The Landscape of Long Non-Coding RNAs in Metastatic Prostate Cancer

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Introduction & Background: RNA sequencing data in cancers are being generated on a large scale at a rapid rate. Ab initio assembly of RNA-sequencing reads into transcript predictions provides an unbiased modality for predicting transcripts in unannotated regions of the genome, namely long non-coding RNAs (IncRNAs). IncRNAs have emerged as crucial aspects of human biology including cancer. Despite efforts to catalog IncRNAs in the human transcriptome, our current knowledge of cancer-associated IncRNAs remains infantile. These previous efforts were performed on a small number of cell lines or normal tissue samples, but because cancers possess highly heterogeneous gene expression patterns, detecting recurrent expression of subtype-specific IncRNAs will likely require analysis of large tumor cohorts. We hypothesized that large-scale transcriptome reconstruction from thousands of RNA-Seq datasets would reveal uncharacterized prostate cancer- and prostate tissue-associated IncRNAs and allow the scientific community to begin researching their biological relevance.

Methods & Design: We have downloaded, curated, and processed 23,623 RNA-seq samples largely from the TCGA, ICGC, GTEx, and CCLE, comprising 37 tissue types and over 35 cancer types. RNA-seq data processing was performed using STAR, Cufflinks, Kallisto, and TACO. The web tool for visualization and access to these data and analyses was built using a JavaScript-based front- and back-end server infrastructure (Noje.js) and a relational PostgreSQL database.

Results: The SSEA tool was used to nominate IncRNAs that are lineage specific and those that are differentially expressed in cancers versus normals. Hundreds of novel and previously annotated tissue-specific and cancer-specific IncRNAs were identified and nominated to be potentially implicated in conferring oncogenic phenotype in each of the 12 tissue cohorts for which we have matched normal samples. A number of novel IncRNAs were identified to be exquisitely specific to prostate tissue and prostate cancer, serving as prime potential biomarkers for aggressive prostate cancer.

Conclusions & Future Directions: Discovery of novel prostate tissue and cancer associated IncRNAs provides new and exciting targets that can be used as biomarkers and to further understand the disease mechanism for multiple cancer types. Further studies characterizing the biological function of the IncRNAs we have discovered will be necessary.

Conflicts of Interest: None to report.

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