Differential expression of phosphoinositide-3-kinase regulatory subunit 1 in cancers of the breast.

Shahan Mamoor, MS¹

¹shahanmamoor@gmail.com

East Islip, NY 11730

Breast cancer affects women at relatively high frequency¹. We mined published microarray datasets^{2,3} to determine in an unbiased fashion and at the systems level genes most differentially expressed in the primary tumors of patients with breast cancer. We report here significant differential expression of the gene encoding phosphoinositide-3-kinase regulatory subunit 1, PIK3R1, when comparing primary tumors of the breast to the tissue of origin, the normal breast. PIK3R1 was also differentially expressed in the tumor cells of patients with triple negative breast cancer. PIK3R1 mRNA was present at significantly lower quantities in tumors of the breast as compared to normal breast tissue. Analysis of human survival data revealed that expression of PIK3R1 in primary tumors of the breast was correlated with overall survival in patients with basal and luminal A subtype cancers in a contrary manner, demonstrating a complex relationship between primary tumor expression of a differentially expressed gene and patient survival outcomes influenced by molecular subtype. PIK3R1 may be of relevance to initiation, maintenance or progression of cancers of the female breast.

Keywords: breast cancer, PIK3R1, phosphoinositide-3-kinase regulatory subunit 1, systems biology of breast cancer, targeted therapeutics in breast cancer.

Invasive breast cancer is diagnosed in over a quarter of a million women in the United States each year¹ and in 2018, breast cancer was the leading cause of cancer death in women worldwide⁴. While patients with localized breast cancer are provided a 99% 5-year survival rate, patients with regional breast cancer, cancer that has spread to lymph nodes or nearby structures, are provided an 86% 5-year survival rate^{5,6}. Patients with metastasis to distant sites, like the brain, are provided a 27% 5-year survival rate^{5,6}. Understanding how primary tumors are most transcriptionally different from the tissue from which they originate, the breast, can facilitate development of novel diagnostic and therapeutics to promote early detection and enhanced treatment, and contribute to efforts to prevent progression to metastatic stages. We mined published microarray data^{2,3} to understand at the transcriptome level and in an unbiased fashion genes most differentially expressed in primary tumors of the breast as compared to normal breast tissue. Phosphoinositide-3-kinase regulatory subunit 1 emerged as among the most differentially expressed genes in cancer of the female breast.

Methods

We utilized datasets GSE109169² and GSE38959³ for this differential gene expression analysis of female breast cancer. GSE109169 was generated using Affymetrix Human Exon 1.0 ST Array technology with $n=25$ normal breast tissue and $n=25$ tumors of the breast; analysis was performed using platform GPL5175. The tissues from this first dataset are paired tissues (25 tumors matching 25 breast tissues from 25 patients). GSE38959 was generated using Agilent-014850 Whole Human Genome Microarray 4x44K G4112F technology with $n=13$ samples of normal mammary gland ductal cells and $n=30$ samples of tumor cells from patients with triple negative breast cancer; analysis was performed using platform GPL4133. The Benjamini and Hochberg method of p -value adjustment was used for ranking of differential expression but raw p -values were used to assess statistical significance of global differential expression. Log-transformation of data was auto-detected, and the NCBI generated category of platform annotation was used. A statistical test was performed to evaluate whether PIK3R1 expression was significantly different between primary breast tumors and breast tissue using a two-tailed t -test. For Kaplan-Meier survival analysis, we used the Kaplan-Meier plotter online tool⁷ for correlation of PIK3R1 mRNA expression levels with overall survival (OS) in $n=404$ patients with basal subtype cancer, $n=794$ patients with luminal A subtype cancer, $n=515$ patients with luminal B subtype cancer, and $n=166$ patients with HER2+ cancer.

Results

We performed discovery of genes associated with breast cancer in females by mining two independently published microarray datasets^{2,3}.

PIK3R1 is differentially expressed in primary tumors of the breast.

Comparison of 25 normal breast tissues to 25 tumors of the breast² from patients with early-onset breast cancer revealed that the gene encoding the phosphoinositide-3-kinase regulatory subunit 1, PIK3R1, was among the genes most differentially expressed in tumors of the breast in human breast cancer (Chart 1). When sorting each of the genes expressed in tumors of the breast based on significance of difference as compared to normal breast tissue, PIK3R1 ranked 83 out of 19076 total transcripts, equating to 99.6% differential expression (Chart 1). Differential expression of PIK3R1 in female breast cancer was statistically significant (Chart 1; $p=4.91\text{E-}15$).

Analysis of a second microarray dataset³, here in tumor cells of patients with triple negative breast cancer as compared to normal mammary gland ductal cells, again revealed significant differential expression of PIK3R1 in human breast cancer (Chart 2). When sorting each of the genes expressed in the

tumor cells of patients with triple negative breast cancer based on significance of difference as compared to normal mammary gland ductal cells, PIK3R1 ranked 2532 out of 45015 total transcripts, equating to 94.4% differential expression (Chart 2). Differential expression of PIK3R1 in the tumor cells of patients with triple negative breast cancer was statistically significant (Chart 2; $p=1.45E-05$). These data suggested that differential expression of PIK3R1 was not an artifact of a single microarray dataset, nor was it associated with one type of breast cancer, rather a general feature of cancers of the breast.

PIK3R1 is expressed at significantly lower levels in breast tumors as compared to the breast.

We obtained exact mRNA expression levels for PIK3R1 from the breast and from breast tumors to understand the magnitude and direction of PIK3R1 expression change. PIK3R1 was expressed at lower levels in tumors of the breast as compared to normal breast tissue (Figure 1). Decreased expression of PIK3R1 in primary breast tumors was statistically significant (Figure 1; $p<0.0001$). PIK3R1 was expressed at 10.67 ± 0.32 arbitrary units (AU) in normal breast tissue, while it was expressed at 9.48 ± 0.45 AU in tumors of the breast. We calculated a mean fold change of 0.89 in PIK3R1 mRNA levels when comparing primary tumors of the breast to normal breast tissues.

PIK3R1 expression correlates with survival outcomes in basal and luminal A subtype human breast cancer.

We performed Kaplan-Meier survival analysis in an attempt to correlate PIK3R1 mRNA expression levels with survival outcomes in patients with breast cancer, evaluating correlations between molecular subtype and overall survival. We observed a correlation between PIK3R1 expression and overall survival (OS) in patients with basal subtype breast cancer that trended towards statistical significance (Figure 2; log rank p -value: 0.097 for overall survival, hazard ratio: 1.38 (0.94-2.02) (Fig. 2)). PIK3R1 mRNA levels were a negative prognostic indicator in basal subtype breast cancer patients. Median OS was 66.12 months for basal patients with low tumor expression of PIK3R1 while median OS was 48 months for basal patients with high tumor expression of PIK3R1 (Chart 3). We also observed a statistically significant correlation between PIK3R1 expression and overall survival (OS) in patients with luminal A subtype breast cancer (Figure 2; log rank p -value: 0.0019 for overall survival, hazard ratio: 0.61 (0.44-0.83) (Fig. 2)). PIK3R1 mRNA levels were a positive prognostic indicator in luminal A subtype breast cancer patients. Median OS was 99 months for luminal A patients with low tumor expression of PIK3R1 while median OS was 179.01 months for luminal A patients with high tumor expression of PIK3R1 (Chart 3). PIK3R1 primary tumor expression was not correlated with overall survival in luminal B breast cancer (Figure 2; log rank p -value: 0.23 for OS, hazard ratio: 0.81 (0.57-1.14) (Fig. 2)) or HER2+ breast cancer (Figure 2; log rank p -value: 0.91 for OS, hazard ratio: 1.03 (0.59-1.82) (Fig. 2)).

Thus, through comparative transcriptome analysis of primary tumors of the breast and normal breast tissue, we found that differential expression and down-regulation of PIK3R1 was among the most significant transcriptional features in primary tumors from patients with breast cancer. PIK3R1 expression in primary tumors of the breast was correlated with overall survival in patients with luminal A and basal subtype disease, with mRNA levels of PIK3R1 a positive prognostic indicator for luminal A breast cancer patients but a negative prognostic indicator for basal subtype breast cancer patients.

Discussion

Invasive breast cancer is a medical problem with a 27% 5-year survival rate for women whose disease has spread to distant sites^{5,6}. To facilitate understanding of the basic transcriptional differences between primary tumors of the breast and the tissues from which these tumors originate, normal breast tissues, we performed comparative transcriptome analysis using two independently published microarray

1 datasets^{2,3}, providing evidence here that differential expression of phosphoinositide-3-kinase regulatory
2 subunit 1, encoded by PIK3R1, is a defining transcriptional feature of human breast cancer: in early
3 onset-breast cancer, and in triple negative breast cancer. PIK3R1 was expressed at significantly lower
4 levels in primary tumors from patients with breast cancer as compared to normal breast tissue.
5 Importantly, in patients with luminal A and basal subtype breast cancers, expression of PIK3R1 was
6 correlated with overall survival, but in a contrary manner. Phosphoinositide-3-kinase regulatory subunit 1
7 and the molecular processes to which it pertains to, may be relevant to the initiation or progression of
8 human breast cancer.
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Rank: 83
Probe ID: 2813060
p-value: 4.91E-15
t: 1.10E+01
B: 24.030669
Gene: PIK3R1
Gene name: phosphoinositide-3-kinase regulatory subunit 1

Chart 1: PIK3R1 is differentially expressed in the primary tumors of patients with early-onset human breast cancer.

Rank of differential expression, probe ID, p-value of global differential expression, t, a moderated t-statistic, B, the log-odds of differential expression between the groups compared, gene and gene name are listed in this chart.

Rank: 2532
Probe ID: 10643
p-value: 1.45E-05
t: 4.8600054
B: 2.790922
Gene: PIK3R1
Gene name: phosphoinositide-3-kinase regulatory subunit 1

Chart 2: PIK3R1 is differentially expressed in the primary tumor cells of patients with triple negative breast cancer.

Rank of differential expression, probe ID, p-value of global differential expression, t, a moderated t-statistic, B, the log-odds of differential expression between the groups compared, gene and gene name are listed in this chart.

Figure 1: PIK3R1 is expressed at significantly lower levels in primary breast tumors as compared to normal breast tissue.

The mRNA expression level of PIK3R1 in normal breast tissue (left) and in primary tumors of the breast (right) is graphically depicted with the result of a statistical test evaluating significance of difference in PIK3R1 expression between normal breast tissue and primary tumors of the breast, a p -value, is $p < 0.0001$.

Figure 2: PIK3R1 expression correlates with overall survival in patients with basal and luminal A subtype breast cancer, but not in patients with luminal B or HER2+ subtype cancer.

Depicted in this Kaplan-Meier plot is the probability of overall survival (OS) for $n=404$ patients with basal subtype breast cancer (upper left), $n=166$ patients with HER2+ breast cancer (upper right), $n=794$ patients with luminal A breast cancer (lower left), and $n=515$ patients with luminal B breast cancer (lower right), stratified into two groups, based on low or high expression of PIK3R1 in patient primary tumors. The log rank p-value denoting statistical significance of difference in overall survival when comparing the two groups, as well as hazard ratio for this comparison is listed above. Listed below is the number of patients at risk (number of patients alive) per interval, after stratification based on PIK3R1 expression; in the first interval, number at risk is number of patients alive; in each subsequent interval, number at risk is the number at risk less those who have expired or are censored.

Basal patients

Low PIK3R1 expression: 66.12 months

High PIK3R1 expression: 48 months

Luminal A patients

Low PIK3R1 expression: 99 months

High PIK3R1 expression: 179.01 months

Chart 3: In basal subtype breast cancer, median overall survival is superior in patients with low primary tumor expression of PIK3R1, but in luminal A breast cancer, median overall survival is superior in patients with high primary tumor expression of PIK3R1.

The overall survival of $n=404$ basal subtype and $n=794$ luminal A subtype breast cancer patients based on stratification into low or high tumor expression of PIK3R1 is listed in this chart.