The LMCD1-AS1/miR-526b-3p/OSBPL5 axis promotes cell proliferation, migration and invasion in non-small cell lung cancer

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Abstract
Purpose: To explore the specific role and regulatory mechanism of oxysterol binding protein like 5 (OSBPL5) in non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC).

Methods and results: Quantitative real-time polymerase chain reaction (qRT-PCR) analysis demonstrated that OSBPL5 expression was notably elevated in NSCLC tissues and cell lines, and Kaplan–Meier analysis manifested that high OSBPL5 expression was closely related to the poor prognosis of NSCLC patients. Besides, according to the results from western blot analysis, cell counting kit-8, EdU and Transwell assays, knockdown of OSBPL5 suppressed NSCLC cell proliferation, migration and epithelial-mesenchymal transition (EMT) process. Additionally, by performing qRT-PCR analysis, luciferase reporter and RNA pull-down assays, we verified that OSBPL5 was a downstream target of miR-526b-3p and long noncoding RNA (lncRNA) LMCD1-AS1 served as a sponge for miR-526b-3p. Moreover, from rescue assays, we observed that OSBPL5 overexpression offset LMCD1-AS1 knockdown-mediated inhibition in cell proliferation, migration and EMT in NSCLC.

Conclusions: This paper was the first to probe the molecular regulatory mechanism of OSBPL5 involving the LMCD1-AS1/miR-526b-3p axis in NSCLC and our results revealed that the LMCD1-AS1/miR-526b-3p/OSBPL5 axis facilitates NSCLC cell proliferation, migration, invasion and EMT, which may offer a novel therapeutic direction for NSCLC.

Keywords: LMCD1-AS1, miR-526b-3p, OSBPL5, Non-small cell lung cancer

Introduction
Non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC), accounting for about 85% of all lung cancer cases, is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths worldwide [1]. Both epigenetic and genetic changes promote the occurrence, development and metastasis of NSCLC [2]. Although great advance has been made in treating this disease over the past decades, the average median survival time is still only 10 months and the long-term survival rate is far from satisfactory with the average 5-year-svival rate at 9% [3]. Thus, it is of great urgency to illuminate the molecular mechanism of NSCLC to improve its diagnosis and therapy.

Messenger RNAs (mRNAs), a kind of intracellular endogenous RNAs, can be translated into proteins and regulate the progression of tumors, including NSCLC [4, 5]. For example, MYB facilitates the growth and metastasis of salivary adenoid cystic carcinoma [6]. RB associated KRAB zinc finger (RBAK) is upregulated in NSCLC and accelerates cell migration and invasion [7]. Ribonucleotide reductase regulatory subunit M2 (RRM2) contributes to NSCLC development by promoting cell proliferation [8]. Oxysterol binding protein like 5 (OSBPL5), also known as OBPH1 or ORP5, has been reported to be associated with the development of some cancers [9–13].

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Importantly, previous research has shown that OSBPL5 exhibits a high expression level in lung cancer tissues and cells, and overexpressed OSBPL5 facilitates the invasive ability of lung cancer cells [10]. Accordingly, we predicted that OSBPL5 may exert an oncogenic role in NSCLC. In addition, it is confirmed that mRNAs can participate in the regulation of various diseases by serving as a downstream target of microRNAs (miRNAs) [14, 15]. OSBPL5 was reported to be targeted by miR-124-3p and miR-32-5p in transient cerebral ischemia [16]. However, the regulatory mechanism of OSBPL5 in cancers including NSCLC has rarely been investigated.

The purpose of this study was to illustrate the biological role and molecular regulatory mechanism of OSBPL5 in NSCLC. It was hypothesized that OSBPL5 might affect cell proliferation, migration, invasion and epithelial-mesenchymal transition (EMT) in NSCLC by interacting with other molecules. The results might provide a new research target for NSCLC treatment.

**Materials and methods**

**Tissue collection**

NSCLC tissues and adjacent noncancerous tissues were collected from 54 NSCLC patients at Shengli Oilfield Central Hospital (Shandong, China). These collected tissues were frozen in liquid nitrogen immediately and stored at −80 °C for follow-up experiments. Informed consent of this study was signed by all patients before surgery. Before the operation, these patients had received no chemotherapy or radiotherapy. The study conformed to the requirements of the Ethics Committee of Shengli Oilfield Central Hospital (Shandong, China). All experiments were performed in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations.

**Cell lines**

NSCLC cell lines (A549, H1975) and normal human bronchial epithelial cell line (16HBE) were obtained from the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC; USA). NSCLC cell lines (SPC-A1 and PC-9) were purchased from the Cell Bank of the Chinese Academy of Science (Shanghai, China). All cells were incubated in Dulbecco’s modified Eagle’s medium (DMEM; Gibco, USA) containing 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS; Gibco), 100 U/ml penicillin (Gibco) and 100 µg/ml streptomycin (Gibco) in a humidified atmosphere under 5% CO2 at 37 °C.

**Cell transfection**

Short hairpin RNAs (shRNAs) targeting LMCD1-AS1 (Sh-LMCD1-AS1) were transfected into A549, SPC-A1, H1975 and PC-9 cells to knock down LMCD1-AS1, and shRNAs targeting OSBPL5 (sh-OSBPL5#1 or sh-OSBPL5#2) were transfected into A549, SPC-A1, H1975 and PC-9 cells to knock down OSBPL5 with the sh-NC vector as a negative control. The pcDNA3.1/OSBPL5 vector was used to overexpress OSBPL5 in the four cell lines with the pcDNA3.1 empty vector as a negative control. MiR-526b-3p was overexpressed using miR-526b-3p mimics, with NC mimics as a negative control. All these synthesized plasmids were obtained from GenePharma (Shanghai, China). Plasmid transfection was conducted by Lipofectamine 3000 (Invitrogen, USA) according to the manufacturer’s recommendations. Cells were incubated for 24 h after transfection and then they were purified for subsequent assays.

**Western blot analysis**

Western blot analysis was performed in accordance with the previous description [17]. Specially, total protein was extracted from NSCLC cells (A549, SPC-A1, H1975 and PC-9) using TRIzol reagent (Invitrogen) with the manufacturer’s instructions. An extracted RNA was reverse transcribed into complementary DNA (cDNA) using cDNA Reverse Transcription Kit (Thermo Fisher Scientific, USA). Then, qRT-PCR was performed by using SYBR Premix Primer Eraser kit (Thermo Fisher Scientific) with GAPDH and U6 as the internal references. Relative expression levels of LMCD1-AS1, miR-526b-3p, and OSBPL5 were calculated using the 2−ΔΔCt method.

**Cell counting kit-8 (CCK-8) assay**

CCK-8 assay was conducted as previously described [18]. Briefly, the transfected cells were planted into 96-well plates at 37 °C. At 0, 24, 48 and 72 h after transfection,
10 µl CCK-8 reagent (Dojindo, Japan) was added to each well for 4-h incubation. Then a microplate reader (Bio-
Rad, USA) was used to measure absorbance at 450 nm.

5-Ethynyl-2′-deoxyuridine (EdU) assay
Cell proliferation was analyzed using the 5-ethyl-2′-
deoxyuridine (EdU) detection kit (Ribobio, Guangzhou,
China) following the manufacturer’s protocols. NSCLC
cells were seeded in 96-well plates for 48 h. Then, the
treated cells were cultured with 50 µM EdU labeling
medium for 2 h at 37 °C containing 5% CO2 and fixed by
4% paraformaldehyde. Afterwards, the cells were incubated
with 100 µl DAPI solution (Thermo Fisher Scien-
tific) at room temperature for 30 min and observed under
a fluorescent microscope (Olympus, Japan).

Transwell assay
To detect cell migration and invasion, Transwell assay
was performed as previously described [17]. The four
transfected cell lines were cultivated with serum-free
DMEM (Gibco) in the upper chambers (Millipore) with-
out or with Matrigel (BD Biosciences, USA) according
to the manufacturer’s instructions. DMEM (Gibco) sup-
plemented with 10% FBS (Gibco) was added to the lower
chambers and cultured at 37 °C with 5% CO2. After 48 h,
the cells on the lower membrane surfaces were fixed by
methanol and stained by crystal violet. Then, the number
of migrated or invaded cells was counted under the
Olympus microscope in five random fields.

Luciferase reporter assay
Luciferase reporter assay was conducted in line with the
previous description [49]. Putative binding site between
OSBPL5 and miR-526b-3p or miR-526b-3p and LMCD1-
AS1 was predicted in starBase (https://starbase.sysu.
edu.cn/index.php). In brief, the pmirGLO-OSBPL5-Wt
or pmirGLO-OSBPL5-Mut vectors were respectively co-
transfected with NC mimics or miR-526b-3p mimics into
A549, SPC-A1, H1975 and PC-9 cells. Kaplan–Meier analy-
sis was used to evaluate group differences. A prob-
ability analysis was performed to analyze clinical data.
Spearman’s correlation analysis was conducted for the
analysis of correlations among target genes. P < 0.05
was considered statistically significant.

Results
OSBPL5 is upregulated in NSCLC
First, qRT-PCR analysis was carried out to detect the
expression of OSBPL5 in NSCLC. As shown in Fig. 1A,
the expression level of OSBPL5 in NSCLC tissues was
higher than that in adjacent normal tissues. Additional-
ly, OSBPL5 expression exhibited an evident rise in
NSCLC cell lines (A549, SPC-A1, H1975 and PC-9) com-
pared with that in normal human bronchial epithe-

tial cell line (16HBE) (Fig. 1B). Kaplan–Meier analy-
sis indicated that NSCLC patients with high OSBPL5
expression had lower survival rate than those with low
OSBPL5 expression (Fig. 1C). Additionally, OSBPL5
expression in 100 NSCLC cell lines is displayed by data
from Cancer Cell Line Encyclopedia datasets (CCLE,
https://sites.broadinstitute.org/ccle) (Fig. 1D). In sum-
mary, OSBPL5 was upregulated in NSCLC tissues and
cell lines, and high OSBPL5 expression was closely
related to the poor prognosis of NSCLC patients.

Knockdown of OSBPL5 inhibits cell proliferation, migration
and invasion in NSCLC
Given that OSBPL5 was highly expressed in NSCLC,
we intended to explore the biological functions of
OSBPL5 underlying NSCLC progression. As shown by
qRT-PCR, OSBPL5 expression in A549, SPC-A1, H1975
and PC-9 cells was decreased after transfection
with sh-OSBPL5#1/2 vectors (Fig. 2A, Additional
file 1: Fig. S1A). The similar trend was observed in the
results of western blot analysis (Fig. 2B, Additional
file 1: Fig. S1B). Then, CCK-8 and EdU assays illustrated
that OSBPL5 knockdown inhibited the viability and
proliferation of NSCLC cells (Fig. 2C, D, Additional
file 1: Fig. S1C-D). Moreover, cell migration and inva-
sion were suppressed by OSBPL5 deficiency (Fig. 2E, F,
Additional file 1: Fig. S1E-F). Then, result from western
blot analysis demonstrated that OSBPL5 silence caused
an increase of E-cadherin and a decrease of N-cad-
herin and Vimentin in NSCLC cells (Fig. 2G, Addi-
tional file 1: Fig. S1G), suggesting OSBPL5 knockdown
impeded EMT process in NSCLC cells. In conclusion,
knockdown of OSBPL5 suppresses NSCLC cell proliferation, migration, invasion and EMT.

**OSBPL5 is a downstream target of miR-526b-3p**

MiRNAs can directly interact with their target mRNAs and lead to target gene silencing [20], so we then aimed to find the miRNA that targets OSBPL5 in NSCLC. By searching starBase database, we identified six candidate miRNAs which harbored binding sites on OSBPL5 (screening condition: Predicted Program: PicTar + microT; Pan-cancer: 8 cancer types) (Fig. 3A). Then, we measured the expressions of the six candidate miRNAs

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**Fig. 1** OSBPL5 is upregulated in NSCLC. **A, B** OSBPL5 expression in NSCLC tissues and adjacent normal tissues as well as in NSCLC cell lines (A549, SPC-A1, H1975 and PC-9) and normal human bronchial epithelial cell line (16HBE) was assessed by qRT-PCR. *P < 0.05 vs. Normal or 16HBE group. **C** The association between OSBPL5 expression and overall survival rate of NSCLC patients was measured by Kaplan–Meier analysis. **D** OSBPL5 expression in 100 NSCLC cell lines displayed by CCLE datasets.
in NSCLC tissues and adjacent normal tissues. The results demonstrated that four of the candidate miRNAs exhibited abnormal expression in NSCLC tissues: miR-526b-3p, miR-20a-5p, miR-93-5p, miR-17-5p; among them, miR-526b-3p, miR-20a-5p, miR-17-5p were downregulated in NSCLC tissues (Fig. 3B). Subsequently, qRT-PCR analysis revealed that the expression of OSBPL5 was significantly decreased in miR-526b-3p-overexpressed NSCLC cell lines, while that in miR-20a-5p or miR-17-5p-overexpressed cells was not significantly changed (Fig. 3C), so miR-526b-3p was selected for subsequent assays. Then, we found that miR-526b-3p expression was significantly downregulated in NSCLC cell lines (A549, SPC-A1, H1975 and PC-9) compared with that in normal human bronchial epithelial cell line (16HBE) (Fig. 3D). Subsequently, qRT-PCR analysis showed that miR-526b-3p was overexpressed by the introduction of miR-526b-3p mimics (Fig. 3E). In addition, the luciferase activity of the pmirGLO-OSBPL5-Wt reporter in miR-526b-3p mimics group was weaker than that in the NC mimics group, while the pmirGLO-OSBPL5-Mut reporter exerted no prominent change in the two groups (Fig. 3F), indicating that OSBPL5 could bind with miR-526b-3p. Additionally, we observed that overexpression of miR-526b-3p reduced the protein level of OSBPL5 (Fig. 3G). Moreover, Spearman’s correlation analysis confirmed that OSBPL5 expression was negatively correlated with miR-526b-3p expression in NSCLC tissues (Fig. 3H). In addition, knocking down OSBPL5 has no significant impact on the expression of miR-526b-3p in NSCLC cells (Fig. 3I). The results from western blot analysis revealed that overexpression of miR-526b-3p inhibited EMT process in NSCLC cells (Fig. 3J). In summary, OSBPL5 is a downstream target of miR-526b-3p in NSCLC cells.

**MiR-526b-3p is sponged by LMCD1-AS1**

As competing endogenous RNAs (ceRNAs), long non-coding RNAs (lncRNAs) can interact with miRNAs to modulate the expression of target genes, which is of great importance in the development of cancers [21–23]. From starBase, we found that 5 lncRNAs shared binding sites with miR-526b-3p (screening condition: CLIP Data: medium stringency (≥ 2); Pan-Cancer: 4 cancer types). Then, qRT-PCR analysis revealed that LMCD1-AS1 was significantly upregulated in NSCLC cell lines (A549, SPC-A1, H1975 and PC-9) (Fig. 4A). Therefore, LMCD1-AS1 was selected for the further experiments. Subsequently, luciferase reporter assay illustrated that miR-526b-3p mimics distinctly weakened the luciferase activity of the pmirGLO-LMCD1-AS1-Wt reporter but exerted no influence on that of the pmirGLO-LMCD1-AS1-Mut reporter (Fig. 4B), confirming the binding relation between miR-526b-3p and LMCD1-AS1. In addition, RNA pull-down assay displayed that a large amount of LMCD1-AS1 was pulled down by the bio-miR-526b-3p-Wt, which further validated that miR-526b-3p could directly bind with LMCD1-AS1 (Fig. 4C). Moreover, Spearman’s correlation analysis demonstrated that LMCD1-AS1 expression was negatively correlated with miR-526b-3p expression, while LMCD1-AS1 expression was positively correlated with OSBPL5 expression in NSCLC tissues (Fig. 4D). Hence, LMCD1-AS1 acts as a sponge for miR-526b-3p in NSCLC cells.

**LMCD1-AS1 accelerates NSCLC cell proliferation, migration and invasion via the regulation of OSBPL5**

To explore whether LMCD1-AS1 could accelerate NSCLC cell proliferation, migration and invasion through the regulation of OSBPL5, we performed rescue assays. In the first place, we found that OSBPL5 mRNA and protein levels were decreased under sh-LMCD1-AS1 transfection, but pcDNA3.1/OSBPL5 alleviated such decrease in NSCLC cells (Fig. 5A, Additional file 1: Figs. S2A, S3A-B). Moreover, the upregulation of OSBPL5 reversed the inhibitory influence of LMCD1-AS1 depletion on NSCLC cell migration and invasion, as displayed by Transwell assays (Fig. 5D, E, Additional file 1: Figs. S2D-E, S3E-F). Consistently, OSBPL5 upregulation offset LMCD1-AS1 downregulation-mediated suppression in EMT process (Fig. 5F, Additional file 1: Figs. S2F, S3G). Overall, OSBPL5 overexpression offset LMCD1-AS1 depletion-induced inhibitory effect on cell proliferation, migration, invasion and EMT in NSCLC.
Fig. 2 (See legend on previous page.)
Discussion
NSCLC is one of the most fatal malignancies with unfavorable prognosis [24]. Previous evidence shows that OSBPL5 is involved in the regulation of several cancers [9–13]. Importantly, OSBPL5 overexpression facilitates cell invasion in lung cancer [10]. However, the specific role and potential regulatory mechanism of OSBPL5 in NSCLC remain to be further clarified. This paper validated that OSBPL5 was prominently upregulated in NSCLC tissues and cell lines, and high OSBPL5 expression was strongly related to the poor prognosis of NSCLC patients. Additionally, OSBPL5 was proved to enhance cell proliferation, migration, invasion and EMT in NSCLC.

MiRNAs, short non-coding RNA molecules with approximately 22 nucleotides, can target mRNAs to regulate gene or protein expression; they are proved to be involved in many biological processes of cancers [25, 26]. For example, upregulation of miRNA-143 impedes cell proliferation by inhibiting glucose uptake in colon cancer [27]. MiRNA-96-5p suppresses the proliferation and migration of gastric cancer cells through targeting Fox22 [28]. Especially, some miRNAs are implicated in the development of NSCLC by targeting mRNAs. MiR-143 suppresses NSCLC progression through modulating MDM2 [29]. MiR-425 regulates NSCLC cell proliferation, migration, and apoptosis via targeting AMPH-1 [30]. Previous studies have shown that as a tumor suppressor, miR-526b-3p restrains cell proliferation, invasion, and migration of glioma through targeting WEE1 as well as impedes the development of colon cancer by regulating HIF-1α [31, 32]. However, the role of miR-526b-3p in NSCLC has never been investigated. In this study, miR-526b-3p was found to target OSBPL5 in NSCLC cells. Moreover, we verified that miR-526b-3p bound with and inversely regulated OSBPL5 in NSCLC. Overexpression of miR-526b-3p could inhibit EMT of NSCLC cells, confirming that miR-526b-3p might also be a tumor suppressor in NSCLC.

LncRNAs are long RNA molecules with more than 200 nucleotides and without protein-coding ability; they are considered as the main part of ceRNA network because they regulate the expression of protein-coding genes by acting as miRNA sponges, playing significant roles in the biological processes of cancers, including NSCLC [33, 34]. For example, LncRNA UCA1 facilitates cell growth and invasion through the miR-706/CLOCK axis in glioma [35]. LINCO0958 accelerates NSCLC cell proliferation and migration through the JNK/NNN signaling [36]. LMCD1-AS1 was proved to play a pro-cancer role in many tumors. LMCD1-AS1 serves as a ceRNA for miR-106b-5p to promote osteosarcoma development [37]. LMCD1-AS1 promotes cholangiocarcinoma cell progression via modulating the miR-345-5p/COL6A3 axis [38]. LMCD1-AS1 sponges let-7 g to facilitate tumor growth and collagen deposition in hepatocellular carcinoma [39]. In the present study, we confirmed that LMCD1-AS1 absorbed miR-526b-3p in NSCLC. Moreover, LMCD1-AS1 deficiency inhibited NSCLC cell proliferation, migration and invasion. Moreover, rescue assays presented that OSBPL5 overexpression rescued LMCD1-AS1 silencing-mediated inhibition in the proliferation, migration and invasion of NSCLC cells.

In conclusion, the paper elucidated that the LMCD1-AS1/miR-526b-3p/OSBPL5 axis exerted great influence on NSCLC cell proliferation, migration and invasion, which may provide a novel perspective in the treatment of NSCLC. However, there are some limitations in this study. Epidermal growth factor receptor tyrosine kinase inhibitors (EGFR-TKIs) are the standard of care for advanced NSCLC patients, however, most patients tend to develop resistance [40]. It was not investigated whether the LMCD1-AS1/miR-526b-3p/OSBPL5 axis has an effect on drug resistance in NSCLC in the present study; more studies are needed in the future for a better understanding of OSBPL5 role in NSCLC. Moreover, other lncRNAs including HLA complex P5 (HCP5) that can interact with miR-526b-5p and are differentially expressed in some NSCLC cells need further investigation in the future.
Fig. 3 (See legend on previous page.)
Fig. 4  MiR-526b-3p is sponged by LMCD1-AS1. A The potential miR-526b-3p-binding lncRNA was identified by starBase database and qRT-PCR. *P < 0.05 vs. 16HBE group. B, C The binding ability between miR-526b-3p and LMCD1-AS1 was confirmed by luciferase reporter and RNA pull-down assays. *P < 0.05 vs. NC mimics or Bio-NC group. D The correlation between miR-526b-3p and LMCD1-AS1 as well as OSBPL5 and LMCD1-AS1 was probed by Spearman’s correlation analysis.

Fig. 5  LMCD1-AS1 accelerates NSCLC cell proliferation, migration and invasion through the regulation of OSBPL5. A The mRNA and protein levels of OSBPL5 in NSCLC cells were tested by qRT-PCR and western blot analyses. *P < 0.05. B, C Cell viability and proliferation in A549 cells after transfection of sh-NC, sh-LMCD1-AS1, or sh-LMCD1-AS1 + pcDNA3.1 OSBPL5 was measured by CCK-8 and EdU assays, respectively. *P < 0.05. D, E Cell migration and invasion in A549 cells after transfection of indicated plasmids were evaluated by Transwell assays. *P < 0.05. F EMT process-associated protein (E-cadherin, N-cadherin and Vimentin) expressions in A549 cells in the three groups were detected by western blot analysis. *P < 0.05.
Fig. 5 (See legend on previous page.)
Supplementary Information

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Additional file 1: Supplementary Figure S1–S3.

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Authors’ contributions

All authors participated in the literature search, analysis and interpretation of the data, and the writing of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

All data from this study are available in this published article.

Code availability

Not applicable.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. The study complied with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Ethics Committee of Shengli Oilfield Central Hospital.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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