



HAL
open science

Emerging roles of circular RNAs in liver cancer

Corentin Louis, Delphine Leclerc, Cédric Coulouarn

► **To cite this version:**

Corentin Louis, Delphine Leclerc, Cédric Coulouarn. Emerging roles of circular RNAs in liver cancer. *JHEP Reports Innovation in Hepatology*, 2022, 4 (2), pp.100413. 10.1016/j.jhepr.2021.100413 . hal-03555129v2

HAL Id: hal-03555129

<https://hal.science/hal-03555129v2>

Submitted on 3 Feb 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

Emerging roles of circular RNAs in liver cancer

Corentin Louis,^{1,†} Delphine Leclerc,^{1,†} Cédric Coulouarn^{1,*}



Summary

Hepatocellular carcinoma and cholangiocarcinoma are the most common primary liver tumours, whose incidence and associated mortality have increased over recent decades. Liver cancer is often diagnosed late when curative treatments are no longer an option. Characterising new molecular determinants of liver carcinogenesis is crucial for the development of innovative treatments and clinically relevant biomarkers. Recently, circular RNAs (circRNAs) emerged as promising regulatory molecules involved in cancer onset and progression. Mechanistically, circRNAs are mainly known for their ability to sponge and regulate the activity of microRNAs and RNA-binding proteins, although other functions are emerging (e.g. transcriptional and post-transcriptional regulation, protein scaffolding). In liver cancer, circRNAs have been shown to regulate tumour cell proliferation, migration, invasion and cell death resistance. Their roles in regulating angiogenesis, genome instability, immune surveillance and metabolic switching are emerging. Importantly, circRNAs are detected in body fluids. Due to their circular structure, circRNAs are often more stable than mRNAs or miRNAs and could therefore serve as promising biomarkers – quantifiable with high specificity and sensitivity through minimally invasive methods. This review focuses on the role and the clinical relevance of circRNAs in liver cancer, including the development of innovative biomarkers and therapeutic strategies.

© 2021 The Authors. Published by Elsevier B.V. on behalf of European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL). This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Introduction

Circular RNAs (circRNAs) belong to a family of recently rediscovered RNA molecules. They are produced during the maturation of RNA transcripts. Structurally, circRNAs are covalently closed by a phosphodiester linkage between downstream donor and upstream acceptor RNA splice domains. Mainly considered as splicing errors during the past decade, circRNAs are now accepted as functional RNA molecules. They display tissue- and cell-specific expression patterns and are encoded from thousands of genes.¹ Emerging evidence demonstrates that circRNAs are involved in biological processes contributing to the onset and progression of cancer.^{2–4} In addition, due to their circular structure, circRNAs are resistant to the action of exoribonucleases and therefore exhibit an expanded half-life compared to their parental linear counterparts, allowing detection even when expressed at a low level.^{5,6} It is estimated that exonic circRNAs are very stable in cells, with most species exhibiting a half-life of over 48 hours,⁷ compared to an average half-life of 10 hours for mRNAs.⁶ These properties suggest that circRNAs could represent clinically relevant biomarkers for the management of patients with cancer. This review specifically highlights recent discoveries on the functions and clinical relevance of circRNAs in liver cancer, including hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) and cholangiocarcinoma (CCA).

CircRNA discovery, biogenesis and function

CircRNA discovery

CircRNAs were first discovered in 1976 on viroid particles.⁸ Then, circular structures were identified by electron microscopy in the cytoplasm of eukaryotic cells, notably in HeLa cells.⁹ Nevertheless, it was only in 1993 that circRNAs (circSry, a 1.3 kb circRNA derived from a single exon of the sex-determining region Y transcript in mice) were molecularly identified by dedicated experiments, including RNase H digestion followed by northern blotting, reverse-transcription PCR and sequencing.¹⁰ Afterward, several circRNAs previously described as “scrambled exon RNAs” were reported, including a circRNA from the rat cytochrome P450 2C24 gene.¹¹ However, no specific biological function was reported for circRNAs at that time.

Next-generation sequencing (NGS) ushered in the beginning of the genome-wide identification of circRNAs. Traditional RNA-sequencing pipelines remove non-conventional reads that do not map with the reference genome, such as reads that arise from gene fusion or those originating from back-splicing events. New bioinformatic algorithms based on back-splice junction overlapping reads recognition made it possible to efficiently detect *de novo* circRNAs and to differentiate them from their

Keywords: circRNA; hepatocellular carcinoma; cholangiocarcinoma; cancer hallmarks; biomarker

Received 9 July 2021; received in revised form 16 November 2021; accepted 18 November 2021; available online 27 November 2021

¹Inserm, Univ Rennes 1, COSS (Chemistry, Oncogenesis Stress Signaling), UMR_S 1242, Centre de Lutte contre le Cancer Eugène Marquis, F-35042, Rennes, France
[†]These authors contributed equally to the work

* Corresponding author.
 Address: Inserm UMR_S 1242, “Chemistry, Oncogenesis, stress, Signaling” (COSS), Centre de Lutte contre le Cancer Eugène Marquis, Rue de la Bataille Flandres Dunkerque, Bat D, F-35042 Rennes, France. Tel.: +33-2-2323-3881.
 E-mail address: cedric.coulouarn@inserm.fr (C. Coulouarn).

linear counterparts.^{12–15} In addition, novel specific protocols for NGS library preparation were established to enrich the RNA fraction with circRNAs, including ribosomal and polyA+ RNA depletion and RNase R treatment to degrade linear RNAs.¹⁶ Accordingly, the number of circRNA libraries drastically increased and repository databases (e.g. circBase) were established to annotate circRNAs.¹⁷ Recently, Xin *et al.* used rolling circle amplification followed by nanopore long read sequencing to decrypt full-length circRNA sequences, thereby increasing the roster of known circRNA isoforms.¹⁸ It is now accepted that circRNAs are the most abundant RNA isoforms, originating from thousands of human genes,¹⁹ and that their expression is conserved in eukaryotes.²⁰

CircRNA biogenesis

Contrary to their linear counterparts, circRNAs are generated by a non-canonical splicing mechanism, called back-splicing. A downstream 5' splice donor site from a pre-RNA transcript reacts with an upstream 3' splice acceptor site, which results in the 3' extremity of a downstream exon joining to the 5' extremity of an upstream exon. Therefore, the circularisation junction is formed of 2 mis-ordered exons (according to their genomic location). CircRNA back-splicing is an active process that can be promoted through various mechanisms (Fig. 1). For instance, many studies

Key points

- circRNAs contribute to liver cancer by regulating cellular processes involved in cancer onset and progression.
- circRNAs are currently mainly described as sponges regulating the activity of microRNAs but more diverse functions are emerging.
- circRNAs represent promising biomarkers due to the stability linked to their intrinsic circular structure.
- circRNAs are detected in body fluids, freely or embedded into vesicles.
- circRNA-based therapeutics represent a promising approach in cancer.

demonstrated that complementary inverted sequences localised into introns flanking the circularised exon junction could promote RNA circularisation.^{21,22} By hybridising to each other, inverted complementary sequences form a loop bringing distant splice sites into proximity, and thus facilitating back-splicing events. Further studies reported that circRNA biogenesis is driven by RNA-binding proteins (RBPs) located upstream and downstream of the circularised exons, promoting back-splicing by direct interaction or dimerisation. For example, by binding to specific intronic motifs, the RBP Quaking (QKI) induces circRNA biogenesis during epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition (EMT).²³ It was further demonstrated that artificial insertion of QKI motifs was sufficient to induce back-splicing. Altogether,

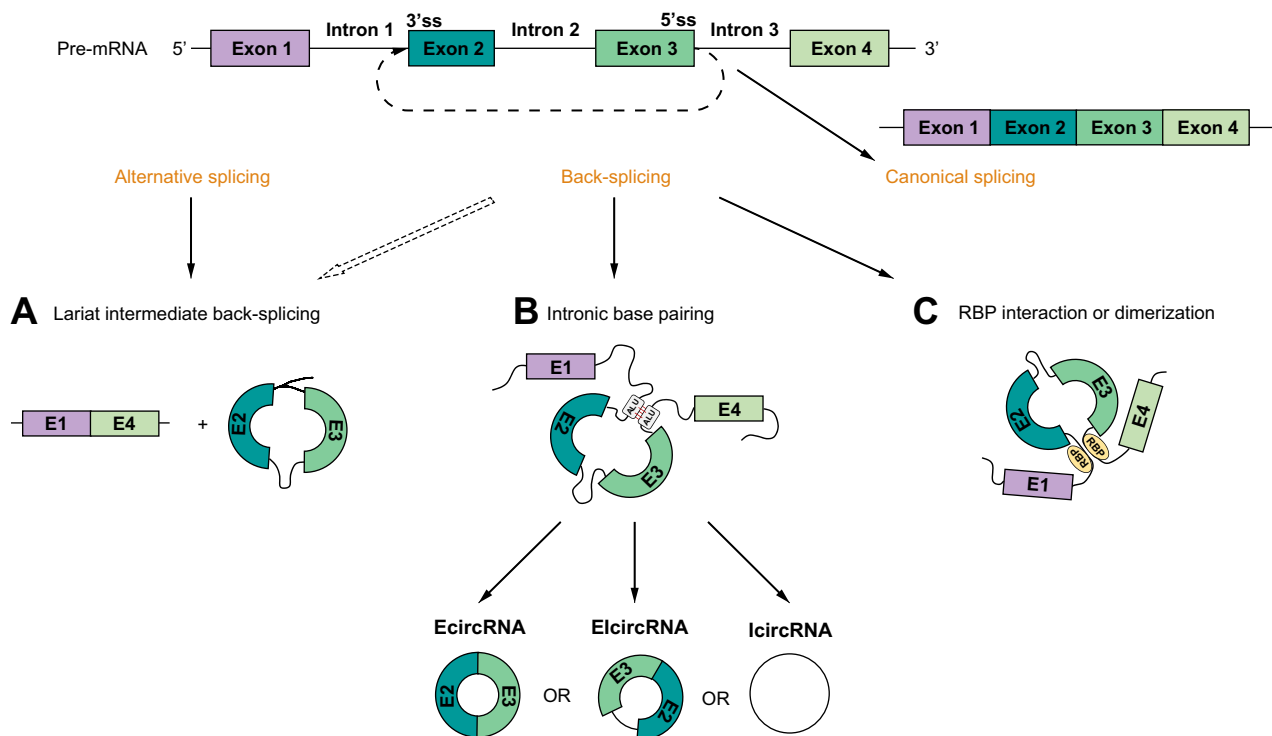


Fig. 1. The biogenesis of circRNA. CircRNAs are generated by a non-canonical back-splicing, where a 5' donor splice site (5'ss) of a downstream exon (here, exon 3, E3) will react with a 3' acceptor splice site (3'ss) of an upstream exon (here, exon 2, E2), resulting in the formation of a unique back-splice junction that does not exist in linear RNA (here, the 5' extremity of E2 with the 3' extremity of E3). So far, 3 main mechanisms spearhead the RNA circularisation. (A) Lariat intermediate back-splicing. The back-splicing process occurs after alternative splicing generates an intermediate structure called a lariat, which includes the excluded exons (here, E2 and E3) and which can be secondly spliced. (B) Intronic base pairing. A direct physical proximity between distant splice sites allows the back-splicing process. This proximity is mediated by a complementary base pairing between the introns flanking the circRNA. (C) RBP interaction or dimerisation. Here, the physical proximity between 5'ss and 3'ss is mediated by RBP interaction/dimerisation located on the exons flanking the circularisation junction. These 3 main mechanisms result in the formation of either EcircRNA, ElcircRNA or IcircRNA. CircRNA, circular RNA; EcircRNA, exonic circRNA; ElcircRNA, exonic-intronic circRNA; IcircRNA, intronic circRNA; RBP, RNA-binding protein.

these data suggest that a combination of *cis*-acting elements and *trans*-acting factors bring into proximity a downstream 5' donor splice site with an upstream 3' splicing acceptor site, facilitating back-splicing events. Another so-called "lariat splicing" mechanism has also been reported to promote circRNA formation. During alternative splicing events, excluded exon(s) are incorporated into an intermediate circular lariat containing intron-exon structures, which could be spliced again to generate circRNAs^{7,11}(Fig. 1). While the majority of circRNAs are only comprised of exonic sequences (EcircRNA), a substantial portion of circRNAs also include retained intronic sequences. The so-called exonic-intronic circRNAs (EircRNAs) have been reported to interact with U1 small nuclear ribonucleoproteins (snRNP), thereby regulating the transcription of their parental gene.²⁴ Likewise, some circRNAs consisting of only intronic sequences (IcircRNAs; lariat-derived circRNAs) have been reported.²⁵

CircRNA functions

Although circRNAs were discovered decades ago, defining their role remains a major challenge because of their low abundance and their sequence similarity with parental linear RNAs. To date, the most frequently reported mechanism of action of circRNAs is their capacity to sponge microRNAs (miRNAs) although other functions are emerging (e.g. transcriptional and post-transcriptional regulation, protein scaffolding) (Fig. 2).^{26,27} MiRNAs are small non-coding RNAs regulating gene expression at the post-transcriptional level. By binding the 3' untranslated regions of mRNAs, miRNAs repress mRNA translation and/or induce their degradation.²⁸ Accordingly, miRNA abundance and activity are tightly regulated. Notably, miRNAs can be sequestered by RNA sponges, including circRNAs.²⁹ Thus, CDR1 antisense circular RNA (circCDR1as) contains more than 70 miR-7 responsive elements. Through its sponging capability, circCDR1as acts as a competitive inhibitor of the tumour suppressor

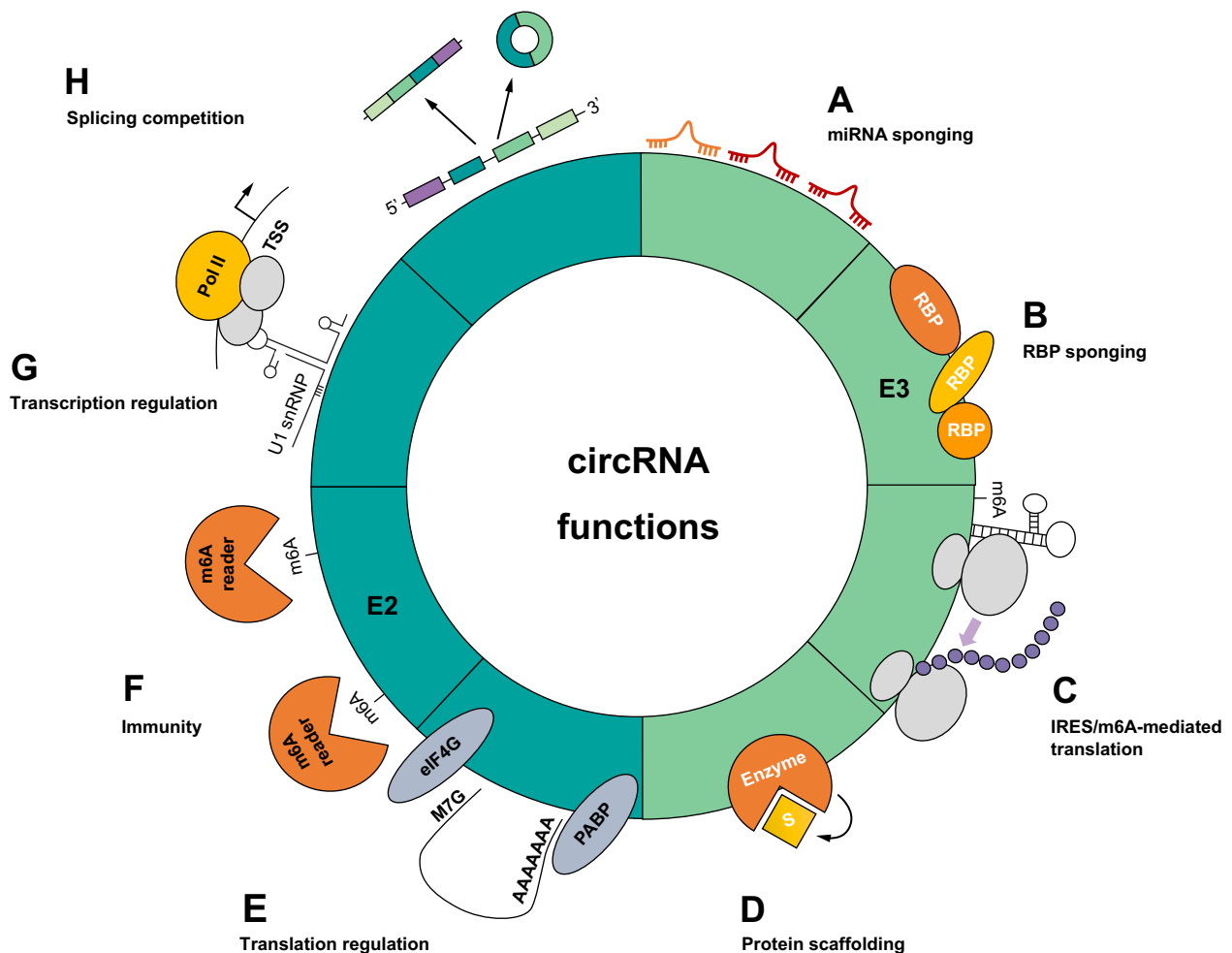


Fig. 2. CircRNA functions. (A) miRNA sponging: Numerous circRNA harbour miRNA response elements. Therefore, by sponging miRNA, circRNA act as competitive endogenous RNA, preventing miRNA post-transcriptionally binding to and repressing their natural targets. (B) RBP sponging: CircRNA display specific protein binding motifs offering them the capability to sequester RBP, regulate their activity and influence their localisation. (C) IRES/m6A-mediated translation: CircRNA containing IRES or with m6A epitranscriptomic modifications can be translated in a cap-independent manner. (D) Protein scaffolding: Proteins can be recruited by circRNA, facilitating enzymatic reactions. (E) Translational regulation: The translation initiation complex factors PABP and eIF4G are able to bind to circRNA. In this case, the interaction negatively regulates the translation initiation process. (F) Immunity: The endogenous m6A modification is necessary to distinguish self and non-self circRNA like those coming from viruses. (G) Transcription regulation: EircRNA regulate transcription by interacting with U1 snRNP and promoting the transcription of their parental genes. (H) Splicing competition. Spliceosome machinery can foster circRNA biogenesis under specific conditions leading to the reduction of linear mRNA production. CircRNA, circular RNA; EircRNA, exonic-intronic circRNA; IRES, internal ribosome entry sites; miRNA, microRNA; RBP, RNA-binding protein.

miR-7, preventing it from binding to and repressing its natural targets involved in tumour promotion.^{27,30} However, this feature is uncommon. Indeed, an expanded identification and characterisation of circRNAs in mammals reported that circCDR1as is only 1 of 2 circRNAs with an over-representation of binding sites for a single miRNA.³¹ In addition, it should be noted that circCDR1as is detected in circular but not in linear form, complicating interpretations of its role as a sponge for miR-7.²⁷ circRNA databases (e.g. CircInteractome, starBase) also predict the presence of circRNA/miRNA networks based on bioinformatics and/or experimental cross-linking immunoprecipitation (CLIP)-sequencing data.^{32,33} These databases also include information on RBP-circRNA interactions. Indeed, emerging evidence demonstrated that circRNAs can sponge RBPs, with functional consequences for their subcellular localisation and activity.³⁴ For example, it was recently demonstrated that circFOXK2 interacts with YBX1 and hnRNPK to promote the expression of NUF2 and PDXK oncogenes in pancreatic cancer.³⁵ In some cases, back-splicing also competes with canonical splicing. A typical example concerns muscleblind (*MBL* or *MBNL1* in humans) RNA which contains several intronic motifs which the MBL protein can bind to. When overexpressed, MBL binds to these specific intronic RNA motifs, thus promoting an exon 2 back-splicing event and reducing its own protein expression as a feedback mechanism.³⁶ Another study described a regulatory network involving YAP circRNA (circYAP) and its associated linear RNA. In breast cancer cell lines, it was demonstrated that circYAP interacts with YAP mRNA, PABP and the translation initiation protein eIF4G. This interaction inhibits the assembly of the translation initiation complex on YAP mRNA, resulting in the inhibition of translation.³⁷ Interestingly, circRNAs can promote transcription of their parental gene by interacting with U1 snRNP and the RNA polymerase II complex.²⁴ It is also important to emphasise that circRNAs may be coding, as demonstrated in *Drosophila* by ribosome footprinting sequencing specifically focused on reads that overlap with specific circRNA circularisation junctions.³⁸ Likewise, translation of circRNAs can be mediated by internal ribosome entry sites (IRES).^{39–41} In addition, emerging data suggest that circRNA translation could be driven by epitranscriptomic modifications, including N⁶-methyladenosine (m⁶A), in a cap-independent manner.⁴² Recent studies also demonstrated that the m⁶A modifications could distinguish self-circRNAs from immunogene foreign circRNAs (*i.e.* those coming from viruses).⁴³ Although the functions of circRNAs have not been fully elucidated, it is clear that circRNAs contribute to the regulation of gene expression. Thus, one can assume that the deregulation of circRNAs under pathological conditions will greatly affect fundamental processes required to maintain cellular and tissue homeostasis.

Overview of circRNAs in cancer: mechanisms and clinical relevance

As reviewed in 2020, circRNAs are involved in physiological processes by regulating gene expression and protein activity.⁴⁴ Growing evidence demonstrates that circRNAs are deregulated in cancer.^{2,4,44} Indeed, up- or downregulation of specific circRNAs correlates with clinical features like TNM stage, differentiation or survival.⁴⁵ In addition, the ratio between the expression of circRNAs and the corresponding linear RNAs can be modified, suggesting that back-splicing is an actively regulated process involved in cancer. In 2019, a loss-of-function screen using small-

hairpin RNAs (shRNAs) directed against highly expressed circRNAs indicated that 11.3% of circRNAs are necessary to promote cell growth in V16A prostate cancer cells. In contrast, among the related linear counterpart transcripts, 91.8% were not essential to fulfil this function.⁴⁶ Thus, by exhibiting tumour suppressive or oncogenic activities, circRNAs may contribute to cancer onset and progression. As mentioned above, a well-described function of circRNAs is their capability to sponge miRNAs, thereby promoting or suppressing tumour progression, depending on the nature of the miRNA targets.^{47,48}

Given that the field is still in its infancy, there is currently little overlap between studies,³ similar to what we observed years ago for miRNAs. Although the current literature has not yet enabled the identification of master oncogenic or tumour suppressive circRNAs, such as *RAS* or *TP53* for coding genes, several circRNAs have been detected in multiple cancers (e.g. circHIPK3, ciRS-7, circFOXO3, circMTO1). One archetype of a possible oncogenic circRNA is circHIPK3, which harbours 18 binding sites for sponging 9 tumour suppressor miRNAs involved in cell growth in several cancers, including breast cancer, colorectal cancer and HCC.⁴⁹ This observation has revealed new therapeutic opportunities, such as using target site blocker oligonucleotides to inhibit the sponging activity of circHIPK3. However, circHIPK3 was also reported to be downregulated in bladder cancer and involved in cell growth and metastasis inhibition, suggesting that circRNA function could be highly context-dependent, making it difficult to define a particular circRNA as oncogenic or tumour suppressive.^{3,50} Interestingly, circRNAs have also been shown to derive from master oncogenic or tumour suppressive genes, including circTP53, which was reported to promote colorectal cancer by sponging miR-876-3p and subsequently increasing cyclin-dependent kinase-like 3 expression.⁵¹ An exome capture RNA-sequencing project was recently conducted in more than 2,000 cancer samples, including cell lines, tumours from diverse organs and non-pathological tissues. Data were compiled into MiOncoCirc, the first international cancer-specific circRNA database.⁵

CircRNAs and the hallmarks of liver cancer

Liver cancer ranks sixth among the most prevalent cancers worldwide. Dramatically, both its incidence and associated mortality have steadily increased over the last decade. HCC and intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma (iCCA) account for ~80% and ~15% of primary liver tumours, respectively.^{52–54} Both are associated with limited therapeutic options as they are frequently diagnosed late.^{53,54} Although our understanding of liver carcinogenesis has improved, notably through functional genomic studies, effective long-term targeted therapies are still lacking. By integrative genomics based on gene expression, the core transcriptional hallmarks of human HCC were previously highlighted, identifying potentially targetable signalling pathways that were commonly altered.⁵⁵ In 2011, Hanahan and Weinberg updated the hallmarks of cancer and described 10 hallmarks that govern the evolution of normal cells to a neoplastic state in most cancers.⁵⁶ Defining circRNAs that are involved in the hallmarks of liver cancer could provide new insights into liver carcinogenesis and open avenues for the development of new therapeutic options. However, to what extent circRNAs contribute to liver carcinogenesis still requires experimental investigations. In order to determine how circRNAs could contribute to liver cancer, we reviewed the current

literature on cancer hallmarks impacted by circRNAs (Fig. 3 and Table 1).

Hepatocellular carcinoma

Data from the recent literature suggest that circRNAs are relevant molecules involved in regulatory networks governing HCC onset and progression. While the role of circRNAs in cell proliferation, apoptosis, migration and invasion is rather well described, their role in angiogenesis, immune surveillance and metabolic switching is still under investigated. The involvement of circRNAs in enabling replicative immortality, another hallmark of cancer cells, has not been investigated in HCC.

CircRNAs in cell proliferation and resistance to cell death

Sustained proliferation is one of the distinguishing features of cancer cells. Some circRNAs exhibit tumour suppressor activities and display low expression in HCC (Table 1). For instance,

circMTO1 was downregulated in HCC and was reported to sponge miR-9, a well-known oncogenic miRNA. Reduced expression of circMTO1 in HCC results in increased miR-9 activity, leading to reduced expression of its natural targets, such as the cell cycle inhibitor p21. Accordingly, circMTO1 suppresses HCC progression and low expression of circMTO1 predicts poor overall survival.⁴⁷ Deregulation of cell proliferation pathways in HCC is also mediated by pro-oncogenic circRNAs. Among them, SCD-circRNA 2 was upregulated in HCC tissues. A gene regulatory network was proposed, in which the RBP RBM3 promotes HCC cell proliferation in a SCD-circRNA 2-dependent manner.⁵⁷ Oncogenic circRHOT1 was also related to sustained HCC cell proliferation by recruiting TIP60 (also known as KAT5), a member of the MYST sub-family of histone acetyltransferases, to the promoter of NR2F6 and subsequently enhancing its transcription.⁵⁸ Interestingly, NR2F6 has also been reported as a central intracellular immune checkpoint for cancer immune surveillance that suppresses adaptive anti-cancer immune responses.⁵⁹ An

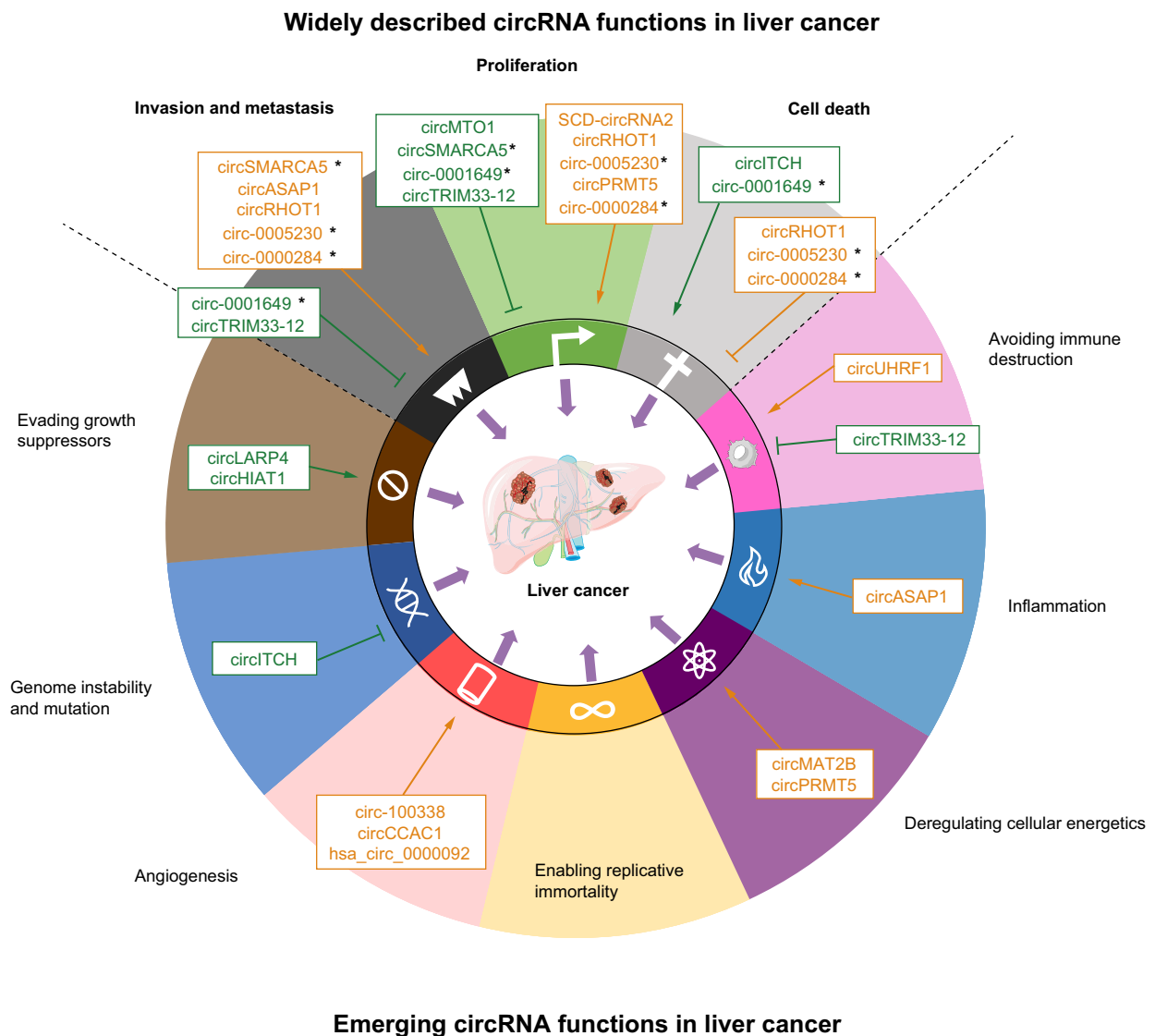


Fig. 3. CircRNA functions in liver cancer onset and progression. The upper part gathers the most described functions driven by circRNAs in liver cancer, while the lower part pinpoints potential emerging regulatory functions of circRNAs. Pro-oncogenic circRNAs are indicated in red and tumour suppressor circRNAs are indicated in green. CircRNAs deregulated in iCCA are marked by an asterisk. CircRNA, circular RNA; iCCA, intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma.

Table 1. Reported functions of circRNAs in liver carcinogenesis.

| Liver cancer | circRNA ID | circRNA function | Sponged molecules | Regulated targets | Reported functions | Ref. |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| circRNA induced in HCC | | | | | | |
| HCC | SCD-circRNA2* | RBP interaction | N/A | p-ERK ↑ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, invasion and metastasis | 57 |
| HCC | circRHOT1* | transcription regulation | NRF26 TIP60 | NRF26 ↑ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, resisting cell death, invasion and metastasis | 58 |
| HCC | circ-100338* | RBP interaction | N/A | MMP9 ↑ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, invasion and metastasis, inducing angiogenesis | 110 |
| HCC | circ-0000092* | miRNA sponging | miR-338-3p ↓ | HN1 ↑ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, invasion and metastasis, inducing angiogenesis | 73 |
| HCC | circPRMT5* | miRNA sponging | miR-188-5p ↓ | HK2 ↑ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, invasion and metastasis, deregulating cellular energetics | 111 |
| HCC | circMAT2B* | miRNA sponging | miR-338-3p ↓ | PKM2 ↑ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, invasion and metastasis, deregulating cellular energetics | 75 |
| HCC | circASAP1* | miRNA sponging | miR-326 ↓ miR-532-5p ↓ | MAPK1 ↑ CSF-1 ↑ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, invasion and metastasis, tumour-promoting inflammation | 80 |
| HCC | circβ-catenin* | translated, decoy | N/A | β-catenin ↑ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, invasion and metastasis | 60 |
| HCC | circUHRF1* | miRNA sponging | miR-449c-5p ↓ | TIM3 ↑ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, immune surveillance escape | 112 |
| circRNA repressed in HCC | | | | | | |
| HCC | circTRIM33-12* | miRNA sponging | miR-191 ↑ | 5hmc ↓ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, immune surveillance escape, invasion and metastasis | 77 |
| HCC | circHIAT1* | miRNA sponging | miR-3171 ↑ | PTEN ↓ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, evading growth suppressors, resisting cell death | 61 |
| HCC | circLARP4* | miRNA sponging | miR-761 ↑ | RUNX3 ↓ p53 ↓ p21 ↓ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, evading growth suppressors | 62 |
| HCC | circMTO1* | miRNA sponging | miR-9 ↑ | p21 ↓ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, invasion and metastasis | 47 |
| HCC | circITCH | miRNA sponging | miR-224-5p ↑ | maff ↓ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, resisting cell death, genome instability and mutation | 65,113 |
| circRNA induced in CCA | | | | | | |
| iCCA | circ-0000284* | miRNA sponging | miR-637 ↓ | LY6E ↑ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, resisting cell death, invasion and metastasis | 64 |
| iCCA | circ-0005230* | miRNA sponging | miR-1238 ↓ miR-1299 ↓ | N/A | Sustaining proliferative signalling, resisting cell death, invasion and metastasis | 63 |
| iCCA | circACTN4* | miRNA sponging transcription regulation | miR-424-5p ↓ | YAP ↑ FZD7 ↑ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, invasion and metastasis | 82 |
| circRNA repressed in HCC and CCA | | | | | | |
| HCC iCCA | circ_0001649* | miRNA sponging | miR-127-5p ↑ miR-612 ↑ miR-4688 ↑ | SHPRH ↓ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, resisting cell death, invasion and metastasis | 66,67 |
| HCC iCCA | circSMARCA5* | miRNA sponging | miR-17-3p ↑ miR-181b-5p ↑ | TIMP3 ↓ | Sustaining proliferative signalling, invasion and metastasis | 48,81 |

CircRNA, circular RNA; HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma; iCCA, intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma; miR/miRNA, microRNA.

* *In vivo* functional confirmation in preclinical mouse models.

original mode of action of circ β -catenin, a circRNA derived from β -catenin, a well-characterised oncogene in liver cancer, has recently been reported.⁶⁰ Indeed, circ β -catenin is translated into a 370-amino acid β -catenin isoform and acts as a decoy. This shorter isoform can stabilise full-length β -catenin by antagonising GSK3 β -induced β -catenin phosphorylation and degradation, leading to activation of the Wnt pathway, and promoting tumour cell growth.⁶⁰

Another well-described feature of tumour cells is their ability to evade anti-proliferative signals governed by tumour suppressor genes (*i.e.* quiescence, cell cycle arrest, senescence, cell death).⁵⁶ Such properties are essential to maintain a pool of active transformed cells, notably by repressing or inactivating cell cycle regulators. For instance, a network involving circHIAT1, miR-3171 and the *PTEN* tumour suppressor gene was shown to contribute to HCC progression (Table 1). Thus, circHIAT1 downregulation in HCC was responsible for miR-3171 release, thereby promoting *PTEN* repression.⁶¹ Similarly, it was demonstrated that miR-671 activation, as a consequence of circLARP4 sponge downregulation, drives the silencing of master tumour suppressor genes RUNX3, CDKN1A and TP53 in HCC.⁶²

Programmed cell death by apoptosis is responsible for the removal of damaged cells. Notably, apoptosis serves as a bulwark against the propagation of transformed cells. Investigations into pro- and anti-apoptotic programmes will be critical to elucidate the paths whereby tumours succeed in progressing to states of high-grade malignancy and resistance to therapy.⁵⁶ Lately, circRNAs were reported for their entailment in signalling tracks governing the apoptotic machinery in liver cancer. Several studies identified circRNAs that can regulate apoptosis (Table 1). Pro-oncogenic circRNAs such as circRHOT1, circ-0005230, or circ0000284 have all been shown to exert anti-apoptotic actions on HCC and iCCA cell lines. Through intrinsic miRNA sponging properties, these circRNAs promote tumourigenesis by preserving anti-apoptotic factors, such as *NRF26* and *LY6E*, from degradation.^{58,63,64} Meanwhile, a decreased expression of circITCH and circ-0001649 contributes to cell death resistance by loosening the sponging of specific anti-apoptotic miRNAs. Thus, pro-apoptotic natural targets (*e.g.* MAFF and SHRPB) lack circRNA protection against miRNA degradation and are unable to counteract tumour cell spreading.^{65–67} Remarkably, most of these circRNAs are also involved in sustained abnormal cell proliferation, resulting in unbalanced cell homeostasis and cancer progression.

CircRNAs in invasion, metastasis and angiogenesis

Invasion and metastasis are tightly associated with EMT, a critical cellular process governing the plasticity of epithelial cells which lose adherent junctions, apico-basal polarity and acquire the abilities to resist apoptosis, to invade, and to disseminate.^{56,68} However, to what extent circRNAs are involved in acquiring mesenchymal features and a metastatic phenotype has not been extensively explored in liver cancer (Table 1). RNA-sequencing identified a signature of circRNAs that were significantly deregulated in HCC tissues, including circSMARCA5. Low expression of circSMARCA5 in HCC was attributed to the regulation of DEXH-box helicase 9 (DHX9), an abundant nuclear RNA helicase, and was shown to promote HCC cell growth and metastasis. One mechanism of action resulting from the reduced expression of circSMARCA5 involved a decreased expression of the metalloproteinase inhibitor TIMP3 due to the increased activity of miR-17-3p and miR-181b-5p, 2 miRNAs naturally

sponged by circSMARCA5. Further highlighting its importance in cancer, it was recently reported that circSMARCA5 can bind to its parent gene locus, forming an R-loop, which results in the downregulation of tumour-promoting SMARCA5 in breast cancer.⁶⁹ In glioblastoma multiform, circSMARCA5 is also a tumour suppressor and acts as a decoy for SRSF1 (serine and arginine rich splicing factor 1) through a GAUGAA binding motif, thus controlling cell migration and angiogenesis, notably by regulating *VEGFA* mRNA splicing.⁷⁰ In HCC, circSMARCA5 downregulation was associated with poor outcomes, including shorter overall and recurrence-free survival.⁴⁸ The role of circRNAs in HCC metastasis was further evaluated by circRNA expression profiling in 15 patients who displayed pulmonary metastasis and 15 patients that did not show any metastasis or recurrence. Hence, circASAP1 was specifically upregulated in HCC with a high metastatic potential. Gain and loss of function experiments demonstrated that circASAP1 promotes HCC cell metastasis by acting as a competitive endogenous RNA for miR-326 and miR-532-5p, leading to the induction of their common targets, the kinase MAPK1/ERK2 and CSF1, also known as macrophage colony-stimulating factor (M-CSF). By regulating these 2 targets, circASAP1 modulates HCC cell proliferation, invasion and tumour-associated macrophage (TAM) infiltration.⁴⁸ More recently, an original mechanism of action has been reported for circPABPC1, a tumour suppressive circRNA downregulated in HCC.⁷¹ Although circPABPC1 is predominantly localised in the cytoplasm, its small size (91 bases) makes it unlikely to be a miRNA sponge. Indeed, circPABPC1 functions as a protein scaffold for ITGB1, a key integrin involved in HCC metastasis. Frequent loss of circPABPC1 correlates with increased ITGB1 level in patients with advanced HCC. Mechanistically, circPABPC1 physically links ITGB1 to the proteasome 26S and promotes its degradation in a ubiquitin-independent manner, thereby reducing tumour cell adhesion, migration, and metastatic spreading.⁷¹

Tumour cell spreading requires a tailored vascular system to ensure its operational needs. Hence, during tumour progression, a new tumour-associated vasculature is generated by uncontrolled angiogenesis.^{56,72} *In silico* analysis suggested that circRNAs, including hsa_circ_0000092, could contribute to the tumour-associated angiogenic switch occurring during liver carcinogenesis (Table 1). Hsa_circ_0000092 is upregulated in HCC and significantly associated with shortened overall survival. A comprehensive analysis of both coding and non-coding RNAs suggested that hsa_circ_0000092 interferes with the negative regulation of haematopoietic- and neurologic-expressed sequence 1 (HN1) by miR-338-3p. Increased expression of oncogenic HN1 not only promotes HCC cell invasion and migration, but also angiogenesis.⁷³

CircRNAs in metabolic switching

An important hallmark of cancer is the adjustment of energy metabolism to support cancer cell proliferation. During carcinogenesis, cells classically switch towards aerobic glycolysis to meet their energy demands. This typical glycolytic reprogramming is associated with well-known oncogenes.^{56,74} However, there is still little evidence regarding the role of circRNAs in this process (Table 1). Meta-analysis of gene expression datasets demonstrated that circMAT2B was upregulated in HCC (compared to paired adjacent normal tissues) and strongly associated with glycolysis. More specifically, circMAT2B promotes glycolysis-dependent cell proliferation and migration

under hypoxic conditions both *in vitro* and *in vivo*. A regulatory axis was proposed in which circMAT2B positively regulates the miR-338-3p target gene pyruvate kinase M2, a key enzyme involved in glycolysis.⁷⁵ CircMAT2B is also clinically relevant since its elevated expression is associated with shortened overall survival.⁷⁵

CircRNAs in immune system surveillance escape and inflammation

It has long been recognised that tumour onset and progression are continuously monitored by the immune system. Thus, proliferating tumour cells have somehow developed the capability to evade immune surveillance.^{56,76} A recent study pinpointed that circTRIM33-12 downregulation in HCC was correlated with poor clinical features, suggesting its potential utility as an independent HCC risk factor (Table 1). Mechanistically, circTRIM33-12 expression was negatively associated with cell proliferation, migration and invasion through the miR-191-dependent positive regulation of TET1 demethylase. In addition, circTRIM33-12 was shown to participate in immune evasion via the regulation of activating receptor NKG2D (natural-killer group 2 member D) ligands. Thus, circTRIM33-12 regulates natural killer cell-, $\gamma\delta$ +T cell- and CD8+ T cell-mediated immune responses to cancers.⁷⁷

Inflammation is an essential mechanism to protect the body against injuries and pathogenic microorganisms. Nevertheless, in the context of carcinogenesis, substantial evidence indicates that the immune system could exert tumourigenic properties.⁷⁸ For instance, by releasing cytokines, infiltrated immune cells indirectly promote tumour growth and survival.⁷⁹ One study reported the involvement of circRNAs in tumour-promoting inflammation in HCC (Table 1). Hence, it was highlighted that an enhanced expression of circASAP1 indirectly induces CSF1 expression, a macrophage mitogenic factor, by sponging miR-532 and miR-326, and therefore promotes TAM recruitment.⁸⁰ There is growing evidence that TAM infiltration is strongly associated with tumour onset, progression and aggressiveness.⁷⁹ Thus, circASAP1 could promote HCC development by participating in TAM infiltration.⁸⁰

Intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma

Only few studies have reported on the role of circRNAs in iCCA so far (Table 1). One study focused on circSMARCA5, a tumour suppressor circRNA already largely described for its role in the progression of several cancers, including HCC. The expression of circSMARCA5 was reduced in iCCA tissues and negatively correlated with advanced TNM stage and overall survival. Overexpression of circSMARCA5 was further associated with decreased iCCA cell proliferation.⁸¹ Very recently, circACTN4 has been shown to be induced in iCCA and to promote tumour cell growth and metastasis by regulating the Hippo and Wnt signalling pathways. Interestingly, circACTN4 has been reported i) to act as a sponge for miR-424-5p which could target YAP in the cytoplasm and ii) to recruit YBX1 to initiate FZD7 transcription in the nucleus. This study implies that circACTN4 acts as a signalling nexus allowing for the coordinated activation of Hippo and Wnt pathways in iCCA.⁸² However, the dynamic regulation of circRNA shuttling between the nucleus and the cytoplasm, in relationship to their function, is an important feature which remains to be elucidated. A couple of other studies identified aberrantly expressed circRNAs in both CCA cell lines and resected

iCCA tumours. Thus, circ-0001649 and circ-0005230 were respectively down- and upregulated in iCCA. These circRNAs were associated with cell proliferation, migration and invasion.^{63,67} Very recently, upregulation of circHMGCS1-016 was also reported to contribute to iCCA development and immune tolerance by sponging miR-1236-3p to regulate CD73 and GAL-8 expression.⁸³ Several circRNAs derived from CASC15, a transforming growth factor beta-induced long non-coding RNA, have also been associated with an inflammatory microenvironment in iCCA.⁸⁴ Most of the studies reported so far have focused on circRNAs within iCCA tumours. Nevertheless, circRNA are also found circulating in body fluids (e.g. embedded in extracellular vesicles [EVs]) and could therefore provide promising clinical opportunities. For instance, the expression of circ-0000284 was increased in CCA cell lines, tissues and plasma EVs. The circ-0000284-enriched EVs produced by CCA cells were able to enhance migration, proliferation and invasion of the normal surrounding cells both *in vitro* and *in vivo*.⁶⁴ These results not only highlight circRNAs as mediators of cellular communication but also as potentially promising biomarkers.

Limitations and challenges in interpreting data on circRNAs

While studies reporting on the functions of circRNAs in liver cancer are promising, it is important to point out that circRNAs' sponge activity is the major mechanism investigated so far (Table 1). Many of these studies rely on the cytoplasmic location of the circRNA of interest as a rationale to investigate miRNA activity, although this is where most exon-encoded circRNAs are located.^{7,19} Most studies also look for evidence of sponge activity by searching for any predicted miRNA binding sites in the circRNA and correspondingly expressed miRNAs and/or looking for interaction of the circRNA with proteins from the RNA-induced silencing complex (RISC). Although these strategies suggest interactions, they do not demonstrate function and should be complemented with loss of function or depletion studies to validate a functional effect on miRNAs. It is also important to consider that essentially all of the sequences attributed to circRNAs are contained in the parental mRNA, so unless the circRNA is more abundant than the mRNA or is somehow locking the miRNA into the RISC, it is hard to understand the stoichiometry to explain how circRNAs can effectively act as sponges in many cases. Similarly, a circRNA contains the same mRNA sequence encoded by the same exons (with the exception of the back-splice) so that ectopic expression of circRNA and mRNA from the same gene could have the same effect. This point should be addressed in functional studies given that in many cases, the expression of circRNAs tends to follow the expression of the mRNAs, so increases in expression of circRNAs are usually associated with increased expression of mRNA. However, given that the median half-life of circRNAs is estimated to be at least 2 to 5 times higher than that of linear mRNA,^{6,7,85} one can hypothesise that the contribution of circRNA to RNA sponging activity is greater than that of their linear counterpart. Thus, the dynamic of mRNA splicing and translation, the half-life of circRNA vs. mRNA, as well as their sub-cellular location, should be considered, as these features may contribute to the differential sponge activity of circRNA vs. mRNA. Additional studies, including Ago-CLIP followed by long read sequencing without RNase R treatment, will be needed in the future to better understand the stoichiometry of each

Table 2. CircRNA as biomarkers for liver cancer diagnosis and prognosis.

| Liver cancer | circRNA ID | Biological sample | Biomarker relevance | Ref. |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------|
| Upregulated circRNA | | | | |
| HCC (HBV related) | circRNA-100338 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 114 |
| HCC (HBV related) | hsa_circ_0000976 | plasma | Diagnostic | 115 |
| | hsa_circ_0007750 hsa_circ_0139897 | | | |
| HCC (HBV related) | hsa_circ_0027089 | plasma | Diagnostic | 116 |
| HCC (early stage) | circ-CDYL | HCC tissue | Surveillance biomarker, early diagnostic | 95 |
| HCC | circRNA ciRS-7 (Cdr1as) | HCC tissue | Microvascular invasion | 117 |
| HCC | circ_0008450 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 118 |
| HCC | circRHOT1 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 58 |
| HCC | circBIRC6 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 119 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0000517 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 120 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0128298 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic, prognostic | 121 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0091579 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic, prognostic | 122 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0016788 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic, prognostic | 123,124 |
| HCC | circPCNX | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 125 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0056836 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic, prognostic | 126 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0005075 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic, prognostic | 127,128 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0091581 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 129 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0128298 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic, prognostic | 121 |
| HCC | circ-10720 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 130 |
| HCC | circRNA-101368 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 131 |
| HCC | circMAT2B | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 75 |
| HCC | circ_0000267 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 132 |
| HCC | circ_001569 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 133 |
| HCC | circRNA-104718 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 134 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0067934 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 135 |
| HCC | SCD-circRNA 2 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 57 |
| HCC | circRNA_0000502 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 136 |
| HCC | circPTPRM | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 137 |
| HCC | circPVT1 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 138 |
| HCC | circRNA MYLK | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 139 |
| HCC | circABCB10 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 140 |
| HCC | circ-ZNF652 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 141 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0103809 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 142 |
| HCC | circ_0021093 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 143 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0000673 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 144 |
| HCC | hsa_circRNA_103809 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 145 |
| HCC | circZFR | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 146 |
| HCC | circMET | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 147 |
| HCC | circ-HOMER1 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 148 |
| HCC | circFBXO11 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 149 |
| HCC | circ-TCF4.85 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic | 150 |
| HCC | circBACH1 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic, prognostic | 151 |
| HCC | circRNA-SORE | HCC tissue | Sorafenib resistance | 99 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0003998 | HCC tissue, plasma | Diagnostic, prognostic | 152 |
| HCC | circASAP1 | HCC tissue, plasma, plasma exosomes | Prognostic | 80 |
| HCC | circ-ZEB1.33 | HCC tissue, serum | Diagnostic, prognostic | 153 |
| HCC | circRNA_101237 | HCC tissue, serum | Prognostic, cisplatin resistance | 154 |
| HCC | circ-FOXP1 | HCC tissue, serum | Diagnostic, prognostic | 155 |
| HCC | circ_0000798 | Peripheral blood mononuclear cells | Diagnostic, prognostic | 156 |
| HCC | circ_104075 | Serum | Diagnostic | 94 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_000224 | Serum | Diagnostic | 157 |
| HCC | circPTGR1 | Serum exosomes | Prognostic | 158 |
| CCA | circCdr1as | CCA tissue | Prognostic | 159 |
| Downregulated circRNA | | | | |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0001649 | HCC tissue | Prognostic, diagnostic | 160 |
| | | | | 161 |
| HCC | circMTO1 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 47 |
| HCC | circZKSCAN1 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic | 162 |
| HCC | circSETD3 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 97 |
| | hsa_circ_0000567 | | | |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0028502 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic | 163 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0076251 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic, prognostic | 163 |
| HCC | circ-ITCH | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 65 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0068669 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic, prognostic | 164 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0003570 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic | 165 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0078602 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic, prognostic | 166 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0004018 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic | 167 |
| HCC | circC3P1 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 168 |

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

| Liver cancer | circRNA ID | Biological sample | Biomarker relevance | Ref. |
|--------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------|
| HCC | circTRIM33-12 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 77 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0091570 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic, prognostic | 169 |
| HCC | circRNA_101505 | HCC tissue | Prognostic cisplatin resistance | 170 |
| HCC | circHIAT | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 61 |
| HCC | circADAMTS13 | HCC tissue | Prognostic | 171 |
| HCC | circ-EPHB4 | HCC tissue | Diagnostic | 172 |
| | hsa_circ_0001730 | | | |
| HCC | circSMARCA5 | HCC tissue, plasma | Diagnostic, prognostic | 48,173 |
| HCC | circADD3 | HCC tissue, plasma | Diagnostic, prognostic | 174 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0001445 | Plasma | Diagnostic | 175 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_0051443 | Plasma exosomes | Diagnostic | 176 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_00156 | Serum | Diagnostic | 157 |
| HCC | hsa_circ_000520 | Serum | Diagnostic, prognostic | 157 |

CCA, cholangiocarcinoma; CircRNA, circular RNA; HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma.

molecule implicated in the sponging of miRNAs. It should also be noted that even if the aforementioned studies performed experimental validations using animal models (subcutaneous injection of cancer-derived cell lines stably over- or under-expressing a specific circRNA), the readout of these experiments is mainly tumour growth. Therefore, even though *in vivo* experiments confirmed the tumour suppressive or pro-oncogenic role of circRNAs, further investigations are needed to validate their involvement in several of the hallmarks of cancer. This aspect could be critical if circRNAs' function is context-dependent and should be considered in view of emerging strategies for specific knockdown of circRNAs *in vivo*.⁸⁶

CircRNAs: clinical opportunities in liver cancer

CircRNAs are promising clinically relevant biomarkers

In addition to the new insights on their regulatory functions, circRNAs also provide good opportunities to improve the management of patients with liver cancer. Indeed, even if most circRNAs are expressed at a low level (roughly <10% of the expression of their linear counterpart),⁸⁷ their circular structure provides a higher resistance to exonuclease activity and therefore an expanded half-life. Such intrinsic physical features mean that circRNAs could be promising diagnostic and prognostic biomarkers. In addition, circRNAs are found circulating in liquid biopsies (e.g. blood, urine, saliva, bile),^{5,88} either freely or embedded into EVs.⁸⁹ A recent study demonstrated that circRNAs are more specifically enriched and stable in exosomes compared to host secretory cells.⁹⁰ Therefore, exosomal circRNAs could be useful minimally invasive biomarkers. They provide clear benefits over protein biomarkers which are prone to degradation and present limited organ specificity.⁹¹ In addition, methodologies used for circRNA detection are usually more specific and sensitive than the immunoassays commonly used for protein biomarkers.⁹² Indeed, as nucleic acids, circRNAs can be easily and specifically amplified by reverse-transcription quantitative PCR using specific primers overlapping the back-splice junction.³⁴ It was further demonstrated that circRNAs display tissue- and cell-specific expression patterns,¹ a feature which could be helpful for diagnosis. Thus, circRNAs appear as promising molecules for the management of patients with cancer, as they exhibit many of the features expected of a biomarker: they are often more stable than linear RNAs, including miRNAs, and require minimally invasive intervention to be detected in body fluids by specific and sensitive methods. Accordingly, several ongoing clinical trials are exploring circRNAs as

biomarkers in cancer, including biliary tract cancers (e.g. NCT03334708, NCT04584996, NCT04792437). However, it should be noted that a high level of circRNAs from serum/plasma may also only reflect a high level of circulating cells, as was reported for miRNAs.^{3,93}

CircRNAs for liver cancer diagnosis and prognosis

Recent profiling studies support the utility of circRNAs as potential diagnostic and prognostic biomarkers in patients with liver cancer (Table 2). However, these studies currently suffer from limited sample sizes; hence, a robust signature of circRNAs commonly deregulated in patients with liver cancer remains elusive. Despite this weakness, merging the results of 3 independent studies identified circ_104075 as a circRNA recurrently upregulated in tissues and sera of patients with HCC compared to healthy individuals.⁹⁴ Its expression is particularly high in HCC compared to other types of cancer and liver disease, suggesting that it could represent a biomarker for HCC diagnosis.⁹⁴ Further statistical analyses demonstrated that circ_104075 exhibited a better sensitivity and specificity than biomarkers commonly used to diagnose HCC, such as alpha-fetoprotein.⁹⁴ Such observations could be practice changing given that alpha-fetoprotein serum dosage and ultrasound, which are routinely used to diagnose early stage HCC, sometimes lack precision.⁵⁴ Thus, patients could benefit from these innovative specific biomarkers if they enable the early detection of HCC. Similarly, circCDYL was expressed during the early stages of HCC, and thus might be a clinically relevant biomarker for early diagnosis and surveillance in high-risk populations, including patients with hepatitis B or C infection and/or cirrhosis.⁹⁵

The prognostic potential of circRNAs has also been reported in liver cancer. A recent meta-analysis in HCC highlighted a tight correlation between an elevated expression of pro-oncogenic circRNAs and poor clinical outcomes such as reduced overall survival.⁹⁶ Two other studies reported that low expression of circMTO1 and circSETD3 in HCC was significantly associated with poor prognosis.^{47,97} In the same vein, it was shown that low levels of circSMARCA5 in iCCA correlate with poor overall survival. Interestingly, overexpression of circSMARCA5 in iCCA cell lines improves chemosensitivity to gemcitabine and cisplatin.⁸¹ Likewise, downregulation of circ-0003418 resulted in cisplatin resistance in HCC cells through activation of the Wnt/ β -catenin pathway.⁹⁸ Lately, circRNA-SORE was reported to mediate sorafenib resistance in HCC by stabilising YBX1, a master oncogenic factor. CircRNA-SORE acts by trapping YBX1 and thus, preventing its degradation by the E3 ubiquitin system. More interestingly,

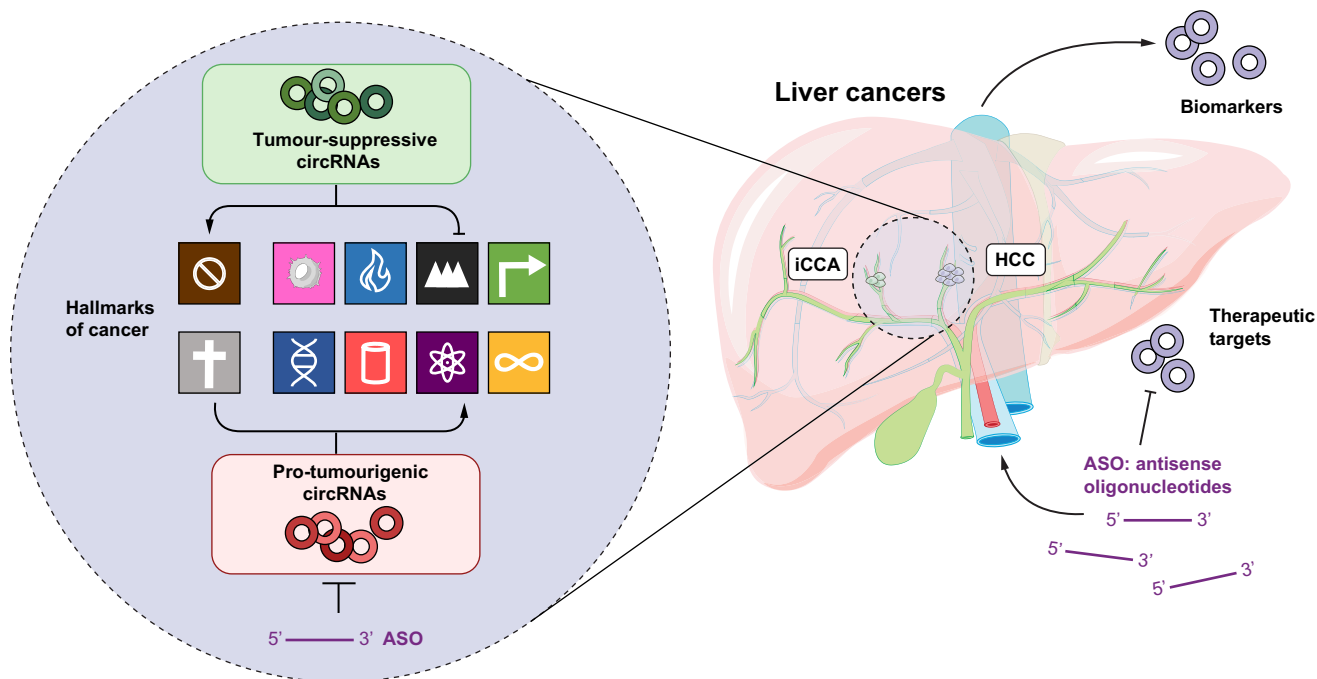


Fig. 4. CircRNAs as innovative biomarkers and therapeutic targets in liver cancer. The left panel highlights tumour-suppressive and pro-tumourigenic circRNAs acting on well-known cancer hallmarks. The right panel highlights circRNAs as innovative biomarkers and therapeutic targets using ASOs. ASO, antisense oligonucleotide; circRNA, circular RNA; HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma; iCCA, intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma.

circRNA-SORE-related features spread across cancer cells through exosomal communication.⁹⁹ These observations raise the possibility of developing innovative circRNA biomarkers to predict response to therapy.

CircRNAs as companion biomarkers for targeted therapies in liver cancer

Several targeted therapies are currently under clinical evaluation in liver cancer.¹⁰⁰ In this context, the development of robust diagnostic tools to select the most suitable personalised therapy could be valuable. In HCC, nivolumab, an immune checkpoint inhibitor targeting PD-1, was approved by the FDA in 2017. However, objective anti-tumour response rates were only 15-20%.^{54,101} Therefore, a circRNA signature predictive of anti-PD1 response might be relevant. This innovative concept involving the development of companion biomarker tests from circRNA signatures may represent a breakthrough to guide targeted therapies. So far, to the best of our knowledge, there is no published report of circRNAs as companion biomarkers and/or theranostic targets that can predict response to a specific therapy, either in HCC or in iCCA.

Future directions: circRNAs and therapeutic opportunities

As mentioned above, there is growing evidence showing that circRNAs are deregulated in cancer and contribute to the regulation of oncogenic processes (Fig. 3). Thus, circRNAs might be considered as relevant therapeutic targets in cancer. The singularity of circRNA regulatory functions offers various opportunities to regulate their action during tumour progression and therefore, to develop innovative therapeutic strategies.

The pro-oncogenic activity of numerous circRNAs relies on sponging of tumour suppressor miRNAs.^{47,48} Thus, several strategies could be developed to reduce this pro-oncogenic activity, including the development of specific target site blockers (TSBs). TSB antisense oligonucleotides (ASOs) could be designed to target miRNA response elements carried by circRNAs. Thus, by competitive binding, TSBs could restore the tumour suppressor activity of a given miRNA. Although this strategy has not been applied to circRNAs yet, it showed great efficacy when applied to linear RNA sponges *in vitro* and *in vivo*.¹⁰² Another strategy aiming at directly decreasing circRNA abundance could be even more efficient. For that purpose, antisense locked nucleic acid gapmers specifically targeting the back-splice junction of circRNAs could switch off the expression of a specific circRNA without affecting the expression of the parental linear RNA. Several studies already demonstrated the efficacy of this approach not only with gapmers, but also with small-interfering RNAs and shRNAs. Besides, it was shown that circHIPK3 silencing in mice *via* adeno-associated virus shRNA could alleviate diabetic proliferative retinopathy.¹⁰³ CRISPR/Cas13-based RNA editing systems¹⁰⁴ could also be used to specifically silence circRNA activity. In addition, the abundance of pro-oncogenic circRNAs could be modulated at an upstream level by interfering with the splicing machinery to control the occurrence of back-splicing events. Indeed, it was already reported that circRNA biogenesis during EMT is tightly regulated by the RBP splicing factor QK15.²³ Thus, one could hypothesise that modulating the expression level of a specific RBP could control the expression of circRNAs. Otherwise, as indicated above, there is strong evidence that circRNA biogenesis is mediated by hybridisation of complementary

intronic regions flanking circRNA sequences.^{21,22} Thus, one might anticipate that targeting these complementary sequences on pre-messenger RNAs using ASOs may block circRNA biogenesis by preventing the interaction of back-spliced regions. On the contrary, ASOs targeting key splice domains could be designed to enhance circRNA biogenesis. Recently, a base editing strategy targeting key back-splice domains showed great efficacy to specifically repress circRNA expression without affecting the linear counterpart RNAs (bioRxiv; <https://doi.org/10.1101/2021.08.05.455347>). This study provides an efficient method to deplete circRNAs for functional studies.

Nucleic acid-based therapeutics represent a promising approach in cancer. To date, several RNA-based drugs like ASOs are already FDA approved, and many are under clinical evaluation,¹⁰⁵ paving the way for circRNA-based therapeutics. Indeed, circRNAs are often more stable than mRNA or miRNA molecules, and methods have already been developed to produce synthetic circRNAs.¹⁰⁶ The advantage of this approach is the possibility of designing specific circRNAs. For example, a synthetic circRNA containing 5 binding sites for miR-21, an overexpressed onco-miRNA, was shown to effectively suppress miR-21 activity and to induce apoptosis in gastric cancer cell lines.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, synthetic circRNAs could be designed to sequester oncoproteins. Indeed, a specific artificial circRNA able to sequester and inactivate the RBP hnRNP has already been engineered.¹⁰⁸

Considering that RBPs participate in cancer progression, especially via splicing deregulation, this proof-of-concept study opens new avenues for promising circRNA-based therapeutics. In addition, it was demonstrated that exogenous circRNA can efficiently produce proteins *in vitro*.¹⁰⁹ Thus, circRNA carrying IRES could be specifically engineered to express tumour suppressor proteins.

Conclusions

A plethora of therapeutic strategies are being developed to target circRNAs in liver cancer. Although proof-of-concept studies have reported promising results, it must be taken into account that circRNAs are still newly described protagonists in cancer onset and progression. Indeed, a great deal of effort is needed to fully understand the physiological roles, the regulatory functions and the biogenesis of circRNAs. A better understanding of these molecular mechanisms will provide a deeper insight into the specific role of circRNAs in the whole RNA regulatory network governing cancer hallmarks. This knowledge could eventually pave the way for circRNA-mediated molecular therapies and for clinically relevant biomarkers in liver cancer (Fig. 4). Thus, as an emerging field, circRNAs represent a wealth of opportunities for future research.

Abbreviations

ASO, antisense oligonucleotide; CCA, cholangiocarcinoma; circRNA, circular RNA; CLIP, cross-linking immunoprecipitation; EMT, epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition; EVs, extracellular vesicles; HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma; HN1, haematopoietic- and neurologic-expressed sequence 1; IRES, internal ribosome entry sites; miRNA, microRNA; NGS, next-generation sequencing; QKI, Quaking; RBP, RNA-binding protein; RISC, RNA-induced silencing complex; shRNA, small-hairpin RNA; snRNP, small nuclear ribonuclear proteins; TAM, tumour-associated macrophage; TSB, target site blockers.

Financial support

The authors are supported by Inserm, Université de Rennes 1, Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche et de l'Innovation, Ligue Contre le Cancer (CD22, CD35, CD85), Fondation ARC, INCa and ITMO Cancer AVIESAN (Alliance Nationale pour les Sciences de la Vie et de la Santé) dans le cadre du Plan cancer (Non-coding RNA in cancerology: fundamental to translational). This work was supported by a grant from the French Ministry of Health and the French National Cancer Institute, PRT-K20-136, CHU Rennes, CLCC Eugène Marquis, Rennes.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no competing interest.

Please refer to the accompanying ICMJE disclosure forms for further details.

Authors' contributions

All the authors contributed to all aspects of the work. CL and DL contributed equally as co-first authors.

Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhepr.2021.100413>.

References

Author names in bold designate shared co-first authorship

- [1] Salzman J, Chen RE, Olsen MN, Wang PL, Brown PO. Cell-type specific features of circular RNA expression. *Plos Genet* 2013;9:e1003777.
- [2] Li J, Sun D, Pu W, Wang J, Peng Y. Circular RNAs in cancer: biogenesis, function, and clinical significance. *Trends Cancer* 2020;6:319–336.
- [3] Dragomir M, Calin GA. Circular RNAs in cancer - lessons learned from microRNAs. *Front Oncol* 2018;8:179.
- [4] Kristensen LS, Hansen TB, Venø MT, Kjems J. Circular RNAs in cancer: opportunities and challenges in the field. *Oncogene* 2018;37:555–565.
- [5] Vo JN, Cieslik M, Zhang Y, Shukla S, Xiao L, Zhang Y, et al. The landscape of circular RNA in cancer. *Cell* 2019;176:869–881 e813.
- [6] Jeck WR, Sharpless NE. Detecting and characterizing circular RNAs. *Nat Biotechnol* 2014;32:453–461.
- [7] Jeck WR, Sorrentino JA, Wang K, Slevin MK, Burd CE, Liu J, et al. Circular RNAs are abundant, conserved, and associated with ALU repeats. *RNA* 2013;19:141–157.
- [8] Sanger HL, Klotz G, Riesner D, Gross HJ, Kleinschmidt AK. Viroids are single-stranded covalently closed circular RNA molecules existing as highly base-paired rod-like structures. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A* 1976;73:3852–3856.
- [9] Hsu MT, Coca-Prados M. Electron microscopic evidence for the circular form of RNA in the cytoplasm of eukaryotic cells. *Nature* 1979;280:339–340.
- [10] Capel B, Swain A, Nicolis S, Hacker A, Walter M, Koopman P, et al. Circular transcripts of the testis-determining gene Sry in adult mouse testis. *Cell* 1993;73:1019–1030.
- [11] Zaphiropoulos PG. Circular RNAs from transcripts of the rat cytochrome P450 2C24 gene: correlation with exon skipping. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A* 1996;93:6536–6541.
- [12] Hoffmann S, Otto C, Dooze G, Tanzer A, Langenberger D, Christ S, et al. A multi-split mapping algorithm for circular RNA, splicing, trans-splicing and fusion detection. *Genome Biol* 2014;15:R34.
- [13] Ma XK, Wang MR, Liu CX, Dong R, Carmichael GG, Chen LL, et al. CIR-Cexplorer3: a CLEAR pipeline for direct comparison of circular and linear RNA expression. *Genomics Proteomics Bioinformatics* 2019;17:511–521.
- [14] You X, Conrad TO. Acfs: accurate circRNA identification and quantification from RNA-Seq data. *Sci Rep* 2016;6:38820.
- [15] Cheng J, Metge F, Dieterich C. Specific identification and quantification of circular RNAs from sequencing data. *Bioinformatics* 2016;32:1094–1096.
- [16] Szabo L, Salzman J. Detecting circular RNAs: bioinformatic and experimental challenges. *Nat Rev Genet* 2016;17:679–692.

- [17] Glazar P, Papavasileiou P, Rajewsky N. circBase: a database for circular RNAs. *RNA* 2014;20:1666–1670.
- [18] **Xin R, Gao Y, Gao Y, Wang R, Kadash-Edmondson KE, Liu B, et al.** isoCirc catalogs full-length circular RNA isoforms in human transcriptomes. *Nat Commun* 2021;12:266.
- [19] **Salzman J, Gawad C, Wang PL, Lacayo N, Brown PO.** Circular RNAs are the predominant transcript isoform from hundreds of human genes in diverse cell types. *PLoS One* 2012;7:e30733.
- [20] Wang PL, Bao Y, Yee MC, Barrett SP, Hogan GJ, Olsen MN, et al. Circular RNA is expressed across the eukaryotic tree of life. *PLoS One* 2014;9:e90859.
- [21] Liang D, Wilusz JE. Short intronic repeat sequences facilitate circular RNA production. *Genes Dev* 2014;28:2233–2247.
- [22] Zhang XO, Wang HB, Zhang Y, Lu X, Chen LL, Yang L. Complementary sequence-mediated exon circularization. *Cell* 2014;159:134–147.
- [23] Conn SJ, Pillman KA, Toubia J, Conn VM, Salamanidis M, Phillips CA, et al. The RNA binding protein quaking regulates formation of circRNAs. *Cell* 2015;160:1125–1134.
- [24] **Li Z, Huang C, Bao C, Chen L, Lin M, Wang X, et al.** Exon-intron circular RNAs regulate transcription in the nucleus. *Nat Struct Mol Biol* 2015;22:256–264.
- [25] **Stoll L, Rodriguez-Trejo A, Guay C, Brozzi F, Bayazit MB, Gattesco S, et al.** A circular RNA generated from an intron of the insulin gene controls insulin secretion. *Nat Commun* 2020;11:5611.
- [26] Hansen TB, Jensen TI, Clausen BH, Bramsen JB, Finsen B, Damgaard CK, et al. Natural RNA circles function as efficient microRNA sponges. *Nature* 2013;495:384–388.
- [27] **Memczak S, Jens M, Elefsinioti A, Torti F, Krueger J, Rybak A, et al.** Circular RNAs are a large class of animal RNAs with regulatory potency. *Nature* 2013;495:333–338.
- [28] Bartel DP. MicroRNAs: target recognition and regulatory functions. *Cell* 2009;136:215–233.
- [29] Tay Y, Rinn J, Pandolfi PP. The multilayered complexity of ceRNA cross-talk and competition. *Nature* 2014;505:344–352.
- [30] Zhong Q, Huang J, Wei J, Wu R. Circular RNA CDR1as sponges miR-7-5p to enhance E2F3 stability and promote the growth of nasopharyngeal carcinoma. *Cancer Cell Int* 2019;19:252.
- [31] Guo JU, Agarwal V, Guo H, Bartel DP. Expanded identification and characterization of mammalian circular RNAs. *Genome Biol* 2014;15:409.
- [32] **Dudekula DB, Panda AC, Grammatikakis I, De S, Abdelmohsen K, Gorospe M.** CirInteractome: a web tool for exploring circular RNAs and their interacting proteins and microRNAs. *RNA Biol* 2016;13:34–42.
- [33] Li JH, Liu S, Zhou H, Qu LH, Yang JH. starBase v2.0: decoding miRNA-ceRNA, miRNA-ncRNA and protein-RNA interaction networks from large-scale CLIP-Seq data. *Nucleic Acids Res* 2014;42:D92–97.
- [34] Kristensen LS, Andersen MS, Stagsted LVW, Ebbesen KK, Hansen TB, Kjems J. The biogenesis, biology and characterization of circular RNAs. *Nat Rev Genet* 2019;20:675–691.
- [35] Wong CH, Lou UK, Li Y, Chan SL, Tong JH, To KF, et al. CircFOXK2 promotes growth and metastasis of pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma by complexing with RNA-binding proteins and sponging MiR-942. *Cancer Res* 2020;80:2138–2149.
- [36] **Ashwal-Fluss R, Meyer M, Pamudurti NR, Ivanov A, Bartok O, Hanan M, et al.** circRNA biogenesis competes with pre-mRNA splicing. *Mol Cell* 2014;56:55–66.
- [37] Wu N, Yuan Z, Du KY, Fang L, Lyu J, Zhang C, et al. Translation of yes-associated protein (YAP) was antagonized by its circular RNA via suppressing the assembly of the translation initiation machinery. *Cell Death Differ* 2019;26:2758–2773.
- [38] Pamudurti NR, Bartok O, Jens M, Ashwal-Fluss R, Stottmeister C, Ruhe L, et al. Translation of CircRNAs. *Mol Cell* 2017;66:9–21 e27.
- [39] Legnini I, Di Timoteo G, Rossi F, Morlando M, Briganti F, Sthandier O, et al. Circ-ZNF609 is a circular RNA that can be translated and functions in myogenesis. *Mol Cell* 2017;66:22–37 e29.
- [40] Chen CK, Cheng R, Demeter J, Chen J, Weingarten-Gabbay S, Jiang L, et al. Structured elements drive extensive circular RNA translation. *Mol Cell* 2021.
- [41] **He L, Man C, Xiang S, Yao L, Wang X, Fan Y.** Circular RNAs' cap-independent translation protein and its roles in carcinomas. *Mol Cancer* 2021;20:119.
- [42] **Yang Y, Fan X, Mao M, Song X, Wu P, Zhang Y, et al.** Extensive translation of circular RNAs driven by N(6)-methyladenosine. *Cell Res* 2017;27:626–641.
- [43] **Chen YG, Chen R, Ahmad S, Verma R, Kasturi SP, Amaya L, et al.** N6-Methyladenosine modification controls circular RNA immunity. *Mol Cell* 2019;76:96–109 e109.
- [44] Chen LL. The expanding regulatory mechanisms and cellular functions of circular RNAs. *Nat Rev Mol Cell Biol* 2020;21:475–490.
- [45] Tang Q, Hann SS. Biological roles and mechanisms of circular RNA in human cancers. *Onco Targets Ther* 2020;13:2067–2092.
- [46] Chen S, Huang V, Xu X, Livingstone J, Soares F, Jeon J, et al. Widespread and functional RNA circularization in localized prostate cancer. *Cell* 2019;176:831–843 e822.
- [47] **Han D, Li J, Wang H, Su X, Hou J, Gu Y, et al.** Circular RNA circMTO1 acts as the sponge of microRNA-9 to suppress hepatocellular carcinoma progression. *Hepatology* 2017;66:1151–1164.
- [48] **Yu J, Xu QG, Wang ZG, Yang Y, Zhang L, Ma JZ, et al.** Circular RNA cSMARCA5 inhibits growth and metastasis in hepatocellular carcinoma. *J Hepatol* 2018;68:1214–1227.
- [49] **Zheng Q, Bao C, Guo W, Li S, Chen J, Chen B, et al.** Circular RNA profiling reveals an abundant circHIPK3 that regulates cell growth by sponging multiple miRNAs. *Nat Commun* 2016;7:11215.
- [50] **Li Y, Zheng F, Xiao X, Xie F, Tao D, Huang C, et al.** CircHIPK3 sponges miR-558 to suppress heparanase expression in bladder cancer cells. *EMBO Rep* 2017;18:1646–1659.
- [51] **Yan S, Wei H, Li Q, Si M, Feng W, Chen Z.** CircTP53 promotes colorectal cancer by acting as a miR-876-3p sponge to increase cyclin-dependent kinase-like 3 expression. *Cell Signal* 2021;78:109845.
- [52] Munoz-Garrido P, Rodrigues PM. The jigsaw of dual hepatocellular-intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma tumours. *Nat Rev Gastroenterol Hepatol* 2019;16:653–655.
- [53] Banales JM, Marin JGG, Lamarca A, Rodrigues PM, Khan SA, Roberts LR, et al. Cholangiocarcinoma 2020: the next horizon in mechanisms and management. *Nat Rev Gastroenterol Hepatol* 2020;17:557–588.
- [54] Forner A, Reig M, Bruix J. Hepatocellular carcinoma. *Lancet* 2018;391:1301–1314.
- [55] Allain C, Angenard G, Clement B, Coulouarn C. Integrative genomic analysis identifies the core transcriptional hallmarks of human hepatocellular carcinoma. *Cancer Res* 2016;76:6374–6381.
- [56] Hanahan D, Weinberg RA. Hallmarks of cancer: the next generation. *Cell* 2011;144:646–674.
- [57] **Dong W, Dai ZH, Liu FC, Guo XG, Ge CM, Ding J, et al.** The RNA-binding protein RBM3 promotes cell proliferation in hepatocellular carcinoma by regulating circular RNA SCD-circRNA 2 production. *EBioMedicine* 2019;45:155–167.
- [58] Wang L, Long H, Zheng Q, Bo X, Xiao X, Li B. Circular RNA circRHOT1 promotes hepatocellular carcinoma progression by initiation of NR2F6 expression. *Mol Cancer* 2019;18:119.
- [59] Klepsch V, Hermann-Kleiter N, Do-Dinh P, Jakic B, Offermann A, Efreanova M, et al. Nuclear receptor NR2F6 inhibition potentiates responses to PD-L1/PD-1 cancer immune checkpoint blockade. *Nat Commun* 2018;9:1538.
- [60] Liang WC, Wong CW, Liang PP, Shi M, Cao Y, Rao ST, et al. Translation of the circular RNA circbeta-catenin promotes liver cancer cell growth through activation of the Wnt pathway. *Genome Biol* 2019;20:84.
- [61] Wang Z, Zhao Y, Wang Y, Jin C. Circular RNA circHIAT1 inhibits cell growth in hepatocellular carcinoma by regulating miR-3171/PDEN axis. *Biomed Pharmacother* 2019;116:108932.
- [62] Chen Z, Zuo X, Pu L, Zhang Y, Han G, Zhang L, et al. circLARP4 induces cellular senescence through regulating miR-761/RUNX3/p53/p21 signaling in hepatocellular carcinoma. *Cancer Sci* 2019;110:568–581.
- [63] **Xu Y, Yao Y, Liu Y, Wang Z, Hu Z, Su Z, et al.** Elevation of circular RNA circ_0005230 facilitates cell growth and metastasis via sponging miR-1238 and miR-1299 in cholangiocarcinoma. *Aging (Albany NY)* 2019;11:1907–1917.
- [64] Wang S, Hu Y, Lv X, Li B, Gu D, Li Y, et al. Circ-0000284 arouses malignant phenotype of cholangiocarcinoma cells and regulates the biological functions of peripheral cells through cellular communication. *Clin Sci (Lond)* 2019;133:1935–1953.
- [65] Guo W, Zhang J, Zhang D, Cao S, Li G, Zhang S, et al. Polymorphisms and expression pattern of circular RNA circ-ITCH contributes to the carcinogenesis of hepatocellular carcinoma. *Oncotarget* 2017;8:48169–48177.
- [66] **Su Y, Xu C, Liu Y, Hu Y, Wu H.** Circular RNA hsa_circ_0001649 inhibits hepatocellular carcinoma progression via multiple miRNAs sponge. *Aging (Albany NY)* 2019;11:3362–3375.
- [67] Xu Y, Yao Y, Zhong X, Leng K, Qin W, Qu L, et al. Downregulated circular RNA hsa_circ_0001649 regulates proliferation, migration and invasion in

- cholangiocarcinoma cells. *Biochem Biophys Res Commun* 2018;496:455–461.
- [68] Yang J, Antin P, Berx G, Blanpain C, Brabletz T, Bronner M, et al. Guidelines and definitions for research on epithelial-mesenchymal transition. *Nat Rev Mol Cell Biol* 2020;21:341–352.
- [69] Xu X, Zhang J, Tian Y, Gao Y, Dong X, Chen W, et al. CircRNA inhibits DNA damage repair by interacting with host gene. *Mol Cancer* 2020;19:128.
- [70] Barbagallo D, Caponnetto A, Barbagallo C, Battaglia R, Mirabella F, Brea D, et al. The GAUGAA motif is responsible for the binding between circSMARCA5 and SRSF1 and related downstream effects on glioblastoma multiforme cell migration and angiogenic potential. *Int J Mol Sci* 2021;22.
- [71] Shi L, Liu B, Shen DD, Yan P, Zhang Y, Tian Y, et al. A tumor-suppressive circular RNA mediates uncanonical integrin degradation by the proteasome in liver cancer. *Sci Adv* 2021;7.
- [72] Morse MA, Sun W, Kim R, He AR, Abada PB, Mynderse M, et al. The role of angiogenesis in hepatocellular carcinoma. *Clin Cancer Res* 2019;25:912–920.
- [73] Pu J, Wang J, Li W, Lu Y, Wu X, Long X, et al. hsa_circ_0000092 promotes hepatocellular carcinoma progression through up-regulating Hn1 expression by binding to microRNA-338-3p. *J Cell Mol Med* 2020.
- [74] Bergers G, Fendt SM. The metabolism of cancer cells during metastasis. *Nat Rev Cancer* 2021;21:162–180.
- [75] Li Q, Pan X, Zhu D, Deng Z, Jiang R, Wang X. Circular RNA MAT2B promotes glycolysis and malignancy of hepatocellular carcinoma through the miR-338-3p/PKM2 Axis under hypoxic stress. *Hepatology* 2019;70:1298–1316.
- [76] Jhunjhunwala S, Hammer C, Delamarre L. Antigen presentation in cancer: insights into tumour immunogenicity and immune evasion. *Nat Rev Cancer* 2021;21:298–312.
- [77] Zhang PF, Wei CY, Huang XY, Peng R, Yang X, Lu JC, et al. Circular RNA circTRIM33-12 acts as the sponge of MicroRNA-191 to suppress hepatocellular carcinoma progression. *Mol Cancer* 2019;18:105.
- [78] Greten FR, Grivennikov SI. Inflammation and cancer: triggers, mechanisms, and consequences. *Immunity* 2019;51:27–41.
- [79] Taniguchi S, Elhance A, Van Duzer A, Kumar S, Leitenberger JJ, Oshimori N. Tumor-initiating cells establish an IL-33-TGF-beta niche signaling loop to promote cancer progression. *Science* 2020;369.
- [80] Hu ZQ, Zhou SL, Li J, Zhou ZJ, Wang PC, Xin HY, et al. Circular RNA sequencing identifies CircASAP1 as a key regulator in hepatocellular carcinoma metastasis. *Hepatology* 2020;72:906–922.
- [81] Lu Q, Fang T. Circular RNA SMARCA5 correlates with favorable clinical tumor features and prognosis, and increases chemotherapy sensitivity in intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma. *J Clin Lab Anal* 2020;34:e23138.
- [82] Chen Q, Wang H, Li Z, Li F, Liang L, Zou Y, et al. Circular RNA ACTN4 promotes intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma progression by recruiting YBX1 to initiate FZD7 transcription. *J Hepatol* 2021.
- [83] Xu YP, Dong ZN, Wang SW, Zheng YM, Zhang C, Zhou YQ, et al. circHMGC51-016 reshapes immune environment by sponging miR-1236-3p to regulate CD73 and GAL-8 expression in intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma. *J Exp Clin Cancer Res* 2021;40:290.
- [84] Merdrignac A, Angenard G, Allain C, Petitjean K, Bergeat D, Bellaud P, et al. A novel transforming growth factor beta-induced long noncoding RNA promotes an inflammatory microenvironment in human intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma. *Hepatol Commun* 2018;2:254–269.
- [85] Enuka Y, Lauriola M, Feldman ME, Sas-Chen A, Ulitsky I, Yarden Y. Circular RNAs are long-lived and display only minimal early alterations in response to a growth factor. *Nucleic Acids Res* 2016;44:1370–1383.
- [86] Pamudurti NR, Patop IL, Krishnamoorthy A, Ashwal-Fluss R, Bartok O, Kadener S. An in vivo strategy for knockdown of circular RNAs. *Cell Discov* 2020;6:52.
- [87] Liang D, Tatomer DC, Luo Z, Wu H, Yang L, Chen LL, et al. The output of protein-coding genes shifts to circular RNAs when the pre-mRNA processing machinery is limiting. *Mol Cell* 2017;68:940–954 e943.
- [88] Liu B, Song F, Yang Q, Zhou Y, Shao C, Shen Y, et al. Characterization of tissue-specific biomarkers with the expression of circRNAs in forensically relevant body fluids. *Int J Leg Med* 2019;133:1321–1331.
- [89] Louis C, Desotex M, Coulouarn C. Exosomal circRNAs: new players in the field of cholangiocarcinoma. *Clin Sci (Lond)* 2019;133:2239–2244.
- [90] Li Y, Zheng Q, Bao C, Li S, Guo W, Zhao J, et al. Circular RNA is enriched and stable in exosomes: a promising biomarker for cancer diagnosis. *Cell Res* 2015;25:981–984.
- [91] Meng S, Zhou H, Feng Z, Xu Z, Tang Y, Li P, et al. CircRNA: functions and properties of a novel potential biomarker for cancer. *Mol Cancer* 2017;16:94.
- [92] Nimse SB, Sonawane MD, Song KS, Kim T. Biomarker detection technologies and future directions. *Analyst* 2016;141:740–755.
- [93] Pritchard CC, Kroh E, Wood B, Arroyo JD, Dougherty KJ, Miyaji MM, et al. Blood cell origin of circulating microRNAs: a cautionary note for cancer biomarker studies. *Cancer Prev Res (Phila)* 2012;5:492–497.
- [94] Zhang X, Xu Y, Qian Z, Zheng W, Wu Q, Chen Y, et al. circRNA_104075 stimulates YAP-dependent tumorigenesis through the regulation of HNF4a and may serve as a diagnostic marker in hepatocellular carcinoma. *Cell Death Dis* 2018;9:1091.
- [95] Wei Y, Chen X, Liang C, Ling Y, Yang X, Ye X, et al. A noncoding regulatory RNAs network driven by circ-CDYL acts specifically in the early stages hepatocellular carcinoma. *Hepatology* 2020;71:130–147.
- [96] Huang X, Zhang W, Shao Z. Prognostic and diagnostic significance of circRNAs expression in hepatocellular carcinoma patients: a meta-analysis. *Cancer Med* 2019;8:1148–1156.
- [97] Xu L, Feng X, Hao X, Wang P, Zhang Y, Zheng X, et al. CircSETD3 (Hsa_circ_0000567) acts as a sponge for microRNA-421 inhibiting hepatocellular carcinoma growth. *J Exp Clin Cancer Res* 2019;38:98.
- [98] Chen H, Liu S, Li M, Huang P, Li X. circ_0003418 inhibits tumorigenesis and cisplatin chemoresistance through Wnt/beta-catenin pathway in hepatocellular carcinoma. *Onco Targets Ther* 2019;12:9539–9549.
- [99] Xu J, Ji L, Liang Y, Wan Z, Zheng W, Song X, et al. CircRNA-SORE mediates sorafenib resistance in hepatocellular carcinoma by stabilizing YBX1. *Signal Transduct Target Ther* 2020;5:298.
- [100] Greten TF, Lai CW, Li G, Staveley-O'Carroll KF. Targeted and immune-based therapies for hepatocellular carcinoma. *Gastroenterology* 2019;156:510–524.
- [101] Llovet JM, Montl R, Villanueva A. Randomized trials and endpoints in advanced HCC: role of PFS as a surrogate of survival. *J Hepatol* 2019;70:1262–1277.
- [102] Gilot D, Migault M, Bachelot L, Journe F, Rogiers A, Donnou-Fournet E, et al. A non-coding function of TYRP1 mRNA promotes melanoma growth. *Nat Cell Biol* 2017;19:1348–1357.
- [103] Shan K, Liu C, Liu BH, Chen X, Dong R, Liu X, et al. Circular noncoding RNA HIPK3 mediates retinal vascular dysfunction in diabetes mellitus. *Circulation* 2017;136:1629–1642.
- [104] Abudayyeh OO, Gootenberg JS, Essletzbichler P, Han S, Joung J, Belanto JJ, et al. RNA targeting with CRISPR-Cas13. *Nature* 2017;550:280–284.
- [105] Kaczmarek JC, Kowalski PS, Anderson DG. Advances in the delivery of RNA therapeutics: from concept to clinical reality. *Genome Med* 2017;9:60.
- [106] Petkovic S, Muller S. RNA circularization strategies in vivo and in vitro. *Nucleic Acids Res* 2015;43:2454–2465.
- [107] Liu X, Abraham JM, Cheng Y, Wang Z, Wang Z, Zhang G, et al. Synthetic circular RNA functions as a miR-21 sponge to suppress gastric carcinoma cell proliferation. *Mol Ther Nucleic Acids* 2018;13:312–321.
- [108] Schreiner S, Didio A, Hung LH, Bindereif A. Design and application of circular RNAs with protein-sponge function. *Nucleic Acids Res* 2020;48:12326–12335.
- [109] Wesselhoeft RA, Kowalski PS, Anderson DG. Engineering circular RNA for potent and stable translation in eukaryotic cells. *Nat Commun* 2018;9:2629.
- [110] Huang XY, Huang ZL, Huang J, Xu B, Huang XY, Xu YH, et al. Exosomal circRNA-100338 promotes hepatocellular carcinoma metastasis via enhancing invasiveness and angiogenesis. *J Exp Clin Cancer Res* 2020;39:20.
- [111] Ding Z, Guo L, Deng Z, Li P. Circ-PRMT5 enhances the proliferation, migration and glycolysis of hepatoma cells by targeting miR-188-5p/HK2 axis. *Ann Hepatol* 2020;19:269–279.
- [112] Zhang PF, Gao C, Huang XY, Lu JC, Guo XJ, Shi GM, et al. Cancer cell-derived exosomal circUHRF1 induces natural killer cell exhaustion and may cause resistance to anti-PD1 therapy in hepatocellular carcinoma. *Mol Cancer* 2020;19:110.
- [113] Wu M, Deng X, Zhong Y, Hu L, Zhang X, Liang Y, et al. Maff is regulated via the circ-ITCH/miR-224-5p Axis and acts as a tumor suppressor in hepatocellular carcinoma. *Oncol Res* 2020;28:299–309.
- [114] Huang XY, Huang ZL, Xu YH, Zheng Q, Chen Z, Song W, et al. Comprehensive circular RNA profiling reveals the regulatory role of the circRNA-100338/miR-141-3p pathway in hepatitis B-related hepatocellular carcinoma. *Sci Rep* 2017;7:5428.

- [115] Yu J, Ding WB, Wang MC, Guo XG, Xu J, Xu QG, et al. Plasma circular RNA panel to diagnose hepatitis B virus-related hepatocellular carcinoma: a large-scale, multicenter study. *Int J Cancer* 2020;146:1754–1763.
- [116] Zhu K, Zhan H, Peng Y, Yang L, Gao Q, Jia H, et al. Plasma hsa_circ_0027089 is a diagnostic biomarker for hepatitis B virus-related hepatocellular carcinoma. *Carcinogenesis* 2020;41:296–302.
- [117] Xu L, Zhang M, Zheng X, Yi P, Lan C, Xu M. The circular RNA ciRS-7 (Cdr1as) acts as a risk factor of hepatic microvascular invasion in hepatocellular carcinoma. *J Cancer Res Clin Oncol* 2017;143:17–27.
- [118] Zhang J, Chang Y, Xu L, Qin L. Elevated expression of circular RNA circ_0008450 predicts dismal prognosis in hepatocellular carcinoma and regulates cell proliferation, apoptosis, and invasion via sponging miR-548p. *J Cell Biochem* 2019;120:9487–9494.
- [119] Yang G, Wang X, Liu B, Lu Z, Xu Z, Xiu P, et al. circ-BIRC6, a circular RNA, promotes hepatocellular carcinoma progression by targeting the miR-3918/Bcl2 axis. *Cell Cycle* 2019;18:976–989.
- [120] Wang X, Wang X, Li W, Zhang Q, Chen J, Chen T. Up-regulation of hsa_circ_0000517 predicts adverse prognosis of hepatocellular carcinoma. *Front Oncol* 2019;9:1105.
- [121] Chen D, Zhang C, Lin J, Song X, Wang H. Screening differential circular RNA expression profiles reveal that hsa_circ_0128298 is a biomarker in the diagnosis and prognosis of hepatocellular carcinoma. *Cancer Manag Res* 2018;10:1275–1283.
- [122] Zhang C, Zhang C, Lin J, Wang H. Circular RNA Hsa_Circ_0091579 serves as a diagnostic and prognostic marker for hepatocellular carcinoma. *Cell Physiol Biochem* 2018;51:290–300.
- [123] Guan Z, Tan J, Gao W, Li X, Yang Y, Li X, et al. Circular RNA hsa_circ_0016788 regulates hepatocellular carcinoma tumorigenesis through miR-486/CDK4 pathway. *J Cell Physiol* 2018;234:500–508.
- [124] Cheng F, Wang L, Zhang J. Circular RNA 0016788 displays as a biomarker for tumor progression and poor prognosis in surgical hepatocellular carcinoma patients. *J Clin Lab Anal* 2020;34:e23300.
- [125] Sun P, Fan X, Hu X, Fu X, Wei Q, Zang Y. circPCNX and pecanex promote hepatocellular carcinoma cell viability by inhibiting miR-506. *Cancer Manag Res* 2019;11:10957–10967.
- [126] Li Z, Liu Y, Yan J, Zeng Q, Hu Y, Wang H, et al. Circular RNA hsa_circ_0056836 functions an oncogenic gene in hepatocellular carcinoma through modulating miR-766-3p/FOSL2 axis. *Aging (Albany NY)* 2020;12:2485–2497.
- [127] Shang X, Li G, Liu H, Li T, Liu J, Zhao Q, et al. Comprehensive circular RNA profiling reveals that hsa_circ_0005075, a new circular RNA biomarker, is involved in hepatocellular carcinoma development. *Medicine (Baltimore)* 2016;95:e3811.
- [128] Yang X, Song H, Zi Z, Kou J, Chen S, Dai Y, et al. Circ_0005075 promotes hepatocellular carcinoma progression by suppression of microRNA-335. *J Cell Physiol* 2019;234:21937–21946.
- [129] Wei X, Zheng W, Tian P, He Y, Liu H, Peng M, et al. Oncogenic hsa_circ_0091581 promotes the malignancy of HCC cell through blocking miR-526b from degrading c-MYC mRNA. *Cell Cycle* 2020;19:817–824.
- [130] Meng J, Chen S, Han JX, Qian B, Wang XR, Zhong WL, et al. Twist1 regulates vimentin through Cui2 circular RNA to promote EMT in hepatocellular carcinoma. *Cancer Res* 2018;78:4150–4162.
- [131] Li S, Gu H, Huang Y, Peng Q, Zhou R, Yi P, et al. Circular RNA 101368/miR-200a axis modulates the migration of hepatocellular carcinoma through HMGB1/RAGE signaling. *Cell Cycle* 2018;17:2349–2359.
- [132] Pan H, Tang L, Jiang H, Li X, Wang R, Gao J, et al. Enhanced expression of circ_0000267 in hepatocellular carcinoma indicates poor prognosis and facilitates cell progression by sponging miR-646. *J Cell Biochem* 2019.
- [133] Liu H, Xue L, Song C, Liu F, Jiang T, Yang X. Overexpression of circular RNA circ_001569 indicates poor prognosis in hepatocellular carcinoma and promotes cell growth and metastasis by sponging miR-411-5p and miR-432-5p. *Biochem Biophys Res Commun* 2018;503:2659–2665.
- [134] Yu J, Yang M, Zhou B, Luo J, Zhang Z, Zhang W, et al. CircRNA-104718 acts as competing endogenous RNA and promotes hepatocellular carcinoma progression through microRNA-218-5p/TXNDC5 signaling pathway. *Clin Sci (Lond)* 2019;133:1487–1503.
- [135] Zhu Q, Lu G, Luo Z, Gui F, Wu J, Zhang D, et al. CircRNA circ_0067934 promotes tumor growth and metastasis in hepatocellular carcinoma through regulation of miR-1324/FZD5/Wnt/beta-catenin axis. *Biochem Biophys Res Commun* 2018;497:626–632.
- [136] Zhang S, Liu Y, Liu Z, Zhang Y, Chen G, Li K, et al. CircRNA_0000502 promotes hepatocellular carcinoma metastasis and inhibits apoptosis through targeting microRNA-124. *J BUON* 2019;24:2402–2410.
- [137] Luo Z, Mao X, Cui W. Circular RNA expression and circPTPRM promotes proliferation and migration in hepatocellular carcinoma. *Med Oncol* 2019;36:86.
- [138] Zhu Y, Liu Y, Xiao B, Cai H, Liu M, Ma L, et al. The circular RNA PVT1/miR-203/HOXD3 pathway promotes the progression of human hepatocellular carcinoma. *Biol Open* 2019;8.
- [139] Li Z, Hu Y, Zeng Q, Wang H, Yan J, Li H, et al. Circular RNA MYLK promotes hepatocellular carcinoma progression by increasing Rab23 expression by sponging miR-362-3p. *Cancer Cell Int* 2019;19:211.
- [140] Fu Y, Cai L, Lei X, Wang D. Circular RNA ABCB10 promotes hepatocellular carcinoma progression by increasing HMG20A expression by sponging miR-670-3p. *Cancer Cell Int* 2019;19:338.
- [141] Guo J, Duan H, Li Y, Yang L, Yuan L. A novel circular RNA circ-ZNF652 promotes hepatocellular carcinoma metastasis through inducing snail-mediated epithelial-mesenchymal transition by sponging miR-203/miR-502-5p. *Biochem Biophys Res Commun* 2019;513:812–819.
- [142] Cai H, Hu B, Ji L, Ruan X, Zheng Z. Hsa_circ_0103809 promotes cell proliferation and inhibits apoptosis in hepatocellular carcinoma by targeting miR-490-5p/SOX2 signaling pathway. *Am J Transl Res* 2018;10:1690–1702.
- [143] Liu L, Qi X, Gui Y, Huo H, Yang X, Yang L. Overexpression of circ_0021093 circular RNA forecasts an unfavorable prognosis and facilitates cell progression by targeting the miR-766-3p/MTA3 pathway in hepatocellular carcinoma. *Gene* 2019;714:143992.
- [144] Jiang W, Wen D, Gong L, Wang Y, Liu Z, Yin F. Circular RNA hsa_circ_0000673 promotes hepatocellular carcinoma malignance by decreasing miR-767-3p targeting SET. *Biochem Biophys Res Commun* 2018;500:211–216.
- [145] Zhan W, Liao X, Chen Z, Li L, Tian T, Yu L, et al. Circular RNA hsa_circRNA_103809 promoted hepatocellular carcinoma development by regulating miR-377-3p/FGFR1/ERK axis. *J Cell Physiol* 2020;235:1733–1745.
- [146] Tan A, Li Q, Chen L. CircZFR promotes hepatocellular carcinoma progression through regulating miR-3619-5p/CTNNB1 axis and activating Wnt/beta-catenin pathway. *Arch Biochem Biophys* 2019;661:196–202.
- [147] Huang XY, Zhang PF, Wei CY, Peng R, Lu JC, Gao C, et al. Circular RNA circMET drives immunosuppression and anti-PD1 therapy resistance in hepatocellular carcinoma via the miR-30-5p/snail/DPP4 axis. *Mol Cancer* 2020;19:92.
- [148] Zhao M, Dong G, Meng Q, Lin S, Li X. Circ-HOMER1 enhances the inhibition of miR-1322 on CXCL6 to regulate the growth and aggressiveness of hepatocellular carcinoma cells. *J Cell Biochem* 2020;121:4440–4449.
- [149] Li J, Qin X, Wu R, Wan L, Zhang L, Liu R. Circular RNA circFBXO11 modulates hepatocellular carcinoma progress and oxaliplatin resistance through miR-605/FOXO3/ABCB1 axis. *J Cell Mol Med* 2020;24:5152–5161.
- [150] Gao J, Dai C, Yu X, Yin XB, Zhou F. Circ-TCF4. 85 silencing inhibits cancer progression through microRNA-486-5p-targeted inhibition of ABCF2 in hepatocellular carcinoma. *Mol Oncol* 2020;14:447–461.
- [151] Liu B, Yang G, Wang X, Liu J, Lu Z, Wang Q, et al. CircBACH1 (hsa_circ_0061395) promotes hepatocellular carcinoma growth by regulating p27 repression via HuR. *J Cell Physiol* 2020;235:6929–6941.
- [152] Qiao GL, Chen L, Jiang WH, Yang C, Yang CM, Song LN, et al. Hsa_circ_0003998 may be used as a new biomarker for the diagnosis and prognosis of hepatocellular carcinoma. *Oncotargets Ther* 2019;12:5849–5860.
- [153] Gong Y, Mao J, Wu D, Wang X, Li L, Zhu L, et al. Circ-ZEB1.33 promotes the proliferation of human HCC by sponging miR-200a-3p and upregulating CDK6. *Cancer Cell Int* 2018;18:116.
- [154] Zhou S, Wei J, Wang Y, Liu X. Cisplatin resistance-associated circRNA_101237 serves as a prognostic biomarker in hepatocellular carcinoma. *Exp Ther Med* 2020;19:2733–2740.
- [155] Wang W, Li Y, Li X, Liu B, Han S, Li X, et al. Circular RNA circ-FOXP1 induced by SOX9 promotes hepatocellular carcinoma progression via sponging miR-875-3p and miR-421. *Biomed Pharmacother* 2020;121:109517.
- [156] Lei B, Zhou J, Xuan X, Tian Z, Zhang M, Gao W, et al. Circular RNA expression profiles of peripheral blood mononuclear cells in hepatocellular carcinoma patients by sequence analysis. *Cancer Med* 2019;8:1423–1433.
- [157] Matboli M, Shafei AE, Ali MA, Ashry AM, Kamal KM, Agag MA, et al. circRNAs (hsa_circ_00156, hsa_circ_000224, and hsa_circ_000520) are novel potential biomarkers in hepatocellular carcinoma. *J Cell Biochem* 2018.

- [158] **Wang G, Liu W, Zou Y, Wang G, Deng Y, Luo J, et al.** Three isoforms of exosomal circPTGR1 promote hepatocellular carcinoma metastasis via the miR449a-MET pathway. *EBioMedicine* 2019;40:432–445.
- [159] Jiang XM, Li ZL, Li JL, Xu Y, Leng KM, Cui YF, et al. A novel prognostic biomarker for cholangiocarcinoma: circRNA Cdr1as. *Eur Rev Med Pharmacol Sci* 2018;22:365–371.
- [160] Qin M, Liu G, Huo X, Tao X, Sun X, Ge Z, et al. Hsa_circ_0001649: a circular RNA and potential novel biomarker for hepatocellular carcinoma. *Cancer Biomark* 2016;16:161–169.
- [161] **Zhang X, Qiu S, Luo P, Zhou H, Jing W, Liang C, et al.** Down-regulation of hsa_circ_0001649 in hepatocellular carcinoma predicts a poor prognosis. *Cancer Biomark* 2018;22:135–142.
- [162] **Yao Z, Luo J, Hu K, Lin J, Huang H, Wang Q, et al.** ZKSCAN1 gene and its related circular RNA (circZKSCAN1) both inhibit hepatocellular carcinoma cell growth, migration, and invasion but through different signaling pathways. *Mol Oncol* 2017;11:422–437.
- [163] Jiang Z, Shen L, Wang S, Wu S, Hu Y, Guo J, et al. Hsa_circ_0028502 and hsa_circ_0076251 are potential novel biomarkers for hepatocellular carcinoma. *Cancer Med* 2019;8:7278–7287.
- [164] Yao T, Chen Q, Shao Z, Song Z, Fu L, Xiao B. Circular RNA 0068669 as a new biomarker for hepatocellular carcinoma metastasis. *J Clin Lab Anal* 2018;32:e22572.
- [165] Fu L, Wu S, Yao T, Chen Q, Xie Y, Ying S, et al. Decreased expression of hsa_circ_0003570 in hepatocellular carcinoma and its clinical significance. *J Clin Lab Anal* 2018;32.
- [166] **Kou P, Zhang C, Lin J, Wang H.** Circular RNA hsa_circ_0078602 may have potential as a prognostic biomarker for patients with hepatocellular carcinoma. *Oncol Lett* 2019;17:2091–2098.
- [167] Fu L, Yao T, Chen Q, Mo X, Hu Y, Guo J. Screening differential circular RNA expression profiles reveals hsa_circ_0004018 is associated with hepatocellular carcinoma. *Oncotarget* 2017;8:58405–58416.
- [168] Zhong L, Wang Y, Cheng Y, Wang W, Lu B, Zhu L, et al. Circular RNA circC3P1 suppresses hepatocellular carcinoma growth and metastasis through miR-4641/PCK1 pathway. *Biochem Biophys Res Commun* 2018;499:1044–1049.
- [169] **Wang YG, Wang T, Ding M, Xiang SH, Shi M, Zhai B.** hsa_circ_0091570 acts as a ceRNA to suppress hepatocellular cancer progression by sponging hsa-miR-1307. *Cancer Lett* 2019;460:128–138.
- [170] Luo Y, Fu Y, Huang R, Gao M, Liu F, Gui R, et al. CircRNA_101505 sensitizes hepatocellular carcinoma cells to cisplatin by sponging miR-103 and promotes oxidored-nitro domain-containing protein 1 expression. *Cell Death Discov* 2019;5:121.
- [171] Qiu L, Huang Y, Li Z, Dong X, Chen G, Xu H, et al. Circular RNA profiling identifies circADAMTS13 as a miR-484 sponge which suppresses cell proliferation in hepatocellular carcinoma. *Mol Oncol* 2019;13:441–455.
- [172] Tan Y, Du B, Zhan Y, Wang K, Wang X, Chen B, et al. Antitumor effects of circ-EPHB4 in hepatocellular carcinoma via inhibition of HIF-1alpha. *Mol Carcinog* 2019;58:875–886.
- [173] **Li Z, Zhou Y, Yang G, He S, Qiu X, Zhang L, et al.** Using circular RNA SMARCA5 as a potential novel biomarker for hepatocellular carcinoma. *Clin Chim Acta* 2019;492:37–44.
- [174] **Sun S, Wang W, Luo X, Li Y, Liu B, Li X, et al.** Circular RNA circ-ADD3 inhibits hepatocellular carcinoma metastasis through facilitating EZH2 degradation via CDK1-mediated ubiquitination. *Am J Cancer Res* 2019;9:1695–1707.
- [175] Zhang X, Zhou H, Jing W, Luo P, Qiu S, Liu X, et al. The circular RNA hsa_circ_0001445 regulates the proliferation and migration of hepatocellular carcinoma and may serve as a diagnostic biomarker. *Dis Markers* 2018;2018:3073467.
- [176] **Chen W, Quan Y, Fan S, Wang H, Liang J, Huang L, et al.** Exosome-transmitted circular RNA hsa_circ_0051443 suppresses hepatocellular carcinoma progression. *Cancer Lett* 2020;475:119–128.