REPORT TO THE 2021 LEGISLATURE

Report on the University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center
on the Etiologies of the High Incidence
of Liver and Bile Duct Cancer

Act 265, SLH 2019

November 2020
Pursuant to Act 265, Session Laws of Hawai‘i 2019, the Hawai‘i State Legislature appropriated funds to the University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center (UHCC) to determine the etiologies of the high incidence of liver and bile duct cancer in Hawai‘i. This report will contain UHCC’s findings, including how the appropriated funds are being spent.

The appropriated funds were released in October 2019. Funds were allocated to projects to conform to the guidelines and intent of the legislation in order to conduct research to determine the etiologies of the high incidence of liver and bile duct cancer in Hawai‘i. The projects are as outlined in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Project Titles</th>
<th>UHCC Principal Investigators</th>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Liver Fluke and Aflatoxin as an etiology for liver and bile duct cancer</td>
<td>Yu, Jia</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>Immunotherapy of liver cancer (IIT)</td>
<td>Acoba</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>Smaller scale projects</td>
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<td>1. Oral microbiome and HCC risk</td>
<td>1. Hernandez</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) and hepatocellular cancer</td>
<td>2. Kuwada</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Identify signature of exosomal miRs transferred from TAMs to HCC and</td>
<td>3. Fabbri</td>
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<td></td>
<td>mechanism of PDL-1 upregulation in HCC by TAM-derived exosomal miRs</td>
<td>4. Kwee</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Pet imaging and liquid biopsy detection of CTNNB1 exon 3 mutations in HCC</td>
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Results on the various projects are attached to this memorandum. Multiple projects had very significant findings that are being prepared for peer-reviewed publications. In addition, several of the investigators are utilizing the preliminary data generated under this limited one-year funding mechanism to support applications for additional research grants through the National Institutes of Health.

Major findings include:
- No evidence of liver fluke infection in liver cancer patients in Hawai‘i, though testing for other forms of liver fluke is being considered.
- There is aflatoxin B food contamination, especially in raw peanuts in Hawai‘i that may contribute to liver cancer in the state.
- The composition of oral bacterial (microbiota) may contribute to liver and bile duct cancer through the disruption of the healthy flora of the mouth inducing insulin resistance, aberrant fatty acid metabolism and other metabolic disruption.
• Oral bacterial metabolites may induce liver toxins and act independently from other known risk factors.
• An association between tumorigenic Wnt signaling and PET/CT imaging phenotype has been confirmed in liver cancer.
• Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) patients have an over-representation of Asians.
• Aspirin may be an effective anti-fibrotic agent in NAFLD patients and could be tested as a cancer prevention strategy for liver cancer.
• An investigator-initiated immunotherapy trial of combination immunotherapy for liver cancer patients has been initiated and remains ongoing. Two patients have experienced stable disease for >10 months and one patient had an 85% reduction in the extent of tumor.
• Micro-RNAs impact PDL1 expression in liver cancer cells in vitro, and the latter is a marker of clinical responsiveness to immune therapies.
• Fibroblasts in the tumor microenvironment play a role in transmitting micro-RNAs and affecting the immune-responsiveness of the cancer milieu.

Results from four of the projects were presented at the University of Hawai’i Cancer Center Scientific Retreat, held in virtual format on October 9, 2020. These presentations, plus summaries from the other two projects, are attached.

A summary composite budget delineating expenditure of funds is also appended to this report.

Randall F. Holcombe, MD, MBA
Director, University of Hawai’i Cancer Center
October 23, 2020
Investigation of Risk Factors of Liver Cancer in Hawaii

Herbert Yu

October 9, 2020
Background

- Community request
- Legislature bill (SB2049 in 2018)
- Legislature bill (HB654 in 2019)
- State government funding (July, 2019)
- Research focus (local risk factors)
- Liver fluke infection
- Food contamination by Aflatoxin B1
Are There Liver Flukes in Hawaii?

A UH research study entitled *Parasite Infections of Man and Animals in Hawaii* by Joseph E. Alicata, a professor at the Hawaii Agricultural Experiment Station, College of Tropical Agriculture, University of Hawaii, November 1964, clearly shows that liver flukes are relatively common in Hawaii found in various animals and snails in and near fresh water habitats such as streams, ponds and wet soil. [https://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/tb-61.pdf](https://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/tb-61.pdf)

According to one report: "There are twelve watercress farms in Oahu, each growing a different variety of watercress, but all twelve are in the vicinity of the Pearl Harbor Spring (the rest around Pearl City and Waipahu)." [http://hawaiiindependent.net/story/sumida-farms-embraces-the-past-and-future-of-agriculture-in-hawaii](http://hawaiiindependent.net/story/sumida-farms-embraces-the-past-and-future-of-agriculture-in-hawaii)

Research should be done at the UH Cancer Center immediately to determine whether residents of Hawaii are at risk of liver/bile duct cancer by eating uncooked watercress which may be infected with liver flukes. There are other possible causes such as eating foods with aflatoxins, produced by a fungus abundant in warm and humid regions, that can grow on foods such as grains e.g. rice and nuts that have been stored improperly. This too should be researched by UHCC.
1. Embryonated eggs passed in feces.
2. Eggs are ingested by the snail.
3. Free-swimming cercariae encyst in the skin or flesh of fresh water fish.
4. Metacercariae in flesh or skin of fresh water fish are ingested by human host.
5. Excyst in duodenum.
6. Adults in biliary duct.
7. Infective Stage
8. Diagnostic Stage
How to examine liver fluke infection?

- Microscopic exam for parasite eggs in stool samples.
- Tissue analysis of parasite eggs in liver specimens.
- DNA/RNA analysis?
- Immunoassay for antigens?
- Immunoassay for human antibodies
- Tested 67 plasma samples from Dr. Wong’s biorepository
- All results were negative.
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Fasciola IgG ELISA RUO

AccuDiag™ Fasciola IgG ELISA Kit
Cat # 8119-35

TEST PRINCIPLE
The micro test wells are coated with Fasciola antigens. During this step, the diluted patient sera, any antibodies that are reactive with the coated well. After washing to remove the rest of the conjugate is added. If antibodies have been bound to the well, the will then bind to these antibodies. After another rinse of the wells, the antibodies bound to the enzyme conjugate are detected with the substrate TMB and a chromogen (chromium pot.)

DRG Instruments GmbH, Germany
Frauenbergstrasse, 16, D-35039 Marburg
Phone: +49 (0)6421-1700 0, Fax: +49 (0)6421-1700 50
Website: www.drg-diagnostica.de
E-mail: drg@drg-diagnostica.de

Distributed by:
DRG International, Inc., USA
841 Mountain Ave., Springfield, NJ 07081
Phone: (732) 584-7555, Fax: (732) 584-7556
Website: www.drginternational.com
E-mail: oorp@drginternational.com

ORIGENE

Product Information
Fasciola hepatica IgG ELISA Kit
Catalog Number: EA101104
Storage Temperature: 2 – 8°C

Instruction for Use

Diagnostic Automation / Corex Diagnostics, Inc.
IMMUNO DIGNOSTICS

OriGene Technologies, Inc.
9520 Medical Center Dr., Suite 200, Rockville, MD 20850
Phone: 1-888-207-4436, Fax: 301-240-4924
Email: techsupport@origene.com, Web: www.origene.com
Liver Fluke Parasites

- Opisthorchis viverrini (Opisthorchis felineus)
- Clonorchis sinensis
- Fasciola hepatica
How to evaluate aflatoxin exposure?

- Human who have consumed the food contaminated by aflatoxin b1.
  - Antibody?
  - Antigen?
  - DNA-adducts

- Food contaminated by aflatoxin
AF (Total Aflatoxin) ELISA Kit
Catalog No: MBS2556985
96T

This manual must be read attentively and completely before using this product.
If you have any problems, please contact our Technical Service Center for help.

Aflatoxin B1 (AFB1) ELISA Kit

[INTENDED USE]
For the quantitative detection of Aflatoxin B1 (AFB1) concentration in cereal, compound feed, cooking oil, peanut, sausages, wheat and other feed, beer, wine, soy sauce, vinegar.

This package insert must be read in its entirety before using this product.

Aflatoxin B1 ELISA Assay Kit
(For Research Use Only)

Instructions

Competitive enzyme immunoassay for the quantitative detection of Aflatoxin B1

Catalog number: BTAFEK-001
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<td>0.0071</td>
<td>0.0136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashroom(M)</td>
<td>Cake (brown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.0150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mashroom(L)</td>
<td>Honey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.0083</td>
<td>0.0804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemon</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.1059</td>
<td>0.0206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papaya</td>
<td>Papaya skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.0125</td>
<td>0.0070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papaya skin</td>
<td>Corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.0119</td>
<td>0.0077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanut (fresh)</td>
<td>Peanut (dry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.3810</td>
<td>0.0300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanut shell</td>
<td>Rice 26562 (Safeway)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.1473</td>
<td>0.0115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanut 2</td>
<td>Rice 20105 (Safeway)</td>
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<td>0.0065</td>
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<td>Poke (From Safeway)</td>
<td>Rice 28560 (Safeway)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pineapple</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.0106</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Corn (From Safeway)</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.0076</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyro (From Safeway)</td>
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<td>0.0440</td>
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### DESSERTS AND SNACKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YOUR USUAL SERVING SIZE</th>
<th>AVERAGE USE DURING LAST YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never or hardly ever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Cream</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Milk, Frozen Yogurt, or Sherbet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cookies, Brownies, or Fruit Bars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crackers and Pretzels (such as soda, graham, Japanese rice crackers, wheat thins)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanuts or Other Nuts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Liver cancer and peanut/corn consumption in MEC HI

Adjusted for sex, ethnicity, energy and alcohol consumption, Healthy Eating Index, smoking status, pack-years, log BMI

Hazard ratio (95% CI)
n=412 cases

### ANALYSIS I
Not adjusted for Healthy Eating Index

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>p for tertile trend</th>
<th>p for continuous trend</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peanuts and other nuts (g/day)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.724</td>
<td>(0.574-0.913)</td>
<td>0.882</td>
<td>(0.672-1.158)</td>
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<td>Corn (g/day)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.922</td>
<td>(0.731-1.161)</td>
<td>1.009</td>
<td>(0.781-1.304)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peanut butter (g/day)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.024</td>
<td>(0.779-1.345)</td>
<td>1.019</td>
<td>(0.819-1.269)</td>
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### ANALYSIS II
Further adjusted for Healthy Eating Index
Summary

- We found no evidence of liver fluke infection in liver cancer patients in Hawaii, but our evaluation was preliminary, testing only one form of parasite. We need to test other forms of liver fluke if possible, and search for other evidence of live fluke infection.

- We found evidence of food contamination by aflatoxin b1, but did not know if the contaminated food is being consumed regularly. We need to collect more evidence on food contamination and human intake.
Acknowledgement

- Wei Jia
- Linda Wong
- Brenda Hernandez
- Lynne Wilkens
- Zhanwei Wang
- Jason Wang
The overall objective of our study was to investigate the role of the oral bacterial microbiome in the development of liver cancer and to identify novel biomarkers of liver cancer that may inform prevention and early detection strategies.

Bacterial 16S rRNA sequences were evaluated in oral samples from 90 hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) cases and 90 matched controls from the U.S. mainland (R01CA138698, PI Yu). Compared to controls, HCC cases showed significantly reduced oral bacterial diversity (Shannon diversity index p-value =0.002) including reductions in common commensal species. HCC cases had a significantly higher relative abundance of certain taxa including the phyla, Cyanobacteria (p=0.02), and the genus, Aggregatibacter (p=0.002), relative to controls. Cyanobacteria are found in all terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and include a wide range of species producing toxins with tumor-promoting properties, including the potent liver toxins—microcystins (MC), nodularins (NOD), and cylindrospermopsin (CYN). Aggregatibacter include the periodontal pathogen, \textit{A. actinomyctemcomitans}, which has been positively correlated with visceral fat, fasting plasma insulin, and insulin resistance in patients with non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), a common condition that can lead to liver damage and progress to cancer.

We then evaluated the presence of MC/NOD and CYN in serum from 57 HCC patients from Hawaii. Mean levels of MC/NOD in HCC patients exceeded international standards for water designated for human use. MC/NOD levels significantly varied by etiology with the highest levels in HCC cases of unknown etiology and alcohol-associated disease; levels were intermediate in metabolic/NAFLD-associated HCC cases and lowest in hepatitis C associated HCC cases (p=0.0082). Uptake of MC-LR into hepatocytes has been previously shown to be reduced in HCV and increased in NAFLD through shared substrates including OATP transporters. Moreover, positive interactions of MC-LR and alcohol exposure have been shown.

We next compared tumor gene expression and cyanotoxin levels in a subset of 16 HCC cases. Expression of 770 genes were evaluated using the Nanostring nCounter platform. Serum levels of MC/NOD and
CYN were significantly correlated with tumor expression of three host genes functioning in fatty acid metabolism, CD36 (cluster of differentiation 36), FABP4 (fatty acid binding protein 4), and LPL (lipoprotein lipase). Fatty acid metabolism is a key source of energy and anabolism in cancer development as transformed cells switch to aerobic glycolysis.

Our study results provide evidence that oral bacteria may contribute to liver cancer through the disruption of the healthy flora of the mouth characterized by reduced levels of commensal bacteria and growth of both exogenous and resident pathogenic bacteria including toxin-producing species and species inducing insulin resistance, aberrant fatty acid metabolism, and other metabolic disruption. Bacteria and bacterial metabolites, including liver toxins, may act independently or with known risk factors to influence liver cancer risk.
PET imaging and liquid biopsy detection of CTNNB1 exon 3 mutations in HCC
-A Pilot Study-

Sandi Kwee, Maarit Tiirikainen, Karolina Peplowska, Chris Farrar, Linda Wong
October 9, 2020 UHCC Scientific Retreat
Background

• Immune checkpoint inhibitors FDA approved for hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC)
  • Objective response occurs in minority of patients
    • 20% experience objective response to anti-PD1 used as second-line (2017, 2018)
    • 36% experience objective response to anti-PD-L1+bevacizumab used as first-line (2020)

• Biomarkers that can predict response to ICI therapy in other cancers
  • Tumor PD-L1 Expression
  • Tumor Mutation Burden
  • Microsatellite Instability-High
Background

• Immune checkpoint inhibitors FDA approved for hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC)
  • Objective response occurs in minority of patients
    • 20% experience objective response to anti-PD1 used as second-line (2017, 2018)
    • 36% experience objective response to anti-PD-L1+bevacizumab used as first-line (2020)

• Biomarkers that can predict response to ICI therapy in other cancers
  • Tumor PD-L1 Expression
  • Tumor Mutation Burden
  • Microsatellite Instability- High
Background

• Biomarkers that can predict clinical response to immune-checkpoint inhibitors in other cancers don’t seem to work for HCC.

• GEMM models of in-situ melanoma and HCC reveal a novel mechanism of immune avoidance mediated by Wnt/beta-catenin signaling.
  • Beta-catenin is a transcription co-activator that binds nuclear T-cell factor/lymphoid enhancing factor (TCF/LEF) to initiate multiple cellular programs including immune programming.
  • This results in altered cytokine signaling with diminished recruitment of dendritic antigen presenting cells and T-cells to the tumor microenvironment.
  • This in turn limits the effectiveness of immune-checkpoint inhibition.

• Aberrant beta-catenin activation present in up to 2/3 of HCCs.
  • CTNNB1 exon 3 mutations (present in 30-40% of HCCs) are the most common cause.
Specific Aims

1. Perform targeted next-generation DNA sequencing of previously collected surgically-resected hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) samples to profile mutations associated with Wnt/beta-catenin activation.

2. Conduct targeted sequencing on cell-free DNA (cfDNA) from patient blood samples (ie. liquid bx) corresponding to the tumor samples.

3. Explore the associations with biomarkers (including PET imaging) that have already been applied to our samples.

Goal: Assess the feasibility of non-invasively measuring beta-catenin activation in HCC as a potential predictive biomarker for HCC immunotherapy.
Prior Data

Figure 1: Tumor FCH uptake corresponds with immunotherapy-relevant expression profiles. Gene set enrichment plots are based on 41 tumor samples (31 FCH-avid, 10 FCH non-avid): A) Tumors showing high FCH metabolism were significantly enriched for genes from a CTNNB1 activation signature (FDR 0.062). B) A signature of T-cell inflammation that can predict immunotherapy response in several different tumor types was enriched by tumors that showed low FCH metabolism (FDR 0.116).

Activities Performed

• Deparaffinization, laser capture microdissection of FFPE sections
  • Christine Farrar
  • Thanks also to Owen Chang and the PSR Team

• DNA extraction, dual replicant targeted sequencing using Accel-Amplicon 56G Cancer Panel v2 (Swift) (44 cfDNA, 8 FFPE, 4 fresh frozen)
  • Maarit Tiirikainen and Karolina Peplowska

• Variant Calling using ERASE-Seq algorithm on replicated samples
  • Peplowska via Cloud-based Data Analysis Pipeline (Fluxion)
Wnt/beta-catenin pathway mutations of interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gene ID</th>
<th>Mutation Freq.</th>
<th>Panel Coverage</th>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Published References</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>CTNNB1</td>
<td>25-40%</td>
<td>Exon 3</td>
<td>GOF</td>
<td>[14, 17, 27, 28]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AXIN1 *</td>
<td>6-19%</td>
<td>Hotspot</td>
<td>LOF</td>
<td>[14, 27, 32-35]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>5-7%</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>LOF</td>
<td>[17, 107]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNAS</td>
<td>&lt; 2%</td>
<td>Exons 1,8</td>
<td>LOF</td>
<td>[99]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Mutations that impact β-catenin signaling in HCC. Coverages are validated by Foundation Medicine. Only CTNNB1 will be evaluated individually in Aim 2. GOF = gain of function, LOF = loss of function.
## Highlighted Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>PET/CT</th>
<th>Detected in Tumor by GTC 434-gene Cancer Panel (VAF %)</th>
<th>cfDNA Detected (VAF %)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>(FCH+)</td>
<td>CTNNB1 missense (5.7%), <strong>TP53 missense</strong> (9.1%), TET2 stop-gain (6.4%), and missenses of CSF3R (5.1%), BRAF (4.8%), PTEN (5.8%)</td>
<td>CTNNB1 missense (3.8%), <strong>TP53 missense</strong> (7.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>(FCH+)</td>
<td>CTNNB1 missense (36.3%), INHBA/INHBA-AS1 insertion (12%)</td>
<td>CTNNB1 missense (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>(FCH+)</td>
<td>CTNNB1 missense (34.4%), PBRM1 missense (12.2%), NUP93 stop-gain (13.1%), DNM2 (11.3%), SMARCA4 missense (29.6%)</td>
<td>CTNNB1 missense (0.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>(FCH+)</td>
<td>GNAS missense (42.1%), EPHA3 stop-gain (38.7%), ATM stop-gain (4.6%), STAG2 stop-gain (4.8%)</td>
<td>GNAS missense (10.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1</td>
<td>(FCH-)</td>
<td>SPTA1 stop-gain (12.6%), STAT4 stop-gain (10.8%), FANCM stop-gain (11.5%), SMAD4 missense (3.8%)</td>
<td>No mutation loci detected on the 56 gene panel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2</td>
<td>(FCH-)</td>
<td>ARID1A frameshift (6.6%), LRP1B stop-gain(13%), PDGFRA stop-gain(8.4%), PTEN frameshift (7.1%), BRIP1 stop-gain/splice (11.2%)</td>
<td>DNMT3A missense (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

• Demonstrated feasibility of an in-house liquid biopsy approach employing targeted cfDNA sequencing to profile mutations of 56 oncology related genes.

• Mutations detected in cfDNA corroborated with tumor DNA.

• Preliminary affirms an association between Wnt/beta-catenin activating mutations and a PET/CT imaging phenotype that we previously found associated with beta-catenin activation in HCC.
Outcomes

• NIH R01 Grant Application
  • PAR 19-363: Integration of Imaging and Fluid-Based Tumor Monitoring in Cancer Therapy (R01 Clinical Trial)

• Working on concept/protocol for review by Foundation Medicine Study Committee
  • Foundation One CDx Liquid Biopsy (309 genes, FDA Approved August 2020)
Acknowledgement

• Hawaii Legislative Act 265, SLH 2019 (HB654 HD1 SD1 CD1)
Hepatocellular Carcinoma (Hepatoma)

- 4th leading cause of cancer deaths in US
- 5-year survival in US = 10%
- Incidence of liver cancer in the U.S. is second highest in Hawaii and is highest in Native Hawaiians
- >90% of cases occur in patients with cirrhosis (severe liver scarring)
Liver Cancer

Chronic liver inflammation (hepatitis) → fibrosis → cirrhosis → hepatocellular carcinoma

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease
NAFLD (non-alcoholic fatty liver disease) in Hawaii

Prevalence of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD—>5% liver fat in the absence of high alcohol intake):
- Latinos (56% in men, 47% in women)
- Japanese Americans (38%, 46%)
- Native Hawaiians (35%, 42%)
- whites (23%, 21%)
- African Americans (21%, 18%)

NAFLD is a more common cause of cirrhosis in Japanese Americans (32.3%), Native Hawaiians (31.5%), & Latinos (31.9%) than whites (21.7%)

Non-alcoholic Steatohepatitis (NASH) = subset of NAFLD w/ liver inflammation

- Rapidly becoming the leading cause of liver transplantation and hepatocellular carcinoma in the U.S.
- Occurs in 30% of NAFLD (non-alcoholic fatty liver disease)
  - NAFLD affects up to 90 million Americans
  - Approximately 5% (1,500,000) of NASH patients progress to cirrhosis
I148M variant of the palatin-like phospholipase domain-containing 3 (PNPLA3) gene: 13%-19% of Asians, compared to only 4% of whites and 2% of African-Americans

- Confers 73% higher hepatic fat content and 3-fold increased risk of severe inflammation and fibrosis

Liver Injury → Activation of Hepatic Stellate Cells → Fibrosis
Our Study

- **Goals:**
  - Identify NASH patients in Hawaii for dietary intervention trial (P20 Specific Aim #1)
  - Characterize NASH in our multi-ethnic population
Diagnosis & Treatment of NASH Patients

- Suspected cases of NASH – chronic elevation of transaminases (ALT, AST) in the absence of chronic heavy ethanol use, HBV, HCV, autoimmune hepatitis, hereditary liver diseases

- Risk stratification → high risk for progression →
  1. Evaluation for hepatic fibrosis: liver biopsy, elastography
  2. Weight loss
  3. Pharmacological Rx: Vitamin E, aspirin, investigational drugs
Ultrasound guided liver biopsy - gold standard for liver fibrosis
Elastography – Fibroscan®

How FibroScan® measure stiffness?

- Hard liver
  - Pathological status
  - High kPa value

- Soft liver
  - Normal status
  - Low kPa value

How FibroScan® measure steatosis?

- Quantify the decrease in amplitude of ultrasound waves

More Steatosis

Higher CAP value
NASH Patient Selection

- Searched Queen’s Medical Center Fibroscan and Liver Biopsy databases over the past 5 yrs for NASH cases
- Identified 175 Fibroscans and 76 Liver Biopsies (54 had both)
NASH – Gender & Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WOMEN</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEN</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NASH & Ethnicity – Asians are overrepresented

75% = Asian

Japanese 36%
Filipino 19%
Chinese 9%
Asian Other 11%
Hawaiian 10%
White 13%
African-American 2%

US Census (2019)
Hawaii-Asians = 57.7%
Body Mass Index

BMI
<25 = normal
25-29 = overweight
30+ = obese

$\text{AVE BMI} = \frac{\text{weight (kg)}}{[\text{height (m)}]^2}$

Women

Men

p = 0.07
Body Mass Index & Ethnicity

NAFLD
Ave BMI by Ethnicity

BMI
<25 = nml
25-29 = overweight
30+ = obese

c/w Whites
n.s. differences in Ave BMI
Fibroscan Fibrosis Score by Ethnicity

- White
- Asian Other/NOS
- Chinese or Taiwanese
- Filipino
- Japanese or Okinawan
- Native Hawaiian

Scores:
- F0
- F1
- F2
- F3
- F4
Aspirin use and fibrosis score – all ethnicities

* * *  

*p < 0.05
Aspirin & Fibrosis Score

Asians

* p<0.05
Conclusions

- NAFLD pts referred for Fibroscan & liver biopsies show overrepresentation of Asians.
- Aspirin may be an effective anti-fibrotic agent in NASH patients.
  - And if so, can it be an effective chemopreventive agent for hepatocellular carcinoma?
  - Is aspirin effective in patients with I148M PNPLA3?
Acknowledgements

- CTO:
  - Kate Bryant-Greenwood
  - Nate Ramos
  - Anita Cheung

- OnCore:
  - Robert Schuetz

- Hawaii Pathology Lab
  - Casey Phan

- Loic Le Marchand
- Unhee Lim
- Carol Boushey
- Brenda Hernandez
- Kevin Cassel
- Linda Wong
Phase II study of TSR-022 in combination with TSR-042 for the treatment of advanced hepatocellular carcinoma

PI: Jared Acoba

This is a phase II, single arm study for patients with advanced and incurable hepatoma (cancer of the liver). Hawaii has a very high incidence of hepatoma, so novel therapies are incredibly valuable to our patients. Immunotherapy in the form of immune checkpoint inhibitors is a recently established strategy for treating hepatoma. I developed a protocol that combines two immune checkpoint inhibitors, an anti-PD-1 antibody (TSR-042) and an anti-TIM-3 antibody (TSR-022), with a primary objective of improving the objective response rate. Highlights of the trial so far:

- Four patients have been enrolled on the trial; one from a neighbor island.
- No serious treatment-associated side effects have occurred.
- Two patients have not had growth of their cancer for >10 months. One patient has had over 85% of his cancer disappear.
RNA in Extracellular Vesicles affects the microenvironment of Liver Cancer

Muller Fabbri, MD, PhD
Associate Professor
Cancer Biology Program
University of Hawai‘i
Cancer Center
Honolulu, HI
Hypothesis


2. Significant direct correlation between TAM Markers (CD163, CD206) and PDL1 expression in HCC patients (r2 database)

3. High TLR8 expression directly correlates with High PDL1 expression in 371 HCC patients (r2 database)
HepG2+THP1 co-culture – RNA sequencing

THP1 CRISPR TLR8
THP1 wt TLR8
Co-cultured with HepG2
RNAseq (Genomics and Bioinformatics Shared Resource)
Ongoing analysis (collaboration with Youping Deng and Vedbar Khadka)
Does HepG2-THP1 co-culture generate a THP1 phenotype capable of inducing PDL1 expression in HepG2 cells?

THP1s co-cultured with HepG2s for 35 days
- THP1s seeded onto fresh HepG2s every 7 days
- Transwell setup

PDL1 measured on HepG2 cells every 7 days by flow cytometry

Co-culture of THP1 with HepG2 does not upregulate HepG2 PDL1

Role of THP1 polarization
M1 differentiation and characterisation

THP1s differentiated into M1-THP1s (pro-inflammatory cells):
- 5ng/mL PMA for 24 hours
- IFN-γ (20ng/mL) and LPS (100ng/mL) for 48 hours

Differentiation confirmed by:
- Adherence and flattening of cells
- Increase in expression of CD80 (M1 marker), measured by flow cytometry

Expression of CD80 on THP1s

WT THP1s

M1 THP1s

![Expression of CD80 on THP1s](image-url)
HepG2/Hep3B co-cultured with M1 differentiated THP1s for 72 hours
- Transwell setup

PDL1 expression measured on HepG2/Hep3B by flow cytometry

Co-culture with M1-THP1 increases HepG2/Hep3B PDL1

Do EVs derived from the M1-THP1s contribute to this PDL1 upregulation?
For EV studies, EV isolation from cell supernatant must be carried out. THP1 and M1-THP1 conditioned media collected. EVs isolated by ultracentrifugation on a sucrose cushion. To concentrate and purify EVs.

THP1/M1-THP1 conditioned media
- Differential centrifugation
- Sucrose cushion ultracentrifugation
  - 100,000g, 90min
  - Ultracentrifugation to pellet EVs
  - 100,000g, 90min
- Resuspend EVs in PBS and freeze

EV characterisation
Following isolation of EVs, characterisation is carried out to demonstrate purity of vesicle preparation

1. Tunable resistive pulse sensing (TRPS) shows EVs are 50-100nm in size
2. Electron microscopy displays typical “cup-shaped” morphology
3. Preparations are enriched in EV markers (TSG101 and CD81)
   Negative for non-EV component (Calnexin)
HepG2/Hep3B cells were treated with increasing doses of isolated M1-THP1 derived EVs. PDL1 expression on the cancer cells measured by flow cytometry.

These EVs could significantly increase PDL1 in both HepG2 and Hep3B cells.

What EV cargo is responsible for the upregulation of PDL1?
Expression of PDL1 on M1 THP1s and EVs

Pro-inflammatory macrophages are known to express PDL1
- EVs carrying proteins can directly transfer these to recipient cells
- Do M1-THP1s express PDL1? And do their EVs?

Western blot performed on M1-THP1s and their EVs to determine whether they express PDL1
- M1-THP1s express PDL1
- EVs derived from M1-THP1s are enriched in PDL1

Can PDL1 protein be transferred directly from M1-THP1 EVs to HepG2/Hep3B cells?

Do the EVs deliver miRNAs that drive PDL1 expression?

Cyclophilin A (CypA) used as loading control
The role of THP1 miRNAs in driving PDL1 expression in HCC cells was determined using Drosha KO THP1s

Drosha KO THP1s were differentiated into an M1 phenotype
- Then co-cultured with HepG2 cells for 72 hours

PDL1 expression on HepG2 was measured by flow cytometry

**KO of Drosha in the THP1 impedes their ability to drive PDL1 expression in HepG2**

This suggests a role for THP1 miRNAs in HepG2 PDL1 induction
Fibroblasts form a large part of the tumour mass and are involved in inflammation.

Do fibroblasts contribute to tumour PDL1?

Primary lung fibroblasts co-cultured with HepG2/Hep3B for 72 hours - PDL1 measured on the fibroblasts and liver cancer cells by flow cytometry.
Future directions

1. Identify a “signature of miRs/RNAs involved in PDL1 up-regulation in HCC”

2. Assess their mechanism of action

3. Better understand the role of PDL1 in cancer-associated fibroblasts

4. Determine the effects on checkpoint inhibitor therapy
<table>
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<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
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<td>1. Materials and Supplies</td>
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<td>2. Publication Costs</td>
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<td>3. Consultant Services</td>
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<td>4. ADP/Computer Services (N/A)</td>
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<td>5a. Subawards/Consortium/Contract</td>
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<td>5b. Subawards/Consortium/Contract</td>
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<td>7. Alterations and Renovations</td>
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<td>8. Other Expenses</td>
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<td>9. Patient Care Costs</td>
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<td>G. Direct Costs (A thru F)</td>
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<td>1. Total Direct Costs (A thru F)</td>
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