

## ARTICLE



## Genetics and Genomics

# Non-muscle-invasive micropapillary bladder cancer has a distinct lncRNA profile associated with unfavorable prognosis

Joep J. de Jong<sup>1</sup>, Begoña P. Valderrama<sup>2</sup>, Julia Perera<sup>3</sup>, Nuria Juanpere<sup>4</sup>, Paloma Cejas<sup>5</sup>, Henry Long<sup>5</sup>, M. Mar Albà<sup>6,7</sup>, Ewan A. Gibb<sup>8,10</sup> and Joaquim Bellmunt<sup>9,10</sup>

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**BACKGROUND:** Molecular subtyping of bladder cancer has revealed luminal tumors generally have a more favourable prognosis. However, some aggressive forms of variant histology, including micropapillary, are often classified luminal. In previous work, we found long non-coding RNA (lncRNA) expression profiles could identify a subgroup of luminal bladder tumors with less aggressive biology and better outcomes.

**OBJECTIVE:** In the present study, we aimed to investigate whether lncRNA expression profiles could identify high-grade T1 micropapillary bladder cancer with differential outcome.

**DESIGN, SETTING, AND PARTICIPANTS:** lncRNAs were quantified from RNA-seq data from a HGT1 bladder cancer cohort that was enriched for primary micropapillary cases (15/84). Unsupervised consensus clustering of variant lncRNAs identified a three-cluster solution, which was further characterised using a panel of micropapillary-associated biomarkers, molecular subtypes, gene signatures, and survival analysis. A single-sample genomic signature was trained using lasso-penalized logistic regression to classify micropapillary-like gene-expression, as characterised by lncRNA clustering. The genomic classifier (GC) was tested on luminal tumors derived from the TCGA cohort ( $N = 202$ ).

**OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS:** Patient and tumor characteristics were compared between subgroups by using  $\chi^2$  tests and two-sided Wilcoxon rank-sum tests. Primary endpoints were overall, progression-free and high-grade recurrence-free survival, calculated as the date of high-grade T1 disease at TURBT till date of death from any cause, progression, or recurrence, respectively. Survival rates were estimated using weighted Kaplan–Meier (KM) curves.

**RESULTS AND LIMITATIONS:** Primary micropapillary HGT1 showed decreased FGFR3, SHH, and p53 pathway activity relative to tumors with conventional urothelial carcinoma. Many bladder cancer-associated lncRNAs were downregulated in micropapillary tumors, including *UCA1*, *LINC00152*, and *MALAT1*. Unsupervised consensus clustering resulted in a lncRNA cluster 1 (LC1) with worse prognosis that was enriched for primary micropapillary histology and the Luminal Unstable (LumU) molecular subtype. Interestingly, LC1 appeared to better identify aggressive HGT1 disease, compared to stratifying outcomes using primary histologic characteristics. A signature trained to identify LC1 cases showed good performance in the testing cohort, identifying seven cases with significantly worse survival ( $p < 0.001$ ). Limitations include the retrospective nature of the study and the lack of a validation cohort.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Using the lncRNA transcriptome we identified a subgroup of aggressive HGT1 bladder cancer that was enriched with micropapillary histology. These data suggest that lncRNAs can facilitate the identification of aggressive micropapillary-like tumors, potentially improving patient management.

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## INTRODUCTION

Micropapillary bladder cancer is an aggressive urothelial variant that frequently co-occurs with conventional urothelial carcinoma of the

bladder [1]. When present, micropapillary histology has been associated with aggressive clinical behaviour, often presenting as more advanced disease [2]. While the clinical characteristics

<sup>1</sup>Department of Urology, Erasmus MC Cancer Institute, Rotterdam, The Netherlands. <sup>2</sup>Hospital Universitario Virgen del Rocío Sevilla, Sevilla, Spain. <sup>3</sup>IMIM-Hospital del Mar and GRIB, Barcelona, Spain. <sup>4</sup>Department of Pathology, Parc de Salut Mar, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain. <sup>5</sup>Center for functional Cancer Epigenetics, Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Boston, MA, USA. <sup>6</sup>Evolutionary Genomics Group, Research Programme on Biomedical Informatics, Hospital del Mar Medical Research Institute (IMIM) and Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), Barcelona, Spain. <sup>7</sup>Catalan Institution for Research and Advanced Studies (ICREA), Barcelona, Spain. <sup>8</sup>Veracyte Inc., Vancouver, BC, Canada. <sup>9</sup>Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, PSMAR-IMIM Lab, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, USA. <sup>10</sup>These authors contributed equally: Ewan A. Gibb, Joaquim Bellmunt.

<sup>✉</sup>email: [ewan.gibb@veracyte.com](mailto:ewan.gibb@veracyte.com); [jbellmunt@bidmc.harvard.edu](mailto:jbellmunt@bidmc.harvard.edu)

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of micropapillary bladder cancer are well-established, the molecular features of micropapillary bladder cancer are less well-characterised [3, 4].

Molecular subtyping has advanced our understanding of muscle-invasive bladder cancer (MIBC), showing potential utility in predicting prognosis and treatment response [5–7]. At the highest level, bladder cancer can be divided along an intrinsic basal and luminal axis, with additional classifications providing refined granularity [8–10]. More recently, efforts have been made to apply molecular subtyping to non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer (NMIBC), where most cases are found to have a luminal character [11, 12]. In general, luminal tumors tend to have a more favourable prognosis, although the luminal class does present with significant heterogeneity at the molecular level [13]. Unexpectedly, certain aggressive forms of variant histology, including micropapillary, tend to be classified as luminal [3].

While most studies to date have focused on messenger RNA (mRNA) expression to differentiate molecular subtypes of NMIBC, the mammalian transcriptome is comprised of a diverse range of coding (mRNA) and non-coding RNAs [14, 15]. Long non-coding RNAs (lncRNAs) are mRNA-like transcripts that range in length from 200 nucleotides to over 100 kilobases and lack open reading frames. While it is unclear how many lncRNAs have biological functions, their expression patterns can be specific to a particular biological or disease state, including cancer [16]. In previous work, we adopted lncRNA expression profiles to identify a subgroup of luminal MIBC with favourable tumor biology [17]. These data suggest that there might be an inherent utility in lncRNA expression profiles for classifying subsets of bladder cancer with unique biology in other disease stages or in variant histologies.

In the present study, we aimed to investigate whether lncRNA expression profiles could be adopted for the identification and molecular characterisation of high-grade T1 micropapillary bladder cancer.

## METHODS

### Patient populations

For the present study, we selected cases with complete clinical data from a previously published retrospective cohort [4], resulting in a total of 84 high-grade T1 bladder tumors, including 15 cases with high micropapillary component (primary micropapillary) and 7 cases with secondary micropapillary histology. Archival FFPE tissue specimens were collected at the time of TURBT confirming the diagnosis of high-grade T1 bladder cancer. Informed consent was provided by each subject and the use of the tissue was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Hospital del Mar, and Hospital Vall d'Hebron and all research complied with local ethics guidelines. Gene expression data of the T1 cohort have been uploaded to GEO (GEO: GSE136401).

### Pathology

All specimens were reviewed by two pathologists, who assessed the percentage of micropapillary histology, depth of tumor invasion, lymphovascular invasion, and presence of carcinoma-in situ (CIS). A two-tier system was used to assess the depth of lamina propria invasion; T1a when tumor involved the subepithelial connective tissue superficial to muscularis mucosae (MM); T1b when tumor was found at the level or beyond the MM. Of note, patients with T1b substaging underwent re-TURBT after BCG therapy as per institutional approved protocol. Primary micropapillary cases contained >50% micropapillary component. For the secondary micropapillary cases, only tumors with at least  $a > 10\%$  of micropapillary component, measured by a semiquantitative (visual) estimation of the micropapillary component percentage, were included. However, when coring, the micropapillary component could not have been included. Only high-grade T1 tumors with a visible, clearly identifiable, and disease-free muscularis propria and micropapillary high-grade T1 on which both pathologists concur on the presence of micropapillary component (>10%) were included in this study. Pathology review of tumor regions of interest (ROI), where tumor cellularity was in excess of 70%, were annotated by the two pathologists. Up to  $5 \times 0.6$  mm cores were punched from FFPE tissue blocks within the

tumor-rich ROI. Every effort was made when sampling micropapillary areas to ensure that micropapillary histology was present throughout the thickness of the tissue core.

### Gene expression profiling

RNA extraction, quality control, quantification using the Quant-iT RiboGreen assay and RNA-Seq library preparation have been previously described for this cohort. For the current study, gene expression profiles were matched to the Decipher array platform using quantile normalization (R package preprocessCore). To facilitate future applicability of our results to multiple RNA expression platforms, we pre-selected genes that were present at the Quant-iT RiboGreen assay, the Decipher bladder assay, and the Illumina HiSeq assay (The Cancer Genome Atlas), as the initial gene list for our analyses (19970 genes). The Cancer Genome Atlas cohort has been previously described [17].

### Unsupervised clustering using lncRNAs

For unsupervised clustering analysis (R package ConsensusClusterPlus), the normalized gene expression data for  $N = 84$  samples (T1 cohort), including expression of 1271 available lncRNAs, was pre-processed by filtering low-variance genes, selecting the 160 lncRNAs with the highest median absolute deviation (R package MADs) (Table S1). The expression clustering analysis was performed by a consensus partitioning around medoids (PAM) approach, using Pearson correlations as the similarity metric, the Ward algorithm for clustering, running 5000 iterations with 0.95 random fraction of samples used in each iteration.

### Classification of tumors into molecular mRNA subtypes

To assign tumors to the consensus bladder cancer (basal/squamous (Ba/Sq), luminal papillary (LumP), luminal non-specified (LumNS), luminal unstable (LumU), stroma-rich, and neuroendocrine-like (NE-like)) molecular subtypes [10], we downloaded and applied the centroid-based models as described [10].

### Gene expression analyses

We created heatmaps and boxplots to visualize differences between tumors from lncRNA and mRNA subtypes, regarding the expression of (I) individual genes, (II) gene signatures, and (III) hallmark gene sets from the molecular signature database hallmark gene set collection (MSigDB). We applied our lncRNA-based genomic classifier that was developed to identify a subgroup of luminal MIBC tumors characterised by distinct biologic activity, including high FGFR3 activity. FGFR3 activity, hedgehog signaling, basal and luminal signature score calculations have been described previously [8, 17]. We employed R package Limma to perform differential gene expression analyses and created volcano plots using R package EnhancedVolcano.

### Discovery of a micropapillary-like classifier

The current cohort was used to train a genomic signature to predict aggressive bladder cancer that is associated with micropapillary biology, as was identified by lncRNA consensus cluster 1 (LC1). The initial gene list (19970 features) was used for differential gene expression analysis within the training cohort, comparing LC1 ( $N = 16$ ) to the rest of the cohort ( $N = 68$ ). Using R package Limma, we first selected the top 500 differentially expressed features (genes). Next, these 500 genes were further filtered based on an expression level standard deviation of greater than 0.3, resulting in the final input set of 69 genes. These genes were used for the training of a  $100 \times 10$ -fold cross-validated, lasso ( $\alpha = 0$ ) penalized logistic regression model (R package GLMNET) in the training cohort. For this model, input gene features were grouped into coefficients by cutting a dendrogram that was constructed by clustering all input genes, making the model more generalisable for external dataset testing. This signature was evaluated using distribution density plots where a probability threshold of 0.44 was selected for classifying positive predicted model cases (MP+). As a last step, we applied the signature to the testing ( $N = 202$ , TCGA luminal) cohort. The TCGA RNA-seq data was available as part of the TCGA research network (<http://cancergenome.nih.gov/>).

### Statistical analyses

Statistical analyses were performed using R statistical software (R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria). Patient and tumor characteristics were compared between subgroups by using  $\chi^2$  tests and two-sided Wilcoxon rank-sum tests.  $P$  values in boxplot figures represent

**Table 1.** Clinicopathological characteristics of the high-grade T1 study cohort.

| Variables               |                       | Conventional <i>n</i> (%) | Micropapillary <i>n</i> (%) | <i>p</i> -value |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Total                   |                       | 69 (100%)                 | 15 (100%)                   |                 |
| Age                     | Median [IQR]          | 69 [61–74]                | 70 [61–78]                  | 0.54            |
| Sex                     | Female                | 10                        | 2                           | 1               |
|                         | Male                  | 59                        | 13                          |                 |
| Lamina propria invasion | T1a                   | 19                        | 6                           | 0.52            |
|                         | T1b                   | 50                        | 9                           |                 |
| Secondary MP histology  | Present               | 7                         | ..                          |                 |
|                         | Absent                | 62                        |                             |                 |
| Carcinoma in situ       | Absent                | 49                        | 8                           | 0.48            |
|                         | Present               | 20                        | 6                           |                 |
|                         | Unknown               | 0                         | 1                           |                 |
| Consensus subtype       | Basal/squamous        | 4                         | 0                           | <0.001          |
|                         | Luminal-papillary     | 46                        | 2                           |                 |
|                         | Luminal non-specified | 6                         | 4                           |                 |
|                         | Luminal unstable      | 12                        | 9                           |                 |
|                         | Stroma-rich           | 1                         | 0                           |                 |

*P*-values represent comparisons between micropapillary and conventional histology, using  $\chi^2$  tests for categorical variables and two-sided Wilcoxon rank-sum tests for continuous variables.

results of Kruskal–Wallis rank sum tests when comparing multiple groups, and Wilcoxon rank sum tests when comparing two groups. Primary endpoints were overall, progression-free and high-grade recurrence-free survival, calculated as the date of high-grade T1 disease at TURBT till date of death from any cause, progression, or recurrence, respectively. Disease progression was defined as progression to MIBC or development of metastasis. Disease recurrence was defined as recurrence of high-grade NMIBC. Patients who were lost to follow-up were censored at the date of last contact. The Kaplan–Meier method was used to estimate the statistical significance of differences between survival curves for patient subgroups, using the log-rank test. Statistical code was either trivial or is available based upon reasonable request (partner@decipherbio.com).

## RESULTS

The clinical characteristics of the study cohort are reported in Table 1. Patient age, sex, lamina propria invasion, and presence of CIS, were similar for both micropapillary and conventional high-grade T1 bladder tumors. *P*-values in Table 1 represent comparisons between micropapillary and conventional histology, using  $\chi^2$  tests for categorical variables and two-sided Wilcoxon rank-sum tests for continuous variables.

### Micropapillary tumors have unique gene expression profiles

Application of the consensus molecular subtyping model resulted in most of the tumors being classified as a ‘luminal’ subtype (LumP, LumU, or LumNS). Significant differences in the distribution of molecular subtypes between urothelial and micropapillary tumors ( $p < 0.001$ ) were found, with micropapillary tumors being enriched for the ‘LumU’ class (9/15) (Table 1). Both urothelial and micropapillary tumors showed higher luminal signature scores, with lower scores for the basal signature (Fig. S1). However, no significant differences were observed for either signature between groups. Further, we observed significant differences in progression-free (PFS) or overall survival (OS) when stratifying by subtype (Ba/Sq, LumP, LumNS, LumU, Stroma-rich; Fig. S2).

Differential gene expression analyses comparing micropapillary and urothelial tumors found many luminal markers were upregulated in primary micropapillary cases, including *UPK1B*, *UPK3A*, and *KRT20*. Genes associated with micropapillary disease (i.e., *MUC1*, *MUC4*) were also upregulated in the primary micropapillary cases (Fig. 1a). Interestingly, many of the downregulated genes were

lncRNAs. Comparing only the lncRNA profiles, we found several lncRNAs previously associated with bladder cancer were significantly downregulated in micropapillary tumors, including *UCA1* [18], *LINC00152* [19], and *MALAT1* [20] (Fig. 1b).

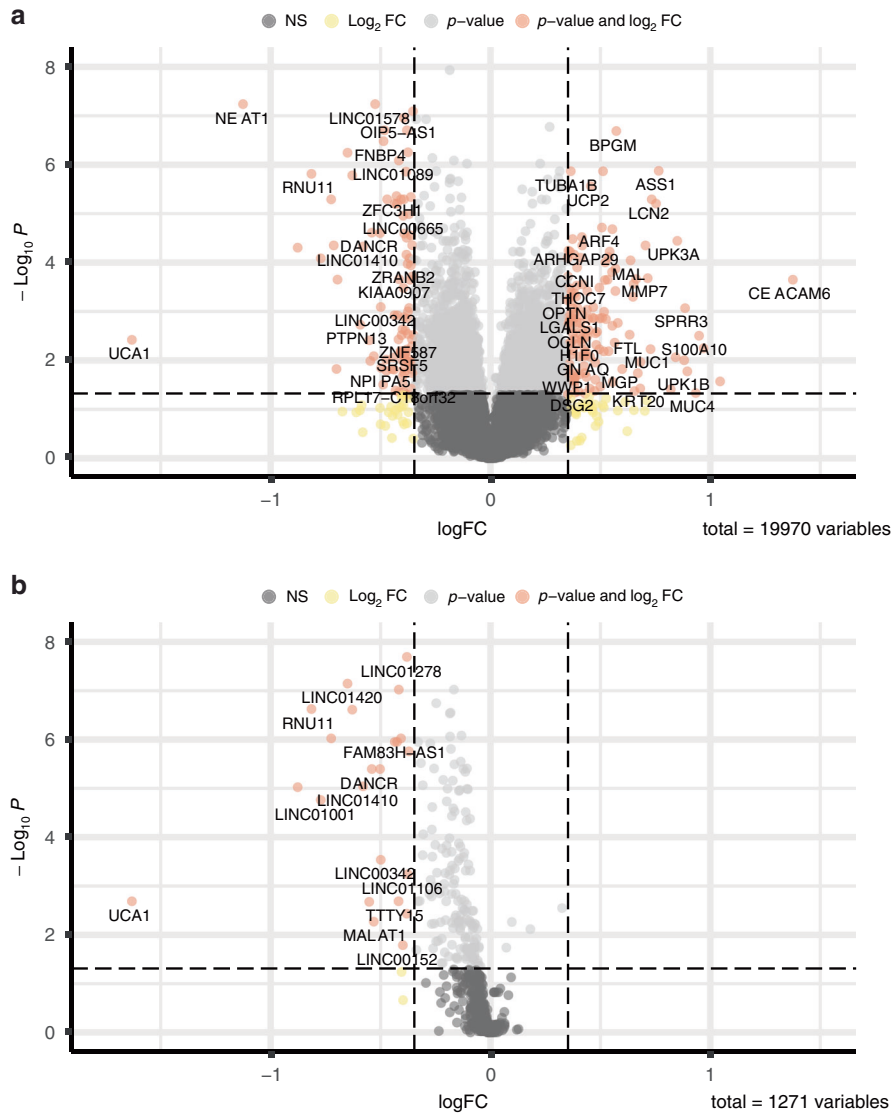
### A long non-coding RNA-based genomic classifier identifies FGFR3 active tumors

In previous work, we developed a lncRNA-based single-sample genomic classifier to identify muscle-invasive bladder tumors with activated FGFR3 (FGFR3+) and less aggressive tumor biology [17]. Application of the lncRNA classifier to the study cohort revealed seven FGFR3+ cases with enhanced SHH activity, higher p53 pathway activity, lower FGFR3 pathway activity, and lower EMT scores. Notably, none of the micropapillary cases were classified as FGFR3+, but showed decreased SHH and p53 signature scores, with higher EMT activity (Fig. 2). The OS of patients with FGFR3+ tumors were similar to the rest of the cohort ( $p = 0.94$ , Fig. S3).

### lncRNA-based unsupervised clustering identifies aggressive micropapillary cases

Unsupervised consensus clustering of 160 highly variant lncRNAs resulted in a three-cluster consensus solution (LC1–3) (Fig. S4A). Comparing the clustering solution with the cohort histology, we found LC1 contained 16 cases, of which 12 were micropapillary histology, meaning LC1 was significantly enriched for primary micropapillary histology cases ( $p < 0.001$ ). The remaining four LC1 cases were all T1b disease. The remaining three micropapillary histology cases were among LC2 (Fig. S4B). Only one of the seven conventional urothelial carcinoma cases with secondary micropapillary histology was clustered in LC1. Given the enrichment of primary micropapillary histology in LC1, we decided to characterise this cluster in detail, which we named the “Micropapillary lncRNA Consensus Cluster (MP-LncCC)”.

Survival analysis of the cohort stratified by histological subtype (micropapillary vs urothelial), found no significant difference in outcome for either recurrence- or progression-free survival ( $p = 0.95$  and  $p = 0.4$ , respectively), but significant differences in overall survival ( $p = 0.04$ , Fig. 3a–c). When stratified by MP-LncCC differences in recurrence-free survival were not observed ( $p = 0.49$ ), but MP-LncCC cases had significantly worse PFS and OS ( $p < 0.001$  for both; Fig. 3d–f). Unsupervised lncRNA-based clustering



**Fig. 1 Differential gene expression differences between tumors with micropapillary histology and conventional urothelial carcinoma.** **a** Protein-coding genes and lncRNAs and **b** lncRNAs only. Dark grey circles (NS) indicate non-significant genes, yellow circles ( $\text{Log}_2 \text{FC}$ ) indicate genes with a  $\text{logFC}$  lower than  $-0.35$  or higher than  $0.35$  but with an adjusted  $p > 0.05$ . Light grey circles are genes with a  $\text{logFC}$  between  $-0.35$  and  $0.35$  with an adjusted  $p < 0.05$ . Orange circles indicate genes with a  $\text{logFC} < -0.35$  or  $> 0.35$  with an adjusted  $p < 0.05$ . FC = fold-change.

showed results that were superior to primary histological characteristics with respect to progression free survival but were similar with respect to overall survival. Table S2 lists Cox proportional hazard models for recurrence-free, progression-free, and overall survival outcomes, revealing MP-LnCC as a significant predictor for progression-free survival on multivariable analyses.

To characterise the MP-LnCC tumors, we used a set of genes previously associated with micropapillary disease [3], finding similar expression patterns (Fig. 4). Genes such as *MUC1*, *MESP1*, and *CLDN3* were upregulated in the MP-LnCC group, but downregulated in the remaining tumors. Other genes, such as *KRT5*, were downregulated in the MP-LnCC cases, but were highly upregulated in the remaining tumors, particularly in those classified as Ba/Sq by the consensus classifier (Fig. 4).

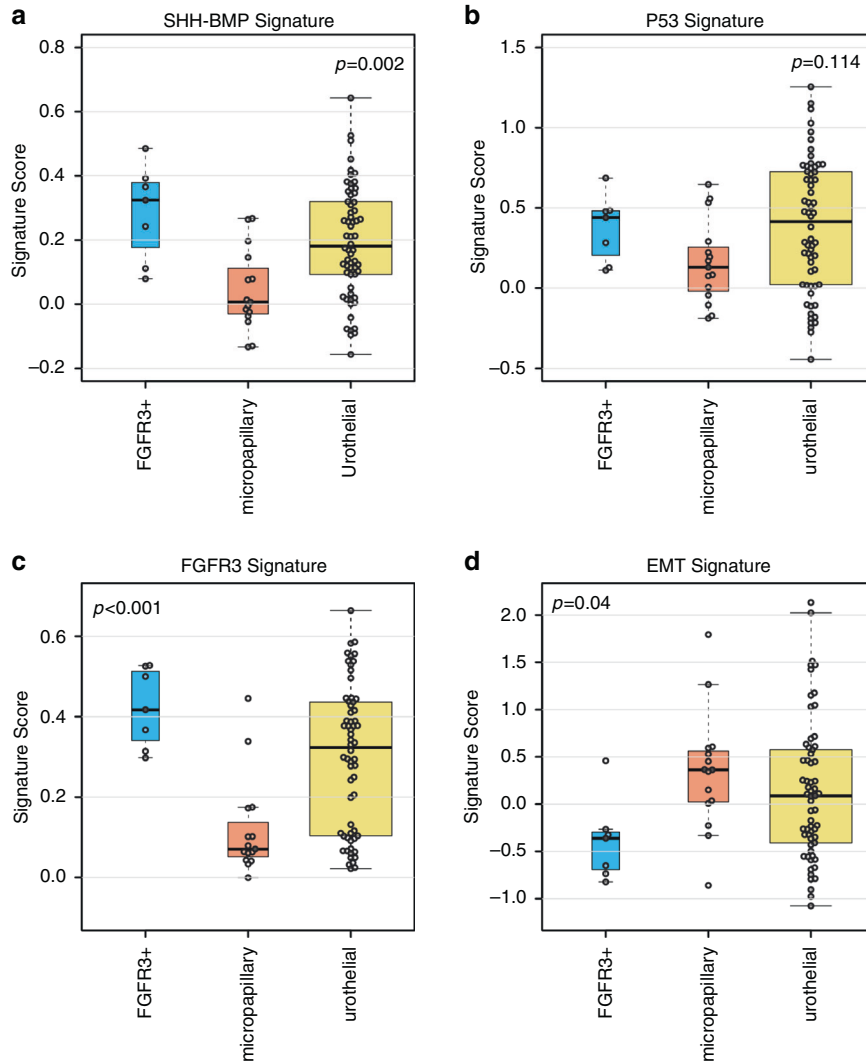
#### A micropapillary-like gene expression signature

To provide clinical utility to our findings, we developed a single-sample genomic signature to identify aggressive bladder cancer that is associated with micropapillary biology (MP+). To evaluate the

performance of this micropapillary signature, we downloaded gene expression data for the TCGA cohort (MIBC, Radical Cystectomy,  $n = 405$ ). As most of the cases in the training cohort had a luminal expression profile, we selected only the luminal tumors ( $n = 202$ ) from the TCGA cohort for testing the model. Here, we identified 7/202 (3.4%) MP+ cases, which were all classified as LumU. The gene expression patterns of micropapillary-associated genes for the MP+ cases were consistent with our previous findings (Fig. 5a). The MP+ cases also had lower P53-, SHH- and FGFR3 signature scores, but higher EMT activity (Fig. 5b–e). Importantly, patients with MP+ tumors showed significantly worse survival than other luminal cancer patients (Rest) or FGFR3+ cases ( $p < 0.001$ ; Fig. 5f).

#### DISCUSSION

Molecular subtyping of bladder cancer using transcriptome profiling has shown promise for predicting outcomes and response to therapy [5–7]. In 2019, the Bladder Cancer Molecular Taxonomy Group put significant effort to harmonise existing



**Fig. 2 Biological pathways differentially regulated between FGFR3 active (FGFR3+) urothelial ( $N = 7$ ), micropapillary ( $N = 15$ ) and remaining urothelial tumors ( $N = 62$ ).** **a** SHH-BMP pathway activity, **b** p53 hallmark activity, **c** FGFR3 signature score, and **d** EMT hallmark activity. Median values [IQR] for **a** SHH-BMP pathway activity were 0.32 [0.18, 0.38] for FGFR3 active, 0.01 [-0.03, 0.11] for micropapillary and 0.18 [0.09, 0.32] for urothelial tumors. Median values [IQR] for **b** p53 hallmark activity were 0.44 [0.21, 0.48] for FGFR3 active, 0.13 [-0.02, 0.26] for micropapillary and 0.42 [0.02, 0.73] for urothelial tumors. Median values [IQR] for **c** FGFR3 signature score were 0.42 [0.34, 0.51] for FGFR3 active, 0.07 [0.05, 0.14] for micropapillary and 0.32 [0.11, 0.43] for urothelial tumors. Median values [IQR] for **d** EMT hallmark activity were -0.39 [-0.69, -0.29] for FGFR3 active, 0.36 [0.02, 0.56] for micropapillary and 0.14 [-0.40, 0.56] for urothelial tumors.  $P$  values in boxplot figures represent results of comparing three groups by Kruskal–Wallis rank sum tests.

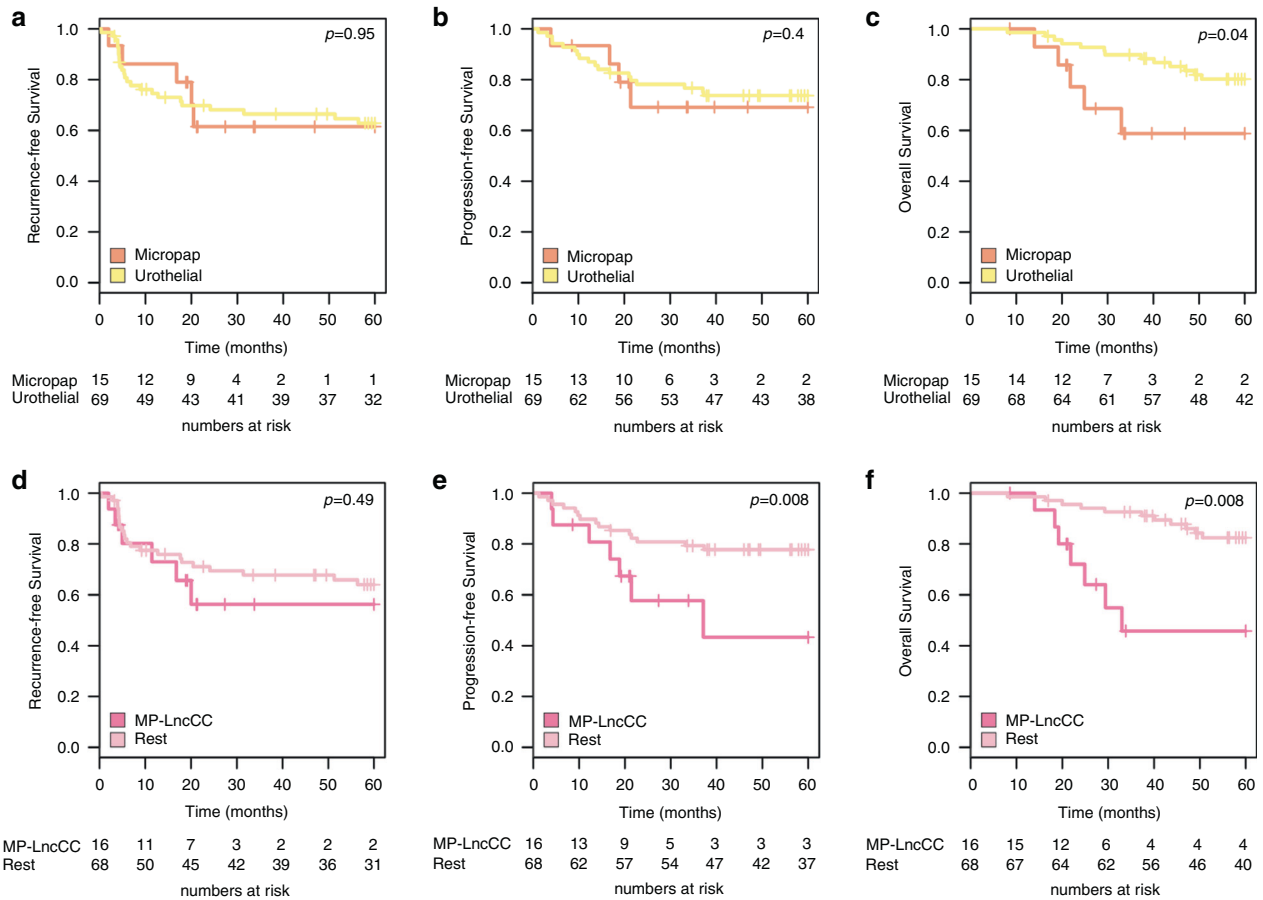
subtyping models, reporting on a consensus classifier comprised of six subtypes of MIBC [10]. Molecular subtyping of NMIBC is also underway, where these tumors appear to be enriched for the luminal subtype [11, 12]. However, the majority of these efforts have invested in mRNA-based subtyping, which actually represents only a minority of the full transcriptome [15]. In 2017, the TCGA demonstrated the non-coding transcriptome could be used to stratify the luminal subtype into subgroups with distinct prognoses [6]. This finding was subsequently confirmed, resulting in the development of a lncRNA-based single-sample classifier that identifies luminal tumors with improved outcomes [17]. Taken together, these studies suggest the lncRNA transcriptome may provide a sensitive read on specific luminal disease states.

Reports describing the molecular characterisation of variant tumors, including micropapillary, are somewhat limited [21, 22]. In 2016, Guo et al. reported on a set of unique molecular features associated with micropapillary MIBC, including differences in cellular pathways such as transformation, cell cycle regulation, DNA damage repair, and signal transduction [3]. Likewise, HGT1

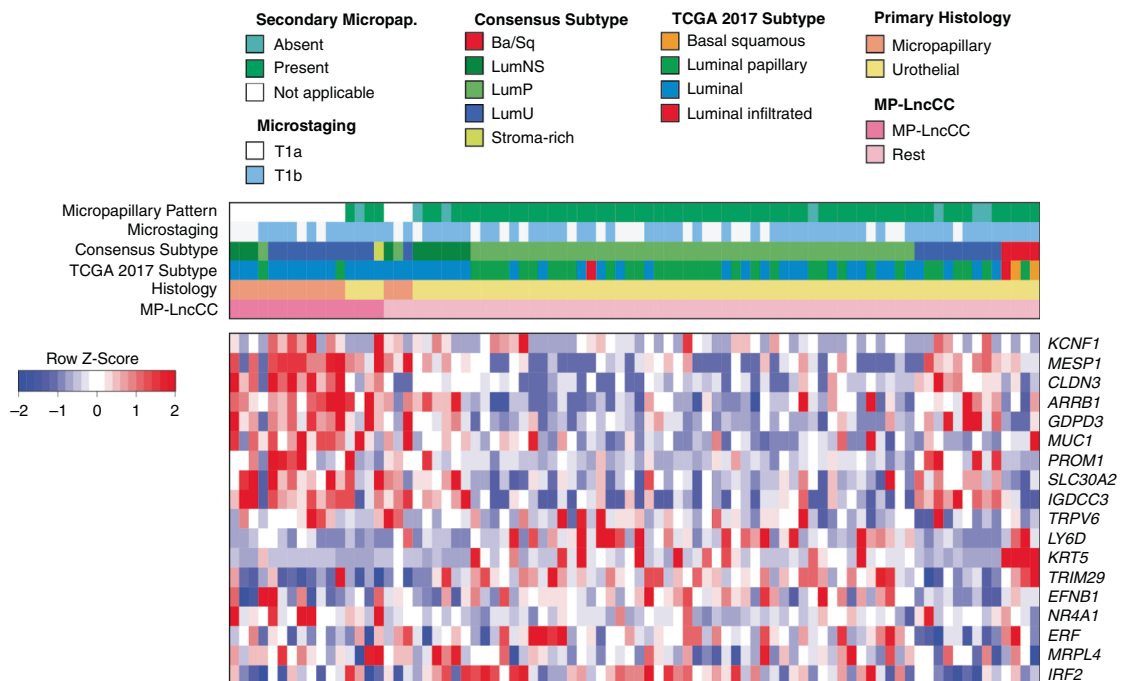
micropapillary bladder cancer has a unique transcriptome profile, with increased immune, metabolic and cell cycle pathway activity [4]. Moreover, molecular subtyping, using either RNA- or IHC-based methods, has shown the majority of micropapillary bladder tumors are classified as a luminal subtype [4, 21, 22].

In the present study, we focused on the lncRNA transcriptome, building on our previous work in identifying subsets of luminal bladder tumors using a unique lncRNA-based FGFR3+ classifier [17]. This classifier identifies a subset of luminal MIBC tumors (called FGFR3+ by the model) with improved outcomes that have enhanced FGFR3 activity and improved outcomes. When this classifier was applied to the current cohort, we did not identify any micropapillary cases as FGFR3+, as was anticipated given the unique molecular profile for micropapillary tumors. Using differential gene expression analysis, we found that selected lncRNAs were downregulated in micropapillary compared to urothelial tumors. These data suggested that micropapillary tumors may have a unique lncRNA expression profile with potential to serve as a novel biomarker.

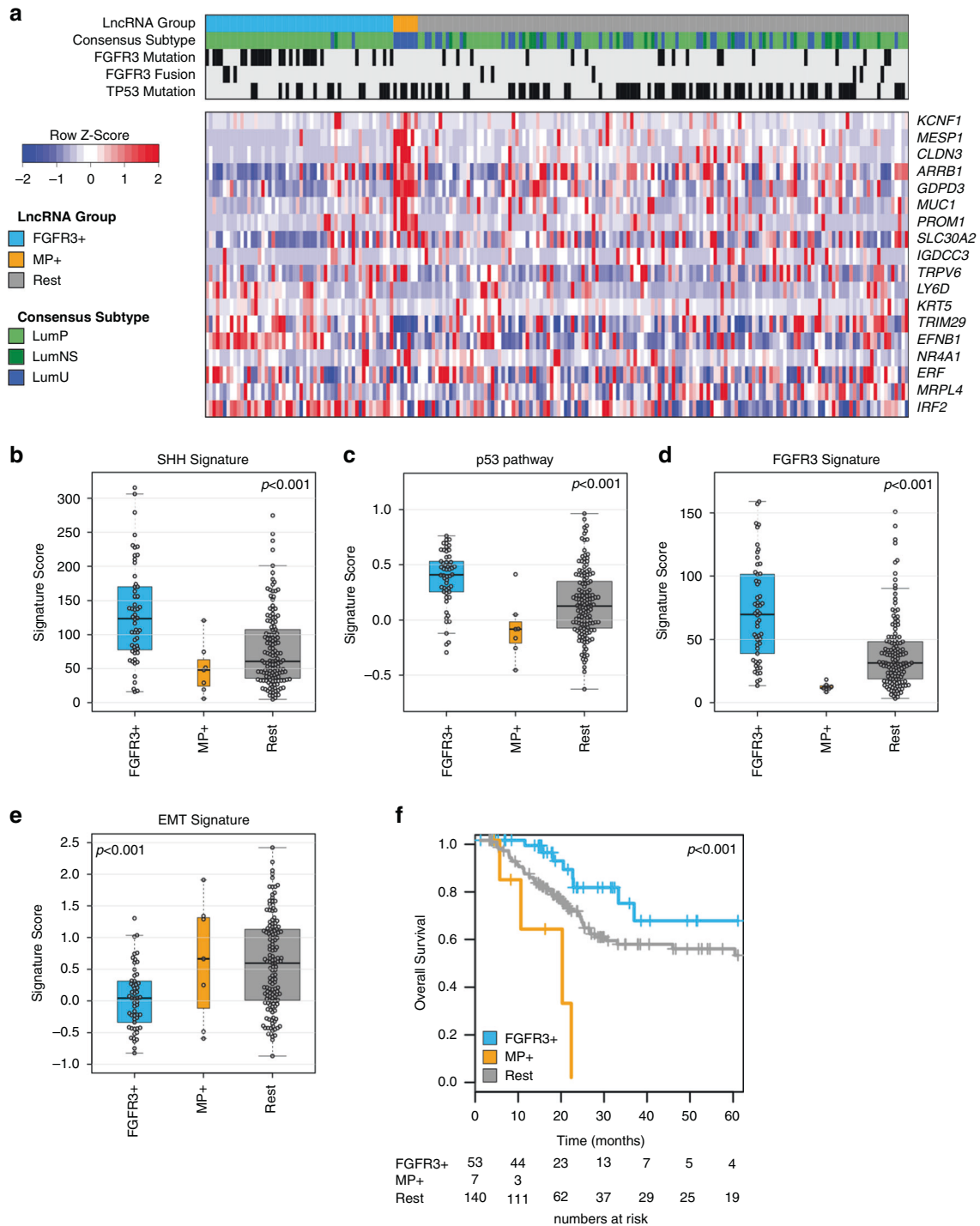




**Fig. 3 Survival analysis stratified by micropapillary histology and by MP-LncCC.** Survival analysis stratified by micropapillary histology for **a** recurrence-free survival, **b** progression-free survival, and **c** overall survival. **d-f** They follow the same order but are stratified by MP-LncCC. *P*-values represent comparisons between survival curves using log-rank tests.



**Fig. 4 Biological characterisation of the MP-LncRNA cluster (MP-LncCC) using selected micropapillary marker genes.** Both the consensus (Ba/Sq, LumNS, LumP, LumU, Stroma-rich) and TCGA subtypes (basal squamous, luminal papillary, luminal, luminal infiltrated) are indicated in the covariate tracks. Additional covariate tracks include micropapillary patterns, microstaging, and micropapillary histology.



**Fig. 5 Biological and clinical characterisation of the FGFR3+ and MP+ cases in the subset of N = 202 luminal tumors from the TCGA cohort.** **a** Expression patterns of selected micropapillary genes. The consensus subtypes (Ba/Sq, LumNS, LumP, LumU, Stroma-rich), FGFR3 mutations and fusions, and TP53 mutations are indicated in the covariate tracks. Signature scores for FGFR3+ (N = 54), MP+ (N = 7) and the rest of the cohort (N = 141), **b** SHH-BMP pathway, **c** p53 pathway, **d** FGFR3 pathway, and **e** epithelial-mesenchymal transition (EMT). **f** Overall survival KM plots.

Using consensus clustering we identified a group of tumors (LC1) showing gene expression patterns consistent with the micropapillary disease, including upregulation of *MUC1* and *MESP1* [3]. Most of these tumors had primary micropapillary histology with four only being conventional urothelial carcinoma. Survival analysis comparing LC1 revealed poor outcomes suggesting lncRNA expression patterns may identify tumors with aggressive clinical characteristics, independent of the histological presentation. Other studies on

bladder cancer with variant histology have reported similar findings. The most well-characterised of these is the NE-like subtype, where the NE-like tumors have genomic and clinical characteristics that are nearly identical to histological small cell tumors, yet typically present as conventional urothelial carcinoma [23, 24]. Taken together, these data may support the hypothesis that a variant-specific expression profile may precede the presence of the variant morphology itself [25].

As a proof of concept, we adopted the lncRNA transcriptome to develop a genomic classifier for identifying aggressive MP-like tumors (MP+). This classifier was tested on a subset of luminal (LumP, LumNS, and LumU) tumors from the TCGA cohort [6], finding 7/201 cases were MP+. These MP+ tumors had micropapillary-like gene expression patterns, lower FGFR3, SHH, and p53 signature scores, and extremely poor outcomes. While further development and testing are necessary for clinical application, these initial findings demonstrate the potential utility of the lncRNA transcriptome for the development of novel biomarkers identifying aggressive micropapillary bladder cancer.

The retrospective nature and lack of a validation cohort are among the limitations of this study. Tumors with micropapillary histology are also rare, limiting the sample size for the development of a validated classifier, which limits the immediate clinical utility of this model for prospective validation studies.

## CONCLUSIONS

In summary, using the lncRNA transcriptome, we identified a subgroup aggressive T1 bladder cancer that was associated with micropapillary histology. Genomic analyses revealed significant downregulation of lncRNAs for micropapillary bladder cancer, a variant that is consistently classified as a luminal molecular subtype. These data demonstrate further utility in lncRNA transcriptome profiling for molecular bladder cancer classification.

## DATA AVAILABILITY

Gene expression data of the T1 cohort have been uploaded to GEO (GEO: GSE136401). The TCGA RNA-seq data was available as part of the TCGA research network (<http://cancergenome.nih.gov/>).

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

JJdJ, EAG, and JB designed the study. JJdJ performed gene expression analyses and classifier development, with suggestions from EAG and JB. JJdJ, EAG, and JB wrote the manuscript with feedback from all authors. JJdJ, EAG, JB, JP, and MA curated data for the study. All authors provided critical review and revisions, and all authors approved the final version of the manuscript for submission and publication. EAG and JB contributed equally. EAG and JB contributed equally, had full access to all the data in the study, and take responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Ewan Gibb is an employee of Veracyte, Inc. The remaining authors declare no competing interests.

## ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Informed consent was provided by each subject and the use of the tissue was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Hospital del Mar and Hospital Vall d'Hebron and all research complied with local ethics guidelines.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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**Correspondence** and requests for materials should be addressed to Ewan A. Gibb or Joaquim Bellmunt.

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