CLINICAL STUDY

A meta-analysis of the associations between common variation in the PDE8B gene and thyroid hormone parameters, including assessment of longitudinal stability of associations over time and effect of thyroid hormone replacement

Peter N Taylor1, Vijay Panicker1,2, Adrian Sayers3, Beverley Shields4, Ahmed Iqbal1, Alexandra P Bremner5, John P Beilby3, Peter J Leedman2,7,8, Andrew T Hattersley4, Bijay Vaidya9, Timothy Frayling4, Jonathan Evans10, Jonathan H Tobias3, Nicholas J Timpson11, John P Walsh2,12 and Colin M Dayan1,13

1Henry Wellcome Laboratories for Integrative Neurosciences and Endocrinology, University of Bristol, Bristol BS1 3NY, UK, 2School of Medicine and Pharmacology, University of Western Australia, Crawley, Western Australia 6009, Australia, 3Academic Rheumatology, Avon Orthopaedic Centre, Southmead Hospital, Bristol BS10 5NB, UK, 4Peninsula NIHR Clinical Research Facility, Peninsula Medical School, University of Exeter, Exeter PL6 8BU, UK, 5School of Population Health, University of Western Australia, Crawley, Western Australia 6009, Australia, 6Pathwest Laboratory Medicine, WA, Nedlands, Western Australia 6009, Australia, 7Laboratory for Cancer Medicine, Western Australian Institute for Medical Research, Centre for Medical Research, University of Western Australia, Perth, Western Australia 6000, Australia, 8Department of Endocrinology and Diabetes, Royal Perth Hospital, Perth, Western Australia 6847, Australia, 9Department of Endocrinology and Diabetes, Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, Exeter EX2 5DE, UK, 10Academic Unit of Psychiatry University of Bristol, Bristol BS6 6JR, UK, 11Department of Social Medicine, MRC Centre for Causal Analyses in Translational Epidemiology, University of Bristol, Bristol BS8 2BN, UK, 12Department of Endocrinology and Diabetes, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Nedlands, Western Australia 6009, Australia and 13Cardiff University School of Medicine, Centre for Endocrine and Diabetes Science, Heath Park, Cardiff CF14 4XN, Wales, UK

(Correspondence should be addressed to C M Dayan at Cardiff University School of Medicine; Email: dayancm@cardiff.ac.uk)

Abstract

Objective: Common variants in PDE8B are associated with TSH but apparently without any effect on thyroid hormone levels that is difficult to explain. Furthermore, the stability of the association has not been examined in longitudinal studies or in patients on levothyroxine (L-T4).

Design: Totally, four cohorts were used (n = 2557); the Busselton Health Study (thyroid function measured on two occasions), DEPTH, EFSOCH (selective cohorts), and WATTS (individuals on L-T4).

Methods: Meta-analysis to clarify associations between the rs4704397 single nucleotide polymorphism in PDE8B on TSH, tri-iodothyronine (T3), and T4 levels.

Results: Meta-analysis confirmed that genetic variation in PDE8B was associated with TSH (P = 1.64 × 10^{-10}) 0.20 s.d./allele, 95% confidence interval (CI) 0.142, 0.267) and identified a possible new association with free T4 (P = 0.023, -0.07 s.d./allele, 95% CI -0.137, -0.01), no association was seen with free T3 (P = 0.218). The association between PDE8B and TSH was similar in 1981 (0.14 s.d./allele, 95% CI 0.04, 0.238) and 1994 (0.20 s.d./allele, 95% CI 0.102, 0.300) and even more consistent between PDE8B and free T4 in 1981 (-0.068 s.d./allele, 95% CI -0.167, 0.031) and 1994 (-0.07 s.d./allele, 95% CI -0.170, 0.030). No associations were seen between PDE8B and thyroid hormone parameters in individuals on L-T4.

Conclusion: Common genetic variation in PDE8B is associated with reciprocal changes in TSH and free T4 levels that are consistent over time and lost in individuals on L-T4. These findings identify a possible genetic marker reflecting variation in thyroid hormone output that will be of value in epidemiological studies and provides additional evidence that PDE8B is involved in TSH signaling in the thyroid.

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Introduction

Variation in thyroid function within the reference range is associated with important differences in key biological outcomes in the general population. These include body mass index, lipid levels, blood pressure, childhood development, and risk of fatal ischemic heart disease events (1–5). Although nominally informative, these studies have all relied upon measurements of serum thyroid hormone levels taken on a single occasion. This approach may not represent an individual’s lifetime exposure and is also susceptible to confounding factors (6, 7). For example, cigarette smoking is associated with reduced TSH concentrations, (8) making it difficult to accurately assess the effect of thyroid dysfunction on cardiovascular disease (5).

Genetic association studies represent an alternative method to study life course differences in the thyroid
hormone pathway and phenotypic outcomes. The genetic approach avoids confounding and reverse causation effects present in traditional epidemiological studies. It may also better reflect lifetime exposure to thyroid hormones than a single serum measurement. For the genetic approach to be practical, robust genetic associations with thyroid hormone levels need to be established.

At present, the genetic and temporal architecture of this important trait remains incompletely understood. Genomewide association studies (GWAS) and candidate gene studies have identified single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) in a number of genes that have been associated with variance in TSH levels or the free thyroxine (T\(_4\))/free tri-iodothyronine (T\(_3\)) ratio in the normal population (9–11). However, to date, no genetic variant has been confirmed at a high level of statistical significance to be associated with the overall thyroid function set point. Furthermore, no data exist on the temporal stability of genetic associations with thyroid function over time. Both these elements are key in determining whether a genetic marker can be found that is a valuable surrogate for lifetime thyroid hormone exposure.

Arnaud-Lopez et al. (10) identified that variation in rs4704397 SNP in \(PDE8B\) was associated with altered TSH levels in the reference range. This initial study, however, did not include free T\(_3\) and free T\(_4\) levels. As \(PDE8B\) encodes a cAMP phosphodiesterase enzyme (12), strongly expressed in the thyroid gland (13–15) but undetectable in the pituitary gland (16), it was postulated that its influence on thyroid hormone parameters was via the hydrolysis and inactivation of cAMP in the thyroid in response to TSH signaling. This work raises the possibility that variation in \(PDE8B\) influences the thyroid hormone set point by making the thyroid less responsive to TSH, equivalent to a mild degree of thyroid failure resulting in higher TSH levels. Such a mode of action would be expected to also result in changes in thyroid hormone levels, in a reciprocal direction to the change in TSH.

Intriguingly, a recent study of 1017 pregnant women (17) replicated the association of this SNP with TSH levels but failed to find any evidence of association with free T\(_3\) and free T\(_4\) levels. However, due to the log-linear relationship between TSH and thyroid hormone levels, small changes in thyroid hormone levels result in relatively large changes in TSH: this study might, therefore, have been underpowered to detect associations between \(PDE8B\) and free T\(_3\) and free T\(_4\) levels.

In this study, we undertook a meta-analysis to investigate the association between variation at rs4704397 SNP in \(PDE8B\) on free T\(_3\) and free T\(_4\) levels in the general population and in individuals on thyroid hormone replacement and assessed the temporal stability of its effects in the Busselton cohort (18). As a control, we also studied the temporal stability of the rs2235544 SNP in the deiodinase 1 (\(DIO1\)) gene which our group previously identified was associated with altered free T\(_3\)/free T\(_4\) ratio \((P=3.6\times 10^{-13}\) effect size 0.2 s.d./allele s.e.m. 0.003) and altered free T\(_4\) levels \((P=2.1\times 10^{-9}\) but not serum TSH levels (11). Furthermore, we aimed to test whether variation in \(PDE8B\) was still associated with TSH in individuals on L-T\(_4\).

Finally, we also explored two new candidate SNPs, rs10499559 in \(RAPGEF5\) and rs9322817 in \(HACE1\). These two SNPs had the strongest associations with TSH \((P=8.3\times 10^{-6}\) and \(6.5\times 10^{-6}\) respectively) where the identity of the gene tagged by the SNP was defined (19) using generalized estimating equations (GEE), from a GWAS of the Framingham Heart Study. The GEE analysis from this study was utilized as it estimates the average response over a population, rather than familial aggregation and hereditability. Therefore, SNPs identified with the GEE approach would be potentially very applicable for use in Mendelian Randomization studies in epidemiological cohorts.

Although these SNPs could have been identified due to a type 1 error, \(RAPGEF5\) is a member of the RAS subfamily of GTases and is the key link between cell surface receptors and RAS activation. It is expressed in a wide variety of tissues including the thyroid, and we postulated that it may also be involved in TSH signaling. \(HACE1\) is expressed in multiple tissues including the heart, brain, and kidney but is not thought to be present in the thyroid gland. We postulated that its association with TSH may be due to differences in detection of thyroid hormone in the brain.

Subjects and methods

In this study, four cohorts were used: the Busselton Health Study (Busselton), the Depression and Thyroid Disease study (DEPTH), The Exeter Family Study of Childhood Health (EFSOCH), and The Weston Area T3 T4 Study (WATTS). These studies have all been described previously (11, 20–22). Busselton is a community-based cohort in which individuals were tested for thyroid function on two occasions 13 years apart (1981 and 1994), DEPTH is a primary care cohort of individuals referred for thyroid function testing, EFSOCH is a cohort of male partners of pregnant women recruited for a family study, and WATTS is a cohort of patients on thyroid hormone replacement recruited for an intervention study. Baseline characteristics of all cohorts are presented in Table 1. Further details of the cohorts/collections can be found in the Supplementary data, see section on supplementary data given at the end of this article. All individuals in all cohorts were of white European ancestry.

To examine the association of genetic variation with endogenous thyroid hormone levels separately from the effects of disease processes or medication that affects thyroid function, individuals with any TSH, free T\(_3\), or
free T4 levels outside the reference ranges for the assays used (see Supplementary data) were excluded from the Busselton, DEPTH, and EFSOCH cohorts. These exclusions were not applied to the WATTS cohort in which subjects were on thyroid hormone replacement and WATTS was, therefore, excluded from the meta-analysis of the cohorts. Subgroup analysis was subsequently performed for the WATTS-cohort individuals with TSH, free T3, or free T4 levels outside the reference range excluded.

**Statistical analyses**

Descriptive statistics of the three cohorts are presented as means and s.d. TSH results across the cohorts were not normally distributed; a log e transformation was, therefore, used to normalize the data.

Within each cohort, the association per minor allele of the different genotypes and serological markers was assessed using ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression. Results are presented in both ‘natural’ and ‘standardized’ (per s.d.) units; all models were adjusted for age and sex. Simple inverse variance weighted (fixed effects) meta-analysis was performed to pool study specific results and combined estimates and P values presented along with metrics of heterogeneity. Additional individual patient data (IPD) meta-analysis was performed on genetic markers shown to be associated with serological markers (i.e. P < 0.05).

The IPD meta-analysis was performed with a multilevel regression model using restricted maximum likelihood estimation; cohort was entered as a random effect to preserve the hierarchical nature of the data. IPD meta-analysis models were successively adjusted for sex, age, free T3, and free T4. We tested for heterogeneity using the Q statistic.

To assess the temporal stability of the genetic effect, the Busselton cohort was studied using a series of multivariate seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) models. SUR is a generalization of OLS linear regression, which allows simultaneous model fitting between two different outcomes (serological levels in 1981 and 1994), and a consistent genetic exposure. The SUR enables the genetic effect between 1981 and 1994 to be tested and the residual (error) correlation between 1981 and 1994 to be explored.

All data analysis was performed using STATA version 11.0 (STATACORP, College Station, TX, USA).

**Results**

**Study populations**

Circulating levels of free T3 and free T4 were approximately normally distributed in the Busselton, DEPTH, EFSOCH, and WATTS cohorts. Log transformation of TSH led to a near-normal distribution. Table 2 presents baseline characteristics of the cohorts (s.d. in brackets). Table 2 shows genotype frequencies and Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium (χ²) by cohort.

**Table 1** Baseline characteristics of the cohorts (s.d. in brackets).

| Characteristic | Busselton | DEPTH | WATTS | WATTS abnormal TSH removed | EFSOCH |
|---------------|-----------|-------|-------|---------------------------|--------|
| n             | 825       | 387   | 544   | 387                       | 801    |
| % Male        | 50.1      | 22.7  | 16.5  | 14.5                      | 100    |
| Age (years)   | 45.1 (± 14.2) | 43.6 (± 14.7) | 57.0 (± 11.1) | 55.6 | 32.7 (± 5.9) |
| TSH (mU/l)    | 1.47      | 1.72  | 1.47  | 1.61                      | 1.99   |
| Free T3 (pmol/l) | 5.53 (± 0.53) | 4.67 (± 0.63) | 3.84 (± 0.72) | 3.78 (± 0.69) | 5.51 (± 0.53) |
| Free T4 (pmol/l) | 16.6 (± 2.64) | 16.3 (± 2.65) | 21.1 (± 3.68) | 20.3 (± 3.23) | 16.5 (± 2.02) |

**Table 2** Genotype frequencies and Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium (χ²) by cohort.

| Gene SNP  | Cohort   | A:A   | A:G   | G:G   | A:C   | C:C   | C:T   | T:T   | Total | χ² |
|-----------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| PDE8B (rs4704397) | Busselton | 116 (14.1) | 397 (45.2) | 317 (38.4) | | | | | 825 | 0.07 |
| DEPTH     | 66 (17.1) | 201 (51.9) | 120 (31.1) | | | | | | 387 | 1.36 |
| WATTS      | 87 (16.9) | 243 (41.2) | 185 (35.9) | | | | | | 515 | 0.22 |
| EFSOCH     | 131 (16.35) | 374 (46.7) | 296 (37.0) | | | | | | 801 | 0.05 |
| DIO1 (rs2235544)* | Busselton | 213 (25.9) | | 393 (47.8) | 216 (26.2) | | | | 822 | 1.58 |
| DEPTH     | 103 (27.2) | | 176 (46.8) | 98 (25.9) | | | | | 377 | 1.65 |
| WATTS      | 400 (82.1) | | 72 (14.7) | 15 (3.1) | | | | | 487 | 21.8 |
| HACE1 (rs9322817) | Busselton | 312 (37.8) | | 390 (47.2) | 123 (14.9) | | | | 825 | 0 |
| DEPTH     | 145 (41.2) | | 157 (44.2) | 50 (14.2) | | | | | 352 | 1.6 |
| WATTS      | 171 (38.7) | | 196 (44.2) | 75 (17.1) | | | | | 441 | 2.26 |

*Incidences of the rs2235544 (DIO1) genotypes in the WATTS cohort has been published previously (11).
demonstrates that all SNPs were in Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium (HWE) in all cohorts except for rs10499559 in RAPGEF5 in the WATTS cohort. There were difficulties in genotyping this SNP from the DNA stores available, and this led to an unusually high error rate; furthermore, there were difficulties in distinguishing between the CC and the CT genotype. We have presented the data for this SNP in WATTS, but it should be interpreted with caution.

**Effects on TSH and serum thyroid hormone levels in individuals with intact thyroid function**

The meta-analysis of three cohorts of individuals not on thyroid hormone replacement reconfirmed the association between the rs4704397 SNP in the PDE8B on TSH levels (P = 1.64 × 10^{-10}). Table 3 shows results for the individual cohorts, and the results of the meta-analysis are shown in Table 4. Minimal attenuation of the effect was observed (see Fig. 1) after adjusting for multiple covariates including free T4, and only a small increase in the s.e.m. was observed, resulting in a small increase in the P value from $P = 2.95 × 10^{-10}$ (unadjusted) to $P = 1.64 × 10^{-10}$ (fully adjusted). Meta-analysis also revealed an association with free T4 levels (P = 0.023), in the opposite direction to the association seen with TSH.

Our meta-analysis also validated the association with the rs223554 SNP in the DIO1 gene on free T4 (P = 0.001) and free T3/free T4 ratio (P = 9.26 × 10^{-4}) and confirmed that there was no association with TSH (P = 0.32).

**The effect of variation in the PDE8B and DIO1 genes on serum thyroid hormone and TSH levels over time in the same individuals in the Busselton cohort**

In the Busselton cohort, the effect size per minor A allele of the rs4704397 SNP of the PDE8B gene on TSH levels in 1981 was 0.141 S.D./allele (P = 0.146 95% CI −0.225, −0.037) in 1994. Testing the difference in genetic effects between 1981 and 1994 showed that there was no evidence of any difference (P = 0.93) and the residual error correlation between 1981 and 1994 was also high (r = 0.368), again indicating commonality of effect.

Very similar results were obtained for the effect size per minor C allele of the rs223554 SNP of the DIO1 gene on T4 levels in 1981: −0.136 S.D./allele (P = 0.0054 95% CI −0.23, −0.042) versus 0.131 S.D./allele (P = 0.006 95% CI −0.225, −0.037) in 1994. Testing the difference in genetic effects between 1981 and 1994 showed that there was no evidence of any difference (P = 0.93) and the residual error correlation between 1981 and 1994 was also high (r = 0.368), again indicating commonality of effect.

**The associations between PDE8B and thyroid hormone parameters on TSH in individuals on thyroid hormone replacement**

The WATTS cohort (individuals on thyroid hormone replacement) was analyzed separately. In this cohort, unlike the general population, we observed no evidence of association with the rs4704397 SNP in the PDE8B gene on TSH levels (P = 0.99). Similarly, no effect of this PDE8B SNP was seen on free T4 (P = 0.59) or free T3 levels (P = 0.90). By contrast, an effect was seen on free T4/free T3 ratio with the DIO1 SNP in this cohort as previously reported (11).

Our meta-analysis failed to confirm any association between genetic variation in rs10499559 in RAPGEF5 on TSH (P = 0.67), free T3 (P = 0.21), or free T4 (P = 0.49). Our meta-analysis also found no evidence of association between genetic variation in rs9322817 in HACE1 on TSH (P = 0.93), free T3 (P = 0.94), or free T4 (P = 0.09).

**Discussion**

Our meta-analysis has confirmed that the rs4704397 SNP in the PDE8B gene is associated with variation in TSH levels, in keeping with the initial report of Arnaud-Lopez et al. (10) and a subsequent study in pregnant women (20). However, the additional power available to us in this meta-analysis enabled us to detect that this SNP is also reciprocally associated with free T4 levels. For each additional minor A allele at this SNP, there was an increase in TSH levels and a reduction in free T4 levels, indicating relative hypothyroidism (Fig. 1). Although the level of significance for the association with free T4 remains modest, and further larger confirmatory studies are required to validate this, our finding is supported by its replication in the same individuals 13 years later in the Busselton cohort. Associations with the rs2235544 SNP in DIO1 were also consistent over time, but by contrast, this SNP was associated with free T4/free T3 ratio and not TSH (11). We found no evidence of association between SNPs, rs10499559 in RAPGEF5 gene and rs9322817 in HACE1 gene, on thyroid hormone parameters.

These findings are important for two reasons. First, they potentially resolve the paradox raised by Shields et al. (17), which demonstrated an association with the rs4704397 SNP of PDE8B on TSH, but no evidence of association with free T3 or T4. Therefore, we have provided evidence that this SNP is a valuable marker for
Table 3 The effect of variation in rs4704397 in PDE8B, rs223554 in DIO1, rs10499559 in RAPGEF5, and rs9322817 in HACE1 on TSH and serum thyroid hormone levels by cohort.

|                      | β estimate           | n     | Natural | Std. 95% CI     | P      | r²   |
|----------------------|----------------------|-------|---------|-----------------|--------|------|
| TSH                  |                      |       |         |                 |        |      |
| **PDE8B**            |                      |       |         |                 |        |      |
| Busselton 1981       | 825                  | 0.066 | 0.139   | 0.040 to 0.238  | 0.0062 | 0.011|
| Busselton 1994       | 825                  | 0.095 | 0.201   | 0.102 to 0.300  | 0.0008 | 0.031|
| DEPTH                | 387                  | 0.122 | 0.225   | 0.079 to 0.371  | 0.0026 | 0.025|
| WATTS                | 515                  | 0     | 0       | −0.123 to 0.122 | 0.9970 | 0.001|
| EFSOCH               | 801                  | 0.096 | 0.199   | 0.101 to 0.297  | 0.0001 | 0.02 |
| **DIO1**             |                      |       |         |                 |        |      |
| Busselton 1981       | 822                  | 0.029 | 0.06    | −0.035 to 0.155 | 0.2160 | 0.004|
| Busselton 1994       | 818                  | 0.001 | 0.001   | −0.093 to 0.096 | 0.9770 | 0.012|
| DEPTH                | 377                  | −0.068| −0.125  | −0.262 to 0.013 | 0.0760 | 0.012|
| **RAPGEF5**          |                      |       |         |                 |        |      |
| Busselton 1981       | 827                  | 0.017 | 0.037   | −0.104 to 0.177 | 0.6098 | 0.002|
| Busselton 1994       | 822                  | −0.016| −0.033  | −0.173 to 0.107 | 0.6453 | 0.012|
| DEPTH                | 368                  | −0.005| −0.009  | −0.217 to 0.199 | 0.9302 | 0.002|
| WATTS                | 487                  | −0.165| −0.104  | −0.291 to 0.083 | 0.2779 | 0.006|
| **HACE1**            |                      |       |         |                 |        |      |
| Busselton 1981       | 825                  | 0.034 | 0.072   | −0.027 to 0.171 | 0.1527 | 0.005|
| Busselton 1994       | 821                  | 0.008 | 0.017   | −0.082 to 0.116 | 0.7333 | 0.012|
| DEPTH                | 352                  | −0.028| −0.052  | −0.203 to 0.098 | 0.4950 | 0.002|
| WATTS                | 441                  | −0.022| −0.014  | −0.147 to 0.12  | 0.8405 | 0.002|
| **Free T₃**          |                      |       |         |                 |        |      |
| **PDE8B**            |                      |       |         |                 |        |      |
| Busselton 1981       | 825                  | −0.034| −0.048  | −0.147 to 0.050 | 0.3343 | 0.04 |
| DEPTH                | 387                  | −0.03 | −0.048  | −0.195 to 0.100 | 0.5271 | 0.001|
| WATTS                | 515                  | 0.006 | 0.008   | −0.116 to 0.133 | 0.8955 | 0.004|
| EFSOCH               | 801                  | −0.014| −0.027  | −0.123 to 0.070 | 0.3859 | 0.053|
| **DIO1**             |                      |       |         |                 |        |      |
| Busselton 1994       | 818                  | 0.066 | 0.094   | 0.000 to 0.187  | 0.0492 | 0.043|
| DEPTH                | 377                  | 0.003 | 0.005   | −0.133 to 0.144 | 0.9399 | 0    |
| **RAPGEF5**          |                      |       |         |                 |        |      |
| Busselton 1994       | 822                  | −0.063| −0.089  | −0.227 to 0.049 | 0.2054 | 0.04 |
| DEPTH                | 368                  | −0.024| −0.038  | −0.247 to 0.171 | 0.7242 | 0.001|
| WATTS                | 487                  | 0.11  | 0.152   | −0.038 to 0.343 | 0.1181 | 0.007|
| **HACE1**            |                      |       |         |                 |        |      |
| Busselton 1994       | 821                  | −0.012| −0.017  | −0.115 to 0.081 | 0.7352 | 0.039|
| DEPTH                | 352                  | 0.018 | 0.029   | −0.122 to 0.179 | 0.7111 | 0.001|
| WATTS                | 441                  | 0.08  | 0.11    | −0.023 to 0.243 | 0.1058 | 0.007|

Std., standardized.

*Free T₃ levels not available in the Busselton 1981 data set.
use in large epidemiological studies to examine the impact of small reductions in thyroid gland function on biological phenotypes and common diseases in the population. Such an approach can also then be used to explore the potential benefits of thyroid hormone supplementation in subjects with thyroid function in the lower parts of the reference range.

Second, our finding of reciprocal changes in TSH and free T4 with common genetic variation in PDE8B provides further support for the suggestion, arising from the data of Arnaud-Lopez et al. (10) that PDE8B plays a role in TSH signaling in the thyroid gland rather than operating at the level of central control of TSH secretion. This is entirely consistent with the predominant expression of the PDE8B gene in the thyroid gland (14), with expression to a lesser extent in the brain (13).

The observation that the association with TSH is lost in subjects on thyroid hormone replacement is unlikely to be an issue of statistical power, as an association with TSH was seen in the DEPTH cohort (not on T4) that is smaller in number than WATTS (Table 3). This finding is also consistent with PDE8B having an effect at the level of the thyroid, as in these individuals thyroid responsiveness to TSH will play little or no role in determining thyroid hormone levels. In this context, it is interesting to note that individuals in the WATTS cohort have a higher free T4 (P ≤ 0.001) and a lower free T3 (P = 0.04), despite having a similar TSH (P = 0.74) level to subjects in the Busselton cohort (general population) in keeping with previous reports (23). This trend persisted even when individuals with abnormal and suppressed TSH levels were removed from the WATTS cohorts; individuals in WATTS had a higher T4 (P < 0.001) and a lower free T3 (P = 0.03) despite having similar TSH levels (P = 0.24). This observation emphasizes that although thyroid hormone replacement may restore an individual’s TSH levels to within the ‘normal population range’, this may be outside an individual’s genetically determined set point.

The rs4704397 SNP is present in intron 1 of the PDE8B gene. However, it is possible that this SNP is not itself functional but linked to functional locus outside intron 1. Arnaud-Lopez et al. (10) have previously demonstrated that the rs4704397 SNP shows linkage disequilibrium with SNPs in neighboring regions. It is, however, unlikely to be involved in a coding region because sequence analysis of 20 subjects homozygous for the rare and 20 subjects for the common allele of rs4704397 did not demonstrate any coding variants

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Table 4: Meta-analysis to show associations between variation in rs4704397 in PDE8B, rs223554 in DIO1, rs10499559 in RAPGEF5, and rs9322817 in HACE1 on TSH and thyroid hormone levels. Cohort 1 = Busselton, Cohort 2 = Depth, and Cohort 3 = EFSOCH.

| Cohorts | Gene     | β        | 95% CI     | P value | Q   | p(Q) ≥ |
|---------|----------|----------|------------|---------|-----|--------|
| TSH     | PDE8B    | 0.205    | (0.142, 0.267) | 1.64 × 10⁻¹⁰ | 0.093 | 0.955  |
| 1, 2, 3 | DIO1     | −0.04    | (−0.118, 0.038) | 0.324 | 2.188 | 0.139  |
| 1, 2    | RAPGEF5  | −0.026   | (−0.142, 0.091) | 0.667 | 0.035 | 0.861  |
| 1, 2    | HACE1    | −0.004   | (−0.087, 0.079) | 0.928 | 0.562 | 0.453  |
| T3      | PDE8B    | −0.039   | (−0.102, 0.023) | 0.218 | 0.106 | 0.948  |
| 1, 2, 3 | DIO1     | 0.066    | (−0.011, 0.144) | 0.093 | 7.501 | 0.006  |
| 1, 2    | RAPGEF5  | −0.073   | (−0.189, 0.042) | 0.211 | 0.159 | 0.69   |
| 1, 2    | HACE1    | −0.003   | (−0.086, 0.079) | 0.936 | 0.251 | 0.616  |
| T4      | PDE8B    | −0.074   | (−0.137, −0.010) | 0.023 | 0.205 | 0.902  |
| 1, 2, 3 | DIO1     | −0.132   | (−0.210, −0.054) | 0.001 | 0.014 | 0.907  |
| 1, 2    | RAPGEF5  | −0.041   | (−0.158, 0.076) | 0.491 | 0.304 | 0.582  |
| 1, 2    | HACE1    | −0.072   | (−0.155, 0.010) | 0.086 | 1.365 | 0.243  |
| T3 T4   | PDE8B    | 0.027    | (−0.036, 0.089) | 0.407 | 0.469 | 0.791  |
| 1, 2, 3 | DIO1     | 0.148    | (0.071, 0.226) | 9.2 × 10⁻⁴ | 0.158 | 0.691  |
| 1, 2    | RAPGEF5  | −0.018   | (−0.133, 0.098) | 0.737 | 0.749 | 0.387  |
| 1, 2    | HACE1    | 0.055    | (−0.027, 0.138) | 0.189 | 2.617 | 0.106  |

Figure 1: Standardized TSH, free T3, and free T4 levels by rs4704397 (PDE8B) genotype.
We were unable to confirm the association between the rs10499559 SNP in 
RAPGEF5 and the rs9322817 SNP in 
HACE1 with serum TSH levels. Genetic variation in 
rs9322821 in HACE1 was evenly distributed in our 
cohorts, and our study was sufficiently powered to 
detect an effect of 0.10 s.d./allele. The initial identifi-
cation of an association between this SNP and TSH may 
be due to a type 1 error or else its effect is only modest. 
By contrast, the mean allele frequency of rs10499559 
in RAPGEF5 is low, at 0.15, in our cohorts and we 
were, therefore, only sufficiently powered to detect an 
association of 0.15 s.d./allele or higher. This SNP will 
require further replication studies in several large 
epidemiological cohorts with thyroid function available 
to fully assess its effect.

We were able to demonstrate the continuing 
association between genetic variation due to SNPs on 
TSH and thyroid hormone levels, and to our knowledge, 
this report is the first to provide evidence for this. 
The marked similarity in effect size per additional minor 
allele for both the rs4704397 SNP in 
PDE8B on TSH and free T4 and the rs2235544 SNP in 
DIO1 on free T4 over a 13-year period provides compelling evidence 
for the consistent associations of these SNPs on thyroid 
hormone parameters over time. Indeed, over this time 
interval, there was a mean increase in serum TSH of 
0.31 μU/ml, and yet the relative genetic effect of these 
SNPs remained constant. This suggests that the genetic 
approach better reflects lifelong trends in TSH and 
thyroid hormone levels compared with individual 
serum values.

Supplementary data
This is linked to the online version of the paper at http://dx.doi.org/10. 
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Declaration of interest
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest that could be 
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