



Alterations in long non-coding RNAs in women with and without Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome

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2
3 25 **Abstract.** Long non-coding RNAs (lncRNAs) are RNA transcripts over 200 nucleotides long
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5 26 that are not translated into protein; however, there is increasing evidence of their regulatory
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7 27 functions. To date, there are few studies measuring lncRNA in **control** women or women with
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9 28 polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

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12 29 **Objective.** To determine lncRNA **differences between PCOS and control women**.

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14 30 **Methods** LncRNA were measured in 24 anovulatory women with all three diagnostic features
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16 31 of PCOS compared to 24 control women in the follicular phase of their menstrual cycle from
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18 32 a PCOS biobank.

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20 33 **Results.** Women with PCOS were age and weight matched compared to the **control** women
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22 34 but were significantly insulin resistant and hyperandrogenemic ($p < 0.01$). Eight lncRNA (p
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24 35 < 0.05) were detected that differed between PCOS and control women, but only MIRLET7BHG
25
26 36 correlated with body mass index ($r = 0.66$, $p < 0.05$). No lncRNA correlated with **anti-mullerian**
27
28 37 hormone (AMH) levels, insulin resistance (HOMA-IR) or the free androgen index (FAI).
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30 38 Ingenuity pathway assessment (IPA) did not identify any functional pathways for the lncRNAs.

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32 39 **Conclusion.** LncRNAs differ between anovulatory PCOS and **control** women in the follicular
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34 40 phase of the menstrual cycle. It is unclear if this is due to inherent differences between PCOS
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36 41 and **control** women or due to changes in lncRNA that are menstrual cycle dependent. However,
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38 42 their IPA did not identify linked pathways, likely because few functions are as yet assigned to
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40 43 these lncRNAs.
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46 Introduction

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48 Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) affects 9-21% of the female population, making it one
49 of the most common endocrine disorders amongst women of reproductive age, and it is the
50 major cause of anovulatory infertility (1). The clinical and biochemical hyperandrogenism
51 characteristic of PCOS are associated with insulin resistance (IR), obesity, type 2 diabetes,
52 and hypercholesterolemia (2). Though the etiology of PCOS is poorly understood, genetic
53 abnormalities, such as mutations, epigenetic alterations and changes in noncoding RNAs, are
54 considered to be major underlying etiological factors (3-5).

55 The ENCODE project established that, in both humans and rodents, only approximately 2%
56 of the genome is transcribed into coding sequences, the vast majority being transcribed into
57 noncoding sequences. These noncoding sequences include microRNAs, small interfering
58 RNAs and long noncoding RNAs (lncRNAs) (6, 7). Long noncoding RNAs are transcripts
59 greater than 200 nucleotides in length that lack protein-coding capacity. An understanding of
60 their mechanistic role in diverse biological processes is accumulating (8). Evidence indicates
61 that they have regulatory role in development, differentiation, proliferation and apoptosis and
62 their involvement in diseases such as diabetes (9), cardiovascular disease (10), neurological
63 disorders (11), and cancer (8). More recently, differential expression of 862 lncRNA
64 transcripts (692 upregulated, 170 downregulated) was reported in granulosa cells from
65 Chinese women with PCOS undergoing *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) therapy (12); however, the
66 number of women in the study (7 PCOS, 7 controls) was limited.

67 Given the limited data on lncRNA in PCOS, our study was designed to use serum samples
68 from the PCOS Biobank collected within the follicular phase in normal women to compare
69 circulating levels of lncRNAs in Caucasian women with PCOS versus controls. The lncRNA
70 were not preselected but rather those that were detected from each of the RNA libraries
71 constructed.

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4 73 **Materials and methods**

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6 75 **Study design:** This was a cross sectional study undertaken in 24 medication naïve women with
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9 76 PCOS and biochemical hyperandrogenaemia (age 18-45 years) who presented sequentially to
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11 77 the department of endocrinology and those who fulfilled the criteria of the study were recruited
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13 78 into the local PCOS biobank at United Kingdom (ISRCTN70196169). Twenty-four **control**
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15 79 women (age 20-44 years) who were age and body mass index (BMI) matched to the PCOS
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17 80 women were included into this study. Subject demographics are shown in Table 1. The
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19 81 diagnosis of PCOS was based on fulfilling all three diagnostic criteria of the Rotterdam
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21 82 consensus, namely clinical and biochemical evidence of hyperandrogenemia (Ferriman-
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23 83 Gallwey score >8; free androgen index >4 respectively), oligomenorrhea or amenorrhea and
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25 84 polycystic ovaries on transvaginal ultrasound (classical phenotype) (13). Liver ultrasound was
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27 85 performed at the same time to exclude non-alcoholic fatty liver disease. Study participants had
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29 86 no concurrent illness, **and were not on any medication for the preceding nine months**. None of
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31 87 the women had successful pregnancy or miscarriage at least five year prior to study entry.
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33 88 Diabetes was excluded by a 75g oral glucose tolerance test. Non-classical 21-hydroxylase
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35 89 deficiency, hyperprolactinaemia, Cushing's disease and androgen-secreting tumours were
36
37 90 excluded by appropriate tests. All women gave written informed consent. This study was
38
39 91 approved by the Newcastle & North Tyneside Ethics committee, UK.

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41 92 **Sample collection:** Blood samples were taken after an overnight fast during the follicular
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43 93 phase of the menstrual cycle in **control** women and serum was stored frozen at -80°C pending
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45 94 analysis. **All PCOS women were anovulatory (3 months amenorrhea; random progesterone less**
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47 95 **than 5nmol/l)**. Serum testosterone and androstenedione were measured by isotope dilution
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49 96 liquid chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry (Waters Corporation, Manchester, UK). Sex
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51 97 hormone binding globulin (SHBG) was determined by an immunometric assay with
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53 98 fluorescence detection on the DPC Immulite 2000 analyzer using the manufacturer's
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3 99 recommended protocol. The free androgen index was obtained as the total testosterone
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5 100 x100/SHBG. Serum insulin was assayed using a competitive chemiluminescent immunoassay
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7 101 performed on the manufacturer's DPC Immulite 2000 analyzer (Euro/DPC, Llanberis, UK).
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9 102 The analytical sensitivity of the insulin assay was 2 μ U/ml, the coefficient of variation was 6%,
10
11 103 and there was no stated cross-reactivity with proinsulin. Plasma glucose was measured using a
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13 104 Synchron LX20 analyzer (Beckman-Coulter), using the manufacturer's recommended
14
15 105 protocol. The coefficient of variation for the assay was 1.2% at a mean glucose value of 5.3
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17 106 mmol/liter during the study period. The insulin resistance was calculated using the HOMA
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19 107 method [HOMA-IR=(insulin x glucose)/22.5], and pancreatic beta cell sensitivity measured by
20
21 108 HOMA— β [HOMA- β =(20 x insulin)/glucose -3.5].
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26 109 **RNA preparation and analysis Following RNA extraction:** Approximately 20ng of total
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28 110 RNA was used to generate strand-specific paired end 75bp Illumina libraries with NEXTFLEX
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30 111 Rapid Directional RNA-Seq Library Prep Kit (Bio-Scientific, Austin, TX) according to the
31
32 112 manufacturer's protocol. Briefly, the protocol included the following steps: first strand cDNA
33
34 113 synthesis, second strand synthesis, A- tailing, adaptor ligation and purification, followed by
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36 114 UDG treatment, library amplification and purification. Library quality and quantity were
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38 115 analyzed with the Bioanalyzer 2100 (Agilent, Santa Clara, CA) on a High Sensitivity DNA
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40 116 chip. Six libraries were then pooled in equimolar ratios and sequenced on one lane of an
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42 117 Illumina HiSeq 4000 run (Illumina, San Diego, CA). Average sequencing depth for the libraries
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44 118 is 16 million reads.
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49 119 **RNA-seq data analysis:** We performed quality check for the read with FastQC (14). Reads
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51 120 with adaptors and rRNA contamination were removed using BBMap (15). After filtering, the
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53 121 reads were mapped to human reference genome from Ensembl GRCh38 release 93 (16) with
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55 122 STAR (17) using Ensembl 93 gene annotation(16). For mapped read quantification, we used
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57 123 featureCounts function from Rsubread package (18) in R (19).
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3 124 Following quantification, lncRNA were identified and the lncRNAs were then quantified using
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5 125 Wald test from DESeq2 (20). P value <0.05 was taken as the cutoff for significance.

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8 126 **Statistical analysis:** There was no information for lncRNA on which to base a sample size
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10 127 calculation. For such pilot studies, Birkett and Day (14) suggest a minimum of 20 degrees of
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12 128 freedom to estimate variance from which a larger trial could be powered. We recruited 24 for
13
14 129 each group to allow for drop-outs and covariate adjustment. Statistical analysis was performed
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16 130 using SPSS (v22, Chicago, Illinois). Descriptive data is presented as mean \pm SD for continuous
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18 131 data and n (%) for categorical data. T-tests or Mann Whitney tests were used to compare
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20 132 means/medians where appropriate. Linear associations were assessed using the Pearson's
21
22 133 correlation test.

23 24 25 26 134 **Results:**

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28 135 Baseline characteristics of the 24 PCOS and 24 control women are shown in Table 1. The
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30 136 PCOS and control women did not differ for age or BMI; however, the PCOS women showed
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32 137 greater insulin resistance and hyperandrogenemia ($p < 0.01$), androstenedione did not differ.
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34 138 There were 8 significant lncRNAs between the PCOS and control women (Table 2). Of
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36 139 those, MIRLET7BHG significantly correlated with BMI ($r = 0.66$, $p < 0.05$). No lncRNA
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38 140 correlated with age, AMH, HOMA-IR, testosterone, androstenedione or the FAI. All of the
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40 141 lncRNA detected are shown in Supplementary Table 1.

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44 142 When Ingenuity pathway analysis was undertaken to look at the functional relationships, no
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46 143 pathway could be constructed when taking the top 10, top 25, top 50 or top 70 lncRNAs into
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48 144 account.

49 50 51 145 **Discussion**

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53 146 Next generation sequencing (NGS) has provided a wealth of novel information about
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55 147 genomic organization and regulation of gene expression, with non-coding (non-translated)
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57 148 RNAs being identified as important regulators of gene expression (15). Whilst thousands of
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3 149 lncRNAs have now been identified, functional characterization has only been determined in a
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5 150 small subset but has indicated that they are involved in numerous physiological processes,
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7 151 working at the epigenetic, transcriptional and post-transcriptional level (16). Information to
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9 152 date has shown that their dysregulation is associated with a wide variety of diseases including
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11 153 cancer (8), neurological disorders(11), cardiovascular disease(10) and diabetes (9). At least
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13 154 19 lncRNAs are associated with diabetes in humans (17), some directly affecting pancreatic
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15 155 beta-cells, with others acting as a link between insulin signaling and insulin resistance (18).
16
17 156 Insulin resistance is an integral component of PCOS, and the prevalence of T2DM is
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19 157 increased in women with PCOS (2), therefore aberrant expression of lncRNAs in serum of
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21 158 women with PCOS might be anticipated, and indeed the findings are not unexpected.
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23 159 This study suggests that there are significant alterations of lncRNAs in subjects with PCOS
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25 160 compared to age and BMI matched control subjects in the normal women in the follicular
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27 161 phase of the menstrual cycle compared to the anovulatory PCOS.
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29 162 In women with PCOS compared to controls, there were 8 lncRNAs that differed significantly.
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31 163 Using www.genecard.org, MALAT1 (metastasis associated lung adenocarcinoma transcript
32
33 164 1) is thought to provide molecular scaffolds for ribonuclear proteins and is associated with
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35 165 cancer progression. MIR181A1HG is associated with acute myeloid leukaemia. The
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37 166 functions of the other lncRNAs (AC005332.6, AC009404.1, PSMG3-AS1, MIRLET7BHG,
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39 167 AC016831.6 and AC012313.1) are unknown.
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41 168 Reported phenotypes associated with the lncRNA include BMI (AP001999.1 and IQCH-
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43 169 AS1), systolic blood pressure (AC093459.1 and AC016831.6), type 2 diabetes (AC016831.6)
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45 170 dyslipidemia (AC016831.6) and PCOS (LINC01828) (www.genecard.org). Given that little
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47 171 function has to date been ascribed to lncRNAs, it may therefore be understood why no
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49 172 functional pathways could be constructed with the Ingenuity Pathway assessment tool.
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3 173 Correlation was undertaken for the significant lncRNAs for the follicular phase with age,
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5 174 BMI, AMH, HOMA-IR and FAI, but only MIRLET7BHG correlated with BMI in the
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8 175 follicular phase. However, the sample size was too small to exclude a type 2 statistical error.
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10 176 This pilot study was limited by the small number of subjects but the strength of the study was
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12 177 that all of the PCOS women fulfilled all 3 of the diagnostic Rotterdam criteria providing
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14 178 homogeneity. A comparison with PCOS subjects without the metabolic phenotype would
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17 179 have been of value. The study clearly showed that lncRNAs may be found in PCOS and that
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19 180 they differ from control women. However, given that the lncRNA did not correlate to either
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21 181 insulin resistance or androgen levels then it may suggest that the differences could be more
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23 182 related to the menstrual cycle, but there is no data on lncRNA throughout the menstrual cycle
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25
26 183 to answer this.

27
28 184 In conclusion, lncRNA were found to differ between **PCOS and control women** in the
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30 185 follicular phase of the menstrual cycle, though functional pathway analysis was limited by
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32 186 the unknown functions of many of the lncRNAs. The phase of the menstrual cycle may be
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34 187 important for lncRNA expression and that needs to be taken into account in future studies.
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39 40 189 **Author contributions**

41
42 190 A.E. Butler contributed to data analysis and wrote the manuscript. Shahina Hayat and Soha R
43
44 191 Dargham analyzed the data. Joel Malek, Silvana Abdullah and Yasmin A. Mahmoud
45
46 192 performed the LNC RNA measurements. Karsten Suhre contributed to data analysis.
47
48 193 Thozhukat Sathyapalan supervised sample collection. Stephen L. Atkin designed the studies,
49
50 194 supervised the work, contributed to data analysis and was involved in preparation of the
51
52 195 manuscript.
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57
58 197 perceived as prejudicing the impartiality of the paper reported. SLA is the guarantor of this
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3 198 work and, as such, had full access to all the data in the study and takes responsibility for the
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5 199 integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis.

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7
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9
10 201 Biomathematics Research Core at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar.

11
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13
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17 204 **Data availability statement:** The data that support the findings of this study are available
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19 205 from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Table 1. Demographics, biochemical and clinical markers (mean±SD) for the PCOS and control group 1 from biobank women.

	Control women (n=24)		PCOS women (n=24)		P-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	S D	
Age (years)	32.4	7.8	31.6	8.8	0.735
BMI	27.2	6.0	28.8	5.6	0.324
Glucose (mmo/l)	4.6	0.5	4.8	0.6	0.202
Insulin mIU/ml)	7.3	4.9	12.0	6.1	0.012
HOMA IR	1.5	0.9	2.6	1.7	0.006
Androstenedione (nmol/l)	8.3	4.8	10.6	6.6	0.21
Testosterone (nmol/l)	1.0	0.4	2.5	1.6	0.007
SHBG (mmol/l)	76.4	76.1	46.6	51.0	0.167
FAI	2.0	1.0	12.4	18.0	0.013

(BMI, body mass index; FAI, free androgen index; SHBG, sex hormone binding globulin; HOMA-IR, homeostatic model assessment-insulin resistance)

Table 2. Significant long non coding RNA (n=8) in patients unselected for date of menstrual cycle for patients with PCOS and control women.

LNC RNA	Fold Change	p value
AC005332.6	0.444	0.008
MALAT1	-0.095	0.016
AC009404.1	0.561	0.026
MIR181A1HG	0.617	0.034
PSMG3-AS1	0.547	0.038
MIRLET7BHG	0.334	0.040
AC016831.6	-0.669	0.045
AC012313.1	0.427	0.048

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Supplementary Table 1. All long non coding RNA (significant n=8) in patients unselected for date of menstrual cycle for patients with PCOS and control women.

LNC RNA	Fold Change	p value
AC005332.6	0.444	0.008
MALAT1	-0.095	0.016
AC009404.1	0.561	0.026
MIR181A1HG	0.617	0.034
PSMG3-AS1	0.547	0.038
MIRLET7BHG	0.334	0.040
AC016831.6	-0.669	0.045
AC012313.1	0.427	0.048
AC103718.1	1.046	0.057
AC015813.1	0.220	0.085
LINC01588	-0.420	0.106
TP53TG1	-0.401	0.157
XIST	0.723	0.159
LINC00667	-0.269	0.159
MIR22HG	-0.290	0.195
CYTOR	-0.317	0.196
SMIM25	-0.620	0.196
LINC00513	-0.414	0.226
MIAT	-0.609	0.228
HCG11	0.334	0.251
APTR	0.315	0.257
AC245041.2	0.393	0.266
AC245041.1	0.541	0.277
AC060780.1	0.243	0.278
MIR222HG	0.340	0.278
SNHG15	-0.243	0.280
LINC00665	0.371	0.298
OLMALINC	0.434	0.313
BAIAP2-DT	-0.223	0.366
AL160272.1	0.265	0.378
EPB41L4A-AS1	0.263	0.390
AC006504.5	0.196	0.393
SERPINB9P1	0.286	0.397
LINC01089	-0.282	0.402
NEAT1	-0.066	0.410
LINC01934	-0.268	0.414
AC092171.2	0.143	0.462
AC090114.2	0.164	0.465

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3	RAB30-AS1	-0.211	0.468
4	MIR34AHG	-0.251	0.477
5	CASC15	0.289	0.501
6	LINC-PINT	-0.190	0.503
7	AC092490.1	-0.540	0.514
8	FP671120.4	-0.330	0.530
9	AC078846.1	-0.198	0.542
10	AL161431.1	0.401	0.545
11	PVT1	0.127	0.562
12	AP003486.1	0.127	0.568
13	LINC00294	0.157	0.573
14	MIR29B2CHG	-0.143	0.592
15	NUP50-DT	-0.156	0.597
16	AC232271.1	-0.154	0.605
17	AC006058.1	-0.198	0.611
18	LINC01503	0.131	0.617
19	AC083843.2	-0.136	0.630
20	LINC00472	-0.234	0.653
21	LINC00342	-0.090	0.655
22	LINC02015	0.164	0.655
23	LINC01963	-0.129	0.665
24	LINC00958	0.197	0.668
25	AL512274.1	0.177	0.671
26	LINC00630	0.118	0.694
27	LINC00861	-0.249	0.704
28	MIATNB	-0.161	0.717
29	AC007878.1	-0.098	0.721
30	AC005261.1	0.047	0.723
31	GMDS-DT	-0.063	0.763
32	LINC02035	-0.049	0.764
33	LINC00662	-0.104	0.765
34	AC058791.1	0.101	0.792
35	ILF3-DT	0.064	0.808
36	MIR4435-		
37	2HG	-0.047	0.829
38	EIF3J-DT	-0.052	0.844
39	AF117829.1	0.034	0.877
40	SNHG8	-0.042	0.886
41	MUC20-OT1	0.017	0.887
42	LINC01184	0.025	0.889
43	AC008124.1	-0.045	0.892
44	EBLN3P	-0.014	0.899
45	AC016831.4	-0.031	0.902
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	Fold change	p value
AC048341.1	0.025	0.919
LINC00265	0.017	0.936
NORAD	0.004	0.970
FTX	-0.006	0.978
LNC RNA		
NEAT1	0.972784308	0.001318918
	-	
MALAT1	0.095207667	0.012134396
AC103718.1	1.077682776	0.0369768
MIRLET7BHG	0.317374986	0.043351359
	-	
TP53TG1	0.619755201	0.071335597
PSMG3-AS1	0.453541106	0.081348578
HCG11	0.603643213	0.081929868
	-	
LINC00667	0.341448173	0.087503347
AC015813.1	0.227320011	0.092930753
	-	
SNHG15	0.683187137	0.103497955
SERPINB9P1	0.731681883	0.111523219
AL160272.1	0.583857724	0.116441763
AC245041.2	0.523006704	0.13472168
AC012313.1	0.328641312	0.143946995
MIR181A1HG	0.435739735	0.15073483
AC005332.6	0.279377116	0.164287339
	-	
MIAT	0.646798865	0.174631999
MIR222HG	0.41222115	0.18000658
LINC01503	0.427762913	0.200340291
AC009404.1	0.361729735	0.208276474
AC245041.1	0.578277167	0.216315965
	-	
AC078846.1	0.460605791	0.218564928
AC058791.1	0.574462618	0.245814576
	-	
SNHG8	0.560413955	0.246369192
MUC20-OT1	0.187348995	0.260903116
	-	
NORAD	0.140427453	0.263529997
LINC02015	0.438662764	0.265375365
	-	
EBLN3P	0.170719196	0.268378424
AC016831.4	0.461698707	0.276379729
	-	
LINC01963	0.363631346	0.282413238
MIR29B2CHG	0.473979602	0.307546848

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AL161431.1 0.646113968 0.309886358

For Peer Review