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Authors
Conde, Lucia
Halperin, Eran
Akers, Nicholas K
et al.

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Abstract

To identify susceptibility loci for non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL) subtypes, we conducted a three-stage genome-wide association study. We identified two variants associated with follicular lymphoma (FL) in 1,465 FL cases/6,958 controls at 6p21.32 (rs10484561, rs7755224, \( r^2 = 1.0 \); combined \( p \)-values=1.12x10^{-29}, 2.00x10^{-19}), providing further support that MHC genetic variation influences FL susceptibility. Confirmatory evidence of a previously reported association was also found between chronic lymphocytic leukemia/small lymphocytic lymphoma and rs735665 (combined \( p \)-value=4.24x10^{-9}).

Non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL) is a complex group of B- and T-cell neoplasms with >300,000 new cases diagnosed worldwide each year (http://www-dep.iarc.fr/globocan/database.htm). Family and epidemiological studies suggest an important genetic role in the etiology of lymphoma, though the inherited genetic basis of the disease is largely unknown. Recently, we conducted a genome-wide association study (GWAS) of three common histological subtypes of NHL, follicular lymphoma (FL), chronic lymphocytic leukemia/small lymphocytic lymphoma (CLL/SLL), and diffuse large B-cell lymphoma (DLBCL), using a pooled DNA genotyping strategy. Due to experimental and technical noise associated with pooled DNA GWAS, we conducted a new individual genotyping-based study on a larger subset of NHL cases and control using a three-stage GWAS study design (Supplementary Table 1, Supplementary Fig. 1).

In Stage 1, we conducted a GWAS using a subset of samples (SF1 study) chosen from a larger population-based case-control study of NHL based in the San Francisco Bay Area. After applying quality control metrics (Supplementary Methods), 213 FL, 211 CLL/SLL and 257 DLBCL cases and 750 controls were included in the final statistical analysis of Stage 1. The genome-wide results for FL, CLL/SLL and DLBCL are represented in Supplementary
Fig. 2a-c, where overall, 18 SNPs showed unadjusted trend p-values below a $10^{-5}$ threshold (Supplementary Table 2). The most notable findings were for SNPs associated with FL in the major histocompatibility complex (MHC) region on chromosome 6, concentrated around two independent peaks at 6p21.33 and 6p21.32 ($r^2<0.01$; Figure 1). The strongest signal in 6p21.33 is located at the psoriasis susceptibility region 1 (PSORS1) (rs1265086, trend p-value=$3.34\times10^{-6}$, Supplementary Table 3), where we have previously detected a FL susceptibility locus2. The 6p21.32 association peak is located in a region encompassing the HLA-DR and HLA-DQ genes. Here, eight SNPs exhibited trend p-values ≤$10^{-4}$ (Supplementary Table 3).

In Stage 2, 40 SNPs with the lowest trend p-values for each NHL subtype (Supplementary Tables 4-6) were genotyped in two independent population-based case-control studies (SCALE4 for FL, Mayo-GEC5 for CLL/SLL) and in a separate sample of 118 DLBCL population-based cases and 651 controls (SF1B study) drawn from the same population as SF1 (Supplementary Table 1, Supplementary Fig. 1). Seven SNPs were associated with FL risk (p<0.05) in the SCALE study (Supplementary Table 7). The two SNPs with the lowest p-values, rs7755224 and rs10484561 (allelic p-values=$6.30\times10^{-5}$ and $1.20\times10^{-5}$) are located in the MHC Class II region at 6p21.32. They are in complete linkage disequilibrium (LD) ($r^2=1.0$) and lie, respectively, 16kb and 29kb upstream of HLA-DQB1. Four additional SNPs were associated with FL in the MHC region at 6p21.33, including the two SNPs, rs6457327 and rs2517448 (allelic p-values=$2.90\times10^{-2}$ and $3.45\times10^{-2}$), previously reported in our pooled DNA GWAS2.

Two SNPs with trend p-values <0.05 were positively associated with CLL/SLL risk in the Mayo-GEC study (rs735665 and rs484458, trend p-values=$2.64\times10^{-3}$ and $6.43\times10^{-3}$; Supplementary Table 7). Located in an intergenic region on 11q24.1, rs735665 was previously reported as a risk allele for CLL in a genome scan by Di Bernardo and colleagues6. Interestingly, two other SNPs, rs872071 and rs9378805, reported to be highly associated with CLL in that study were ranked among the top 100 CLL/SLL SNPs in our Stage 1 GWAS (trend p-values = $7.17\times10^{-4}$ and $1.75\times10^{-4}$ respectively).

None of the SNPs genotyped in Stage 2 for DLBCL showed evidence of association with disease risk (p-value<0.05). Failure to identify associated alleles may be due to the heterogeneity of DLBCL as evidenced from gene expression and immunophenotyping studies.

In Stage 3, the nine SNPs associated with FL and CLL/SLL risk were genotyped in 873 FL, 471 CLL/SLL, 916 DLBCL cases and 4,470 controls recruited from six case-control studies of European descent participating in the InterLymph Consortium (Supplementary Table 1, Supplementary Fig. 1). Again, rs10484561 was associated with increased FL risk across all studies, with trend p-values ranging from $2.21\times10^{-2}$ to $1.40\times10^{-10}$ (Table 1). The combined p-value reached $1.12\times10^{-29}$ in the meta-analysis of samples from all three stages (combined odds ratio [OR]=1.95, 95% confidence interval [CI] 1.72-2.22, Supplementary Table 8, Supplementary Fig. 3). No evidence was found of heterogeneity across studies (Cochran’s Q statistic=5.61, d.f.=7, p-value=0.5857; $I^2$ heterogeneity index=0%). Likewise, rs7755224 was associated with FL in the meta-analysis from all stages (combined p-value=$2.00\times10^{-19}$,
OR=2.07, 95% CI 1.76-2.42, Supplementary Table 8, Supplementary Fig. 4) and no evidence was found of significant heterogeneity (Q=5.42, d.f.=3, p-value=0.1438; I²=44.6%). While the association between rs6457327 and FL was replicated in Stage 2, and in three other independent sample sets2, this association was poorly replicated in the smaller studies from Stage 3, resulting in a weaker combined p-value (6.64×10^-6; OR=0.68, 95% CI 0.58-0.79, Supplementary Table 8) than previously reported2 (see Supplementary Table 9 for additional information).

For CLL/SLL, rs735665 exhibited a trend p-value of 3.58×10^-4 in Stage 3 and a combined p-value of 4.24×10^-9 in the meta-analysis of all samples (OR=1.81, 95% CI 1.50-2.20; Supplementary Table 8). This finding confirms the previous association of rs735665 with CLL risk6, and further supports its role in CLL susceptibility.

To search for additional FL-associated variants that were not genotyped in the HLA-DQB1 region in Stage 1, we imputed SNP genotypes in a 500kb region centered on rs10484561 (Figure 1). We identified four SNPs with imputed p-values<10^-3 that were in complete LD with rs10484561 (D'=1, r²=1 in HapMap-CEU), although none showed stronger signals than rs10484561 or rs7755224 (Supplementary Table 10). These SNPs are located in a 100kb region of relatively high LD in chromosome 6p21.32 that covers HLA-DQB1 and HLA-DQA1, and in close proximity to HLA-DRB1. Logistic regression analysis conditional on the associated SNPs in the region suggested that none were independent signals (Supplementary Table 11), and that a single locus or haplotype in LD with rs10484561/rs7755224 may harbor the causal variant(s). Analysis of SNP interactions and preliminary functional analyses did not provide further refinement of the signal (Supplementary Methods). However, one of the imputed SNPs, rs6457614, reported as a tag SNP for the HLA-DQB1*0501 allele in European, African and Japanese populations7, suggested that the association signal may be driven by this protein variant. To verify our imputation, rs6457614 was genotyped in the SF1 study. We found 99% concordance between imputed and observed genotypes for rs6457614, which was in strong LD with rs10484561 (D'=0.99, r²=0.95 in controls). Because HLA-DRB1*0101 and HLA-DQA1*0101 form the most frequent haplotype containing HLA-DQB1*0501 in European American populations8, tag SNPs for these two MHC Class II alleles (rs4947332 and rs1794265, respectively)7 also were genotyped in SF1. Genotyping results revealed that markers for an extended haplotype that includes HLA-DRB1*0101-HLA-DQA1*0101-HLA-DQB1*0501-rs104845561 were associated with FL risk (OR=2.07, 95% CI=1.40-3.06, p-value=2.32×10^-4).

Several small studies have reported links between MHC Class II alleles and NHL9,10,11, with somewhat conflicting results that may be attributable to small sample size, the combined analysis of mixed NHL subtypes, and/or differences in ethnic groups being analyzed11. In a large pooled study within the InterLymph consortium, the variant allele for TNF-308G>A (rs1800629) and a TNF/LTA haplotype located in the MHC Class III region were positively associated with DLBCL risk, but no association was found for FL12.

Further, MHC Class I and II alleles have been evaluated in the context of TNF extended haplotypes, which revealed independent positive associations for TNF-308A and HLA-B*0801 alleles in risk of DLBCL13. These loci are not in LD with rs10484561 in our controls (r²=0.014 for rs10484561 and TNF-308A; r²=0.007 and 0.001 for rs10484561 and
HLA-B*0801 tag SNPs [rs6457374, rs2844535]7), suggesting that our signal is not driven by these MHC Class III and I loci. Importantly, the association found here in the MHC Class II region also appears to be independent of the FL susceptibility locus at PSORS12, since the LD block at HLA-DRB1-HLA-DQA1-HLA-DQB1 is located 1.43Mbp downstream of the PSORS1 locus (Figure 1), and the LD measurement between rs6457327 and rs10484561 (r²<0.01) in our controls and in HapMap-CEU indicates no correlation between these loci. Results from conditional logistic regression analysis adjusted for the additive effects of rs6457327 in the SF1 study provided additional evidence for an independent role of rs10484561 (p-value=3.46×10⁻⁵) in FL risk.

In conclusion, we have identified a new FL susceptibility locus at chromosome 6p21.32 with combined p-values of 1.12×10⁻²⁹ and 2.00×10⁻¹⁹ for rs10484561 and rs7755224, respectively, providing evidence that genetic variation in the MHC Class II region is strongly associated with FL susceptibility. These loci appear to be part of an extended haplotype that includes HLA-DRB1*0101-HLA-DQA1*0101-HLA-DQB1*0501. Of note, although rs10484561 showed a trend towards association in DLBCL in SF1 (trend p-value=3.58×10⁻²), we did not observe markedly significant associations between the MHC region with risk of CLL/SLL or DLBCL (Supplementary Fig. 5), which suggests that the influence of MHC genetic variation differs by NHL subtype.

Supplementary Material

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Authors

Lucia Conde1, Eran Halperin2,3, Nicholas K. Akers1, Kevin M. Brown4, Karin E. Smedby5, Nathaniel Rothman6, Alexandra Nieters7,8, Susan L. Slager9, Angela Brooks-Wilson10,11, Luz Agana1, Jacques Ribi1, Jianjun Liu12, Hans-Olov Adami13,14, Hataf Darabi13, Henrik Hjalgrim15, Hui-Qi Low12, Keith Humphreys13, Mads Melbye15, Ellen T. Chang16,17, Bengt Glimelius18,19, Wendy Cozen20, Scott Davis21, Patricia Hartge6, Lindsay M. Morton6, Maryjean Schenk22, Sophia S. Wang6,23, Bruce Armstrong24, Anne Kricker24, Mark P. Purdue6, Claire M. Vajdic26, Peter Boyle27, Qing Lan6, Shelia H. Zahm6, Yawei Zhang28, Tongzhang Zheng28, Nikolaus Becker7, Yolanda Benavente29, Paolo Boffetta30,31, Paul Brennan32, Katja Butterbach7, Pierluigi Cocco33, Lenka Foretova34, Marc Maynadié35, Silvia de Sanjosé29, Anthony Staines36, John J. Spinelli10,37, Sara J. Achenbach9, Timothy G. Call9, Nicola J. Camp38, Neil E. Caporaso6, James R. Cerhan9, Julie M. Cunningham9, Lynn R Goldin8, Curtis A. Hanson9, Neil E. Kay9, Mark C. Lanasa39, Jose F. Leis9, Gerald E. Marti40, Kari G. Rabe9, Laura Z. Rassenti41, Logan G. Spector42, Sara S. Strom43, Celine M. Vachon9, J. Brice Weinberg39, Elizabeth A. Holly44, Stephen Chanock6, Martyn T. Smith1, Paige M. Bracci44, and Christine F. Skibola1,*
Affiliations

1Division of Environmental Health Sciences, School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720 2Molecular Microbiology and Biotechnology Department, Tel-Aviv University, Tel-Aviv, 69978, Israel 3International Computer Science Institute, 1947 Center Street, Suite 600, Berkeley, CA 94704 4Integrative Cancer Genomics Division, Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen), 445 N. Fifth Street, Phoenix, AZ 85004 5Dept of Medicine, Clinical Epidemiology Unit, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden 6Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD, 20892 7Cancer Epidemiology, German Cancer Research Center, Heidelberg, Germany 8Molecular Epidemiology, Centre of Chronic Immunodeficiency, University of Freiburg Medical Centre, Germany 9Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, USA 10British Columbia Cancer Research Center, British Columbia Cancer Agency, Canada 11Department of Biomedical Physiology and Kinesiology, Simon Fraser University, Canada 12Human Genetics, Genome Institute of Singapore, A*STAR, Singapore 13Dept. of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden 14Dept. of Epidemiology, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, MA, USA 15Dept. of Epidemiology Research, Statens Serum Institut, Copenhagen, Denmark 16Cancer Prevention Institute of California (formerly the Northern California Cancer Center), 2201 Walnut Avenue, Suite 300, Fremont, CA 94538, USA 17Division of Epidemiology, Department of Health Research and Policy, Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA, USA 18Departments of Oncology and Pathology, Karolinska University Hospital, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden 19Departments of Oncology, Radiology and Clinical Immunology, Akademiska Hospital, Uppsala University, Sweden 20Department of Preventive Medicine, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA 21Division of Public Health Sciences, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Seattle, Washington 22Department of Family Medicine and Public Health Sciences, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA 23Division of Etiology, Beckman Research Institute and the City of Hope, Duarte, CA 91010 24Sydney School of Public Health, The University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia 25Department of Haematology, St. Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, NSW, Australia 26University of New South Wales Cancer Research Center, Prince of Wales Clinical School, Sydney, NSW, Australia 27International Prevention Research Institute, Lyon, France 28School of Public Health, Yale University, New Haven, CT 06510 29Unit of Infections and Cancer (UNIC), Cancer Epidemiology Research Programme, Catalan Institute of Oncology, IDIBELL, CIBERESP, Barcelona, Spain 30The Tisch Cancer Institute, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, NY 31International Prevention Research Institute, Lyon, France 32International Agency for Research on Cancer, Lyon, France 33Department of Public Health, Occupational Health Section, University of Cagliari, Italy 34Masaryk Memorial Cancer Institute, Brno, Czech Republic 35Registry of Hematological Malignancies, EA4184, University of Burgundy, Universitary Hospital of Dijon, France 36School of Public Health and Population Science, University College Dublin, Ireland 37School of
Population and Public Health, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada
University of Utah School of Medicine, Department of Biomedical Informatics, Salt Lake City, Utah
Division of Cell and Gene Therapies/Office of Cellular, Tissues and Gene Therapies, US Food and Drug Administration, NIH, Bethesda, MD
Moores Cancer Center, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA
Prevention and Etiology Research Program, Masonic Cancer Center, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
Prevention and Etiology Research Program, Masonic Cancer Center, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
Division of Cell and Gene Therapies/Office of Cellular, Tissues and Gene Therapies, US Food and Drug Administration, NIH, Bethesda, MD
Department of Medicine, Duke University Medical Center, Durham, NC
Division of Cell and Gene Therapies/Office of Cellular, Tissues and Gene Therapies, US Food and Drug Administration, NIH, Bethesda, MD

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Figure 1. LD and association results for the FL-associated regions in the major histocompatibility complex (MHC)

In the main panel, trend p-values (as $-\log_{10}$) are shown for SNPs genotyped in the MHC region between positions 30,000Mb and 35,000Mb, where two independent FL-associated peaks were found. The first peak, represented by rs6457327 (in yellow), is located at 6p21.33 in the MHC Class I region. The second independent peak, represented by rs10484561 (in green), is located at 6p21.32 in the MHC Class II region. The secondary panel shows the SNPs genotyped (in black) and imputed (in red) in Stage 1 in a 500kb region centered on rs10484561 at 6p21.32. Imputations were based on data from HapMap.
Phase II release #22 in CEU population. Figure constructed using the snp.plotter R package (http://cbdb.nimh.nih.gov/~kristin/snp.plotter.html).
### Table 1
Summary statistics for association between rs10484561 and FL in all three stages.

| Stage | Dataset | Population                                      | # FL cases | # controls | MAF (cases/controls) | Variant allele OR (95% CI) | Allelic OR (95% CI) | Trend p-value | Genotypic p-value |
|-------|---------|-------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------|------------------|
| 1     | SF1     | SF Bay Area NHL2 study - USA                    | 213        | 750        | 0.21/0.13            | 2.06 (1.49-2.85)            | 1.81 (1.36-2.39)    | 3.21E-005     | 5.88E-005       |
| 2     | SCALE   | Denmark/Sweden                                   | 379        | 791        | 0.18/0.11            | 1.67 (1.26-2.20)            | 1.71 (1.34-2.19)    | 1.83E-005     | 2.91E-005       |
| 3     | NCI-SEER | USA                                              | 153        | 482        | 0.20/0.13            | 1.61 (1.05-2.46)            | 1.73 (1.21-2.45)    | 5.94E-003     | 1.53E-003       |
|       | NSW     | New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory, Australia | 141        | 369        | 0.18/0.10            | 2.08 (1.32-3.27)            | 1.93 (1.30-2.85)    | 1.06E-003     | 3.50E-003       |
|       | Yale    | USA                                              | 98         | 460        | 0.18/0.12            | 1.83 (1.12-2.99)            | 1.61 (1.05-2.41)    | 2.21E-002     | 7.06E-002       |
|       | BC      | British Columbia, Canada                         | 174        | 610        | 0.21/0.10            | 2.29 (1.57-3.33)            | 2.30 (1.66-3.17)    | 5.02E-007     | 1.12E-006       |
|       | Epilymph | Czech Republic, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Spain | 195        | 1864       | 0.25/0.12            | 2.50 (1.83-3.41)            | 2.43 (1.89-3.12)    | 1.40E-010     | 1.12E-009       |
|       | SF2     | SF Bay Area-NHL1 study - USA                     | 112        | 685        | 0.20/0.14            | 1.72 (1.11-2.64)            | 1.64 (1.13-2.35)    | 9.24E-003     | 3.36E-003       |

| Stage | Dataset | Population                                      | # FL cases | # controls | MAF (cases/controls) | Variant allele OR (95% CI) | Allelic OR (95% CI) | Trend p-value | Genotypic p-value |
|-------|---------|-------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------|------------------|
|       |         | # total FL cases                                 | 1465       | 6011       |                      |                             |                     |               |                  |
|       |         | # total controls                                 |            |            |                      |                             |                     |               |                  |

**Combined OR** calculated using a fixed effect, inverse variance meta-analysis

**Combined p-value** calculated using a weighted z-score-based meta-analysis

OR = odds ratio, CI= confidence interval, FL=follicular lymphoma