# MicroRNAs, RNA modifications, and RNA editing

# Oncology for Scientists (RPN 530)

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# MicroRNAs

- •History
- •Biogenesis
- •Nomenclature
- •Tissue specificity
- Mechanisms of action
- MicroRNA targets
- Detection
- •Engineering
- Applications

# History

- 1993 -- First microRNA discovered (*lin-4* of *C. elegans*)
- 2000 -- Second microRNA discovered (*let-7* of *C. elegans*)
- 2001 -- Discovery of Dicer enzyme (generates microRNAs)
- 2002 -- Association of microRNAs with cancer identified

Known today:

2,588 human microRNAs 1,915 mouse microRNAs 466 Drosophila microRNAs 434 *C. elegans* microRNAs 427 Arabidopsis microRNAs

### **MicroRNAs**

Ultra-short RNAs of 18-23 nucleotides

### mRNA



#### microRNA



Present in all eukaryotes Also encoded by genes of viruses

### **Biogenesis of microRNAs**

#### **MicroRNA genes**

- Standalone microRNA gene: e.g., *MIR210* for *miR-210* microRNA
- Gene encoding another RNA: e.g., Transcription factor TP63-encoding gene for *miR-944*

### **MicroRNA genesis pathway**

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Primary RNA (primary or pri-microRNA)
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Mature microRNA (two produced from a pre-microRNA)

### **Biogenesis of microRNAs**



Pre-microRNAs have hairpin stemloop structure

Winter at al. Nature Cell Bio, 2009

### MicroRNA nomenclature

Through miRBase registry of microRNA sequences and annotations (www.mirbase.org)

### Prefixes:

All microRNAs are named with a *miR*- prefix (except *let-7*) A species indicator may be prefixed

*miR-210*, *miR-375*, *miR-630*, etc.

hsa-miR-210 (human), mmu-miR-375 (mouse), ath-miR-630 (Arabidopsis)

### **MicroRNA nomenclature**

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### Suffixes:





#### hsa-pre-miR-210

### MicroRNA nomenclature

MicroRNA genes: *MIR* prefix. E.g., *MIR375* Pri-microRNAs: *pri-* prefix. E.g., *pri-miR-210* Pre-microRNAs: *pre-* prefix. E.g., *pre-miR-210* 

### miRBase IDs:

Pre-microRNAs: *MI* ID (e.g., MI0000286 for *hsa-pre-miR-21*0) MicroRNAs: *MIMAT* ID (e.g., MIMAT0026475 for *hsa-miR-210-5p*)

### **MicroRNA** families:

Conserved 'seed' region in sequences miR-8 family

Eipper-Mains at al. Front Gen, 2012

miR-141 miR-200a miR-200b miR-200c miR-429 123456789 UAACACUGUCUGGUAAAGAUGG UAACACUGUCUGGUAACGAUGU UAAUACUGCCUGGUAAUGAUGA UAAUACUGCCGGGUAAUGAUGGA UAAUACUGUCUGGUAAUGCCGU

SEED SEQUENCE

# **Tissue specificty of microRNA expression**

Most microRNAs are not tissue-specific Examples of tissue-specific microRNAs:

*miR-124* (nervous system), *miR-122* (liver), *miR-142* (immune cells)



# **Tissue specificty of microRNA expression**

# Relative expression of groups of microRNAs (microRNA signatures) has some degree of tissue specificity



# Mechanism of action of microRNAs

- MicroRNAs are incorporated in RNA-induced silencing complex (RISC) and direct RISC to target mRNAs
- RISC is also used by siRNAs
- Argonaute proteins are the major component of RISC (AGO1-4 in humans)



mRNA targeting by RISC/microRNA leads to translation inhibition, mRNA degradation, etc.

Stefani et al. Nature Rev Mol Cell Bio, 2008

Nature Reviews | Molecular Cell Biology

## mRNA targeting by microRNAs

MicroRNAs typically target 3'untranslated region of mRNAs

The 'seed' sequence (nts. 2-8) of a microRNA is a major determinant of mRNA targeting specificity

Targeting of an RNA is driven by sequence complementarity, with tolerance for imperfection



Peterson at al. Front Gen, 2014

# mRNA targeting by microRNAs

**Current model:** MicroRNA nts. 2-5 used to scan RNAs for potential targeting; if complementarity present, further interrogation with nts. 6-8 and 13-16.



# 'Pleiotropic' targeting by microRNAs

### Multiple microRNAs can target the same mRNA

### The same microRNA can target multiple mRNAs

Gene	Conservation	3'UTR Position	Target Site	
KLF4	H/R/M/D	256-285	5'UUACAAAAUGCCAAGGGGGUG <u>ACUGGA</u> AG       : :      3' UUCCCUAAGGACCCUUUUGACCUG	(UTR) (miR-145)
POU5F1 (OCT4)	н	138-157	3 ' AGGGGAGUUUGGGGCAACUGGUU     : ::    :       5 ' UCCCUAAGGACCCUUUUGACCUG	(UTR) (miR-145)
SOX2	H/M/R	1-20	5' GGCCGGACAGCGAACUGGAG        :      3' UUCCCUAAGGACCCUUUUGACCUG	(UTR) (miR-145)



# **Co-targeting of molecular pathways**



Ь	miR-17	C <mark>AAAGUG</mark> CUUACAGUGCAGGUAG
	miR 18a -	U <mark>AAGGUG</mark> CAUCUAGUGCAGAUAG
	mlR-19a	U <mark>GUGCAA</mark> AUCUAUGCAAAACUGA
	mIR-92a-1	U <mark>AUUGCA</mark> CUUGUCCCGGCCUGU



Genes of 4 microRNAs of the miR-17~92 cluster are close to each other.

Targets of the 4 microRNAs functionally interact with each other.

### **MicroRNA** target prediction

### Multiple computational tools

Tool name	Seed match	Conservation	Free energy	Site accessibility	Target-site abundance	Machine learning
mißanda	х	х	х			
miRanda-mirSVR	x	х	x	х		х
TargetScan	х	х				
DIANA-microT-CDS	х	х	x	x	х	х
MirTarget2	x	х	x	x		х
RNA22-GUI	х		х			
TargetMiner	x	х	x	х	х	х
SVMicrO	х	х	х	х	х	х
PITA	х	х	х	х	х	
RNAhybrid	Х		х		х	

Peterson at al. Front Gen, 2014

### **MicroRNA** target prediction

### Target prediction tools have high inaccuracy rates



Figure 1. Distribution of miRNA predictions.

- (a) Degree of overlap between mirWIP, miRanda, PicTAR and TargetScanS.
- (b) That between mirWIP, PITA and ma22.

(Ambros V., et al, Nature Methods, vol.5 No.9 2008)



#### Figure 2.

Comparison of sensitivity and specificity of four existing miRNA-target prediction methods on 190 miRNA-target interaction pairs experimentally tested in Ilies. (Segal F., et. al, Nature Genetics vol. 39, No.10, 2007)

### Experimental validation of microRNA targeting of an mRNA

# Examine microRNA overexpression/knockdown with target mRNA/protein levels



### Experimental validation of microRNA targeting of an mRNA



RNA immunoprecipitation (RIP)

crosslinking and immunoprecipitation (CLIP)

crosslinking, immunoprecipitation and sequencing of hybrids (CLASH)

Hausser et al. Nat Rev Gen, 2014

### Extraction of microRNAs

Small RNAs, including microRNAs, are purified along with larger RNAs during typical RNA extractions:

- Organic solvent-based methods (e.g., TRIzol<sup>™</sup>)
- Affinity chromatography with silica matrix (spin-columns): appropriate alcohol and salt conc. in buffers are important for microRNA binding to matrix

Enriching for small/microRNA fraction:

- Affinity chromatography with different ethanol conc.
- Size-exclusion chromatography
- Capture using hybridization to antisense DNA oligonucleotides

### Assessment of total microRNA quality & amount

#### **Quality assessment:**

•Difficult because of small size (e.g., Bioanalyzer™ assay is not informative)



### **Quantification:**

- Absorbance spectrometry 260 nm; like total RNA; unreliable for low RNA concentration
- Fluorescence RNA-specific dyes like RiboGreen; very sensitive

## Detection and quantification of microRNAs

MicroRNAs are detected like 'regular' RNAs:

•Hybridization-based approaches:

- Northern blotting
- RNA/DNA in situ hybridization
- Microarrays
- (RT-) PCR
- Other (mass spectrometry, Raman spectroscopy, etc.)
- •RNA sequencing

Considerations:

•In situ vs. extracted RNA

•Presence of other RNAs (e.g., small RNA fragments of degraded RNA in formalin-fixed tissue)

# **RT-PCR of microRNAs**

Need strategies to overcome limitations due to the short length of microRNAs

forward primer Mature miRNA 1. Stem-loop RT primer -31 1111111111111 Separate RT for separate miRs Stem-loop primer Revorse Detect by TagMan primer probe (real-time PCR) 2. Poly(A) tailing miRNA-specific Mature miRNA forward prime: 5'-Poly(A) tailing One RT for multiple miRs AAAAAAA AAAAAA TTTTTT 7 Oligo-c(T) Reverse primer Reverse primer transcription Detect by SYBR green

Pritchard at al. Nature Rev Gen 13:358-69, 2012

# Normalization of microRNA detection values

*Normalization*: Adjust data to remove non-biological variation across biological samples

- 1. Endogenous or house-keeping controls
- •Typically for RT-PCR of individual microRNAs
- •Small nucleolar RNAs like U6B (RNU6-2/RNU6B), SNORD43
- •Control should be present in biological sample and invariant
- 2. High throughput data (hundreds of microRNAs quantified)
- •Global mean normalization, etc. (RT-PCR)
- •Quantile normalization, etc. (microarray)
- •Fraction of read counts, etc. (RNA sequencing)

# **MicroRNA engineering**

### Overexpression

Principle:

- •Overexpress pre-microRNA
- Introduction of synthetic mature microRNA doesn't work

Methods:

- •Expression from DNA (plasmid or virus)
- Introduce synthetic pre-microRNA (electroporation, transfection, etc.)
- •Physiological stimulus (e.g., hypoxia for *miR-210*, endotoxin for *miR-146a*)

### **MicroRNA** overexpression

### Synthetic pre-microRNAs

Modifications:

- •Enhance delivery: E.g., 3' cholesterol conjugation
- •Increase nuclease resistance: E.g., phophorothioate

Selective overexpression of either 5p or 3p microRNA:

•Change nucleotide sequence for the sister microRNA



### **MicroRNA knockdown**

#### (1) MicroRNA gene knock-out

(2) Antisense DNA oligonucleotides: Can have modifications such as locked nucleic acid, phosphorothioate, etc. to enhance delivery, nuclease resistance, etc.

(3) MicroRNA sponge: Artificial RNA with multiple microRNA targets; transcribed from introduced plasmid/gene/virus



### **MicroRNA** applications

#### (1) Artificial microRNAs

Short hairpin RNAs (shRNAs) for efficient RNA interferenceTargeting of multiple RNAs



### **MicroRNA biomarkers**

Advantages compared to mRNA biomarkers:

- ~2500 microRNAs vs ~25000 genes (mRNAs) more robust analysis
- Better preservation in non-frozen samples
- Presence in body fluids

Generally ubiquitous expression No cancer-specific microRNA, e.g. Degree of over- or under-expression is important

### **Preservation of microRNAs**

Unlike mRNAs, microRNAs are preserved well in formalin-fixed tissues stored at room temperature (typical clinical specimen storage)

> frozen vs. formalin-fixed; measurements of 500+ microRNAs >

Kolbert et al. PLOS One, 2013

MicroRNAs are preserved in dried body fluids at temperatures as high as 60 deg. C

Patnaik et al. Analytical Biochem, 2010







# **MicroRNAs in body fluids**

#### MicroRNAs are secreted by cells

Secreted, extracellular microRNAs are within membrane-bound exosomes

Circulating excecimes multi-vesicular exosomes body Exosomal microRNA 50 nm TEM Doner cell Pre-maRNA. Multiveacular body has no almadian sandar bardy with plasma membrane Blocking release. **ICW45540** 20503005 with miRNA 200 (ed blood cell Endocytosis White blood only Recipient cell

Exosomes enter blood stream and eventually urine, saliva, tear fluid...

Exosomes are picked by other cells

Calin et al. Nature Rev Drug Disc, 2013

Identification of origin of cancer of unknown origin

Flow chart, using different microRNAs at multiple decision points:



Rosenfeld et al. Nature Biotech, 2008

Distinguishing squamous cell carcinoma sub-type of lung cancer using *miR-205* expression level

Receiver operating curve (ROC) analysis of performance of *miR-205*-based assay:



Lebanony et al. J Clin Oncol 2009

Detection of hepatotoxicity resulting from acetaminophen (Tylenol<sup>™</sup>) overdose

MicroRNA-based test performs better than the standard test (ALT enzyme assay):



Prediction of recurrence and survival in non-small cell lung cancer

Kaplan-Meier survival curves:



Blood (plasma fraction) microRNAs to diagnose transplant rejection (graft vs. host disease)



Xiao et al. Blood, 2013

### MicroRNA biomarkers / atypical examples

Exosome-enclosed microRNAs in **exhaled breath** hold potential for biomarker discovery in patients with pulmonary diseases. (J Allergy Clin Immunol, 2013)

Specific microRNA signatures for the detection of saliva and blood in **forensic body-fluid** identification (J Forensic Sci, 2011)

Detection of miR-92a and miR-21 in **stool samples** as potential screening biomarkers for colorectal cancer and polyps (Gut, 2012)

Chronic **academic stress** Increases a Group of microRNAs in Peripheral Blood (PLOS One, 2013)

### **MicroRNA-based therapeutics**

- Under development
- Most advanced for hepatitis C treatment: *miR-122/HCV* RNA complex stabilizes *HCV*
- Delivery system and pharmacodynamics/kinetics cruce



Company	miRNA target	Mode of action	Indication	Status
Santar's Pharma	miR-122	antim R	HCY	Clinical Phase T
Mima Therapeutics	miR-34	mimic	Unresectable primary liver cancer	Clinical Phase
	let-7	minnic,	Caricer	Preclinical
Regulus Therapeutics	miR-122	antim R	нсү	Clinical Phase
	miR-221	antim R	Hepatocellular carcinoma	Preclinical
	miR-1Cb	antim R	Glioblastoma	Preclinical
	miR-21	antim R	Hepatocellular carcinoma	Preclinical
	miR-21	antim R	Kidney fibrosis	Preclinical
	miR-33	antim R	Atherosclerosis	Preclinical
miRagen Therapeutics	miR-208	antim R	Heart failure	Preclinical
	miR-15/195	antim R	Post-MI remodeling	Preclinical
	miR-145	antim R	Vescula diseese	Preclinical
	miR-451	antim R	Myelopioli erative disease	Preclinical
	miR-29	mimic	Fibrosis	Preclinical
	miR-208	antim R	Cardiometabolic disease	Preclinical
	miR-92	antim R	Per pheral artery disease	Preclinical

van Rooij at al. EMBO Mol Med, 2014

# **RNA** editing

### **RNA editing through base deamination**

Editing is not non-specific; edited base typically in certain RNA sequence context



Gerberet al. Trends Biochem Sci, 2001

#### C-to-U (C>U) editing

- Trypanosome parasites (mitochondrial tRNA)
- Mammalian small intestine (apolipoprotein B)

#### A-to-I (A>I) == A>G editing

- Hepatitis D virus (anti-genomic RNA)
- Octopus potassium channel mRNA
- Eukaryotic/prokaryotic tRNAs
- Mammalian serotonin receptor mRNAs

#### Aminotransferases for U>C or I>A editing?

#### A>I RNA editing by ADAR enzymes





- \* ADARs acts on double-stranded RNA
- \* RNA binding motif (RBM)
  - + catalytic deaminase domain
- \* Mammals: *ADAR1-3* genes Dosophila: *ADAR* 
  - C. elegans: ADR1-2
- \* Present in nucleus

#### Facilitating survival of octopuses in cold temperatures

Garrett et al. Science, 2012







#### C>U RNA editing by APOBEC proteins



#### Human APOBEC genes and proteins



APOBEC3A, APOBEC3B and APOBEC3G proteins are also C>U RNA editors **APOBEC proteins:** 

- •Also deaminate C residues to U in DNA
- •Possess 1-2 cytidine deaminase domains
- •Important roles in viral immunity, retrotransposition, cancer mutagenesis

#### **Discovery of APOBEC3A as a C>U RNA editor**



#### M1 vs. M2 transcriptome-wide editing levels



#### **Examination of the Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA)**



#### **APOBEC3A edits SDHB RNA**

#### APOBEC3A knockdown in M1 macrophages

mean & range; n = 3





# In vitro SDHB RNA editing by APOBEC3A protein

mean & range; n = 3



#### Assays for RNA editing

#### 1. Sanger sequencing of RNA (cDNA)

Example: Sequencing of cDNA and genomic DNA of control and APOBEC3B transfectants for 2 genes whose RNAs are edited by APOBEC3B

#### 2. "Next generation" RNA sequencing

Uses computational/bioinformatics workflows





#### 3. Allele-specific RT-PCR



#### Summary

RNAs of thousands of genes are edited

Editing is **not non-specific** 

- edited nucleotides have a sequence context

Editing can have **high impact at protein level** – a 'new' angle to examine cellular phenomena

Editing can be **physiologically affected** – examples: increased editing in M1 macrophages (vs. M2), in hypoxic monocytes (vs. normoxic)

A>G (I) and C>U types of editing are typical

#### Much to discover (fertile field)

- •Prevalence across cell types, diseases
- •Mechanisms and their modulation
- •Functional relevance
- •Non-A>G/C>U editing

### **RNA modifications**

# **Types of RNA modifications**

#### Not including:

RNA editing, splicing, mRNA 5' capping or poyladenylation, etc. Transfer RNA (tRNA) modifications (pseudouridylation, methylation, etc.)

#### (messenger) RNA modifications:

~110 types – majority methylations – may not be reversible (unidirectional) DNA methylation discovered in 1925; RNA,1968 Examples:



Li et al. Ann Rev Genom Hum Gen, 2014

## m<sup>6</sup>A modification

Like protein phosphorylation

а

HO.

Noticed in 1970s (0.1%-0.4% of all A residues of cellular RNA)

Recent discoveries facilitated by RNA sequencing technology (capture with anti-m<sup>6</sup>A antibody)

RNAs of majority (>15,000) of human genes are m<sup>6</sup>A-methylated

Sequence context: G [G/A]  $\underline{m^6A}$  C U

Reversible (=> "dynamic epitranscriptome")

Widespread across eukaryota

### m<sup>6</sup>A modification – writers & erasers

METTL (methyltransferase-like) 3 and 14 **methylases** catalyze m<sup>6</sup>A modification FTO and ALKBH5 **demethylases** reverse the modification



### m<sup>6</sup>A modification – readers

#### m<sup>6</sup>A modification affects binding of various proteins

- \* reduced binding to RNAs of HuR (human antigen R, an RNA stabilizing protein)
- \* enhanced binding of YTHDF1-3 (YTH domain family proteins) \* enhanced binding of RBM15/15B, HNRNP and other proteins



### m<sup>6</sup>A modification – relevance

Under active investigations Effects of modification vary by gene/cellular context

1. enhanced nuclear exit of RNA

Ex.: circadian clock gene transcripts => regulation of circadian rhythm

- reduced RNA stability
  Ex.: transcripts of pluripotency-associated proteins => initiation of cellular differentiation
- 3. enhanced RNA translation

Ex.: heat shock transcripts => protection from stress

4. reduced gene transcription

Ex.: modification of XIST => inactivation of X chromosome genes



# Suggested reading

#### **Classics:**

- Identification of microRNAs: Lee et al. Cell 75, 843-854 (1993)
- Identification of multiple microRNA genes: Lagos-Quintana et al. Science, Vol. 294 no. 5543 pp. 853-858 (2001)
- Discovery of Dicer: Bernstein et al. Nature 409, 363-366 (2001)
- Discovery of association of microRNAs with cancer: Calin et al. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A, 99(24): 15524–15529 (2002)
- Discovery of APOBEC1 RNA editing enzyme: Teng et al. Science 260, 1816-1819 (1993)
- Demonstration that m<sup>6</sup>A RNA modification is widespread: Meyer et al. Cell 149, 1635-1646 (2012)

#### **Reviews:**

- MicroRNA biogenesis: Ha et al. Nature Reviews Molecular Cell Biology 15, 509– 524(2014)
- MicroRNA targeting: Hausser et al. Nature Reviews Genetics 15, 599-612 (2014)
- MicroRNA assays: Pritchard et al. Nature Reviews Genetics 13, 358-369 (2012)
- MicroRNAs and cancer: Hayes et al. Trends in Molecular Medicine, 20(8):460-9 (2014)
- RNA editing and RNA modifications: Licht et al. Journal of Cell Biology, 213:15-22 (2016)

### Exam

Multiple choice questions Question itself a learning material Answer key with explanations

#### Example:

#### Question

Exosomes are lipid bilayer-bound vesicles of about 30-150 nm diameter that are secreted by cells, and they can be detected in bodily fluids such as blood and urine. These vesicles contain microRNAs, mRNAs and proteins, and the uptake of exosomes by other cells can affect their cellular processes. In a project to study exosomal microRNA-mediated cell-cell communication, you wish to remove pre-existing exosomal microRNAs from the serum that is to be used for in vitro cell culture. Which one of the following techniques may be suitable for this purpose?

- A. Addition of a mild detergent to serum
- B. Addition of a generic ribonuclease such as RNAse A to serum
- C. Ultracentrifugation of serum
- D. Heat treatment of serum

#### Answer

#### С

RNAses will not enter the lipid bilayerbound exosomes. A detergent will disrupt the exosome but unless it is removed from the serum, it will affect cell culture as well. Heat treatment at a high enough temperature might damage exosomes but it will likely degrade proteins and other factors in serum that are necessary for cell growth. Overnight ultracentrifugation is the currently accepted standard for depleting serum of exosomes .

### **Questions?**

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