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Allele-Specific DNA Methylation and Its Interplay with Repressive Histone Marks at Promoter-Mutant TERT Genes

Graphical Abstract

- Mutant TERT promoters maintain lower 5-methyl-cytosine
- Methyl-cytosine promotes PRC2 binding

In Brief

The promoter for a telomerase gene (TERT) is the third most frequently mutated site in cancer. These mutations drive unusual expression of TERT from a single allele, allowing unceasing cell division. Stern et al. identify modifications of the promoter that appear to collaborate to maintain this expression pattern in these cancers.

Highlights

- Promoter mutant TERT genes show allele-specific DNA hypomethylation
- This is opposite to the situation in cancers without TERT promoter mutations
- Methyl-CpG enhances PRC2 binding, suggesting causal link to histone methylation
- TERT CpG island methylation correlates with patient survival in several cancers

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Allele-Specific DNA Methylation and Its Interplay with Repressive Histone Marks at Promoter-Mutant TERT Genes

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SUMMARY

A mutation in the promoter of the Telomerase Reverse Transcriptase (TERT) gene is the most frequent noncoding mutation in cancer. The mutation drives unusual monoallelic expression of TERT, allowing immortalization. Here, we find that DNA methylation of the TERT CpG island (CGI) is also allele-specific in multiple cancers. The expressed allele is hypomethylated, which is opposite to cancers without TERT promoter mutations. The continued presence of Polycomb repressive complex 2 (PRC2) on the inactive allele suggests that histone marks of repressed chromatin may be causally linked to high DNA methylation. Consistent with this hypothesis, TERT promoter DNA containing 5-methyl-CpG has much increased affinity for PRC2 in vitro. Thus, CpG methylation and histone marks appear to collaborate to maintain the two TERT alleles in different epigenetic states in TERT promoter mutant cancers. Finally, in several cancers, DNA methylation levels at the TERT CGI correlate with altered patient survival.

INTRODUCTION

TERT encodes the catalytic subunit of telomerase, the ribonucleoprotein complex that maintains telomere length in stem cells and most cancer cells (Counter et al., 1992). Multiple cancers show unusual monoallelic activation of TERT by the de novo acquisition of a C > T transition on one TERT promoter (Horn et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2013, 2015; Killela et al., 2013; Stern et al., 2015). These mutations occur at −124 (occasionally at −146) bp from the translational start site and provide a new binding site for the GABPA/B1 transcription factor; the transcriptionally inactive TERT promoter in the same cell bears the H3K27me3 repressive mark (Bell et al., 2015; Stern et al., 2015). In many other cancers, TERT is expressed biallelically or monoallelically by molecular mechanisms that remain poorly understood (Huang et al., 2015).

In addition to H3K27me3, 5-methyl-lysine (5mC) at CpG dinucleotides is a canonical epigenetic mark of transcriptional silencing (Baylin et al., 1998; Herman, 1999; Herman et al., 1998; Laird and Jaenisch, 1996; Merlo et al., 1995). Here, however, the TERT gene has been an outlier. TERT expression in most previously studied cancers is associated with increased 5mC in the TERT promoter CpG island (CGI) (Barthel et al., 2017; Dessain et al., 2000; Deveraux et al., 1999). Thus, in these cancers, TERT transcription occurs despite this gain of 5mC. To explore this non-canonical relationship with 5mC in more detail, we chose to study cancers with heterozygous −124 mutations, capitalizing on the fact that these cells contain TERT alleles maintained in different transcriptional states. We reasoned that, if TERT CGI methylation was a positive regulator of TERT mRNA expression in these cells as suggested by previous studies (e.g., Barthel et al., 2017), we should observe higher levels of 5mC on the active promoter mutant allele.

Contrary to this expectation, our results indicate that 5mC levels at the TERT promoter in cancers with heterozygous −124 mutations are maintained at lower levels on the active allele than on the transcriptionally silent allele. This finding is consistent with the canonical influence of 5mC on transcription. Thus, TERT promoters with −124 mutations exhibit divergent regulatory dynamics compared to those with wild-type (WT) promoters. We find that the EZH2 subunit of PRC2, the enzyme responsible for deposition of H3K27me3, resides at the inactive TERT allele. Testing for a causal relationship between DNA methylation and histone methylation, we show that PRC2 displays a strong binding preference for methylated TERT promoter DNA in vitro. This suggests a regulatory circuit, wherein low 5mC discourages PRC2 binding on active TERT alleles in these −124 cancers.

RESULTS

Distinct 5mC Levels at the TERT CGI in −124 Cancers

The TERT promoter contains a CGI that is methylated in cancer, and the entire feature extends from near chromosome (chr)
We first studied 5mC levels in the promoter region of the TERT CGI using ENCODE reduced representation bisulfite sequencing (RRBS) data generated on a wide variety of primary cells and tumor-derived cell lines (Figures 1A and 1B; Table S1A). We observed a nearly uniform lack of methylation in this region of the TERT CGI in primary cells (e.g., fibroblasts, BJ cells, IMR90) (Figure 1B). In contrast, a nearly uniform gain of 5mC characterized the tumor-derived lines. Upon closer examination, it appeared that the three cell lines with /C0 124 mutations (HepG2, U87 MG, and SK-N-SH) exhibited intermediate or low levels of methylation at cg11625005 (Figure 1B). We then examined unpublished RRBS data for 55 tumor-derived cell lines with /C0 124 or /C0 146 mutations in the Cancer Cell Line Encyclopedia (CCLE) and compared them with 207 cell lines lacking TERT promoter mutations (Figures 1C and S1). These cell lines were derived from a very broad range of cancer types (Table S1B). The data indicate that the average level of 5mC is significantly lower in the lines with mutated TERT promoters starting from around −220 bp upstream of the TERT ATG through −700 bp and significantly higher within exon 1 (+109 to +145; Figure 1C; Table S2).

Some cancer cell lines show monoallelic expression (MAE) of TERT even in the absence of promoter mutations (Huang et al., 2015). This phenotype suggested that the epigenetic conditions that facilitate TERT expression in these cells might be distinct from those with WT promoters that express TERT biallelically or cancers with promoter mutations. Therefore, we examined DNA methylation in 16 cell lines with MAE and found methylation levels resembling the WT cell lines at many nucleotide positions (Figures 1C and S1). At two positions (−290 to −271 and +109 to +145), however, the MAE cells converged with the epigenotype of TERT promoter mutants, suggesting that these positions may be important for monoallelic expression.

To assess whether patient tumor samples in The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA) recapitulated the observed reduction in methylation in the TERT CGI seen in these promoter mutant cell lines, we combined −124 genomic profiling with TERT promoter 5mC from the Illumina Infinium HumanMethylation450 BeadChip array at cg11625005 (a specific CpG dinucleotide at −634). We compared patient tumor samples with −124 mutations to samples without mutations in cutaneous melanoma, liver cancer, and bladder cancer. Despite the Infinium array data comprising both active and inactive alleles, we detected significantly reduced levels of methylation at cg11625005 in −124 tumors (Figure S2). Thyroid cancer and lower grade glioma did not display the same relationship between 5mC and
the −124 mutation, although both of these tumor types exhibited conspicuously low TERT mRNA, and thyroid cancer also displayed overall anomalously low levels of DNA methylation (Figure S2B).

**Higher TERT Transcription in Bladder Cancer Cell Lines Associates with Reduced 5mC in the TERT CGI**

The aforementioned data indicate that both −124 mutant tumors and −124 cell lines exhibit distinct methylation patterns at the TERT CGI, compared to tumors and cell lines with WT promoters. Given the importance of promoter DNA methylation in regulating transcription, we measured TERT CGI methylation and transcription in a panel of related −124 mutant bladder cancer cell lines. T24 bladder carcinoma cells are a non-metastatic-tumor-derived cell line; T24T is a metastatic relative of T24 and was subsequently passaged in mice to obtain the metastatic lines FL3 and SLT4 (Gildea et al., 2000, 2002). Bisulfite sequencing analysis indicated that T24 exhibited the highest level of 5mC at the TERT CGI, while the other three lines exhibited decreased levels of 5mC at specific CpG dinucleotides (Figures 2A and S3A). T24 expresses low levels of the telomerase enzyme, while FL3, SLT4, and T24T express much higher levels (Borah et al., 2015). We assessed the level of TERT mRNA in these cells and found that the levels were highest in the metastatic derivative lines (Figure 2B). Thus, levels of 5mC at this locus are negatively correlated with TERT mRNA expression in this series of related bladder cancer lines.
Reduced 5mC Characterizes the 124 Mutant TERT Alleles

Because the levels of 5mC described in the previous datasets are a composite of both transcriptionally active and inactive alleles, we considered the possibility that tumor-derived 124 cells may have allele-specific reduction of methylation. To isolate the active alleles for bisulfite sequencing analysis, we used chromatin immuno-noprecipitation (ChIP) using anti-H3K4me2/3 antibodies (Stern et al., 2015) in six 124 cell lines. DNA fragments isolated by ChIP were subjected to bisulfite sequencing. Bisulfite conversion results in the transition of cytosine to thymine only in the absence of 5mC; methylated cytosines are protected from this chemical reaction. Therefore, for each nucleotide position, the level of 5mC in ChIP samples relative to input samples can be assessed by quantifying the peak height of unconverted cytosine relative to thymine. For each sequencing sample, the bisulfite conversion was efficient, as assessed by the complete conversion of neighboring non-CpG cytosines. Quantification of these data across the six cell lines revealed that the H3K4me2/3-associated active alleles commonly exhibited lower levels of CpG methylation at many positions in the TERT CGI (Figures 2C, 2D, and S3C). Note that these results are opposite to the expectation from the literature of increased TERT gene expression correlating with high CpG methylation in other cell types (Barthel et al., 2017; Guilleret and Benhattar, 2004), but they are consistent with our data on the four related bladder cancer lines (Figures 2A and 2B). To provide additional confidence in this conclusion, we cloned the PCR products from four cell lines from input and H3K4me2/3 ChIP products (Figure S3D). The observation of higher methylation in the input samples than in the ChIP samples supports our conclusion that reduced methylation characterizes the transcribed alleles in these heterozygous cell lines.

EZH2 Is Preferentially Associated with the Silent TERT Allele

Previously, we have described that transcriptionally inactive alleles in cancers with 124 mutations bear the H3K27me3 histone mark (Stern et al., 2015), which is one of the two canonical histone marks of repressive chromatin. The enzyme responsible for the deposition of H3K27me3, enhancer of zeste homolog 2 (EZH2), is the catalytic subunit of the PRC2 complex. To test whether EZH2 exhibited allele-specific recruitment at TERT, we performed ChIP using antibodies directed against histone marks or EZH2, followed by DNA purification, PCR, and Sanger sequencing. While DNA purified from chromatin prior to ChIP displayed both alleles in sequencing traces, ChIP for both H3K27me3 and EZH2 exhibited enrichment for the CCCTCC sequence (Figures 3A and 3B) diagnostic of the silent allele. Thus, in these cells at this locus, PRC2 exhibits a preference for occupying the inactive TERT allele. The second major histone mark of repressive chromatin, tri-methylated H3K9, can co-occur with H3K27me3 (Mozzetta et al., 2015). Allele-specific ChIP using antibodies against H3K9me3 showed that it was also enriched on the inactive WT TERT promoter in these cells (Figure 3B). Therefore, the inactive TERT promoter is the target of both PRC2 and the enzymes responsible for deposition of H3K9me3, such as G9a, SetDB1, and SUV39H1 and –H2 (Greer and Shi, 2012).

Because cell lines with WT TERT promoters typically exhibit much higher levels of 5mC at the promoter (Figure 1B), we tested whether this might correlate with relatively higher levels of EZH2 recruitment. Therefore, we performed EZH2 ChIP in three lines with WT promoters: HeLa, SNU-449, and HEK293T. In addition, since the heterozygous liver cancer cell line HepG2 displays relatively higher levels of 5mC for a TERT promoter mutant line, we also tested EZH2 occupancy in this line. Each of these lines displayed relatively high levels of EZH2 at the TERT promoter (Figure S4B), compared to the heterozygous lines (Figure 3C). To further test the relationship between EZH2 and 5mC, we analyzed ENCODE ChIP-seq data for HepG2, for which 5mC data are also available (Figure S4C). These data indicate that both 5mC and EZH2 levels are higher in the 5’ region of the TERT CGI, while levels of both are reduced near the TERT transcription start site (TSS). Because the active allele in HepG2 cells is likely to contribute relatively little signal to these ChIP-seq data, and as we have demonstrated that in heterozygous lines the active allele is hypomethylated, we conclude that the levels of 5mC and EZH2 are correlated at this locus in this liver cancer cell line.

5mC Enhances PRC2 Binding to TERT Promoter DNA In Vitro

Given that the inactive TERT allele in the 124 mutant cells accumulates both 5mC and H3K27me3, as well as EZH2, we hypothesized that a functional relationship may exist between these marks of inactive chromatin. Indeed, a number of studies have addressed the relationship between DNA methylation and repressive histone marks (Bartke et al., 2010; Lynch et al., 2012). Therefore, we tested whether 5mC modification of DNA affects PRC2 binding in vitro. We purified a recombinant human five-protein PRC2 complex (EZH2, SUZ12, EED, RBBP4, and AEBP2; Figure S4A) and used electrophoretic mobility shift assays (EMSA) to test its ability to bind to either a fully unmethylated or a fully methylated TERT CGI DNA. PRC2 displayed ~30-fold higher affinity to the 5mC-modified region of the TERT promoter over the unmethylated DNA (Figures 3D and 3E). These data suggest a positive feedback relationship whereby reduced 5mC methylation at an active TERT locus may discourage PRC2 recruitment.

5mC Levels at the TERT CGI Associate with Patient Survival in Multiple Cancers

Methylation levels at cg11625005 are negatively correlated with patient survival in some cancers (Castelo-Branco et al., 2013, 2016; Gojo et al., 2017). Therefore, we analyzed overall survival (OS) with respect to methylation and TERT promoter mutation in patient samples for a range of cancers within the TCGA. We first analyzed the data for cutaneous melanoma (SKCM) and found that samples with cg11625005 methylation beta values ≥ 0.75 showed a trend toward poorer survival, with borderline statistical significance (p = 0.058) (Figure 4). Therefore, we analyzed the remaining cancer types using this threshold. These analyses revealed that, in hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) (liver hepatocellular carcinoma [LIHC], in which 124 mutations are common) and kidney renal papillary cell carcinoma (KIRC, in which 124 mutations are uncommon),
patients with methylation above 0.75 at cg11625005 had significantly poorer overall survival. In contrast, patients with stomach adenocarcinoma (STAD; in which /C0124 mutations are uncommon) exhibited significantly better survival (Figure 4).

STAD not only exhibited an opposite relationship between 5mC and survival compared to LIHC and KIRP, but also had an opposite relationship between EZH2 expression levels and overall survival (Figure S4D). These data suggest that the processes underlying TERT CGI hypermethylation and genome-wide activity of PRC2 may be linked and are indicative of altered patient survival in these cancers.

DISCUSSION

A key question in understanding the indefinite proliferation of cancer cells is how they regulate the expression of their telomere maintenance machinery. Most cancers activate TERT expression, either biallelically through poorly understood mechanisms or monoallelically, driven in many cases by heterozygous promoter mutations. Here, we find that a major arm of epigenetic gene regulation, CpG methylation, exhibits opposing dynamics in cancers with heterozygous –124 mutations compared to cancers with WT TERT promoters. Thus, the machinery maintaining the immortal phenotype in these two classes of cancers is distinct. Reduced 5mC in the TERT promoter has been reported previously for isolated subtypes of cancers with –124 mutations (Fan et al., 2016; Lindsey et al., 2014), although the allele specificity of 5mC has not previously been reported. Our analyses of large datasets of clinical samples broaden these findings to numerous cancers across many tissue types and provide a mechanistic rationale for how DNA methylation may affect TERT gene silencing in –124 cancers.

Cancers with heterozygous –124 mutations also exhibit allele-specific deposition of H3K27me3 by EZH2/PRC2, as well as deposition of H3K9me3 (Figure 3B). Intriguingly, there is a direct mechanistic relationship between H3K9me3 and the enzymatic machinery responsible for the 5mC modification (Cedar and Bergman, 2009; Epsztejn-Litman et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2013; McGarvey et al., 2006; Rose and Klose, 2014; Rothbart et al., 2012, 2013; Schübeler, 2015; Smith and Meissner, 2013) suggesting that the presence of H3K9me3 on the inactive allele could promote the accumulation of 5mC at the TERT promoter.

Repression facilitated by EZH2/PRC2 at the TERT locus may also be directly linked to CpG methylation (Figure 3), with the specificity for 5mC possibly conferred by the AEBP2 subunit of PRC2 (Wang et al., 2017). Preferential PRC2 binding to methylated TERT CGI DNA is likely to be
locus dependent, because, in other cases, PRC2 has been found to bind unmethylated CpG-rich chromatin (Bartke et al., 2010; Lynch et al., 2012). Factors other than CpG methylation certainly affect the level of PRC2 occupancy at any given locus in vivo.

Our data reveal that cell lines with MAE expression exhibit 5mC levels similar to that of WT TERT promoters at many CpG positions, but at specific loci (−290 to −271 and +109 to +145), they closely resemble TERT promoter mutants. The higher level of methylation within exon 1 (+109 to +145) for cells expressing TERT monoallelically (with or without promoter mutations) may represent a mechanism to increase the fidelity of transcription initiation (Maunakea et al., 2010; Neri et al., 2017), perhaps to more efficiently utilize their single active TERT allele.

The association between 5mC levels at the TERT promoter and either poorer overall survival in liver cancer and kidney renal papillary cell carcinoma or significantly improved overall survival in patients with stomach adenocarcinoma, suggests that these epigenotypes may be relevant to cancer progression. Association between higher methylation at cg11625005 and poorer patient survival has been previously reported (Castelo-Branco et al., 2013, 2016; Gojo et al., 2017; Seynnaeve et al., 2017); our results extend these findings to two additional cancer types, suggesting that hypermethylation of the TERT promoter may represent a broadly applicable prognostic marker.

The mechanisms driving survival in these patients may be distinct.

In conclusion, we find that TERT promoters in cancers with −124 mutations exhibit allele-specific chromatin and DNA modifications that differ from those on active TERT genes in cancers with WT promoters. These findings implicate multiple mechanisms by which cancers reactivate or maintain TERT expression to achieve telomere maintenance and immortalization. Such information may be clinically relevant, because inhibitors for both 5mC deposition and EZH2 are being developed for cancer therapy (Pfister and Ashworth, 2017).

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

Further details and an outline of resources used in this work can be found in the Supplemental Experimental Procedures.

Statistical Methods

For CCLE samples, comparisons were made using the Wilcoxon rank-sum test. The cg11625005 survival analysis was done using the survival R package (Therneau and Grambsch, 2000) (https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/survival/citation.html). Patients were stratified based on a cg11625005 methylation beta value threshold of 0.75, and differences between the survival curves of the stratified patient groups were tested using the log-rank test. The 5mC:C ratios in H3K4me2/3 ChIP of −124 samples were log transformed and compared using a single-sample t test against a hypothetical mean of 1. For this analysis, the n was the number of CpGs tested (18) in the TERT CGI.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Supplemental Information includes Supplemental Experimental Procedures, four figures, and two tables and can be found with this article online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.celrep.2017.12.001.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS
J.L.S. designed and performed allele-specific ChIP experiments. J.L.S. and R.D.P. designed and R.D.P. performed PRC2 binding experiments. J.L.S. designed and R.N. performed experiments related to T24 lines. J.L.S. and J.C.C. designed and J.C.C. performed TCGA analyses. F.W.H. and M.G. designed and analyzed CCLE data. J.L.S. and T.R.C. wrote the manuscript.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS
T.R.C. is on the board of directors of Merck.

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Supplemental Information

Allele-Specific DNA Methylation and Its Interplay with Repressive Histone Marks at Promoter-Mutant TERT Genes

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# Supplemental Experimental Procedures

## RESOURCE TABLE

| REAGENT or RESOURCE | SOURCE | IDENTIFIER |
|---------------------|--------|------------|
| **Antibodies**      |        |            |
| H3K4me2/3           | Abcam  | ab-6000    |
| H3K27me3            | EMD Millipore | 07-449   |
| EZH2                | Active Motif | ac22     |
| H3K9me3             | EMD Millipore | 07-442   |
| IgG control         | EMD Millipore | 12-370   |
| **Critical Commercial Assays** |        |            |
| EZ DNA methylation-Gold Kit | Zymo Research | D5005   |
| IQ SYBR Green Supermix | Biorad    | 1708880   |
| 7-Deaza-2'-deoxy-guanosine-5'-triphosphate | Roche | 10988537001 |
| SYBRselect          | ThermoFisher | 4472919  |
| pGEM®-T Easy Vector | Promega | A1360     |
| Superscript III     | ThermoFisher | 18080-044 |
| **Experimental Models: Cell Lines** |        |            |
| SNU-475             | ATCC   | CRL-2236   |
| SNU-423             | ATCC   | CRL-2238   |
| Human fibroblasts   | ATCC   | PCS-201-012 |
| WM793               | Wistar Institute | WM793 |
| HepG2               | ATCC   | HB-8065    |
| U87MG, SK-N-SH, SCaBER, T24 and related lines | University of Colorado, Anschutz Cancer Center Protein Production Shared Resource | U87MG, SCaBER, T24, T24T, FL3, SLT4 |

See Table S1 for CCLE cell lines.

## Oligonucleotides

| Oligonucleotides | Source | Identifier |
|------------------|--------|------------|
| Bisulfite TERT CGI Forward 5'-TTTGAGAATTGTAAAGAGAAATGA-3' | IDT | |
| Bisulfite TERT CGI Reverse 5'-AATATAAAAACCTAAACAAATAC-3' | IDT | |
| Bisulfite CpG 1-8 sequencing 5'-AAACTAAAAAATACAAAAAAAAC-3' | IDT | |
| Bisulfite CpG 9-18 sequencing 5'-ATATAAAAACCTAAACAAATAC-3' | IDT | |
| EMSA top strand 5'-AATGCGTCTCGGTTGTCGCCAGGCGTCCTACGCGCCTCCGTCCT-3' | IDT | |
| EMSA bottom 5'-AGGACGGAGGCAGGTAGACGGGCTGGGAGAAGCCGAGGAGCATT-3' | IDT | |
| TERT Exon 14 Foward 5'-CATTTTCATCAGCAAGTTGGAAG-3' | IDT | |
| TERT Exon 14 Reverse 5'-TTTCAGGATGAGATGAGAGGAG-3' | IDT | |
| Random Hexamer | ThermoFisher | N8080127 |
| qPCR primer spanning cg11625005 Forward 5'-CTGTTGTCAGGAGCCTAAAGT-3' | IDT | |
| qPCR primer spanning cg11625005 Reverse 5'-CTGGCCTGATCCCGGAGAC-3' | IDT | |
| qPCR primer between cg11625005 and -124 mutation Forward 5'-CGTCCTCCCCCTTCACGT-3' | IDT | |
ChIP was performed as previously described (Stern et al., 2015). For immunoprecipitation, 5-25 μg of solubilized chromatin was used with 2-4 μg of α-H3K4me2/3 (Abcam, ab-6000), α-H3K27me3 (EMD Millipore, 07-449), α-EZH2 (ac22) (Active Motif), α -H3K9me3 (07-442, EMD Millipore) or a non-specific IgG control (12-370, EMD Millipore) of equal mass, and nutated overnight at 4°C. Protein G/Protein A agarose beads (IP05-1.5 mL, EMD Millipore Corporation) were added for three hours and then treated as previously described (Stern et al., 2015). Bisulfite conversion of ChIP-purified material was performed using the EZ DNA Methylation-Gold Kit (D5005, Zymo).

CCLE Methylation Analysis
Cell lines from the CCLE underwent reduced RRBS as previously described (Landau et al., 2014). RNAseq data and TERT promoter mutations were annotated as previously described (Huang et al., 2015). A total of 278 lines were analyzed for which the TERT promoter mutation status, RNAseq data, and methylation data at the TERT locus were determined.

EMSA and PRC2-5mC-DNA Binding
5mC substituted DNA was synthesized by Integrated DNA technologies. All DNA substrates were radiolabeled using T4 PNK (NEB M0201L) by standard protocol. Stock PRC2 was diluted in binding buffer and added to radiolabeled DNA. The binding reaction was carried out for 30 min at 30°C, followed by loading samples onto non-denaturing 1.0% native agarose gel (Fisher BP160-100) buffered with TRIS/borate/EDTA (TBE) at 4°C. Dried gels were exposed to phosphorimaging plates, which were scanned using a Typhoon Trio phosphorimager (GE Healthcare) for signal acquisition. Gel analysis was carried out with ImageQuant software (GE Healthcare) and data fitted to a sigmoidal binding curve using MATLAB (MathWorks).

Cell Culture
SNU-423, SNU-475, HepG2 were obtained from American Type Culture Collection. U87MG, SK-N-SH, SCaBER, T24, T24T, FL3, SLT4, obtained from the University of Colorado, Anschutz, Tissue Culture Shared Resource. WM793 cells were obtained from S. Spencer at the University of Colorado, Boulder. All cells were cultured in DMEM (VWR Scientific) with
2mM GlutaminePlus (Atlanta Biologicals), 10% FBS (Thermo Fisher), 2 mM GlutaMAX-I (GIBCO), 100 units/ml penicillin and 100 mg/ml streptomycin (GIBCO) and 1mM sodium pyruvate (GIBCO), except U87MG and HepG2 cells were cultured in EMEM (American Type Culture Collection) plus serum and glutamax, but without sodium pyruvate.

RNA Extraction and cDNA Preparation

Following RNA extraction with Trizol (Life Technologies), reverse transcription was performed by treating of 10 μg of RNA with 5 U of RQ1 DNase (Promega) according to the manufacturer’s protocol, followed by phenol extraction (pH 7), chloroform:isoamyl alcohol extraction, and then ethanol precipitation. The cDNA was generated from 2 μg of RNA synthesized using random hexamers, oligo(dT) 20-mer, and SuperScript III (Life Technologies). Following treatment with RNase H (New England Biolabs) quantitative PCR was performed with either SybrSelect (Thermo Fisher) or iQ SYBR Green (Bio-Rad) PCR mix using a Roche LightCycler 480 with the program 10 min at 98°C, 30 sec at 95°C, 30 sec at 60°C, 30 sec at 72°C, and 5 min at 72°C, followed by quantification using the Roche LightCycler 480 software. Melt curve analyses were examined to ensure the uniformity of relevant PCR amplicons and all PCR amplicons were sequenced at least once to confirm the product identity. Primers for TERT mRNA exon 2 were forward 5’-CGTGGTTTCTGTGTGGTGC-3’ and reverse 5’-CCTTGTCGCCCTGAGGAGTAG-3’; and exon 14 were those previously described (Borah et al., 2015).

TERT CpG island coordinates were assessed using the UCSC Genome Browser bona fide CpG island data (Bock et al., 2007). This CGI island is commonly analyzed using the Infinium 450K BeadChip methylation arrays from Illumina which contains a probe (cg11625005) for this region that is designed to hybridized to the 50 bases preceding the chr5:1295737 (HG19). This probe on the Infinium arrays reports on the methylation status of this CpG dinucleotide.

Bisulfite ChIP Analysis

PCR with bisulfite converted samples was performed using BioRad iQ SYBR Green PCR mix using the program: 10 min at 95°C, followed by 17 step-down cycles of 1 min at 95°C, 1 min at 70°C–54°C, and 2 min at 72°C; 30 cycles of 1 min at 95°C, 1 min at 56°C, and 2 min at 72°C; and 10 min at 72°C. Temperature ramp rates for primer annealing were 1°C/min and extension at 2°C/min. Bisulfite primer sequences for amplifying the region of the TERT CGI were designed using MethPrimer (http://www.urogene.org/cgi-bin/methprimer/methprimer.cgi) and were forward 5’-TTTGAAGTTTGGTAAAAGAAGAATGA-3’; reverse 5’-AATATAAAAAACCTAAAAAACATAC-3’; and sequenced using 5’-AACTAAAAATACAAAAACAAAA-3’ for CpGs 1-8 and 5’-ATATATATATATATATATATATAC-3’ for CpGs 9-18. Three PCR reactions were pooled for each sample, and gel purified (Qiagen miniElute) followed by sequencing (Genewiz). Sequencing analysis was performed using Snapgene and Sequence Scanner 2.0 (Applied Biosystems). To account for non-normal distribution of peak heights, data were log transformed prior to taking averages, and then back-transformed to calculate ratios for ChIP/input values.

cg11625005 Survival Analysis

The methylation data for patients with samples run on the Illumina Human Methylation 450 arrays are reported in the associated TCGA studies. Beta values for cg11625005 were extracted from the associated patient files, and the average was calculated for any patient that had data generated for multiple vials according to the TCGA barcode. Patients were stratified based on a methylation beta value threshold of 0.75 and differences between the survival curves of the stratified patient groups were tested using the log-rank test. The results in this study are in whole or part based upon data generated by the TCGA Research Network: http://cancergenome.nih.gov/. Processed files with computed methylation beta values were downloaded from the Genomic Data Commons (https://gdc.cancer.gov/). Clinical information, including overall survival (OS_STATUS and OS_MONTHS) was downloaded from cBioPortal (Cerami et al., 2012) under the bulk data download (http://www.cbioportal.org/data_sets.jsp). All datasets (BLCA, BRCA, CESC, GBM, HNSC, LGG, LIHC, LUAD, LUSC, PRAD, SKCM, THCA) were processed through cBioPortal on June 22, 2016.

EZH2 Survival Analysis for Primary Tumors

Gene expression profiles for EZH2 and overall survival information were selected for patients in the TCGA (SKCM, LIHC, STAD, KIRP) using the CGDS-R R package (v1.2.5; https://github.com/cBioPortal/cgdsr). Each cancer type was filtered to only include primary tumor samples. To find the gene expression threshold that defined the best overall patient survival stratification, EZH2 expression values were ranked, then patients were iteratively stratified into low and high EZH2
expression groups. Overall survival comparisons between these two groups were made using the log rank test in the R survival package (v 2.40-1; https://github.com/therneau/survival). The EZH2 expression value that resulted in the most significant patient stratification defined the best separation threshold and was used for plotting overall patient survival.

**Protein Expression and Purification**

Human PRC2 5-mer complexes were expressed in insect cells as previously described (Davidovich et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2017). In brief, sequences encoding human EZH2, SUZ12, EED, RBBP4, and AEBP2 were cloned into the pfast-bac1 expression vector (Invitrogen) with PreScission-cleavable N-terminal hexahistidine-MBP tags. Standard Bac-to-Bac baculovirus expression system (Invitrogen) was used to generate baculovirus stocks according to manufacturer’s protocol. Following infection, the cells were incubated for 72 h (27°C, 130 rpm) before they were harvested. The harvested cells were snap-frozen for later purification. PRC2 was purified as previously described (Wang et al., 2017). In brief, cell extract was incubated with the amylose resin and washed thoroughly, followed by elution with 10 mM maltose. The eluate was concentrated, then followed by digestion with PreScission protease at a mass ratio of 1:50 protease:protein. After completion of cleavage, protein complex was injected into a 5 ml Hi-Trap Heparin column (GE, 17-0407-03), followed by fractionation over a HiPrep 16/60 Sephacryl S-400 HR sizing column. PRC2 peak fractions were identified using SDS-PAGE, pooled, and concentrated as above. Final protein concentration was measured by absorbance at 280 nm, and the ratio of absorbance at 260 nm/280 nm was <0.7, an indication of no nucleic acid contamination.

**EMSA and PRC2-5mC-DNA Binding**

5mC substituted DNA was synthesized by Integrated DNA technologies. All DNA substrates were radiolabeled using T4 PNK (NEB M0201L) by standard protocol. After labeling, excess [γ-32P]-ATP in the reaction was removed by running the samples over a G50 Sephadex column (Roche 11 273 949 001). Radiolabeled DNA substrates were purified by native polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (PAGE). DNA was extracted and pellets were dissolved in TRIS-EDTA buffer, pH 7.5. The radiolabeling efficiency of the purified DNA was determined by liquid scintillation counting. Radiolabeled DNA, with specific activity no less than 100,000 cpm/pmol, was adjusted with binding buffer (50 mM Tris-HCl pH 7.5 at 25°C, 100 mM KCl, 2.5 mM MgCl2, 0.1 mM ZnCl2, 2 mM 2-mercaptoethanol, 0.05% v/v NP-40, 0.1 mg/ml bovine serum albumin, 5% v/v glycerol). Next, stock PRC2 was diluted in binding buffer and added to radiolabeled DNA. The binding reaction was carried out for 30 min at 30°C, followed by loading samples onto non-denaturing 1.0% native agarose gel (Fisher BP160-100) buffered with TRIS/borate/EDTA (TBE) at 4°C. Gel electrophoresis was carried out for 90 min at 66 V packed in an ice box within a 4°C cold room. A Hybond N+membrane (Amersham, Fisher Scientific 45-000-927) and two sheets of Whatman 3 mm chromatography paper were put underneath the gel, which then was vacuum dried for 60 min at 80°C. Dried gels were exposed to phosphorimaging plates, which were scanned using a Typhoon Trio phosphorimager (GE Healthcare) for signal acquisition. Gel analysis was carried out with ImageQuant software (GE Healthcare) and data fitted to a sigmoidal binding curve using MATLAB (MathWorks).

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Figure S1. TERT DNA methylation levels and TERT mRNA expression in CCLE samples depicting individual cell line data for Fig. 1C across the TERT proximal promoter. Related to Figure 1. Cell lines (n=278) are grouped by TERT promoter mutation status and monoallelic expression status (wt, wild type promoter with biallelic expression, n = 207; MAE, wt promoter with monoallelic expression, n = 16; mut, TERT promoter mutant, n = 55). Each dot represents a cell line and is color-coded for TERT mRNA expression level; the legend refers to TERT mRNA levels where blue refers to lower TERT mRNA levels, red indicates higher TERT mRNA. Each boxplot displays the median methylation level and 1st and 3rd quartiles. Tests for significance between wt and -124/-146 are displayed in Fig. 1C and in Table S2.
Figure S2. 5mC Levels at cg11625005 in Patient Tumor Samples with vs. without TERT Promoter Mutations. Related to Figure 1. (A) Reduced methylation at cg11625005 in -124 and -146 mutant TERT promoters in TCGA patient tumor samples. Melanoma, SKCM; LIHC, liver cancer; BLCA, bladder cancer; THCA, thyroid cancer; LGG, lower grade glioma; n = the number of patient samples in each group. Error bars are +SEM. BLCA, p < 0.05 for both -124 and -146 mutants; SKCM, p < 0.001 for -124 mutants, p < 0.05 for -146 mutants; LIHC, p < 0.05; THCA p < 0.02; LGG p < 0.0001. P values were generated using an unpaired, two-tailed t-test assuming equal variance. (B) In cancers that commonly exhibit -124 mutations, 5mC did not correlate with TERT mRNA expression. Where sufficient data were available, TCGA samples were assigned a status for the -124 mutation and RNAseq data were analyzed. BLCA, bladder cancer; LGG, lower grade glioma; LIHC, liver hepatocellular carcinoma; SKCM, cutaneous melanoma; THCA, thyroid cancer. TERT mRNA levels are color coded; blue refers to lower TERT mRNA levels, red refers to higher TERT mRNA levels. Each dot represents a single patient sample.
Figure S3. Bisulfite sequencing data for heterozygous cell lines. Related to Figure 2. (A) 5mC in the TERT CGI in T24 and related lines. Data are mean 5mC/cytosine ratios for specific CpGs (see Fig. 3D) +SEM; n = 4. T24 bladder carcinoma cells are a -124 mutant, non-metastatic tumor-derived cell line; T24T is a metastatic relative of T24 and was subsequently passaged through mice to obtain the metastatic lines FL3 and SLT4 (Gildea et al., 2000, 2002). (B) Example of a calculation to determine sequencing ratios of peak heights for bisulfite converted DNA samples in bisulfite PCR products. (C) Allele-specific H3K4me2/3 ChIP bisulfite sequencing data for individual heterozygous cell lines. Data are the ratio of the peak heights of cytosines to thymine. Data are untransformed means + SEM. Number of biological replicates (n) are indicated above bars. (D) T/A cloned PCR products from bisulfite converted PCR products generated from input and H3K4me2/3 ChIP samples in U87MG glioblastoma, liver cancer line SNU-475, bladder cancer line T24T, and the melanoma line WM793. Data are for CpGs 1-8 as detailed in Figure 2. c = cytosine, t = thymine. The presence of a c indicates protection from bisulfite conversion due to the presence of 5mC.
Figure S4. 

A. Absorbance (mAU) vs. Elution Volume (mL) profile.

B. % of input pulled down for EZH2 and IgG across different cell lines:
- HeLa WT
- 293T WT
- SNU-449 WT
- HepG2 -124

C. Heatmap showing methylation levels across EZH2.

D. Survival analysis for Cutaneous Melanoma, Liver Hepatocellular Carcinoma, Kidney Renal Papillary Cell Carcinoma, and Stomach Adenocarcinoma:
- 5mC, EZH2: Survival rates for different cancer types.
- Comparison of survival rates with median EZH2 expression as a cutoff.
Figure S4. Relationship between EZH2 and 5mC at the TERT promoter. Related to Figure 3. (A) Relates to Fig 3D-F. Top, PRC2 is monodisperse by size-exclusion chromatography on a Superose 6 Increase column. The absence of nucleic acid contamination is indicated by absorbance ratio 260/280 < 0.7. Bottom, representative SDS-PAGE of purified protein from top panel plus mononucleosomes used in histone methyltransferase assays. Proteins were visualized by Coomassie staining. The top band contains both EZH2 and SUZ12 (Wang et al., 2017b). Bottom right, histone methyltransferase activity assays using in vitro reconstituted mononucleosomes and [14C]S-adenosyl methionine. (B) EZH2 ChIP in cancer cells with relatively high levels of 5mC at the TERT promoter. Data are means of three technical replicates + SEM. (C) 5mC levels in relation to ChIP-seq signal H3K27me3 at the TERT promoter in HepG2 -124 cells. (D) Kaplan-Meier analysis for 5mC levels at the TERT promoter and EZH2 expression for TCGA primary tumors only. Stomach cancer shows a converse trend to melanoma, liver cancer and renal papillary cell carcinoma with respect to both 5mC and EZH2 expression. Data from TCGA metastatic tumor samples are omitted in this analysis, reducing the number of patients compared to Figure 5. Top panel, 5mC and bottom panel EZH2 expression levels. Patients were partitioned on methylation levels >0.75, and EZH2 was partitioned on high expression vs. low expression, using best separation.
Table S2. Statistical analysis of CCLE lines. Related to Figure 1. WT, wild-type at the *TERT* promoter. MUT, -124 or -146 *TERT* promoter mutants, mono_WT, cell lines without known *TERT* promoter mutations exhibiting monoallelic *TERT* expression (Huang et al. 2015).

| CpG positions | mean_ | mean_ | mean_ | median_ | median_ | stddev_w | stddev_m | t   | std_t | std_t | P_wt_vs | P_wt_vs | P_wt_vs |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|----------|----------|----------|----------|------|-------|-------|----------|----------|----------|
|               | wt    | mono  | mut   | wt    | mono    | wt    | mono    |      |       |       | wt       | mut      | mut      |
| 1295754:1295760:1295762:1295771:1295772:1295797:1295799 | 0.902 | 0.874 | 0.649 | 0.956 | 0.936   | 0.757 | 0.160   | 0.190 | 0.289 | 0.011 | 0.049    | 0.040    | 0.299    | 0.000    | 0.000    |
| 1295681:1295685:1295699:1295705:1295707 | 0.871 | 0.836 | 0.690 | 0.952 | 0.931   | 0.683 | 0.196   | 0.188 | 0.218 | 0.014 | 0.050    | 0.030    | 0.214    | 0.000    | 0.011    |
| 1295594:1295606:1295619 | 0.813 | 0.792 | 0.556 | 0.926 | 0.859   | 0.566 | 0.253   | 0.234 | 0.311 | 0.018 | 0.060    | 0.047    | 0.445    | 0.000    | 0.014    |
| 1295431:1295444:1295454:1295454:1295458 | 0.582 | 0.496 | 0.365 | 0.662 | 0.559   | 0.335 | 0.324   | 0.323 | 0.277 | 0.024 | 0.083    | 0.037    | 0.321    | 0.000    | 0.160    |
| 1295375:1295377:1295394 | 0.551 | 0.450 | 0.398 | 0.606 | 0.355   | 0.377 | 0.358   | 0.345 | 0.280 | 0.036 | 0.086    | 0.038    | 0.333    | 0.005    | 0.721    |
| 1295321:1295328:1295343 | 0.480 | 0.410 | 0.371 | 0.487 | 0.444   | 0.357 | 0.321   | 0.283 | 0.243 | 0.025 | 0.073    | 0.035    | 0.398    | 0.044    | 0.718    |
| 1295247:1295257:1295262:1295267:1295274 | 0.165 | 0.155 | 0.097 | 0.063 | 0.104   | 0.035 | 0.211   | 0.177 | 0.135 | 0.015 | 0.046    | 0.030    | 0.368    | 0.116    | 0.739    |
| 1295056:1295058:1295100:1295106:1295117:1295118:1295135:1295139 | 0.237 | 0.247 | 0.302 | 0.145 | 0.247   | 0.248 | 0.251   | 0.192 | 0.253 | 0.018 | 0.048    | 0.034    | 0.469    | 0.089    | 0.635    |
| 1294958:1294963:1294963:1294971:1294974:1294981:1294983:1294995 | 0.239 | 0.298 | 0.363 | 0.162 | 0.316   | 0.362 | 0.234   | 0.195 | 0.273 | 0.016 | 0.050    | 0.037    | 0.200    | 0.001    | 0.454    |
| 1294873:1294890 | 0.175 | 0.225 | 0.156 | 0.060 | 0.204   | 0.076 | 0.227   | 0.211 | 0.183 | 0.016 | 0.053    | 0.025    | 0.243    | 0.771    | 0.238    |