Differential expression of AFF4 in cancer of the vulva.

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In these brief notes we document work using published microarray data (1, 2) to pioneer integrative transcriptome analysis comparing vulvar carcinoma to its tissue of origin, the vulva. We report the differential expression of AF4/FMR2 family member 4, encoded by AFF4, in cancer of the vulva. AFF4 may be of pertinence to understanding transformation and disease progression in vulvar cancer (3).

Keywords: vulvar cancer, vulvar carcinoma, AFF4, AF4/FMR2 family member 4.

Gynecologic cancers include cervical cancer, ovarian cancer, endometrial (uterine) cancer, and vulvar cancer (4, 3). Vulvar cancer is thought to be the least prevalent of these, with 6190 cases reported in the United States in 2018 (5). We integrated separate published microarray datasets to understand, at the systems level, the transcriptional landscape of vulvar carcinoma.

Methods

We utilized microarray datasets GSE63678 (1) and GSE5563 (2) for this integrated, transcriptome-level differential gene expression analysis of human vulvar cancers in conjunction with GEO2R. GSE63678 was generated using Affymetrix Human Genome U133A 2.0 Array technology with $n=7$ normal vulvar tissues and $n=6$ vulvar carcinoma tissues; analysis was performed using platform GPL571. GSE5563 was generated using Affymetrix Human Genome U133 Plus 2.0 Array technology with $n=10$ normal vulvar tissues and $n=9$ VIN (vulvar intraepithelial neoplasia) tissues; analysis was performed using platform GPL570. 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 AFF4 expression was significantly different between normal vulvar tissue and vulvar carcinoma using a two-tailed t -test.

Results

We mined published microarray data (1, 2) to understand the most significant transcriptional changes between the normal vulva and cancer of the vulva.

AFF4 is differentially expressed in vulvar cancer.

We found that AF4/FMR2 family member 4, encoded by AFF4, was among the most differentially expressed genes, transcriptome-wide, in cancer of the vulva (1). When sorting each transcript whose expression was measured across the transcriptome based on significance of change between the normal vulva and vulvar cancer tissues, AFF4 ranked 229 out of 22277 total transcripts, equating to 99.0% differential expression (Chart 1) (1). Differential expression of AFF4 was statistically significant (Chart 1; $p=7.23E-05$).

We validated our findings by performing a similar analysis using a second published microarray dataset (2), but here measuring gene expression in vulvar intraepithelial neoplasia, a dysplastic cell state from which vulvar carcinomas are said to originate from (6). When sorting each transcript whose expression was measured across the transcriptome based on significance of change between the normal vulva and vulvar cancer tissues, AFF4 ranked 7081 out of 54662 total transcripts (Chart 2) (2), equating to 87.0% differential expression. Differential expression of AFF4 was again statistically significant (Chart 2; $p=2.14E-02$).

AFF4 expression is higher in cancer tissue as compared to the vulva.

We obtained exact mRNA expression data from the first microarray dataset we mined to directly compare expression levels between control and cancer tissues. AFF4 was expressed at significantly higher

1 levels in cancer of the vulva as compared to normal vulva. AFF4 was expressed at 5.30 ± 0.18 arbitrary
2 units (A.U.) in normal vulva, but at 6.22 ± 0.35 A.U. in vulvar cancer tissues (Figure 1). We calculated a
3 mean fold change of 1.17 in AFF4 expression when comparing vulvar carcinoma to vulva.

4 **Discussion**

5 We documented here that AFF4 is differentially expressed at the transcriptome level in cancer and
6 dysplasia of the human vulva (1, 2). AFF4 is a candidate gene of interest in understanding the
7 transcriptional biology of vulvar cancer.
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Rank: 229
Probe ID: 219199_at
p-value: 7.23E-05
t: -5.627576
B: 1.88829
Gene: AFF4
Gene name: AF4/FMR2 family member 4

Chart 1: Differential expression of AFF4 in vulvar 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: 7081
Probe ID: 219199_at
p-value: 2.14E-02
t: -2.5021048
B: -3.667515
Gene: AFF4
Gene name: AF4/FMR2 family member 4

Chart 2: Differential expression of AFF4 in VIN tissues.

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: AFF4 is expressed at significantly higher levels in vulvar cancer as compared to normal vulva.

The mRNA expression level of AFF4 in the normal vulva (left) and in vulvar carcinoma (right) is graphically depicted with the result of a statistical test evaluating significance of difference in AFF4 expression between the two groups, a *p*-value, listed above.