Differential expression of TREM2 in cancer of the vulva.

Shahan Mamoor, MS¹

¹shahanmamoor@gmail.com

East Islip, NY USA

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 triggering receptor expressed on myeloid cells 2, encoded by TREM2, in cancer of the vulva. TREM2 may be of pertinence to understanding transformation and disease progression in vulvar cancer (3).

Keywords: vulvar cancer, vulvar carcinoma, TREM2, triggering receptor expressed on myeloid cells 2.

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 GSE38228 (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. GSE38228 was generated using Illumina HumanHT-12 V4.0 expression beadchip technology with $n=5$ normal vulvar tissues and $n=13$ vulvar SCC (squamous cell carcinoma) tissues; analysis was performed using platform GPL10558. 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 TREM2 expression was significantly different between normal vulva and vulvar cancer 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.

TREM2 is differentially expressed in vulvar cancer.

We found that triggering receptor expressed on myeloid cells 2, encoded by TREM2, 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, TREM2 ranked 43 out of 22277 total transcripts (Chart 1) (1), equating to 99.8% differential expression. Differential expression of TREM2 was statistically significant (Chart 1; $p=2.95E-06$).

We validated our findings by performing this same analysis using a second published microarray dataset (2). When sorting each transcript whose expression was measured across the transcriptome based on significance of change between the normal vulva and vulvar cancer tissues, TREM2 ranked 3158 out of 47323 total transcripts (Chart 2) (2), equating to 93.3% differential expression. Differential expression of TREM2 was again statistically significant (Chart 2; $p=2.09E-03$).

TREM2 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. TREM2 was expressed at significantly higher levels in cancer tissues of the vulva as compared to normal vulva. TREM2 was expressed at 6.72 ± 0.32 arbitrary units (A.U.) in normal vulva, but at 8.30 ± 0.42 A.U. in vulvar cancer (Figure 1). We

1 calculated a mean fold change of 1.24 in IL36G expression when comparing vulvar carcinoma to vulva.
2

3 **Discussion**

4 We documented here that TREM2 is differentially expressed at the transcriptome level in cancer of
5 the human vulva (1, 2). TREM2 is a candidate gene of interest in understanding the transcriptional
6 biology of vulvar cancer.
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Rank: 43
Probe ID: 219725_at
p-value: 2.95E-06
t: -7.648069
B: 4.94162
Gene: TREM2
Gene name: triggering receptor expressed on myeloid cells 2

Chart 1: Differential expression of TREM2 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: 3158
Probe ID: ILMN_1701248
p-value: 2.09E-03
t: -3.5805293
B: -1.73519
Gene: TREM2
Gene name: triggering receptor expressed on myeloid cells 2

Chart 2: Differential expression of TREM2 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.

Figure 1: TREM2 is expressed at significantly higher levels in vulvar cancer as compared to normal vulva.

The mRNA expression level of TREM2 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 TREM2 expression between the two groups, a *p*-value, listed above.