoslavsky, MD, PhD
Revolutionizing cancer metabolism studies for enhanced therapeutics.

2023 Spark Awards

Andrew Elia, MD, PhD – Studying the role of DNA repair pathways within immune cells.

Gad Getz, PhD – Developing a deep learning molecular language model for cancer drug discovery.

Abner Louissaint, MD, PhD – Creating and testing models of patient-derived lymphomas.

Mo Motamedi, PhD – Testing a novel epigenetic strategy for overcoming EMT-mediated resistance to cancer therapy.

Shannon Stott, PhD – Developing a non-invasive blood test to predict immunotherapy related adverse events in melanoma.

The 2023 Technology awards will fund the purchase of advanced microscopy, flow cytometry, real time cell culture technologies and high content imaging data storage and handling.

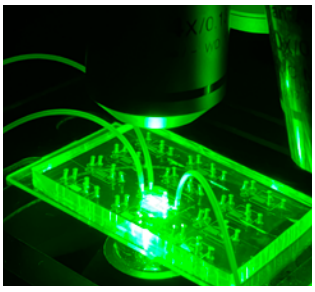
About the Krantz Family Center for Cancer Research

The *KF-CCR* includes 54 Principal Investigators with Harvard Medical School (HMS) appointments in the Departments of Medicine, Pathology, Radiation Oncology, Surgery, Dermatology and Pediatrics, as well as the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard. Together with over 500 laboratory investigators, they conduct research in 80,000 square feet of laboratory space in three MGH research facilities: Charlestown Navy Yard (CNY), Simches Research Building, and Jackson Building. Ongoing research projects range from exploring cancer genetics, genomics, epigenetics and proteomics, to developmental biology, cell signaling, cancer diagnostics, molecular therapeutics and drug resistance, immunology and immunotherapy, cellular metabolism, cell cycle regulation, RNA biology, and computational biology.

Since the creation of the Mass General Cancer Center in 1988, landmark publications from our faculty have included the first discovery of germline mutations conferring familial susceptibility to cancer (Malkin et al., *Science* 1990) and the major contribution of "founder BRCA1 mutations" to early-onset breast cancer in Ashkenazi populations (FitzGerald et al., *NEJM* 1996). Our investigators first cloned the E2F gene, the primary cell cycle regulator that is unleashed by cancer-associated mutations in the RB Retinoblastoma tumor suppressor (Helin et al., *Cell* 1992). Using functional screens in fruit-fly genetic models, scientists first discovered the Fbxw7/Ago (Moberg et al., *Nature* 2001) and Hippo/YAP (Harvey et al., *Cell* 2003) pathways, major drivers of cancer proliferation. In 2004, researchers identified activating mutations in the EGFR gene, which drive 10% of all lung cancers and underlie their extreme sensitivity to targeted kinase inhibitors (Lynch et al., *NEJM* 2004). This discovery helped launch the field of "precision oncology" in solid tumors; it set in motion major initiatives in molecular genotyping of cancers to guide therapy and the application of accelerated early phase clinical trials of targeted therapies for genotyped cancers. Mass General Hospital was the first hospital in the US to establish genotyping as part of standard clinical care for cancer in 2008, and in 2011 the Cancer Center launched the Termeer Center for Targeted Therapies, which has emerged as an internationally renowned center of excellence for First-in-Human clinical trials. It is through this integration of transformative research and exceptional clinical care that the Mass General Cancer Center has emerged internationally as a recognized leader in cancer research and innovation.

Today, our investigators continue to actively pursue fundamental questions in cancer biology, together with translational applications with potential clinical impact. Major areas of emphasis include our *Center for Molecular Therapeutics*, bringing together high-throughput cellular screens, proteome-wide targeting of reactive cysteines, metabolomics-directed drug targets, and unique patient-derived tumor models; *Circulating Tumor Cell Biology*, a unique partnership between bioengineers, molecular biologists and clinicians to create tools and develop insights into blood-based spread of cancer; *CAR-T & Cellular Immunotherapy*, a rapidly expanding program to design novel cellular therapies, from initial concept through to first-in-human clinical trials; *Cancer Immunology*, a comprehensive research program from single-cell and spatial transcriptomic mapping of patient-derived biopsies to creation of new-generation cancer vaccines; *Rare Cancer Initiatives*, a focus on cancers with specific features that are understudied yet potentially treatable; *Advanced Proteomics & Computational Biology*, an initiative combining next-generation mass spectrometric analytics of proteins in blood and human tissues with machine-learning algorithms, transforming their capabilities and applications. Beyond these highlights, all *KF-CCR* faculty pursue their scientific vision, as detailed in the individual reports of Principal Investigators.

The *KF-CCR* greatly values creativity and innovation across multiple disciplines of cancer research, and we are proud of our strong culture of collaboration and collegiality, demonstrated by multiple co-authored manuscripts, joint laboratory meetings, and cross-laboratory team science. We are committed to increasing diversity among our faculty and trainees, and to directing scientific discovery toward areas of unmet need in our society. Finally, it is through training and mentoring the next generation of young scientists that we will continue to harness the power of science and uncover new and more effective ways to fight cancer.



Scientific Advisory Board

2024–2025 Members

Paul Joseph Anderson, MD, PhD
Mass General Brigham

Dafna Bar-Sagi, PhD
NYU Langone Health

Joan S. Brugge, PhD
Harvard Ludwig Cancer Center

M. Celeste Simon, PhD
University of Pennsylvania

Past Members

Julian Adams
Gamida Cell, Ltd

Spyros Artavanis-Tsakonas, PhD
Harvard Medical School

Joseph Avruch, MD
Massachusetts General Hospital

David Baltimore, PhD
Broad Institute

Cori Bargmann, PhD
Rockefeller University

Edward J. Benz Jr., MD
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

David E. Fisher, MD, PhD
Massachusetts General Hospital

Donald Ganem, MD
University of California, San Francisco

Walter J. Gehring, PhD[ᛟ]
Biozentrum, University of Basel

Richard O. Hynes, PhD
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

David Hogness, PhD[ᛟ]
Stanford University School of Medicine

David Housman, PhD
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Peter Howley, MD
Harvard Medical School

Tyler Jacks, PhD
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Robert E. Kingston, PhD
Massachusetts General Hospital

Alfred G. Knudson Jr., MD, PhD[ᛟ]
Fox Chase Cancer Center

David Livingston, MD[ᛟ]
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

David N. Louis, MD
Massachusetts General Hospital

Scott Lowe, PhD
Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

Frank McCormick, PhD
University of California, San Francisco

Stuart Orkin, MD
Children's Hospital and
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

Terry Orr-Weaver, PhD
Whitehead Institute

Anthony Pawson, FRS, PhD
Samuel Lunenfeld Research Institute

Carol Prives, PhD
Columbia University

Gerald M. Rubin, PhD
University of California, Berkeley

Gary Ruvkun, PhD
Massachusetts General Hospital

Jeffrey Settleman, PhD
Pfizer, Inc.

Phillip A. Sharp, PhD
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Arlene Sharpe, MD, PhD
Harvard Medical School

Eileen White, PhD
Rutgers University Cancer Institute of New Jersey

[ᛟ]*In Memoriam*

The Jonathan Kraft Prize for Excellence in Cancer Research

Presented by the Mass General Cancer Center

2025
Jennifer A. Wargo, MD, MMSc

R. Lee Clark Endowed Professor
Professor, Dept. of Surgical Oncology
Professor, Dept. of Genomic Medicine
The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

2024
Howard Y. Chang, MD, PhD

Virginia and D.K. Ludwig Professor of Cancer Genomics
Professor of Dermatology and of Genetics
Stanford University School of Medicine

2023
Michelle Monje, MD, PhD

Professor of Neurology
Stanford University School of Medicine

2021
Aviv Regev, PhD

Head, Genentech Research and Early Development
Core Member (on leave), Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT
Professor of Biology, MIT

2019
Carl H. June, MD

Professor in Immunotherapy
Director, Center for Cellular Immunotherapies
University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine

2018
Charles Swanton, MD, PhD

Professor and Chair, Personalized Cancer Medicine
University College London Cancer Institute, London, UK

2017
Kevan M. Shokat, PhD

Professor and Chair, Department of Cellular and Molecular Pharmacology, UCSF
Professor, Department of Chemistry, UC Berkeley

2016
Joan A. Steitz, PhD

Sterling Professor of Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry Yale School of Medicine

2015
C. David Allis, MD, PhD[ϰ]

Joy and Jack Fishman Professor, Laboratory of Chromatin Biology and Epigenetics, Rockefeller University

[ϰ]*In Memoriam*

The Annual MGH Award in Cancer Research

In memory of Nathan and Grace Shiff

2014
Hans Clevers, MD, PhD

President of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences
Professor of Molecular Genetics
University Utrecht, Netherlands

2013
James Allison, PhD

Chair, Department of Immunology
MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, Texas

2012
Craig Thompson, MD

President and Chief Executive Officer
Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York

2011
Michael Stratton, MD, FRS

Director, Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Cambridge, UK

2010
Charles Sawyers, MD

Chairman of the Human Oncology and Pathogenesis Program
Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York

2009
Bert Vogelstein, MD

Director of the Ludwig Center for Cancer Genetics & Therapeutics
Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center
Johns Hopkins University, Maryland

2008
Titia de Lange, PhD

Associate Director of the Anderson Cancer Center
Rockefeller University, New York

2007
Joan Massague, PhD

Chairman of the Cancer Biology and Genetics Program
Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York

2006
Anton Berns, PhD

Director of Research and Chairman of the Board of Directors, Netherlands Cancer Institute and Antoni van Leewenhoek Hospital, Netherlands

Faculty

Krantz Family Center for Cancer Research Faculty

Leadership

Daniel A. Haber, MD, PhD
Director, Krantz Family Center for Cancer Research
Director, Mass General Cancer Center
Kurt J. Isselbacher Professor of Oncology (Medicine)
Investigator, Howard Hughes Medical Institute

Raul Mostoslavsky, MD, PhD
Scientific Director, Krantz Family Center for Cancer Research
Laurel Schwartz Professor in Medicine in the Field of Oncology
Professor of Medicine

Andrea I. McClatchey, PhD
Director for Academic Affairs, Krantz Family Center for Cancer Research
Poitras Family Endowed Chair in Oncology
Professor of Pathology

Nir Hacohen, PhD
Director, Center for Cancer Immunology, Krantz Family Center for Cancer Research
Director, Center for Cell Circuits, Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT
David P. Ryan Endowed Chair in Cancer Research
Professor of Medicine

Charlestown Laboratories

Liron Bar-Peled, PhD
Rullo Family Endowed Chair in Cancer Research
Associate Professor of Medicine

Lloyd Bod, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Ryan B. Corcoran, MD, PhD
Director, Cancer Center-Tucker Gosnell Center for Gastrointestinal Cancers
Mark J. Kusek Endowed Chair in Colorectal Cancer
Associate Professor of Medicine

Shawn Demehri, MD, PhD
Arthur and Sandra Irving Endowed Chair in Cancer Immunology
MGH Research Scholar 2023-2028
Associate Professor in Dermatology (Cutaneous Biology Research Center)

Andrew Elia MD, PhD
Assistant Professor of Radiation Oncology

David E. Fisher, MD, PhD
Director, Cancer Center Melanoma Program
Director, Cutaneous Biology Research Center
Lancer Professor of Dermatology
Edward Wigglesworth Professor and Chair of Dermatology

Gaddy Getz, PhD
Director of Bioinformatics, Cancer Center and Pathology
Director of Cancer Bioinformatics, Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT
Paul Zamecnik, MD Endowed Chair in Oncology Basic Research
Professor of Pathology

Francesca Gazzaniga, PhD
Assistant Professor of Pathology (Molecular Pathology Unit)

Doğa C. Gülhan, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine and Assistant Professor of Biomedical Informatics

Timothy A. Graubert, MD
Director, Cancer Center Program in Hematologic Malignancies
Hagler Family Endowed Chair in Hematologic Malignancies
Professor of Medicine

Wilhelm Haas, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Daniel A. Haber, MD, PhD

Nir Hacohen, PhD

Aaron Hata, MD, PhD
Associate Professor of Medicine

Anthony John Iafrate, MD, PhD
Austin L. Vickery, Jr. Professor of Pathology
Deputy Chair, Department of Pathology

Othon Iliopoulos, MD
Associate Professor of Medicine

Max Jan, MD, PhD
Assistant Professor of Pathology

David M. Langenau, PhD
Atul K. Bhan, MBBS, MD, Endowed Chair in Experimental Pathology
Professor of Pathology (Molecular Pathology Unit)

Michael S. Lawrence, PhD
Assistant Professor of Pathology

Mark B. Leick, MD
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Abner Louissaint, Jr., MD, PhD
Aziz and Nur Hamzaogullari Endowed Scholar in Hematologic Malignancies
Associate Professor of Pathology (Molecular Pathology Unit)

Shyamala Maheswaran, PhD
Mary B. Saltonstall Endowed Chair in Oncology
Professor of Surgery

Robert Manguso, PhD
Co-Director Tumor Immunotherapy Discovery Engine, Broad Institute
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Marcela V. Maus, MD, PhD
Director, Cancer Center Program in Cellular Immunotherapy
Paula J. O'Keeffe Endowed Chair in Thoracic Oncology
Professor of Medicine

Andrea I. McClatchey, PhD

Avanish Mishra, PhD
*Faculty Member**

David T. Miyamoto, MD, PhD
Associate Professor of Radiation Oncology

Mo Motamedi, PhD
James and Patricia Poitras Endowed Chair in Cancer Research
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Eugene Oh, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Christopher J. Ott, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Luca Pinello, PhD
MGH Research Scholar 2024-2029
Associate Professor in Pathology (Molecular Pathology Unit)

Esther Rheinbay, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Miguel N. Rivera, MD
Thomas F. and Diana L. Ryan MGH Research Scholar 2019-2024
Associate Professor of Pathology (Molecular Pathology Unit)

Debattama Sen, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Dennis C. Sgroi, MD
Executive Vice-Chair of Pathology
Professor of Pathology

Toshihiro Shioda, MD, PhD
Associate Professor of Medicine

Mikołaj Słabicki, PhD
*Faculty Member**

Shannon Stott, PhD
d'Arbeloff MGH Research Scholar 2022-2027
Associate Professor of Medicine

Mario L. Suvà, MD, PhD
Vice-Chair of Pathology for Research
Director, Molecular Pathology Unit
Janet and William Ellery James MGH Research Scholar 2020-2025
Associate Professor of Pathology

David T. Ting, MD
Associate Clinical Director for Innovation, Cancer Center
Amin and Zebunisha Juma Endowed Chair in Oncology
Associate Professor of Medicine

Alexandra-Chloé Villani, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine (Center Immunology & Inflammatory Diseases)

Jackson Laboratories

Genevieve M. Boland, MD, PhD
Vice Chair for Research, Department of Surgery
MGH Research Scholar 2023-2028
Associate Professor of Surgery

Nir Hacohen, PhD

Russell Jenkins, MD, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Moshe Sade-Feldman, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Ioannis Sanidas, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Simches Laboratories

Nabeel Bardeesy, PhD
John R. Gallagher III and Katherine A. Gallagher Endowed Chair in Gastrointestinal Cancer Research
Professor of Medicine

Priscilla Brastianos, MD
Terry and Jean de Gunzburg MGH Research Scholar 2021-2026
Associate Professor of Medicine (Neuro-Oncology)

Leif W. Ellisen, MD, PhD
Director, Cancer Center Program in Breast Medical Oncology
Nelson Family and Jerry Younger, MD Endowed Chair in Breast Cancer Research
Professor of Medicine

Konrad Hochedlinger, PhD
Gerald and Darlene Jordan Endowed Chair for the Center for Regenerative Medicine
Professor of Medicine (Genetics)

Hanno Hock, MD, PhD
Brant Carleton Endowed Chair in Acute Myeloid Leukemia Research
Assistant Professor of Medicine

William L. Hwang, MD, PhD
Assistant Professor of Radiation Oncology (Center for Systems Biology)

Peter Miller, MD, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Raul Mostoslavsky, MD, PhD

David A. Sweetser, MD, PhD
Chief of Medical Genetics and Metabolism, Department of Pediatrics
Leslie Meyer and Lewis Ball Holmes Chair in Genetics and Teratology
Associate Professor of Pediatrics (Pediatrics, Genetics)

** Assistant professor appointment process initiated*

Faculty Listing by Theme

Cancer Cell Biology

Liron Bar-Peled, PhD
Nabeel Bardeesy, PhD
Genevieve Boland, MD, PhD
Shawn Demehri, MD, PhD
Andrew Elia, MD, PhD
Konrad Hochedlinger, PhD
William L. Hwang, MD, PhD
David M. Langenau, PhD
Shyamala Maheswaran, PhD
Andrea I. McClatchey, PhD
Eugene Oh, PhD
Miguel Rivera, MD
Ioannis Sanidas, PhD
Toshihiro Shioda, MD, PhD
Mikołaj Słabicki, PhD

Cancer Genomics, Epigenetics and Proteomics

Liron Bar-Peled, PhD
Nabeel Bardeesy, PhD
Lloyd Bod, PhD
Genevieve Boland, MD, PhD
Priscilla Brastianos, MD
Andrew Elia, MD, PhD
Leif Ellisen, MD, PhD
Gaddy Getz, PhD
Timothy Graubert, MD
Wilhelm Haas, PhD
Konrad Hochedlinger, PhD
Hanno Hock, MD, PhD
William L. Hwang, MD, PhD
Abner Louissaint, Jr., MD, PhD
Peter Miller, MD, PhD
David Miyamoto, MD, PhD
Raul Mostoslavsky, MD, PhD
Mo Motamedi, PhD
Eugene Oh, PhD
Christopher J. Ott, PhD
Luca Pinello, PhD
Esther Rheinbay, PhD
Miguel N. Rivera, MD
Debattama Sen, PhD
Toshihiro Shioda, MD, PhD
Mario L. Suvà, MD, PhD
David Sweetser, MD
David T. Ting, MD

Cancer Immunology

Lloyd Bod, PhD
Genevieve Boland, MD, PhD
Shawn Demehri, MD, PhD
David Fisher, MD, PhD
Francesca Gazzaniga, PhD
Nir Hacohen, PhD
Max Jan, MD, PhD
Russell Jenkins, MD, PhD
Mark Leick, MD
Robert Manguso, PhD
Marcela V. Maus, MD, PhD
Moshe Sade-Feldman, PhD
Debattama Sen, PhD
Alexandra-Chloé Villani, PhD

Cancer Metabolism

Liron Bar-Peled, PhD
Nabeel Bardeesy, PhD
Leif Ellisen, MD, PhD
Othon Iliopoulos, MD
Raul Mostoslavsky, MD, PhD

Genomic Instability

Andrew Elia, MD, PhD
Doğa Gülhan, PhD
Michael S. Lawrence, PhD
Peter Miller, MD, PhD
Shyamala Maheswaran, PhD
Raul Mostoslavsky, MD, PhD
Eugene Oh, PhD
Ioannis Sanidas, PhD

Metastasis and Quiescence

Liron Bar-Peled, PhD
Nabeel Bardeesy, PhD
Priscilla Brastianos, MD, PhD
Daniel A. Haber, MD, PhD
David M. Langenau, PhD
Shyamala Maheswaran, PhD
David T. Miyamoto, MD, PhD
Raul Mostoslavsky, MD, PhD
Mo Motamedi, PhD

Molecular Cancer Diagnostics

Gaddy Getz, PhD
Doğa Gülhan, PhD
Daniel A. Haber, MD, PhD
William L. Hwang, MD, PhD
A. John Iafrate, MD, PhD
David M. Langenau, PhD
Abner Louissaint, Jr., MD, PhD
Shyamala Maheswaran, PhD
Avanish Mishra, PhD
David Miyamoto, MD, PhD
Miguel Rivera, MD
Dennis Sgroi, MD
Shannon Stott, PhD
Mario L. Suvà, MD, PhD
David Sweetser, MD
David T. Ting, MD

Molecular Therapeutics and Chemical Biology

Liron Bar-Peled, PhD
Ryan Corcoran, MD, PhD
Leif Ellisen, MD, PhD
Gaddy Getz, PhD
Daniel A. Haber, MD, PhD
Aaron Hata, MD, PhD
A. John Iafrate, MD, PhD
David M. Langenau, MD, PhD
Christopher J. Ott, PhD
Ioannis Sanidas, PhD

Protein Degradation and Ubiquitin Signaling

Liron Bar-Peled, PhD
Andrew Elia, MD, PhD
William Hwang, MD, PhD
Max Jan, MD, PhD
Peter Miller, MD, PhD
Eugene Oh, PhD
Christopher J. Ott, PhD
Mikołaj Słabicki, PhD

RNA Biology

Mo Motamedi, PhD
Miguel N. Rivera, MD
David T. Ting, MD

Systems and Computational Biology

Lloyd Bod, PhD
Gaddy Getz, PhD
Doğa Gülhan, PhD
Nir Hacohen, PhD
William L. Hwang, MD, PhD
Michael S. Lawrence, PhD
Mo Motamedi, PhD
Luca Pinello, PhD
Esther Rheinbay, PhD
Moshe Sade-Feldman, PhD
Toshihiro Shioda, MD, PhD
Mikołaj Słabicki, PhD
Alexandra-Chloé Villani, PhD

Faculty Listing by Disease

Brain Cancer

Priscilla Brastianos, MD
Andrew Elia, MD, PhD
A. John Iafrate, MD, PhD
Andrea I. McClatchey, PhD
Miguel N. Rivera, MD
Shannon Stott, PhD
Mario L. Suvà, MD, PhD

Breast Cancer

Liron Bar-Peled
Lloyd Bod, PhD
Shawn Demehri, MD, PhD
Andrew Elia, MD, PhD
Leif Ellisen, MD, PhD
Francesca Gazzaniga, PhD
Gaddy Getz, PhD
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Genitourinary Cancers

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Head and Neck Squamous Cell Cancer

Moshe Sade-Feldman, PhD

Hematologic Malignancies

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Liver, Pancreatic and Gastrointestinal Cancers

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Lung Cancer

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Melanoma and Skin Cancers

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Pediatric Cancers

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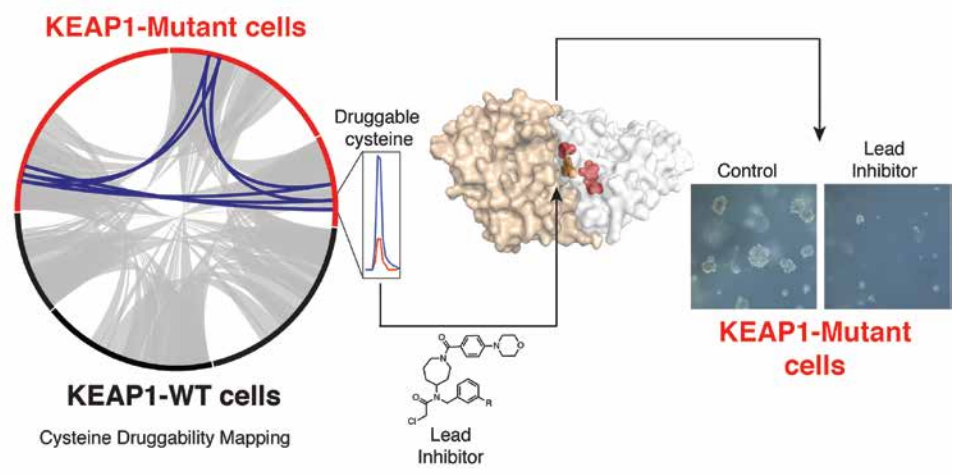
Research in **the Bar-Peled laboratory** sits at the interface of cellular metabolism and signal transduction and focuses on understanding how cancer cells respond to altered metabolic states. Rapidly proliferating cancer cells are characterized by increased production of toxic metabolic byproducts known as reactive oxygen species (ROS) that at high levels potently block cancer cell growth. To neutralize high ROS levels, cancer cells activate the NRF2 pathway, which governs the cellular antioxidant response. While the NRF2 pathway is critical for cancer growth, the molecular mechanisms by which this pathway functions and provides cancer cells with a proliferative advantage remain poorly understood. By combining frontier molecular, chemical and proteomic approaches, research in our lab has revealed that NRF2 establishes a unique cellular environment that protects critical proteins required for cancer cell growth from inactivation by ROS. Our studies indicate that these ROS-regulated proteins are highly targetable by small molecule inhibitors and may be exploited to develop chemical tools to inactivate these dependencies in cancers.

Cancer cells display remarkable plasticity allowing them to adapt to ever changing environments. A key feature of this plasticity is their ability to rewire core metabolic networks to provide a steady source of energy and building blocks needed for rapid growth. This demand for energy produces byproducts, including ROS that alters the function of proteins, DNA and lipids, and if left unchecked, results in oxidative stress and impairs cancer cell viability. To counter a rise in oxidative stress, cells activate the NRF2 transcription factor leading to the expression of a vast network of antioxidant and detoxification genes that restore redox homeostasis. Multiple cancer cells, including ~30% of non-small cell lung cancers (NSCLCs) activate NRF2 through the genetic disruption of its negative regulator KEAP1. Despite its clear importance in cancer cell proliferation, we know remarkably little about how the NRF2/KEAP1 pathway functions within cancer cells or how ROS modification of proteins alters their function. Our long-term goal is to understand how cancer cells sense and respond to ROS and to pharmacologically modulate these pathways in cancers where they are deregulated.

Redox control pathways in lung cancer

Our recent studies focus on how the intracellular environment generated by NRF2 in NSCLCs is required for cancer cell proliferation. By employing a chemical proteomics platform (isoTOP-ABPP) that identifies changes in cysteine reactivity mediated by ROS, we demonstrated that NRF2 is required for the protection of dozens of proteins from ROS modification. We found that silencing NRF2 in NSCLCs reduced the reactivity of the catalytic cysteine of the glycolytic enzyme GAPDH without changing GAPDH protein abundance. Concomitant knockdown of NRF2 significantly reduced GAPDH enzyme activity and glycolytic flux, a metabolic pathway required to fuel cancer cell proliferation. These results illustrate how NRF2 can regulate enzyme and pathway activity, not through direct transcriptional control, but rather by fostering a favorable redox environment required for proper



(Left) A cysteine druggability map identifies proteins exclusively druggable in KEAP1-mutant NSCLC cells enabling the development of small molecule inhibitors that disrupt NR0B1 protein interactions (middle) and block KEAP1-mutant cell growth (right).

Images from Bar-Peled et al., 2017.

enzyme function. Current studies in our lab seek to elucidate how other proteins are post-translationally regulated by NRF2 and feedback into this pathway. To address these questions, we are studying the function of ROS-regulated sites on proteins as well as the identifying reactive metabolites that modify them.

Druggable co-dependencies

Our investigations suggest that the cellular state created by NRF2 may be exploited to develop inhibitors targeting proteins whose expression and function are stimulated by this environment. Because of their importance to protein function, cysteines are targeted by multiple clinically approved inhibitors. To identify pharmacological targets of the NRF2 pathway, we use powerful chemical proteomic platforms (cysteine druggability mapping) to identify the landscape of protein druggability (e.g. ligand-protein interactions) in genetically defined lung cancers. Our studies reveal that multiple proteins, including the orphan nuclear receptor NR0B1, are exclusively druggable in KEAP1-mutant, NRF2-activated cells. By developing a small molecule inhibitor that disrupts NR0B1 protein interactions we show that NR0B1 functions as a critical signaling node within the NRF2 pathway to support its pro-proliferative transcriptional output required for anchorage-independent growth. Recently we uncovered that cysteine residues that are sensitive to ROS modification are highly targetable by covalent inhibitors. Our current studies suggest that these sites may be exploited to develop inhibitors that target proteins required for the proliferation of NRF2- activated cancers.

Ongoing projects:

1. Determine how cancer proteomes respond to changes in the intracellular redox environment
2. Elucidate the role of NRF2-regulated reactive metabolites on protein function
3. Decipher how cells adapt to anchorage-independent growth
4. Identify druggable transcriptional dependencies in genetically-defined cancers

Selected Publications:

Takahashi M†, Chong HB, Zhang S, Yang TY, Lazarov MJ, Harry S, Maynard M, Hilbert B, White RD, Murrey HE, Tsou CC, Vordermark K, Assaad J, Gohar M, Dürr BR,... Oh E, Fisher DE, Maheswaran S, Haber DA, Boland GM, Sade-Feldman M, Jenkins RW, Hata AN, Bardeesy NM, Suvà ML, Martin BR, Liau BB, Ott CJ, Rivera MN, Lawrence MS†, **Bar-Peled L**†. DrugMap: A quantitative pan-cancer analysis of cysteine ligandability. *Cell.* 2024 Apr 17:S0092-8674(24)00318-0.

Weiss-Sadan T, Ge M†, Hayashi M, Gohar M, Yao CH, de Groot A, Harry S, Carlin A, Fischer H, Shi L, Wei TY, Adelmann CH, Wolf K, Vornbäumen T, Dürr BR, Takahashi M, Richter M, Zhang J, Yang TY, Vijay V, Fisher DE, Hata AN, Haigis MC, Mostoslavsky R, Bardeesy N, Papagiannakopoulos T, **Bar-Peled L**†. NRF2 activation induces NADH-reductive stress, providing a metabolic vulnerability in lung cancer. *Cell Metab.* 2023 Apr 4;35(4):722.

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Nabeel Bardeesy, PhD

Pancreatic cancer and biliary cancer are among the most lethal types of human cancers. **The Bardeesy laboratory** has developed a series of genetically engineered mouse models and patient-derived models to define the role of key gene mutations that drive these cancer types. Current projects focus on understanding the function of cancer genes in controlling the way cells modulate their growth and utilize energy in response to available nutrients. Additional studies are exploring how some therapies targeting key mutations initially cause tumor to stop growth and why resistance eventually develops. Each of these studies is being used to inform improved therapeutic approaches.

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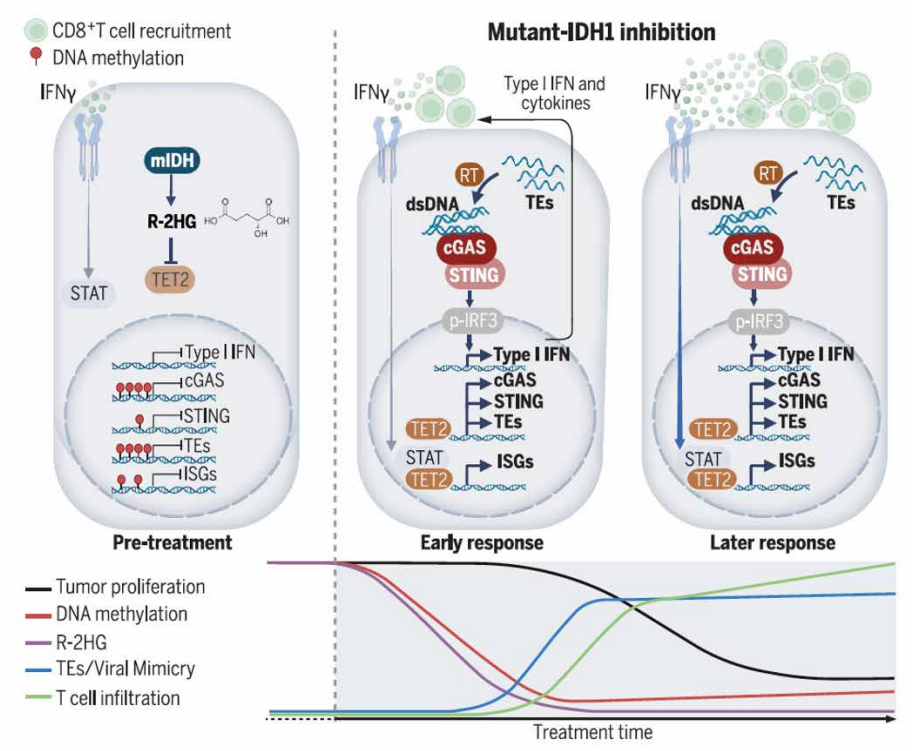
The Bardeesy lab studies the pathways driving the pathogenesis of pancreatic and biliary cancers. The lab has developed a series of genetically engineered mouse models that has elucidated the functional interactions of major gene mutations associated with these diseases in humans. Studies have focused on the roles of key cancer genes in regulation of cell metabolism, and the discovery of mechanisms of resistance to targeted therapies.

Interplay between metabolism and chromatin regulation

An important area of current focus in our lab is to elucidate the metabolic regulators of pancreatic cancer and biliary cancers, with particular attention paid to factors that reprogram cancer cell metabolism.We have linked mutations in the IDH1gene to changes in metabolism that ultimately alter epigenetic states. Identifying these pathways has provided insights in mechanisms of cell transformation arising from these mutations and predict novel therapeutic vulnerabilities. Mutant IDH proteins acquire a novel enzymatic activity allowing them to convert alpha-ketoglutarate (αKG) to 2-hydroxyglutarate (2HG), which inhibits the activity of multiple αKG-dependent dioxygenases, including the TET family DNA demethylases. We are focusing on how epigenetic defects caused by IDH-mediated inhibition of TET affect cross-talk between tumor and immune cells to support cancer growth.

Oncogenic functions of protein kinase A signaling in pancreatic and liver cancers

The protein kinase A (PKA) signaling pathway is activated by mutations in a number of tumor types. These include the subset of pancreatic and biliary tumors harboring mutations in GNAS, an upstream regulator of PKA, and a type of liver tumor (fibrolamellar carcinoma) harboring activating gene fusions of PKA. Although PKA is an important driver of the growth of these tumor types, the specific oncogenic mechanisms have not been as widely studied as for many other cancer gene mutations. We have focused on elucidating the primary mechanisms of PKA-driven growth. Our work has identified the Salt-inducible kinases (SIK1-3) as the critical targets of cancer-causing PKA alterations. In addition, we have linked this pathway to a downstream epigenetic mechanism controlling proliferation and reprogramming mitochondrial function and tumor cell metabolism.



Cancers with mutant IDH1 (mIDH1) accumulate high levels of the oncometabolite R-2HG, which inhibits the DNA-demethylating enzyme TET2, leading to defects in immune signaling pathways. Pharmacological inhibition of mIDH1 activates TET2, which induces dormant viral-like TEs throughout the genome and reactivates silenced genes in the cGAS-STING pathway that detect dsDNA generated by the TE-encoded reverse transcriptase. TET2 activation also enables tumor cells to respond to the antitumor cytokine IFNg. These immune pathways cooperate to promote CD8+ T cell infiltration and elicit a robust immune response.

Understanding and targeting FGFR2-driven biliary cancer

Genetic alterations that activate Fibroblast Growth Factor 2 (FGFR2) signaling are common in biliary cancer and predict response to pharmacological inhibition of the FGFR in patients. However, tumor shrinkage is often modest and acquired resistance invariably arises. We are investigating oncogenic mechanisms controlled by FGFR2 in biliary cancer, including direct targets of FGFR2 signaling as well as downstream impact on cellular metabolism and differentiation. Additionally, we are investigating resistance mechanisms and approaches to prevent and overcome resistance.

Models of biliary cancer

Recent genetic studies have identified multiple recurrent mutations in biliary cancers and have indicated considerable genetic heterogeneity between individual tumors. A key limitation in the field includes a paucity of experimental systems with which to define the contributions of the lesions to biliary cancer progression. We have established a series of genetically engineered mouse models that incorporate combinations of the major mutations found in the human disease. In addition, our ongoing efforts include the development of a human biliary cancer cell line bank and the use of this system in large-scale genetic and small-molecule screens to systematically define targetable vulnerabilities in molecularly defined subtypes of this cancer.

Selected Publications:

Gritti I, Wan J, Weerasekara V, Vaz JM, Tarantino G, Bryde TH, Vijay V, Kammula AV, Kattel P, Zhu S, Vu P, Chan M, Wu MJ, Gordan JD, Patra KC, Silveira VS, Manguso RT, Wein MN, Ott CJ, Qi J, Liu D, Sakamoto K, Gujral TS, **Bardeesy N**. DNAJB1-PRKACA fusion drives fibrolamellar liver cancer through impaired SIK signaling and CRTC2/p300-mediated transcriptional reprogramming. *Cancer Discovery* 2024 (in press).

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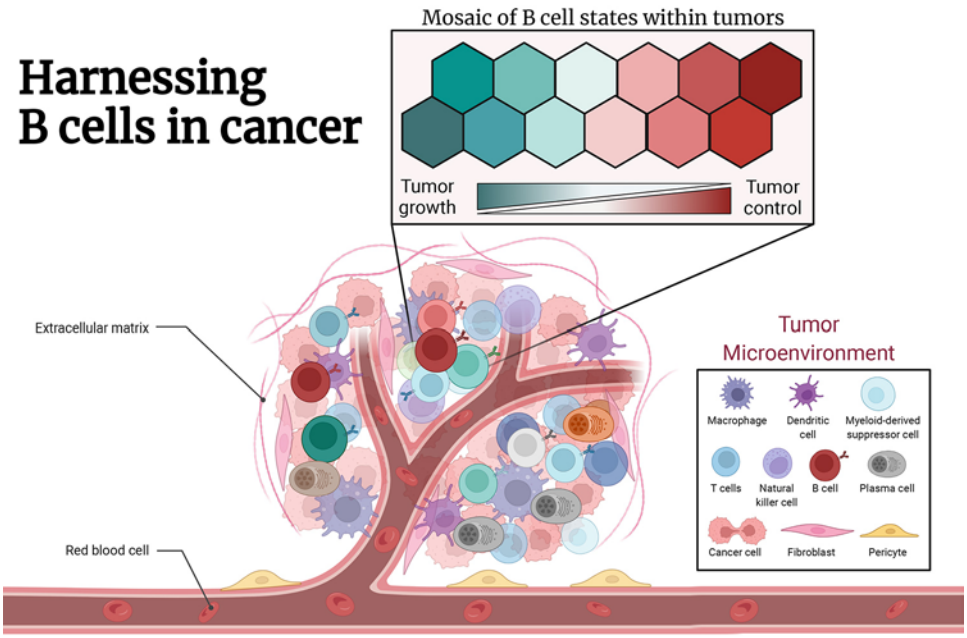
Immunotherapies have demonstrated remarkable clinical success in the treatment of various cancers mainly by boosting the function of endogenous T cells to attack neoplastic cells. Unfortunately, the frequency of patients responding to these therapies is modest and a significant fraction of patients develop severe immune-related adverse events. These observations have catalyzed a more thorough investigation of other cell types in the tumor microenvironment that could be targeted to increase treatment efficacy while mitigating toxicity. B cells are an important arm of the adaptive immune system frequently infiltrating solid tumors, however, their function on cancer progression has not been sufficiently explored. **The Bod laboratory** focuses on deciphering the landscape of phenotypic and functional B cell states within tumors. In particular, we are interested in exploring which B cell subset is favorable or detrimental for cancer progression, and by which mechanisms these B cells control tumor growth. Our thorough examination of the B cell response towards cancer aims to provide a new angle to harness the anti-tumor immune response more effectively.

Historically, B cells have been at the forefront of research in allergies, infectious diseases, and vaccines. Beyond mediating the humoral response, B cells are potent antigen presenting cells (APCs). They can provide co-stimulatory or co- inhibitory signals and secrete cytokines and chemokines that regulate functions of other cell types including effector T cells.

However, the role of B cells in the cancer scenario is unclear. While some studies have shown that B cells are critical for promoting anti-tumor immunity, others report that they may play a detrimental role, favoring relapse and metastasis. Indeed, on one hand, B cells form tertiary lymphoid structures (TLS) in the context of successful immune checkpoint blockade (ICB) therapy in human cancer patients, suggesting that B cells and TLS provide critical help to promote anti-tumor immunity and inhibit tumor growth.

On the other hand, B cells may also play an inhibitory role through the expression of soluble and/or inhibitory molecules on their surface which contribute to dismantle the anti-tumor T cell immunity. Whether the paradoxical effects of B cells in these settings is due to their functional diversity or distinct roles within different tumor types remains to be elucidated.

A more comprehensive understanding of B cell heterogeneity in tumors will allow us to identify B cell subsets and their respective functionality arising during different stages of tumor growth and regulating anti-tumor immunity. Growing evidence suggests that lymphocytes occupy a vast and continuous landscape of possible cellular states, as opposed to the idea of disconnected discrete subtypes. Recent advances in genomic analysis and sophisticated computational methods are enabling us to explore such diversity and are transforming our comprehension of immunology. Using such approaches, the lab aims to generate new insights into the role of B cells in inducing and regulating anti-tumor immunity. The main axes of research in our laboratory are:



While existing anti-cancer immunotherapies mainly engage effector T cells, harnessing both arms of the adaptive immune system might be more favorable. Illustrated by the mosaic of diverse B cell states, B cells are a highly dynamic cell population in the tumor microenvironment (TME) favoring or impeding tumor growth. In our lab, we want to thoroughly dissect the diverse and complex functions of TME-associated B cells to pave the way for new therapeutic avenues and improve the anti-cancer immune response. Adapted from "Tumor Microenvironment", by BioRender.com (2022).

1. Deciphering the landscape of B cell states within the tumor microenvironment using multi-omics technologies. Our goal is to establish an atlas of B cell states in cancer, and to thoroughly interpret the spatial, transcriptomic, and epigenetic status of B cells in different contexts (e.g., different tumor types, healthy tissues, post-treatment with immune checkpoint blockade therapy, chemotherapy, or radiotherapy).
2. Identifying B cell-specific biomarkers and/or -targets in cancer. Using genetic and genomics approaches, we aim to explore potential B cell biomarkers and novel targets that are expressed on B cells, which may synergize with T cell-based checkpoint blockade therapy to enhance anti-tumor immunity.
3. Dissecting the underlying cellular and molecular mechanisms that govern the B cell response to cancer. The tumor microenvironment is layered with multiple tissular, cellular and molecular components which are associated with distinct tumor-promoting or -inhibiting mechanisms, and ultimately, open distinct therapeutic windows. We are interested in elucidating how B cells integrate these components and how the anti-tumor B cell response evolves in response to these signals.

Selected Publications:

Bod L, Kye YC, Shi J, Torlai Triglia E, Schnell A, Fessler J, Kuchroo JR, Barilla RM, Zaghouani S, Christian E, Delorey TM, Mohib K, Xiao S,Rothstein DM, Rozenblatt-Rosen O, Sharpe AH, Apetoh L, Regev A, Kuchroo V.K: B-cell specific checkpoint molecules that regulate anti-tumor immunity. *Nature* 2023, Jul;619(7969):348-356.

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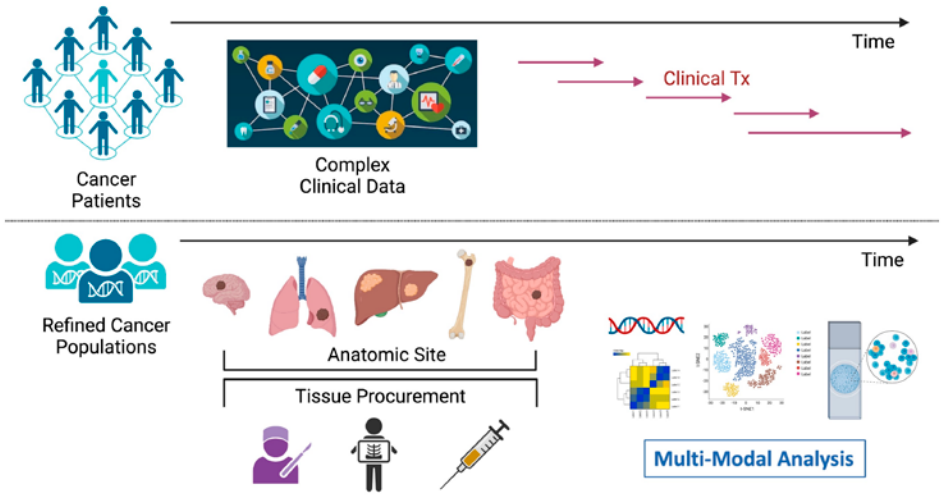
As a translational immuno-oncology laboratory, **the Boland laboratory** is focused on questions relating to tumor and immune interactions. The group uses a variety of complex approaches to characterize tumor biology and understand the interactions between tumor and immune cells and how these modify the surrounding tumor and tissue. Additionally, the Boland Lab is focused on identification of blood-based biomarkers to inform clinical decision-making. The areas of interest to the laboratory span from early cancer biology (why tumors form and/or metastasize) to how tumors respond to a variety of modern therapies. The Boland Lab bridges the complementary but disparate environments of clinical and basic research, with a primary goal of translating interesting research findings into meaningful clinical interventions based on the newest available technology.

The Boland Lab leads the Mass General correlative immuno-oncology efforts in melanoma and GI malignancies. The goal is to utilize patient-derived specimens (tumors/blood) to understand cancer biology, identify mechanisms of response and resistance to current therapies, identify biomarkers of therapeutic responses and immune-related toxicities, and nominate new targets for combinatorial trials. The group uses emerging technology to deconvolve tumor and immune interactions, integrating multiple complex datasets to understand the dynamic interplay occurring in the tumor microenvironment. The lab's translational research pipeline spans from clinical tissue and blood-based analyses to ex vivo tumor/immune modeling to small animal models of cancer. The focus of the Boland Lab is not limited to cutaneous melanoma but also includes rare melanoma subtypes and a variety of solid tumor histologies in which tumor-immune interactions are critical for tumor formation and propagation. Through these efforts, the Boland Lab has identified a de-differentiated tumor phenotype that is multi-drug resistant, and efforts are ongoing to target unique vulnerabilities in these cells thought to be responsible for downstream recurrences. Simultaneously, the Boland Lab has identified novel relationships between these resistant cell types and immune cells in the tumor microenvironment, allowing refinement of combinatorial therapeutic approaches.

In parallel, the Boland Lab is using the tumor-level analysis to identify and validate blood-based biomarkers allowing more cost-effective and clinically viable platforms to inform clinical decision making in real time. The approaches in the Boland Lab leverage extracellular vesicles, plasma proteomics, and immunophenotyping in parallel with integrated tumoral analysis for immunotherapy response prediction and monitoring, as well as for identifying and characterizing immune-related adverse events.

Finally, the group is focused on direct-to-tumor therapies, and Dr. Boland also serves as Director of the Therapeutic Intralesional Program. This component of the Boland Lab's efforts is directed toward clinical



The Boland Lab creates a translational pipeline arising directly from patient care and feeding back to next-generation clinical trials.

translation of research findings, with an emphasis on regionally applied therapies (e.g., oncolytic viruses, vaccines, ablative therapies). In this way, the Boland Lab is uniquely positioned between the clinical and translational realms, seamlessly creating a bidirectional pipeline informed by the clinical care of patients and feeding into the next generation of clinical trials.

Selected Publications:

Holder AM, Dedeilia A, Sierra-Davidson K, Cohen S, Liu D, Parikh A, **Boland GM**. Defining clinically useful biomarkers of immune checkpoint inhibitors in solid tumours. *Nat Rev Cancer.* 2024 Jul;24(7):498-512.

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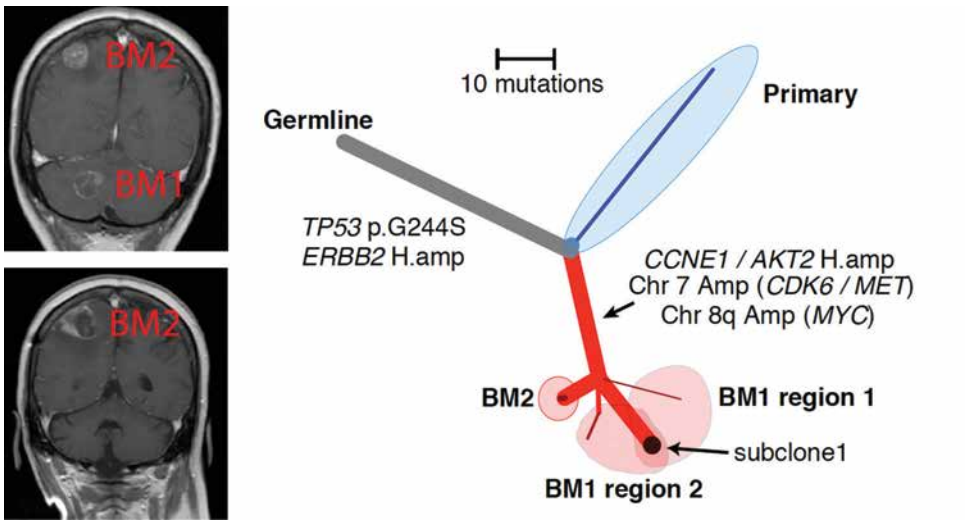
The Brastianos laboratory studies molecular drivers of human brain tumors. A lack of understanding of the molecular drivers of many brain tumors has hampered the development of novel therapies for many brain cancers. Our overarching objective is to characterize the tumor and immune microenvironment in primary brain tumors and brain metastases, and accelerate the development of novel therapeutic approaches for these diseases. We recently discovered clinically significant genetic drivers in meningiomas, craniopharyngiomas, hemangioblastomas, glioneuronal tumors and brain metastases. We are currently investigating the role of these genomic drivers as potential therapeutic targets in several national NCI-sponsored multi-center clinical trials. Additionally, we are expanding our in vitro and in vivo investigations to further elucidate the molecular evolution of the metastatic process to the central nervous system.

Characterizing genomic drivers of craniopharyngiomas

Craniopharyngiomas are a rare brain tumor that can cause profound clinical sequelae both through mass effect at presentation and through morbidity of treatment. Historically, incomplete knowledge of the molecular mechanisms that drive craniopharyngiomas has limited the development of targeted therapies for this tumor. We recently comprehensively characterized the molecular drivers of craniopharyngiomas. We identified activating mutations in CTNNB1 in nearly all adamantinomatous craniopharyngiomas and recurrent mutations in BRAF (resulting in p.Val600Glu) in nearly all papillary craniopharyngiomas (Brastianos et al. *Nature Genetics* 2014). These findings have important implications for the diagnosis and treatment of these neoplasms. We initiated a national multicenter trial in craniopharyngiomas (Alliance A071601) to investigate the role of targeted therapies in these tumors. In patients with newly diagnosed papillary craniopharyngioma, we showed that all patients who received one or more cycles of vemurafenib/cobimetinib had dramatic responses to therapy (Brastianos et al. *NEJM* 2023)

Identifying molecular drivers of meningiomas

Meningiomas are the most common primary nervous system tumor with no known effective systemic therapy. Recently, we comprehensively characterized meningiomas and demonstrated that meningiomas harbor recurrent oncogenic clinically actionable mutations in AKT1 (E17K) and SMO (W535L) (Brastianos et al. *Nature Genetics* 2013). Notably, these mutations were present in therapeutically challenging tumors of the skull base. We also recently identified potential genetics drivers of progression in meningiomas (BAP1, TERT promoter mutations, DMD). Our lab is working on developing better preclinical models of meningioma with the goal of testing new therapeutic targets in this disease. We are now conducting a prospective national multicenter Phase 2 study (A071401) of targeted therapy in patients with recurrent or progressive meningiomas harboring clinically actionable mutations, respectively (Brastianos et al. *JCO* 2023).



Representative phylogenetic tree of a primary tumor and 2 anatomically distinct brain metastases. Different regions of the brain metastases shared the same amplifications in CCNE1, AKT2, CDK6, MET and MYC, which were not present in the primary tumor biopsy.

Central nervous system metastasis center

Brain metastases are a common complication of cancer, with a dismal prognosis. There is a limited understanding of the oncogenic alterations harbored by brain metastases and whether these are shared with their primary tumors or other metastatic sites. The objectives of the Central Nervous System Metastasis Center are to (1) identify novel therapeutic targets through comprehensive molecular characterization, (2) functionally characterize candidate drivers through in vitro and in vivo models of metastasis, and (3) accelerate the application of our scientific findings to the clinical setting. We are comprehensively characterizing the tumor and immune microenvironment of brain metastases to understand how they evolve in the CNS. We have demonstrated that brain metastases harbor clinically actionable drivers not detected in the primary tumors (Brastianos, Carter et al. *Cancer Discovery* 2015). We are evaluating the roles of these genetic alterations using various assays of metastasis (Shih, Nayyar et al. *Nature Genetics* 2020) and inhibiting pathways commonly altered in brain metastases with novel therapies. In addition, using single-cell RNA sequencing, we are characterizing the dynamic changes in immune microenvironment during treatment (Prakadan et al. *Nature Communications* 2021). Based on the work in the lab, we have now initiated a national genomically guided brain metastasis trial (A071701). Our hope is that the findings from our genomic and functional investigations will allow us to develop more rational therapeutic approaches for this disease.

Selected Publications:

Brastianos PK et al. BRAF-MEK Inhibition in Newly Diagnosed Papillary Craniopharyngiomas. *N Engl J Med*. 2023 Jul 13;389(2):118-126.

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Prakadan SM, Alvarez-Breckenridge C.A., Markson SC, … Carter SL**, **Brastianos PK****, Shalek AK**. Genomic and transcriptomic correlates of immunotherapy response within the tumor microenvironment of leptomeningeal metastases. *Nat Commun*. 2021 Oct 12;12(1):5955

Brastianos PK*, Kim AE*, et al. Palbociclib demonstrates intracranial activity in progressive brain metastases harboring cyclin-dependent kinase pathway alterations. *Nature Cancer*. 2021; May;2 (5):498-502.

Shih DJH, Nayyar N,…Carter SL*, **Brastianos PK***. Genomic characterization of human brain metastases identifies drivers of metastatic lung adenocarcinoma. *Nat Genet*. 2020; Apr;52(4):371-377.

Brastianos PK, et al. Single-arm, open-label phase 2 trial of pembrolizumab in patients with leptomeningeal carcinomatosis. *Nat Med*. 2020; Aug;26(8):1280-1284.

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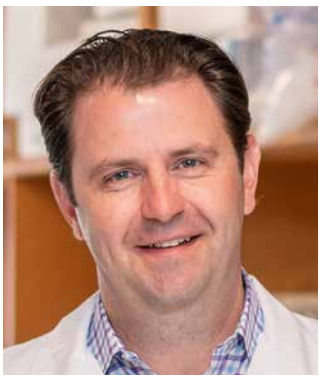
Ryan Corcoran, MD, PhD



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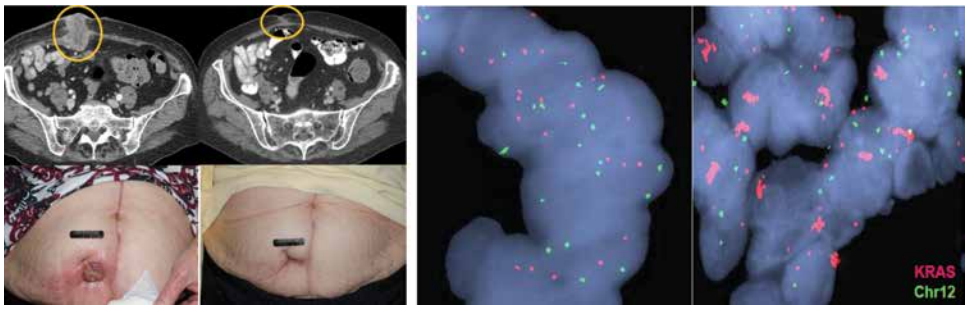
The Corcoran laboratory focuses on developing new and effective therapies for gastrointestinal cancers, including colorectal, pancreatic, stomach, and esophageal cancers, by targeting the specific survival signals that are active in a given patient's cancer. Our research utilizes targeted therapies, which are drugs that inhibit signaling pathways activated by the specific mutations that drive individual tumors. Since cancer cells often become resistant to these targeted therapies by activating alternative signaling pathways, we focus on identifying these key resistance signals in cancer cells. We utilize this information to devise effective combinations of targeted therapies that anticipate and ultimately overcome these mechanisms of drug resistance. Overall, our goal is to develop promising therapeutic strategies that can be evaluated in clinical trials for patients whose cancers are driven by specific mutations.

Targeted therapy strategies for gastrointestinal cancers

Historically, the standard clinical approach for patients with advanced cancers has been to treat all patients with the same tumor type with the same generalized chemotherapy strategy. However, even among patients with the same type of tumor, the genetic mutations driving tumor growth in each individual patient can be vastly different. As an alternative approach, by identifying the key gene mutations present in an individual patient's tumor, we can "personalize" therapy by matching each patient with specific therapies that target those mutations essential for tumor growth. Our laboratory focuses on developing targeted therapy strategies directed against specific mutations commonly found in gastrointestinal cancers, including cancers with BRAF and KRAS mutations. However, while targeted therapy strategies can lead to dramatic tumor responses, clinical benefit is often limited by the ability of tumor cells to evolve and develop resistance to therapy. By identifying and understanding the key signals driving resistance, our laboratory aims to devise combinations of targeted agents that can overcome or even prevent resistance.

BRAF-mutant colorectal cancer

BRAF mutations occur in 10-15% of colorectal cancers and confer poor prognosis. While BRAF inhibitors have shown dramatic anti-tumor activity in melanomas harboring BRAF mutations, these agents are ineffective in BRAF-mutant colorectal cancers. Therefore, our laboratory has focused on determinants of resistance to BRAF inhibitors in BRAF-mutant colorectal cancers. We have found that reactivation of the MAPK signaling pathway (often mediated through EGFR), contributes to the relative insensitivity of BRAF mutant colorectal cancers to BRAF inhibition. However, we found that combining BRAF inhibitors with EGFR and/or MEK inhibitors can overcome resistance, leading to improved efficacy (*Cancer Discovery*, 2012). We have also identified multiple mechanisms of resistance that can arise to these newer BRAF inhibitor combinations, and are utilizing this information to develop therapeutic strategies to surmount resistance (*Cancer Discovery*, 2015; *Cancer Discovery*, 2018).



Pre-treatment Week 16 Pre-treatment Post-progression

Response and resistance in BRAF-mutant colorectal cancer. (Left) Example of a dramatic tumor response in a patient treated with the combination of a BRAF and a MEK inhibitor. (Right) KRAS amplification (red probes) can lead to BRAF inhibitor resistance in BRAF mutant colorectal cancer patients.

KRAS-mutant cancers

KRAS is the most commonly mutated oncogene in human cancer, mutated in ~20% of all cancers, including pancreatic (~90%) and colorectal cancers (~40%). Currently no effective therapies exist for KRAS-mutant cancers because KRAS itself has proven difficult to target directly with small molecules. Currently, our work focuses on identifying novel target pathways in KRAS-mutant cancers through hypothesis-based and large-scale pooled RNA interference screening approaches, with the goal of developing new targeted therapy combination approaches for KRAS-mutant cancers. We have identified adaptive feedback signals that impede the ability of MEK inhibitors to suppress MAPK signaling and have explored the role of novel agents (ERK inhibitors) or convergent signaling nodes to overcome feedback. We have expanded these approaches to identify other potentially effective targets in KRAS-mutant cancers, including direct KRAS inhibitors. Despite promising clinical responses in KRAS-G12C mutant NSCLC, there has been limited efficacy of G12C inhibitors as single agents in colon cancer. To address this limitation, we have defined key mechanisms of adaptive feedback resistance in response to KRAS inhibition and have employed vertical pathway inhibition strategies targeting the RAS-MAPK pathway as described in a recent publication (*Clinical Cancer Research*, 2020).

Translational Oncology

The overall goal of our research is to develop improved treatments for patients with gastrointestinal cancers and to identify molecular markers that may help us identify those patients most likely to respond to a given therapy. As such, our laboratory takes a highly translational approach to bringing new therapeutic strategies into the clinic for evaluation in novel clinical trials. Based on our observations, we have launched several clinical trials of BRAF inhibitor combinations in BRAF-mutant colorectal cancers that are showing increased efficacy (*J Clinical Oncology*, 2015). We have also developed a clinical trial combining the BCL-XL/BCL-2 inhibitor navitoclax with the MEK inhibitor trametinib in KRAS-mutant cancers.

To guide our laboratory investigations, we are utilizing key clinical specimens, including tumor biopsies and patient-derived tumor models to understand how tumors become resistant to therapy. We also utilize serial blood collections for circulating tumor DNA analysis to monitor the tumor heterogeneity and clonal dynamics associated with the emergence of therapeutic resistance (*Cancer Discovery* 2015, *Nature Medicine* 2015, *Cancer Discovery* 2016, *Cancer Discovery* 2017, *Cancer Discovery* 2018.)

Selected Publications:

Rubinson DA, Tanaka N, Fece de la Cruz F, Kapner KS, Rosenthal MH, Norden BL, Barnes H, Ehnstrom S, Morales-Giron AA, Brais LK, Lemke CT, Aguirre AJ, **Corcoran RB**. Sotorasib Is a Pan-RASG12C Inhibitor Capable of Driving Clinical Response in NRASG12C Cancers. *Cancer Discov*. 2024 May 1;14(5):727-736.

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Ryan MB, Coker O, Sorokin A, Fella K, Barnes H, Wong E, Kanikarla P, Gao F, Zhang Y, Zhou L, Kopetz S, **Corcoran RB**. KRASG12C-independent feedback activation of wild-type RAS constrains KRASG12C inhibitor efficacy. *Cell Rep*. 2022 Jun 21;39(12):110993. doi: 10.1016/j.celrep.2022.110993.

Tanaka N, Lin JJ, Li C, Ryan MB, Zhang J, Kiedrowski LA, Michel AG, Syed MU, Fella KA, Sakhi M, Baiev I, Juric D, Gainor JF, Klempner SJ, Lennerz JK, Siravegna G, Bar-Peled L, Hata AN, Heist RS, **Corcoran RB**. Clinical acquired resistance to KRASG12C inhibition through a novel KRAS switch-II pocket mutation and polyclonal alterations converging on RAS-MAPK reactivation. *Cancer Discov.* 2021 Aug;11 (8):1913-1922.

Parikh AR*, Leshchiner I*, Elagina L*, Goyal L, Levovitz C, Siravegna G,... Iafrate AJ, Adalsteinsson VA, Bardelli A, Parida L, Juric D, Getz G, **Corcoran RB**. Liquid versus tissue biopsy for detecting acquired resistance and tumor heterogeneity in gastrointestinal cancers. *Nature Medicine*/2019 Sep;25(9):1415-1421).

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*Denotes equal contribution

Shawn Demehri, MD, PhD

The focus of **the Demehri laboratory** is to determine the role of the immune system in regulating the early stages of cancer development in order to harness its anti-tumor potential for cancer prevention and treatment. To date, several cancer immunotherapies have been developed with proven efficacy against late-stage cancers; however, the role of the immune system in preventing the early development of cancer remains uncertain. The research in the Demehri laboratory is focused on identifying the immune mechanisms that drive an immune activation sufficient to prevent cancer formation from pre-cancerous lesions. This approach raises a great opportunity to discover novel immune pathways that can be leveraged in cancer prevention and therapy.

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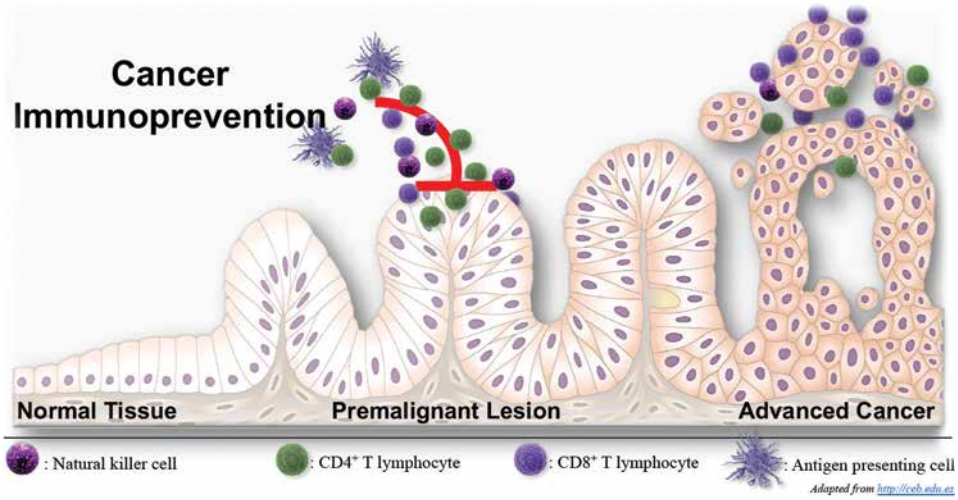
The field of cancer immunology has made substantial advances in recent years by deciphering the role of the tumor infiltrating CD8+ cytotoxic T lymphocytes (CTLs) in attacking cancer cells, which have led to promising new cancer immunotherapeutics. The current immunotherapeutic approaches, however, are largely designed to boost the anti-tumor immune response that has already formed against late-stage metastatic cancers. Therefore, the current cancer immunotherapies like immune checkpoint blockade, which rely on a pre-existing CTL infiltrate in the tumor for their effects, are proven ineffective to treat cancers that frequently lack a significant anti-tumor immune infiltrate, especially during the early in-situ phases of their development. In order to expand the potential of cancer immunotherapy, our laboratory studies the pathways that lead to immune system activation against early phases of cancer development. Devising a mechanism to activate the immune system against early-stage cancers has clear immunopreventive implications by directly blocking the cancer promotion and immunotherapeutic benefits by potentiating the immunity against late disease.

To pursue this goal, our laboratory studies the role of alarmins, damage-associated molecular patterns (DAMPs)/stress signals, commensal viruses, carcinogens, and aging-associated factors in regulating early cancer development. The major areas of research in our laboratory are:

1) Mechanisms of CD4+ T cell activation against cancer. Our laboratory has studied the mechanism of thymic stromal lymphopoietin (TSLP) in evoking tumor suppression. TSLP is an epithelial-derived cytokine that plays a central role in stimulating CD4+ T helper 2 (Th2)-mediated allergic diseases like atopic dermatitis and asthma. We have shown that high TSLP levels establish a dominant anti-tumorigenic immune environment preventing cancer promotion. Currently, our team investigates the detailed mechanism of TSLP anti-tumor function against solid cancers and examines its application for the treatment of pre-cancerous skin and breast lesions in patients.

2) Mechanisms of natural killer (NK) cell recruitment and activation against cancer. NK cells are known for their potent anti-tumor properties. However, their role in controlling cancer development in vivo remains unclear. Our laboratory utilizes an NK cell-specific activating ligand to determine the combination of signals necessary to activate NK cells against early stages of carcinogenesis and to identify the mechanism of anti-tumor immunity mounted



Immune Regulation of Early Cancer Development.

by the activated NK cells to block cancer promotion and progression.

3) The impact of commensal viruses-immune system interplays on the homeostasis of the organs exposed to environmental carcinogens. We aim to determine how the immune system's control of commensal virome regulates the homeostasis of the virus-colonized tissues. Through this effort, we aim to realize the beneficial functions of commensal virome for the prevention and treatment of cancer and other chronic diseases that affect humans.

4) Mechanisms of cancer promotion by the immune system. Although immune cells can mount anti-tumor immunity against cancer, they are also implicated in promoting cancer development in chronic inflammation. Our laboratory studies the initiating mechanisms of cancer-prone chronic inflammation development in the skin, pancreas, colon and liver, which are the major organs affected by chronic inflammation and its cancer sequela.

Selected Publications:

Park JH, Mortaja M, Son HG, Zhao X, Sloat LM, Azin M, Wang J, Collier MR, Tummala KS, Mandinova A, Bardeesy N, Semenov YR, Mino-Kenudson M, **Demehri S**. Statin prevents cancer development in chronic inflammation by blocking interleukin 33 expression. *Nat Commun.* 2024 May 30;15(1):4099.

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Strickley JD, Messerschmidt JL, Awad ME, Li T, Hasegawa T, Ha DT, Nabeta HW, Bevins PA, Ngo KH, Asgari MM, Nazarian RM, Neel VA, Jenson AB, Joh J, and **Demehri S**. Immunity to commensal papillomaviruses protects against skin cancer. *Nature.* 2019 Nov;575(7783):519-522.

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Andrew Elia, MD, PhD

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In response to DNA damage from environmental or endogenous sources, cells evoke an elaborate signaling network known as the DNA damage response (DDR). This response functions to preserve genomic integrity, which is necessary for normal development and the prevention of cancer. **The Elia laboratory** studies the DNA damage response, focusing on pathways regulated by ubiquitin-dependent signaling and pathways that promote the stabilization and repair of stalled replication forks. We utilize innovative proteomic and genetic approaches to investigate these processes. Our ultimate goal is to understand how DDR disruption influences cancer progression and can be exploited to target tumors with specific DNA repair defects.

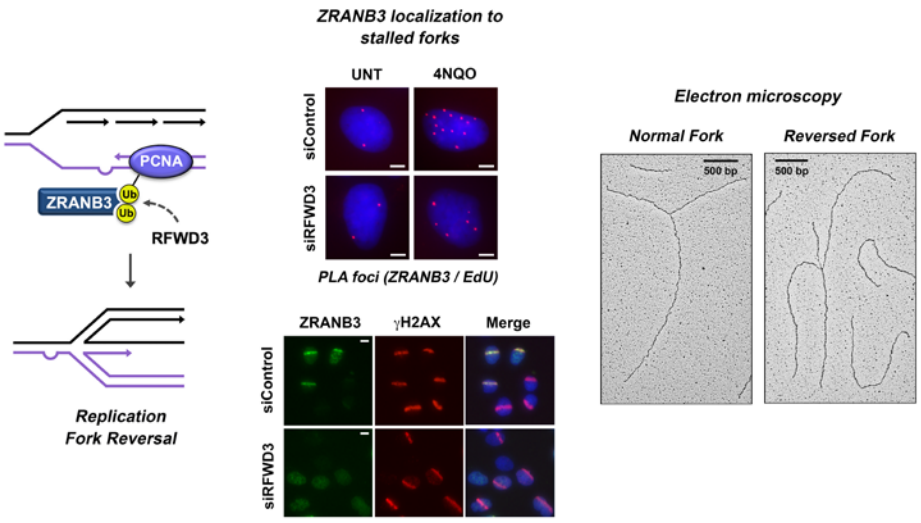
Ubiquitin signaling in the DNA damage response

DNA within cells is under continual assault from metabolic and environmental sources. In response to the ensuing damage, cells activate a signaling network called the DNA damage response (DDR). Defects in this response can lead to hereditary cancer syndromes and can underlie the genomic instability which is a hallmark of sporadic cancers. The DDR promotes genomic integrity by targeting hundreds of factors in diverse pathways ranging from DNA replication and repair to cell-cycle arrest, senescence, and immune regulation. Execution of the DDR relies upon a dynamic array of protein modifications, with ubiquitination playing a central role. Our lab elucidates ubiquitin-dependent signaling pathways that regulate and integrate diverse DDR factors.

Replication-coupled repair and cancer

Replication fork collapse can induce chromosome instability and mutagenic events that cause cancer. Organisms have therefore evolved pathways to stabilize stalled replication forks and to repair collapsed forks through processes such as homologous recombination (HR). Multiple factors involved in HR and replication fork stabilization, such as BRCA1 and BRCA2, are mutated in hereditary cancer syndromes, highlighting the importance of these pathways. We have demonstrated that the ubiquitin ligase RFWD3, which is mutated in the cancer predisposition syndrome Fanconi anemia, ubiquitinates the single-stranded DNA binding factor RPA to promote homologous recombination at stalled replication forks and replication fork restart (*Mol Cell* 2015b).

Replication fork reversal is an important mechanism to protect the stability of stalled forks. While multiple enzymes have been identified that can remodel forks, their regulation remains poorly understood. We have recently discovered a new function for RFWD3 in the regulation of fork remodeling (*J Cell Biol* 2023). We have found that RFWD3 promotes PCNA polyubiquitination to recruit the DNA translocase ZRANB3 to stalled replication forks. Through the analysis of replication intermediates by electron microscopy, we found that RFWD3 promotes replication fork reversal in a ZRANB3-epistatic manner. We are continuing to elucidate novel mechanisms of replication-coupled repair and fork stabilization regulated by ubiquitin signaling.



RFWD3 promotes PCNA polyubiquitination to recruit the DNA translocase ZRANB3 to remodel stalled replication forks (J Cell Biol 2023).

Quantitative proteomics

Numerous ubiquitin ligases have been implicated in the DNA damage response, yet finding their substrates by simple binding techniques can be difficult due to weak substrate interactions. To circumvent this problem, we have pioneered a quantitative proteomic approach to globally profile ubiquitination. Initially, we used this approach to identify substrates of Cullin-RING ubiquitin ligases (*Cell* 2011), which are involved in numerous DNA repair processes. Subsequently, we used it to uncover novel ubiquitination events directly stimulated by DNA damage (*Mol Cell* 2015a), demonstrating the vast breadth of ubiquitin signaling in the DDR. We are continuing to use innovative proteomic approaches to characterize novel and poorly understood ubiquitin ligases in DNA damage signaling pathways.

Targeted cancer therapy

Defects in the DNA damage response can render tumors dependent upon specific DNA repair pathways for survival. Moreover, targeted modulation of the DDR can affect tumor sensitivity to genotoxic treatments and immunotherapy. Increased understanding of DNA repair pathways will lead to enhanced opportunities for developing therapies that target cancers with DNA repair defects, and for improving the efficacy of genotoxic and immunotherapy agents. We are employing methods to translate our work to the development of such therapies.

Selected Publications:

Moore CE, Yalcindag SE, Czeladko H, Ravindranathan R, Wijesekara Hanthi Y, Levy JC, Sannino V, Schindler D, Ciccia A, Costanzo V, **Elia AE**. RFWD3 Promotes ZRANB3 Recruitment to Regulate the Remodeling of Stalled Replication Forks. *J Cell Biol*, 2023; 222(5): e202106022

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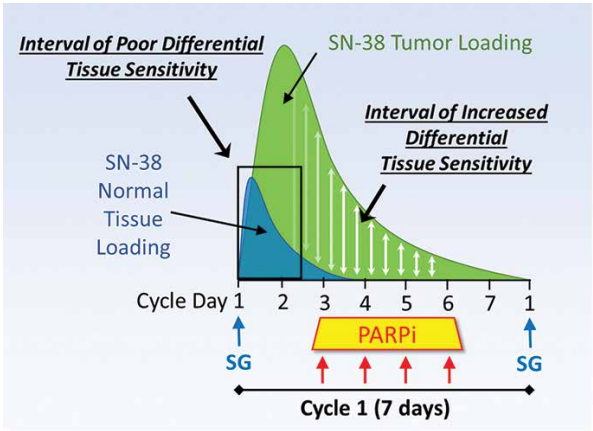
The Ellisen laboratory has a broad interest in how genetic abnormalities in breast cancer and related malignancies influence tumor biology and how that biology can, in turn, be exploited to therapeutic advantage. We address these questions through basic research studies of key cancer hallmarks. including DNA repair defects through BRCA1/2 and related pathways and transcriptional reprogramming through the p53 gene family. Supporting and complementing these studies are sophisticated analyses of patient-derived precancerous and cancerous tissues. Recent innovative tissue-based studies have led to our discovery of novel cancer drivers and have provided a unique window into early cancer pathogenesis, intratumoral heterogeneity, and therapeutic resistance. Our discoveries in the basic laboratory and through human tumor analysis are being applied in ongoing clinical trials that seek to identify predictive markers of response to innovative therapeutics for breast and other cancers. Our ability to work at the interface of basic tumor biology and therapeutic application is strongly supported by our network of collaborators and by the research and clinical infrastructure of the Mass General Cancer Center. For more details, please see our website, Ellisenlab.com.

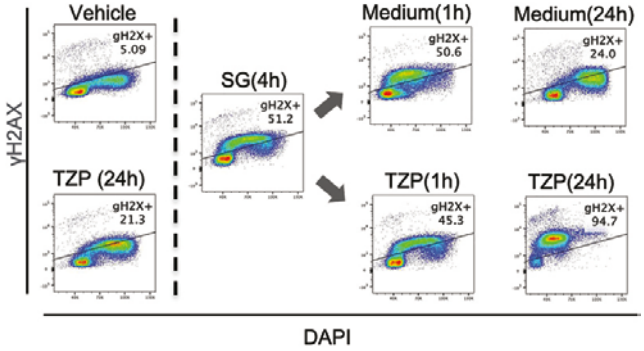
Novel drivers of aggressive breast cancer subtypes

Our work employing advanced tumor molecular diagnostics has revealed gene fusions as novel drivers of an aggressive breast cancer subset. In triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC), extensive intratumoral heterogeneity is itself a driver that we have characterized through single-cell genomic and transcriptomic analysis, leading to our discovery of unanticipated drug resistance mechanisms with immediate therapeutic implications. Of particular interest is resistance to novel Antibody Drug Conjugates (ADCs) that are transforming cancer therapy. Unraveling the complex nature of ADC resistance is a long-term goal of ours that touches every aspect of tumor biology and will have major clinical impact. Our longstanding work on the biology of TNBC is supported by the institution-wide Triple-Negative Breast Cancer Program, which integrates basic research, translational and clinical studies together with human tumor propagation and high-throughput drug screening, all focused on overcoming drug resistance and improving outcomes for patients with TNBC.

BRCA1/2, hereditary cancer predisposition and prevention

Germline mutations in the DNA repair genes BRCA1 and BRCA2 confer dramatically elevated risk of cancers of the breast, ovary, and pancreas, yet the precise pathogenesis of BRCA1/2-associated cancer remains to be elucidated. Together with an international team of collaborators we are carrying out systematic studies of early events that give rise to these cancers, in part through detailed molecular analysis of normal and pre-cancerous tissues from BRCA1/2 mutation carriers. Defining the altered signaling and early cooperating events in this context is likely to reveal new markers of breast cancer predisposition and new targets for prevention. For example, our published single-cell genome analysis has revealed extensive chromosomal damage in BRCA-mutant breast tissues that precedes any





The schematic at the top demonstrates that tumor-selective delivery of cytotoxic SN-38 via the Antibody-Drug Conjugate Sacituzumab govitecan (SG) allows normal cells to rapidly clear the drug, while sequential PARP inhibitor (PARPi) treatment is toxic to tumor cells with residual SN-38. Above, flow cytometry plots showing SG induces DNA damage (g-H2AX) that is rapidly repaired following washout (Medium) but progresses to lethal damage in the presence of PARP inhibitor Talazoparib (TZP). The concept of sequential SG/TZP dosing was successfully applied in our clinical trial for advanced breast cancer (Bardia, Ellisen et al, Clin. Cancer. Res. 2024).

histological abnormalities. This seminal finding implies the existence of early cellular defects and associated vulnerabilities that could be exploited for cancer prevention in this setting.

The p53 family network in cancer biology and therapy

As a transcription factor and key nodal point for integrating cellular stress responses, the p53 tumor suppressor controls diverse cellular processes, including cell cycle progression, survival, and metabolism. Through analysis of two p53-related genes, p63 and p73, we and others have defined a functional network including a tissue-specific role for p63 as the enforcer of an epigenetically controlled stem/progenitor state. Tumor-selective deregulation of p63 and associated chromatin remodeling factors reprogram the transcriptome to inhibit differentiation and promote immune evasion. These findings likely explain why p63 is over-expressed in a large variety of epithelial tumors, particularly squamous cell and breast carcinomas. Collectively, this work serves as a paradigm for the analysis of transcriptional reprogramming in cancer.

Selected Publications:

Coates JT, Sun S, Leshchiner I, Thimmiah N, Martin EE, McLoughlin D, Danysh BP, Slowik K, Jacobs RA, Rhrissorrakrai K, Utro F, Levovitz C, Denault E, Walmsley CS, Kambadakone A, Stone JR, Isakoff SJ, Parida L, Juric D, Getz G, Bardia A, and **Ellisen LW**. Parallel genomic alterations of antigen and payload targets mediate polyclonal acquired clinical resistance to sacituzumab govitecan in triple-negative breast cancer. *Cancer Discovery.* 2021 11:1-10.

Koh SB, **Ellisen LW**. Immune activation and evolution through chemotherapy plus checkpoint blockade in triple-negative breast cancer. *Cancer Cell.* 2021 Dec 13;39(12):1562-1564.

Karaayvaz M, Silberman RE, Langenbucher A, Saladi SV, Ross KN, Zarcaro E, Desmond A, Yildirim M, Vivekanandan V, Ravichandran H, Mylavagnanam R, Specht MC, Ramaswamy S, Lawrence M, Amon A, **Ellisen LW**. Aneuploidy and a deregulated DNA damage response suggest haploinsufficiency in breast tissues of BRCA2 mutation carriers. *Science Advances.* 2020;6:5.

Karaayvaz M, Cristea S, Gillespie SM, Patel AP, Mylvaganam R, Luo CC, Specht MC, Bernstein BE, Michor F, and **Ellisen LW**. Unravelling subclonal heterogeneity and aggressive disease states in TNBC through single-cell RNA-seq. *Nature Communications*. 2018 9:3588-97.

Matissek KJ, Onozato ML, Sun S, Zheng Z, Schultz A, Lee J, Patel K, Jerevall PL, Saladi SV,...Finkelstein DM, Le LP, Bardia A, Goss PE, Sgroi DC, Iafrate AJ, **Ellisen LW**. Expressed Gene Fusions as Frequent Drivers of Poor Outcomes in Hormone Receptor-Positive Breast Cancer. *Cancer Discovery*. 2018; 8:336-353.

Saladi SV, Ross K, Karaayvaz M, Tata PR, Mou H, Rajagopal J, Ramaswamy S, and **Ellisen LW**. ACTL6A is co- Amplified with p63 in Squamous Cell Carcinoma to Drive YAP Activation, Regenerative Proliferation and Poor Prognosis. *Cancer Cell*. 2017 31:35-49.

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The Fisher laboratory focuses on mechanistic studies which underlie the biology and pathophysiology of skin and melanoma. Research studies range from molecular analyses of pigment cell biology to risk factors responsible for the formation of melanoma and other skin cancers. The laboratory utilizes deep molecular tools to understand how genes are regulated, how they contribute to cancer formation, and how they may be successfully targeted by drugs in order to improve disease treatments or to prevent disease formation altogether. Several areas of particular focus include 1) the study of redhair, fair skinned pigmentation and the manner in which such individuals are at increased risk for skin cancer; 2) identification and analysis of oncogenes which control melanoma cell survival; 3) discovery of new drugs that affect pigmentation, melanoma survival, and other skin-related effects; and 4) examination of the ways in which a gene called MITF plays a master-regulatory role in specifying the development of pigment-producing cells in the body.

We study cell death, proliferation, and lineage differentiation signals in relation to development and disease, particularly in cancer of pigment cells (melanoma). We attempt to understand critical modes of cell homeostasis with a goal of enhancing therapeutic as well as prevention opportunities for melanoma and other cancers. Areas of particular focus are explained below.

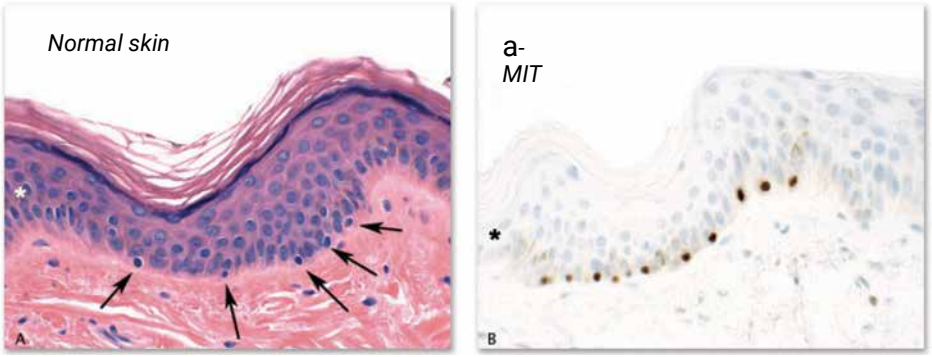
Lessons for malignancy from normal development

We focus heavily on the study of melanocytes, the cells responsible for production of constitutive as well as environmentally responsive pigmentation. This area of research includes examination of the mechanisms transmitting the signals from ultraviolet radiation to the pigmentation machinery in skin. We also study the growth/survival of benign melanocytic nevi, most of which contain mutations in either BRAF or N-Ras oncogenes. One extreme example, Giant Congenital Nevi, are a common cause of childhood melanoma, and we have modeled this in mice, as well as developed potential topical drug approaches to regressing them. We also study melanocyte death in hair follicles, a process associated with hair graying. Our work led to the identification of pathways linking graying to melanocyte and melanoma survival, offering potential leads for novel therapies.

Technology development is an important component of our work. We now routinely develop melanocytes and keratinocytes from iPS cells, and are actively studying production of Dermal Papilla cells (also from iPS) and utilize novel grafting approaches to produce human genetically controlled models of in vivo skin and hair.

Control of life and death in melanoma

Malignant transformation of melanocytes produces one of the most treatment-resistant malignancies in human cancers. We have identified a transcriptional network that regulates melanoma cell survival and proliferation and melanocyte differentiation during development. Using



Histologic images of human skin. Left image shows hematoxylin and eosin (H&E) stain. The top layer is Stratum Corneum (consisting of dead cell derivatives) followed by the deeper purple keratinocyte cell layers constituting the epidermis. Beneath the epidermis is the pink, collagen containing dermis. Melanocytes reside at the base of the epidermis and are highlighted by arrows. The image to the right shows antibody staining for the melanocytic transcription factor MITF, which highlights the melanocytes at the dermal-epidermal junction.

Histologic images were generated by Dr. Scott Granter.

diverse methods— including mouse models, human tumor omics, and cellular assays— we examine mechanisms through which melanoma cells evade death with the goal of improving therapy. Studies include preclinical and clinical analyses of immunotherapy mechanisms and other novel melanoma treatments. Finally we discovered that UV triggers production of endorphin in skin, leading to sun-seeking behavior. We have also identified vitamin D as evolutionary driver of this response, leading to potentially important implications for opiate addiction.

MITF transcription factor family in development and cancer

MITF is a helix-loop-helix factor homologous to the Myc gene which, when mutated in humans, produces absence of melanocytes. MITF acts as a master regulator of melanocyte development and is targeted by several critical signaling pathways. Recently, members of the MITF family have been identified as oncogenes in a variety of human malignancies, particularly sarcomas of childhood. We are currently investigating their roles in cancer as well as strategies to target them therapeutically. Detailed mechanistic studies focus on transcription factor interactions with chromatin, and epigenetic control of gene expression.

Selected Publications:

Choi YS, Erlich TH, von Franque M, … Demehri S, Hawryluk EB, and **Fisher DE**. Topical therapy for regression and melanoma prevention of congenital giant nevi. *Cell* 2022 Jun 9 185(12): 2071-2085

Allouche J, Rachmin I, Adhikari K,… Ruiz-Linares A, **Fisher DE***, Roider E*. NNT mediates redox-dependent pigmentation via a UVB- and MITF-independent mechanism. *Cell*. 2021 Aug 5;184(16):4268-4283.e20.

Lo JA, Kawakubo M, Junega VR, Su MY,…Sharpe AH, Manstein D, **Fisher DE**. Epitope spreading toward wild-type melanocyte-lineage antigens rescues suboptimal immune checkpoint blockade responses. *Sci Transl Med*. 2021 Feb 17;13(581)

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Lo JA, **Fisher DE**. The melanoma revolution: from UV carcinogenesis to a new era in therapeutics. *Science*. 2014 Nov 21;346(6212):945-9.

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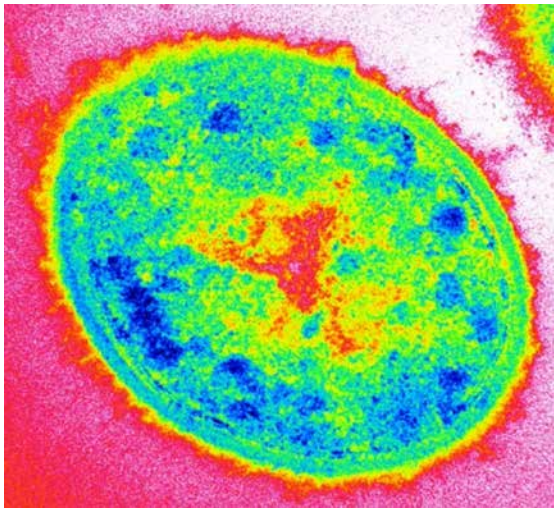
Gut microbiota — the trillions of bacteria, fungi, viruses, and archaea that reside in our gut — contain a dynamic arsenal of products that can protect from or contribute to disease. Diet, medication, exercise and disease impact the composition of the microbiota and influence the products the microbes produce. In turn, specific microbes influence immune cell function in both normal and disease states. **The Gazzaniga laboratory** focuses on unraveling this complex ecosystem that holds huge therapeutic potential, and that reveals the dynamic interplay of environmental factors, microbes, microbial products and immune cells. Specifically, we focus on three main questions: (1) Which bacteria are associated with response in cancer patients? (2) Which gut bacterial produced molecules impact anti-tumor immunity? (3) How do microbe-mediated immune responses impact the anti-tumor response to immunotherapy? Our ultimate goal is to uncover mechanistic information to develop microbe-based therapies that fine-tune the immune system to fight cancer.

The trillions of bacteria that inhabit our intestinal tract as part of our gut microbiota have a dynamic relationship with our immune system. For example, the bacteria in the gut impact the anti-tumor response of immune checkpoint inhibitors on tumors outside of the gut. Treatment with checkpoint inhibitors, such as antibodies targeting programmed cell death protein 1 (PD-1) or programmed cell death ligand 1 (PD-L1), disrupts interactions between PD-1 on T cells and PD-L1 on tumors, reinvigorating T cells to kill cancer cells. Although checkpoint inhibitors are used to treat a wide variety of cancers, the response rates are variable. Understanding what impacts the efficacy of checkpoint inhibitors is critical to increase the number of patients who respond to treatment.

Fecal transplants from melanoma patients who responded to PD-1 blockade can overcome resistance in non-responders. However, the efficacy of the fecal transplants varies with different donors, highlighting the need to understand how bacteria impact anti-tumor immunity. The purpose of the Gazzaniga lab is to translate the notion that the microbiome plays a role in anti-tumor immunity into reliable, microbiome-inspired treatments that increase the number of patients who respond to checkpoint blockade.

Patient stool samples: What is associated with response?

Many studies examining the role of the gut microbiome in response to checkpoint blockade therapy focused on melanoma. However, PD-1 blockade is approved for over 25 different cancers. Depending on the cancer type, PD-1 blockade efficacy ranges from 2%-87%. Therefore, understanding how the microbiome impacts the anti-tumor responses of checkpoint blockade in other cancers is critical to increase the number of patients who respond. We collaborate with clinicians at MGB to analyze stool samples from patients with different cancers at the beginning and end of treatment with checkpoint inhibitors. We investigate which treatments impact the gut microbiome and which bacteria are associated with anti-tumor responses in different cancers.



We isolated Erysipelatoclostridium ramosum from healthy human microbiota and found that it promotes an anti-tumor response to anti-PD-L1 therapy. We are currently isolating the anti-tumor molecule it produces and are investigating the immune pathways it impacts to promote anti-tumor immunity.

Searching for patient-derived therapeutics: What bacterial molecules promote anti-tumor immunity?

Many have sought to identify individual bacteria that could be used as probiotics in the clinic to promote anti-tumor immunity. However, several obstacles make probiotics an unreliable therapy. There are difficulties in delivering live anaerobic bacteria, difficulties in engraftment of probiotics in humans already colonized with bacteria, and differences between lab culture conditions and the human intestine that could contribute to the anti-tumor activity of the bacteria. Bacterial molecules, on the other hand, can be delivered and tested more reproducibly and thus bypass the variability of probiotics and fecal transplants. Using germ-free mice, which lack all microbes, we can investigate how different bacteria impact tumor outcomes. We have isolated two bacterial strains from a healthy human microbiome that promote anti-tumor immunity to PD-1 blockade and are currently identifying the anti-tumor molecules they produce. Next, we will isolate bacterial molecules from patient responder stool to develop reproducibly delivered patient-derived bacterial therapeutics to increase the efficacy of checkpoint inhibitor therapy.

Learning from bacteria: Which microbe-mediated immune mechanisms can we harness to promote anti-tumor immunity?

By comparing mice colonized with healthy human microbiota to mice treated with broad spectrum antibiotics, we have identified several immune pathways in the tumor-draining lymph nodes that are impacted by gut bacteria and associated with anti-tumor immunity. By targeting these immune pathways, we can convert non-responders to responders in multiple tumor models. To make our mouse models more clinically relevant, we compare mice colonized with patient non-responder or responder microbiota to identify immune pathways impacted only by responder microbes. Our overall goal is to learn from bacteria and develop therapeutics that target the immune pathways impacted by responder microbiota to increase the number of patients who respond to treatment.

Selected Publications:

Sarkar A, McInroy CJA, Harty S, Raulo A, Ilbata NGO, Valles-Colomer M, Johnson K V-A, Brito IL, Henrich J, Archie EA, Barreiro LB, **Gazzaniga FS,** Finlay BB, Koonin EV, Carmody RN, Moeller AH. Microbial transmission in the social microbiome and host health and disease. *Cell.* 187 17-43 (2024).

Park JS*, **Gazzaniga FS***, Wu M, Gillis J, Zheng W, LaFleur MW, Johnson SB, Morad G, Park EM, Zhou Y, Watowich SS, Wargo JA, Freeman GJ**, Kasper DL**, Sharpe AH**. Targeting PD-L2–RGMb overcomes microbiome-related immunotherapy resistance. *Nature.* 2023 Jun 28.

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Jalili-Firoozinezhad S†, **Gazzaniga FS**†, Calamari EL† , Camacho DM, Fadel CW, Bein A, Swenor B, Nestor B, Cronce MJ, Tovaglieri A, Levy O, Gregory KE, Breault DT, Cabral JMS, Kasper DL, Novak R, Ingber DE. A complex human gut microbiome cultured in an anaerobic intestine- on-a-chip. *Nat Biomed Eng.* 2019 Jul;3(7):520-531

Erturk-Hasdemir D, Oh SF, Okan NA, Stefanetti G, **Gazzaniga FS**, Seeberger PH, Plevy SE, Kasper DL. Symbionts exploit complex signaling to educate the immune system. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A.* 2019 Dec 26;116(52):26157-26166.

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The Getz laboratory is focused on cancer genome analysis, which includes two major steps: (i) Characterization – cataloging of all genomic events and the mechanisms that created them during the clonal evolution of cancer (starting from normal cells and progressing to premalignancy, primary cancer, and emergence of resistance), comparing events at the DNA, RNA, and protein levels between one or more tumor and normal samples from an individual patient; and (ii) Interpretation – analysis of the characterization data across a cohort of patients with the aim of identifying the alterations in genes and pathways that drive cancer progression, drive resistance, or increase its risk as well as identifying molecular subtypes of the disease, their markers, and relationship to clinical variables. Recently the Getz lab is also studying the tumor and its immune microenvironment using bulk, single-cell RNA-sequencing (RNA-seq) and spatial data. In addition to developing tools for high throughput analysis of cancer data and experimentally testing the findings, the Getz lab develops computer platforms that enable large-scale analytics and visualization.

Characterizing the cancer genome

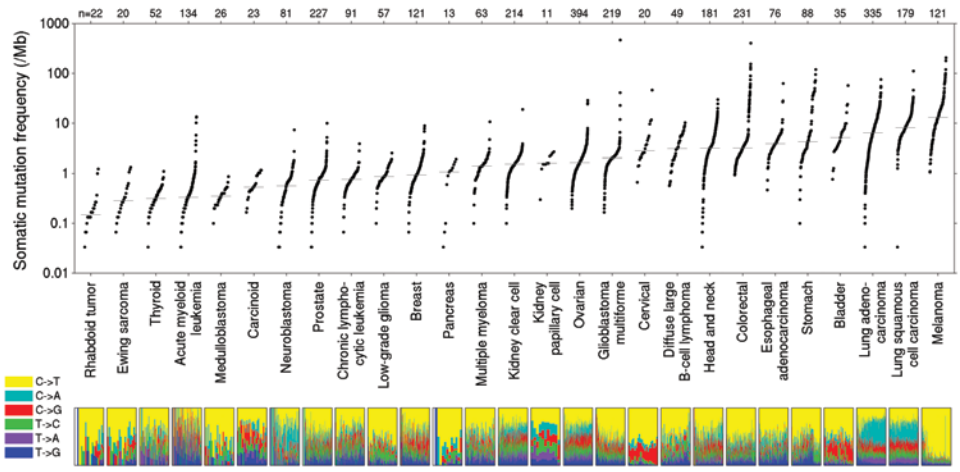
Cancer is a disease of the genome driven by a combination of possible germline risk-alleles, together with a few 'driver' somatic mutations that increase fitness and promote clonal expansion. Mutations occur at all levels and scales, including (i) DNA point mutations; (ii) small insertions and deletions; (iii) larger genomic rearrangements and copy-number alterations; and (iv) epigenetic, transcriptional, and proteomic changes. To generate a comprehensive list of all germline and somatic events that occurred during (and prior to) cancer development, we are developing and applying highly sensitive and specific tools to detect these events in sequencing data. The complexity of the underlying cancer genomes requires state-of-the-art statistical and machine learning approaches to most efficiently extract the signal from the noise.

Detecting cancer-associated genes

After detecting genomic events, we search for genes (and pathways) that show significant signals of positive selection (e.g., the number of mutations exceeds what is expected by chance) across a cohort of samples by constructing a detailed statistical model of the background mutational processes and detecting genes that deviate from it. We developed tools to discover genes significantly gained or lost (GISTIC), and genes with increased density or irregular mutational patterns (MutSig, CLUMPS). In these analyses, correctly modeling the heterogeneity of mutational processes across patients, sequence contexts, and the genome is critical. We are constantly improving methods and working towards a unified method for all types of alterations. We also discovered drivers in non-coding regions of the genome in breast cancer (e.g., hotspot mutations in FOXA1 promoter that likely alter its expression) and, more recently, across cancer, as part of a large international effort.

Heterogeneity and clonal evolution of cancer

Cancer samples are heterogeneous: non-cancer cells intermingle with a cancer cell population that typically contains multiple subclones. Since cancer is a dynamic



Somatic mutation frequencies across cancer.
Each dot represents the total frequency of somatic mutations (in the exome) in each tumor–normal pair. Tumor types are ordered by their median somatic mutation frequency, from haematological and paediatric tumors (left), to tumours induced by carcinogens such as tobacco smoke and ultraviolet light (right). Mutation frequencies vary more than 1,000-fold between lowest and highest across different cancers and also within several tumour types. The bottom panel shows the relative proportions of the six different possible base-pair substitutions. Taken from Lawrence et al. (2013).

system, these subclones may represent (i) remaining cells of less-fit clones not yet overtaken by the expanding the most-fit clone, (ii) interacting subclones that co-evolved and have reached an equilibrium, or (iii) a combination of both. We have developed tools (ABSOLUTE, PhylogicNDT) to characterize the heterogeneity and dynamics of cancer using copy-number, mutational, and other data measured on bulk samples and single cells. These tools can analyze multiple samples per patient to infer clonality of mutations, number of subclones, and subclonal evolution over time or space. We previously demonstrated that subclonal driver mutations are associated with outcome, emphasizing the importance of including clonal information in clinical trials. By analyzing RNA-seq, we recently showed that most healthy adult tissues contain genetic clones with somatic mutations, some in known cancer-associated genes.

Mutational processes

Processes that damage, repair, replicate, and deliberately alter DNA create mutations. Mutation data can thus be used to study these processes, understand their mutational "signatures," infer their molecular mechanisms, and identify alterations associated with their activity. By studying asymmetries in mutational processes, we detected a mechanism that acts on the lagging DNA strand during replication and a new mutational process that generates mutations on the non-transcribed strand. We also used the association between a mutational signature and homologous recombination (HR) defects to show that epigenetic silencing of RAD51C within the HR pathway is an important mechanism for HR deficiency in breast cancer. With international collaborators, we are mapping all common mutational signatures affecting single- and di-nucleotide substitutions as well as small insertions and deletions (indels). We also study indels that occur at microsatellites and, in particular, tumors that have microsatellite instability (MSI) that may benefit from immune checkpoint inhibitor treatment (e.g., anti-PD1). We are developing a method to computationally detect the presence of MSI tumors from cell-free DNA (cfDNA) containing DNA shed from tumor cells, easily obtained from non-invasive blood biopsies.

Selected Publications:

Geffen Y, Anand S, Akiyama Y, **Getz G**. Pan-cancer analysis of post-translational modifications reveals shared patterns of proterin regulation. *Cell.* 2023 Aug 31;186(18):3945-3967.e26.

Ravi A, Hellmann MD, Arniella MB, ..., Hacohen N, **Getz G**, Gainor JF. Genomic and transcriptomic analysis of checkpoint blockade response in advanced non-small cell lung cancer. *Nat Genet.* 2023 May;55(5):807-819.

Parry EM, Leshchiner I, Guièze R, ..., Stilgenbauer S, **Getz G**, Wu CJ. Evolutionary history of transformation from chronic lymphocytic leukemia to Richter syndrome. *Nat Med.* 2023 Jan;29(1):158-169.

(Continued from previous page)

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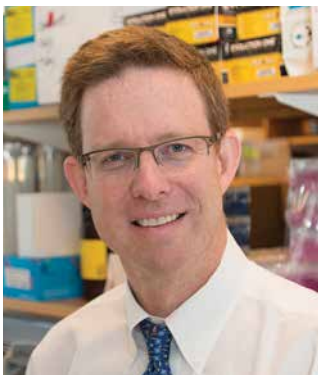

The Graubert laboratory focuses on the molecular basis of human blood cancers, including acute myeloid leukemia and myelodysplastic syndromes. The laboratory utilizes a variety of genomic platforms to interrogate primary samples from patients with myeloid malignancies to identify inherited and somatic mutations that drive these diseases. The goal of these studies is to gain insight into the biological basis of myeloid leukemias, and to improve strategies for diagnosis, risk stratification, and targeted therapy.

Graubert Laboratory

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Clonal heterogeneity of myelodysplastic syndromes

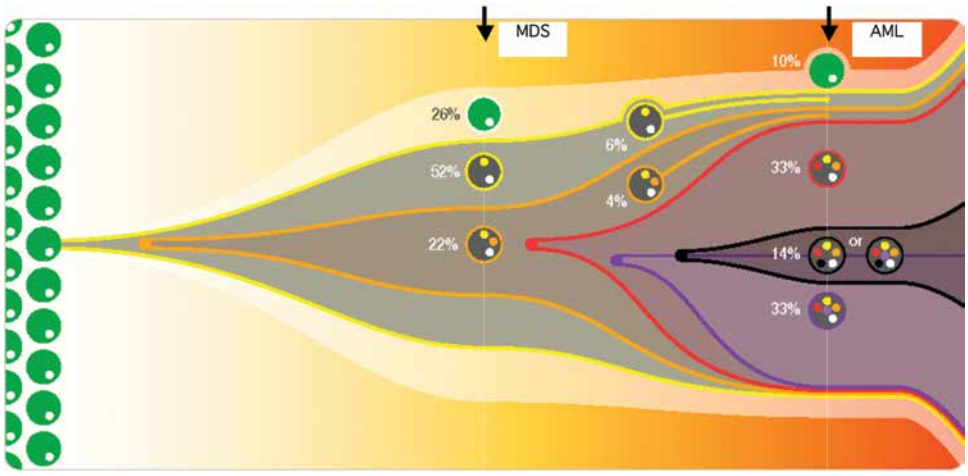
Myelodysplastic syndromes are the most common form of acquired bone marrow failure in adults. Despite the ineffective hematopoiesis that is characteristic of this disease in its early stages, we found through whole genome sequencing that nearly all cells in the bone marrow of these patients are clonally derived (see Figure). When patients evolve to acute myeloid leukemia (which occurs in approximately one third of cases), new subclonal populations emerge that are derived from the original ("founding") clone. These findings raise the possibility that the prognostic value of recurrent mutations in myelodysplastic syndrome and the efficacy of therapies that target these mutations may depend not only on the presence or absence of these mutations, but also on their position within the clonal hierarchy of this disease.

RNA splicing defects at the root of myelodysplastic syndromes

We and several other groups discovered recurrent somatic mutations in genes encoding core components of the RNA splicing complex (the "spliceosome") in patients with myelodysplastic syndrome. Mutations in this pathway tend to be mutually exclusive, suggesting that more than one splicing gene mutation in a cell provides no additional selective advantage, or is deleterious to the clone. We have focused on *U2AF1* which encodes a component of the U2 snRNP that binds to the AG dinucleotide at the 3' intronic splice acceptor site. Mutations in U2AF1 arise early in the pathogenesis of myelodysplastic syndromes (in the founding clone) and affect almost exclusively two codons in predicted zinc finger domains. We have shown that the most common mutation (S34F) has gain-of-function activity in splicing assays. Current work in the Graubert laboratory is focused on comprehensive analysis of the impact of U2AF1 mutations on splicing, the functional consequences of these mutations for blood cell development, and vulnerabilities created by splicing gene mutations that provide opportunities for novel therapies.

Inherited predisposition to myelodysplastic syndrome/acute myeloid leukemia

Acute myeloid leukemia and myelodysplastic syndromes are usually sporadic, late-onset cancers, but in rare instances (<1%) these diseases aggregate in families. In these families, predisposition to acute myeloid leukemia/myelodysplastic syndrome may be a consequence of an inherited bone marrow failure syndrome, but in other cases these are highly penetrant, autosomal dominant, Mendelian disorders. Three genes (*RUNX1, GATA2, CEBPA*) explain fewer than half of these Mendelian cases. The genetic basis in the majority of families is not yet known. Furthermore, the latency and



Clonal evolution from myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS) to acute myeloid leukemia (AML). Whole genome sequencing at the time of MDS diagnosis (left arrow) in a representative patient identified a founding clone comprising ~52% of the bone marrow cellularity and a subclone derived from the founding clone in ~22% of cells. When this patient progressed to AML (right arrow), the original clones were still present and had spawned three new subclones that were dominant in the bone marrow at this time point.

incomplete penetrance of acute myeloid leukemia/ myelodysplastic syndrome in mutation carriers suggest that acquisition of cooperating somatic mutations is required for malignant transformation. We have accumulated a large panel of samples from affected and unaffected members of these families. Ongoing studies in the Graubert laboratory are focused on identification of novel germline variants in families that lack known predisposing factors, and characterization of the landscape of cooperating somatic mutations that arise in these cases. This information is important for genetic counseling in these families, for selection of optimal bone marrow transplant donors, and to increase our understanding of the biological basis of acute myeloid leukemia and myelodysplastic syndromes.

Selected Publications:

Nguyen HD, Zou L, and **Graubert TA**. Targeting R-loop Associated ATR Response in Myelodysplastic Syndrome. *Oncotarget.* 2019 Apr 5; 10(27):2581-2582.

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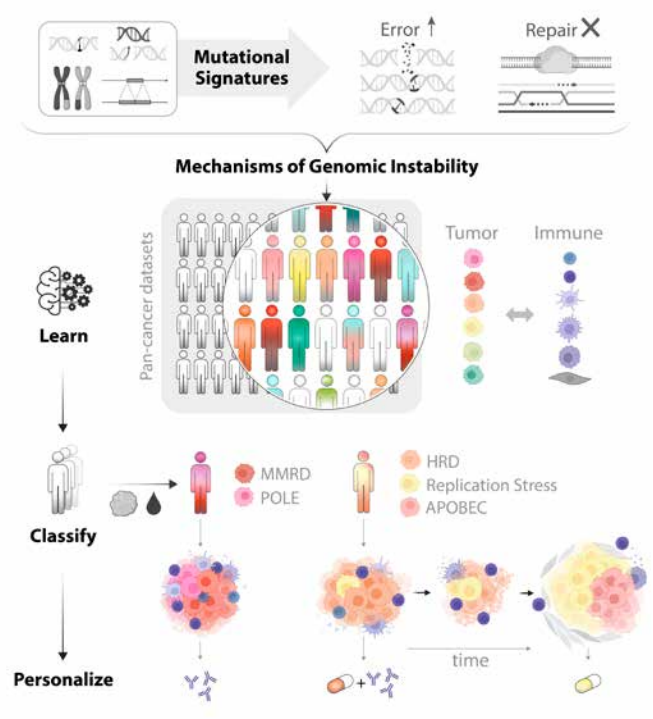
The Gülhan laboratory advances cancer diagnosis and treatment by studying tumors' genetic makeup. We develop methods to classify patients for personalized treatments, ensuring effective therapies. Genomic instability, a hallmark of cancer, enhances tumor growth. We create algorithms to break down mutation patterns into characteristic footprints of biological processes causing genomic instability, distinguishing mechanisms such as repair deficiencies that signal vulnerabilities to targeted- and immuno-therapies. Cancer cells evolve and develop treatment resistance; therefore, effective profiling strategies must capture the disease's dynamic nature. We use blood-based liquid biopsy tests for non-invasive monitoring. We design machine learning algorithms to detect trace amounts of circulating tumor DNA with high sensitivity, distinguishing signals through fragment and mutational patterns amid high noise levels and inferring gene expression using epigenetic imprints on fragmentation patterns. Additionally, we study long-term tumor evolution from bulk sequencing data and short-term cellular heterogeneity and dynamics using single-cell sequencing of cancer tissues. Collaborating closely with clinical researchers, we apply these methods to detect and study cancer at early stages and resistance in metastatic disease.

Characterizing Genomic Instability

Cancer cells have elevated mutation rates arising from a blend of factors, such as exogenous mutagens and intrinsic genomic instability. The latter, resulting from events like DNA repair deficiencies, cell cycle dysregulation, polymerase errors, and editing by APOBEC cytidine deaminases, provides cancer cells with growth advantages and evolutionary flexibility. This trait is a defining hallmark of cancer. However, genomic instability can also be a vulnerability for cancer cells. For instance, tumors with homologous recombination deficiency (HRD) are sensitive to PARP inhibitors that exacerbate DNA damage to an unsustainable level. Genomic instability also interacts intricately with the immune system. Mismatch repair deficiency (MMRD), which causes hypermutations, makes tumors susceptible to anti-PD-1 therapy. The clinical relevance of genomic instability, as exemplified by MMRD and HRD, underscores the need to assess tumors for such mechanisms. Currently, personalized treatments cater to only a fraction of patients. Expanding the clinical interpretation of cancer genomes is essential to bridge this gap, and mutational signature analysis, which identifies patterns corresponding to distinct mechanisms of genomic instability, could aid in this pursuit.

We aim to further enhance the capabilities of signature analysis methodologies by developing methods that can deconvolute not only process-specific patterns but also the temporal and genomic locus-dependent changes in their activity. We are also interested in separating the contributions of damage and repair activities and studying their roles in mutagenesis to improve the interpretation of complex cancer genomes. Utilizing rapidly growing datasets of whole-genome sequenced cancers and our algorithms, we aim to achieve a more detailed map of genomic instability.



We employ mutational signature analysis techniques to infer the origin of mutations, enabling us to categorize tumors based on their mechanisms of genomic instability. By leveraging large cancer genome datasets and using machine learning techniques, we create algorithms specifically designed for patient stratification in clinical settings to personalize their treatment.

In addition to gaining mechanistic insights, these advancements can improve the interpretability of signature results, which is crucial for their integration into clinical applications.

A Dynamic View of Cancer

Although comprehensive characterization of cancer genomes can improve personalized treatment strategies, it is not sufficient due to genomic and transcriptomic selections and adaptations that cancer cells undergo, especially under the pressure caused by cancer treatments. We utilize multiple strategies to improve our dynamic understanding of cancer genomes.

Circulating tumor DNA offers a noninvasive means of capturing tumors' temporal evolution and comprises DNA from multiple sites, providing a better representation of heterogeneity. We develop algorithms to sensitively detect tumor DNA, which constitutes a trace proportion of all cell-free DNA in plasma, and to monitor its changes more robustly. We utilize mutations and fragment characteristics and apply signature-based noise reduction and mixture modeling to improve tumor detection, genotyping, and patient classification. Additionally, we build effective fragmentomics algorithms that infer transcription from the location and length distributions of cfDNA fragments. We are implementing these methods for early cancer detection, particularly in patients with genetic predisposition, and resistance monitoring in serial samples collected from metastatic cancer patients.

Additionally, we are interested in the multimodal characterization of intratumor heterogeneity and building methods to model temporal dynamics. Through mutation timing and lineage tracing strategies applied to bulk genome and transcriptome profiling or single-cell genome-plus-transcriptome sequencing datasets, we aim to infer the long- and short-term dynamics of cancer cells, respectively. We apply these methodologies to study two clinically relevant stages: (i) early cancer development to improve early detection strategies and (ii) late evolution under treatment pressure in metastatic cancer patients to combat resistance.

Selected Publications:

Jin, H.*, **Gulhan DC***, Geiger, B. et al. Accurate and sensitive mutational signature analysis with MuSiCal. *Nat Genet.* 2024 Mar;56(3):541-552.

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Batalini F*, **Gulhan DC***, Mao V, Tran A, Polak M, Xiong N, Tayob N, Tung N, Winer EP, Mayer EL, Knappskog S, Mayer EL, Lønning PE, Matulonis UA, Konstantinopoulos PA, Solit DB, Won HH, Eikesdal HP, Park PJ†, Wulf GM. Mutational signature 3 detected from clinical panel sequencing is associated with responses to olaparib in breast and ovarian cancers. *Clin Cancer Res.* 2022 Nov 1;28(21): 4714-4723.

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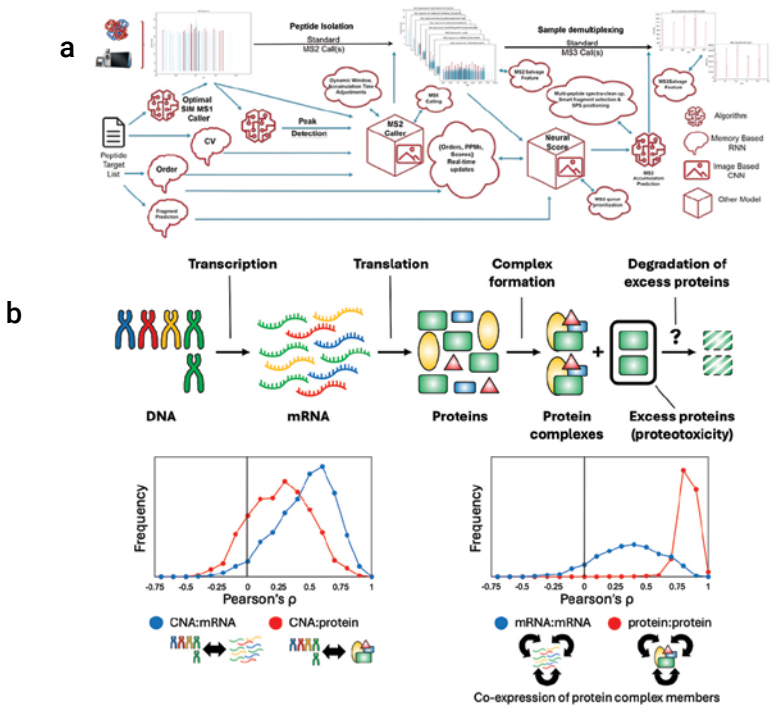
Proteins are the central molecular players in virtually all biological processes and cellular functions. The proteome is the entirety of all proteins in a biological system. The proteome's vast complexity is not only defined by the number of expressed genes but also driven through post-translational protein modifications - such as phosphorylation – and the interaction of proteins to form functional units in the form of multiprotein complexes. **The Haas laboratory** utilizes mass spectrometry-based proteomics to decipher this complexity. The lab aims to understand the extensive changes the proteome undergoes in cancer and to leverage these changes for early cancer detection, cancer diagnosis, cancer treatment guidance, and the development of new treatment strategies.

Cancer is based on dynamic changes of the genome that ultimately translate into an altered proteome, optimized for uncontrolled cell growth and division. In addition, many pathways, initially causing cancer, further promote the propagation of altered genetic information, accelerating the adaption of cancer cells to new environments. This dynamic process becomes even more complex if taking into account the dynamic state of the cellular proteome that is regulated by protein synthesis and degradation, post-translational modifications, protein localization, and the interaction of proteins with other proteins, as well as with different classes of biomolecules. While the cancer genome is now established as a source for cancer diagnosis and for directing treatment strategies, we are only beginning to tap into the information contained in the cancer proteome. Yet, the proteome holds enormous potential to improve our understanding of the basic principles underlying cancer, to revolutionize the early diagnosis of the disease, and to improve patient care. To date, virtually all targeted therapeutics in cancer treatment are targeting proteins. Understanding how these drugs alter the proteome and the interactome – the global map of protein-protein interactions – has the potential to help us refine our approaches to drug design.

The core technology used in our research group is high-throughput quantitative proteomics enabled through multiplexed mass spectrometry. Sample throughput is a key requirement in cancer proteomics as it allows handling the analysis of the large number of samples that have to be examined to generate the basis for understanding a disease that displays such heterogeneity. Foremost, throughput is essential in the early detection of cancer through mapping blood plasma proteomes to detect cancer biomarkers. If such assays are successful, they will eventually be used to map millions of blood plasma samples. To enable such applications of mass spectrometry, we have developed a novel high-throughput proteomics platform including an autonomous artificial intelligence (AI)-powered mass spectrometry data acquisition method to enable unbiased deep proteome mapping. Unbiased screening of >2000 proteins from blood plasma samples (in 10 minutes per sample) rather than mapping a small number of biomarkers will allow us to enable a multi-biomarker assay for multiple cancer types that is constantly improved through adaptation to the detection accuracy.

This technology also allows mapping >8000 proteins of cancer cell line or tumor tissue



(a) This network of multiple neural networks and algorithms enables ultra-high throughput deep mass spectrometry-based proteomics through AI-directed autonomous data acquisition. (b) In aneuploid cancer, mRNA levels accurately reflect the underlying gene copy alterations, while protein levels are adjusted to the concentrations of the protein interaction partners. This enables the use of protein concentration co-regulation analysis for high-throughput exploration of cancer interactomes. The molecular mechanism underlying the protein interaction-driven concentration regulation reveals potential new treatment strategies for aneuploid cancers.

samples at the same high throughput. Analyzing the proteome maps across a panel of cancer cell lines, we recently observed that the concentration of proteins in known complexes is accurately correlated across all analyzed cell lines. We showed that protein co-regulation analysis allows the genome-wide mapping of protein-protein interactions with an accuracy ten -times larger than that when using co-expression analysis based on RNAseq data. We further found that deviations from co-regulation of two interacting proteins in specific cancer cell lines reflect perturbed cellular circuitry, and it remarkably predicts sensitization to therapeutics targeting regulatory modules in the associated pathway. We have termed this approach to fast, in-depth characterization of protein-protein interaction landscapes interactome dysregulation (DysReg) mapping. This novel method enables an interactome-wide mapping of protein-protein interaction dysregulation and inferred cancer vulnerabilities of any cancer sample based on a proteome map acquired at high throughput.

Our goals are to apply these technologies to (i) identify novel cancer vulnerabilities that direct new treatment strategies, to (ii) map cancer vulnerability dynamics, such as those occurring in the development of therapy resistance, to identify novel targets that enable to overcome the treatment resistance, and to (iii) use our technology in a clinical setting for mapping tumor vulnerabilities to inform treatment strategies in a patient-specific manner.

We also recently identified the E3 ligase UBR4 as a key regulator in adjusting the concentration level of interacting proteins – the molecular mechanism enabling our interactome mapping – and we have shown that this role presents UBR4 as a target for treating aneuploid cancer.

Selected Publications:

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Braun CR*, Bird GH, Wühr M, Erickson BK, Rad R, Walensky LD, Gygi SP*, **Haas W**.* Generation of Multiple Reporter Ions from a Single Isobaric Reagent Increases Multi-plexing Capacity for Quantitative Proteomics. *Anal. Chem.* 2015; 87, 9855-9863.

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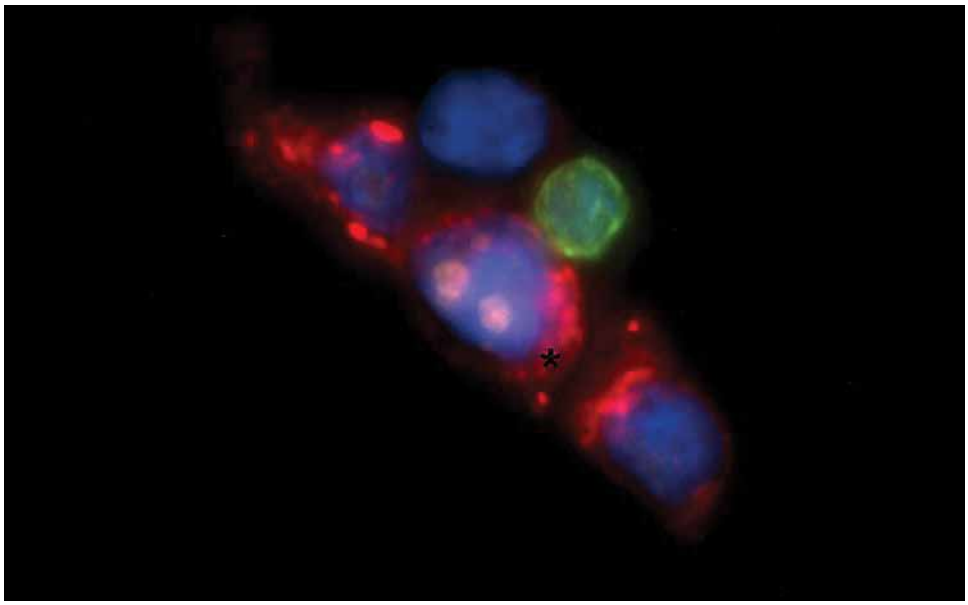
The Haber laboratory focuses on understanding mutations that are acquired by tumors and render them susceptible to specific targeted drug therapies. In 2004, we identified mutations in the EGFR gene in lung cancers which confer dramatic sensitivity to drugs that specifically inhibit that pathway. This finding triggered the application of targeted therapies in lung cancer, and more generally pointed to the critical importance of mutational analysis for treatment selection in common epithelial cancers. Since then, we have collaborated with the bioengineering team led by Dr. Mehmet Toner, the molecular biology group led by Dr. Shyamala Maheswaran, and the MGH Cancer Center clinical disease centers to develop, characterize and apply microfluidic devices to isolate rare circulating tumor cells (CTCs) in the blood of patients with cancer. Using these technologies, our lab seeks to explore 1) blood-based early detection of cancer, 2) noninvasive monitoring of cancer for the emergence of drug resistance, and 3) understanding mechanisms of tumor cell dissemination and metastasis, with the ultimate goal of suppressing blood-borne spread of cancer.

Our laboratory is interested in the genetics of human cancer. Current projects include the use of a microfluidic device to capture circulating tumor cells (CTCs) and its application in early detection of invasive cancer, molecular-directed therapy, and in the study of human cancer metastasis.

Circulating tumor cells and molecular genetics underlying targeted cancer therapeutics

Activating mutations in the epidermal growth factor receptor (*EGFR*) were identified in our laboratory in the subset of non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) with dramatic responses to the tyrosine kinase inhibitor gefitinib. We have studied mechanisms underlying such oncogene addiction, as well as the pathways that lead to the acquisition of resistance to targeted therapies, including the application of irreversible kinase inhibitors to circumvent mutations that alter drug binding affinity. Following these efforts to monitor the emergence of drug resistance mutations, we established collaborations with the Toner and Maheswaran laboratories to characterize novel microfluidic devices capable of isolating CTCs from the blood of cancer patients. Our most advanced version of these CTC-Chips relies upon blood flow through a specialized chamber, which allows the high efficiency depletion of antibody-tagged leukocytes, thereby enriching for intact CTCs without selection bias. We have shown that the number of captured CTCs correlates with clinical evidence of tumor response, and that the cells can be used to define molecular markers characteristic of the underlying malignancy, including *EGFR* mutations in lung cancer and measurements of androgen receptor (AR) activity in prostate cancer. We have applied next generation single-molecule RNA sequencing and RNA-in-situ hybridization to characterize the heterogeneous expression profiles of individual CTCs in breast, prostate and pancreatic cancers, as well as melanoma and glioblastoma. To facilitate CTC quantitation and provide the sensitivity and specificity required for early cancer



Circulating prostate tumor cell cluster stained for PSA (green) along with Ki67 (orange) and CD45 (red).

detection, we have we have applied high throughput CTC isolation from blood with molecular genetic and epigenetic markers.

Understanding metastasis through CTC biology

In addition to noninvasive detecting and monitoring of cancer, CTCs provide a window to study the process of blood-borne metastasis. We demonstrated treatment-associated epithelial-to-mesenchymal transitions (EMT) within CTCs from women with breast cancer. Using a combination of mouse models and patient-derived studies, we observed that tumor-derived fragments generate CTC-Clusters, which have greatly enhanced metastatic propensity compared with single CTCs. CTC-Clusters are held together by plakoglobin, whose knockdown dramatically suppresses CTC-Cluster formation and metastatic spread of breast cancer cells. We successfully established long-term *in vitro* cultures of CTCs from patients with estrogen-receptor (ER)-positive breast cancer, identifying treatment-associated mutations in the estrogen receptor (ESR1), as well as acquired mutations in druggable therapeutic targets, such as *PIK3CA* and *FGFR*. In a recent study of prostate tumorigenesis, from the earliest Gleason stages through to metastatic CTCs, we tracked, at single cell level, core DNA hypomethylation domains that arise early in tumorigenesis, thereby silencing genes that are colocalized within a chromosomal locus. Early hypomethylation-induced silencing targets immune-related genes, notably the lipid antigen presentation pathway involved in native immunity, while sparing proliferation-associated genes. Ongoing studies are directed at using patient-derived CTCs and mouse models to understand key steps in cancer metastasis, including the shift from cell quiescence to proliferation, viability during blood-borne transit, and resistance to targeted and immune therapies.

Selected Publications:

Burr R, Leshchiner I, Costantino CL, Blohmer M, Sundaresan T, Cha J, Seeger K, Guay S, Danysh BP, Gore I, Jacobs RA, Slowik K, Utro F, Rhrissorrakrai K, Levovitz C, Barth JL, Dubash T, Chirn B, Parida L, Sequist LV, Lennerz JK, Mino-Kenudson M, Maheswaran S, Naxerova K, Getz G, **Haber DA**. Germline mutations and developmental mosaicism underlying EGFR-mutant lung cancer. *Nature* Cancer, in press (2024)

Guo H, Vuille JA, Wittner BS, Lachtara EM, Hou Y, Lin M, Zhao T, Raman AT, Russell HC, Reeves BA, Peskow HM, Wu CL, Meissner GA, Efstathiou JA, Lee RJ, Toner M, Aryee MJ, Lawrence MS, Miyamoto DT*, Maheswaran S*, **Haber DA***. DNA hypomethylation silences anti-tumor immune genes in early prostate cancer and CTCs. *Cell*, 186:2765-2782, 2023 PMID 37327786.

Micalizzi DS, Che D, Nicholson BT, Edd JF, Desai N, Lang ER, Toner M, Maheswaran S, Ting DT, **Haber DA** Targeting breast and pancreatic cancer metastasis using a dual-cadherin antibody. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 119: e2209563119, 2022, PMID 36256815.

Guo H, Golczer G, Wittner BS, Langenbucher A,...Vasudevan S, Zou L, Mostoslavsky R, Maheswaran S*, Lawrence MS*, **Haber DA***. NR4A1 regulates expression of immediate early genes, suppressing replication stress in cancer. *Mol Cell*. 81(19): 4041-4058, 2021 PMID: 34624217.

Hong X, Roh W, Sullivan RJ, Wong KHK, Wittner BS,...Toner M, Stott SL, Getz G, Maheswaran S*, **Haber DA***. The lipogenic regulator SREBP2 induces transferrin in circulating melanoma cells and suppresses ferroptosis. *Cancer Discovery*. 11:678-95, 2021 PMID 33203734.

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Izabella Zamora
Tim Zhu

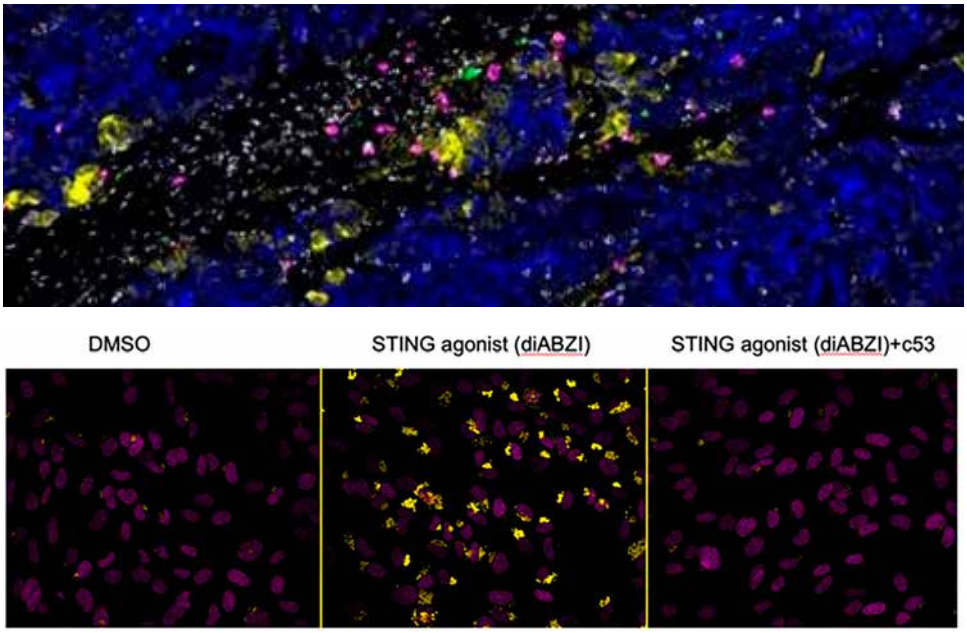
The Hacohen laboratory consists of immunologists, geneticists, biochemists, technologists, physicians and computational biologists working together to develop new and unbiased technologies and strategies to understand basic immune processes and immune-mediated diseases, with an emphasis on the innate immunity, tool development and personalized medicine. We address three key questions in immunology (1) how are immune responses against cancer initiated, maintained and evaded? (2) what are the immune circuits that sense and control pathogens, such as viruses and bacteria? (3) how does immunity against the body develop, in particular, in patients with autoimmune lupus? In addition to discovering and studying specific molecular and cellular mechanisms, we also address how and why the immune response (to tumors, pathogens or self) varies so dramatically across individuals, such as in sepsis. Finally, we are adapting our unbiased analytical strategies into real-world therapeutics, having performed clinical trials (with our collaborator Dr. Catherine Wu), in which patients are vaccinated against their own tumors with a fully personal vaccine that is designed based on a computational analysis of their tumor genome.

Initiators, resistors and targets of tumor immunity

While cancer immunology has been deeply studied in animal models, there remain many open questions in human tumor immunology. We have developed genetic and genomics approaches to explain the large variance in anti-tumor immunity across people, and to discover how tumors evolve to resist productive immunity. We've identified somatic mutations in tumors that are associated with anti-tumor immunity in patients, found T cell subtypes that are associated with a response to anti- PD-1 immunotherapy in melanoma and are studying their properties now (Sade-Feldman et al., *Cell* 2018), and discovered spatially-organized immune cell hubs in colon cancer (Pelka, Hofree, Chen et al, *Cell* 2021; Chen et al, *Nat Imm 2024*). We have also developed new methods to predict which tumor antigens are presented (Abelin et al., *Immunity* 2017, Sarkizova et al., *Nat Biotech* 2020), which are now being used to develop novel therapeutic approaches and targets for immunotherapy, such as personal tumor vaccines targeting multiple HLA-associated neoantigens in human tumors (together with Dr. Catherine Wu at DFCI, Ott et al., *Nature* 2017, Keskin, *Nature* 2018).

Genes and networks underlying innate immunity

We've used genome-wide CRISPR libraries to discover mammalian genes mediating the sensing of pathogens (Parnas et al., *Cell* 2015), impacting HIV infection (Park et al, *Nat Gen* 2017) and affecting influenza infection (Li et al., *Nat Comm* 2020). We have characterized innate myeloid cells (DCs and monocytes) in human blood as part of the human Immune Cell Atlas (Villani et al, *Science* 2017). We defined regulators of viral RNA-sensing (Carlson et al., *PNAS* 2023) and DNA-sensing pathways using FACS- and imaging-based screens. Recently, we discovered that the STING protein, a protein required for sensing cyclic di-nucleotides, is a proton channel that can trigger LC3B lipidation, inflammasome activation and cell death (Liu, Carlson et al., *Science* 2023).



STING, a critical immune sensor, is shown to be a proton channel, which can explain how STING induces the inflammasome, non-canonical autophagy and cell death. Here, cells stimulated with a STING agonist (diABZi) exhibit a pH change (green) that is blocked by C53, a small molecule that binds the putative pore of the STING protein. Credit: Becca Carlson and Bingxu Liu.

Source: Liu, Carlson, Pires et al. Science. 2023

Genetic basis for inter-individual variations in immune responses

We have also developed genomic strategies to analyze human immune responses and explain immune phenotypes with germline genotypes. We characterized the genetic basis for inter-individual variation in the innate immune response to viruses and bacteria (Lee et al., *Science* 2014; Raj et al., Science 2014; Ye et al., *Science* 2014). For example, we found that common alleles of IRF7 tune the strength of an individual's anti-viral response, and that genetic control of splicing is prevalent and important for the immune response (Ye et al., Genome Res 2018). Building on these studies, we developed systematic methods to analyze variants (Ray et al., *Nat Comm* 2021; Mouri, *Nat Genetics*, 2022). We also study non-genetic variations in human immunity, and found a myeloid cell type and state ('MS1' that corresponds to MDSCs) strongly associated with severe infections (bacterial and viral, including COVID-19) and sepsis (Reyes et al, *Nat Med* 2020, *Science Tr Med* 2021), leading us to new hypotheses underlying these dangerous clinical trajectories.

Drivers of autoimmunity

Deficiencies in nucleases that degrade DNA lead to accumulation of self DNA, activation of innate immune responses and development of autoimmune disorders, including systemic lupus erythematosus and Aicardi-Goutières syndrome in humans. How does autoimmunity develop upon triggering of innate immunity by self DNA (rather than pathogen-derived DNA)? We made the surprising observation that immunostimulatory DNA can arise from host damaged DNA that is exported from the nucleus to the lysosome (Lan et al., *Cell Rep* 2014). We hypothesize that this cellular process is a source of inflammation in autoimmunity, cancer, chemotherapy and aging. To further find drivers of autoimmunity, we've been analyzing kidney biopsies and blood from lupus patients in a small (Arazi et al., *Nat Imm* 2019) and large patient cohort (ongoing) and more recently in comparison to animal lupus models (Hoover et al., *bioRxiv* 2023).

Selected Publications:

Chen JH, Nieman LT, Spurrell M, Jorgji V, Elmelech L, Richieri P, Xu KH, Madhu R, Parikh M, Zamora I, Mehta A, …Pelka K, Aryee MJ, Mino-Kenudson M, Gainor JF, Korsunsky I, **Hacohen N**. Human lung cancer harbors spatially organized stem-immunity hubs associated with response to immunotherapy. *Nat Immunol.* 2024. Apr;25(4):644-658

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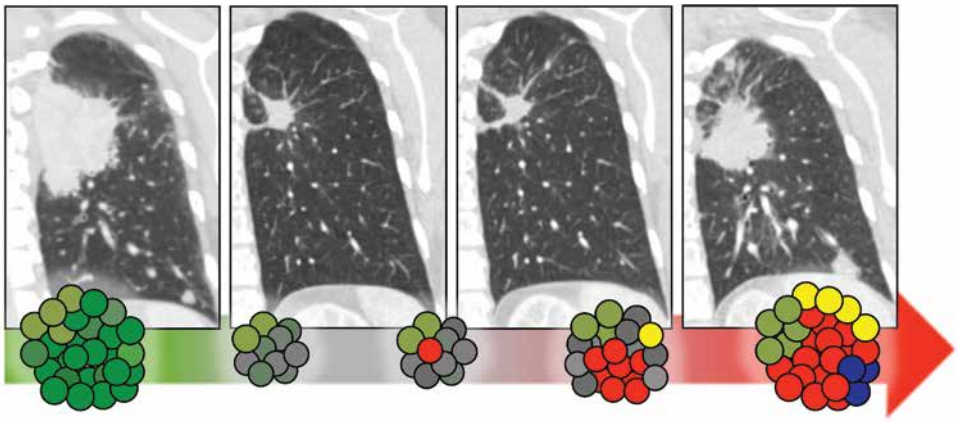
The research goal of **the Hata laboratory** is to advance the development of novel targeted and immunotherapy approaches to benefit patients with lung cancer. Our focus is on understanding biological mechanisms that dictate drug sensitivity and resistance in oncogene-addicted lung cancers (those with activating genetic alterations EGFR, ALK, KRAS, etc.). Our approach is highly translational, integrating assessment of clinical specimens with generation and analysis of patient-derived cell culture and mouse tumor xenograft (PDX) models, performed in close collaboration with clinicians in the MGH Thoracic Oncology group. We have discovered clinical mechanisms of acquired drug resistance and identified therapeutic strategies to overcome them. Our work has also shed light on how cancer cells adapt and evolve during the course of therapy and we are currently working to identify targetable vulnerabilities in residual drug tolerant cancer cells that can be exploited to pre-empt the emergence of drug resistance. Our ultimate goal is to translate our laboratory discoveries into clinical trials testing novel therapeutic approaches.

Mechanisms of acquired drug resistance to targeted therapies

Lung cancers that harbor activating EGFR mutations and ALK fusions are exquisitely sensitive to small molecule EGFR and ALK tyrosine kinase inhibitors, respectively. However, even though most patients experience dramatic responses, drug resistance invariably develops leading to disease relapse. Similar patterns of sensitivity and acquired resistance are also observed in other subsets of oncogene- addicted lung cancers treated with molecularly targeted therapies (e.g. ROS1 fusions, RET fusions, BRAF mutations, MET exon 14 skipping mutations). In collaboration with oncologists in the Mass General Center for Thoracic Cancers, we have identified acquired secondary mutations and other genomic alterations that cause drug resistance in the tumors and blood of patients progressing after initial response to targeted therapies. To functionally interrogate mechanisms of drug resistance, we have developed a robust infrastructure for generating patient-derived cell lines and mouse patient-derived xenograft (PDX) models from lung cancer patients treated with targeted therapies at the MGH Cancer Center. These models have enabled functional screens to identify novel mechanisms of acquired resistance and testing of novel next-generation therapies to overcome them.

Targeting KRAS mutant lung cancers

Mutant-selective KRAS inhibitors have recently entered the clinic, however responses are seen in only a minority of patients. Work by our group revealed that many KRAS mutant lung cancers exhibit decreased oncogenic dependency and a dampened apoptotic response that contributes to intrinsic resistance to KRAS targeted therapy. To overcome this limitation, we are exploring novel therapeutic combinations that can modify these mechanisms and increase sensitivity to KRAS inhibitors. In addition, we are focused on understanding how both inter-patient and intratumoral heterogeneity may influence initial drug response and clonal evolution, leading to the development of acquired drug resistance.



Oncogene-addicted lung cancers can develop acquired drug resistance by selection of pre-existing resistant cells, or via evolution of drug tolerant persister cells that subsequently develop resistance mechanisms during the course of treatment. Therapeutic strategies that eliminate persisters or block their ability to evolve may preempt the development of acquired drug resistance.

Tumor adaptation and evolution during treatment

Despite the development of successive generations of targeted therapies with improved selectivity and potency, acquired resistance inevitably develops. Our discovery that drug tolerant clones that survive initial therapy can acquire a "second genomic hit" enabling outgrowth of fully resistant clones suggests that these persister cells may comprise a cellular reservoir from which heterogeneous mechanisms of resistance may arise. We have identified that targeted therapies can induce expression of the cytidine deaminase APOBEC3A, which increases genomic instability and accelerates the development of drug resistance. Ongoing efforts are focused on characterizing persistent tumor cells in patients and experimental models to identify additional mechanisms that drive adaptation to drug, with the goal of to develop therapeutic strategies to preempt acquired drug resistance.

Impact of tumor microenvironment on drug response and resistance.

Non-cancer cells within the tumor microenvironment (TME), such fibroblasts and macrophages, can potentiate or attenuate drug response. We have uncovered a striking degree of complexity in functional interactions between cells in the TME that may contribute to heterogeneityof drug response in the clinic. By unraveling these mechanisms, we hope to develop orthogonal TME-centric therapeutic strategies to augment the effectiveness of currently approved targeted therapies.

Developing novel immunotherapy approaches for lung cancers with low mutation burden

EGFR mutant and ALK fusion lung cancers typically occur in never-smokers and consequently have low tumor mutation burden and poor response to currently approved immune checkpoint inhibitors. We are developing TCR cellular therapies and novel methods for reprograming tumor cell antigenicity to direct the immune system to recognize and fight EGFR and ALK lung cancers. Additionally, we are exploring methods for stimulating innate immune cells such as macrophages to attack cancer cells.

Selected Publications:

Isozaki H^, Sakhtemani R, Abbasi A, Nikpour N, Stanzione M, Oh S, Langenbucher A, Monroe S, Su W, Cabanos HF, Siddiqui FM, Phan N, Jalili P, Timonina D, Bilton S, Gomez-Caraballo M, Archibald HL, Nangia V, Dionne K, Riley A, Lawlor M, Banwait MK, Cobb RG, Zou L, Dyson NJ, Ott CJ, Benes C, Getz G, Chan CS, Shaw AT, Gainor JF, Lin JJ, Sequist LV, Piotrowska Z, Yeap BY, Engelman JA, Lee JJ, Maruvka YE, Buisson R, Lawrence MS*^, **Hata AN***^. Therapy-induced APOBEC3A drives evolution of persistent cancer cells. Nature. 2023 Aug;620(7973):393-401.

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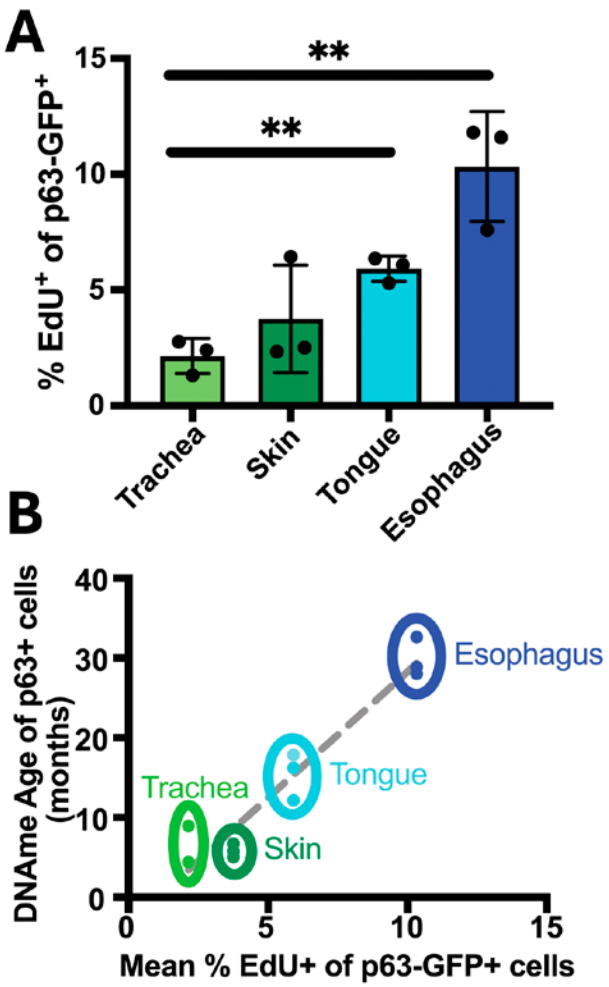
The Hochedlinger laboratory explores the fundamental question of how cells maintain their identity. We hypothesize that factors that reinforce specific cell states, such as pluripotency and differentiation, continue to play functional roles in other cellular contexts including development, tissue homeostasis and cancer. Using stem cell models and reprogramming systems as discovery tools ex vivo, our laboratory has elucidated novel mechanisms that maintain cell identity and function upstream of cell type specific transcription and chromatin factors. Specifically, work from our lab over the past five years revealed that common cellular processes such as protein sumoylation, chromatin assembly, alternative mRNA polyadenylation and P-body homeostasis play key roles in the maintenance of cell identity across distinct lineages. We now aim to probe the functional conservation of these mechanisms across physiological cell fate transitions in vivo using animal models and cell transplantation. As our strategy is not confined to one particular cell type or tissue, we are in a position to uncover shared regulatory principles crucial for the maintenance of cell identity across different developmental contexts.

While development and cellular differentiation were long thought to be irreversible processes, our ability to reprogram differentiated cells to an embryonic-like state revealed that mechanisms that safeguard cell identity and thus restrict developmental plasticity can be overcome through experimental manipulation. Indeed, seminal somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT) experiments proved that the nuclei of terminally differentiated cells and even certain cancer cells retain full developmental potential. While SCNT is a powerful assay to test the developmental potential of a given genome, it does not allow one to study *how* differentiated cell states are established and maintained. By contrast, transcription factor-induced reprogramming of somatic cells into induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) is a molecularly defined and tractable system to dissect fundamental questions of cell state. Our lab initially used this approach to provide crucial insight into the basic mechanisms by which transcription factors and chromatin signaling establish and maintain identity in either pluripotent or differentiated cells, and we began to probe the conservation of these principles in other cellular contexts. For example, we discovered that the transcription factor Sox2, which is essential for the establishment and maintenance of pluripotent stem cells, is re-expressed in adult gastric stem cells where it maintains tissue identity by suppressing an alternative intestinal cell program and tumorigenesis. Similarly, we demonstrated that the manipulation of safeguard mechanisms previously identified during iPSC reprogramming in other cellular contexts facilitate the derivation of self-renewing muscle stem-like cells, which have been notoriously difficult to capture using conventional strategies. More recently, our lab uncovered two post-transcriptional processes, alternative polyadenylation (APA) and Processing body (P-body) turnover, as novel safeguard mechanisms using unbiased screens. While APA and P-bodies are thought to control different aspects of gene regulation in the nucleus (APA) and cytoplasm



(A) Comparison of proliferation rates (%EdU incorporation) between p63+ basal stem cells isolated from diverse epithelia reveals tissue-specific differences. (B) Basal stem cells with higher proliferation rates exhibit higher DNA methylation age relative to basal stem cells with lower proliferation rates based on the Mouse Pan-Tissue Clock (shown here), as well as the Universal Clock-2 and -3. These results indicate that the epigenetic age of adult tissues is in part driven by the proliferative history of resident cells, such as basal stem cells (See: Gorelov et al., Stem Cell Reports, 2024). Image: Rebecca Gorelov, PhD.

(P-bodies), a key commonality that emerged from our work is that both processes regulate the protein homeostasis of hundreds of fate-instructive genes. Together, these examples underscore the power of our approach to gain insights into tissue identity through the study of pluripotency and cellular reprogramming.

Considering that several of the safeguard mechanisms we previously identified in reprogramming converge on chromatin regulators, we have recently developed versatile histone-mutant transgenic tools to directly probe the physiological role of chromatin modifications in cell fate change. These lysine-to-methionine (K-to-M) mutants, which dominantly block methylation at specific sites, have allowed us to uncover previously unappreciated functions of H3K4, H3K9, H3K27 and H3K36 methylation in the regulationof pluripotency, reprogramming, tissue homeostasis and aging, which is the basis for ongoing work in the lab. We are also using these tools to identify epigenetic vulnerabilities in cancer.

Thus, by pursuing our hypothesis that different physiological as well as experimentally induced cell fate transitions utilize common mechanisms, our lab has uncovered novel epigenetic, transcriptional and post-transcriptional regulators of cell identity. As we pursue a deeper understanding of how these underexplored regulators and processes guide cell fate transitions in vivo, we are poised to discover shared principles by which they safeguard cell identity during development and tissue homeostasis and how this knowledge may be exploited in a therapeutic setting to alter cell fate.

Selected Publications:

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Hanno Hock, MD, PhD

Hock Laboratory

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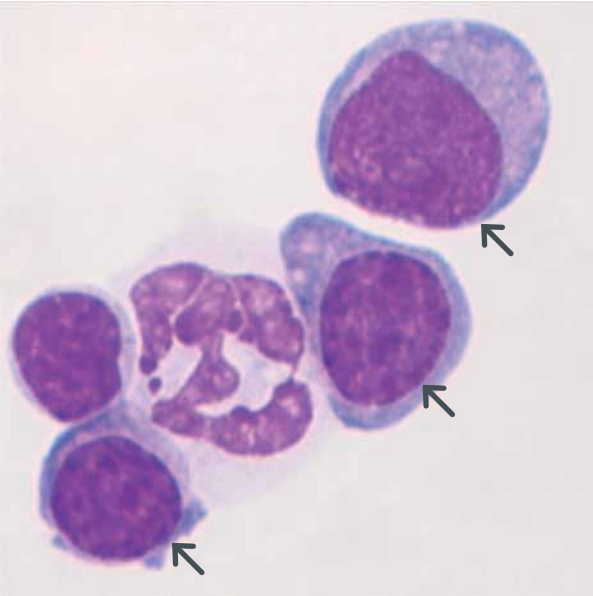
The Hock laboratory explores the molecular basis of blood cell formation and the pathogenesis of leukemia and lymphoma. Specifically, we study the transcription factors that regulate gene activity during normal blood cell development and how the transcriptional apparatus goes awry in cancer. For example, we have developed important insights into a network of transcription factors that help maintain blood stem cells in the bone marrow; this work could lead to new strategies for increasing the yield of stem cells for bone marrow transplantation. Another project in our laboratory focuses on deciphering the multistep process that leads to lymphoblastic leukemia of childhood, with the goal of identifying new drug targets for this devastating disease. Finally, we are interested in how DNA packaging affects the interaction between genes and transcription factors, especially with regard to oncogenes and tumor suppressor genes important in human cancer.

Our laboratory is interested in the molecular control of normal and malignant stem cells with an emphasis on the hematopoietic system. Blood cells need to be continuously replenished by a small population of hematopoietic stem cells (HSCs) that have the capacity to both self-renew and mature stepwise into all known blood lineages. HSCs are also the ancestors of leukemia and lymphoma cells. As HSCs mature, they undergo successive changes in gene expression. The transcriptional apparatus must ensure that genes specific to immature cells are repressed as differentiation proceeds, while genes that are necessary for mature cells become activated. This activating and inactivating of genes is achieved by cooperative action of a variety of lineage-specific and general transcription factors and the complex molecular machinery that regulates the accessibility of different regions of the genome in chromatin. We investigate how transcription factors establish differentiation-specific transcriptional programs and how such programs can become derailed in cancer, leukemia and lymphoma.

Transcriptional control of normal and malignant hematopoietic stem cells in the adult bone marrow

Hematopoiesis in the bone marrow emanates HSCs. We are studying the basic biology of HSCs. Specifically we explore how a network of transcription factors that includes Tel- Etv6, Gfi1, Gfi1b and Gata2 maintains HSCs in the bone marrow (Hock et al. 2004, *Genes & Development*; Hock et al. 2004, *Nature*). The goal is to exploit the biology of transcriptional regulation of HSCs to maintain, expand, and possibly even generate HSCs ex vivo so that more patients will have the option of bone marrow transplantation. In a closely related effort, we are exploring the molecular programs of stem cells in leukemia and lymphoma to identify differences in their molecular regulation compared with normal HSCs. Such differences may allow us to specifically target tumor stem cells while sparing normal blood formation.



Dr. Hock's laboratory works on molecular mechanisms of normal differentiation and malignant transformation. The image shows normal blood cells and leukemic cells (arrows) from a novel experimental model generated in the lab.

Deciphering the molecular events leading to acute lymphoblastic leukemia of childhood

About one in 2000 children develops this catastrophic illness, most often with a t(12;21) translocation. Despite very aggressive treatments, not all children can be cured, and some suffer from long-term side effects of their therapy. Rational development of more specific, less toxic treatments requires a precise understanding of the molecular mechanisms that cause the disease. We have discovered that TEL-AML1, the first hit in childhood leukemia, generates a preleukemic, latent lesion in HSCs. We are now exploring how additional genetic hits cooperate to derail normal blood development and generate leukemia. Deciphering the multistep pathogenesis of this entity is likely to serve as a paradigm for the development of other malignant diseases.

Exploration of novel epigenetic regulators in stem cells

Our understanding of how specialized cells of the body establish their identity by regulating access to genes continues to increase. For example, a large fraction of the genes active in brain cells are inactive in blood cells and, therefore, are stored in a very dense, inaccessible state. As most molecules involved in the regulation of gene accessibility have only recently been identified, studying their biology is likely to provide unique opportunities for the development of entirely novel therapies. We are investigating the utility of a group of proteins termed MBT-proteins, which is very important for condensing DNA and modifying histones. Evidence suggests that this protein family may play important roles in normal and malignant blood formation, but its precise functions remain poorly understood. Our laboratory has recently discovered an entirely novel, essential function of the family member L3mbtl2 in pluripotent stem cells.

Selected Publications:

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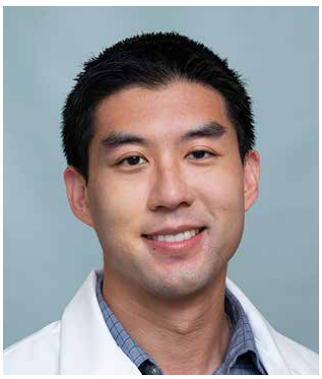

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The Hwang laboratory focuses on the immense phenotypic, temporal and spatial heterogeneity of tumor ecosystems and the many insights that can only be gleaned by studying these systems at the level of their individual components. We study tumor-stroma interactions at unprecedented resolution through the development and application of techniques in spatial and systems oncology, advanced microscopy, genetic engineering and computational biology to patient-derived specimens, stromal tumoroids and mouse models. Our goals are to elucidate mechanisms of (1) therapeutic resistance mediated by genetic, epigenetic, and phenotypic factors including cell state plasticity; (2) treatment-mediated remodeling of the spatial microarchitecture of tumors and underlying cancer cell-stromal interactions; and (3) tumor-nerve crosstalk, which plays a critical role in the pathophysiology and morbidity of many malignancies but remains understudied.

Single-cell dynamics

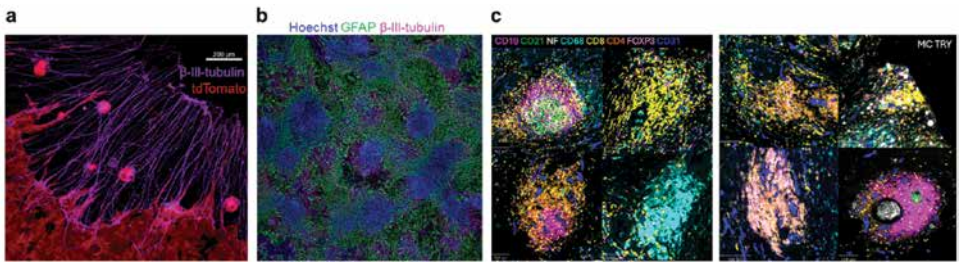
Pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma (PDAC) is a highly lethal and treatment refractory disease. Molecular subtyping of PDAC is rudimentary and does not currently inform clinical management or therapeutic development. We optimized single-nucleus RNA-seq to discover treatment-associated changes in cellular composition and state, including enrichment of a novel neural-like malignant program in residual tumors after chemoradiation. Our high-resolution molecular framework elucidates the inter- and intra-tumoral diversity of PDAC, treatment-associated remodeling and clinically relevant prognostication to enable precision oncology in PDAC.

Ongoing projects:

1. Identifying key regulators, context dependence and therapeutic vulnerabilities of resistant cell states
2. Elucidating (epi)genetic contributions to cell state plasticity in therapeutic resistance
3. Investigating mechanisms of tumorigenesis using single-cell multiomics to enable chemoprevention and early detection
4. Studying developmental lineages and mechanisms of metastasis in pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors

Spatial oncology

Dissociative single-cell approaches enable detailed characterization of the different cell types and states that compose a heterogeneous tumor but sacrifice in situ spatial relationships among cells. Leveraging recent advances in spatial proteo-transcriptomics enabling single-cell resolution and high molecular plex, we performed spatial molecular profiling (SMI) on a cohort of patient-derived PDAC tumors and developed a novel method for inferring multicellular interactions. Spatially Constrained Optimal Transport Interaction Analysis (SCOTIA) that considers both spatial distance and ligand-receptor (LR) expression (collaborator: Martin Hemberg). We used SCOTIA to dissect the remodeled pancreatic tumor microenvironment in response to neoadjuvant chemoradiation and uncovered marked changes in LR interactions between cancer-associated fibroblasts and malignant cells, which was supported by orthogonal experiments using a murine tumoroid co-culture system (https://tinyurl.com/2xtdytxt).



(a) Pancreatic cancer cell aggregates (red) moving along neurites (purple) extending from a dorsal root ganglion (removed). (b) Embryonic murine neurons in culture without glial depletion. (c) Representative immune aggregates in the pancreatic cancer tumor microenvironment identified by 100+ plex spatial proteomics. NF = neurofilament; MC TRY = mast cell tryptase.

Overall, we demonstrated the immense potential of a translational spatial biology paradigm for deriving novel biological insights and identifying actionable therapeutic targets — one that can be broadly applied to other malignancies and treatment contexts.

Ongoing projects:

1. Discovering gene regulatory networks that modulate tumor-stroma interactions through perturbative spatial screens
2. Developing computational models to infer cell state from integrating intrinsic and extrinsic influences
3. Creating a platform for correlating morphological changes to transcriptional changes through combining live-cell imaging with spatial transcriptomics
4. Integrating matched liquid and spatial biomarkers to assess response to therapy

Cancer neuroscience

Active recruitment of nerve fibers into tumors plays an important role in cancer development, treatment resistance, metastasis and mortality for many malignancies, but the diverse molecular mechanisms underlying tumor-nerve crosstalk remain largely unknown. To address this gap in knowledge, we performed a comprehensive, cell-type specific, spatially resolved whole transcriptome analysis of human PDAC using custom tissue microarrays derived from intratumorally matched malignant areas with (N+) and without (N-) nerve involvement. Whole-transcriptome digital spatial profiling revealed that classical malignant cells were depleted near nerves while basal/mesenchymal and neural-like cancer cells were enriched near nerves. Differential gene expression analysis comparing malignant cells in N+ versus N- regions enabled selection of subtype-specific candidate genes for functional investigation. This research will provide a detailed understanding of the mechanisms by which pancreatic cancer cells and the peripheral nervous system collaborate to confer numerous pro-tumorigenic effects, and guide prioritization for therapeutic intervention in the burgeoning cancer neuroscience field.

Ongoing projects:

1. Identifying cell-type specific mediators of nerve outgrowth, invasion and colonization using patient-derived tumors, tumoroids and GEMMs
2. Determining influence of neuronal subtype and activity on the immune response to cancer in primary tumors and draining lymph nodes
3. Dissecting molecular mechanisms of dynamic physical interactions between cancer cells and nerves
4. Discovering the mechanistic basis for differential central nervous system versus peripheral nervous system tropism across the spectrum of cancer

Selected Publications:

Shiau C*, Cai J*, Gregory MT, Gong D, Yin X, Cho J-W, … Fernandez-del Castillo C, Mino-Kenudson M, Ting DT, Hemberg M†, **Hwang WL**†. Spatially resolved analysis of pancreatic cancer identifies therapy-associated remodeling of the tumor microenvironment. *Nature Genetics* 2024, online ahead of print.

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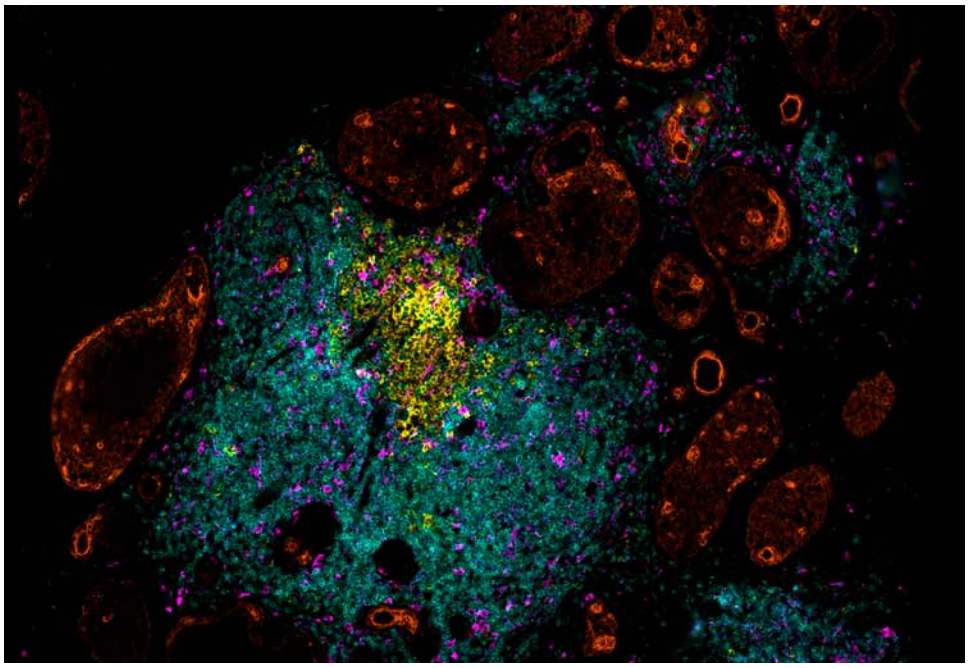
* Graduate student
† Admin Assistant

The Iafrate laboratory has focused efforts on developing highly complex molecular analyses of tumor genetics using novel technologies. We have a strong interest in the clinical implementation of genetic screening technologies that can help direct targeted therapies, focusing on lung, breast and brain tumors. Our recent contributions in the treatment of a subset of non-small cell lung carcinoma (NSCLC) with rearrangements of the ALK tyrosine kinase, rearrangements of the ROS1 tyrosine kinase and MET exon 14 skipping with a small molecule kinase inhibitor (crizotinib), underscore the promise of personalized cancer care (1, 2). We currently are focusing on detecting tumor DNA in blood samples ("liquid biopsies") to allow for efficient and convenient tracking of cancer progression. In additional we are developing new techniques to allow for early detection of cancers by detecting tumor-specific DNA in circulation.

We have developed and deployed next generation sequencing to detect chromosomal rearrangements in tumor tissue, with on-going studies that assess the relative sensitivity in much larger clinical cohorts. The method we have developed, termed "anchored multiplex PCR" or AMP, is an efficient target enrichment technology, allowing for 100s of targets to be simultaneously analyzed from small tissue samples (3). We have used AMP to screen thousands of tumor samples, and have uncovered numerous novel driver fusion genes. Our lab is now focused on modeling novel fusions in vitro and developing therapeutic approaches to screening these fusions. We have also initiated studies of tumor heterogeneity; these efforts focus on gene amplification of receptor tyrosine kinases in glioblastoma (4). This work has revealed a new subclass of brain tumors with mosaic gene amplification of up to three kinases in distinct but intermingled cell populations within the same tumor, forming a mosaic pattern. We found that each subpopulation was actively proliferating and contributing to tumor growth. Detailed genetic analysis found that different subpopulations within a particular tumor shared other gene mutations, indicating that they had originated from the same precursor cells. Mapping the location of different subpopulations in the brain of a glioblastoma patient suggested that each subpopulation may serve a different function in the growth and spread of the tumor. Our lab has developed novel highly-multiplexed FISH technology to address how many genes show copy number heterogeneity, and to study the spatial distribution of such populations (5), see image. We are exploring the therapeutic implications of such driver gene heterogeneity in cell line model systems of glioblastoma using genome-wide CRISPR knock out screens.

More recently we have adapted the AMP sequencing technology in other areas, including (1) mapping off-target rates for CRISPR-CAS genome editing; (2) sequencing and mapping the distribution of IgH and TCR rearrangements in tumor samples; and (3) ultra-high sensitive mutation calling in circulating tumor cells and cell free plasma samples. Using AMP we have developed tissue-specific cell-free DNA (cfDNA) panels to examine the most important cancer genes in common tumors, including lung,



Multiplex Immunofluorescence to detect changes in the immune landscape in head and neck tumors.

melanoma, breast and colon cancer. Such panels are allowing us to track, with a simple blood draw, the tumor burden in patients. We are able to use cfDNA analysis in patients with metastatic cancer to see if they are responding to therapy, and also can track the development of resistance mutations. This allows a real-time dynamic optimization of therapy. Most recently we have developed a methylation-based sequencing assay to allow efficient analysis of tumor-specific methylation patterns in cfDNA samples. We hope that such an approach can be a lot more sensitive in the detection of small amounts of circulating tumor DNA, allowing potential early detection of tumors before they are clinically symptomatic. In addition, the methylation patterns are actually specific to the type of tumor the DNA is derived from, potentially allowing us to determine the actual anatomic site of origin.

The lab has developed multiplex immunofluo rescence panels to study the spatial biology of tumor types including ovarian cancer (looking at homologous recombination repair proteins) and head and neck cancan (looking at immune infiltrates).

Using the Lunaphore platform, the lab can simultaneously examine >15 markers at true singles cell resolution. We have development computation pipelines to analyze these complex datasets.

Selected Publications:

Garcia-Beltran WF, lab EC, Astudillo MG, Yang D, Miller TE, Feldman J, Hauser BM, Caradonna TM, Clayton KL, Nitido AD, Murali MR, Alter G, Charles RC, Dighe A, Branda Ja, Lennerz JK, Lingwood D, Schmidt AG, **Iafrate AJ**, Balazs AB. Covid-19-neutralizing antibodies predict disease severity and survival. *Cell*. 2021; 21;184(2):476-488.

Cheng J, Cao Y, MacLeay A, Lennerz JK, Baig A, Frazier RP, Lee J, Hu K, Pacula M, Meneses E, Robinson H, Batten JM, Brastianos PK, Heist RS, Bardia A, Le LP, **Iafrate AJ**. Clinical Validation of a Cell-Free DNA Gene Panel. *J Mol Diagn.* 2019; 21(4): 632-645.

Onozato ML, Yapp C, Richardson D, Sundaresan T, Chahal V, Lee J, Sullivan JP, Madden MW, Shim HS, Liebers M, Ho Q, Maheswaran S, Haber DA, Zheng Z, Clancy B, Elliott HL, Lennerz JK, **Iafrate AJ**. Highly Multiplexed Fluorescence in Situ Hybridization for in Situ Genomics. *J Mol Diagn*. 2019; 21(3):390-407.

Heist RS, Shim HS, Gingipally S, Mino-Kenudson M, Le L, Gainor JF, Zheng Z, Aryee M, Xia J, Jia P, Jin H, Zhao Z, Pao W, Engelman JA, and **Iafrate AJ**. MET Exon 14 Skipping in Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer. *Oncologist.* 2016; 21(4):481-486.

Zheng Z, Liebers M, Zhelyazkova B, Cao Y, Panditi D, Chen J, Robinson HE, Chmielecki J, Pao W, Engelman JA, **Iafrate AJ***, Le LP*. Anchored multiplex PCR for targeted next-generation sequencing. *Nat Medicine.* 2014; Nov. 10.

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*Co-corresponding authors

Othon Iliopoulos, MD

Iliopoulos Laboratory

Othon Iliopoulos, MD
Dongkook Min, PhD

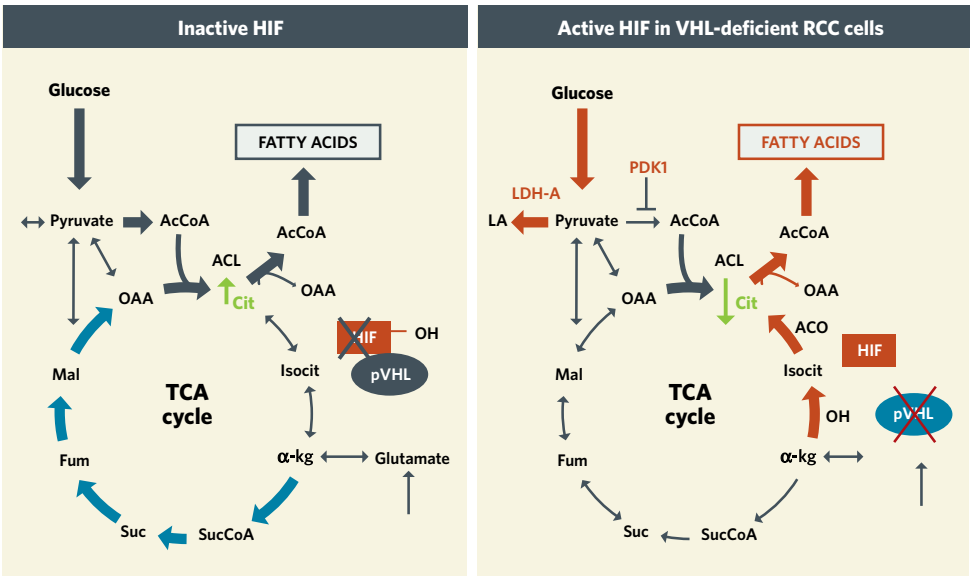
The Iliopoulos laboratory works on the main mechanisms underlying the reprogramming of cancer cell metabolism and cancer angiogenesis with the goal to develop mechanism-based strategies for selectively killing cancer cells. We use Renal Cell Carcinoma (RCC) as a model disease of altered cancer metabolism and angiogenesis mechanisms. Cancer cells transform their metabolism to adapt to the needs of fast growth and to compete with the surrounding normal cells for nutrients and oxygen. In addition to a reprogrammed metabolism, cancer cells stimulate the growth of new blood vessels that bring blood to them, a phenomenon known for many years as "cancer angiogenesis". The laboratory identifies and validates therapeutic targets that disrupt these processes.

Discovery and development of hypoxia inducible factor 2a (HIF2a) inhibitors for treatment of renal cell carcinoma and other HIF2a-dependent cancers

We screened libraries of chemical compounds and discovered chemical molecules that significantly and specifically decrease the expression of HIF2a (Zimmer M. et al. *Molecular Cell* 2008; 32(6): 838-48). We used these HIF2a inhibitors as chemical biology probes and discovered that they suppress the expression of HIF2a by activating IRP1. We thus proved a crosstalk between the iron and oxygen sensing mechanisms within the cell. We demonstrated that the HIF2a inhibitors discovered are "active" and that they reverse the consequences of VHL protein loss (Metelo AM. *Journal Clinical Investigation* 2015; 125(5): 1987-97). Our chemical HIF2a inhibitors are very promising agents for treating RCC.

Targeting the metabolic reprogramming of RCC and HIF2a expressing tumors; from the lab to the bedside

We used metabolic flux analysis to show that hypoxic cells use glutamine as a carbon source for anabolism. We showed that low oxygen levels or HIF2a expression reprogrammed cells to use glutamine in a "reverse" TCA cycle to produce the metabolites required for anabolic reactions, a process called Reductive Carboxylation. These observations provided insights into a mechanism by which hypoxic and HIF2a expressing cancer cells compensate for the Warburg phenomenon (Metallo et al. *Nature* 2012; 481(7381): 380- 4). We delineated the mechanism driving Reductive Carboxylation and proved that reductive carboxylation does not only happen in cultured cells, but can also be detected in human RCC tumors growing as xenografts in mice. We therefore provided for the first time, in vivo evidence for the utilization of glutamine in tumors through reductive carboxylation (Gameiro et al. *Cell Metabolism* 2013; 17(3): 372-385). Recently, we showed that inhibition of Glutaminase 1 (GLS1) decreases significantly the intracellular pyrimidines and results in DNA replication stress in HIF-hypoxia driven cancer cells. Treatment of cancer cells with GLS1 and PARP inhibitors resulted in dramatic suppression of RCC in xenograft models (*J Clin Invest.* 2017; 127(5): 1631-1645).



Expression of Hypoxia Inducible Factor HIF2a rewires the central carbon metabolism in renal cell cancer.

We brought these fundamental observationsof our laboratory on glutamine metabolism to the clinic, testing the combination of GLS1 inhibitors with PARP inhibitors in renal cancer, clear cell ovarian and prostate cancer

Clinical and translational studies to identify resistance to the HIF2a inhibitor Belzutifan.

Belzutifan has been approved by FDA for treatment of VHL disease related RCC, hemagioblastoma and pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors. Our laboratory and the MGH VHL and Hemangioblastoma Centers are leading clinical trials for the optimal use of this first in class oral medication. In addition, we use patient tissue, in vitro and in vivo models to discover mechanisms of resistance to this medication.

Selected Publications:

Okazaki A, Gameiro PA, Christodoulou D, Laviollette L, Schneider M, Chaves F, Stemmer-Rachamimov A, Yazinski SA, Lee R, Stephanopoulos G, Zou L, **Iliopoulos O**. Glutaminase and poly(ADP-ribose) polymerase inhibitors suppress pyrimidine synthesis and VHL-deficient renal cancers. *J Clin Invest.* 2017; 127(5): 1631-1645. Targeting metabolism in RCC. *Nature Reviews Nephrology*. 2017; 13, 320.

Laviolette LA, Mermoud J, Calvo IA, Olson N, Boukhali M, Steinlein OK, Roider E, Sattler EC, Huang D, Teh BT, Motamedi M, Haas W, **Iliopoulos O**. Negative regulation of EGFR signalling by the human folliculin tumour suppressor protein. ***Nat Commun***. 2017; 28;8: 15866.

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Metallo CM, Gameiro PA, Bell EL, Mattaini KR, Yang J, Hiller K, Jewell CM, Zachary R. Johnson JR, Irvine DJ, Guarente G, Kelleher JK, Vander Heiden MG, **Iliopoulos O***, Stephanopoulos G*. Reductive glutamine metabolism by IDH1 mediates lipogenesis under hypoxia. *Nature*. 2011; 481 (7381): 380-4, Nov 20.

Zimmer M, Ebert BL, Neil C, Brenner K, Papaioannou I, Melas A, Tolliday N, Lamb J, Pantopoulos K, Golub T, **Iliopoulos O**. Small-molecule inhibitors of HIF-2a translation link its 5'UTR iron-responsive element to oxygen sensing. ***Molecular Cell***. 2008; 32(6): 838-48.

*Co-corresponding authors

Max Jan, MD, PhD

The Jan laboratory primarily focuses on developing clinically suitable synthetic biology platforms in order to advance next-generation cellular immunotherapies. Harnessing elegant protein degradation cellular machinery that has evolved to control fast biologic transitions related to information flow and signal processing, we have developed molecular switch technologies regulated by the FDA-approved drug lenalidomide as generalizable chemical biology tools and cell therapy controllers. We use genomics, synthetic biology, and biochemistry to build new technologies, explore design principles for adaptive, user-controllable immune cells, and investigate clinical settings to deploy smart cell therapies.

Jan Laboratory

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Co-mentored with Marcela Maus lab

Programming cellular immunotherapies using targeted protein degradation

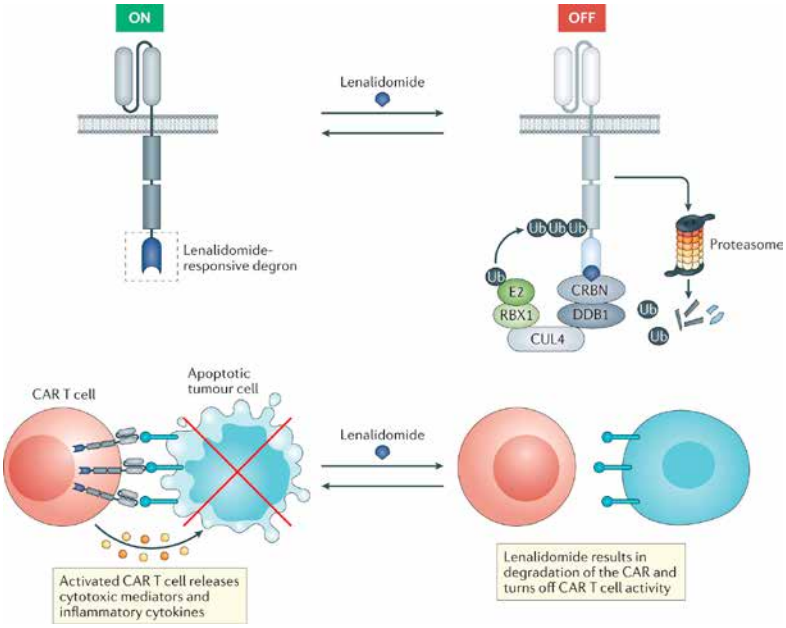
Genetically modified (CAR) T cells have emerged as transformative agents in the care of people with cancer. To reach their full potential, cellular immunotherapies must become safer, more effective, and more accessible. We recently developed chemical genetic control systems around the FDA-approved drug lenalidomide and its analogs, which act as molecular glue targeted protein degraders, recruiting neosubstrate proteins to E3 ubiquitin ligases for polyubiquitination and proteasomal degradation. We engineered clinically suitable lenalidomide-inducible dimerization and degradation systems, and with them drug ON- and OFF-switch CAR T cells (see Figure), prototypes for remote controlled CAR T cell therapies which first entered clinical testing in 2024. These inducible degradation systems have also been further leveraged to encode additional functions in investigational cellular immunotherapies.

To tune up the anti-tumor potency of CAR T cells, we have developed chemical genetic cytokine delivery systems, enabling spatiotemporally controlled release of potent T cell proliferative and anti-tumor cytokine signals that have a poor therapeutic window when delivered systemically. For highly potent and/or novel investigational cell therapies with unproven safety profiles, together with the Manguso lab, we are developing cell therapy suicide switches induced by lenalidomide that may act as safeguards in early-stage clinical testing.

We have also developed a new technology to genetically reprogram E3 ubiquitin ligases to bind and degrade customizable sets of endogenous proteins. This system for targeted endogenous protein degradation in engineered cells can act constitutively, in response to a small molecule controller drug, or in integrated sense-and-response synthetic circuits. Using this protein-protein interaction-based molecular logic for post-translational endogenous protein regulation, we are exploring diverse applications for logic-gated tumor sensing and to supercharge CAR T cell therapies.

Design and evaluation of cellular immunotherapies targeting novel antigens

CAR T cells can be highly effective and well-tolerated therapeutics when they are targeting antigens that are homogenously expressed on tumor cells and are also absent from essential normal tissues. In collaboration with the Villani lab, we



Molecular switch control of genetically engineered cell therapies. *Incorporation of a lenalidomide-responsive degron tag enables drug-dependent degradation mediated by the ubiquitin-proteasome system. Pharmacologic control can be used to mitigate CAR T cell hyperactivation toxicities or to tune CAR signaling. Image credit: Nature Reviews Clinical Oncology.* *Image credit: Nature Reviews Clinical Oncology.*

are leveraging single cell genomics and large-scale tumor and normal tissue gene expression datasets to nominate novel target antigens in select solid tumors including anaplastic, poorly differentiated, and oncocytic thyroid cancers with protein-based validation using archival tissues from the MGH Department of Pathology. We ultimately seek to integrate novel tumor antigen discovery and fit-for-purpose molecular logic systems into investigational cellular immunotherapies targeting malignancies with limited treatment options.

Understanding anti-tumor T cell fate and plasticity using dynamic perturbations

Having developed a suite of tools, including small molecule-controllable genome editing proteins, that can be used in primary human T cells for fast and reversible perturbations of target genes and proteins, we seek to understand how dynamic perturbations can shape and even reprogram T cell fate and function. Transient and traceable perturbations may enable the study of stage-specific molecular mechanisms governing T cell lineage and differentiation trajectories, as well as nascent therapeutic opportunities leveraging rapid development of targeted in vivo delivery modalities.

Selected Publications:

Kann MC, Schneider EM, Almazan AJ, Lane IC, Bouffard AA, Supper VM, … Maus MV, **Jan M**. Chemical genetic control of cytokine signaling in CAR-T cells using lenalidomide-controlled membrane-bound degradable IL-7. *Leukemia.* 2024 Mar;38(3):590-600.

Lane IC, Kembuan G, Carreiro J, Kann MC, Lin W, Bouffard AA, … **Jan M**. Genetic retargeting of E3 ligases to enhance CAR T cell therapy. *Cell Chemical Biology*, 2024 Feb:31(2):338-348.

Kembuan GJ, Kim JY, Maus MV, **Jan M**. Targeting solid tumor antigens with chimeric receptors: cancer biology meets synthetic immunology. *Trends in Cancer*. 2024 Feb.

Sreekanth V, **Jan M**, Zhao KT, Lim D, Davis JR, McConkey M, … & Choudhary A. A molecular glue approach to control the half-life of CRISPR-based technologies. *bioRxiv*. 2023 Mar 20:2023.03.

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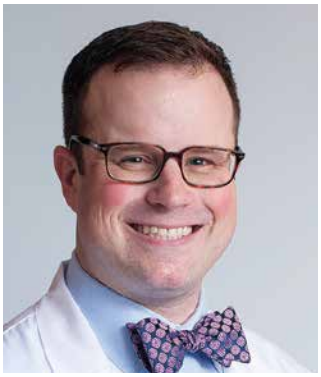
Jan M, Scarfò I, Larson RC, Walker A, Schmidts A, Guirguis AA, … Maus MV, & Ebert BL. Reversible ON-and OFF-switch chimeric antigen receptors controlled by lenalidomide. *Science Translational Medicine*, 2021 Jan 6;13(575):eabb6295.

*Equal contribution

Russell W. Jenkins, MD, PhD



Jenkins Laboratory

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Alex Miranda Rodriguez, PhD
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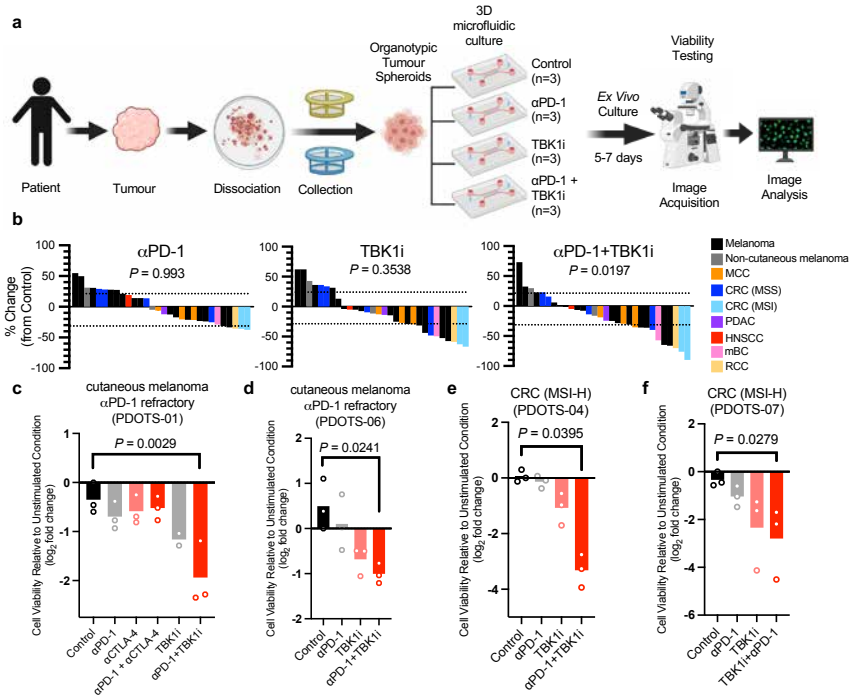
Immunotherapy has transformed the treatment of metastatic melanoma and other cancers, allowing a new avenue of therapeutic options and prolonging lives of many patients. Unfortunately, while immunotherapy is highly effective in some patients, it does not work for every patient and there are no available tests to determine whether or not a patient will respond to immunotherapy before treatment begins. To understand why immunotherapy works for some patients and not others, **the Jenkins laboratory** uses sophisticated tools and techniques to study and investigate the complex and dynamic interactions between cancer cells and the immune system. Our solution to this problem involves a specialized 3-dimensional culture of a patient's own tumor enabling researchers to examine interactions between tumor cells and immune cells. The integration of this novel approach with other emerging technologies is helping us navigate the complex landscape of the tumor immune microenvironment and learn which patients will respond to immunotherapy as well as how to effectively treat cancer patients that do not respond immunotherapy alone.

Precision cancer medicine currently focuses on knowledge of the cancer mutation repertoire and the tailored application of drugs that target altered genes or pathways in individual patients, such as use of BRAF inhibitors in patients with BRAF mutant melanoma. Immune checkpoint inhibitors targeting the PD-1/PD-L1 pathway have shown dramatic and durable clinical responses in melanoma and others cancers, but robust predictive biomarkers are lacking and innate resistance is common. Thus, a critical need exists for more sophisticated ex vivo functional testing modalities that recapitulate human tumor biology to predict response to targeted and immune-based therapies and to develop personalized treatment plans in real-time.

Major focus areas of the Jenkins lab include (1) identifying and characterizing mechanisms of response and resistance to PD-1 blockade, (2) discovering novel therapeutic strategies to overcome resistance to PD-1 blockade, and (3) using the MDOTS/PDOTS as a functional precision medicine platform for the development of novel combinations, and ultimately, personalized immunotherapy to tailor immunotherapy treatment to individual patients. Improved understanding of the response to immune checkpoint inhibitors within the tumor microenvironment will facilitate efforts to identify predictive biomarkers/models for immune checkpoint blockade in real-time, as well as future efforts to screen for therapeutic combinations that enhance the response to immune checkpoint blockade, and may ultimately provide a platform for the 'personalization' of immunotherapy.

Our novel approach for evaluating ex vivo response to PD-1 blockade utilizes murine- and patient-derived organotypic tumor spheroids (MDOTS/PDOTS) cultured in a 3-dimensional microfluidic system.

We demonstrated that organotypic tumor spheroids isolated from fresh mouse and human tumor samples retain autologous lymphoid and myeloid cell populations, including antigen- experienced tumor



TBK1 inhibition enhances sensitivity to PD-1 blockade using PDOTS. a, Schematic of PDOTS preparation. b, Waterfall plots for PDOTS (n = 30, indicated tumor types) treated with anti-PD-1 (250 µg/ml pembrolizumab), TBK1i (1 µM) or combined anti-PD-1 + TBK1i. Mean values (bars) for each sample are shown. Statistical analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA (matched) with Dunnett's multiple- comparison test compared with the control. MCC, Merkel cell carcinoma; CRC, colorectal cancer; MSS, microsatellite stable; PDAC, pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma; HNSCC, head and neck squamous cell carcinoma; mBC, metastatic breast cancer; RCC, renal cell carcinoma.(ref: Sun et al., Nature 2023)

infiltrating CD4 and CD8 T lymphocytes, and respond to PD-1 blockade in short-term *ex vivo* culture (Jenkins et al., *Cancer Discovery* 2018; PMID: 29101162).

Our findings demonstrated the feasibility of *ex vivo* profiling of PD-1 blockade and offer a novel functional approach for the selection of immunotherapeutic combinations. The ultimate goals of these efforts are to identify and characterize novel features of response/resistance to PD-1 blockade and to identify novel therapeutic strategies to overcome resistance to anti-PD-1 therapy, ultimately to bring forward into human clinical trials.

Recently, we identified the innate immune kinase TANK-binding kinase 1 (*TBK1*) as a candidate immune-evasion gene in a pooled genetic screen. Using a suite of genetic and pharmacological tools across multiple experimental model systems, we confirm a role for *TBK1* as an immune-evasion gene. Targeting TBK1 enhances responses to PD-1 blockade by decreasing the cytotoxicity threshold to effector cytokines (TNF and IFNγ). TBK1 inhibition in combination with PD-1 blockade also demonstrated efficacy using patient-derived tumor models, with concordant findings in matched patient-derived organotypic tumor spheroids and matched patient-derived organoids. Tumor cells lacking TBK1 are primed to undergo RIPK- and caspase- dependent cell death in response to TNF and IFNγ in a JAK–STAT-dependent manner. Taken together, our results demonstrate that targeting TBK1 is an effective strategy to overcome resistance to cancer immunotherapy.

Selected Publications:

Sun Y, Revach O-Y, Anderson S, Kessler EA, Wolfe CH, Jenney A, et al. Manguso RT, **Jenkins RW**. Targeting TBK1 to overcome resistance to cancer immunotherapy. *Nature*. 2023;615:158–67.

Revach OY, Liu S, **Jenkins RW**. Targeting TANK-binding kinase 1 (TBK1) in cancer. *Expert Opin Ther Targets*. 2020 Nov;24(11):1065-1078.

Sade-Feldman M, Yizhak K, Bjorgaard SL, Ray JP, de Boer CG, **Jenkins RW**, Lieb DJ, Chen JH, Frederick DT, Barzily-Rokni M, Freeman SS, Reuben A, Hoover PJ, Villani AC, Ivanova E, Portell A, Lizotte PH, Aref AR, Eliane JP, Hammond MR, Vitzthum H, Blackmon SM, Li B, Gopalakrishnan V, Reddy SM, Cooper ZA, Paweletz CP, Barbie DA, Stemmer-Rachamimov A, Flaherty KT, Wargo JA, Boland GM, Sullivan RJ, Getz G, Hacohen N. Defining T Cell States Associated with Response to Checkpoint Immunotherapy in Melanoma. *Cell*. 2018 Nov 1;175(4):998-1013.

Aref AR, Campisi M, Ivanova E, Portell A, Larios D, Piel BP, Mathur N, Zhou C, Coakley RV, Bartels A, Bowden M, Herbert Z, Hill S, Gilhooley S, Carter J, Cañadas I, Thai TC, Kitajima S, Chiono V, Paweletz CP, Barbie DA, Kamm RD, **Jenkins RW**. 3D microfluidic ex vivo culture of organotypic tumor spheroids to model immune checkpoint blockade. *Lab Chip*. 2018 Oct 9;18(20):3129-3143.

Jenkins RW, Aref AR, Lizotte PH, et al. Ex Vivo Profiling of PD-1 Blockade Using Organotypic Tumor Spheroids. *Cancer Discov*. 2018;8(2):196-215.

Deng J, Wang ES, **Jenkins RW**, et al. CDK4/6 Inhibition Augments Antitumor Immunity by Enhancing T-cell Activation. *Cancer Discov*. 2018;8(2):216- 33.

David M. Langenau, PhD

Most pediatric patients whose sarcoma or leukemia recurs will succumb to their disease. The focus of **the Langenau laboratory** is to uncover the mechanisms that drive progression and relapse in pediatric tumors with the long-term goal of identifying new drug targets and therapies to treat relapse and refractory disease.

Langenau Laboratory

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Jihee Lee, PhD
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Yueyang Wang, PhD
Yun Wei, PhD
Alex Weissman

Identifying molecular pathways that drive progression and relapse in pediatric cancer

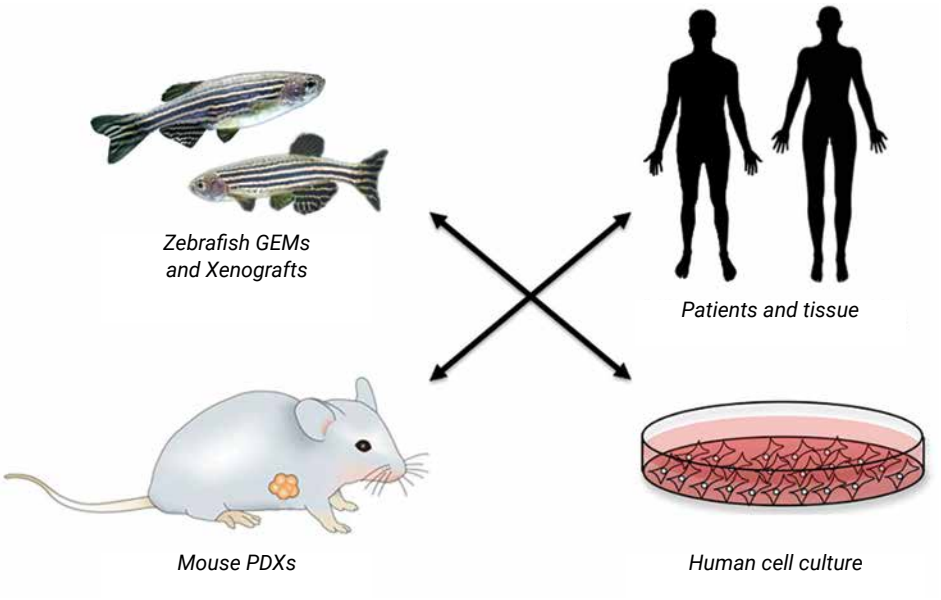
The Langenau laboratory uses zebrafish genetic models, human cell lines, patient derived xenografts, and patient samples to uncover progression and relapse mechanisms in pediatric T-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia (T-ALL) and rhabdomyosarcoma (RMS) muscle cancer. Our work has detailed the remarkable conservation of molecular mechanisms in zebrafish and human cancer and discovered novel biology and new therapies for these diseases. For example, we identified combination Olaparib and temozolomide therapy for the treatment of RMS that is in clinical trial evaluation for RMS patients at Mass General and Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston (NCT01858168, Yan et al., *Cell* 2019).

Uncovering progression-associated driver mutations in T-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia

T-ALL is an aggressive malignancy of thymocytes that affects thousands of children and adults in the United States each year. Recent advancements in conventional chemotherapies have improved the five-year survival rate of patients with T-ALL. However, patients with relapse disease are largely unresponsive to additional therapy and have a very poor prognosis. Ultimately, 70% of children and 92% of adults will die of relapse T-ALL, underscoring the clinical imperative for identifying the molecular mechanisms that cause leukemia cells to re-emerge at relapse. Utilizing a novel zebrafish model of relapse T-ALL, large-scale trangenesis platforms, high-throughput cell transplantation, and unbiased bioinformatic approaches, we have uncovered new oncogenic drivers associated with aggression, therapy resistance and relapse. A large subset of these genes exerts important roles in regulating human T-ALL proliferation, apoptosis and response to therapy. Discovering new relapse-driving oncogenic pathways will likely identify drug targets for the treatment of T-ALL.

Cancer stem cell pathways in pediatric muscle cancer

Rhabdomyosarcoma is a common soft-tissue sarcoma of childhood and phenotypically recapitulates fetal muscle development arrested at early stages of differentiation. Our laboratory has developed transgenic zebrafish models of RMS that mimic the molecular underpinnings of human disease to discover functionally-distinct cell subpopulations, including cancer stems that drive continued tumor growth at relapse. Remarkably these same cell states are found in human disease and drive therapy resistance (Wei et al, *Nature Cancer* 2022). Our group has also uncovered important roles for WNT, MYOD transcription factors, the VANGL2/non-canonical WNT pathway, NOTCH, and P53 loss in driving continued RMS growth.



The Langenau lab uses a wide array of cancer models to discovery new mechansims of progression and relapse. Genetically-engineered models (GEMs) and patient-derived xenografts (PDXs).

Zebrafish avatars of human cancer

The Langenau Lab has generated a number of immunocompromised zebrafish strains that efficiently engraft human tumors. These models are amenable to real-time imaging of cancer hallmarks at single cell resolution and have been used in preclinical modeling experiments to identify drug combinations and new immunotherapy approaches for the treatment of human rhabdomyosarcoma and other cancers. This work has led to the first clinical trial for pediatric cancer originating from findings made in the zebrafish.

Selected Publications:

Danielli SG, Wei Y, Dyer MA, Stewart E, Sheppard H, Wachtel M, Schäfer BW, Patel AG, **Langenau DM**. Single cell transcriptomic profiling identifies tumor-acquired and therapy-resistant cell states in pediatric rhabdomyosarcoma. *Nat Commun.* 2024;15(1):6307

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Michael S. Lawrence, PhD

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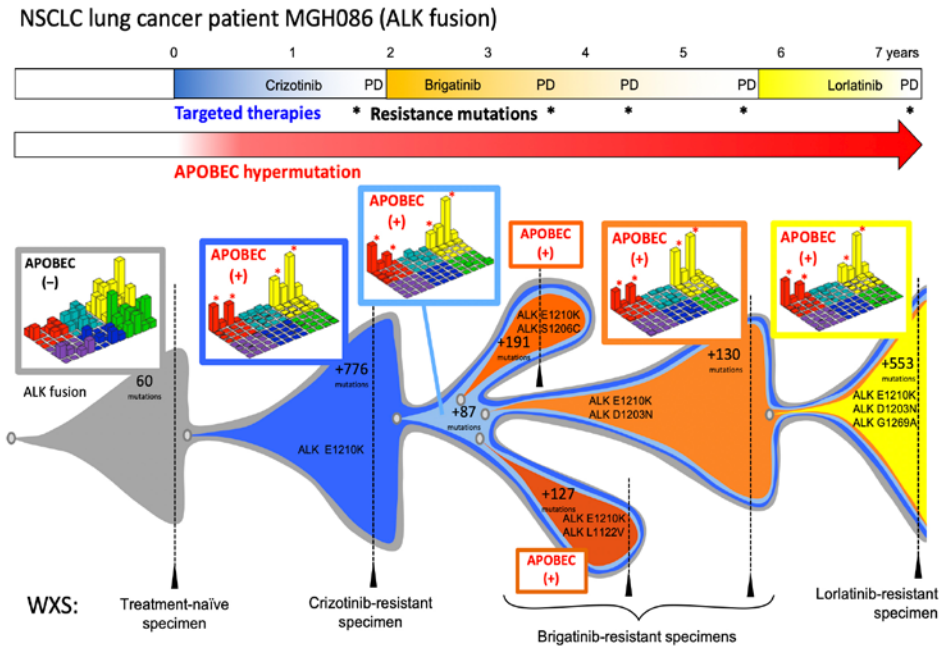
Cancer results from alterations to DNA that lead to the activation of oncogenes or the inactivation of tumor suppressors. **The Lawrence laboratory** focuses on understanding the many ways this can happen, using computation as a powerful microscope to study the processes of DNA damage and repair, gene expression and genome replication, and cancer driver genes. Over our lifetimes, DNA slowly accumulates mutations due to environmental toxins and radiation, as well as from naturally occurring copying errors. Endogenous proteins in human cells can also introduce mutations. One such family of proteins, called APOBEC enzymes, are cytosine deaminases whose normal function is to attack viruses that infect cells. APOBECs are usually dormant in healthy cells, but cancer cells often cause them to become inappropriately activated, inducing them to attack the cell's own DNA, leading to mutations throughout the genome. This can speed a cancer cell's search of sequence space to find resistance mutations that make the cell invulnerable to targeted therapies. Understanding this tactic of cancer cells, and finding a way to inhibit APOBEC enzymes, to put the brakes on cancer evolution, are major interests of our lab.

Analyzing mutational signatures

Cancers vary over many orders of magnitude in their total background mutation burden, ranging from very quiet tumor types such as leukemias and childhood tumors, which may have fewer than 10 somatic mutations in their exome, to carcinogen-associated tumor types such as lung cancer and melanoma, which may have over 1000. Mutations have many causes, and each mutagen can leave a telltale signature. For instance, spontaneous deamination of methylated CpG's causes the transition mutations that dominate many tumor types. Mutagens in tobacco smoke cause G-to-T transversions. Ultraviolet radiation causes C-to-T mutations at dipyrimidines. Agitated APOBEC enzymes cause mutations at C's preceded by T. Loss of mismatch repair causes microsatellite instability (MSI), marked by expansion and contraction of simple- sequence repeats, as well as characteristic types of single- base changes. Tumors carrying mutations in the proofreading exonuclease domain of polymerase epsilon (POLE) tend to accrue C-to-A mutations at the trinucleotide TCT. Very rare "MSI+POLE" cancers show the highest yet known somatic mutation burdens, with upwards of 10,000 coding mutations per patient. Patients affected by MSI and/or POLE mutagenesis are known to experience better clinical outcomes, probably thanks to their high neoantigen loads which attract a powerful immune response.

APOBEC mutations and cancer therapy resistance

A major research interest of our lab is APOBEC/AID enzymes, which normally play a role in the immune system, both the innate immune system, where they act to target viruses infecting a cell or endogenous retroviruses awakened from dormancy in the genome, as well as the adaptive immune system, where they induce somatic hypermutation of the variable regions of immunoglobulins, enabling the selection of ever more optimized antibodies and T cell receptors. Mutagenesis catalyzed by APOBEC/AID enzymes represents a rare case of a cell mutating its own DNA on purpose.



Cancer cells accelerate their evolution by taking advantage of APOBEC hypermutation. This figure illustrates the clinical history of an ALK-driven lung cancer patient being treated at MGH. The initial cancer clone (grey) showed no evidence of APOBEC mutagenesis ("lego plot" lacks APOBEC signature). Crizotinib treatment led to dramatic tumor shrinkage and a two-year remission. However, a resistant clone (blue) eventually emerged, and biopsy of the relapsed tumor revealed the resistance mutation ALK E1210K, as well as hundreds of other new mutations, in aggregate displaying the characteristic APOBEC mutation signature (red stars). This pattern repeated twice more, ultimately exhausting available targeted therapies. Co-treatment with an APOBEC inhibitor could shift the arms race between cancer cells and oncologists, by slowing cancer evolution and prolonging the benefit patients receive from precision medicine.

Because of the potential danger in allowing this to happen, normal healthy cells usually tightly repress the activity of these enzymes.

However, in cancer cells the picture is very different. Cancer genomics studies over the past decade have revealed APOBEC mutation signatures in over half of human tumors. Work from our group and others has revealed genomic details of the preferred targets of APOBEC mutagenesis, such as a strong tendency to mutate cytosines exposed in short loops at the end of genomic stem-loop structures called "hairpins". While APOBEC mutagenesis is widespread in primary tumors, it becomes even more frequent in tumors following treatment with targeted therapies. Our work has revealed that tumors appear to leverage APOBEC mutagenesis as a strategy for discovering useful resistance mutations that allow the tumor to escape therapeutic intervention. To combat this hijacking of the cell's natural immune mechanisms, it would be useful to develop APOBEC inhibitors that could be given as adjuvant or neoadjuvant therapy in combination with driver-targeting drugs. Our ongoing work seeks to employ our insights about APOBEC's preferred substrates to the development of small-molecule or hairpin-mimetic APOBEC inhibitors that could enhance and extend the benefit patients receive from targeted therapies.

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Isozaki H^, Sakhtemani R, Abbasi A, Nikpour N, Stanzione M, Oh S, Langenbucher A, Monroe S, Su W, Cabanos HF, Siddiqui FM, Phan N, Jalili P, Timonina D, Bilton S, Gomez-Caraballo M, Archibald HL, Nangia V, Dionne K, Riley A, Lawlor M, Banwait MK, Cobb RG, Zou L, Dyson NJ, Ott CJ, Benes C, Getz G, Chan CS, Shaw AT, Gainor JF, Lin JJ, Sequist LV, Piotrowska Z, Yeap BY, Engelman JA, Lee JJ, Maruvka YE, Buisson R, **Lawrence MS***^, Hata AN*^. Therapy-induced APOBEC3A drives evolution of persistent cancer cells. *Nature*. 2023 Aug;620(7973):393-401.

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Leick Laboratory

(opens fall 2024)
Mark B. Leick, MD

Redirecting the adaptive immune system, particularly through T cells engineered as chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T cells, has emerged as a groundbreaking clinical strategy for treating relapsed and refractory malignancies. This approach has shown dramatic responses and even cures in a significant subset of patients. However, most patients undergoing CAR-T cell therapy do not achieve long-lasting anti-tumor responses. **The Leick laboratory** is dedicated to understanding and overcoming the challenges associated with CAR-T cell therapy. We focus on integrating investigative knowledge of the mechanisms of response, resistance, and toxicity in CAR-T cell patients to design novel methods for enhancing the next generation of CAR-T cell therapies. Through a virtuous cycle of correlation, design, and testing in patients in the context of thoughtful clinical trials, the Leick Lab continually refines CAR-T cell therapies. By applying these findings, we aim to design CAR-T cells that not only extend and enhance patient responses but also minimize adverse effects.

Since the early days of stem cell transplants, when the graft-versus-leukemia effect was first discovered, the remarkable ability of T cells to eradicate malignant cells has been firmly established. In recent years, immune checkpoint antibodies, which block inhibitory signals to endogenous anti-cancer T cells, have emerged as a cornerstone therapy for many solid tumors by non-specifically activating the immune system. However, this approach can lead to significant collateral damage and is constrained by the natural limits of endogenous T-cell targeting machinery. Enter chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T cell therapy — a revolutionary treatment that combines genetic engineering with novel T cell signaling modulation to target the tumor surfaceome and enhance anti-tumor responses.

The Leick lab is focused on CAR-T cell engineering and clinical translation. Although multiple CAR-T cell therapies have received FDA approval for treating lymphoid malignancies and others have shown promise in solid tumors, most patients currently treated with CAR-T cell therapy will unfortunately not be cured. Nonetheless, we believe these early successes underscore the tremendous potential of CAR-T cell therapy when developed and applied with precision and care.

Our goal is to develop safer, more effective cellular therapies that transform the lives of cancer patients.

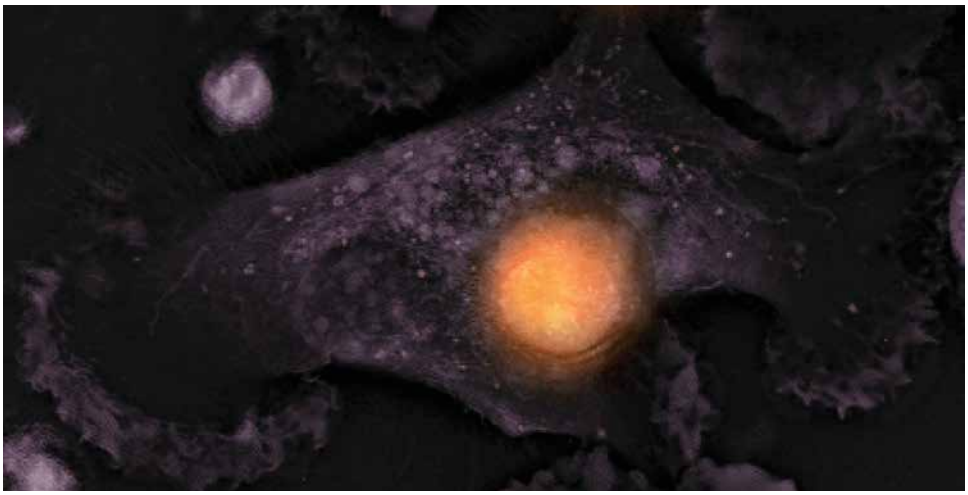
Research Focus Areas:

1. **Innovative CAR-T Cell Design**

   Our team leverages cutting-edge insights in immunology, tumor biology, and clinical strategies to develop innovative approaches for enhancing CAR-T cell efficacy. By rationally designing these therapies, we aim to improve their therapeutic potential and patient outcomes.

2. **Tumor Microenvironment Modulation**

   Suppressive factors within the tumor microenvironment can impede CAR-T cell performance. We use T cells as powerful micro-pharmacies to deliver secreted biologics that target and remodel the immunologic niche. This



CAR-T cell (red) attacking a large pancreatic tumor cell.

approach engages other immune cells and augments CAR-T cell potency while avoiding systemic administration of potentially toxic agents, thus expanding the therapeutic window.

3. **Clinical Translation and Trials**

   While in vitro and in vivo models are invaluable for identifying promising CAR-T cell candidates, they cannot fully replicate the complexity of human physiology. To achieve meaningful progress, we conduct well-designed clinical trials to test innovative strategies directly in patients. Collaborating with Dr. Marcela Maus, Director of the Cellular Immunotherapy Program at MGH, and Dr. Kathleen Gallagher's immune monitoring lab, we develop assays and clinical trials that ensure safe clinical deployment that provide insights into CAR-T cell behavior, fostering a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement.

4. **Deciphering CAR-T Cell Heterogeneity**

   CAR-T cell therapy is a complex and dynamic field. Unlike traditional pharmacological compounds, CAR-T cells exhibit significant inter- and intra-patient heterogeneity, complicating the understanding of variable patient responses. By utilizing multi-omics approaches with expert collaborators, we explore the genomic, transcriptomic, and proteomic landscapes of CAR-T cells, uncovering novel insights into their mechanisms of action and failure.

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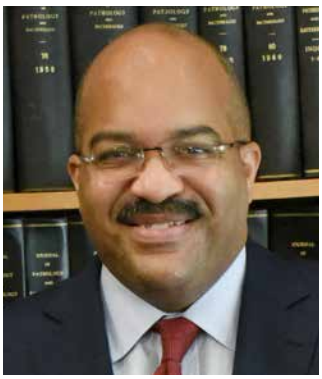

Louissaint Laboratory

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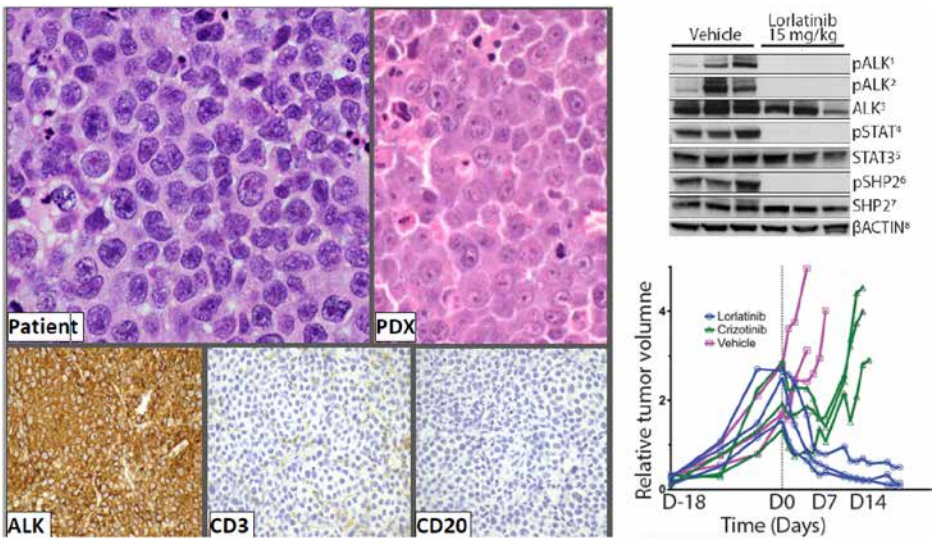
The Louissaint laboratory is interested in understanding how intrinsic genetic alterations and interactions of the lymphoma microenvironment drive lymphoma biology and determine the distinctive clinical behaviors of different lymphoma types. As part of our efforts, we aim to identify biomarkers of prognosis and responsiveness to therapy and to discover potential novel therapeutic targets that may be translated into improved outcomes for lymphoma patients. Traditionally, such investigation has been limited by the paucity of *in-vitro* and *in-vivo* models that faithfully capture the genetic and functional heterogeneity of human lymphomas. To overcome this challenge, our laboratory creates novel in-vivo patient-derived xenograft models and in-vitro primary cell models of lymphoma to investigate the role of genetic alterations, intratumoral heterogeneity, and microenvironment in lymphoma pathogenesis and to test the efficacy of specific therapeutic agents.

Defining novel therapeutic vulnerabilities in aggressive subtypes of large B-cell lymphoma

There are several aggressive lymphoma subtypes of B-cell lineage for which effective therapies do not exist and for which clinical trials sometimes cannot be performed due to the rarity of the diseases and the rapidity with which patients succumb to disease. Some of these lymphomas characterized by plasmablast phenotype do not respond well to standard B-cell chemotherapies and have particularly poor prognosis. One example, anaplastic lymphoma kinase (ALK)-positive large B-cell lymphoma (ALK-LBCL), is characterized by the abnormal expression of alkaline phosphatase protein (ALK), resulting from the production of an abnormal fusion gene of CLTC with ALK. Patients who acquire this lymphoma are typically young and have a dismal prognosis — often dying within two years of diagnosis after failed attempts with standard chemotherapy regimens and preliminary efforts with first generation ALK inhibitors.

We recently created the first patient-derived xenograft (PDX) models of ALK-LBCL that recapitulates the phenotypes and molecular features of the patient lymphomas. Using these xenograft models, we showed that next-generation ALK inhibitors (ALKi) (alectinib and lorlatinib) are active in ALK-LBCL, while the first generation crizotinib inhibitors are not. In collaboration with clinical colleagues, we translated these findings to patients in a multi-institutional study in which advanced stage, chemotherapy refractory ALK-LBCL patients were treated with alectinib followed by allogeneic transplantation, resulting in the first long-term remissions reported in this disease. We have recently developed primary *in-vitro* models of ALK+ LBCL that we are currently using in functional studies to further understand the pathobiological mechanisms driven by ALK fusions in this disease and to identify novel downstream vulnerabilities to complement ALKi therapies, as well as to define the unique mechanisms underlying ALK inhibitor resistance in this disease. We are also actively working on other similarly aggressive molecular subtypes of plasmablastic-type lymphomas and poor-prognosis molecular subtypes of diffuse large B-cell lymphoma using *in-vivo* and *in-vitro* models created in our laboratory.



Efficacy of ALK inhibitors (ALKi) in patient derived xenograph (PDX) models of ALK+ Large B-cell lymphoma. The image on the left shows the histology and immunophenotype of the PDX. The Western (upper right) show activity of ALKi (Lorlatinib) on ALK phosphorylation and signaling in the PDX tumor. The figure (lower right) shows efficacy of third-generation ALKi Lorlatinib on PDX ALK+ LBCL tumor (in contrast to transient partial response to first-generation ALKi Crizotinib).

Unraveling the role of the tumor microenvironment in follicular lymphoma

Follicular lymphoma (FL) is the second most common non-Hodgkin lymphoma, accounting for approximately one quarter of new cases worldwide. As the quintessential indolent B-cell lymphoma, FL is an incurable disease characterized by multiple relapses and frequent transformation (t-FL) to more aggressive lymphomas. Approximately 20% of patients requiring chemotherapy at diagnosis show early progression, usually associated with poor outcomes.

FL, like other indolent B-cell lymphomas, is comprised of heterogeneous population of malignant B cells within a prominent tumor microenvironment including various T cell populations, follicular dendritic cell and other stromal cell populations and some myeloid populations. Interactions between these malignant B cells and elements of tumor microenvironment are critical for FL to thrive. We aim to understand the role of these interactions in lymphoma pathogenesis, and in driving early progression of disease, with the goal of possibly targeting these mechanisms therapeutically.

A major impediment to answering these questions has been the lack of *in-vivo* and *in-vitro* models of human disease that can recapitulate the complexity of genetic alterations and cellular interactions between FL clones and microenvironment that define these lymphomas. We are creating patient-derived xenograft models and *in-vitro* primary models of follicular lymphoma for the purpose of studying these critical cellular interactions within the tumor microenvironment. To unravel and dissect these critical interactions, we are applying single cell sequencing technologies, together with powerful new single cell resolution multi-modal spatial genomics technologies in collaboration with colleagues Vignesh Shanmugam, Fei Chen and Todd Golub. These efforts will accelerate our understanding of the interplay of genetic alterations and microenvironment in driving the biology of indolent lymphomas and drive the discovery of novel targets of these diseases.

Selected Publications:

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Metastasis, the leading cause of cancer-related deaths, is governed by multiple steps, which are not well understood. Using cell culture and mouse models, as well as patient-derived tumor tissues and tumor cells circulating in the blood (Circulating Tumor Cells/CTCs), **the Maheswaran laboratory** has uncovered novel tumor cell characteristics that promote metastasis and therapeutic vulnerabilities in breast cancer patients. Further, tumor microenvironmental factors contribute to tumor cell plasticity leading to multiple cell states creating extensive tumor heterogeneity. These altered cells states dictate the interaction of tumor cells with the non-tumor cell populations in the tumor microenvironment leading to tumor progression. Our goal is to define these interactions and to identify druggable nodes resulting from the interaction of tumor cells and their environment. These investigations will provide insight into the contribution of heterogeneous cancer cell populations to tumor progression and metastasis and their significance as biomarkers and therapeutic targets.

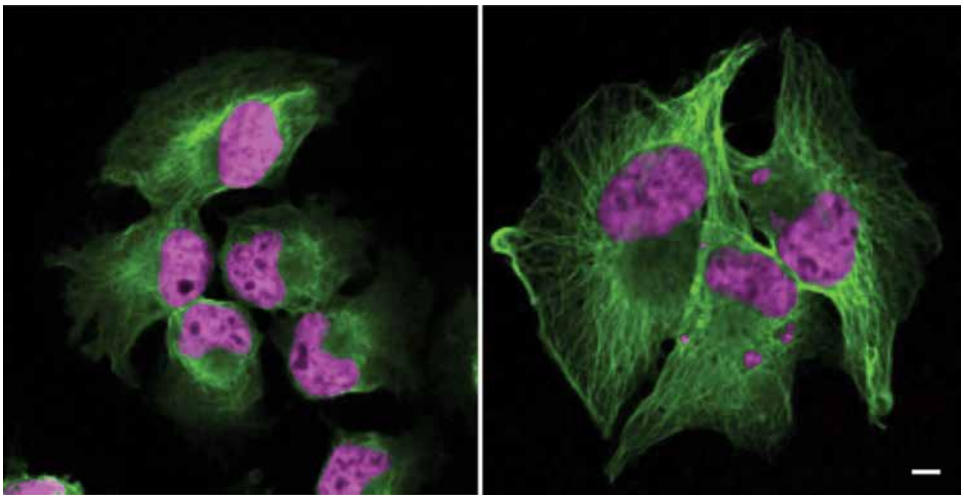
Mechanisms of Breast Cancer Metastasis

The research in my laboratory is focused on defining the molecular mechanisms that drive breast cancer progression and metastasis. Cancer, initially confined to the primary site, eventually spreads to distal sites, including lung, liver, bone and brain, by invading into the bloodstream. Upon reaching these distal sites, the tumor cells continue to grow and evolve well after removal of the primary tumor resulting in overt metastasis and disease recurrence, the leading causes of cancer-related deaths. Using cell culture and mouse models, patient derived tissues, and circulating tumor cells (CTCs) enriched from the blood of women with breast cancer, we characterize the contribution of oncogenic-and tumor-microenvironment-derived signals to cellular states including: epithelial to mesenchymal plasticity, senescence, and how these aspects of tumor heterogeneity influence cancer progression and therapeutic responses.

Naturally occurring senescence induced by microenvironmental factors

Senescence is associated with the secretion of bioactive molecules - the senescence-associated secretory phenotype (SASP). SASP, which is context dependent, remodels the cellular microenvironment and contributes to many age-related diseases. Senolytic compounds, that eliminate senescent cells, alleviate these age-related conditions in preclinical models and in clinical trials; thus, senescence is a druggable cell state. TGFß, prevalent in the hypoxic tumor microenvironment, induces senescence in cancers, rendering it a physiological tumor cell state. In an immune-competent mouse lung cancer model, suppressing TGFß signaling, specifically in the tumor cells, ablated senescent cells in tumors and mitigated immune suppressive immune infiltration. In a therapeutic setting, non-small cell lung cancers with high TGFß/hypoxia-signaling and increased senescence - exhibit poor progression-free survival upon

shGFP escape shSETD1A escape



Confocal images of cells stained with tubulin (green) and DAPI (magenta) show that SETD1A-KD cells escaping senescence harbor chromosome segregation defects visualized as micronuclei (circled). The scale bar represents 50 µm.

receiving immune checkpoint inhibitors (ICI). We are now exploring whether microenvironmental hypoxia-TGFß-induced physiological senescence and SASP are exploited by tumors to mount an innate resistance to ICIs, and how we can exploit this phenotype to improve ICI responses.

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The Manguso laboratory is working to improve the efficacy of cancer immunotherapy. We use a range of approaches including mouse models, functional genomics, cellular immunology, and single-cell profiling to understand how cancers evade the immune system. Our lab has pioneered the use of *in vivo* genetic screens with CRISPR to identify new immunotherapy targets and resistance mechanisms. Using these approaches, we identified the tyrosine phosphatase PTPN2, a critical regulator of immunotherapy sensitivity in tumor cells. We also identified the dsRNA-editing enzyme ADAR1 as a checkpoint that regulates the sensing of self-dsRNA by tumor cells. Our results indicate that there are dozens of ways that cancers can be targeted by the immune system, and we are working to understand the new mechanisms revealed by our studies. In the long term, these approaches will enable a new understanding of how the immune system interacts with cancerous tissue and how the interaction can be manipulated to destroy tumors.

Over the last decade, critical discoveries in immunology and cancer biology have revealed how tumors are shaped by the immune system and how they evolve to evade it. We now know that disrupting immune checkpoints such as CTLA-4 and PD-1/PD-L1 can lead to T cell-mediated elimination of tumors. However, there is still a critical unmet need, as the vast majority of patients with cancer do not benefit from current immunotherapies. Our most pressing challenge is to discover the next generation of immunotherapies that can bring clinical benefit to the majority of patients.

To discover immunotherapy targets and resistance mechanisms in high throughput, we have developed an *in vivo*, CRISPR-based genetic screening system to identify genes that regulate tumor cell sensitivity to immunotherapy (Manguso et al, *Nature* 2017). We genetically modify mouse cancer cell lines that can be transplanted into animals and used as immunotherapy models. After delivery of Cas9 and libraries of single guide RNAs (sgRNAs), we implant pools of modified tumor cells into animals that are treated with immunotherapy. In a single experiment we can determine genes that, when deleted, increase or decrease sensitivity to immunotherapy (Figure 1). This strategy has enabled the rapid and simultaneous identification of new targets and resistance mechanisms that are potent regulators of anti-tumor immunity.

This powerful, unbiased discovery system allows us to identify targets and resistance mechanisms with no previously identified roles in immunotherapy. Three examples illustrate the power of this system for discovery: 1) we found that deletion of the phosphatase PTPN2 increased tumor cell sensitivity to immunotherapy; 2) we discovered that the non-classical MHC-I gene HT-T23/Qa-1 (HLA-E) is a major immune checkpoint that limits anti-tumor immunity by T cells and NK cells; 3) our screens identified that deletion of ADAR1, an adenosine deaminase, enhances recognition of endogenous dsRNA by cytosolic pattern recognition receptors and can overcome resistance to immunotherapy caused by loss of antigen presentation (Ishizuka & Manguso et al, *Nature* 2018).

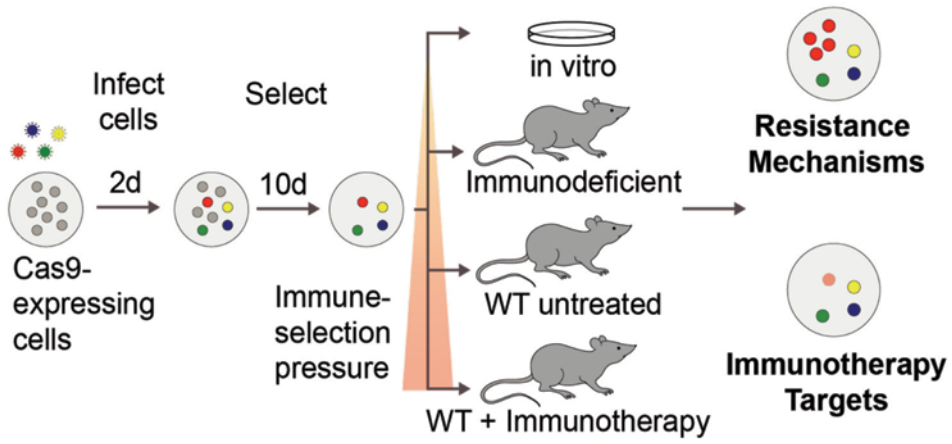

Diagram of in vivo CRISPR screening system. Pools of Cas9-expressing, sgRNA library-transduced tumor cells are implanted into either wild-type or immunocompromised mice. After 2 weeks, tumors are harvested and genomic DNA is extracted from tumor tissue. Next generation sequencing of the sgRNA library is used to identify resistance mechanisms or immunotherapy targets.

More recently, in collaboration with Calico Life Sciences and Abbvie, we discovered and characterized ABBV-CLS-484 (AC484), a first-in-class, orally bioavailable, potent PTPN2 and PTPN1 active-site inhibitor, now in early stage clinical trials. Our work in preclinical models showed that the inhibitor works both as a monotherapy and in combination with checkpoint blockade, acting to simultaneously enhance immune cell functions while also increasing cancer cell sensitivity to immune cell killing (Baumgartner & Ebrahimi-Nik et al, *Nature* 2023).

We have demonstrated that in vivo CRISPR screens are a powerful way to discover new targets and probe the interaction of tumor cells with the host immune system. We can now broadly apply these genetic tools to advance our understanding of how immunotherapy works, why it may fail, and how we can improve it. Ongoing projects in the lab include:

1. Discover novel immunotherapy targets and mechanisms of resistance across several well-characterized mouse cancer models
2. Identify pathways that can overcome acquired resistance to immunotherapy
3. Understand how we can manipulate antigen presentation to enhance immunotherapy

These projects will define new ways to generate anti-tumor immune responses, reveal pathways that can be targeted to enhance these responses across cancer types, and anticipate and overcome the mechanisms by which tumors will become resistant. More broadly, these studies will improve our understanding of how tumors evolve under the selective pressure of immune surveillance and enable the development of more effective therapeutics.

Selected Publications:

Wu MJ*, Kondo H*, Kammula AV*, Shi L, Xiao Y,... Haas W, Cahill D, McBrayer SK, **Manguso RT***, Bardeesy N*. Mutant IDH1 inhibition induces dsDNA sensing to activate tumor immunity. *Science.* 2024 Jul 12;385(6705):eadl6173.

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Griffin GK*, Wu J*, Iracheta-Vellve A*, Patti JC, Hsu J, ..., Doench JG, Haining WN, Yates KB, **Manguso RT***, Bernstein BE*. Epigenetic silencing by SETDB1 suppresses tumour intrinsic immunogenicity. *Nature.* 2021 Jul;595(7866):309-314.

* Denotes equal contribution

Marcela V. Maus, MD, PhD

The immune system has become a powerful tool in the fight against cancer. In particular, T cells of the immune system are potent pathogen killers and maintain memory to provide long-term protection for many years. Therefore, using T cells as a cancer treatment has the potential to induce long-term, durable remissions, and perhaps even cure some patients. **The Maus laboratory** uses genetic engineering techniques to re-direct T cells to find and kill tumor cells, while sparing healthy tissues. We aim to develop new ways to design and re-direct T cells to target tumors, use T cells as delivery vehicles for other drugs, use drugs to help T cells work against tumors, and understand how T cells can work as "living drugs" to treat patients with cancer. We achieve these goals through translational research, initiating clinical trials with our T cell designs, and learning from how these T cells function in patients.

Maus Laboratory

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Immune therapies that engage T cells have the potential to induce long-term durable remissions of cancer. In hematologic malignancies, allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplant can be curative, in part due to T-cell mediated anti-tumor immunity. In solid tumors, checkpoint blockades with anti- CTLA-4 or anti-PD-1 monoclonal antibodies can mediate long-term responses by releasing T cells from tightly controlled peripheral tolerance. Our laboratory focuses on T cell biology and T cell engineering. We design chimeric antigen receptors (CARs) to re-direct T cells to specific antigens. This re- direction is an alternative method of overcoming tolerance and has shown great promise in the clinical setting for B cell malignancies, such leukemia and lymphoma. However, application of this therapy to other cancers has not been as successful. We are working to make CAR T cells safe and effective across tumor types.

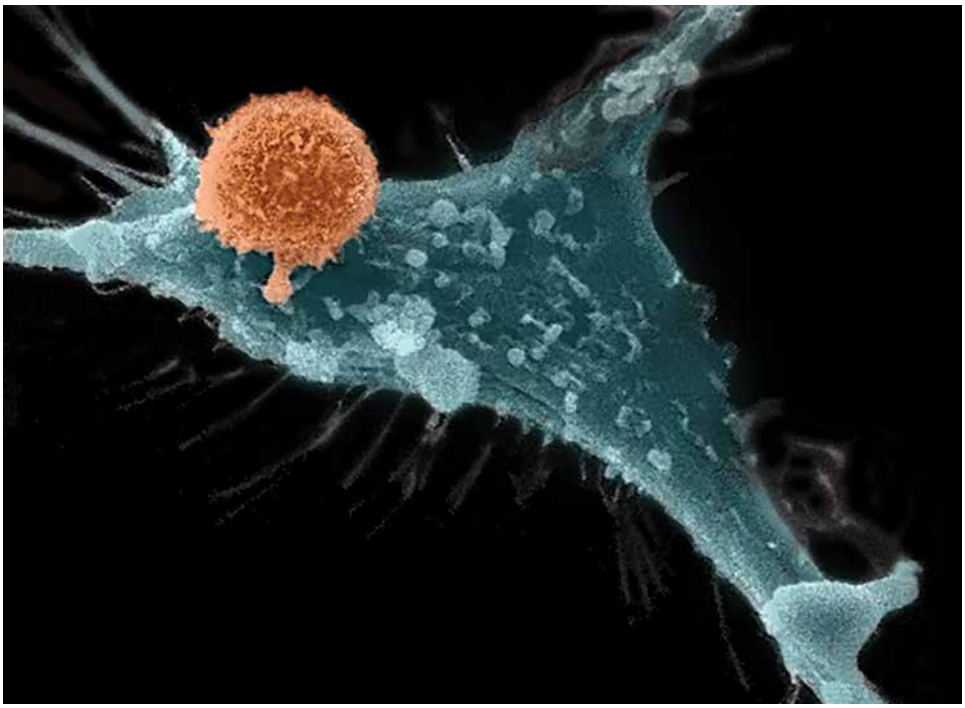
The goal of the Maus lab is to design and evaluate next-generation genetically-modified T cells as immunotherapy in patients with cancer.

The Mass General Cellular Immunotherapy Program, directed by Dr. Maus, aims to generate a pipeline of genetically engineered CAR T cells to use as "living drugs" in patients with cancer. The program is composed of a "research and discovery" arm that designs and examines the novel CAR T cells, "a regulatory/translational" arm to test the CAR T cells in human subjects, and a "reverse translation" arm to learn how the CAR T cells engraft, persist, and function following infusion into patients. From this knowledge, we then design and evaluate the next generation of CAR T cells that are even more likely to eliminate their target tumor. The reverse translation arm is led by Dr. Kathleen Gallagher, Director of our Immune Monitoring Laboratory.

Specifically, the collective goals of the Maus lab are to:

1. *Increase CAR T cell efficacy by overcoming tumor-specific challenges using novel engineering strategies.*

   We are developing novel types of antigen receptors to target multiple antigens on tumor cells, which improves the elimination of heterogenous tumor cells and prevents antigen-negative relapse while also decreasing the risk of targeting healthy cells. We are also using novel techniques to generate CAR T cells that secrete molecules to enhance CAR T cell function and engage other tumor-infiltrating immune cells.



CAR-T Cell Targeting a Glioblastoma Cell Expressing EGFRvIII, Scanning Electron Micrograph; Credit: Bryan D. Choi, Mark B. Leick, and Marcela V. Maus.

2. *Combine CAR T cells with other drugs to sensitize tumors to T cell-mediated killing, potentiate T cell function, or improve safety.*

   Many of the small molecule drugs and antibodies used in the clinic exert their effects on signaling pathways in tumor cells, T cells, and other immune cells. We aim to discover synergistic drug/T cell combinations to increase safety and efficacy, and use genetic engineering tools to confer specific drug sensitivity, resistance, or enhanced molecular switches.

3. *Build on the basic biology that drives natural and engineered T cell functions.*

   We aim to understand the signaling mechanisms and effector functions used by CAR T cells versus native T cells. We are using high throughput screens to understand genes that regulate CAR T cell function and decipher how tumor cells become or are intrinsically resistant to killing by CAR T cells. We can then better engineer CAR T cells to prevent resistance from occurring.

4. *Understand how CAR T cells are functioning in patients.*

   After translating our novel CAR T cells from the lab to the clinic, we carefully follow how CAR T cells expand, persist, and/or change phenotype over time in patients. We then correlate this data with patient outcomes and changes in the tumor. Based on these findings, we go back to the lab and redesign CAR T cells to be more effective in patients.

5. *Develop improve CAR T cell manufacturing processes.*

   Variations in CAR T cell manufacturing regulate their activity in patients, and novel CAR T cell designs require different manufacturing processes compared to CAR T cells currently approved for patients. Our process development lab is working to streamline the manufacturing of novel CAR T cells while also striving to make CAR T cells more readily available to patients.

Selected Publications:

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Andrea I. McClatchey, PhD

McClatchey Laboratory

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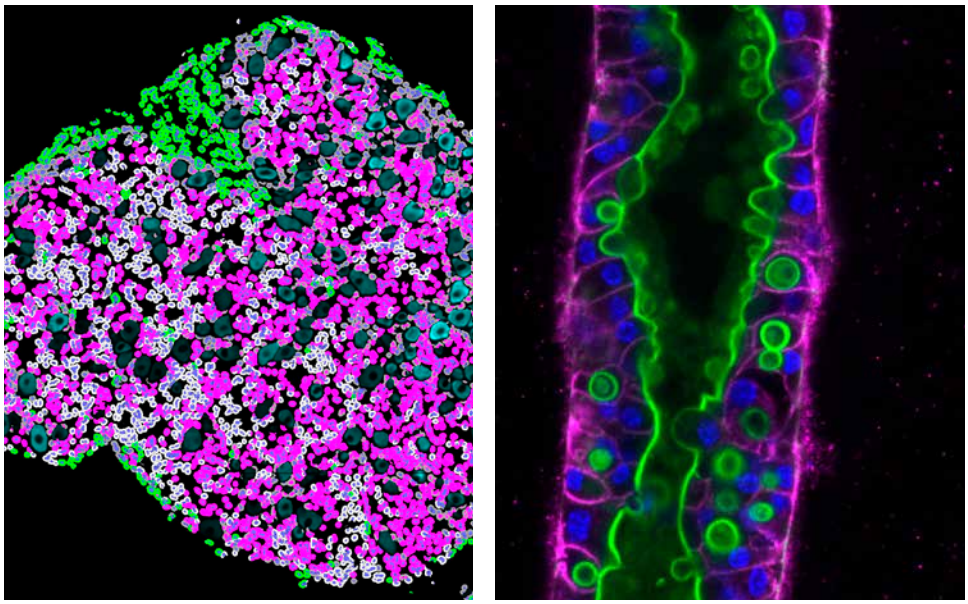
The McClatchey laboratory focuses on understanding how cells spatially organize their outer surface to build and regenerate functioning tissues and how defects in that organization can drive tumor formation. Using in vivo and physiologic 3D models and quantitative imaging, we have uncovered important ways cells spatially coordinate receptor tyrosine kinase trafficking and signaling with cell-cell adhesion and actomyosin organization during tissue morphogenesis. Our studies have focused on the process of de novo lumen formation that drives morphogenesis of tubular bile ducts and other organs, and on the polarization and plasticity of Schwann cells in the peripheral nervous system. In each case, we uncovered unexpected ways that tumor-causing mutations hijack the mechanisms that normally spatially pattern the cell surface to drive tumor initiation and heterogeneity. Our research establishes new models and therapeutic avenues for both biliary (cholangiocarcinoma) and Schwann cell (schwannoma) tumors and highlights the value of convergent studies of morphogenesis and tumorigenesis.

Convergent studies of morphogenesis and tumorigenesis

The vast array of forms and functions exhibited by different cell types is enabled by the intrinsic organization of specialized domains within the cell cortex such as the leading edge of migratory cells, immunological synapse, and microvillus-studded apical surfaces of epithelial cells. The spatial organization of individual cells, in turn, governs their organization into three-dimensional structures that carry out organ-specific functions, such as the tubular networks of the liver, kidney, breast and lung and the heterotypic axoglial junction of peripheral nerves. The spatial organization of cortical domains in individual cells and tissues provides an essential layer of regulation to both biochemical and adhesive receptors on the cell surface. Alterations in cellular architecture are the earliest evidence of a developing tumor and signatures of tumor invasion and metastasis.

The overarching goal of my laboratory is to understand how the dynamic organization of the outer cell surface contributes to morphogenesis and tumorigenesis. We have focused particular attention on the liver and peripheral nervous system. For example, we discovered that biliary epithelial cells self-organize into a tubular network during development via the de novo formation, extension and interconnection of apical lumens. Using a physiologic and quantitative 3D model we found that FGFR signaling is important for biliary morphogenesis, and that FGFR2 mutants that are common drivers of cholangiocarcinoma disrupt this process. Unexpectedly, we found that the trafficking and signaling of normal FGFR2 and phenotypic consequences of FGFR2 mutants are governed by the epithelial state of the cell and nature of the mutation, highlighting the value of using mutants as tools to study morphogenesis and of physiological models to study tumor-causing mutants.



Left: Digital image analysis highlights intra-tumoral heterogeneity of autocrine ligand production in a dorsal root ganglia from a six-month old Postn-Cre/Nf2flox/flox mouse. The Highplex FL algorithm in HALO imaging software was used to achieve single cell segmentation and detect neuregulin-1 positive (magenta), phospho-S6 positive (green), or neuregulin-1/phospho-S6 positive (gray) cells (in collaboration with the laboratory of Dr. Shannon Stott). Image credit: Christine-Chiasson MacKenzie, PhD

Right: Confocal image of a three dimensional cell culture model of biliary tube formation labelled for E-cadherin (green) and actin (magenta). Image credit: Evan O'Loughlin, PhD

Related studies center on a longstanding focus on the role of the membrane:cytoskeleton linking neurofibromatosis type 2 (NF2) tumor suppressor, Merlin, and closely related ERM proteins (Ezrin, Radixin and Moesin) in organizing the Schwann cell surface, We found that in the absence of Merlin, Schwann cells exhibit unstable polarity, which, in turn, yields intrinsic heterogeneity in an otherwise genetically 'cold' (homogeneous) tumor. Through quantitative imaging in mouse models we created an initial atlas of how schwannoma heterogeneity develops, evolves and responds to drug treatment. These studies have provided desperately needed insight into the histological, clinical and therapeutic heterogeneity exhibited by schwannomas and a framework for overcoming it – something desperately needed for NF2 patients who often develop multiple debilitating spinal and cranial schwannomas.

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O'Loughlin E, Zhang Y, Chiasson-MacKenzie C, Dave P, Rheinbay E, Stott S, **McClatchey AI**. Distinct phenotypic consequences of cholangiocarcinoma-associated FGFR2 alterations depend on epithelial maturity. *bioRxiv*, 10.1101/2024.08.30.610360, 2024.

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*Denotes equal contribution

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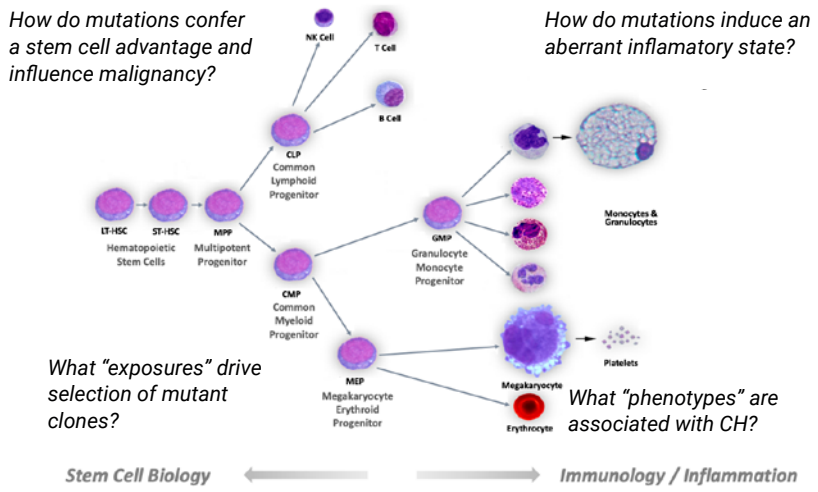
The Miller laboratory seeks to understand how somatic mutations in blood cells arise and drive abnormal cellular states including the development of blood cancers such as leukemia. We incorporate orthogonal tools including human genetics, mouse models, cellular assays, genetic screens, and molecular techniques to identify genes that are recurrently altered in blood disorders and determine how these alterations alter cellular programs such as self-renewal, response to DNA damage, and inflammation. We are particularly interested in using these tools to understand (1) the role of *PPM1D*, a gene that regulates the DNA Damage Response, in blood cell development (2) how mutations in *PPM1D* allow cells to be more resistant to chemotherapy and (3) how mutations in blood cells more generally influence inflammatory programs and pathophysiologic processes across multiple tissue-types. We seek to use our understanding of this biology to develop new therapies for the prevention and treatment of blood cancers.

Over the lifespan of an organism, somatic mutations arise in stem cells in many organs, some of which confer a competitive survival or growth advantage to the mutant cells. In such cases, a clonally selected population emerges in which additional mutational events can lead to malignant transformation and the development of cancer. This is particularly true in the blood system where mutations can drive selection of a non-malignant population, so called clonal hematopoiesis (CH), with subsequent mutational events leading to the development of blood cancers including myeloid neoplasms such as myeloproliferative neoplasms, myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS), and acute myeloid leukemia (AML). We believe that understanding the molecular mechanisms by which mutations arise in hematopoietic cells and drive neoplastic transformation can highlight novel therapeutic opportunities for the treatment of blood cancers, particularly MDS and AML.

DNA sequencing studies have informed our understanding of the genetic landscape of many hematologic malignancies, including MDS and AML. Further efforts have catalogued the genes that are mutated in CH by identifying somatic alterations present in the peripheral blood of individuals without blood cancers. Taken together, these human genetic studies can inform the timing and context in which various mutations arise, and in so doing identify critical mediators of both normal hematopoiesis and malignancy. We utilize these studies to define testable hypotheses in the lab, the results of which can further inform clinical decision-making.

Our work has largely focused on mutations in the gene *PPM1D*. Using selected patient cohorts, we have found that individuals who have received cytotoxic therapy (chemotherapy or radiation) are significantly more likely to harbor activating mutations in *PPM1D*, in the form of CH or frank malignancy (MDS or AML). We now know that these mutations, which arise in hematopoietic stem cells, lead to increased levels of PPM1D protein via impaired proteasomal degradation. This in turn allows PPM1D to suppress the DNA damage response and P53 activation more effectively, thereby allowing *PPM1D*-mutant



Framework for thinking about how somatic mutations arise in hematopoietic stem cells and drive aberrant stem cells processes including malignancy (left) and how these mutations influence aberrant inflammatory programs when present in mature immune cells and contribute to various disease phenotypes (right).

cells to have a survival advantage relative to unmutated cells in the presence of cytotoxic stress. We now seek to more deeply characterize the biological processes driving these observations using novel genetically engineered mouse models, functional genetic techniques, and biochemical assays. We hypothesize that defining the role of PPM1D in normal and malignant hematopoiesis will both drive our efforts to therapeutically target PPM1D in numerous oncologic contexts, and more broadly inform our understanding of the DNA damage response in normal and cancerous cells. This is particularly important in individuals who have therapy-related cancers that tend to be highly resistant to our standard therapies and have very poor outcomes.

We also are interested in understanding how CH mutations drive aberrant inflammatory states. Numerous groups have shown that individuals with CH have a greater risk of adverse cardiovascular outcomes, via enhanced inflammatory programs within mature, mutant immune cells. Using analogous approaches, we found that individuals with CH are more likely to have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), particularly severe forms, and that mice with hematopoietic loss of Tet2, a gene commonly mutated in CH, have enhanced pulmonary emphysema in numerous models, akin to what is seen in human COPD. We now seek to understand which mutant blood cell types and the specific molecular pathways that drive this enhanced lung inflammation. We believe that a deep understanding of the link between CH and COPD will define new therapeutic opportunities to treat inflammatory disease of the lung and beyond.

Taken together, our lab seeks to leverage observations from human genetic studies to make clinically meaningful biological insights with the goal of developing new therapies to improve the outcome of our patients with hematologic malignancies.

Selected Publications:

Jiang W, Shaw S, Rush J, Dumont N, Kim J, Singh R, Skepner A, Khodier C, Raffier C, Yan N, Schluter C, Yu X, Szuchnicki M, Sathappa M, Kahn J, Sperling AS, McKinney DC, Gould AE, Garvie CW, **Miller PG**. Identification of Small Molecule Inhibitors of PPM1D Using a Novel Drug Discovery Platform. *BioRxiv* [Preprint]. 2024 May 21:2024.05.20.595001.

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Mayerhofer C,...**Miller PG**. Clonal Hematopoiesis in Older Patients with Breast Cancer Receiving Chemotherapy. *J National Cancer Institute*. 2023. Apr 12;djad05.

Miller PG*, Qiao D*,...Cho MH, Ebert BL. Association of Clonal Hematopoiesis with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. *Blood*. 139(3):357-368, 2022.

Miller PG, Sperling AS, Gibson CJ,... Ebert BL. Contribution of clonal hematopoiesis to adult-onset hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis. *Blood.* 136(26):3051-3055, 2020.

Miller PG, Al-Shahrour F,... Ebert BL. In Vivo RNAi screening identifies a leukemia-specific dependence on integrin beta 3 signaling. *Cancer Cell.* 24(1):45-58, 2013.

*Denotes equal contribution

Avanish Mishra, PhD

Mishra Laboratory

(Opens fall 2024)
Avanish Mishra, PhD

In **the Mishra laboratory**, we develop bioengineering approaches for cancer diagnostics and cell therapy manufacturing. Specifically, we focus on the application of large-volume microfluidics bioengineering tools for liquid biopsy of cancer cells, immune subset enrichment for cell therapy manufacturing, and enrichment of hematopoietic stem cells for genetic engineering in sickle cell disease. Leveraging the precision and controllability of microfluidics, we recover viable and untouched rare tumor cells from billions of contaminating cells, enabling a comprehensive "cell-based liquid biopsy" with multi-analyte analyses applicable to a diverse array of cancers. The ability to interrogate large numbers of intact cancer cells in individual patients offers unprecedented opportunities for serial multi-omics at the single-cell level, including paired RNA and DNA analyses applied to large numbers of individual tumor cells.

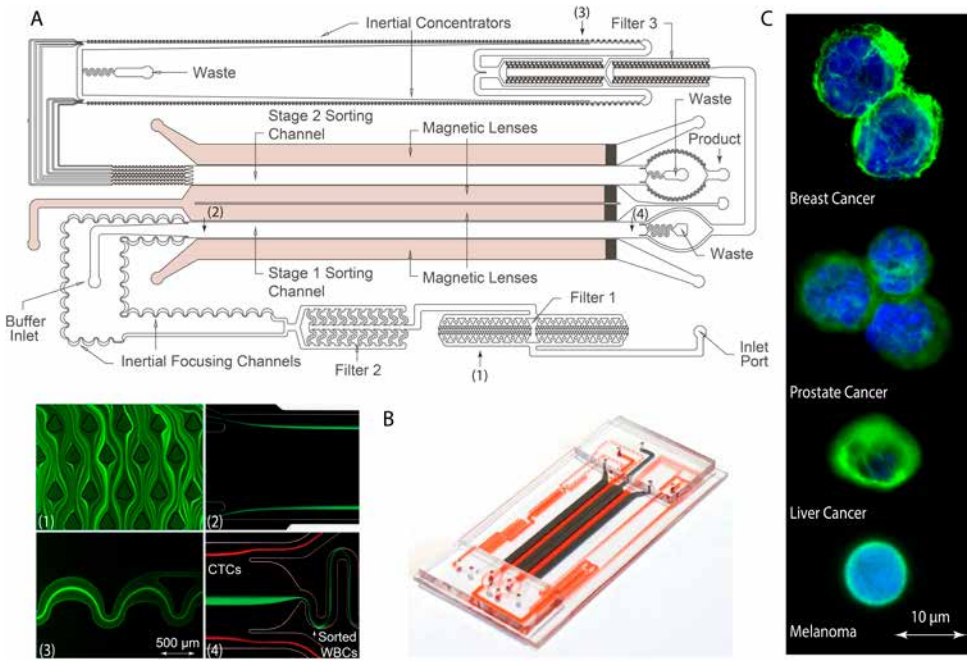
Tumor-cell based liquid biopsies have emerged as a promising tool for cancer diagnostics, treatment selection, and response monitoring. Intact tumor cells provide the full complement of analytes, including DNA, RNA, proteins, and metabolic markers. However, these cells are often extremely rare and exist in large sample volumes. For instance, clinical biofluids, like blood products, require large sampling volumes of tens to hundreds of milliliters, where tumor cells can be as rare as 1 in 50 million nucleated cells. We leverage the precision and controllability of microfluidics, enabled by semiconductor manufacturing techniques, to uncover viable and untouched rare cells at high cellular throughputs (100 million cells/min).

Large-volume microfluidics for tumor-cell based liquid biopsy

Circulating tumor cells (CTCs) are extremely rare (1 cell in 10 mL blood), and current technologies cannot process the blood volumes required to isolate a sufficient number of tumor cells for in-depth assays. We developed a high-throughput microfluidic platform utilizing high-flow channels and amplification of cell sorting forces through magnetic lenses for processing concentrated large-volume blood products. LPCTC-iChip operates without clogging and activating platelets while providing identical sorting conditions at the single-cell level. In collaboration with Haber, Maheswaran, and Toner labs, this technology has been applied to analyze patient-derived blood products, screening whole blood volume from patients with metastatic cancer, with a median yield of 2,799 CTCs purified per patient. Isolation of 100-fold more CTCs from individual patients enables the characterization of their morphological and molecular heterogeneity, including cell size and RNA expression. It also allows robust detection of gene copy number variation, a definitive cancer marker with potential diagnostic applications. High-volume microfluidic enrichment of CTCs constitutes a new dimension in liquid biopsies.

Microfluidic devices for cell and gene therapy manufacturing

Cellular therapies based on the ex vivo editing of hematopoietic stem cells or immune T cells have emerged as a transformative disease-modifying option for treating various diseases such as Sickle Cell



(A) High-throughput sorter for processing large volume blood products. Insets show streak images of cells in the sorter. (B) Microfabricated chip. (C) Tumor cells isolated from patient leukopak samples.

Disease and hematologic cancers. Most cell therapy products utilize patients' own blood cells, collected through leukapheresis, as the starting material. This demands precise isolation of rare stem cells or subsets of T cells from high cell-density, large volume (300 to 400 mL) leukopaks. The isolation is followed by genetic modification of the cells and their subsequent culture and infusion back into the patient. Conventional bulk cell sorting methods are highly lossy in recovering rare cells, risk contamination, yield impure products, and prove averse to automation. While these bulk methods suffer from cell loss, microfluidic cell sorting approaches produce high-purity products and enable superior cell yield. To address these challenges, we will bring microfluidic innovations from the field of cancer diagnostics to the field of cell therapy manufacturing. We are focusing on two directions: stem cell purification from blood products for sickle cell gene therapy and the development of a microfluidic CAR-T manufacturing platform.

Selected Publications:

Mishra A, Huang S-B, Dubash T, Burr R, Edd JF, Wittner BS, et al. Tumor cell-based liquid biopsy using high-throughput microfluidic enrichment of entire leukapheresis product. *BioRxiv* 2024:2024.03.13.583573.

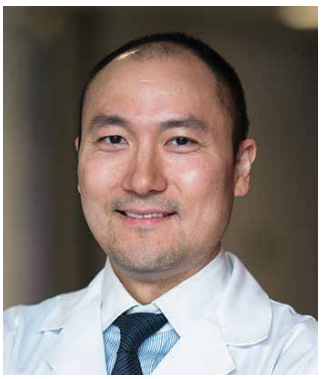
Gopinathan KA, **Mishra A**, Mutlu BR, Edd JF, Toner M. A microfluidic transistor for automatic control of liquids. *Nat 2023* 6227984 2023; 622:735–41.

Mishra A, Dubash TD, Edd JF, Jewett MK, Garre SG, Karabacak NM, et al. Ultra-high throughput magnetic sorting of large blood volumes for epitope-agnostic isolation of circulating tumor cells. Proc *Natl Acad Sci* 2020;117:1–35.

Edd JF, **Mishra A**, Dubash TD, Herrera S, Mohammad R, Williams EK, et al. Microfluidic concentration and separation of circulating tumor cell clusters from large blood volumes. *Lab Chip* 2020;20:558–67.

Mishra A, Kwon J-SJ-S, Thakur R, Wereley S. Optoelectrical microfluidics as a promising tool in biology. *Trends Biotechnol* 2014;32:414–21.

David T. Miyamoto, MD, PhD



The Miyamoto laboratory focuses on the discovery and development of novel biomarkers to guide the personalized treatment of patients with prostate and bladder cancer. We analyze molecular profiles of tumor biopsies as well as circulating tumors cells (CTCs) in the blood that can be sampled non-invasively and repeatedly. By studying these patient-derived specimens, we have identified new molecular predictors of response to therapy and potential mechanisms of treatment resistance. Our overall aim is to develop tools for "real-time precision medicine" to probe the molecular signatures of cancers as they evolve over time, and to guide the rational selection of appropriate therapies for each individual patient with cancer.

Miyamoto Laboratory

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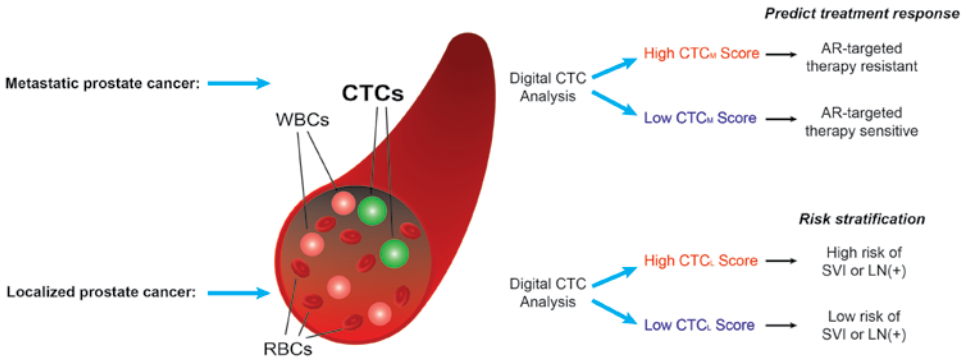
The mission of our translational research laboratory is to discover and develop molecular biomarkers that inform clinical decisions in the management of patients with genitourinary malignancies. We aim to develop circulating and tissue-based biomarkers in a variety of clinical contexts to actualize the concept "real-time precision medicine," integrating genomic analyses of liquid and tissue biopsies to guide the personalized care of patients with genitourinary malignancies.

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men and the second leading cause of cancer-related death in men. There is a critical unmet need for predictive biomarkers to guide the rational selection of appropriate treatment options for each patient with prostate cancer in settings ranging from localized to metastatic disease. A major focus of our laboratory is the investigation of circulating tumors cells (CTCs), which are rare cancer cells shed by primary and metastatic tumors into the peripheral blood circulation. CTCs represent a type of "liquid biopsy" that may be performed repeatedly and non-invasively to monitor treatment efficacy and study tumor evolution during therapy. As part of a collaborative, multidisciplinary team at MGH, we have developed novel molecular assays using microfluidic technologies to isolate and analyze CTCs from cancer patients. Our recent studies include the use of CTC expression profiling to interrogate signaling pathways and derive CTC RNA signatures that predict resistance to androgen receptor (AR)-targeted therapy in metastatic cancer and early dissemination in localized cancer. Ongoing projects include the development of CTC molecular signatures to predict clinical outcomes after radiation therapy as well as novel prostate cancer therapies currently in Phase 1/2 clinical trials. Another focus is the development of novel tissue-based biomarkers. We utilize technologies including next-generation sequencing and RNA in situ hybridization (RNA-ISH) to evaluate prognostic and predictive molecular signatures in limited quantities of archival prostate tumor tissues from clinical trials or carefully selected clinical cohorts. Our ongoing efforts are directed at correlating molecular findings with clinical outcomes to identify novel biomarkers predictive of treatment response that can be useful in the clinic.

Bladder cancer is the fifth most common cancer in the US, causing 18,000 deaths per year. Muscle-invasive bladder cancer has a high propensity for metastasis and requires aggressive treatment with either radical



Potential clinical applications of digital CTC analysis in metastatic and localized prostate cancer. AR, androgen receptor; CTC, circulating tumor cell; LN, lymph node; RBC, red blood cell; SVI, seminal vesicle invasion; WBC, white blood cell (Miyamoto et al. Cancer Discovery 2018).

cystectomy or bladder-sparing trimodality therapy (transurethral tumor resection followed by chemoradiation). However, the decision regarding which treatment to pursue is often made based on arbitrary factors including patient or physician preference. There is an urgent unmet need for molecular biomarkers to guide patients towards the most appropriate therapy based on the biology of their tumor. We recently performed gene expression profiling of bladder tumors from patients treated with trimodality therapy and identified immune and stromal molecular signatures predictive of outcomes after chemoradiation. Ongoing projects include the development of CTC RNA signatures to predict outcomes and monitor for minimal residual disease after bladder cancer therapy. We are currently evaluating these and other candidate biomarkers as predictors of treatment response in prospective clinical trials and carefully defined retrospective clinical cohorts.

Selected Publications:

Saylor PJ*, Otani K*, Balza R, Ukleja J, Pleskow H, Fisher R, Kusaka E, Otani YS, Badusi PO, Smith MR, Meneely E, Olivier K, Lowe AC, Toner M, Maheswaran S, Haber DA, Yeap BY, Lee RJ, **Miyamoto DT**. Circulating and imaging biomarkers of Radium-223 response in metastatic castration-resistant prostate cancer. *JCO Precision Oncology.* 2024; Feb;8:e2300230.

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Kamran SC, Zhou Y, Otani K, Drumm M, Otani Y, Wu S, Wu CL, Feldman AS, Wszolek M, Lee RJ, Saylor PJ, Lennerz J, Van Allen E, Willers H, Hong TS, Liu Y, Davicioni E, Gibb EA, Shipley WU, Mouw KW, Efstathiou JA, **Miyamoto DT**. Genomic tumor correlates of clinical outcomes following organ-sparing chemoradiation therapy for bladder cancer. ***Clin Cancer Res***. 2023 Dec 15;29(24):5116-5127.

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Miyamoto DT, Lee RJ, Kalinich M,... Toner M, Maheswaran S, Haber DA. An RNA-based digital circulating tumor cell signature is predictive of drug response and early dissemination in prostate cancer. *Cancer Discovery.* 2018; 8:288-303.

Miyamoto DT, Zheng Y, Wittner BS,... Toner M, Maheswaran S, Haber DA. RNA-Seq of single prostate CTCs implicates noncanonical Wnt signaling in antiandrogen resistance. *Science*. 2015; 349:1351-1356.

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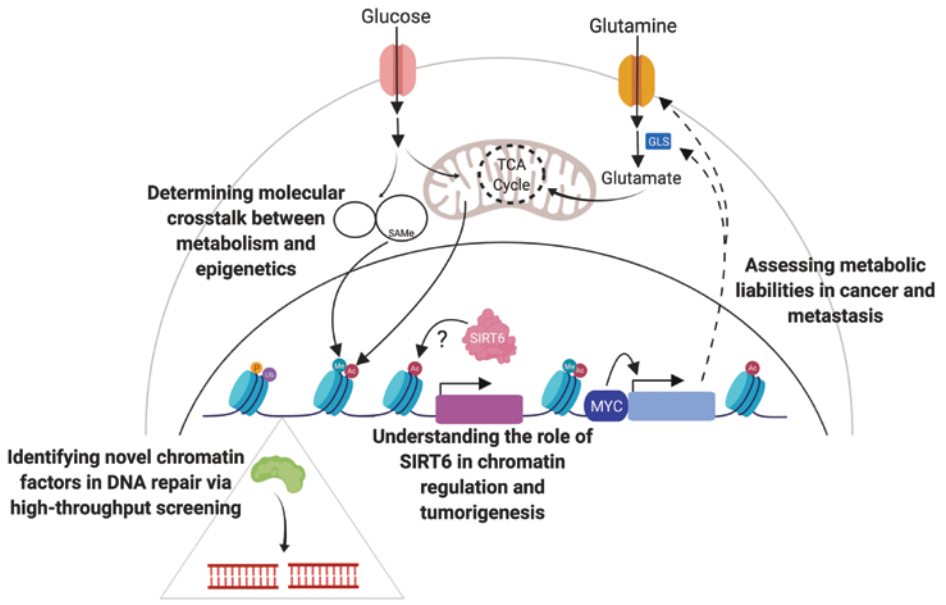
Research in **the Mostoslavsky laboratory** focuses on the crosstalk between chromatin dynamics and cellular metabolism. Most of our previous work involves the Sir2 mammalian homolog known as SIRT6, an enzyme that plays a role in compacting the DNA scaffolding structure known as chromatin. Using a combination of in vitro and in vivo transgenic mice, our research indicates that SIRT6 modulates glucose metabolism and DNA repair and functions as a strong tumor suppressor gene. More recently, we have expanded our work to understand roles for metabolic heterogeneity in modulating chromatin dynamics and how cancer cells adapt to specific nutrient stressors. In particular, we have started to explore the unique adaptations of metastatic cells, and how they manage to set and grow in a new niche environment. We have found that they do so mainly through non-genetic adaptations, and we have identified novel genes uniquely upregulated as drivers of metastatic disease. We are currently exploring the molecular mechanisms by which these genes drive metastatic outgrowth.

DNA and histones are arranged in the nucleus in a highly condensed structure known as chromatin. Cellular processes that unwind the double helix—such as transcription, replication and DNA repair—have to overcome this natural barrier to DNA accessibility.

Multicellular organisms also need to control their use of cellular energy stores. Glucose metabolism plays a crucial role in organismal homeostasis, influencing energy consumption, cell proliferation, stress resistance and lifespan. Defective glucose utilization causes numerous diseases ranging from diabetes to an increased tendency to develop tumors. In order to respond appropriately to changes in energy status, cells need a finely tuned system to modulate chromatin dynamics iand to respond to metabolic cues. Reciprocally, chromatin changes necessary for cellular functions need to be coupled to metabolic adaptations.

Our lab is interested in understanding the influence of chromatin on nuclear processes (gene transcription, DNA recombination, and DNA repair) and the relationship between chromatin dynamics and the metabolic adaptation of cells. One of our interests is studying a group of proteins called SIRTs, the mammalian homologues of the yeast Sir2. In particular, our work has focused on the mammalian Sir2 homologue, SIRT6. In recent years, we have identified SIRT6 as a key modulator of metabolism, functioning as a histone H3K9 deacetylase to silence glycolytic genes; thus directing pyruvate to the TCA cycle to promote ATP synthesis. This function appears critical for glucose homeostasis, as SIRT6 deficient animals die early in life from hypoglycemia. Remarkably, we found SIRT6 to act as a tumor suppressor in multiple cancers, regulating cancer metabolism through mechanisms that bypass known oncogenic pathways. Cancer cells prefer fermentation (i.e., lactate production) to respiration, as described by biochemist and Nobel laureate Otto Warburg decades ago (i.e., the Warburg effect), yet the molecular mechanisms behind this metabolic switch remained a mystery. We



Understanding the crosstalk between metabolism and Epigenetics

Image Credit: Lara Roach

found that SIRT6 is a critical epigenetic modulator of the Warburg effect, providing a long-sought molecular explanation to this phenomenon. Importantly, new work from the lab suggests that such metabolic adaptation occurs in a rare population of cells, indicating that tumors exhibit metabolic heterogeneity, and current work from the lab aims to understand whether such heterogeneity is dynamic, and whether it influences chromatin changes in cancer cells, as a mechanism to acquire "epigenetic plasticity".

In recent years, we have broadened our research to explore roles of onecarbon metabolism (1C) in chromatin dynamics, particularly how the universal donor SAM is modulated in cells, exploring novel metabolic liabilities in cancer, new chromatin modifications, and new chromatin modulators of DNA repair. Importantly, past work on metabolism and chromatin in cancer has focused on primary tumors. We have started to explore the unique metabolic and epigenetic adaptation of metastatic cells, something that remains mostly unknown. In recent studies we have uncovered novel genes that are upregulated in metastatic cells, driving the survival of disseminated tumor cells in the new niche. These genes include metabolic enzymes and transporters, suggesting that metabolic adaptations will be key for metastatic cells to outgrowth, and we are currently exploring whether metabolic heterogeneity is a feature of metastasis as well. We use a number of experimental systems, including biochemical and biological approaches, as well as genetically engineered mouse models.

Specific projects:

1. Determining the role of SIRT6 in tumorigenesis and aging
2. Identifying novel histone modifications, and their roles in DNA repair
3. Determining molecular crosstalk between epigenetics and metabolism
4. Discovering non-genetic (epigenetic and metabolic) drivers of metastases

Selected Publications:

Ferrer CM., Cho HM, Boon R, Bernasocchi T, Wong LP, Cetinbas M, Haggerty ER, Mitsiades I, Wojtkiewicz GR, McLoughlin DE, Aboushousha R, Abdelhamid H, Kugel S, Rheinbay E, Sadreyev R, Juric D, Janssen-Heininger YMW, and **Mostoslavsky R**. The glutathione S-transferase Gstt1 drives survival and dissemination in metastases. *Nature Cell Biol.* 2024, 26, 975-990.

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Mo Motamedi, PhD

Motamedi Laboratory

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Research in **the Motamedi laboratory** focuses on a molecular memory system, called epigenetics, which allows cells to develop distinct identities during development or become resistant to different types of stress such as chemotherapy. Epigenetic states are formed when groups of genes are turned on and off at a given time in a given cell. Recent work has shown that cancer cells exploit epigenetic mechanisms to develop resistance to radiation, chemo- or immune-therapy. By studying the molecular machinery that establish epigenetic states in model organisms, the Motamedi lab has identified a critical pathway that helps cancer cells establish resistance to therapy. By inhibiting this pathway, they aim to reverse chemotherapy resistance stably in several cancers. This discovery will help in addressing this difficult unmet need in cancer therapy.

Epigenetic changes are heritable, phenotypic alterations which occur without mutations to the underlying genes. Once triggered, these phenotypic changes persist through numerous cell divisions independently of the original inducing signal. Epigenetic changes are critical for the stable formation of cellular identities, upon which all developmental processes depend. Disruption to epigenetic regulation underlies a variety of human maladies, including cancers. In fact, epigenetic pathways can contribute to all stages of cancer progression, including initiation, metastasis, resistance and recurrence. Indeed, understanding the molecular mechanisms that establish epigenetic states is fundamental to the development of therapies that target the epigenetic components of cancers.

Often, but not always, epigenetic changes are concomitant with alterations to the chromatin state of underlying genes. Most of what is known about how chromatin states are altered in response to epigenetic triggers comes from decades of research in model organisms. These studies have revealed highly conserved protein families, which are now used for therapeutic or diagnostic purposes in cancers. The Motamedi lab uses the fission yeast and human cancer as models to understand how changes to eukaryotic chromatin are made, maintained and propagated, and how these changes establish alternative transcriptional programs particularly in response to persistent stress.

Noncoding RNAs and chromatin – partners in epigenetic regulation

One of the first models for how long and small noncoding RNAs regulate chromatin states was proposed in the fission yeast. It posits that noncoding RNAs, tethered to chromatin, provide a platform for the assembly of RNA-processing and chromatin-modifying proteins (Motamedi et al 2004; Khanduja et al 2024), leading to transcriptional regulation of the underlying genes. These principles now have emerged as conserved mechanisms by which noncoding RNAs partake in chromatin regulation in eukaryotes including in humans.

A focus of the lab is cellular quiescence (or G0). G0 is a ubiquitous cellular state in which cells exit proliferation and enter a state of reversible dormancy. Developmental programs, such as wound

The image depicts as cells enter quiescence (moon), they load Ago1 (ships) with euchromatic small RNAs to mediate Quiescent-induced Transcriptional Repression (Q) of a set of euchromatic genes. Exosome activity separates heterochromatic (dark blue) from euchromatic (yellow) regions. When entering quiescence, the exosome barrier opens, permitting euchromatic transcripts (differently colored dots) to become substrates for RNAi degradation. Ago1, acquiring new color (sRNAs) as it crosses the exosome barrier, targets Q to the corresponding color in euchromatin.

healing, or exposure to a variety of stress, such as starvation, can trigger entry into or exit from G0. G0 cells have distinct transcriptional programs through which they acquire new properties compared to their proliferative selves, including long life, thrifty metabolism and resistance to stress. Loss of G0 regulation results in defects in developmental and adaptive programs. How cells enter, survive and exit G0 is a critical question in basic biology, which is largely unexplored. To address this knowledge gap, we modeled G0 in fission yeast and showed that when cells transition to G0, new ncRNAs emerge which coopt and deploy constitutive heterochromatin proteins (histone H3 lysine 9 methyltransferase, Clr4/SUV39H) to several euchromatic gene clusters to regulate the expression of a set of developmental, metabolic and cell cycle genes. We show that this pathway is critical for survival and the establishment of the global G0 transcriptional program. This work revealed a new function of heterochromatin proteins and noncoding RNAs, which orchestrate the genome-wide deployment of heterochromatin factors in response to long-term stress. It also led to the proposal of several hypotheses that we are currently testing. Moreover, in collaboration with several groups, we have begun to test whether this pathway also plays an important role in cancer dormancy and treatment resistance.

Selected Publications:

Khanduja JS, Joh RI, Perez MM, Paulo JA, Palmieri CM, Zhang J, Gulka AOD, Haas W, Gygi SP, **Motamedi M**. RNA quality control factors nucleate Clr4/SUV39H and trigger constitutive heterochromatin assembly. *Cell* 2024. 187: 3262-3283.

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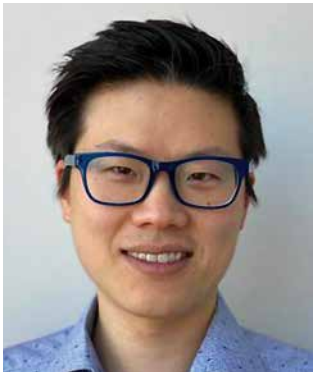
*Equal Contribution

†This paper was the cover story in ***Molecular Cell*** and featured in ***Boston Magazine*** (***http://www.bostonmagazine.com/sponsor-content/mgh-study-potentially-finds-the-achilles-heel-for-dormant-cancer-cells/***)

††This article was the cover story in ***Cell***

Eugene Oh, PhD



Oh Laboratory

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Brian Brannigan
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Linlin Zhao, PhD

Ubiquitylation is one of the most common protein modifications and arguably the most versatile. How this post-translational modification shapes the intracellular signaling networks that dictate specific cellular states and behaviors is a central focus of **the Oh laboratory**. We recently identified a novel ubiquitin-dependent mechanism that integrates gene expression with cellular division to preserve the identity of proliferating cell types. Our current focus is to elucidate how various cancer cell types hijack this system to confer specific proliferative and survival advantages. The goals of this exploration are to target the ubiquitin system for drug discovery and to find new strategies to rewire the gene expression landscape of cancer cells.

How cells process information and make decisions is essential for their survival. The intracellular signaling events that ultimately evoke specific cellular responses make frequent use of ubiquitylation. Failure to properly do so can cause abnormal cell growth and uncontrolled proliferation, both hallmarks of tumorigenesis. Our lab is broadly interested in understanding the ways in which ubiquitylation gates key decision-making processes and how misregulation of this modification contributes to various malignancies

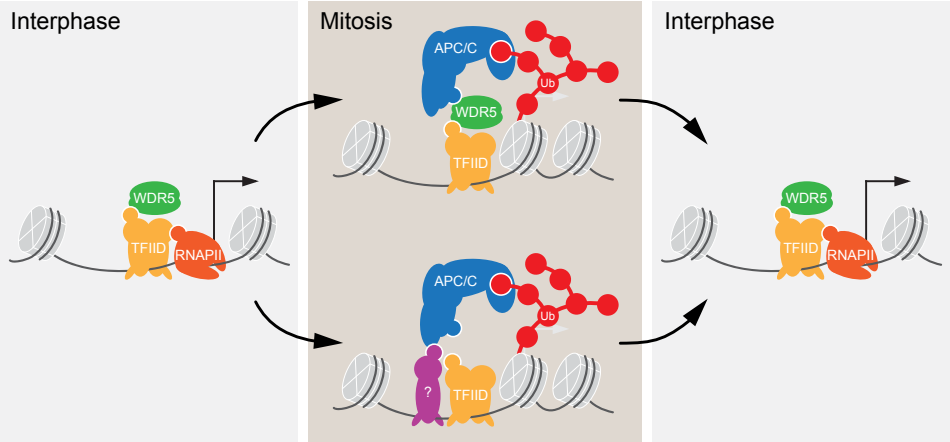
Ubiquitin-dependent control of gene expression

The identity of every cell is governed by the coordinated expression of specific gene networks. Yet dividing cells temporarily halt their transcriptional output during mitosis, thus how these cells preserve a transcriptional memory that defines their cellular state is not completely understood. Using modern genetic discovery platforms, we found that the ubiquitin ligase APC/C (anaphase-promoting complex) is required for controlling the pluripotent identity of human embryonic stem cells. Our studies revealed that the APC/C is recruited to a subset of gene promoters by the chromatin recruitment factor WDR5, which enables the APC/C to decorate nearby histone proteins with ubiquitin chains assembled through specific linkages. These ubiquitin polymers serve as potent extraction signals for the ATP-dependent segregase p97/VCP. The displacement of histone proteins removes a critical barrier to transcription, ensuring the rapid re-expression of pluripotency genes upon entry into the next cell cycle. Altogether, our work highlights an unexpected role for ubiquitylation in gene expression control.

A key implication of this mechanism is that the APC/C can direct the identity of any dividing cell type, including abnormally proliferating cancer cells. Our ongoing research focuses on identifying which cancer types are dependent on the APC/C for their identity and characterizing the molecular basis for this control. Interestingly, the APC/C binds to a number of cancer-linked transcription factors, with many of these interactions only observed in specific cancer lines, suggesting that a single enzyme can elicit a multi-faceted response by tailoring a custom gene expression program for each cancer type

Decoding the chromatin-bound ubiquitin code

Ubiquitin can also form polymeric chains that adopt unique structures. This



A model for how APC/C controls gene activity in dividing cell types. The expression of self-renewal genes is dependent on WDR5, while the expression of cancer-specific genes requires factors that are yet to be identified.

topological diversity translates into a diversity of functional outcomes, making this modification exceptionally versatile as a regulatory system. Our lab found that the APC/C deposits defined ubiquitin polymers – linked via residues Lys11 and Lys48 – on chromatin-bound substrates. Yet whether and how other ubiquitin chain types control gene expression is unknown. Ongoing efforts in our lab include developing new strategies to probe for the various linkage types that regulate gene activity and understanding the molecular basis for these linkages. Our ultimate goal is to untangle the complexity of the chromatin-bound ubiquitin code and to decipher how this code is controlled. Major questions include understanding how specificity of this modification is achieved and whether ubiquitylation might crosstalk with other post-translational modifications.

Selected Publications:

Saxena S, Nabel CS, Seay TW, Patel PS, Kawale AS, Crosby CR, Tigro H, **Oh E**, Heiden MGV, Hata AN, Suo Z, and Zou L. Unprocessed genomic uracil as a source of DNA replication stress in cancer cells. *Mol Cell.* 2024 84, 2036-2052e2037.

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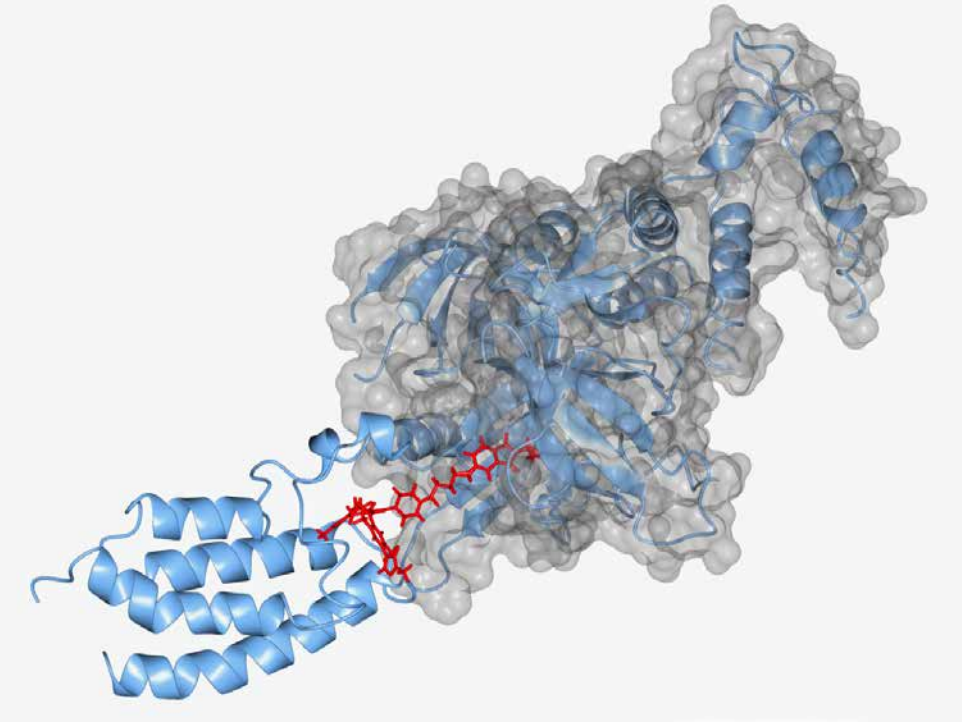
Mutations in cancer cells lead to malfunctioning control of gene expression. **The Ott laboratory** is dedicated to discovering the gene expression control factors that are essential for cancer cell survival. Discovery of these factors prompts further efforts in our group to design chemical strategies that directly target aberrant mechanisms of gene control. Biologically, gene control factors represent compelling therapeutic targets for cancer treatment as they are master regulators of cell identity. Yet despite this clear rationale, many are perceived as intractable drug targets owing to their large size, disordered shapes, and orchestration of complex cellular circuits. Recent advances in discovery chemistry, high-throughput assay technology, and gene editing technologies have advanced our capability to identify targetable components of gene control machinery. We use these chemical and genetic tools to probe cancer cells for new vulnerabilities ripe for therapeutics development.

Chemical modulation of bromodomains

Gene control factors bind to regions of transcriptionally active chromatin called enhancers. Enhancers are critical for driving cell-type specific gene expression, and their chromatin structures are typically marked with specific histone modifications. Among the most distinctive is lysine side-chain acetylation, recognized (or 'read') by protein modules called bromodomains. Recently, novel chemical compounds have been advanced that selectively target bromodomains. These compounds efficiently displace these proteins from enhancers, and we and others have found them to be active agents in models of acute leukemia, lymphoma, and several solid tumor types (Ott et al, *Blood* 2012; Ott et al, *Cancer Cell* 2018). Using a suite of genome-wide chromatin and transcriptomic assays, we aim to understand principles of bromodomain dependency in cancer. Efforts are ongoing to establish biomarkers for response and resistance, and realize promising rationales for combination therapies with other targeted agents.

Essential enhancers

Classic studies have described oncogenic enhancers in leukemia and lymphoma cells. This aberrant enhancer activity can occur by chromosomal translocation of proto-oncogenes such as *MYC* and *BCL2*. In addition to chromosomal translocations, cancer-specific enhancers have been described at proto-oncogene loci like *TAL1* and *MYC*, which are aberrantly bound by transcription factors through direct somatic mutation of enhancer DNA elements or focal amplification. We have generated high-resolution enhancer landscapes derived from primary patient samples, including a large cohort of chronic lymphocytic leukemia samples (Ott et al, *Cancer Cell* 2018). Current projects include construction of core regulatory transcription factor circuitries, and the discovery of inherited and somatic variants leading to aberrant gene expression. Using genetic and epigenetic genome editing techniques, we are functionally dissecting malfunctioning enhancers and their cognate bound factors to derive mechanistic understanding of the essential enhancers principally responsible



Structural model of the ternary complex formed by a novel chemical degrader of the acetyltransferases CBP/p300 (dCBP-1) developed by the Ott laboratory. dCBP-1 (in red) induces degradation of CBP/p300 by acting as a 'molecular glue' between an E3 ubiquitin ligase and the bromodomain of CBP/p300.

Model generated by Jan F. Sayilgan, PhD. Courtesy of the Mike Lawrence and Christopher Ott laboratories.

for maintaining leukemia and lymphoma cell states.

Expanding the chromatin chemical probe toolbox

The successful discovery chemistry efforts that yielded bromodomain inhibitors have revealed chromatin reader domains broadly, and bromodomains specifically, as protein modules amenable for small molecule ligand development. Used experimentally, enhancer-targeting compounds enable precise and acute modulation of chromatin factors and can be used to identify and validate discrete biophysical and biochemical functions of target proteins. Paired with an understanding of integrated epigenomics, these probes elucidate fundamental aspects of epigenome structure and function. We use high-throughput protein-protein interaction assays and cellular assays of chromatin reader activity to identify reader domain inhibitors. Lead compounds are iteratively optimized for potency and selectivity, followed by functional assessments in cancer cells. Our recent efforts have led us to describe the first chemical degrader of the enhancer lysine acetyltransferases CBP and p300 (Vannam et al, *Cell Chemical Biology* 2021). Ongoing projects seek to expand our current toolbox of enhancer-targeting small molecules, and to develop these compounds into prototype cancer therapies.

Selected Publications:

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Luca Pinello, PhD

The focus of **the Pinello laboratory** is to use innovative computational approaches and cutting-edge experimental assays, such as CRISPR genome editing and single-cell sequencing, to systematically analyze sources of genetic and epigenetic variation and gene expression variability that underlie human traits and diseases. The lab uses generative AI, machine learning, and high-performance computing technologies to solve computationally challenging and Big Data problems associated with gene regulation, functional genomics, and sequencing data analysis. Our mission is to use computational strategies to further our understanding of disease etiology and to provide a foundation for the development of new drugs and novel targeted treatments.

Pinello Laboratory

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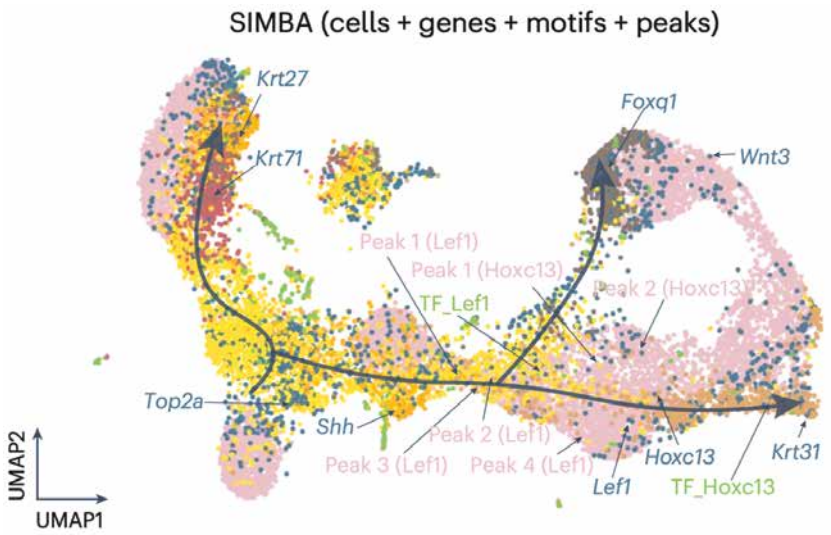
The Pinello laboratory is at the forefront of computational biology, focusing on deciphering the role of chromatin structure, dynamics, and non-coding regions in gene regulation. Our mission is to integrate multi-omics data to explore and better understand the functional mechanisms of the genome and to provide accessible tools for the scientific community to accelerate discovery in this field.

We have made significant contributions to the genome editing field, developing computational tools like CRISPResso, which has become the standard for quantifying and visualizing CRISPR editing outcomes. Our work on the BCL11A enhancer led to the development of clinical trials for sickle cell disease and β-thalassemia, and ultimately contributed to the first FDA-approved CRISPR-based drug, Casgevy. Recently, we developed CRISPRme, a tool that considers genetic variants to provide a more comprehensive assessment of off-target risks in CRISPR-based therapies. This work uncovered unappreciated off-targets for therapeutic guides based on genetic diversity, with immediate implications for ongoing clinical trials in diseases ranging from blood disorders to cancer.

In the field of single-cell genomics, we have developed methods like STREAM for trajectory inference from transcriptomic and epigenomic data, SIMBA for clustering-free marker discovery and omics data integration, and Dictys for recovering dynamic regulatory networks from single-cell multiomics data. These tools are enabling deeper insights into cellular heterogeneity, developmental processes, and gene regulatory dynamics across various biological contexts.

Our lab is also leading one of the characterization centers of the NHGRI Impact of Genomic Variation on Function (IGVF) Consortium. Here, we are combining CRISPR genome editing, single-cell assays, and novel computational tools to characterize the impact of genetic variants on different phenotypes at scale. This work has already led to significant advancements in variant classification and effect size quantification, particularly in the context of cardiovascular diseases. Our recent publication in *Nature Genetics* (Ryu et al., 2024) introduces BEAN, a Bayesian network that integrates genotypic and phenotypic data from base editing screens. This innovative approach significantly improves the accuracy of variant effect



SIMBA (Single-cell embedding along with features) co-embedding of cells and multi-omic features reveals regulatory circuits and master regulators in mouse hair follicle differentiation. The visualization shows cells, top-ranked genes, TF motifs, and associated chromatin accessibility peaks in a shared embedding space. Key regulators like Lef1 and Hoxc13 are positioned along the differentiation trajectory, with their associated genes and regulatory elements clustered nearby. This co-embedding approach enables the identification of cell type-specific features, master regulators, and potential target genes, providing insights into the gene regulatory dynamics during cellular differentiation.

Image Credit: Adapted from Chen et al., Nature Methods, 2023

predictions, outperforming existing methods in classifying pathogenic variants and quantifying their effect sizes. By applying BEAN to high-throughput base editing screens, we have successfully identified common variants affecting LDL uptake and novel genes associated with this process. Moreover, our saturation base editing of LDLR accurately predicted the effects of missense variants on LDL-C levels, aligning with measurements from UK Biobank individuals. This work not only enhances our ability to characterize disease-associated variants but also presents a robust methodology for improving the efficacy of base editor screens in functional genomics research.

Looking ahead, we are excited to explore cutting-edge spatial profiling technologies and harness the power of generative AI for therapeutic DNA sequence synthesis. These new directions hold tremendous potential for advancing our understanding of tissue structures in various diseases and for synthesizing novel DNA regulatory sequences to control gene expression. Our recent work on DNA-Diffusion exemplifies this approach, leveraging generative models to design synthetic regulatory elements that can control chromatin accessibility and gene expression. This innovative method allows us to explore and potentially manipulate the fundamental rules governing gene regulation, opening new avenues for therapeutic interventions and synthetic biology applications.

Our ultimate goal is to further our understanding of disease etiology involving poorly characterized genomic regions and to provide a foundation for the development of new drugs and more targeted treatments. By leveraging state-of-the-art computational approaches and experimental assays, we aim to systematically analyze sources of genetic and epigenetic variation that affect gene regulation in different human traits and diseases.

Selected Publications:

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Wang L, et al. Dictys: dynamic gene regulatory network dissects developmental continuum with single-cell multiomics. *Nat Methods*. 2023 Sep;20(9):1368-1378.

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Wei Y, et al. Single-cell analysis and functional characterization uncover the stem cell hierarchies and developmental origins of rhabdomyosarcoma. *Nat Cancer*. 2022 Aug;3(8):961-975.

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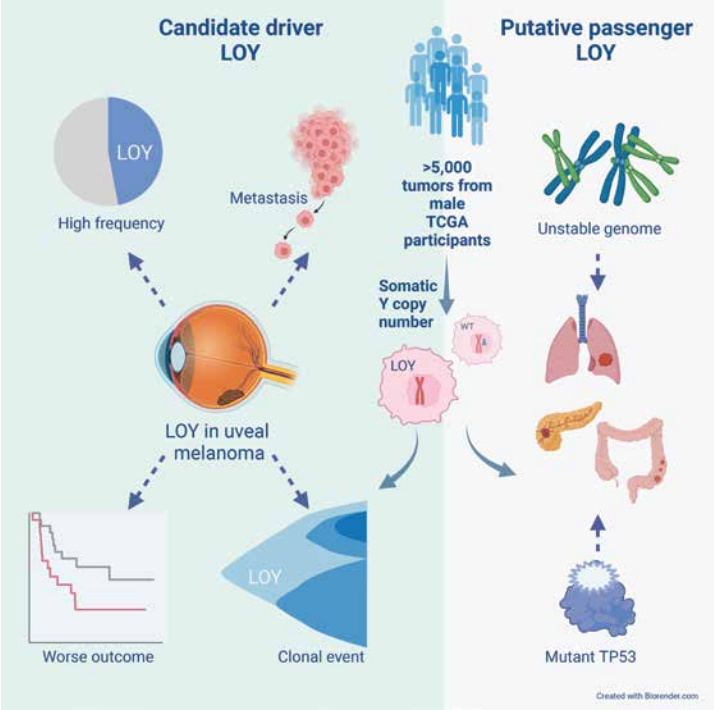
Most known genomic drivers of cancer are in coding genes, affecting the encoded protein's interaction with other proteins, DNA or biological compounds. Recent advances in DNA sequencing technology have made it possible to study non-coding regions that regulate these protein-coding genes. Several cancer drivers have been identified and characterized in these regulatory regions, however, this genomic territory remains relatively unexplored in human tumors. **The Rheinbay laboratory** concentrates on identifying and functionally characterizing these non-coding drivers in the sequences of tumor whole genomes through development of novel analysis strategies and collaborations with experimental investigators.
We are also interested in the contribution of the sex chromosomes, especially the Y chromosome, to cancer. Loss of Y is known to be associated with morbidity and mortality in aging men, yet its role in tumors is largely unclear. Much of this is due to technical challenges that our group aims to solve. Understanding the driver genes on the sex chromosomes will help us explain differences in male and female tumors, and forge a path to more effective, sex-informed treatment.

Regulatory driver mutations in cancer genomes

Genomic cancer driver discovery has traditionally focused on protein-coding genes (the human exome), and large-scale sequencing of these genes in thousands of tumors has led to the discovery of novel frequently altered genes. However, exome sequencing focused only on coding genes does not allow analysis of non-coding regions in the human genome. Protein-coding genes are regulated by several types of genomic elements that control their expression (promoters, distal enhancers and boundary elements), translation (5'UTRs) and mRNA stability (3'UTRs). Alterations in the DNA sequence of these elements thus directly affect the expression and regulation of the target gene. Several such non-coding elements have been identified as recurrently altered in human cancer, and functionally characterized, although these non-coding drivers appear infrequent compared to protein-coding oncogenes and tumor suppressors. One reason might be that gene regulation is highly tissue-specific, and therefore driver alterations in non-coding regions might create a fitness advantage in only a single tumor type. Finding such a specific driver requires a sufficient number of whole genomes from this tumor type. With recent advances in DNA sequencing technology and an increasing number of whole cancer genomes available for analysis, we are just starting to map out and characterize regulatory driver alterations. The Rheinbay laboratory works on the development of novel methods to identify non-coding driver candidates using genomic and epigenomic sources of information, and to understand their impact on tumor initiation, progression and treatment resistance through collaborations with experimental colleagues.

Role of the sex chromosomes in cancer

Cancer affects men and women disparately, with strong differences in incidence and



Y chromosome loss in cancer can be a driver (left) or passenger (right) event.

outcome in some tumor types. Human sex is determined by the sex chromosomes X and Y. Because men only have one X chromosome, they are particularly vulnerable to congenital and acquired somatic variants in X-linked genes. It has been shown that both sex chromosomes can be lost in both normal blood cells with age, as well as certain tumor cells. Yet the meaning of Y chromosome loss, and possible cancer genes on this chromosome, are poorly understood. This is because Y is technically challenging to study with commonly used 'omics' profiling approaches. We develop analysis strategies and methods to tackle these technical challenges and use them to find new X and Y-linked drivers in published tumor genome sequences. Our goal is to identify sex-specific, and potentially targetable, vulnerabilities in human cancer.

Selected Publications:

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Rheinbay E, Parasuraman P, Grimsby J, et al. Recurrent and functional regulatory mutations in breast cancer. *Nature*. 2017;547:55-60.

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*Equal contribution

Miguel N. Rivera, MD

Research in **the Rivera laboratory** focuses on using genomic tools to identify and characterize gene regulation pathways that are altered in cancer. An important feature shared by most tumors is the dysregulation of complex gene expression programs that control cell proliferation and differentiation. Our work combines the use of genomic technologies for the direct identification of gene regulation abnormalities in tumors with functional analysis of critical mechanisms and pathways. Given that the mechanisms that drive changes in gene expression programs in cancer are poorly understood, we anticipate that our studies will point to new therapeutic approaches.

Rivera Laboratory

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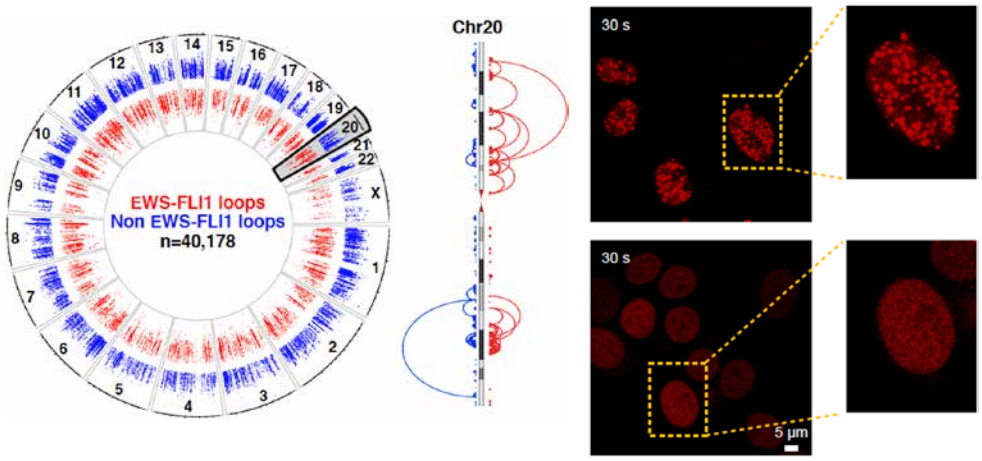
Epigenomic approaches for the identification of novel pathways in cancer

While genetic studies have led to the development of important cancer therapies, most genetic alterations in cancer do not point to specific therapeutic targets. In the case of pediatric cancers, which are often driven by low numbers of recurrent mutations, the identification of therapeutic targets through genetic studies has been particularly challenging. In order to discover new pathways involved in these tumors, we are using new genomic technologies to identify abnormalities in the mechanisms that regulate gene expression programs controlling cell proliferation and differentiation.

One of these technologies is genome-wide chromatin profiling, which combines chromatin immunoprecipitation and high-throughput sequencing. This approach has been used to study how genes are activated or repressed by regulatory elements in the genome such as promoters and enhancers. As a complement to gene expression studies, chromatin profiling provides a unique view of gene regulation programs by allowing the identification of both active and repressed genomic domains based on patterns of histone modification. Several studies have shown that prominent active histone marks are associated with genes that play key roles in cell identity and proliferation, including oncogenes that promote the growth of tumor cells. In contrast, repressive marks are found at loci that are maintained in an inactive state to prevent cellular differentiation. Recently, our work has also incorporated new 3D chromatin configuration technologies (e.g. HiC and HiChiP) that can measure the critical contributions of spatial organization to gene regulation in a genome-wide scale.

We have performed extensive chromatin profiling of several tumor types, including pediatric tumors such as Ewing sarcoma and medulloblastoma that have been linked to abnormalities in transcriptional regulation. Our work has uncovered novel genes and pathways involved in these diseases by comparing chromatin patterns in primary tumor samples and normal tissue specific stem cells. In addition, we have identified gene regulation mechanisms that play critical roles in tumor formation through functional studies of transcription factors and chromatin regulators. We are now characterizing these pathways in detail and extending our epigenomic analysis to other tumor types where oncogenic pathways are



Looping patterns and IDR condensation in Ewing sarcoma cells. Left panels: The oncogenic transcription factor EWS-FLI1 is a dominant force in establishing the 3D configuration of DNA in Ewing sarcoma. EWS-FLI1 accounts for almost half of all loops in tumor cells (shown as red dots in the circle plot and as loops for a magnified view of Chromosome 20. Right panels: Optogenetic experiment showing induction of condensates by a transcription factor with an intrinsically disordered domain (IDR, top). This effect is lost if the IDR is removed (bottom).

poorly defined. These analyses have led us to identify new therapeutic targets for tumors where no targeted therapies are currently available.

Role of intrinsically disordered regions (IDRs) in cancer

Our studies of gene regulation in cancer have led us to identify unexpected oncogenic mechanisms that have broad implications. In particular, our work has shown that the intrinsically disordered region (IDR) of the EWS-FLI1 oncogenic fusion protein is essential for its function and enables the activation of tumor specific regulatory elements. Given that EWS-FLI1 is part of a large group of fusion oncogenes that share the same disordered domains, we have used this insight to study similar mechanisms in other tumor types (e.g. Clear Cell Sarcoma). Moreover, IDRs are present in many other oncogenes involved in gene regulation and we are developing new methods to study these domains. For example. we recently developed DisP-seq, a method that allows us to identify genomic locations with high concentrations of IDRs. Similarly, given that IDRs often form condensates that can promote gene activation, we are using optogenic tools to study IDRs from different transcription factors involved in cancer.

Selected Publications:

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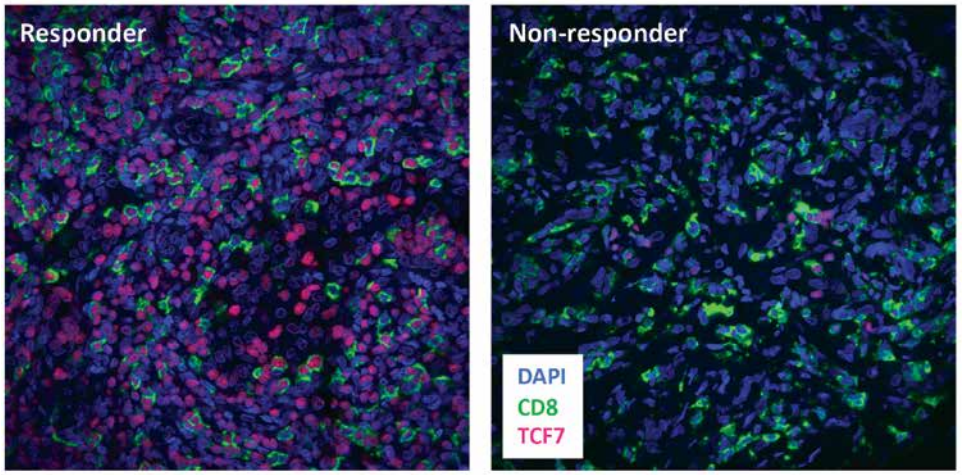
The Sade-Feldman laboratory focuses on identifying response and resistance mechanisms in cancer patients treated with immunotherapies. In the last decade, the treatment of solid tumors has been revolutionized by the development and FDA approval of checkpoint blockade (CPB) immunotherapies. While long-lasting responses are induced, only a small subset of patients benefits from these treatments. Thus, identifying the key components that drive or prevent effective immunity against tumors remains an unmet clinical need. Treatment response to immunotherapy and other therapies (e.g., targeted and chemotherapies) is influenced by complex interactions between multiple cell types in the tumor microenvironment (TME) and the heterogeneous population of tumor cells. The Sade-Feldman laboratory integrates single-cell multi-omics methods, computational biology, patient data-driven functional genomic screens, and detailed mechanistic studies to delve deeper into this intricate ecosystem and the mechanisms behind therapy response and resistance. Combining these approaches enables us to understand resistance mechanisms to immunotherapy, predict patient response, prioritize targets for validation, and identify new drug targets and combinations for cancer treatment.

While there have been numerous successful trials and FDA approvals of antibodies that block the immune regulatory checkpoints, CTLA4, PD-1, PD-L1, and LAG3, for the treatment of multiple cancer types, most patients will not respond and will succumb to the disease. The success of these immune-based therapies mainly relies on identifying tumor antigens presented on MHC-I molecules by cytotoxic immune cells. Working together with scientists, computational biologists, oncologists, surgeons, and pathologists at Mass General, our lab has discovered several mechanisms underlying the control of tumors by the immune system: I. Point mutations, deletions, or loss of heterozygosity (LOH) in beta-2-microglobulin (B2M) as a resistance mechanism to immunotherapy (Sade-Feldman et al. *Nature Comm* 2017); II. High expression of the transcription factor TBX3 in de-differentiated malignant cells as a resistance mechanism (Freeman et al. *Cell Reports Med* 2022); III. T cell states associated with clinical outcomes in melanoma patients treated with CPB inhibitors (Sade-Feldman et al. *Cell* 2018); IV. Inflammatory factors that control the differentiation and function of suppressive myeloid cells (MDSCs) (Sade-Feldman et al. *Immunity* 2014) and their clinical significance in melanoma patients treated with CPB inhibitors (Sade-Feldman et al. *Clinical Cancer Research* 2015); and V. Interferon-induced APOBEC3 as an acquired resistance mechanism to CPB in HNSCC (Lin et al. *NPJ Precis Oncol* 2022) and the prognostic impact of CXCL9/SPP1 polarity of tumor-associated macrophages in HNSCC patients with recurrent advanced disease (Bill R et al. *Science* 2023).

While these studies enabled us to understand some mechanisms of resistance to checkpoint blockade immunotherapy, still many questions remain open:

1. Despite the FDA approval of standard chemotherapy with immune checkpoint blockade (in NSCLC, SCLC, and HNSCC),



Ref: Sade-Feldman et al. *Cell* 2018

Representative overlaid images of melanoma tumors from responder and non-responder patients stained with DAPI (blue), CD8 (green), and TCF7 (red). A higher proportion of CD8+TCF7+ at baseline is observed in patients who responded to anti-PD1 immunotherapy.

we still don't fully understand how drug A affects the activity of drug B and the contribution of each drug to therapy resistance when combined.

2. Are there any shared primary or acquired resistance mechanisms between different diseases (e.g., melanoma, NSCLC, and HNSCC)?
3. While our translational efforts generate many hypotheses and predictors of outcomes, we still don't know the function of those genes/pathways and their impact on treatment response.
4. Can we identify ways to overcome resistance mediated by the loss of antigen presentation by perturbing tumor intrinsic pathways?
5. To date, most of our efforts have been focused on patients with metastatic disease receiving immunotherapy. However, there is an unmet clinical need to identify targets that can synergize with traditional therapies for local and recurrent advanced disease, particularly in cancers with a poor response to such treatments.

To address the above questions, we use a systems biology approach that involves three main steps: I. discover cellular and molecular factors associated with effective/failed therapy using integrative analysis of single-cell multi-omics datasets from human tumors; II. Perform systematic functional genetic screens to determine the role of human genes associated with outcomes; III. Characterize the key sensitivity/resistance mechanisms to understand the intra- and inter-cellular circuits underlying their action.

Main current projects in the lab:

1. Identify and validate factors conferring sensitivity and resistance to patients treated with mono or combinatorial (e.g., targeted and chemotherapy) immunotherapy by bridging together analyses of human tumors with systemic perturbations and mechanistic studies in animal and human models.
2. Identify tumor intrinsic pathways that can sensitize cells to immunotherapy in the absence of the MHC-I antigen-presentation machinery.
3. Discover targets to overcome radiation and chemotherapy resistance in local and recurrent advanced cancers.

By combining detailed human observations and rigorous functional tests, these studies are expected to reveal the basis for therapeutic resistance and response, creating a roadmap for identifying targets for therapeutic development.

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* Co-first authorship

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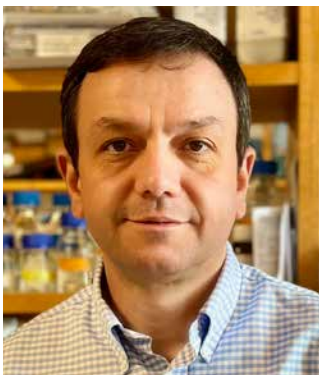

Sanidas Laboratory

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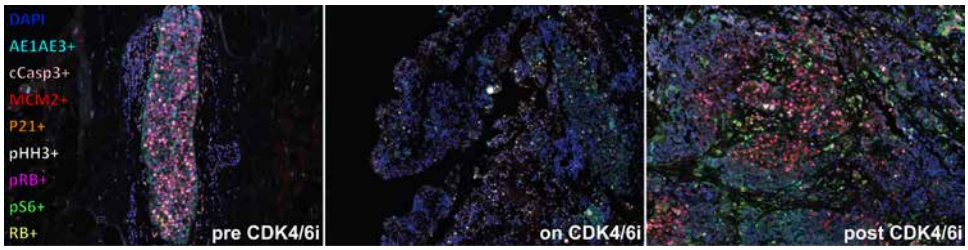
Ioannis Sanidas, PhD
Alice Zheng

Cell cycle deregulation is a hallmark of cancer. **The Sanidas laboratory** examines the cell cycle to discover cancer cell vulnerabilities that can lead to novel therapeutic approaches. Our research primarily focuses on the retinoblastoma tumor suppressor protein (RB), a key regulator of the cell cycle that prevents cells from dividing. RB's activity is controlled by cyclin-dependent kinases (CDKs) that phosphorylate and inactivate RB to enable cell proliferation. Although RB has been described as a universal cell cycle regulator, its tumor suppressor activity is context-specific. Loss of RB is answered to a particular group of human tumors, and CDK inhibitors have provided therapeutic benefits to a relatively small number of cancer patients. The Sanidas laboratory aims to understand the molecular complexity of RB and identify the context-specific implications of its inactivation in human malignancies. Our goal is to optimize the advantages of the recently developed selective CDK inhibitors, which target the pharmacological activation of RB.

Over the last decade, a substantial amount of research has been devoted to molecular therapeutics targeting RB's activation, leading to the development of highly selective CDK inhibitors. These efforts have resulted in advanced cancer therapy methods, significantly prolonging the survival rate in Breast Cancer patients. Despite the widespread deregulation of the RB pathway in cancer cells, the effectiveness of these drugs remains limited to specific tumor types. At the Sanidas laboratory, we aim to address this conundrum through two lines of investigation: 1) Understanding the molecular complexity of RB and deciphering the context-specific implications of RB inactivation in cancer cells. 2) Investigating how CDK inhibitors work in various tumor types, with the goal of enhancing drug efficacy and determining the group of patients that will primarily benefit from this treatment.

Investigation of RB's mechanism of action

RB has often been described as a highly conserved cell cycle regulator with a universal mechanism of action. According to this conventional model, RB targets the E2F-promoters to suppress the expression of cell cycle genes. This interaction is dependent on the cell cycle and inhibited by CDKs. However, this description explains only a part of RB's activity; RB is essential for the control of multiple transcriptional programs, the maintenance of chromosome stability, the commitment to cell lineage, and the emergence of drug resistance in cancer cells. These RB functions are context-specific and largely independent of RB/E2F regulation. It is acknowledged that additional investigations are required to decipher the mechanisms governing this "non-canonical" RB activity. A significant obstacle hindering progress in this area has been that the RB research community has never really figured out how to deal with the molecular complexity of RB. Many studies have focused on the consequences of RB loss without being able to capture the details of RB in action. In the Sanidas laboratory, we have successfully developed sophisticated molecular tools to unravel the complexity of RB's action. Precisely, we can now dissect RB into its distinct functional



Multiplex imaging on human ER-positive Breast Cancer tumor biopsies pre-, on-, and post-treatment with CDK4/6 inhibitor. Significant inhibition of active cell proliferation during treatment with the CDK4/6 inhibitor (on-CDK4/6i) was evident from the reduction of the expression of the inactive-phosphorylated RB (in pink) and the DNA replication marker MCM2 (in red). However, both markers were re-expressed upon developing resistance to CDK4/6 inhibition therapy (post-CDK4/6i).

forms (Sanidas et al., 2019), separate the different pools of the chromatin-associated RB (Sanidas et al., 2022), and identify, using Micro-C analysis, the RB-mediated regulation of chromatin organization. These groundbreaking tools can finally provide the information needed to study RB. We aim to i) define the cell type-specific functions of RB, ii) elucidate why RB's tumor suppressor activity varies among different tumor types, and iii) determine the factors contributing to the tumor type-specific efficacy of drugs targeting RB activation. With the aid of these innovative tools, we can look into RB's mechanism of action with a significantly improved resolution, shedding light on previously uncharted aspects of RB's activity in cancer biology.

Targeting the cell cycle machinery in cancer therapy

The activation of RB's tumor suppressor activity represents a pivotal approach in molecular cancer therapeutics. Current strategies for recurrent, adjuvant, and de novo metastatic therapy in Estrogen Receptor-positive Breast Cancer involve CDK4/6 inhibitors combined with hormonal therapy. Phase I clinical trials are underway for CDK2-specific inhibitors, targeting Cyclin E-amplified tumors, as well as tumors that progressed after CDK4/6 inhibition therapy. The Sanidas laboratory collaborates with the Termeer Center for Investigational Cancer Therapeutics at MGH to study the mechanism of action of novel investigational drugs that target the cell cycle machinery. The efficacy of these drugs relies on the tumor type, genetic background, and treatment history. Our goals are to: i) optimize the cell cycle drugs' efficacy by defining their synergistic activity with other agents, and ii) identify biomarkers that predict response to these drugs

Selected Publications:

Sanidas I, Lawrence MS, & Dyson NJ. Patterns in the tapestry of chromatin-bound RB. *Trends Cell Biol*. 2023 Aug 28:S0962-8924(23)00156-3.

Krishnan B, **Sanidas I***, Dyson NJ*. Seeing is believing: the impact of RB on nuclear organization. *Cell Cycle*, 2023 May 3;1-10.

Sanidas I, Lee H, Rumde PH, Boulay G, Morris R, Golczer G, Stanzione M, Hajizadeh S, Zhong J, Ryan MB, Corcoran RB, Drapkin BJ, Rivera MN, Dyson NJ, Lawrence MS. Chromatin-bound RB targets promoters, enhancers, and CTCF-bound loci and is redistributed by cell-cycle progression. *Mol Cell.* 2022 Aug 12:S1097-2765(22)00710-9.

Krishnan B, Yasuhara T, Rumde P, Stanzione M, Lu C, Lee H, Lawrence MS, Zou L, Nieman LT, **Sanidas I***, Dyson NJ*. Active RB causes visible changes in nuclear organization. *J Cell Biol*. 2022 Mar 7;221(3):e202102144.

Sanidas I, Morris R, Fella KA, Boukhali M, Tai EC, Ting DT, Lawrence MS, Hass W and Dyson NJ. "A code of mono-phosphorylation modulates the function of RB." *Mol Cell* 2019, Mar 7;73(5):985-1000.

* Denotes equal contribution

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Sen Laboratory

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Snehanshu Chowdhury, PhD
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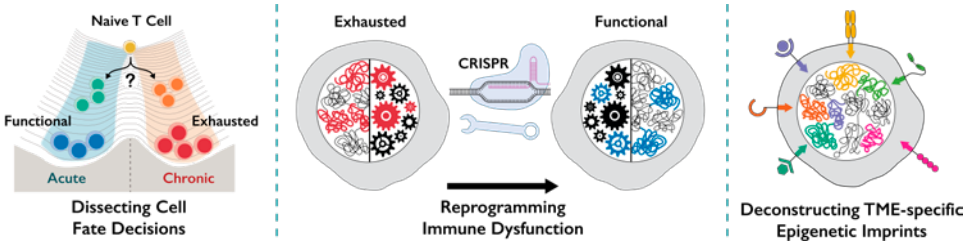
Dysfunction of the immune system is central to disease progression in cancer. **The Sen laboratory** investigates the regulation of T cell dysfunction in tumors and explores epigenetic approaches for T cell engineering. Our work lies at the interface of human immunology, systems biology, and functional epigenomics – merging clinical observations with mechanistic mouse studies to develop novel therapeutic strategies. We have found that the regulatory "circuitry" of dysfunctional T cells differs remarkably from functional T cells fighting off acute viruses. By comparing chronic viral infections and cancer, we demonstrate that this altered epigenetic wiring is a fundamental adaptation to chronic diseases and cannot be rescued by current treatments. Therefore, improved understanding of this altered regulation will be critically important for reversing cancer-associated immune dysfunction. We also pinpoint a radical new approach where we can "tune" specific components of the circuitry in immune cells to remedy their pathological state in cancer while preserving their physiological role in other contexts, thereby minimizing unwanted side-effects in patients.

Effective immunotherapy responses have been limited in 50-70% of patients, in part due to the development of T cell exhaustion wherein CD8+ T cells become dysfunctional and fail to control tumor growth. Despite ongoing clinical efforts to target exhaustion, the fundamental mechanisms specifying this state, and the potential for reinvigorating exhausted T cells, remain poorly understood.

Cell fate and behavior are governed at the level of the epigenome, through transcription factors (TFs) binding to regulatory enhancers. Therefore, we have used the gold-standard mouse model of chronic viral infection to ask whether distinct epigenetic regulation drives CD8+ T cell exhaustion. To overcome technical limitations imposed by low cell numbers, we performed ATAC-seq in exhausted cells and profiled the landscape of accessible chromatin, which is enriched for active enhancers and other regulatory elements. These studies revealed for the first time that exhausted cells acquire an extensive, state-specific epigenetic program that is distinct from memory T cells. We then integrated systems-level characterization of T cell state with CRISPR/Cas9-based enhancer editing in mouse T cell lines to show that these putative enhancers are organized into functional modules and can directly regulate exhaustion-associated genes such as PD-1.

We have sought to translate these findings to other disease contexts. First, by comparison of mouse T cells to those isolated from HCV and HIV chronic infection, we identified a conserved epigenetic program of exhaustion across species. Second, using a mouse melanoma model, we found that tumor-specific CD8+ T cells also share critical epigenetic and transcriptional features with chronic viral infection. Thus, we address a long-standing controversy about how T cell states in cancer relates to chronic viral infection by showing that T cell exhaustion is a fundamental immune adaptation to settings of chronic stimulation. Simultaneously, we have identified epigenetic signatures unique to either disease paradigm, highlighting our ability to define context-specific regulation in an unbiased way.



Leveraging the epigenetic regulation of T cell exhaustion to address fundamental and translational questions: How do T cells commit to exhaustion? How can we rescue exhausted T cells? How do disease-specific tumor microenvironments (TME) shape T cell exhaustion?

Nevertheless, major questions still remain about whether the exhausted epigenetic state is fixed or plastic in response to current treatment modalities. Recently, we examined two of the most prominent therapies to treat chronic infection and cancer: curative anti-viral regimens and immune checkpoint blockade, respectively. In chronic infection, ATAC-seq analysis of HCV-specific CD8+ T cells after cure of viremia did not reverse canonical features of exhaustion, including active super-enhancers near key TFs. In cancer, anti-PD-1 treatment of melanoma tumors also could not rescue the exhausted epigenetic state. T cell exhaustion is therefore an evolutionarily conserved epigenetic state that becomes fixed and is not reversed by some of the most common therapies.

It is becoming evident that alleviating T cell exhaustion will require new targeted approaches to reprogram exhausted cells. Our studies strongly suggest that large-scale epigenetic analysis, paired with precise CRISPR/Cas9 manipulation, will provide a roadmap for rational engineering to prevent T cell exhaustion and improve patient outcomes. To accomplish this, my lab focuses on the following:

1. Dissecting epigenetic mechanisms that govern early differentiation of CD8+ Tcells *in vivo*
2. Defining context-dependent epigenetic map of T cell dysfunction to guide patient therapies
3. Engineering exhaustion-resistant CD8+ T cells through epigenetic manipulation

These projects will generate new insights into the mechanisms and contexts in which T cell exhaustion develops in order to better design patient-specific immunotherapy regimens. In addition, they will enable unprecedented context-specific manipulation of T cell responses and create an integrative framework for characterizing and reprogramming epigenetic regulation of immune dysfunction.

Selected Publications:

Weiss SA, Huang A, Fung ME, Chen C,… Doench JG, Haining WN, Sharpe AH*, **Sen DR**.* Deletion of a state-specific PD-1 enhancer modulates exhausted T cell fate and function. *Nature Immunology* (in press).

Chen ACY, Jaiswal S*, Martinez D*, Yerinde C,… Garris CS, Mempel TR, Hacohen N, **Sen DR**. The aged tumor microenvironment limits T cell control of cancer. *Nature Immunology.* 2024 Jun;25(6):1033-1045.

Yates KB, Tonnerre P, Martin GE, Gerdemann U,…Chung RT, Allen TM, Kim AY, Fidler S, Fox J, Frater J, Lauer GM, Haining WN*, **Sen DR***. Epigenetic scars of CD8+ T cell exhaustion persist after cure of chronic infection in humans. *Nature Immunology*. 2021 Aug;22(8): 1020-1029.

Paper was highlighted on the cover of the Aug 2021 issue of Nature Immunology.

Collier JL*, Weiss SA*, Pauken KE, **Sen DR**, Sharpe AH. Not-so-opposite ends of the spectrum: CD8+ T cell dysfunction across chronic infection, cancer, and autoimmunity. *Nature Immunology*. 2021 Jul;22(7):809-819.

Miller BC*, **Sen DR***, Al-Abosy R, Bi K,…Hodi FS, Rodig SJ, Sharpe AH, Haining WN. Subsets of exhausted CD8+ T cells differentially mediate tumor control and respond to checkpoint blockade. *Nature Immunology*. 2019 Mar;20(3):326-336.

Sen DR*, Kaminski J*, Barnitz RA, Kurachi M,…Chung RT, Allen TM, Frahm N, Lauer GM, Wherry EJ, Yosef N, Haining WN. The epigenetic landscape of T cell exhaustion. *Science*. 2016 Dec 2;354(6316): 1165-1169.

Paper was highlighted on the cover of the Dec 2016 issue of Science.

*Equal contribution

Dennis Sgroi, MD

Sgroi Laboratory

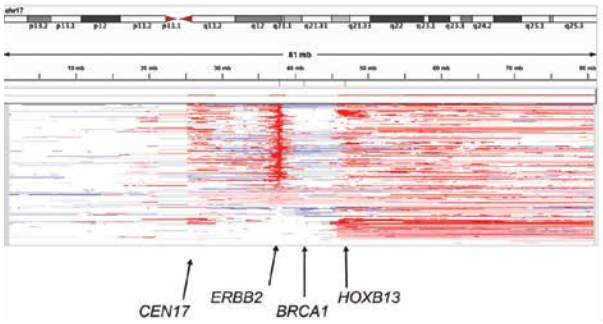
Dennis Sgroi, MD
Marinko Sremac, PhD

The overarching goals of research in **the Sgroi laboratory** are to detect molecular alterations in breast cancer that identify breast cancer patients who are at risk of developing a recurrence and those who will benefit from specific therapies to prevent disease recurrence. We have developed a clinical test in which the measurement of two genes, HOXB13 and IL17RB predicts whether a patient with estrogen receptor (ER) positive breast cancer will benefit from extending hormonal targeted therapy. Using mouse models of ER-positive and ER-negative breast cancer, we are currently studying the biological role of HOXB13 in human breast cancer, and we are using this knowledge to develop novel therapeutic strategies for not only ER-positive but also ER-negative breast cancer.

My laboratory focuses on integrating multi-omic approaches to identify biomarkers that will predict clinical outcome and treatment response. Our lab has developed and the Breast Cancer Index (BCI) gene expression biomarker, and we have validated it prognostic and treatment-predictive performance in multiple randomized clinical trial of extended adjuvant hormonal therapy in post-menopausal women with ER+ breast cancer. Our successful validation of the BCI biomarker has led to clinical adoption in the NCCN and ASCO treatment guidelines. Presently, BCI is being assessed in premenopausal women with ER+ breast cancer who are treated with ovarian suppression. A significant research aim of my lab is now to understand the mechanistic contribution of the gene HOXB13, the primary determinant of the prognostic and predictive performance of the BCI assay. Using HOXB13-expressing mouse models of ER-positive, we have shown that HOXB13 creates a tumor growth advantage by modulating the tumor microenvironment.

Furthermore, we have shown that HOXB13 creates an identical alteration of the tumor microenvironment in a mouse model of triple negative breast cancer. Several tumor microenvironment alterations are amendable to therapeutic targeting, and we are developing combinatorial strategies to counter the tumor promoting effect of HOXB13. To validate our mouse model findings in human breast cancer, we use multiplex immunofluorescence imaging to correlate HOXB13 expression with various protein targets across a large, well-annotated cohort of triple negative breast cancer patients. Lastly, we have recently shown that HOXB13 is frequently co-gained or co-amplified with ERBB2, and that a subset of patients with HOXB13/ERBB2 co-amplification are associated with interstitial deletion of BRCA1. Tumors with HOXB13/ERBB2 co-amplification are unique to breast cancer patients, and such patients display worse clinical outcomes than those with ERBB2-only amplification. We are currently validating this finding in additional patient

A



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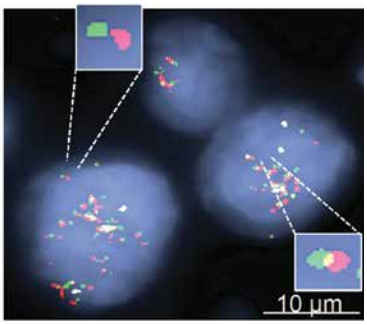

A. ERBB2/HOXB13 co-amplification with interstitial BRCA1 deletion: Integrative genomics viewer screenshot of chromosome 17 depicting copy number alterations in representative sampling of TCGA breast tumors. White: neutral copy number. Red: copy gain. Blue: copy loss.

B. Representative high-power image of FISH assay from a Human breast tumor cell demonstrating spatially distinct ERBB2 (red probe) and HOXB13 (green probe) loci (enlarged insert image, upper left), and spatially overlapping ERBB2 and HOXB13 loci (yellow) consistent with interstitial deletion (enlarged insert image, bottom right).

cohorts, and exploring therapeutic strategies to treat such tumors.

Selected Publications:

Mamounas E, Bandos H, Rastogi P, Zhang Y, Treuner K, Lucas P, Geyer C, Fehrenbacher L, Chia S, Brufsky A, Walshe J, Soori G, Dakhil S, Paik S, Swain S, **Sgroi D,** Schnabel C, Wolmark N. Breast Cancer Index and Prediction of Benefit from Extended Aromatase Inhibitor Therapy in Hormone Receptor-positive Breast Cancer: NRG Oncology/NSABP B-42. *Clin Cancer Res.* 2024 Feb 20.

Sgroi DC, Treuner K, Zhang, Y, Piper T, Salunga R, Ahmed I, Doos L, Thornber S, Taylor KJ, Brachtel E, Pirrie S, Schnabel CA, Rea D, Bartlett JMS. Correlative studies of the Breast Cancer Index (HOXB13/IL17BR) and ER, PR, AR, AR/ER ratio and Ki67 for prediction of extended endocrine therapy benefit: a Trans-aTTom study. *Breast Cancer Res.* 2022 Dec 16;24(1):90.

Bartlett JMS, **Sgroi DC***, Treuner K, Zhang Y, Piper T, Salunga RC, Ahmed I, Doos L, Thornber S, Taylor KJ, Brachtel EF, Pirrie SJ, Schnabel CA, Rea D. Breast Cancer Index is a predictive biomarker of treatment benefit and outcome from extended tamoxifen therapy: final analysis of the Trans-aTTom study. *Clin Cancer Res.* 2022; 28:1871-80.

Nunes R, Sella T, Treuner K, Atkinson J, Wong J, Zhang Y, Exman P, Dabbs D, Richardson A, Schnabel C, Sgroi D, Oesterreich S, Cimino-Mathews A, Metzger Filho O. Prognostic utility of Breast Cancer Index to stratify distant recurrence risk in invasive lobular carcinoma. Clin Cancer Res. 2021 Oct 15;27(20):5688-5696.

Li K, Li T, Feng Z, Huang M, Wei L, Yan Z, Long M, Hu Q, Wang J, Liu S, **Sgroi DC**, Demehri S. CD8+ T cell immunity blocks the metastasis of carcinogen-exposed breast cancer. *Sci Adv.* 2021 Jun 18;7(25): eabd 8936.

Bartlett JMS, **Sgroi DC***, Treuner K, Zhang Y, Ahmed I, Piper T, Salunga R, Brachtel EF, Pirrie SJ, Schnabel CA, Rea DW. Breast Cancer Index and prediction of benefit from extended endocrine therapy in breast cancer patients treated in the Adjuvant Tamoxifen-To Offer More? (aTTom) trial. *Ann Oncol.* 2019 Nov 1;30(11):1776-1783.

*Denotes co-first author

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Shioda Laboratory

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Yoko Hashimoto, PhD
Junko Odajima, PhD
Keiko Shioda, RN, BS
Toshihiro Shioda, MD, PhD
Takuto Yamamoto, PhD

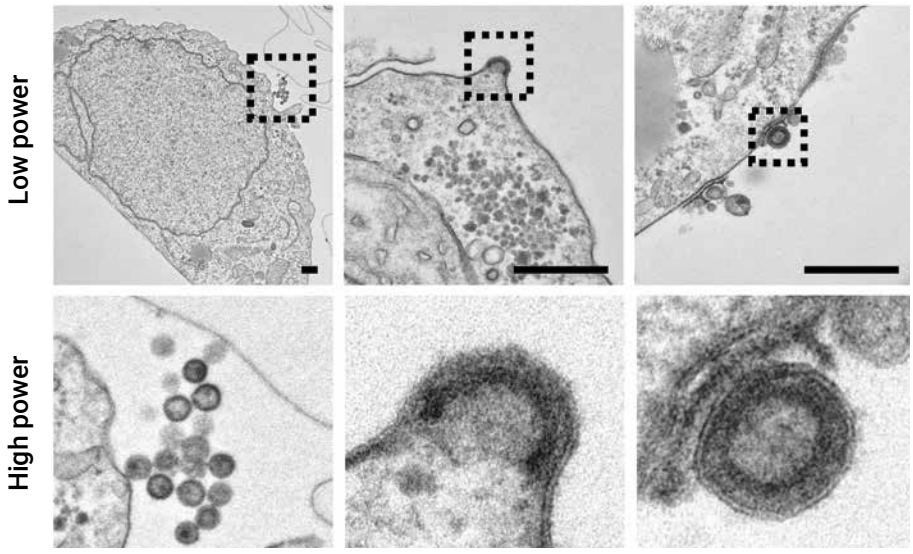
The Shioda laboratory is interested in Primordial Germ Cells (PGCs), the common precursor of gametes. Since access to PGCs in human embryos is limited, iPS cell-derived PGC-Like Cells (PGCLCs) play important roles in studying PGCs, but their lifespan is very short. Our breakthrough Long Term Culture (LTC) protocol supports perpetual expansion of PGCLCs. We found that LTC-PGCLCs produce virus-like particles resembling human- infectious retroviruses and that the responsible retrovirus (the HML-2 endogenous retrovirus) is also active in PGCs in human embryos. Testicular cancers are malignancies of PGCs, and these are the most frequent cancers among young men. About 50% of testicular cancer is seminoma, but only one seminoma cell line has ever been established due to technical difficulties. We found that the LTC protocol of PGCLC culture also efficiently supports growth of seminoma cells, and we have successfully established multiple new human seminoma cell lines and associated normal iPS cells from patient-derived tumor tissues. These cell culture resources provide unprecedented opportunities to understand mechanisms of testicular carcinogenesis and vulnerability of PGCs to toxic substances.

Long-term maintenance of human PGCLCs *in vitro*

Several labs, including ours, have established the usefulness of PGCLCs as a cell culture model faithfully resembling human embryonic PGCs. However, PGCLCs are short-lived and lost in cell culture in 10-14 days. This major technical barrier has prevented the application of PGCLCs to various studies such as chemical or genetic screenings. To overcome this hurdle, we have performed a systemic evaluation of cell culture conditions and successfully established a novel protocol that supports amplification of PGCLCs perpetually without losing their PGC- like characteristics, achieving one billion-fold increase in cell number over 160-days cell culture. Under our Long-Term Culture (LTC) condition, PGCLCs proliferate with no sign of senescence while strictly maintaining their PGC-like transcriptomal profile and marker protein expression. The LTC-PGCLC provided us with a unique opportunity to perform proteomics analysis (with Dr. Wilhelm Haas, KF-CCR), which detected retrovirus-like proteins expressed in this cell culture model of normal human PGCs. To our surprise, it turned out that LTC- PGCLCs robustly produce even retrovirus-like particles from their surface. The HML-2 human endogenous retrovirus is responsible for the formation of the virus-like particles in PGCLCs, and analysis of previously published single-cell RNA-seq data of human embryos revealed HML-2 activation in PGCs *in vivo*. Thus, the LTC-PGCLC model provides the relevant fields of research with unprecedented opportunities to access unlimited amounts of PGCLCs, facilitating studies of normal development and disease formation of human germ cells.

Genetic modeling of human testicular cancers

Testicular cancer is the most common malignancy that affects juvenile and young-adult males at 15-35 years old. The vast majority of testicular cancer is the Type II germ cell tumor, which arise from PGCs, and about 50% of them are seminomas, while the others are non-seminomas such



HML-2 human-specific endogenous retroviruses form virus-like particles at the surface of human primordial germ cell-like cells (hPGCLCs). hPGCLC is a pluripotent stem cell-derived cell culture model of human primordial germ cells, which are the earliest precursor of all germline cells. The viral capsid is assembled beneath the cell surface (center) and eventually pinched out of the cells with plasma membrane surrounding it as viral envelope (right). The virus-like particles are often released from hPGCLCs as aggregates (left).

as embryonal carcinomas. Most cases of invasive testicular cancers harbor chromosome (chr) 12p amplification and are associated with Germ Cell Neoplasia In Situ (GCNIS), which consist of cells resembling PGCs and lacking chr12p amplification. Testicular cancer is known for its very strong familial predisposition. Whereas testicular cancers lack genetic mutations commonly found in many other types of adult cancers, they often harbor gain-of-function c-KIT mutations or focal amplification of the gDNA region including the wild type *c-KIT* gene.

Genome-wide association studies have repeatedly suggested the involvement of the pro-apoptotic gene *BAK1* in testicular carcinogenesis. However, the mechanisms by which *c-KIT*, *BAK1*, and/or chr12p amplification contribute to testicular carcinogenesis and progression still remain largely unknown due to the lack of adequate experimental models. The genetic basis of the familial predisposition of testicular cancer is also poorly understood. In collaboration with members in Mass General Urology (Keyan Salari, Philip Saylor, Richard Lee) and Urological Pathology (Chin-Lee Wu), we are attempting to make a breakthrough by establishing a novel cell bank specialized in cell lines of human testicular cancers associated with patients-derived normal iPS cells, and PGCLCs. It turned out that LTC protocol developed for PGCLCs also efficiently supports growth of seminomas. In-vitro culture of seminoma cells has been extremely challenging and represented by only one cell line (TCam2), whose karyogram does not show chr12p amplification. We are currently expanding and characterizing multiple cell lines of seminomas, non-seminomas, iPSCs derived from the same testicular cancer patients, and PGCLCs derived from these iPSCs. Our T548 embryonal carcinoma cells harbor four extra copies of chr12p and their wild type c-KIT is strongly amplified. T836 seminoma cells, which harbor a gain-of-function c-KIT mutation and chr12p amplification, may represent the GCNIS status because they produce both seminomatous and non-seminomatous components in mouse xenograft tumors. In contrast, T889 seminoma cells with no c-KIT mutation or amplification represent stable seminomatous features. With these cell culture resources, we are currently working to recapitulate testicular carcinogenesis *in vitro*.

Selected Publications:

Lee H, Blumberg B, Lawrence M, **Shioda T**. Revisiting the use of structural similarity index in Hi-C. *Nature Genetics*. 2023. Dec;55(12):2049-2052.

Pierson Smela MD, Kramme CC, Fortuna PRJ, Adams JL, Su AR, Dong E, Kobayashi M, Brixi G, Kavirayuni VS, Tysinger E, Kohman RE, **Shioda** T, Chatterjee P, Church GM. Directed differentiation of human iPSCs to functional ovarian granulosa-like cells via transcription factor overexpression. *eLife*. 2023. 12:E83921.

Kobayashi Mu, Kobayashi Mi, Odajima J, Shioda K, Hwang YS, Sasaki K, Chatterjee P, Kramme C, Kohman RE, Church GM, Loehr AR, Weiss RS, Jüppner, H, Gell JJ, Lau C, and **Shioda T**. Expanding homogenous culture of human primordial germ cell-like cells maintaining germline features without serum or feeder layers. *Stem Cell Reports* 2022 Mar 8;17(3):507-521.

Mitsunaga S, Odajima J, Yawata S, Shioda K, Owa C, Isselbacher KJ, Hanna JH, and **Shioda T**. Relevance of iPSC-derived human PGC-like cells at the surface of embryoid bodies to prechemotaxis migrating PGCs. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA*. 2017 Nov 14;114(46):E9913-E9922.

Chamorro-García R, Diaz-Castillo C, Shoucri BM, Käch H, Leavitt R, **Shioda T**, Blumberg B. Ancestral perinatal obesogen exposure results in a transgenerational thrifty phenotype in mice. *Nature Communications*. 2017 Dec 8;8(1):2012.

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Mikołaj Słabicki, PhD

The Słabicki laboratory is dedicated to expanding the druggable proteome by employing functional genomics and targeted protein degradation. We harness the body's own waste disposal machinery, especially the E3 ligases that can flag malfunctioning proteins for disposal, to develop new treatments. Leveraging our extensive expertise in functional genomics, cell biology, bioinformatics, molecular biology, chemical biology and biochemistry, we reprogram the ubiquitin-proteasome system to identify and characterize novel therapeutic modalities. Our work enhances our fundamental understanding of biology and enables the creation of new treatments for diseases that currently lack therapeutic options.

Słabicki Laboratory

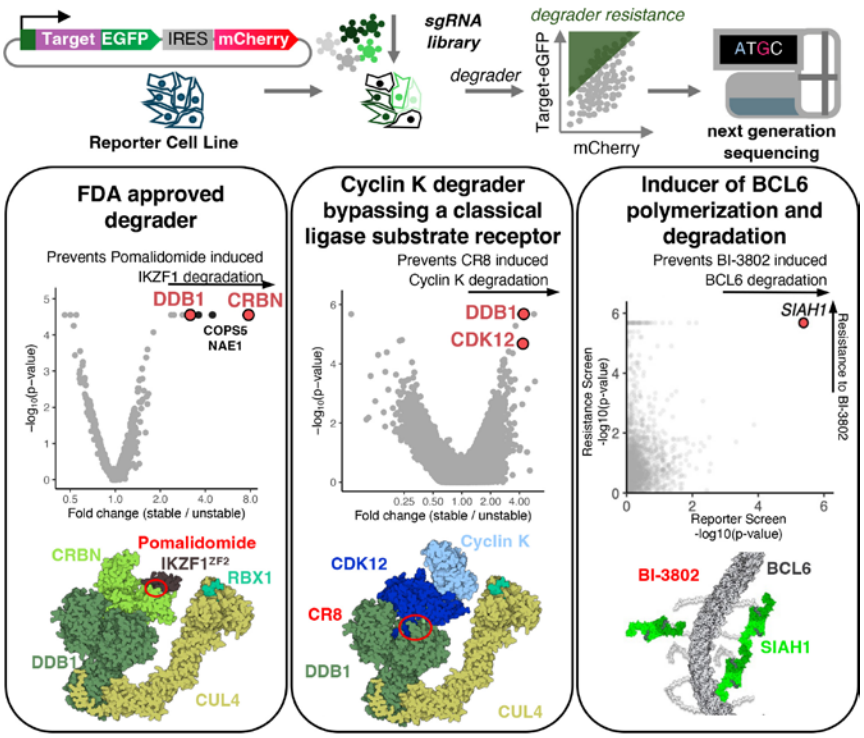
Molly Fraser
Marek M. Nagiec, PhD
Jesse Pellman
Abby Perschon
Mikołaj Słabicki, PhD

Targeted protein degradation (TPD) is an exciting and novel pharmacological modality in which the ubiquitin proteasome system (UPS) is reprogrammed to induce depletion of targets that are often otherwise undruggable. Unlike traditional occupancy-based inhibitors, TPD utilizes event-based pharmacology, degrading multiple target protein molecules with a single drug molecule, possibly enhancing clinical effectiveness. Two main classes of degraders exist. First, monovalent molecular glue degraders - such as the clinically-used thalidomide, lenalidomide, and pomalidomide - were discovered to work by binding to an E3 ligase and degrading neo-substrates. Second, PROteolysis TArgeting Chimeras (PROTACs) are rationally designed bi-functional molecules that contain two moieties: one that binds to a target protein and one that engages an E3 ubiquitin ligase.

The Słabicki laboratory will advance both foundational knowledge and therapeutic innovation in protein degradation by developing new approaches and establishing new workflows. For example, we have extensively optimized a generalizable fluorescent reporter and flow cytometry-based CRISPR screening method to identify genes that regulate the post-translational stability of any protein of interest. By elucidating the mechanisms governing target-ligase interactions, we aim to expedite the discovery and optimization of promising drug candidates.

Our recent research led to the identification of the kinase inhibitor CR8 as a molecular glue degrader. Unlike previous examples of degraders, CR8 induces an interaction between a target and a substrate adaptor in the absence of a traditional substrate receptor. CR8 induces a neo-interaction between the CDK12-cyclin K complex and DDB1, inducing the ubiquitination and subsequent degradation of cyclin K (Słabicki M, Kozicka Z, Petzold G, et al., *Nature*. 2020). We also identified the intricate mechanism through which the small molecule BI-3802 promotes the polymerization of the oncogenic transcription factor BCL6, leading to enhanced ubiquitination by the E3 ligase SIAH1 and subsequent proteasomal degradation (Słabicki M, Yoon H, Koeppel J, et al., *Nature*. 2020). Both findings revealed novel mechanisms by which proteins can be degraded, expanding the repertoire of therapeutic opportunities for otherwise difficult-to-target proteins.

Building on the small molecule-induced polymerization of BCL6, our team has developed a drug-induced, reversible polymerization switch. By fusing BCL6-BTB



The Słabicki laboratory is dedicated to expanding the druggable proteome by employing functional genomics and targeted protein degradation. To understand how small molecules lead to target degradation reporter cell lines are infected with the CRISPR library, and the degrader-resistant population is flow-sorted, with enriched sgRNAs deconvoluted by next-generation sequencing. Results for different molecular mechanisms of targeted protein degradation are presented alongside the drug-induced complexes.

domain to the epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR), we were able to activate downstream signaling pathways and promote cellular proliferation, when the polymerization-inducing drug was present, even in the absence of epidermal growth factor (EGF), (Nitsch, L. et al. *Cell Rep Methods*, 2022). We also defined how the human E3 ligase RNF185 influences the stability of the SARS-CoV-2 Envelope protein (Zou, C., et al., *iScience*, 2023). Currently, our team is engaged in a project that aims to broaden the scope of human zinc finger degrons targeted by glutaramide analogs via CRBN.

The Słabicki laboratory's future research will use high throughput chemical genomic approaches to systematically dissect the protein homeostasis machinery for clinically relevant targets. We will further elucidate the mechanisms governing protein-ligase interactions, establish comprehensive E3-ligase target maps, and expand the array of targets amenable to small molecule-mediated degradation. Our ultimate objective is to advance the development of precision-based therapeutic interventions, particularly in the field of oncology, while simultaneously establishing a comprehensive framework for identifying E3 ligases for unique protein targets.

Selected Publications:

Park PMC, Park J, Brown J, Hunkeler M, Roy Burman SS, Donovan KA, Yoon H, Nowak RP, **Słabicki M**, Ebert BL, Fischer ES. Polymerization of ZBTB transcription factors regulates chromatin occupancy. *Mol Cell.* 2024 Jul 11;84(13):2511-2524.e8.

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The Stott laboratory is comprised of bioengineers, biologists and chemists focused on translating technological advances to relevant applications in clinical medicine. Specifically, we are interested in using microfluidics, imaging, and biopreservation technologies to create tools that increase our understanding of cancer biology and of the metastatic process. The Stott laboratory has co-developed innovative microfluidic devices that can isolate extraordinarily rare circulating biomarkers such as extracellular vesicles (EVs) and circulating tumor cells (CTCs) from the blood of cancer patients. New microfluidic tools are being developed to both manipulate and interrogate these cells and vesicles at a single particle level. We also explore tumor heterogeneity using multispectral imaging, hoping that the exploration of the spatial relationships between cells within the tissue will help us better predict treatment response. Ultimately, we hope that by working in close partnership with the clinicians and cell biologists at the Mass General Cancer Center, we can create new tools that directly impact patient care.

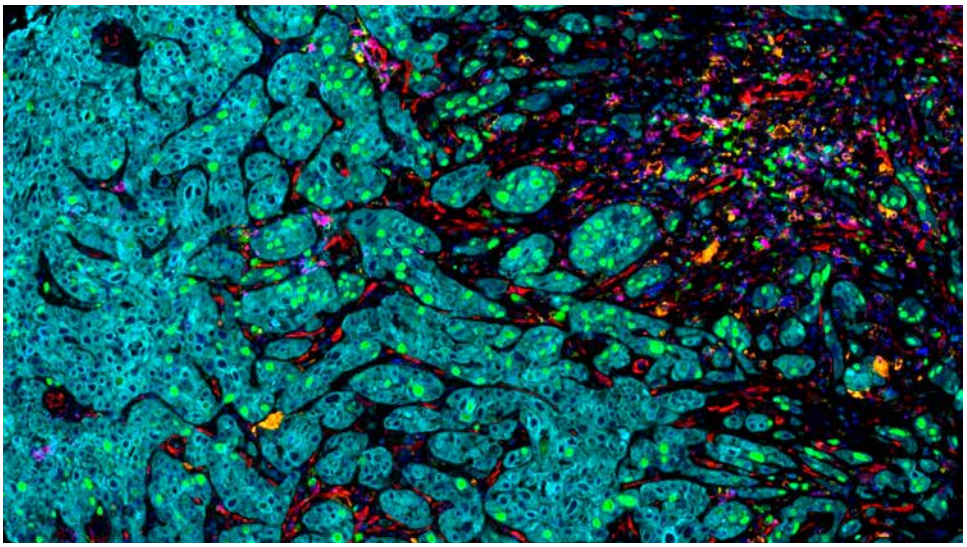
Rapid technological advances in microfluidics, imaging and digital gene-expression profiling are converging to present new capabilities for blood, tissue and single-cell analysis. Our laboratory is interested in taking these advances and creating new technologies to help build understanding of the metastatic process. Our research focus is on 1) the development and application of microfluidic devices and biomaterials for the isolation and characterization of extracellular vesicles, 2) the enrichment and analysis of CTCs at a single cell level, and 3) novel imaging strategies to characterize tumor tissue, cancer cells, and extracellular vesicles.

Extracellular vesicle isolation and characterization

Extracellular vesicles (EVs), such as exosomes, microvesicles, and oncosomes, are small particles that bud off of cancer cells, with some cancer cells releasing up to thousands of EVs per day. Researchers have hypothesized that these EVs shed from tumors transport RNA, DNA and proteins that promote tumor growth, and studies have shown that EVs are present in the blood of most cancer patients. Ongoing work in my lab incorporates microfluidics and novel biomaterials to enrich cell-specific EVs from cancer patients, using as little as 1mL of plasma. Once isolated, we are exploring their protein and nucleic acid content to probe their potential as a less invasive biomarker.

Microfluidics for circulating tumor cell analysis

One of the proposed mechanisms of cancer metastasis is the dissemination of tumor cells from the primary organ into the blood stream. A cellular link between the primary malignant tumor and the peripheral metastases has been established in the form of CTCs in peripheral blood. While extremely rare, these cells provide a potentially accessible source for early detection, characterization and monitoring of cancers that would otherwise require invasive serial biopsies. Working in collaboration with Drs. Mehmet Toner, Shyamala Maheswaran and Daniel Haber, we have designed a



Multispectral image of a section of tumor tissue from a patient with head and neck cancer. Various markers were selected for cell identification to explore the relationship between immune cells and cancer cells within the tumor.

Image courtesy of Daniel Ruiz Torres, MD.

high throughput microfluidic device, the CTC-Chip, which allows the isolation and characterization of CTCs from the peripheral blood of cancer patients. Using blood from patients with metastatic and localized cancer, we have demonstrated the ability to isolate, enumerate and molecularly characterize putative CTCs with high sensitivity and specificity. Ongoing projects include translating the technology for early cancer detection, exploring the biophysics of the CTC clusters, and the design of biomaterials for the gentle release of the rare cells from the device surface. We are also developing new strategies for the long term preservation of whole blood such that samples can be shipped around the world for CTC analysis.

High-content and high-throughput imaging of tumor specimens

Tumors can be highly heterogeneous, and their surrounding stroma even more so. Traditionally, the tumor and surrounding cells are dissociated from the tissue matrix for high throughput analysis of each cell. While this allows for important information to be gained, the spatial architecture of the tissue and corresponding interplay between tumor and immune cells can be lost. The Stott lab is developing quantitative, robust analysis for individual cells within the tumor and neighboring tissue using multispectral imaging. We are using this technology alongside downstream imaging processing algorithms to interrogate signaling activity in cancer cells, immune cell infiltration into to the tumor and pEMT in cancer cells. These data will be used to gain an increased understanding in the relationship between pharmacologic measurements and clinical outcomes, ultimately leading to the optimization of patient therapy.

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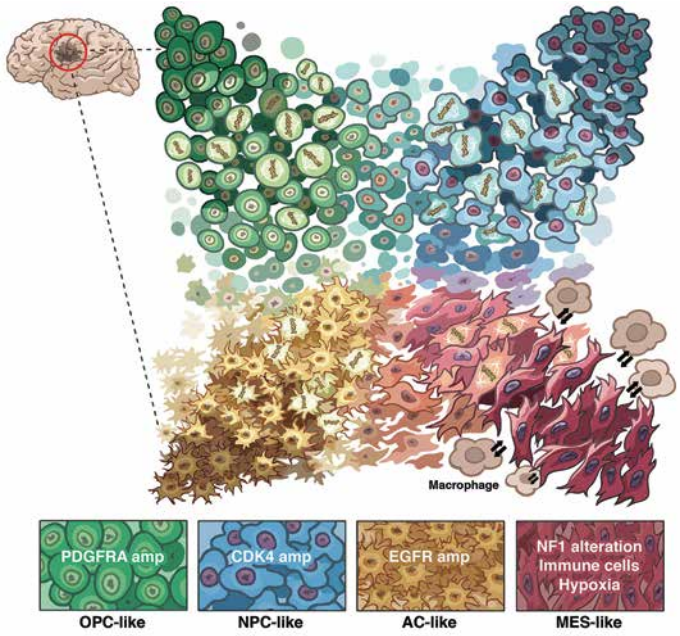
The Suvà laboratory develops and applies multi-dimensional spatial genomic, single-cell multi-omic and advanced computational analyses to dissect the biology of adult and pediatric gliomas. We study clinical samples at single-cell resolution and establish genetically and epigenetically faithful cellular models directly from patient tumors. We model how brain cancer cells exploit their plasticity to establish phenotypically distinct populations of cells, with a focus on malignant cell states that we defined. We seek to redefine tumor cell lineages, stem cell programs and immune cells subsets across all subtypes of gliomas, and to leverage the information for renewed therapeutics. The laboratory additionally leverages single-cell and spatial genomics to characterize the cellular and molecular response of brain tumors to experimental therapies.

Cell state heterogeneity is an important disease hallmark of both IDH-mutant glioma and IDH-wildtype glioblastoma, with genetic clonal diversity intermingled with neurodevelopmental trajectories. Stemness-to-differentiation diversity is central to the glioma stem cell (GSC) model, which posits that stem-like cells are uniquely capable of self-renewal, tumor propagation and preferential resistance to therapy. Recent single-cell RNA-sequencing efforts in glioma led by my laboratory provided high-resolution mapping of cell state diversity and offered additional granularity to the GSC model by revealing multiple transcriptionally-defined cell states related to neurodevelopmental cell types. Yet, while cellular states can be precisely delineated by scRNAseq, glioma cell state heritability and transition dynamics are not defined, and the epigenetic underpinning of glioma cellular states is still largely unknown. Equally unaddressed are cellular cross-talks within the glioma ecosystem (e.g. cancer-immune interactions). In order to dissect those influences and obtain a comprehensive view of gliomas biology, my laboratory is leveraging joint capture of transcriptional, genetic, and epigenetic information (DNAme, chromatin accessibility) at the single-cell resolution to primary diffuse gliomas. Additionally, we integrate single-cell genomics of human tumors with mouse models, computational deconvolution of profiles from The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA) and functional experiments. Our approach offers a compelling framework to comprehensively dissect the glioma ecosystem, both at diagnosis and under therapeutic pressure.

Assessing malignant cells heterogeneity at the single-cell level in gliomas

The Suvà Lab is performing large-scale single-cell RNA-seq analyses in IDH-mutant gliomas, histone H3-mutant midline gliomas, IDH-wildtype glioblastoma, and medulloblastoma to assess tumor cell lineages, stem cell programs and genetic heterogeneity at an unprecedented scale and depth. Our work in IDH-mutant gliomas highlighted a rare subpopulation of actively dividing stem/progenitor cells, solely responsible for fueling tumor growth in patients. Single cell profiling of H3K27-mutant pediatric gliomas highlighted specific vulnerabilities and revealed a differentiation block, maybe explaining the more aggressive nature of this cancer type.



Model for the cellular states of glioblastoma and their genetic and micro-environmental determinants. Mitotic spindles indicate cycling cells. Lighter/darker tones indicate strength of each program. Intermediate states are shown in between the four states and indicate transitions.

More recently, we provided a comprehensive model of glioblastoma biology that integrates single-cell expression programs, genetic composition and tumor subtypes (see figure). Our study of medulloblastoma single-cell programs provided clarifications on tumor histogenesis and classification. The lab is currently performing such single-cell analyses with constantly increased throughput, resolution and in broader clinical settings (e.g. rare entities, novel clinical trials). Overall, our goal is to identify both lineage-defined and somatically-altered therapeutic targets in brain cancer in both children and adults.

Dissecting the ecosystem of gliomas

The composition of the tumor micro-environment (TME) has an important impact on tumorigenesis and modulation of treatment responses. For example, gliomas contain substantial populations of microglia and macrophages, with putative immunosuppressive functions but whose precise programs remains uncharted at single-cell resolution. In addition, very little is known about the functional state of T cells in human gliomas. As is the case in diverse other conditions, the CNS may create a unique microenvironment that impacts T cell function by distinct mechanisms. The laboratory leverages single-cell analyses in clinical samples to dissect the functional programs of immune cells in gliomas that can be used to elucidate mechanisms relevant to immuno-oncology. We profile both dysfunctional T cells that express multiple inhibitory receptors and T cells that are functional based on expression of multiple genes required for T cell cytotoxicity. We find these modules to be distinct from observations in other types of tumors (such as melanoma), underscoring the necessity to perform these analyses directly in gliomas. By analyzing modules of co-expressed genes in subsets of T cells in patients with glioma we seek to shed light on mechanism of activation and exhaustion in patient tumors and to highlight candidate novel regulatory programs that can be exploited for therapeutics.

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Filbin MG†, Tirosh I†, Hovestadt V†, Shaw ML, Escalante LE,... Getz G, Rozenblatt-Rosen O, Wucherpfennig KW, Louis DN, Monje M, Slavc I, Ligon KL, Golub TR, Regev A*, Bernstein BE*, **Suvà ML*** Developmental and oncogenic programs in H3K27M gliomas dissected by single-cell RNA-seq. *Science*. 2018 Apr 20;360(6386).

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Sweetser Laboratory

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The Sweetser laboratory investigates how leukemia and other cancers form with the goal of developing novel, safer, and more effective therapies. Our lab has identified a novel family of tumor suppressor genes, the Groucho/TLE family of co-repressors and defined how TLE1 and TLE4 function as potent tumor suppressors of acute myeloid leukemia and how they have critical roles in hematopoiesis, bone, lung, and brain development, and limiting inflammation. It is this latter function that appears to underlie their tumor suppressor role. Currently, we are defining a cooperative role of TLE1 in melanoma development. A second line of research seeks to define and target critical signaling pathways within the cancer niche that are required for the proliferation and survival of leukemia. As the Mass General site director for the Undiagnosed Diseases Network and Chief of Medical Genetics and Metabolism at Mass General, Dr. Sweetser is also leading a group of clinicians and researchers actively engaged in elucidating the underlying basis of a wide variety of human diseases.

Evaluation of the role of the Groucho/TLE family of corepressors in cancer and development

Our laboratory has defined TLE/Groucho proteins, TLE1 and TLE4, as members of a novel family of tumor suppressor genes..

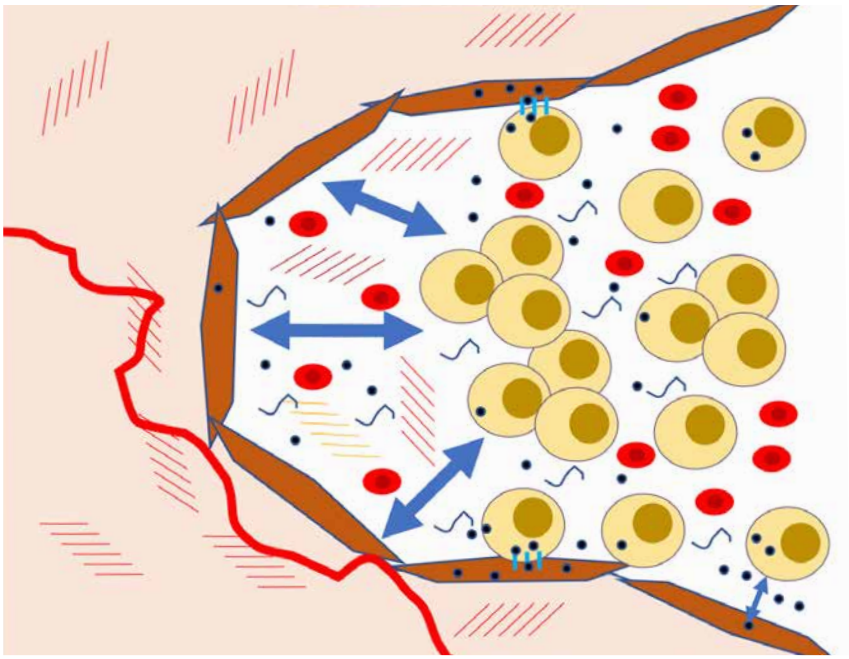
The Groucho/TLE family of corepressor proteins can modulate many of the major pathways involved in development and oncogenesis, including Wnt/β-catenin, Notch, Myc, NFκB, and TGFβ. The TLEs act as tumor suppressor genes in cooperation with specific oncogenes in the pathogenesis of myeloid malignancies and lymphomas, but act as an oncogene in synovial cell sarcoma. TLE1 and TLE4 are potent inhibitors of the AML1-ETO oncogene in the most common subtype of AML. The mechanism of this inhibition appears to involve both regulation of gene transcription and chromatin structure. Our work indicates this cooperative effect appears to involve regulation of Wnt signaling and inflammatory gene pathways. This work has led to the demonstration that specific anti-inflammatory agents can have potent anti-leukemic effects.

Cooperativity of TLE1 loss and BRAF in melanoma

A microdeletion involving the TLE1 locus, has been found in familial cases of ocular melanoma. We are currently using a mouse model to study the role of TLE1 in melanomas using conditional knockout of Tle1 and conditional oncogenicV600E BRAF expression.

The role of the bone marrow niche in nurturing leukemia

The bone marrow niche is remodeled in the process of leukemia development to provide a supportive environment that contributes to leukemic cell proliferation, survival, and resistance to chemotherapy. Leukemia treatments to date have focused on attacking leukemia cells and have largely ignored that fact that the survival of leukemia is critically dependent on the supportive role of a transformed leukemic bone marrow niche. This bone marrow niche is rich in cytokines, growth factors, and various nucleic acids including miRNAs. Using diagnostic bone marrow aspirates



Schematic diagram of the leukemic bone marrow niche. *Remodeling of the bone marrow niche creates a necessary and supportive environment for the development and expansion of leukemia. This synergistic cross talk involves a complex milieu of compounds including cytokines, growth factors, miRNAs and other nucleic acids and proteins. Disruption of critical signals in this niche could represent a valuable therapeutic strategy.*

from patients with leukemia and controls we have characterized many of these dysregulated components in bone marrow stroma, bone marrow plasma and leukemic cells. We are now systematically evaluating these to identify novel therapeutic modalities to block critical signals necessary to sustain leukemic growth and survival.

The undiagnosed diseases network

Dr. Sweetser is also engaged in rare and undiagnosed disease research. The Harvard Medical School Hospital consortium of Mass General, Brigham and Women's Hospital and Children's Hospital together with 14 other clinical sites around the US comprise the NIH sponsored Undiagnosed Diseases Network. As Chief of Medical Genetics at Mass General, and the Mass General site director for the UDN, Dr. Sweetser coordinates a team of expert clinicians and researchers, using comprehensive clinical phenotyping, whole exome/whole genome sequencing, paired with RNASeq and metabolomics profiling, in vitro functional modeling, and collaboration with zebrafish and Drosophila model organism cores to identify the underlying basis of a variety of challenging human diseases. Over three dozen new genetic disorders have been characterized with these efforts. His lab is also developing stem cell models of several inherited neurological disorders to understand alterations in brain development and potential novel therapies.

Selected Publications:

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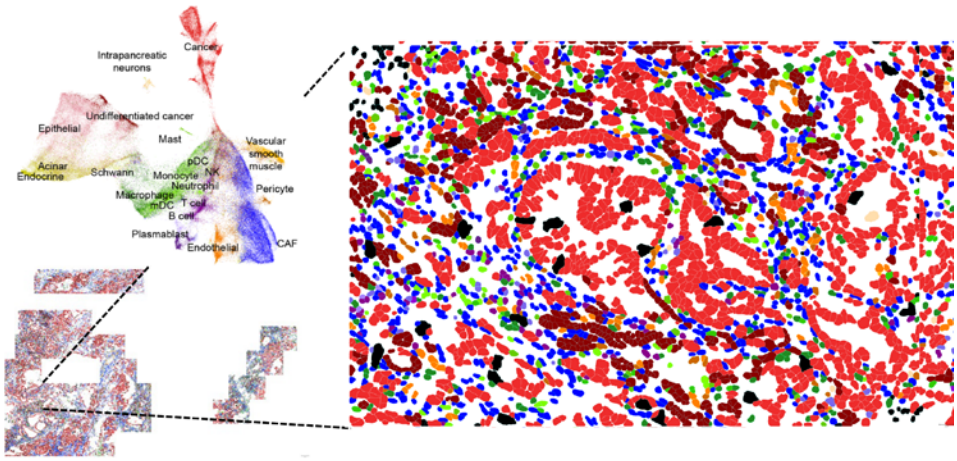
Gastrointestinal cancers are highly lethal cancers where the vast majority of patients are diagnosed too late and conventional therapies have largely been ineffective, making early detection and novel drug targets greatly needed. **The Ting laboratory** has been utilizing innovative technologies to characterize RNA expression patterns in cancer. Our lab has identified aberrant expression of repeat RNA in cancer, which have been found to mimic viruses. We have demonstrated that these viral-like repeat sequences can stimulate innate immune responses, replicate through reverse transcriptional intermediates, and infect cells through extracellular vesicles. We have demonstrated found that these repeat RNAs can serve as biomarkers of immunological response, identified therapeutic targets that can disrupt repeat element biology, and visualized the spatial distribution of these viral-like species in tumors and the surrounding microenvironment using spatial transcriptomics. These studies are providing new mechanistic insight into the contribution of repeat elements in cancer progression, identifying novel biomarkers, and discovering new repeat targeting agents.

The Ting laboratory has utilized RNA-sequencing, RNA in situ hybridization, and spatial transcriptomic technologies to understand the complex transcriptional landscape of cancers. We have used these technologies to characterize non-coding repeat RNA expression across cancer and normal tissues. This has provided novel insight into the role of the repeatome in cancer development and offers a method to identify novel biomarkers and therapeutic targets. In addition, we have used single cell, spatial transcriptomic, and microfluidic technologies that have revealed the importance of repeatome biology in driving cellular plasticity and tumor cell heterogeneity. Genetic and molecular disruption of repeat element function can activate innate immune signaling that has been shown to affect tumor growth and block epithelial mesenchymal transition (EMT) plasticity, a cell fate change important for metastasis.

Repeat RNA Viral Response Alters Cellular Plasticity

RNA sequencing of a broad spectrum of carcinomas demonstrated a highly aberrant expression of repeat RNAs emanating from regions of the genome previously thought to be inactive due to epigenetic silencing. Our initial work identified the HSATII satellite as being exquisitely specific for epithelial cancers, including carcinomas of the pancreas, colon, liver, breast, and lung. This initial work identified a correlation of satellite expression with neuroendocrine differentiation, a type of cellular plasticity related to EMT and known to occur in the setting of therapy resistance. Furthermore, our work using a microfluidic device to isolate rare circulating tumor cells (CTCs) and single cell RNA-seq revealed high enrichment of repeat element expression in these precursors of metastasis. We have recently demonstrated that repeat RNA expression in cancer cells can induce EMT cellular plasticity through activation of an interferon response, which supports a functional effect of repeat elements on metastatic potential. Using customized probes for repeat RNAs, we have now visualized the spatial localization of repeat RNAs in human cancers using spatial transcriptomics (see figure), which has shown high levels in tumor



This image represents a spatial transcriptomic "map" of a pancreatic cancer with individual molecules of repeat and coding RNAs quantified with precise spatial coordinates in a human primary tumor sample. Individual cell types can be determined based on transcriptional profiles with mapping to understand cell-cell interactions within tissue.

cells that are undergoing EMT. Moreover, spatial transcriptomic analysis has revealed presence of repeat RNAs in multiple cells types in the diverse tumor microenvironment ecosystem including cancer associated fibroblasts (CAFs), neurons, and immune cells. We have demonstrated that repeat RNAs can be delivered to other cell types through extracellular vesicles (EVs) that mimic viral particles, which induce innate immune responses that alter the phenotype of different cell types. Altogether, this represents a model of a cancer driven inflammatory response in the tumor microenvironment through an "infection" of repeat RNA containing EVs.

Repeat Elements as Novel Cancer Therapeutic Targets

Different repeat elements have been shown to replicate through reverse transcriptional intermediates, including human endogenous retroviruses (HERVs), the LINE-1 retrotransposon, and satellite repeats. These insertions and expansions in the genome have been found to be a poor prognostic marker in cancer. In preclinical tumor models, we showed the ability to inhibit replication of repeat elements using nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs), drugs commonly used for viral infection. This led to a Phase II clinical trial of the NRTI 3TC in metastatic colorectal cancer, which demonstrated promising single agent activity in 25% of patients. Preclinical models indicate that NRTIs affect migratory capability and clonal growth, which supports a role of retrotransposon activity. We are expanding our studies on the impact of NRTIs on cancer cells and the surrounding microenvironment. Recently, we have focused on the RNA binding protein component of the LINE-1 retrotransposon called ORF1p. Suppression of ORF1p with shRNA had significant effects on tumorsphere and xenograft growth, which was linked with alterations in interferon response and diminished EMT. Altogether, these findings have opened new therapeutic avenues to target repeatome biology.

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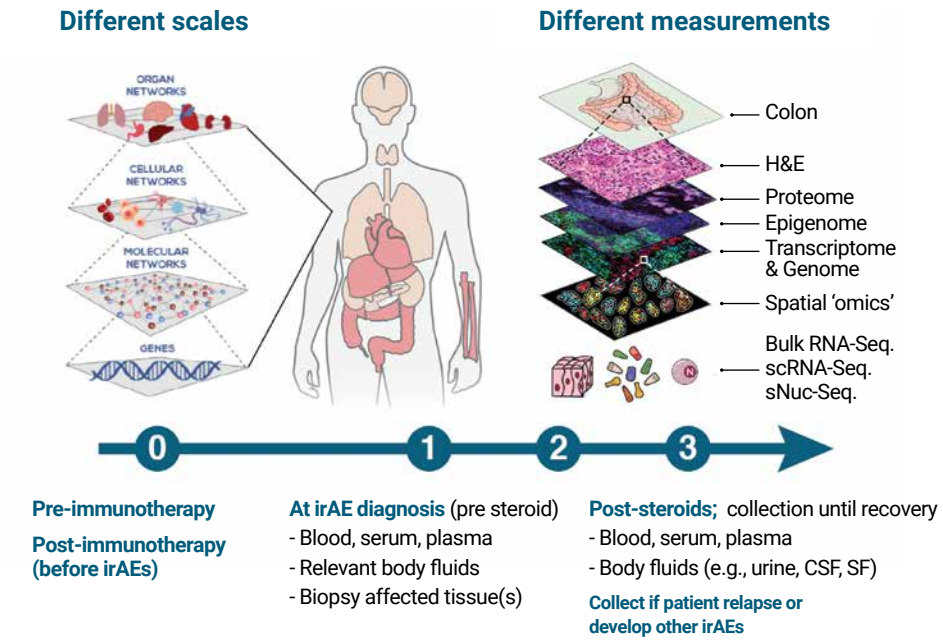
The Villani laboratory seeks to establish a comprehensive roadmap of the human immune system by achieving a higher resolution definition and functional characterization of cell subsets and rules governing immune response regulation, as a foundation to decipher how immunity is dysregulated in diseases. We use unbiased systems immunology approaches, cutting-edge immunogenomics, single-cell 'multi-omics' strategies, and integrative computational frameworks to empower the study and modeling of the immune system as a function of "healthy" and inflammatory states, disease progression, and response to treatment. Our multi-disciplinary team of immunologists, geneticist, computational biologists, and physicians work towards answering several key questions: Do we know all existing human immune cell subsets? How do circulating immune cells mirror those in tissue microenvironment in the context of health and disease? Can we identify targets that would improve immunotherapy efficacy by increasing specificity? Collectively, our groundwork is paving the way for developing a human immune lexicon that is key to promoting effective bench-to-beside translation of findings.

Leveraging single-cell 'multi-omics' to unravel new insights into the human immune system

Achieving detailed understanding of the composition and function of the immune system at the fundamental unit of life — the cell — is essential to determining the prerequisites of health and disease. Historically, leukocyte populations have been defined by a combination of morphology, localization, functions, developmental origins, and the expression of a restricted set of markers. These strategies are inherently biased and recognized today as inadequate. Single-cell RNA sequencing (scRNAseq) and 'multi-omics' analysis provides an unbiased, data-driven way of systematically detecting cellular states that can reveal diverse simultaneous facets of cellular identity, from discrete cell types to continuous dynamic transitions, which cannot be defined by a handful of pre-defined markers or for which markers are not yet known. We combine scRNAseq strategies together with in-depth follow-up profiling, phenotypic and functional characterization of prospectively isolated immune subsets defined by scRNAseq data to overcome such limitations. Our analyses of the human blood mononuclear phagocyte system resulted in the identification of six dendritic cell (DC), four monocyte, and one DC progenitor populations, thus revising the taxonomy of these cells (Villani et al., *Science* 2017). Noteworthy, five of these subsets had never been reported, illustrating the power of our integrative strategies to reopen the definition of these cell types. Our study highlighted the value of embarking on a comprehensive Human Cell Atlas initiative and offered a useful framework for conducting this kind of analysis on other cell types and tissues. We are currently contributing to the immune cell atlas effort by charting at high-resolution the human blood cellular landscape, and are studying paired human tissues with blood to better establish how circulating immune cells mirror those in tissue microenvironment in the context of health and disease.

We also continuously support development



Overview of our strategy for exploring scale, time and modalities to discover underpinnings of diseases.

of in-depth expertise in single-cell 'multi-omics' experimental and computational strategies (Fisher F, *Nat Commun* 2024; Ding, *Nat Biotechnol* 2020; Li, *Nat Methods* 2020; Tukiainen, Villani, *Nature* 2017; Ranu, Villani, *Nucleic Acid Res* 2019; Villani, *Methods Mol Biol* 2016), and its application to study immune cells infiltrates in healthy, tumor lesions and inflamed tissue (Izar, *Science* 2016; Sade-Feldman, *Cell* 2019; Di Pilato, *Nature* 2019; Olah, *Nat Commun* 2018; Balan, *Cell Rep* 2018; Popescu, *Nature* 2019; Smillie, *Cell* 2019; Abbas, *Nat Immunol* 2020; Delorey, *Nature* 2021; Alladina, *Science Immunol* 2023).

Deciphering immune-related adverse events (irAEs) induced by immune-checkpoint inhibitor (ICI) therapy

While ICI therapy is revolutionizing the treatment of solid cancers, its success is currently being limited by treatment-induced irAEs resembling autoimmune diseases that are affecting nearly every organ system. With ICI becoming first- and second-line of cancer treatments, it is expected that irAE incidence will continue rising and limit immunotherapy efficacy unless we find solutions. Our multi-disciplinary translational group of scientists and clinicians are working towards developing a better understanding of the biological players and underlying molecular and cellular mechanisms involved in driving irAEs by directly studying patient blood and matched affected tissue samples using a range of systems immunology, immunogenomics and single-cell 'omics' strategies (Zubiri, *J Immunother Cancer* 2021; Thomas, *Nature Med* 2024; Blum, *Nature* 2024). Our translational research program may result in identifying putative cellular components and mechanisms that could be (i) targeted in a 'primary-prevention' approach to prevent irAE development, and/or (ii) targeted after onset of irAEs, without reducing the efficacy of the immunotherapy.

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*Co-first authorship
†Co-senior authorship

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