MicroRNA in Papillary Thyroid Carcinoma: A Systematic Review from 2018 to June 2020

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Received: 9 September 2020; Accepted: 21 October 2020; Published: 25 October 2020

Simple Summary: The most common form of endocrine cancer - papillary thyroid carcinoma, has an increasing incidence. Although this disease usually has an indolent behavior, there are cases when it can evolve more aggressively. It has been known for some time that it is possible to use microRNAs for the diagnosis, prognosis and even treatment monitoring of papillary thyroid cancer. The purpose of this study is to summarize the latest information provided by publications regarding the involvement of microRNAs in papillary thyroid cancer, underling the new clinical perspectives offered by these publications.

Abstract: The involvement of micro-ribonucleic acid (microRNAs) in metabolic pathways such as regulation, signal transduction, cell maintenance, and differentiation make them possible biomarkers and therapeutic targets. The purpose of this review is to summarize the information published in the last two and a half years about the involvement of microRNAs in papillary thyroid carcinoma (PTC). Another goal is to understand the perspective offered by the new findings. Main microRNA features such as origin, regulation, targeted genes, and metabolic pathways will be presented in this paper. We interrogated the PubMed database using several keywords: “microRNA” + “thyroid” + “papillary” + “carcinoma”. After applying search filters and inclusion criteria, a selection of 137 articles published between January 2018–June 2020 was made. Data regarding microRNA, metabolic pathways, gene/protein, and study utility were selected and included in the table and later discussed regarding the matter at hand. We found that most microRNAs regularly expressed in the normal thyroid gland are downregulated in PTC, indicating an important tumor-suppressor action by those microRNAs. Moreover, we showed that one gene can be targeted by several microRNAs and have nominally described these interactions. We have revealed which microRNAs can target several genes at once.

Keywords: microRNA; miRNA; papillary; thyroid; carcinoma; microcarcinoma
1. Introduction

Given that in the last two and a half years alone, more than 200 articles have been published on the involvement of microRNAs in the pathology of PTC, microRNAs are a hot topic. Several questions arise from the analysis of these studies, for example, how relevant is the information of these studies to daily medical practice; Will this information ever be beneficial for the patients with an aggressive form of papillary carcinoma? Or we design studies on the treadmill pursuing only scientific interest? During the 1970s, Francis Crick asserted what he believed to be the central dogma of molecular biology. Genetic information traveled from deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) to ribonucleic acid (RNA) through transcription, then from RNA to proteins via translation, meaning proteins were the functional end products of genes. However, after the whole human genome sequencing, it was understood that genes that encoded proteins accounted for less than 2% of the genome. Given the intricacy of cellular processes, genetic information is most likely passed by additional regulatory elements and not only by coding genes [1]. MicroRNAs (miRNAs) are a class of endogenous non-coding RNA molecules ranging from 18 to 22 nucleotides in length. MicroRNA’s constitute only 3% of the human genome but it is believed that they regulate more than half of the protein-coding genes. Mature microRNA can promote or inhibit messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) translation and degradation by targeting with precision complementary sequences in 3′UnTranslated Regions (3′UTR). They act both as post-transcriptional regulators of gene expression and as messengers or intercellular signaling [2]. MicroRNAs are involved in central biological processes, including development, organogenesis, tissue differentiation, cell cycles, and metabolism. Alterations in the expression of microRNA contribute to the pathogenesis of the majority of human malignancies (PTC) [3,4]. The most striking evidence that links microRNAs with thyroid cancer is their large alteration in expression in malignant cells compared to benign cells. MicroRNA expression is dysregulated in human cancer through various mechanisms. The most important are amplification or deletion of microRNA genes, abnormal transcriptional control of microRNAs, and epigenetic changes [5]. PTC is the most common thyroid malignancy [6], and it is defined as a malignant epithelial tumor with evidence of follicular differentiation and a series of specific nuclear features [7]. The incidence of PTC is increasing mainly due to improved diagnostic methods such as ultrasound (US) with targeted fine-needle aspiration biopsy (FNAB) [8]. This increase has been predominantly an increase in diagnosing papillary thyroid microcarcinoma (PTMC). PTMC is defined as measuring 1.0 cm or less in the greatest dimension of the tumor [9]. Cervical lymph nodes, lungs, and bones are the most common metastatic sites, brain, liver, and skin involvement is less common. Distant metastases are usually diagnosed through clinical symptoms or suspicious imaging/laboratory findings (abnormal uptake on the post-ablation whole-body scan (WBS). Another diagnostic method can be a positive finding on an F18-fluorodeoxyglucose (F18-FDG) positron emission tomography/computed tomography (PET/CT) evaluation or cross-sectional study prompted by elevated thyroglobulin levels in patients whose post-ablation WBS is negative [10]. Usually, PTC has an excellent prognosis [11]. Therefore, what are the special situations in daily practice that make us need these new potential biological markers for PTC diagnosis, prognosis, and therapeutic targets? The purpose of this review is to summarize the information published in the last two and a half years about the involvement of microRNAs in PTC. It is also to understand the perspective offered by the new findings.

2. Materials and Methods

A literature analysis was performed in MEDLINE using PubMed for studies published from 2018 to June 2020. The following keywords were used: "microRNA“+ "papillary“+ “thyroid“ + “carcinoma”, which resulted in 466 articles in English. All related abstracts were reviewed and relevant studies that were published in English were selected. We only included papers that had full text available and described the exact method and results regarding microRNA’s signatures in PTC epigenetic mechanism. A selection of 137 eligible articles was the result of our search (Figure 1).
3. Results

Data on microRNAs, the sample source, the regulatory mode of microRNAs, the target genes/proteins of microRNAs, and their effect on PTC cells from the 137 studies were selected and presented in Table 1 [12–148].
Table 1. Targets of epigenetic alterations in papillary thyroid carcinoma (PTC).

| miRNA          | Sample Sources | Up/Down-Regulated | Targeted Gene | miRNA Effect on PTC Cells                                                                 | Sponging/Sequestering | Potential Utility | References          |
|----------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| miR-520a-3p    | tissue         | Down              | JAK1          | prevented cell proliferation, migration, invasion, promoted apoptosis                      | TT                    |                  | Bi. CL et al. [12] |
| miR-139-5p     | tissue         | Down              | LMO4          | suppressed cell proliferation, migration, and tumor growth                                | circBACH2             | Pr, TT           | Cai. X et al. [13] |
| miR-128        | tissue         | Down              | SPHK1         | elevated apoptosis increased G0/G1 arrest, reduced Cyclin D1/CDK4 expressions             | -                     | TT               | Cao. XZ et al. [14]|
| miR-2861       | tissue         | Up                | DGCR5         | promoted cell proliferation and invasion                                                 | lncRNA DGCR5          | Pg               | Chen. F et al. [15]|
| miR-101        | tissue         | Down              | CXCL12        | repressed cell proliferation, migration, and invasion. Enhanced apoptosis                 | -                     | Pg, TT           | Chen. F et al. [16]|
| miR-135b-5p    | tissue         | Up                | CCNG2         | modulated tumor cells proliferation, apoptosis, migration                                | lncRNA GAS8-AS1       | TT               | Chen. N et al. [17]|
| miR-202-3p     | tissue         | Down              | WNT           | suppressed the expression of β-catenin, cell migration, and invasion                     | -                     | TT               | Chen. J et al. [18]|
| miR-1271       | tissue         | Up                | IRS1          | suppressed migration, invasion, and proliferation of PTC cells                           | -                     | TT               | Chen. Y et al. [19]|
| miR-153-3p     | tissue         | Down              | ZNRF2         | regulated cell proliferation, migration, and invasion                                   | lncRNA TTN-AS1        | TT               | Cui. Z et al. [20] |
| miR-548c-3p    | tissue         | Down              | HIF1α         | reduced N-cadherin and vimentin expression                                                | -                     | Pg, TT           | Du. Y et al. [21]  |
| miR-150        | tissue         | Down              | MUC4          | suppressed PTC cell proliferation and metastasis                                         | -                     | Dg, TT           | Fa. Z et al. [22]  |
| Ex-miR-103     | blood          | Up                | GPER1         | influenced the differentiation of CD4+ T cell into Treg cells                           | -                     | TT               | Fang. T et al. [23]|
| miR-625-3p     | tissue         | Up                | AEG-1         | promoted the proliferation, migration, and invasion of thyroid cancer cells              | -                     | TT               | Fang. L et al. [24]|
| miR-141-3p     | tissue         | Down              | YY-1          | inhibited cell growth, induced apoptosis, and suppressed invasion                        | -                     | Pg, TT           | Fang. M et al. [25]|
| miR-613        | tissue         | Down              | SphK2         | inhibited cell proliferation, migration, and invasion                                    | lncRNA LINC008460     | TT               | Feng. L et al. [26]|
| miR-93-3p-660  | tissue         | Up                | FOXO1         | inhibited glycolysis that attenuated glucose uptake and lactate production              | lncRNA ASMTL-AS1      | TT               | Feng. Z et al. [27]|
| miR-1266       | tissue         | Down              | FGFR2         | inhibited PTC cell proliferation, migration, and invasion                               | -                     | Dg, TT           | Fu. YT et al. [28] |
| miR-129        | tissue         | Up                | MAL2          | suppressed growth and invasion of PTC cells                                            | -                     | Py, TT           | Gao. X et al. [29] |
| miR-791        | tissue         | Down              | -             | inhibited proliferation of PTC cells via blocking the G1 phase                          | -                     | Pg, TT           | Gao. XB et al. [30]|

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| miRNA     | Sample Sources | Up/Down-Regulated | Targeted Gene | miRNA Effect on PTC Cells                                    | Sponging/Sequestering | Potential Utility | References        |
|-----------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| miR-429   | tissue         | Down              | ZEB1          | inhibited cell proliferation, migration, and invasion       | lncRNA SNHG22         | Dg, TT            | Gao. H et al. [31] |
| miR-30a   | tissue         | Down              | E2F7          | inhibited the proliferation, migration, and invasion of PTC cells |                       |                  |                   |
| miR-9-5p  | tissue         | Down              | BRAF          | suppressed the viability of PTC cells by inducing apoptosis  |                       | TT                | Guo. H et al. [32] |
| miR-215   | tissue         | Down              | ARFGEF1       | inhibited proliferation and metastasis                       |                       | TT                | Guo. F et al. [33] |
| Ex-miR-199| blood          | Down              | DLG1-AS1      | suppressed proliferation of PTC cells                        |                       |                  |                   |
| miR-1252  | tissue         | Up                | FSTL1         | inhibited viability, proliferation, and stimulated apoptosis in PTC cells | hsa_circ_0011290     | TT                | Hu. Z et al. [36] |
| miR-486-5p| tissue         | Down              | KIAA1199      | inhibited cell growth of PTC                                 |                       | TT                | Jiao. X et al. [37]|
| miR-885-5p| tissue         | Down              | RAC1          | suppressed PTC cell proliferation                             | hsa_circ_000458      | TT                | Jin. X et al. [38] |
| miR-15a   | tissue         | Down              | RET/AKT       | inhibited PTC cell proliferation and invasion and enhanced the apoptosis |                       | TT                | Jin. J et al. [39] |
| miR-381-3p| tissue         | Down              | LRP6          | inhibited the proliferation and metastasis of PTC cells      |                       | TT                | Kong. W et al. [40]|
| miR-485-5p| tissue         | Down              | Raf1          | inhibited PTC cell proliferation, migration and invasion    | LncRNA LINC00460     | TT                | Li. G et al. [41]  |
| miR-320a  | cell culture   | Up                | HMG1B         | inhibited cell proliferation, migration and invasion rates   | LncRNA ANRIL          | P, TT             | Li. M et al. [42]  |
| miR-369-3p| cell culture   | Down              | TSPAN13       | suppressed cell proliferation, colony formation, and induced apoptosis in PTC |                       | Dg, P, TT         | Li. P et al. [43]  |
| miR-205   | tissue         | Down              | YAP1          | inhibited proliferation and invasion of thyroid cancer cells |                       | TT                | Li. D et al. [44]  |
| miR-204-3p| tissue         | Down              | CDC23         | suppressed PTC proliferation, migration and invasion         | LncRNA LINC00514     | TT                | Li. X et al. [45]  |
| miR-361-5p| tissue         | Down              | ROCK1         | Inhibited proliferation, migration, and invasion             |                       | TT                | Li. R et al. [46]  |
| miR-4500  | cell culture   | Down              | PLXNC1        | inhibited cell viability, colony formation, and cell apoptosis |                       | Pg, TT            | Li. R et al. [47]  |
| miR-211-5p| tissue         | Down              | SPARC         | suppressed proliferation, migration and invasion of thyroid tumor cells | LncRNA MCM3AP-AS1     | TT                | Liang. M et al. [48]|
| miR-101   | tissue         | Down              | FN1           | promoted the RAI-resistance in PTC                          | LncRNA-NEAT1         | TT                | Liu. C et al. [49] |
| miRNA     | Sample Sources | Up/Down-Regulated | Targeted Gene | miRNA Effect on PTC Cells                                                                 | Sponging/Sequestering | Potential Utility | References      |
|-----------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| miR-214   | tissue         | Down              | PSMD10        | suppressed proliferation, and induced cell apoptosis and cell cycle arrest in PTC cells  | -                     | TT                | Liu. F et al. [50] |
| miR-744   | tissue         | Down              | NOB1          | attenuated the proliferation and invasion of PTC cells                                    | -                     | TT                | Liu. H et al. [51] |
| miR-96-5p | tissue         | Up                | CCDC67        | accelerated the proliferation and metastasis of PTC cells                                | -                     | Dg, TT            | Liu. ZM et al. [52] |
| miR-4728  | cell culture   | Down              | SOST1         | repressed the PTC cell proliferation through MAPK                                           | -                     | Dg, TT            | Liu. Z et al. [53] |
| miR-431   | tissue         | Down              | Glit1         | inhibited cell migration and invasion of PTC                                               | -                     | TT                | Liu. Y et al. [54] |
| miR-524-5p| tissue         | Down              | FOXE1, ITGA3  | suppressed PTC progression by regulating tumor cell proliferation, migration, and invasion | -                     | TT                | Liu. H et al. [55] |
| miR-331-3p| tissue         | Down              | SLC25A1       | inhibited PTC cells proliferation, migration, and invasion                                | IncRNA-BRM            | TT                | Liu. S et al. [56] |
| miR-335-5p| tissue         | Down              | ICAM1         | reduced the proliferation, migration, invasion of PTC                                     | -                     | TT                | Luo. L et al. [57] |
| miR-146a  | tissue         | Down              | GABPA         | suppressed proliferation, migration, and invading capabilities of PTC cells               | -                     | TT                | Long. M et al. [58] |
| miR-29a-3p| tissue         | Down              | OTUB2         | suppressed growth, proliferation, invasion in PTC cells                                   | -                     | PG, TT            | Ma. Y et al. [59] |
| miR-199a-5p| tissue        | Down              | SNAI1         | reduced migration and invasion of PTC                                                      | -                     | TT                | Ma. S et al. [60] |
| miR-363-3p| tissue         | Down              | ITGA6         | suppressed anoikis resistance in PTC cells                                                 | -                     | TT                | Pan. Y et al. [61] |
| miR-1231, miR-1304 | tissue Down | - | inhibited proliferation and invasion of PTC cells | circ_0025033 | TT | Pan. Y et al. [62] |
| miR-146b-5p| tissue        | Up                | DNMT3A        | accelerated extra-glandular invasion and metastasis of PTC cells                          | IncRNA-MALAT1         | Dg, TT            | Peng. Y et al. [63] |
| miR-448   | tissue         | Down              | KDM5B         | inhibited PTC cell progression and tumor growth via TGF1                                  | -                     | TT                | Pu. Y et al. [64] |
| miR-199b-5p| tissue        | Down              | STON2         | inhibited PTC cell growth and metastasis                                                   | -                     | TT                | Ren. L et al. [65] |
| miR-26a-5p | tissue        | Down              | Wnt5a         | inhibited proliferation, colony formation, invasion, and migration of PTC cells.          | -                     | TT                | Shi. D et al. [66] |
| miR-564   | tissue         | Down              | AEG-1          | inhibited cell proliferation, migration, and invasion and induced cell apoptosis          | -                     | TT                | Song. Z et al. [67] |
| miR-214-3p| tissue         | Down              | PSMD10        | impaired PTC cell proliferation and metastasis                                            | IncRNA-SNHG3          | TT                | Sui. G et al. [68] |
| miRNA     | Sample Sources | Up/Down-Regulated | Targeted Gene | miRNA Effect on PTC Cells                                                                 | Sponging/Sequestering | Potential Utility | References |
|-----------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------|
| miR-144   | tissue         | Down              | WWTR1         | inhibited of PTC cell proliferation                                                        | -                     | Pg, TT           | Sun. W et al. [69] |
| miR-106b-5p | tissue        | Down              | ATAD2         | induced apoptosis and suppressed invasion of PTC cells                                     | IncRNA-NEAT1_2        | TT               | Sun. W et al. [70] |
| miR-124-3p | cell culture  | Down              | MAP2K4        | inhibited the proliferation, induced apoptosis and cell cycle arrest in PTC cells         | -                     | TT               | Sun. Y et al. [71] |
| miR-577   | tissue         | Down              | Sphk2         | inhibited PTC cell proliferation, migration, and invasion                                  | IncRNA-LINC00520      | Dg, TT           | Sun. Y et al. [72] |
| miR-486   | tissue         | Down              | TENM1         | inhibited proliferation, invasion, and migration of PTC cell                               | -                     | TT               | Sun. YH et al. [73] |
| miR-497   | tissue         | Down              | BDNF          | suppressed PTC cell proliferation, migration, and invasion                                 | IncRNA-LINC00152      | TT               | Sun. Z et al. [74] |
| miR-22    | tissue         | Up                | -             | promoted PTC cell metastasis and BRAFV600E mutation                                       | -                     | Dg, Pg           | Wang. D et al. [75] |
| miR-599   | tissue         | Down              | Hey2          | diminished PTC cell proliferation, migration, invasion, while stimulating apoptosis        | -                     | Pr, TT           | Wang. DP et al. [76] |
| miR-3619-5p | cell culture  | Down              | FOXM1         | regulated proliferation and apoptosis in PTC                                              | IncRNA-Linc01410      | TT               | Wang. G et al. [77] |
| miR-675   | tissue         | Down              | MAPK1         | suppressed PTC cell proliferation, migration, and invasion                                 | IncRNA-RMRP           | TT               | Wang. J et al. [78] |
| miR-1258  | cell culture  | Down              | TMPRSS4       | inhibited cell viability, migration, and invasion                                          | -                     | Dg, TT           | Wang. L et al. [79] |
| miR-451a  | tissue         | Down              | ZEB1          | suppressed proliferation, mobility, and invasion of PTC cell                              | -                     | TT               | Wang. Q et al. [80] |
| miR-622   | tissue         | Down              | VEGFA         | inhibited PTC cell proliferation, migration, and invasion                                  | -                     | TT               | Wang. R et al. [81] |
| miR-212   | tissue         | Down              | MIAT          | inhibited PTC cell proliferation, migration, and invasion. (possible)                     | IncRNA-MIAT           | TT               | Wang. R et al. [82] |
| miR-718   | tissue         | Down              | PDK1          | inhibited PTC cell growth, reduced cell invasion, repressed glucose metabolism             | -                     | Dg, TT           | Wang. X et al. [83] |
| miR-31    | tissue         | Down              | SOX11         | repressed PTC cell proliferation, invasion, and migration                                  | -                     | TT               | Wang. Y et al. [84] |
| miR-384   | tissue         | Down              | PRKACB        | suppressed PTC cell proliferation and migration                                            | -                     | TT               | Wang. Y et al. [85] |
| miR-873   | tissue         | Down              | CXCL16        | inhibited proliferation, migration, and invasion of the PTC cells                          | -                     | TT               | Wang. Z et al. [86] |
| miR-143-3p | tissue        | Down              | MSI2          | induced apoptosis, suppresses invasion and migration of PTC                               | -                     | TT               | Wang. ZL et al. [87] |
Table 1. Cont.

| miRNA     | Sample Sources | Up/Down-Regulated | Targeted Gene | miRNA Effect on PTC Cells | Sponging/Sequestering | Potential Utility | References               |
|-----------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| miR-1261  | tissue         | Down              | C8orf4        | inhibited PTC cell proliferation, migration, and invasion | circZFR               | TT               | Wei. H et al. [88]      |
| miR-200a-3p| tissue        | Down              | YAP1          | inhibited PTC cell proliferation and promoted apoptosis | IncRNA-SNHG15         | TT               | Wu. DM et al. [89]      |
| miR-329   | tissue         | Down              | WNT1          | decreased PTC cell proliferation, colony formation, suppressed growth | -                     | TT               | Wu. L et al. [90]       |
| miR-203   | tissue         | Down              | Bcl-2         | inhibited cell proliferation, induced apoptosis, and suppressed the motility of PTC cells | -                     | TT               | Wu. X et al. [91]       |
| miR-26a   | tissue         | Down              | ROCK1         | repressed PTC cell viability, invasion, and metastasis | -                     | Dg, TT           | Wu. YC et al. [92]      |
| miR-222   | tissue         | Up                | -             | correlated with capsular invasion, vascular invasion, tumor size and metastasis | -                     | Pg               | Xiang. D et al. [93]    |
| miR-150-5p| cell culture   | Up                | BRAF(V600E)   | promoted PTC cell proliferation, suppressed apoptosis | -                     | TT               | Yan. R et al. [94]      |
| miR-423-5p| cell culture   | Down              | SOX12         | suppressed PTC cell proliferation and invasion | IncRNA-NR2F1-AS1      | TT               | Yang. C et al. [95]     |
| miR-182   | tissue         | Up                | CHL1 *        | correlated with extrathyroidal invasion, cervical lymph node metastasis, and TNM | -                     | Pg               | Yao. XG et al. [96]     |
| miR-1179  | tissue         | -                 | HMGB1         | -                         | circFOXM1             | TT               | Ye. M et al. [97]       |
| miR-1270  | cell culture   | Up                | SCAI          | promoted PTC cell proliferation, migration | -                     | TT               | Yi. T et al. [98]       |
| miR-761   | tissue         | Down              | TRIM29        | inhibited cell proliferation, and cell cycle progression in PTC | IncRNA-HOXA11-AS      | TT               | Yin. X et al. [99]      |
| miR-23a   | tissue         | Down              | CCNG1         | decreased proliferation, induced cell cycle arrest, and promoted PTC cell apoptosis | -                     | Dg, TT           | Yin. JJ et al. [100]    |
| miR-203   | tissue         | Down              | AKT3          | suppressed cell migration and invasion in the PTC cells and promoted cell apoptosis | -                     | TT               | You. A et al. [101]     |
| miR-3619-3p| tissue       | Up                | Wnt           | promoted PTC cell migration and invasion | -                     | TT               | Yu. S et al. [102]      |
| miR-637   | tissue         | Down              | Akt1          | inhibit inhibited PTC cell proliferation, invasion, and migration | IncRNA HOTTIP         | Dg, TT           | Yuan. Q et al. [103]    |
| miR-21    | tissue         | Up                | VHL           | promoted PTC cell proliferation and invasion | -                     | TT               | Zang. C et al. [104]    |
| miRNA   | Sample Sources | Up/Down-Regulated | Targeted Gene | miRNA Effect on PTC Cells | Sponging/Sequestering | Potential Utility | References                  |
|---------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| miR-224-5p | tissue         | Up                | EGR2          | promoted PTC cell migration, invasion | -                     | Dg, TT             | Zang. CS et al. [105]        |
| miR-509  | tissue         | Down              | PAX9          | inhibited cell proliferation and invasion in papillary thyroid carcinoma | -                     | TT                | Zhang. S et al. [106]        |
| miR-766  | tissue         | Down              | IRS2          | inhibited proliferation of PTC cells | -                     | TT                | Zhao. J et al. [107]         |
| miR-96-3p| tissue         | Up                | SDHB          | increased the invasion and migration of PTC cells | TT                    | Zhao. X et al. [108]    |
| miR-138-5p| tissue        | Down              | LRRK2         | inhibited PTC cell proliferation, apoptosis | IncRNA RP11-476D10.1  | TT                | Zhao. Y et al. [109]         |
| miR-409-3p| tissue        | Down              | CCND2         | negatively regulated PTC cell proliferation and cell cycle progression | -                     | Pr, TT             | Zhao. Z et al. [110]         |
| miR-200b/c| tissue        | Down              | Rap1b         | inhibited PTC cell invasion, migration and growth | -                     | TT                | Zhou. B et al. [111]         |
| miR-188-5p| tissue        | Down              | FGF-5 *       | suppressed PTC cells growth | -                     | TT                | Zhou. P et al. [112]         |
| miR-506  | tissue         | Down              | IL17RD        | inhibited the proliferation, invasion, and migration capacities of PTC cells | -                     | Pg, TT             | Zhu. J et al. [113]          |
| miR-146  | tissue         | Up *              | KIT           | promoted PTC cell proliferation and invasion * | IncRNA CTC            | TT                | Liao. B et al. [114]         |
| miR-1178 | tissue         | Up                | TLR4          | promoted cell proliferation and suppressed cell apoptosis | circ_FNDC3B            | TT                | Wu. G et al. [115]           |
| miR-106a | tissue         | Up                | PTEN/ SFR4    | enhanced PTC cell proliferative, migratory and invasive abilities | IncRNA-HULC           | TT                | Yang. Z et al. [116]         |
| miR-335  | tissue         | Down              | SOX2          | suppressed the proliferation, migration, and invasion of PTC cells | IncRNA-LINC01510      | TT                | Li. Q et al. [117]           |
| miR-199a-5p| tissue       | Down              | SLC1A5        | attenuated proliferation, induced apoptosis, and arrested cells in the G0/G1 phase | ABHD11-AS1            | Dg, TT             | Zhuang. X et al. [118]       |
| miR-145-5p| tissue       | Down              | AKT3          | inhibited proliferation, migration and invasion | IncRNA-r384546        | Dg, TT             | Feng. J et al. [119]         |
| miR-211  | tissue         | Up                | RECK          | promoted tumor growth and increased tumor volume in PTC cells | -                     | Dg, Pg              | Wei. ZL et al. [120]         |
| miR-206  | tissue         | Down              | MAP4K3        | enhanced Euthyrox sensitivity in Euthyrox-resistant PTC cells | -                     | TT                | Liu. F et al. [121]          |
| miR-21-5p| cell culture   | Up                | TGFBL, COL4A1| secreted by hypoxic PTC cells is a potent pro-angiogenic factor | -                     | Dg, TT             | Wu. F et al. [122]           |
| Ex-miR-423-5p| blood   | Up                | -             | promoted PTC cell migration and invasion | -                     | Dg, TT             | Ye. W et al. [123]           |
Table 1. Cont.

| miRNA     | Sample Sources | Up/Down-Regulated | Targeted Gene | miRNA Effect on PTC Cells                                    | Sponging/Sequestering | Potential Utility | References       |
|-----------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| miR-422a  | tissue         | Down              | SP1           | suppressed PTC cells proliferation and metastasis           | IncRNA-LINC00313       | TT               | Yan. D et al. [124] |
| miR-1301-3p | tissue       | Down              | STAT3         | inhibited PTC cell proliferation, cell apoptosis accelerated | IncRNA-ABDH11-AS1       | TT               | Wen. J et al. [125] |
| miR-let-7a | tissue        | Down              | c-Myc         | suppressed PTC cell proliferation, migration, and invasion  | -                      | TT               | Huang. J et al. [126] |
| miR-let-7e | tissue        | Down              | HMG1B1        | inhibited PTC cell growth and metastasis                    | -                      | TT               | Ding. C et al. [127] |
| miR-146b-5p| tissue        | Up                | CCDC6         | promoted proliferation, migration, and cell cycle progression of PTC cells | -                      | Dg, TT           | Jia. M et al. [128] |
| miR-145   | tissue        | Down              | ZEB2          | inhibited the migration, invasion, and tumorigenesis of PTC cells | circ_NUP214            | TT               | Li. X et al. [129]  |
| miR-520c-3p| tissue      | Down              | S100A4        | inhibited PTC cells proliferation                            | IncRNA-HOXA-AS2        | TT               | Xia. F et al. [130] |
| miR-15a-5p | tissue       | Down              | -             | inhibited PTC cells growth                                   | IncRNA-HOXA-AS2        | TT               | Jiang. L et al. [131] |
| miR-146b-3p| tissue      | Up                | NF2           | increased PTC cell migration and invasion                   | -                      | TT               | Yu. C et al. [132]  |
| miR-22a-3p | tissue        | Up                | CBL           | promoted PTC cell proliferation and invasion                | circ_ITCH              | TT               | Wang. M et al. [133] |
| miR-21    | cell culture  | -                 | PTEN          | matrine-induced apoptosis and G1 cell cycle arrest          | -                      | TT               | Zhao. L et al. [134] |
| miR-204   | tissue        | Down              | BRD4          | inhibited of PTC cell proliferation                         | IncRNA-UCA1            | TT               | Li. D et al. [135]  |
| miR-4429  | tissue        | Down              | Bcl-2         | suppressed PTC cell proliferation, promoted apoptosis, and induced cell cycle arrest in G2/M phase | IncRNA-LINC00313       | TT               | Wu. JW et al. [136] |
| miR-222   | tissue        | Up                | PPP2R2A       | promoted PTC cell migration and invasion                    | -                      | Dg, TT           | Huang. Y et al. [137] |
| miR-21-5p | tissue        | Down              | Bcl-2         | inhibited TPC cell proliferation and invasion               | IncRNA-BISPR           | Dg, TT           | Zhang. H et al. [138] |
| miR-30a   | tissue        | Down              | IGF1R         | inhibited PTC cell proliferation, cycle progression, invasion, migration | IncRNA-PVT1            | TT               | Feng. K et al. [139] |
| miR-129-5p| tissue        | Down              | KLK7          | inhibited proliferation, cell survival, invasion, and migration | IncRNA-NEAT1           | TT               | Zhang. H et al. [140] |
| Ex-miR-146b-5p, Ex-miR-222-5p | blood        | Down              | -             | enhanced the migration and invasion activity of PTC cells | -                      | Pg               | Jiang. K et al. [141] |
| miR-539   | tissue        | Down              | SLPI          | inhibited PTC cell EMT and tumor growth                     | -                      | TT               | Xu. CB et al. [142]  |
| miRNA    | Sample Sources | Up/Down-Regulated | Targeted Gene | miRNA Effect on PTC Cells                                                                 | Sponging/Sequestering | Potential Utility | References         |
|----------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| miR-24-3p| tissue         | Up                | p27kip1       | regulated PTC cell proliferation, apoptosis migration and invasion                         | ncRNA-MIR22HG         | TT                | Chen. ZB et al. [143] |
| miR-26a  | cell culture   | Down              | ARPP19        | promoted proliferation of PTC cells                                                          | -                     | TT                | Gong. Y et al. [144] |
| Ex-miR-98-5p | blood   | Down              | HMGA2         | promoted PTC cell growth, inhibited apoptosis                                               | -                     | Dg, Pg            | Qiu. K et al. [145]  |
| miR-296-5p| tissue         | Down              | PLK1          | suppressed cell proliferation, inhibited cell clone formation, arrested the cell cycle in G2/M phase, and induced apoptosis | -                     | TT                | Zhou. SL et al. [146] |
| miR-451a | cell culture   | Down              | PSMB8         | inhibited proliferation, EMT and induced apoptosis of PTC cells                            | -                     | TT                | Fan. X et al. [147]  |
| miR-630  | tissue         | Down              | JAK2/STAT3    | suppressed migration and invasion of PTC cells                                               | -                     | TT                | Pan. XM et al. [148]  |

TT—therapeutic target, Dg—Diagnosis, Pg—Prognostic, Pr—Prevention, * The feature discovered in another study than the one cited.
3.1. Up- and Downregulated microRNAs in Papillary Thyroid Cancer

Out of 139 microRNAs, 106 are downregulated and 33 are upregulated (Table 1). This means that more than a quarter of the described microRNAs have an oncogenic role (oncomiR’s) and the rest of them have a tumor-suppressive role. The dysregulation of microRNA is an important event during the development of papillary thyroid carcinoma. Overexpression of certain microRNA can result in the tumor suppressor genes repression. Down-regulation of specific microRNA can lead to increased expression of oncogenes. Overexpression and downregulation induce malignant effects on cell cycle progression, proliferation, migration, and apoptosis, leading to tumor growth and progression in PTC and other types of malignancies [1].

3.2. One Gene Can Be Targeted by Several microRNAs

Analyzing, individually, in each study, the interaction between microRNAs and the genes targeted by them, we noticed that the same gene can be targeted by different microRNAs. For example, HMGB1 has been reported to play an important role in promoting both cell survival and death by regulating multiple signaling pathways, including proliferation, autophagy, inflammation, invasion, and metastasis. The study by Ding, C et al. [127] indicates that microRNA-let-7e downregulates HMGB1 expression by directly targeting the HMGB1 3′-UTR, downregulated HMGB1 inhibits PTC cell proliferation and metastasis [127]. MicroRNA-1179 interacted with the 3′ UTR of HMGB1 and suppressed HMGB1 expression at the post-transcriptional level and indicates that the microRNA-1179/HMGB1 pathway plays a tumor suppressor role in PTC [97]. The same gene-HMGB1 is involved in ANRIL/HMGB1/microRNA-320a pathway. Propofol-mediated ANRIL downregulation competed with HMGB1 to bind microRNA-320a, thus inhibiting PTC cell malignant behaviors [42].

A study by Chen et al. [18] has shown that enforced expression of microRNA-202-3p inhibited WNT signaling by downregulating β-catenin expression in PTC. Again, the same gene is regulated by microRNA-3619-3p to promote cell migration and invasion in PTC [102]. WNT1 has been shown to promote cancer progression because it triggers cell proliferation and metastasis, microRNA-329 inhibits papillary thyroid cancer progression via direct targeting WNT1 [90]. WNT5a, an important signaling molecule in the non-canonical Wnt family, has been involved in nearly all parts of the non-canonical Wnt pathway. The invasion and metastasis of PTC cells were inhibited by microRNA-26a-5p via Wnt5a [66].

B-cell lymphoma-2 (Bcl-2), an oncogene expressed in most thyroid carcinomas, is also found to be a target of several microRNAs. MicroRNA-21-5p suppressed Bcl-2 expression [138], silencing LINC00313 led to down-regulation of anti-apoptotic Bcl-2 proteins [136]. Overexpression of miR microARN-203 may serve a role in PTC tumor cells by downregulating Bcl-2 expression [91].

One more targeted gene by multiple microRNAs in PTC is AKT, the human homolog of the viral oncogene v-Akt is related to protein kinases A (PKA) and C (PKC) in humans. The pathway that involves AKT inactivates several proapoptotic factors, AKT also activates transcription factors which promote anti-apoptotic genes. Overexpression of microRNA-15a inhibited the activation of the AKT pathway, which inhibited cell proliferation and promoted the process of apoptosis [39]. Upregulated microRNA-203 suppresses epithelial-mesenchymal transition (EMT), invasion, proliferation, and migration as well as induces apoptosis of PTC cells via downregulated AKT3 [101]. IncRNA n384546 could regulate the expression of AKT3 by sponging microRNA-145-5p [119]. IncRNA HOTTIP modulated Akt1 expression by regulating microRNA-637 in PTC cell lines [103].

Another example is the Sphingosine kinase (SPHK), an enzyme, catalyzing the formation of the prosurvival second messenger sphingosine-1-phosphate (S1P) from the pro-apoptotic lipid sphingosine. High SPHK expression is correlated with a significant decrease in survival rate in patients with several forms of cancer, including PTC. LncRNA LINC00460 promoted PTC progression via modulating SphK2 through sponging microRNA-613 in PTC [26]. IncRNA LINC00520 accelerates the progression of papillary thyroid carcinoma by serving as a competing endogenous RNA of microRNA-577 to
increase SphK2 expression [72]. MicroRNA-128 targets SPHK1 to induce apoptosis and reduce cell proliferation, migration in thyroid cancer cell lines, and inhibits tumor growth [14].

PTEN (phosphatase with tensin homology), an upstream negative regulatory molecule of the PI3K/AKT pathway, is the direct target gene of microRNA-106 [116] and microRNA-21 [134]. MicroRNA-625-3p [24] and microRNA-564 [67] directly target the same gene, AEG-1 (astrocyte elevated gene 1), an important regulator of PTC genesis and development. Yes-associated protein 1 (YAP1) was identified as a target gene of microRNA -205 [44] and microRNA-200a-3p [89]. Both microRNA-361-5p [46] and microRNA-26a [92] target ROCK1 (Rho-associated coiled-coil kinase 1), which was closely associated with poor PTC prognosis [46]. Zinc Finger E-Box Binding Homeobox 1 (ZEB1) a gene that plays vital roles in the metastasis of cancer, is inhibited by microRNA-451a [80] and a direct target of microRNA-429 [31].

From the same families of genes discovered to be the target of several microRNAs we mention CXCL-12 [16,86], CCNG-1 [17,100], IRS-1 [19,107], FGF-2 [28,112], CCDC-6/67 [52,128], FOX-O1/E1/M1 [27,55,76], ITGA-3/6 [55,61], SL-1A5/25A1 [56,118], MAP-2K4/K1/K3 [71,78,120], and SOX 11/12/2 [84,95,117].

3.3. One MicroRNA Can Target Several mRNAs/Genes

One microRNA does not target only one but several mRNA genes, as it was stated before. In our study, we found several microRNAs with multiple genes targeted. For instance, microRNA-146b-5p, downregulated CCDC6 expression by binding to its 3′-UTR in the study by Jia et al. [128] and promoted the expression of MALAT1 by negatively regulating DNMT3A in the study by Peng et al. [63]. The same microRNA-146b, but with the 3p strand located in the reverse position compared to the 5p strand which is present in the forward (5′-3′) position, meaning microRNA-146b-3p, is targeting directly NF2 [132]. From the same family, microRNA-146a targets GABPA [58], and microRNA-146 targets KIT [114].

MicroRNA-199a-5p inhibited cell migration, invasion, and EMT by targeting SNAI in PTC [60] but also attenuated cell proliferation, induced apoptosis, and arrested cells in the G0/G1 phase through regulating the expression of SLC1A5 [118]. From the same family, microRNA-199b-5p suppressed PTC cell aggressiveness by targeting STON2 [65]. MicroRNA-101 suppresses the proliferation, apoptosis resistance, invasion, and migration of PTC cells by directly targeting CXCL12 [16]. MicroRNA-101-3p deficiency enhanced the expression level of FN1, which therefore promoted the RAI (radioactive iodine)-resistance of PTC [49]. Another example is microRNA-150 which serves a key function in suppressing the malignant growth and aggressive behavior of PTC cells through the downregulation of MUC4 [22]. Overexpression of microRNA-150-5p regulated cell proliferation, metastasis, and apoptosis by regulating BRAFV600E [94]. Both the IGF1R [139] and E2F7 [32] genes are targeted directly by the microRNA-30a. MicroRNA-203 inhibits proliferation and motility, and induces apoptosis of PTC cells via regulation of the expression of Bcl-2 [91], and suppresses EMT, invasion, proliferation, and migration of PTC cells via downregulated AKT3 [101]. Five more genes are found to be the target of the same microRNA in four different studies. VHL [104], Bcl-2 [138], PTEN [134], TGFBI [122], and COL4A1 [122] are all targeted genes by microRNA-21. There are still more examples of the same microRNAs’ but with the 3p strand located in the reverse position compared to 5p strand which is present in the forward (5′-3′) position, that target different genes: [52,108], [119,129], [29,140], [37,73], [39,131], [45,135], [48,120], [50,68], [66,92], and [57,117].

4. Discussion

Each microRNA can regulate hundreds of messenger RNAs (mRNAs), while various microRNA can control the same mRNA. Additionally, many microRNAs regulate and are regulated by other species of non-coding RNAs, such as circular RNAs (circRNAs) and long non-coding RNAs (lncRNAs). For this reason, it is extremely difficult to predict, study, and analyze the precise role of a single microRNA involved in human cancer, considering the complexity of its connections. Focusing on a single microRNA molecule represents a limited approach. Additional information could come
from network analysis, which has become a common tool in the biological field to better understand molecular interactions [1].

Most studies assess the level of expression of the microRNA in question, show the actions of its overexpression/silencing on cell lines, find the gene targeted by the microRNA, and how the metabolic pathway microRNA / target gene works. Although complex information is presented, at the end of the discussion chapter we find the same dry phrase “microRNA-X could be a potential therapeutic/diagnostic/prognostic target for PTC treatment”. Despite this, there are several articles with a different study design that offer something more than “could be”. One of them is the study of Zhao. L et al. [134] which finds Matrine, a traditional Chinese medicine, as an alternative drug for PTC treatment. Treatment with matrine at the concentrations of 1, 2, 5, 10, and 20 mg/ml inhibited TPC 1 cell proliferation by up to 95.8% (for 20 mg/ml matrine). Matrine induced apoptosis and G1 cell cycle arrest through downregulating microRNA-21 to affect the PTEN/Akt signaling in TPC 1 human thyroid cancer cells. Liu. F et al. [121] discovered that microRNA-206 contributed to euthyrox resistance in PTC cells through blockage p38 and JNK signaling pathway by targeting MAP4K3. Another study by Liu et al. [49], found the promoting gene and the signaling pathway regulating RAI-resistance in PTC. The results attested that NEAT1 was upregulated in RAI-resistant PTC accompanied microRNA-101-3p inhibition, FN1 overexpression, and P38K/AKT signaling pathway abnormal activation. Fang. T et al. [23] discovered that Shenmai injection (SMI), a traditional Chinese formula mainly made up of Red Ginseng and Radix Ophiopogonis. SMI inhibits the differentiation of CD4 + T cells into Treg cells via the microRNA-103/GPER1 axis, which improves the immunological function of PTC patients with postoperative 131-Iodine ablation. Although few, these studies differ in the classical approach to the use of microRNAs in papillary thyroid carcinomas and should be recognized as at least promising.

Even if in the world of publications microRNA is a hot topic, when we talk about PTC, most international guidelines regarding thyroid cancer management, do not even mention microRNA. Here we refer to the NCCN 2018 [149], ETA 2019 [7], and ESMO 2019 [11] guidelines. The exception is the ATA 2015 guideline, which, although published several years before the above-listed guidelines, mentions microRNA as an additional diagnostic molecular marker strategy under development. microRNA markers have shown initial diagnostic utility in FNA samples with indeterminate cytological diagnoses, but they have not been thoroughly validated. It is also mentioned about microRNA, also in this guide, in the chapter “Directions for future research”, as possible progress in identifying markers of thyroid cancer. To result in a significantly improved accuracy of cancer detection in thyroid nodules as compared to the currently available clinical tests [8].

Hence, which are the most challenging parts in PTC management where we could use microRNA? After the clinical and ultrasound evaluation of a thyroid nodule, if malignancy criteria are present, a fine needle biopsy is performed for cytological examination. Some results of the cytological examination can be inconclusive. In such cases, there is a need to assess molecular markers to make a presurgical differentiation of benign and malign lesions. MicroRNAs are one of the novel classes of molecular markers that are being used to improve the diagnosis of thyroid cancer. Several studies have shown that a microRNA-based signature in FNABs can be used to discriminate benign from malignant thyroid nodules. MicroRNA profiling of thyroid cancers can also provide prognostic information useful for defining optimal management strategies. Expression levels of certain microRNA in thyroid tumor tissues are associated with clinicopathological characteristics, such as tumor size, multifocality, capsular invasion, extrathyroidal extension, and both lymph node and distant metastases [150]. Treatment options have been proposed and implemented based on the results obtained from research conducted on epigenetic alterations. Therefore, the development of new therapeutic strategies based on targeting epigenetic changes to restore the expression of tumor suppressor microRNAs or to blunt overexpressed oncogenic microRNAs may provide a new landscape for the treatment of aggressive PTC [151].
Although PTMC generally has an excellent prognosis, the long-term rate of recurrence of PTMC has been reported to be as high as 10% [9]. Currently, there are no reliable clinical features including molecular markers, that can differentiate PTMC in patients who develop progressive disease from indolent PTMC. Even so, searching the PubMed database, regarding microRNA signatures in PTMC, there is only one study by Zhang et al. which combines serum microRNA with ultrasound profile as predictive biomarkers of diagnosis and prognosis for PTMC. In this study, microRNAs were found to be significantly associated with a poor prognosis of patients with PTMC and could be used as prognostic molecular markers or patients with PTMC before and after surgery. These results suggest that circulating microRNAs may be useful as non-invasive molecular biomarkers of diagnosis and prognosis for PTMC [9], selecting those cases that need aggressive therapies, despite the histology of PTMC. Given the need for more studies in this field, this topic could be a research idea for the future, in the era of personalized medicine.

5. Conclusions

Research regarding microRNAs in PTC is undergoing a tremendous shift, suggesting rapid maturation of this field. In this review, we tried to represent as briefly as possible the interactions of microRNAs with target proteins. We also showed microRNAs regulation mode and its effect on PTC cells. Our results showed that a gene can target multiple microRNAs simultaneously, and vice versa. All this information can be used to find the most effective therapeutic targets/biomarkers in PTC. For future research, we indicated a possible niche, namely microRNA signatures in PTMC.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, L.H., A.P., D.P. Data curation, L.H., A.-C.H., K.G.; Formal analysis, E.-A.B., A.P.; Investigation, L.H., D.P., P.-A.S.; Methodology, A.P., A.-C.H., D.P.; Supervision, D.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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