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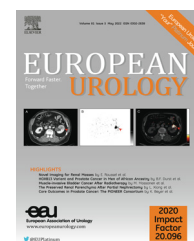
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Platinum Priority – Brief Correspondence

Editorial by Andrew J. Vickers, Aymen Elfiky, Vincent L. Freeman, Mack Roach 3rd on pp. 463–465 of this issue

A Rare Germline HOXB13 Variant Contributes to Risk of Prostate Cancer in Men of African Ancestry

Burcu F. Darst^{a,b,*}, Raymond Hughley^a, Aaron Pfennig^c, Ujani Hazra^c, Caoqi Fan^{a,d}, Peggy Wan^a, Xin Sheng^a, Lucy Xia^a, Caroline Andrews^e, Fei Chen^a, Sonja I. Berndt^f, Zsofia Kote-Jarai^g, Koveela Govindasami^{g,h}, Jeannette T. Bensen^{ij}, Sue A. Ingles^{a,b}, Benjamin A. Rybicki^k, Barbara Nemesure^l, Esther M. John^m, Jay H. Fowkeⁿ, Chad D. Huff^o, Sara S. Strom^o, William B. Isaacs^p, Jong Y. Park^q, Wei Zheng^r, Elaine A. Ostrander^s, Patrick C. Walsh^p, John Carpten^t, Thomas A. Sellers^q, Kosj Yamoah^u, Adam B. Murphy^v, Maureen Sanderson^w, Dana C. Crawford^x, Susan M. Gapstur^y, William S. Bush^x, Melinda C. Aldrich^z, Olivier Cussenot^{aa}, Gyorgy Petrovics^{ab}, Jennifer Cullen^{ab,ac}, Christine Neslund-Dudas^k, Rick A. Kittles^{ad}, Jianfeng Xu^{ae}, Mariana C. Stern^{a,b}, Anand P. Chokkalingam^{af}, Luc Multigner^{ag}, Marie-Elise Parent^{ah}, Florence Menegaux^{ai}, Geraldine Cancel-Tassin^{aa}, Adam S. Kibel^{aj,ak}, Eric A. Klein^{al}, Phyllis J. Goodman^{am}, Janet L. Stanford^{an,ao}, Bettina F. Drake^{ap}, Jennifer J. Hu^{aq}, Peter E. Clark^{ar}, Pascal Blanchet^{as}, Graham Casey^{at}, Anselm J.M. Hennis^{au,av}, Alexander Lubwama^{aw}, Ian M. Thompson Jr^{ax}, Robin J. Leach^{ay}, Susan M. Gundell^a, Loreall Pooler^a, James L. Mohler^{j,az}, Elizabeth T.H. Fontham^{ba}, Gary J. Smith^{az}, Jack A. Taylor^{bb,bc}, Laurent Brureau^{as}, William J. Blot^r, Richard Biritwum^{bd}, Evelyn Tay^{bd}, Ann Truelove^{be}, Shelley Niwa^{be}, Yao Tettey^{bd,bf}, Rohit Varma^{bg}, Roberta McKean-Cowdin^{a,b}, Mina Torres^{bg}, Mohamed Jalloh^{bh}, Serigne Magueye Gueye^{bh}, Lamine Niang^{bh}, Olufemi Ogunbiyi^{bi}, Michael Oladimeji Idowu^{bj}, Olufemi Popoola^{bi}, Akindele O. Adebisi^{bi}, Oseremen I. Aisuodionoe-Shadrach^{bk}, Maxwell Nwegbu^{bk}, Ben Adusei^{bl}, Sunny Mante^{bl}, Afua Darkwa-Abrahams^{bd}, Edward D. Yeboah^{bd,bf}, James E. Mensah^{bd}, Andrew Anthony Adjei^{bd}, Halimatou Diop^{bm}, Michael B. Cook^f, Stephen J. Chanock^f, Stephen Watya^{aw,bn}, Rosalind A. Eeles^{g,h}, Charleston W.K. Chiang^{a,d}, Joseph Lachance^c, Timothy R. Rebbeck^e, David V. Conti^{a,b}, Christopher A. Haiman^{a,b,*}

^aCenter for Genetic Epidemiology, Department of Population and Public Health Sciences, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA; ^bNorris Comprehensive Cancer Center, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA; ^cSchool of Biological Sciences, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, USA; ^dDepartment of Quantitative and Computational Biology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA; ^eHarvard TH Chan School of Public Health and Division of Population Sciences, Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Boston, MA, USA; ^fDivision of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, National Cancer Institute, National Institute of Health, Bethesda, MD, USA; ^gThe Institute of Cancer Research, Sutton, London, UK; ^hRoyal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK; ⁱDepartment of Epidemiology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA; ^jLineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA; ^kDepartment of Public Health Sciences, Henry Ford Hospital, Detroit, MI, USA; ^lDepartment of Family, Population and Preventive Medicine, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY, USA; ^mDepartment of Epidemiology & Population Health and Stanford Cancer Institute, Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA, USA; ⁿDivision of Epidemiology, Department of Preventive Medicine, The University of Tennessee Health Science Center, TN, USA; ^oDepartment of Epidemiology, University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, TX, USA; ^pJames Buchanan Brady Urological Institute, Johns Hopkins Hospital and Medical Institution, Baltimore, MD, USA; ^qDepartment of Cancer Epidemiology, Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute, Tampa, FL, USA; ^rDivision of Epidemiology, Department of Medicine, Vanderbilt Epidemiology Center, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville, TN, USA; ^sCancer Genetics and Comparative Genomics Branch, National



Human Genome Research Institute, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD, USA; ¹ Department of Translational Genomics, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA; ² Department of Radiation Oncology and Cancer Epidemiology, Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute, Tampa, FL, USA; ³ Department of Urology, Northwestern University, Chicago, IL, USA; ⁴ Department of Family and Community Medicine, Meharry Medical College, Nashville, TN, USA; ⁵ Cleveland Institute for Computational Biology, Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH, USA; ⁶ Epidemiology Research Program, American Cancer Society, Atlanta, GA, USA; ⁷ Department of Thoracic Surgery, Division of Epidemiology, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, TN, USA; ⁸ CeRePP & Sorbonne Université, GRC n° 5, AP-HP, Tenon Hospital, Paris, France; ⁹ Center for Prostate Disease Research, Department of Surgery, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Bethesda, MD, USA; ¹⁰ Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH, USA; ¹¹ Department of Population Sciences, City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center, Duarte, CA, USA; ¹² Program for Personalized Cancer Care and Department of Surgery, NorthShore University HealthSystem, Evanston, IL, USA; ¹³ School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, USA; ¹⁴ Univ Rennes, Inserm, EHESP, Irset (Institut de recherche en santé, environnement et travail) -UMR_S 1085, Rennes, France; ¹⁵ Centre Armand-Frappier Santé Biotechnologie, Institut national de la recherche scientifique, University of Quebec, Laval, Quebec, Canada; ¹⁶ Université Paris-Saclay, Université Paris-Sud, CESP (Center for Research in Epidemiology and Population Health), Inserm, Team Cancer-Environment, Villejuif, France; ¹⁷ Division of Urology, Brigham and Women's Hospital/Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Boston, MA, USA; ¹⁸ Washington University, St. Louis, MO, USA; ¹⁹ Glickman Urological & Kidney Institute, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, OH, USA; ²⁰ SWOG Statistical Center, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Seattle, WA, USA; ²¹ Division of Public Health Sciences, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Seattle, WA, USA; ²² Department of Epidemiology, School of Public Health, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA; ²³ Department of Surgery, Division of Public Health Sciences, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, MO, USA; ²⁴ Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center and Department of Public Health Sciences, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, Miami, FL, USA; ²⁵ Atrium Health/Levine Cancer Institute, Charlotte, NC, USA; ²⁶ CHU de Guadeloupe, Univ Antilles, Inserm, EHESP, Irset (Institut de recherche en santé, environnement et travail) -UMR_S 1085, Rennes, France; ²⁷ Center for Public Health Genomics, Department of Public Health Sciences, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, USA; ²⁸ Department of Preventive Medicine, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY, USA; ²⁹ George Alleyne Chronic Disease Research Centre and Faculty of Medical Sciences, The University of the West Indies, Bridgetown, Barbados; ³⁰ School of Public Health, Makerere University College of Health Sciences, Kampala, Uganda; ³¹ CHRISTUS Santa Rosa Health System and The University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio, TX, USA; ³² Department of Cell Systems and Anatomy, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX, USA; ³³ Department of Urology, Roswell Park Cancer Institute, Buffalo, NY, USA; ³⁴ School of Public Health, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, New Orleans, LA, USA; ³⁵ Epigenetic and Stem Cell Biology Laboratory, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, Research Triangle Park, NC, USA; ³⁶ Epidemiology Branch, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, Research Triangle Park, NC, USA; ³⁷ Korle Bu Teaching Hospital, Accra, Ghana; ³⁸ Westat, Rockville, MD, USA; ³⁹ University of Ghana Medical School, Accra, Ghana; ⁴⁰ Southern California Eye Institute, CHA Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA, USA; ⁴¹ Hôpital Général Idrissa Pouye, Dakar, Senegal; ⁴² College of Medicine, University of Ibadan and University College Hospital, Ibadan, Nigeria; ⁴³ College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria; ⁴⁴ College of Health Sciences, University of Abuja, University of Abuja Teaching Hospital and Cancer Science Center, Abuja, Nigeria; ⁴⁵ 37 Military Hospital, Accra, Ghana; ⁴⁶ Laboratoires Bactériologie et Virologie, Hôpital Aristide Le Dantec, Dakar, Senegal; ⁴⁷ Uro Care, Kampala, Uganda

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Abstract

A rare African ancestry-specific germline deletion variant in *HOXB13* (X285K, rs77179853) was recently reported in Martinican men with early-onset prostate cancer. Given the role of *HOXB13* germline variation in prostate cancer, we investigated the association between *HOXB13* X285K and prostate cancer risk in a large sample of 22 361 African ancestry men, including 11 688 prostate cancer cases. The risk allele was present only in men of West African ancestry, with an allele frequency in men that ranged from 0.40% in Ghana and 0.31% in Nigeria to 0% in Uganda and South Africa, with a range of frequencies in men with admixed African ancestry from North America and Europe (0–0.26%). *HOXB13* X285K was associated with 2.4-fold increased odds of prostate cancer (95% confidence interval [CI] = 1.5–3.9, $p = 2 \times 10^{-4}$), with greater risk observed for more aggressive and advanced disease (Gleason ≥ 8 : odds ratio [OR] = 4.7, 95% CI = 2.3–9.5, $p = 2 \times 10^{-5}$; stage T3/T4: OR = 4.5, 95% CI = 2.0–10.0, $p = 2 \times 10^{-4}$; metastatic disease: OR = 5.1, 95% CI = 1.9–13.7, $p = 0.001$). We estimated that the allele arose in West Africa 1500–4600 yr ago. Further analysis is needed to understand how the *HOXB13* X285K variant impacts the *HOXB13* protein and function in the prostate. Understanding who carries this mutation may inform prostate cancer screening in men of West African ancestry.

Patient summary: A rare African ancestry-specific germline deletion in *HOXB13*, found only in men of West African ancestry, was reported to be associated with an increased risk of overall and advanced prostate cancer. Understanding who carries this mutation may help inform screening for prostate cancer in men of West African ancestry.

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* Corresponding authors. Center for Genetic Epidemiology, Department of Population and Public Health Sciences, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, 1450 Biggy Street, Los Angeles, CA 90033, USA. Tel. +1 323 442 0078 (B.F. Darst); Tel. +1 323 442 7755 (C.A. Haiman). E-mail addresses: bdarst@usc.edu (B.F. Darst), haiman@usc.edu (C.A. Haiman).

The nonsynonymous rare germline *HOXB13* G84E variant (rs138213197) is a major risk factor for prostate cancer, accounting for ~5% of hereditary prostate cancer in men of European ancestry [1,2]. Rare prostate cancer *HOXB13* risk variants have also been observed in other populations, including missense variants G132E in Japanese men (rs1286034091; allele frequency = 0.04%) [3] and G135E in Chinese men (rs769634543; allele frequency = 0.004%) [4]. Recently, a rare African ancestry-specific germline deletion variant in *HOXB13* (rs77179853, allele frequency = 0.2%), which removes the stop codon (X285K) and elongates the *HOXB13* protein, was observed in three Martinican men (French West Indies) with early-onset prostate cancer (allele frequency = 3.2%) [5]. Given the critical role of *HOXB13* germline variation in prostate cancer, we investigated the association between the *HOXB13* X285K variant and prostate cancer risk in a large sample of men of African ancestry.

This investigation included 11 688 prostate cancer cases and 10 673 controls from the African Ancestry Prostate Cancer (AAPC) Consortium, ELLIPSE/PRACTICAL OncoArray Consortium, California/Uganda Prostate Cancer Study, Ghana Prostate Study, and Men of African Descent and Carcinoma of the Prostate (MADCaP) Network (Supplementary Tables 1 and 2). The *HOXB13* X285K variant was not included on genome-wide association studies (GWAS) arrays used in the African ancestry prostate cancer studies and was imputed separately using the Trans-Omics for Precision Medicine (TOPMed) r2 and 1000 Genomes Project (1KGP) phase 3 reference panels; the variant was observed in approximately 126 of 97 256 TOPMed participants and three of 2504 1KGP participants (Supplementary material).

We imputed 101 carriers among 22 361 men in the African ancestry studies when using the TOPMed panel (imputation info score range across studies: 0.92–0.97) versus 60 when using 1KGP (imputation info score range across studies: 0.68–0.82; Supplementary Table 3). The carrier concordance between imputation panels was 0% (Supplementary Fig. 1). Confirmatory genotyping of 82 TOPMed imputed carriers, 42 1KGP imputed carriers, and 1431 imputed non-carriers confirmed 81 of 82 TOPMed but none of the 1KGP imputed genotypes (Supplementary Fig. 1 and Supplementary material). Other pathogenic and deleterious variants in *HOXB13* were observed in our African ancestry populations (Supplementary Table 4), but were extremely rare and not able to be imputed with high confidence and tested in the current study.

HOXB13 X285K was present only in men of West African ancestry (Fig. 1 and Supplementary Fig. 2), with an allele frequency ranging from 0% in men from Uganda and South Africa to 0.31% in controls from Nigeria and 0.40% in controls from Ghana (Supplementary Table 5). Allele frequencies ranged from 0% to 0.26% in African ancestry controls from North America, the UK, and France (Supplementary Table 5), likely due to the high degree of European admixture in these populations. Of the 22 361 men, those with greater West African ancestry were found to have larger risk allele frequencies, ranging from 0.05% in cases with 0–20% West African ancestry to 0.90% in cases with 80–100% West African ancestry (Fisher's exact test $p = 2 \times 10^{-4}$; Supplementary Fig. 3 and Supplementary material).

In studies where the variant was observed (10 477 cases and 9688 controls; Supplementary Table 2), the *HOXB13*

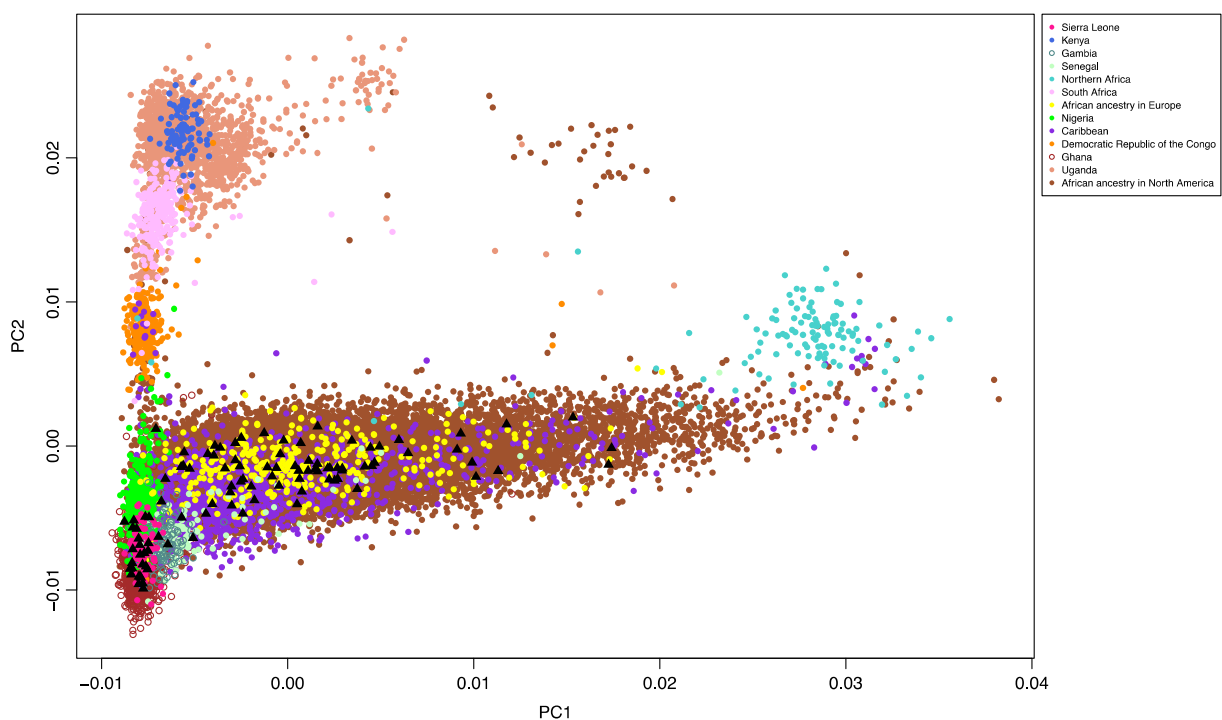


Fig. 1 – Distribution of *HOXB13* rs77179853 by genetic ancestry comparing principal components 1 and 2 calculated in our sample of 22 361 men of African ancestry. Men carrying the rs77179853 delA risk allele are highlighted by black triangles.

Table 1 – Association of *HOXB13* germline variant rs77179853 with prostate cancer risk and disease aggressiveness.^a

Group	n	Carriers, n	Risk allele frequency (%)	Carrier frequency (%)	OR (95% CI)	p value
Overall prostate cancer						
Controls (reference)	9688	28	0.14	0.29	–	–
Cases	10 477	73	0.35	0.70	2.42 (1.52–3.87)	2 × 10 ^{−4}
Men of African ancestry from North America						
Controls (reference)	8766	21	0.12	0.24	–	–
Cases	9192	44	0.24	0.48	1.98 (1.16–3.38)	0.01
Men of African ancestry from West African countries (Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal)						
Controls (reference)	922	7	0.38	0.76	–	–
Cases	920	22	1.20	2.39	3.99 (1.46–10.9)	0.01
Disease aggressiveness						
Controls (reference)	9180	28	0.15	0.31	–	–
Gleason ≤6 tumors	3319	19	0.29	0.57	2.58 (1.28–5.18)	0.01
Gleason 7 tumors	3056	22	0.36	0.72	2.28 (1.22–4.24)	0.01
Gleason ≥8 tumors ^b	1126	19	0.84	1.69	4.65 (2.28–9.47)	2 × 10 ^{−5}
Controls (reference)	8918	28	0.16	0.31	–	–
Stage T1/T2	4784	33	0.34	0.69	2.30 (1.28–4.14)	0.01
Stage T3/T4	959	14	0.73	1.46	4.48 (2.01–9.98)	2 × 10 ^{−4}
Controls (reference)	6526	20	0.15	0.31	–	–
Metastatic or PSA ≥100 ng/ml	511	11	1.08	2.15	5.08 (1.88–13.7)	0.001
Controls (reference)	9688	28	0.14	0.29	–	–
Cases with low-risk disease ^{c,d}	2795	12	0.21	0.43	1.84 (0.87–3.88)	0.11
Cases with intermediate-risk disease ^{c,d}	2721	12	0.22	0.44	1.51 (0.73–3.15)	0.27
Cases with high-risk disease ^d	3082	33	0.54	1.07	3.09 (1.75–5.45)	1 × 10 ^{−4}

CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio; PSA = prostate-specific antigen; RAF = risk allele frequency.

^a Analyses were limited to studies that carried the variant (see [Supplementary Table 2](#)).

^b Compared with 8329 controls (25 carriers, RAF = 0.15%) as the CA UG study did not have Gleason ≥8 tumor case carriers.

^c Compared with 9400 controls (27 carriers, RAF = 0.14%) as MADCaP did not have low- or intermediate-risk case carriers.

^d Low risk disease: Gleason <7, stage T1/T2, and PSA <10 ng/ml; intermediate-risk disease: Gleason = 7, stage T1/T2, and PSA = 10–20 ng/ml; high-risk disease: Gleason 8–10, stage T3/T4, PSA >20 ng/ml, metastatic disease, or died of prostate cancer.

X285K variant was significantly associated with 2.4-fold increased odds of prostate cancer (95% confidence interval [CI] = 1.5–3.9, $p = 2 \times 10^{-4}$; allele frequency in cases = 0.35% and controls = 0.14%; [Table 1](#) and [Supplementary material](#)). The allele frequency was more common in cases with higher Gleason scores (0.29% in men with Gleason ≤6 tumors [odds ratio {OR} = 2.6, 95% CI = 1.3–5.2, $p = 0.01$], 0.36% in men with Gleason 7 tumors [OR = 2.3, 95% CI = 1.2–4.2, $p = 0.01$], and 0.84% in men with Gleason ≥8 tumors [OR = 4.7, 95% CI = 2.3–9.5, $p = 2 \times 10^{-5}$]), in cases diagnosed with higher-stage disease (0.34% in men with stage T1/T2 disease [OR = 2.3, 95% CI = 1.3–4.1, $p = 0.01$] and 0.73% in men with stage T3/T4 disease [OR = 4.5, 95% CI = 2.0–10.0, $p = 2 \times 10^{-4}$]), and in cases with metastatic (or prostate-specific antigen ≥100 ng/ml) disease (1.08% [OR = 5.1, 95% CI = 1.9–13.7, $p = 0.001$]; [Table 1](#) and [Supplementary Table 6](#)).

The absolute risk of prostate cancer was 15.9% (95% CI = 15.9–16.0%) in noncarriers and 32.9% (95% CI = 22.0–44.6%) in carriers by age 85 yr ([Supplementary Fig. 4](#)). We did not observe associations between the variant and age at diagnosis ([Supplementary Tables 7 and 8](#)), family history of prostate cancer ([Supplementary Table 9](#)), or prostate-specific antigen levels ([Supplementary Table 10](#)).

We estimated that the *HOXB13* X285K variant arose approximately 1500–4600 yr ago (refer to [Supplementary Fig. 5](#) and [Supplementary material](#) for details on allelic age estimates based on two complementary approaches) and likely occurred after the Bantu migration from Western to Southern and Eastern Africa [6], which may explain why it is found only in men of West African ancestry. These findings, together with the established prostate cancer susceptibility G84E founder mutation that is more prevalent in Scandinavian populations [7] and the East Asian-specific

G132E and G135E mutations [3,4], underscore the importance of ancestry-specific germline prostate cancer risk variants in the *HOXB13* gene.

The *HOXB13* X285K variant adds to growing evidence of regional differences in Africa for prostate cancer risk variants [8,9] and provides the first evidence of a genetic factor that is limited to specific African ancestry populations, although studies in other populations are needed to better understand the distribution of this variant in Africa. This investigation also demonstrates the importance and necessity of building diverse reference panels to facilitate the discovery of rare ancestry-specific risk variants and the need for larger sequencing studies in prostate cancer. At an exome-wide significance threshold of $p < 5 \times 10^{-7}$, 18 000 cases and 18 000 controls would be needed to detect an OR of 2.4 for an allele frequency of 0.14% (eg, *HOXB13* X285K) with 90% power. The X285K stop codon is predicted to result in a 34% elongation of the *HOXB13* protein, extending it by 96 amino acids [10]. Further studies are needed to understand how the *HOXB13* X285K variant impacts the function of this homeobox transcription factor in the prostate. Understanding who carries this mutation may help inform screening for prostate cancer in men of West African ancestry.

Author contributions: Burcu F. Darst had full access to all the data in the study and takes responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis.

Study concept and design: Haiman.

Acquisition of data: Wan, Sheng, Xia, Andrews, Berndt, Kote-Jarai, Govindasami, Bensen, Ingles, Rybicki, Nemesure, John, Fowke, Huff, Strom, Isaacs, Park, Zheng, Ostrander, Walsh, Carpten, Sellers, Yamoah, Murphy, Maureen Sanderson, Crawford, Gapstur, Bush, Aldrich, Cussenot, Petrovics,

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Appendix A: Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eururo.2021.12.023>.

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